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Cast of Characters

In order of appearance:

BUDDHA, Robes, bald, serene

ZEUS, Beard, flowing robes, laurels

KALI, Rich dress, lots of gold

SATAN, Horns, evil grin

JESUS, Long hair, beard, thorns, loincloth

NURSE, Institutional standard

MILES, Hollywood producer

LARRY, Miles's high-powered lawyer

DEATH, Cloaked, skeletal

BOB, Hollywood director, the auteur

DELIA, Actress, the Name, the ego

TERENCE, Screenwriter, the artist

FAITH AND DEATH IN HOLLYWOODLAND

A DESCENT IN THREE PARTS

by Ken Brady

Preshow

(A film soundstage. Soundstage work lights. Various actors from all three parts come in, move stuff around as if they're actors and crew on a film set. Actress playing DELIA in part three, dressed as a production assistant, barks orders through a bullhorn. Others primp and bullshit. When everything's ready, lights to black.)

I. Jesus Knocking

(Scene: a mental hospital rec room with sparse, drab furniture, white walls; ZEUS sits in a chair, upright and regal, playing a hand-held electronic Yahtzee game, swearing whenever he makes an error; BUDDHA floats, suspended in a chair near a hospital cart; SATAN sits in a wheelchair, one leg in a cast, body bundled in a thick robe, playing cards with BUDDHA. KALI stands, impatiently looking out a window and smoking a cigarette.)

BUDDHA. She asks if I want onions on it, and so I say, "Yes, make me one with everything."

(SATAN laughs evilly, slapping his cast with a handful of cards. BUDDHA joins in the laughter.)

ZEUS. Would you two shut up? You're ruining my concentration.

(NURSE enters, holding JESUS by the hand. JESUS is slightly dazed, looking a bit confused as to where he is. His hands are bandaged and the bandages are soaked with blood.)

NURSE. Everyone, we have a new neighbor. This is Jesus. Say hello to Jesus, everyone.

BUDDHA, SATAN & ZEUS. Hi, Jesus.

(KALI blows smoke toward JESUS, makes it a point to stay uninvolved in this conversation.)

NURSE. *(Pointing to each in turn:)* That's Zeus. Over near the window is Kali. Sitting down is Buddha and in the wheelchair is Satan.

SATAN. *(Extends hand:)* Call me Nick.

(JESUS shakes SATAN's hand. SATAN looks disgustedly at the blood and wipes it on his robe.)

NURSE. Now don't rush him. He's still not used to the idea. Give him some time. *(To JESUS:)* I've got to go make sure everything's prepared for your room, so you just ease into this, okay? Take your time and get to know everyone. They're all just like you. More or less.

JESUS. Okay.

SATAN. *(Hands cards to BUDDHA.)* C'mon, Boody, let's get this game rolling, shall we?

BUDDHA. Yes.

SATAN. Hey, Jesu? You want in on some of this? We're doin' a little low-stakes poker action. What do ya say?

JESUS. Oh, I don't know. I'm not much of a gambler.

SATAN. Hey, c'mon. It's low-stakes. You can't lose much. We're not dealing with immortal souls or anything. *(Smiles.)* At least not yet.

JESUS. *(Beat.)* Well, okay.

SATAN. *(Claps hands.)* Great! Sit on down there and we'll get ya going. Deal him in Boody, will ya?

(JESUS sits.)

BUDDHA. It is wise to know one's opponent before challenging him to a duel.

SATAN. *(Beat.)* Yeah, right. Whatever. Deal the cards.

(BUDDHA shuffles cards and deals to JESUS, SATAN and himself. They all pick up cards and look at them.)

JESUS. (*Perplexed:*) I don't understand these cards. What do these names mean?

SATAN. You'll learn as we go along. It's just a little card deck I made up once to help pass the time in this boring place. More exciting than regular poker, you see.

JESUS. But I've nothing to bet with.

SATAN. Oh, well here. (*Hands JESUS a stack of chips.*) These'll get you started.

JESUS. Thank you.

(They each put a chip in the pot.)

SATAN. I'll open for one. (*Throws in a chip.*)

BUDDHA. Okay. (*Throws in a chip.*) I'll see your one.

JESUS. I put one chip in?

SATAN. Yeah.

JESUS. Okay. (*Throws in a chip.*) Is that all?

SATAN. Great, now I'll take...let's see...three cards. (*Discards three cards.*)

BUDDHA. (*Gives SATAN three cards.*) I'll take two. (*Puts two of his cards down and takes two new ones.*)

JESUS. How do I—

(SATAN rolls his eyes and shakes his head.)

SATAN. Here, I'll help ya. (*Reaches for JESUS's cards, stops.*) Oops. Well, since you don't know how to play, I'll show you. Let's make this a practice hand, okay?

BUDDHA. Yes.

SATAN. You choose which cards to get rid of in the hope you'll get new cards that'll be better, right? Only keep good cards *or* bad cards. (*Smiles.*) Depending on your interpretation of good and bad, of course. See here? (*He holds a card up to JESUS.*) This is a good one to keep. Always keep Death cards, that's what I say. And this one? Keep the Pestilence with Death. But you can get rid of these happy

crappy cards like Sunshine and Waterfall and Rainbow. Won't do you a bit of good.

BUDDHA. They are good cards if—

SATAN. He doesn't care, Boody, okay?

JESUS. Well—

SATAN. (*Ignores him.*) So you put down these three and tell the dealer you want three cards, got it?

JESUS. Okay.

SATAN. Three cards to my man Jesu.

(*BUDDHA gives JESUS three cards. JESUS shows them to SATAN.*)

SATAN. Okay, now we would bet again, but since this is practice, let's just see the hands we got. (*Looks at JESUS's cards.*) Okay, you have a pair of Deaths and a Pestilence. Not bad. I only had a pair of Slimy Graves. Boody?

BUDDHA. Almost a Rainbow flush. But not quite. Missing the blue.

SATAN. Ah, that's really too bad. Well, Jesu, you won, see?

JESUS. That's nice.

SATAN. Yeah...uh-huh, nice. Whatever. You get all the chips in the pot. That is, you would, if we were playing for real.

JESUS. I understand. What are the chips worth?

SATAN. Uh, the white ones are worth one and the black are worth five.

JESUS. Five what?

SATAN. Oh, whoever you want.

JESUS. Whoever?

SATAN. Sure. Any Joe Schmoe off the street. You don't have to know him. Anyone will do.

JESUS. We're playing for peoples' lives?

SATAN. Of course. What else?

JESUS. I thought you said it was low-stakes!

SATAN. It is. High stakes on Fridays are the chronic. We get into whole cities sometimes. Great fun. Want to play a real hand now?

JESUS. No!

SATAN. Relax! *(Beat.)* Whoa...sorry if we offended you.

BUDDHA. Do not worry, my friend. It is only a game.

JESUS. These are peoples' lives, though.

BUDDHA. Yes.

JESUS. Life isn't a game.

BUDDHA. No? Then what is it?

JESUS. Uh...well. *(Beat.)* It just isn't a game.

SATAN. Hmm.

ZEUS. *(Jumps up.)* Yahtzee!

(A long, uncomfortable silence.)

JESUS. *(Looks at Satan's cast.)* Uh, what happened to your leg?

SATAN. Fucking lightning bolts, that's what! Him! *(Points at ZEUS. BUDDHA hands SATAN a rubber chicken, and SATAN throws it at ZEUS.)*

ZEUS. *(Smiling.)* You get what you deserve, devil boy.

SATAN. *(Whining:)* Stop calling me that! I hate that.

ZEUS. *(Sneers:)* Devil boy, devil boy, devil boy, devil—

SATAN. Stop! *(Wheels himself toward ZEUS.)*

ZEUS. *(Pulls his arm back as if to throw a lightning bolt, then attacks SATAN with the chicken.)* C'mon devil boy. Let's see what you got.

(NURSE enters, gets in the middle of it, takes the chicken. She pushes ZEUS away, kicks Satan's wheelchair the other way.)

NURSE. All of you, knock it off! Zeus! No lightning in the rec room. How many times do I have to tell you? Satan, back away from him. What's gotten into you two? I can't leave you alone for five minutes without everything getting out of hand.

SATAN. Nurse, he called me devil boy again.

ZEUS. No I didn't. I never said that. He's lying.

NURSE. Well? *(Beat.)* Which is it? *(Looks at the others.)* Did anyone else hear what was said? Anyone?

JESUS. Um, well, he did call him a devil boy. *(Beat.)* More than once, in fact.

NURSE. *(To ZEUS:)* Is that so?

ZEUS. *(Head down:)* Yes. I did.

NURSE. Now Zeus, you apologize. Right now, understand?

ZEUS. Okay. *(Beat.)* Sorry.

NURSE. What?

ZEUS. I'm sorry.

NURSE. Don't tell me. Tell Satan.

ZEUS. I'm sorry, Satan. I didn't mean it.

NURSE. *(Turns to SATAN:)* Better now?

SATAN. Yes, thank you.

NURSE. Good. Thank you, Jesus, for being honest.

(ZEUS mouths the words "devil boy" while Nurse's back is turned.)

SATAN. He did it again! See! Look!

(NURSE turns around again.)

NURSE. Okay, now that's enough. All of you. Sometimes I wonder about you all. I swear, you act like the universe still revolves around you. *(Beat.)* Now, it's time for group session. And since we have a new member, let's go over what we do in group session, shall we? Come on, gather around.

(They all form a circle. KALI puts out her cigarette and walks to the group. ZEUS walks close to JESUS.)

ZEUS. *(Quietly:)* You're dead, little man.

JESUS. *(Holds up hands to show bandages.)* I was.

(ZEUS snorts and walks to the other side of the circle. KALI sits flirtatiously next to JESUS.)

KALI. Hey, don't let him bother you. A little lightning here and there, but mostly he's a pushover.

JESUS. Thank you.

KALI. That was pretty brave of you. Telling the truth and all.

JESUS. I can't help myself.

(KALI smiles at him, and JESUS nervously smiles back.)

SATAN. Hey, Kali! When are we gonna get together, exchange philosophies and maybe a little ceremonial sex?

KALI. *(Sneers:)* I'd sooner roast in Hell.

SATAN. We could do that, too.

NURSE. Okay now. Who wants to tell Jesus what we do in group session?

(Silence.)

SATAN. Oh, all right. I will. We sit around in a circle and expound on the wonders of our separate philosophies and then critique the hell out of each other.

NURSE. Now Satan, that's hardly an objective view.

SATAN. You didn't ask me to be objective.

NURSE. Well, anyway. What we do is talk about our individual problems. Then we all have a chance to discuss the others' problems. It's very helpful. Very therapeutic. Jesus, are you willing to try this with us?

JESUS. I guess so.

NURSE. Good. Okay, who'd like to begin?

SATAN. I will.

ZEUS. Big surprise.

(SATAN stares at ZEUS for a beat.)

NURSE. All right. Go on.

SATAN. You all know how I've been having problems with the heaters, right? *(There are murmurs of assent.)* Well, it just keeps getting worse. It's cold all the time here.

ZEUS. I could warm you up again.

SATAN. No, thank you.

BUDDHA. Have you tried eating chili peppers?

SATAN. Doesn't work. Just gives me heartburn.

KALI. How about an electric blanket?

SATAN. That's okay at night, but I'm freezing even now.

(Silence.)

NURSE. Jesus, do you have any suggestions?

JESUS. Oh, I don't know. Have you tried thermal underwear?

SATAN. Four pairs.

JESUS. Oh.

NURSE. Well, we'll see what we can do, okay?

(SATAN is silent.)

NURSE. Who's next?

BUDDHA. Every time I turn on the television, I see a commercial. I am beginning to enjoy them in a metaphysical way.

SATAN. Yeah, I know what you mean. It's kind of like those sayings you always have—

BUDDHA. Proverbs.

SATAN. Right. Uh-huh. But instead of something useful I have like "Oxy 5 kills zits on contact" stuck in my head like a mantra.

BUDDHA. Yes. That is what I mean.

KALI. You're lost in this world. There is no place for the useful on television.

SATAN. But the worst is that all the evils of television are attributed to *me*. Go figure.

JESUS. You may have to accept it as a simple fact, Mister Buddha. Being outdated, I mean.

ZEUS. Oh, what do you know? You're pretty new at this. I've been doing it for years.

(ZEUS jumps up, makes a show of being angry. NURSE walks quickly to him and tranquilizes him. ZEUS falls back in his chair.)

KALI. As have I. But where has it gotten us?

BUDDHA. People remember product names before ours.

KALI. I find myself wanting to destroy humanity and give life at the same time. Does anyone find this strange?

ZEUS. *(Drugged.)* Sounds pretty good to me.

SATAN. Kali, that's normal for you. You've been the same since I got here.

ZEUS. It's her brother's influence.

SATAN. Yeah? I just think she's a wacko.

BUDDHA. *(To SATAN:)* Yes, maybe. But you are the newest, aside from Jesus there.

SATAN. But I am observant. Aren't I?

KALI. I don't know about that. You still can't get it through your head that I'm not interested in you.

SATAN. Oh, I know that's what you say. But things change, my dear.

ZEUS. My only problem is him *(Points to SATAN:)*. I think I just want to kill *him*. *(Jumps up to attack SATAN.)*

SATAN. Wait—

(NURSE stands, calmly zaps ZEUS with a stun gun. ZEUS crumples to the floor, then slowly pulls himself back to his chair during following.)

NURSE. Now, now. Let's not get carried away here. We want to talk, not kill and wreak havoc on humanity. Those days are long passed. This should be calm and peaceful.

JESUS. Oh. I suppose that's my problem.

NURSE. What is?

JESUS. Calm and peaceful. I love everyone too much. You know, they nailed me to a cross and I just couldn't hate them.

KALI. Oh, you're *that* Jesus?

JESUS. Yeah.

KALI. Wow. What was it like?

JESUS. What?

KALI. Crucifixion.

JESUS. Oh, that. Well...it hurt a lot.

KALI. Oh.

ZEUS. What is this peace crap?

SATAN. One of Jesus's ideas, I guess.

BUDDHA. Not exactly his idea. It's simple. If I may, Jesus?

(JESUS nods.)

BUDDHA. Jesus believes that all people should love one another and get along as an harmonic world of friends.

ZEUS. Yeah, right.

SATAN. For once I agree with Zeus. It isn't possible.

KALI. Yeah. How could they all get along? I mean, what's there to love about people?

JESUS. Oh, they have great ideas, wonderful dreams—

SATAN. Excuse me? Have you seen the world lately? The Hubble telescope...great idea. Peace in the Middle East...wonderful dream. They just didn't work.

JESUS. I thought they fixed the telescope.

KALI. Yeah, I think they did. Did you hear that NASA wants to make a manned trip to Mars by—

SATAN. That's not the point! The point is even if there is peace it ain't attainable. You can't get there from here. It's beyond the grasp of humanity.

BUDDHA. I always say there is only one road to peace and it begins in the grave.

SATAN. That's cool. I like it. Can I use that some time?

BUDDHA. Sure.

SATAN. Thanks.

ZEUS. Peace sucks.

(Murmurs of assent and dissent.)

JESUS. Can't we do anything?

ZEUS. We all tried, in our day. *(He stands, but NURSE motions to him and he sits.)* I know I have a bad rap. Most of us do. But hey, power begets jealousy and all that. What can you do? We all tried to make it good, make it work. But they have to want it too. And they just don't want it bad enough.

KALI. But you know, it's good you tried. Kudos to you.

SATAN. Say, Jesu...if you could have one thing— anything at all— what would it be?

JESUS. *(Beat.)* Hmm. *(Beat.)* A television studio.

SATAN. What?

JESUS. A way to tell them, to teach them, to—

SATAN. You'd have to cut your hair.

KALI. And hire a staff.

ZEUS. And a lawyer. Lots of lawsuits nowadays.

BUDDHA. And of course the FCC would never let us broadcast from here.

KALI. But it was a good thought.

SATAN. Yeah.

JESUS. So what do I do?

(Silence.)

NURSE. What do you mean? Share your feelings with the others, Jesus.

JESUS. I still want to do *something*.

SATAN. Forget it. The world moves on. We're forgotten. Eventually, we get old enough and we disappear. That's it.

JESUS. Yeah but—

SATAN. No yeah-buts about it. That's it.

(Silence.)

NURSE. Well then, on that note we'll end here for today. Okay, you're all free to go back to what you were doing.

(KALI turns to JESUS and smiles.)

KALI. Cheer up. You could make a comeback someday.

JESUS. I guess.

KALI. Stranger things have happened.

JESUS. *(Smiles.)* I know. Say, you want to go to the cafeteria and get a burger?

KALI. Uh, I don't do burgers.

JESUS. Oh. Then coffee?

KALI. Sure.

(JESUS and KALI walk toward the exit.)

JESUS. One thing I still don't understand.

KALI. Yeah? What's that?

JESUS. Where are we?

KALI. Hollywood, I think.

JESUS. Really? Why's that?

KALI. It's where most actors live. Isn't it?

JESUS. Oh.

(Lights to black. Soundstage lights come back up. Various actors from all three parts come in, move stuff around, again as if they're actors on a film set. Actress playing DELIA in part three is again dressed as a production assistant, barking orders through a bullhorn. When everything's ready...)

PRODUCTION ASST. *(Yells:)* Quiet on the set.

(Lights to black.)

II. Death Sells

(Scene: an office, large wooden desk, an Oscar statue in one corner, a phone, stacks of paperwork on the rest, cheesy movie posters on the walls. MILES sits behind the desk, smoking cigarette in one hand, cell phone in the other, held to his ear— it should be a fake hand with a phone glued to it. He waves around wildly while he talks excitedly. LARRY sits in a chair on the other side of the desk, legs crossed, calmly listening to Miles rant and rave. He occasionally takes a nip from a flask.)

MILES. Of course I know how much money he wants. He's hot shit right now. But he ain't getting two million. Tell him 600 thou or he can bite me. *(Beat.)* Yeah? Well we can find someone else then, can't we? *(Beat.)* No he isn't. *(Beat.)* Yeah? Mort, you're a fuckin' moron, and I can replace you as easy as him. I'm Miles-fuckin'-Mason and I am more powerful than God. You're fired. *(Slams phone into receiver.)* Fucking actors. *(Takes a long drag off his cigarette.)*

LARRY. Problem?

MILES. Same old shit. They want more than they're worth. Worse than lawyers. *(Beat.)* No offense to your distinguished profession, right? But y'know, I'm about out of ideas on this one, Larry.

LARRY. This that action flick? What was it...uh... "Attack on—"

MILES. "Aryan Attack Two?" Nah. That's wrapped. We've got a whole shitheap of horror films lined up. All splatter. No plots. First one, I figure we could use a big name on the bill...but two million fucking dollars? The budget's only eight!

LARRY. What's the plot?

MILES. I said. It ain't got one. Lots of blood and screaming.

LARRY. Eight million dollars worth?

MILES. *(Laughs, gets up and walks around LARRY.)* Okay...there is a story. Guy starts reading all this shit about death, right? Murder and torture and all he can find. So he figures it looks pretty easy...nothin' to it. So he goes out and whacks a couple of college kids, a few women, nothin' big. Standard slasher film crap, right?

LARRY. Uh-huh.

MILES. Right. So he's thinking this shit's too easy, no challenge. He gets bored real quick. Plans this real intricate murder. Some rich guy, walks alone at night, every night. And when he finally makes his move and tries to kill this guy— and this is the good part— he realizes the guy he's trying to kill is Death himself. Y'know, the old Grim Reaper and all that shit. Not bad, eh?

LARRY. Then what happens?

MILES. What do ya mean, what happens?

LARRY. Well, does Death kill the guy or what?

MILES. Of *course* he does. The rest of the movie is Death killing the guy and all his friends and family and shit. The kids will love it. They eat that shit up.

LARRY. So you can't find an actor to—

MILES. To play Death.

LARRY. What a bitch.

MILES. Yeah.

(Phone rings. MILES answers.)

MILES. *(To phone:)* Yeah? Who the fuck is he? Mort, I need a big name, I'm tellin' ya. Big, big, big!

(There is a knock at the door. Then heavy, amplified breathing.)

MILES. Go the fuck away! *(To phone:)* No! Not you, dammit.

(Knocking repeats.)

MILES. Damn! *(To LARRY:)* Get that, would ya?

(LARRY gets up to open the door. Knocking repeats.)

MILES. And tell whoever it is to fuck off.

(MILES walks back behind his desk, leans on it with his cigarette hand. LARRY opens the door and staggers back. He freezes for a moment, then turns and sits back down in his chair, goes pale.)

MILES. *(To phone:)* I think maybe Tim Curry'd play him, don't you? Yeah, he did it before.

LARRY. (*Quietly:*) Miles.

MILES. Or how about that guy— what's his name?— yeah!

LARRY. (*Louder:*) Miles.

MILES. He'd be fucking great, right?

LARRY. (*Yells:*) Miles!

MILES. (*To LARRY, irritated:*) What?

LARRY. You got a visitor.

MILES. I thought I told you to get rid of him. (*To door:*) Go away. I'm pissed and I don't want to talk to anyone, got it? Christ. (*Beat.*) Hey! You out there! Go the fuck—

(DEATH walks into the office, breathing heavily through the bull-horn we saw earlier, and MILES stops talking, stops moving. LARRY is still frozen in place. A nice moment of ominous foreboding and then...)

MILES. (*Mocking:*) Nice getup. Who the hell are you?

(DEATH walks to the desk and stops, faces MILES.)

MILES. (*To phone:*) Look, I gotta go. No. Shut up, will ya? No, it's just that Death just walked in and ...I don't give a shit if you think I'm jerking you around I just—

(DEATH swings his scythe and cuts MILES's hand off. The cell phone and his hand drop to the desk. Blood spurts from the stump. MILES stares at it. Slowly, he sits in his chair.)

MILES. (*Coolly:*) All right. You've got my attention. What the fuck do you want?

LARRY. Uh, Miles. I think this is—

MILES. Shut up, man. Give this caped psycho time to pitch before security shows up. (*Looks at his watch, to DEATH:*) You've got two minutes. What's the story?

LARRY. This is Death, Miles. *The* Death, with a capital D. The old Grim Reaper you were talking about.

MILES. *(Beat.)* No shit? *(Smiles.)* You want a job? *(Beat.)* Well, say something. What are you here for?

DEATH. *(Long, drawn out and guttural:)* To collect your soul.

MILES. Too late, I'm afraid. Swapped it years ago for stock in MGM. But I like the voice. Fuckin' fantastic. Who's your agent? Who represents you?

DEATH. There is none.

MILES. I see. Freelance, eh? Well, damn. You could be a hot ticket item, my friend. Take that hood off, huh? Let's see what your face looks like.

(DEATH removes his hood, and his skeletal face is revealed.)

MILES. *(Smiles.)* Yeah, that's what I'm talking about! That's some kickass latex work, man! *(He reaches forward and touches DEATH's cheek. It's cold. MILES pulls his hand back.)*

MILES. *(Beat.)* What did you say your name was?

DEATH. I did not.

MILES. What is it?

DEATH. I am Death.

LARRY. *(Hysterical:)* See, I told you. This is *the* Death, Miles. This is the end. He said he was coming to collect your soul and—

MILES. I already told him I don't have one.

LARRY. But you were just joking. You've got a soul.

MILES. Of course not. I'm a producer.

(Silence.)

MILES. That's it! *(Claps hands.)* You *are* Death, right?

DEATH. Yes.

MILES. Have I got a deal for you. Look, you can't do your job, cause like I said I don't have a soul, okay? How would you like the starring role in my new movie?

DEATH. Well...

LARRY. What the hell are you saying? You can't put Death in a movie? I mean, really—

MILES. *(To LARRY:)* Why not?

LARRY. Well. He, uh...uh, he's not union.

MILES. *(To DEATH:)* Are you union?

DEATH. No.

MILES. Damn. Well, no problem. We can bump him in. No kidding. This would be your big break. Your name in lights. Millions of kids screaming in terror all over the world at the sound of your name. *(Beat.)* Well, shit, I guess you get that all the time. *(Beat.)* How about a mansion? You have a nice house, all that shit? Nice car? Well?

DEATH. I must collect your soul.

MILES. What's a soul compared with a starring role in a major motion picture? It's just one soul. It's not like you're selling your *own* soul to get a movie deal, like most people do. Death, baby, you could be big. Not that you're not big now, but just *think*.

LARRY. Don't hurt yourself, bonehead.

(DEATH flips LARRY the bird.)

MILES. Box office sales! Merchandising! Videos! A fucking video game, even. The novelization in the bookstores. Sequels, maybe?

DEATH. Ahh...

MILES. You'd be the richest, most celebrated person—

LARRY. — He's not a person.

MILES. — uh, entity in the world. Maybe even a spot on Letterman.

DEATH. And all I have to do is—

MILES. Is be yourself.

(Silence.)

DEATH. Okay. I'll do it.

MILES. Yeah! Okay. All right! I'll just call Morton and get a contract drawn up. (*MILES picks up phone and severed hand and dials.*)

(*DEATH looks around the office, considers the Oscar, picks it up and stands as he mimes receiving the award.*)

MILES. (*To phone:*) Hey, Mort. Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Fax me a contract, right now. I want it for the part in ...yeah, that's it. The actor's name is Death. No shit. Well, fuck, we wanted a big bill name didn't we? How much bigger do we get. (*Beat.*) No, I don't think God's ever even *been* to Hollywood. Yes, do it now. Oh...I don't know. Just a sec. (*To DEATH:*) Hey, uh, Death.

DEATH. Yes?

MILES. Our standard rate for a new actor without any previous credits is—

DEATH. I want two million dollars.

MILES. (*Outraged:*) What?

DEATH. Two million.

MILES. One.

DEATH. (*Moves scythe toward MILES.*) One point five and a percentage of net plus toy through-sales.

MILES. Done. (*To phone:*) Got that? Yeah. One point five mil and a percentage. Yep. Do it.

(*DEATH relaxes, crosses his legs, puts down his scythe.*)

LARRY. How do you even know he can act?

MILES. I'm sure he can.

LARRY. Yeah, but two million? What if the movie fails?

MILES. I still live, don't I?

LARRY. Not in this town.

MILES. What the hell? How often does acting talent relate to getting the part?

LARRY. (*Beat.*) You have a point.

DEATH. And just one more thing. (*DEATH motions MILES nearer with his finger.*)

(MILES moves close as DEATH whispers in his ear. MILES pauses, looks pale. Slowly, he nods his head. DEATH stands, turns, and exits the office.)

LARRY. What did he say?

MILES. Who?

LARRY. Death! What did he whisper to you? He said one more thing. What was it?

MILES. He wants to direct.

(Lights to black. Soundstage lights come back up. Various actors from all three parts come in, move stuff around, again as if they're actors on a film set. This time the actress playing NURSE is dressed as a production assistant, barking orders through the bullhorn. When everything's ready...)

PRODUCTION ASST. (*Yells:*) Quiet on the set.

(Lights to black.)

III. Remake Hell

i.

(Scene: a small, makeshift screening room; a television faces away from the audience; there are a half-dozen chairs arranged in front of the TV; TERENCE looks disheveled, like he hasn't slept in days, and has a script in a three-ring binder on his lap; BOB is dressed in high style and sits, legs crossed, chin on one hand, regarding the TV; MILES talks on his cell phone.)

BOB. Am I the director here or what? Hmm?

TERENCE. I just don't think it needs another explosion, Bob, that's all I'm saying.

BOB. There's always room for another explosion, if you ask me. The audience loves to see things blow up. Am I right, Miles?

MILES. *(To BOB:)* Yeah, you got it, babe. You know what the audience likes and they like you. You're my boy. *(To phone:)* Everything's cool here. Trust me. Bye. *(He hangs up.)*

TERENCE. It's a Bible story, man. *(Motions to the screen:)* Look at that thing. Does that look like Noah's Ark to you?

BOB. The CG hasn't been added yet. Give the geeks some time alone with their pixels and we'll have it.

TERENCE. Then it'll look like the fuckin' Titani—

MILES. *(Quickly clamps his hand over TERENCE's mouth:)* Don't say it. We're in a screening room, Terence, you fuckin' hack. All we need is more bad luck on this shoot.

TERENCE. *(Sarcastic:)* Sorry. It'll look like the goddamn ocean liner movie. Or, maybe we should just paint USS Enterprise on the side and set the whole thing in space.

BOB. *(An epiphany:)* That's it!

MILES. What? Space?

BOB. No, no. We'll make it a Mediterranean cruise. Grand style, intrigue, danger, and finally, everyone dies. *(To BOB:)* You're a genius.

TERENCE. I was fucking kidding.

BOB. It's perfect. Can you get me the rewrites by tomorrow?

TERENCE. Do I have a choice?

BOB. *(Seems to consider it for a moment, then smiles.)* No.

(TERENCE throws his hands up in the air.)

TERENCE. Jesus wept.

(DELIA enters, overdone, overdressed, over-made-up. She sits with the others.)

DELIA. Did I miss anything important?

TERENCE. Just the decline of western civilization, but don't worry, I'm sure you can catch the recap on Entertainment Tonight.

DELIA. *(Grins.)* We're going to be on E.T.?

(A door slams off-stage.)

MILES. Shit. Here comes the boss. Let's give him something good, got it?

(Murmurs of assent. SATAN enters. To us, he's obviously the devil, but no one else notices anything unusual. Just another studio executive.)

SATAN. Okay. I'm here now. What do you have to show me?

(BOB jumps up and faces SATAN. He's excited, and paints the picture with his hands as he talks.)

BOB. It's like this. Noah is on a cruise ship in the Mediterranean. Then a meteor comes down and smacks the mainland and kills everyone on the continent. Then all the people on the cruise ship are forced to resort to cannibalism until only our protagonist is left alive. He can't figure out how to control the ship and crashes into an island. Coincidentally, a cargo ship carrying animals to a zoo has also crashed on this island. But then the volcano on the island starts to erupt and Noah has to lead all the animals onto the cruise ship and sails away.

(Silence.)

SATAN. I like it. *(To TERENCE:)* You've got till tomorrow to get me a new script.

TERENCE. *(Head in his hands.)* I'm in Hell. I know I'm in Hell.

(SATAN grins.)

SATAN. Bob, I want you to meet your new editor.

(DEATH enters. He walks up to BOB. No one seems to recognize DEATH except BOB.)

BOB. I know you. You're, um...did you work on that Spielberg film?

DEATH. I have closely observed many projects of human folly.

BOB. Jeez. Don't get all defensive. It wasn't that bad. *(Beat.)* So, you're the new editor, huh?

DEATH. I like to cut things down.

BOB. Hey, don't push it, huh? I'm well-know for my long running times.

DEATH. Not anymore you're not. I will cut and cut and cut until the only thing left is a teaser trailer for a rated "G" television movie of the week.

BOB. No! *(He throws back his head in anguish.)*

(DEATH laughs, and SATAN joins in. Beat. Then MILES, DELIA, and TERENCE join in the laughter.)

(Soft freeze. Soundstage lights up. NURSE enters, dressed as production assistant on film set, holds up a slate/clapper.)

NURSE. Take forty-two.

(Blackout. Static on TV.)

ii.

(Scene: same as beginning of scene 1.)

BOB. It's perfect. Can you get me the rewrites by tomorrow?

TERENCE. Do I have a choice?

BOB. No.

(TERENCE throws his hands up in the air.)

TERENCE. Some one get me some Alka Seltzer.

(DELIA enters and sits.)

DELIA. Did I miss anything important?

TERENCE. I don't know. When's the last time something important happened while you were around?

DELIA. What do you mean by that?

TERENCE. Nothing. I just hate this job.

(A door slams off-stage.)

MILES. Shit. Here comes the boss. Let's give him something good, got it?

(Murmurs of assent. SATAN enters.)

SATAN. Okay. I'm here now. What do you have to show me?

(TERENCE jumps up and faces SATAN.)

TERENCE. *(Points to BOB:)* He changed it on me at the last minute. It was supposed to be a story about children coming of age in a Warsaw ghetto. I had it. It was poetry and it was passion and I would have won an Oscar I tell ya. And now it's about impotent dwarves who can't get prescriptions to Viagra because their fuckin' health insurance won't cover it. *(Beat.)* Where's the art in that? Where's the drama? Where's the life-changing message to young people everywhere? Huh? What's the point of all this crap?

SATAN. *(Claps.)* That was really very good. Maybe you should be an actor instead of a screenwriter, Terence.

TERENCE. All I ever get from anyone is this. This same abuse. Why do I even try?

SATAN. Terence, I want you to meet someone who'll be taking over the script.

(DEATH enters. He walks up to TERENCE. No one seems to recognize DEATH except TERENCE.)

TERENCE. Hey, wait a minute. I know you. You're, um...did you go to S.C.?

DEATH. My presence is overwhelming in writing classes. You may have seen me there. So many writers kill their art with study.

TERENCE. Yeah, maybe so. *(Beat.)* Hey, wait a minute. They're bringing you in to do the rewrite? What the fuck?

DEATH. I have so many ideas to make it better.

TERENCE. This is my art, you bastard. *(To MILES:)* Miles, help me out here. Is this your doing?

MILES. Hey, not me. Talk to the execs. *(Motions to SATAN.)*

SATAN. *(Holds up a copy of a script.)* You didn't expect us to actually use this crap, did you?

TERENCE. But it's beautiful and poetic. It's original. It's not derivative and it's not a remake. Take a chance for once.

SATAN. *(Shrugs.)* People like derivative. Originality is highly over-rated.

DEATH. I'll take your words and twist them, rend them around and make them unrecognizable to you. I'll write the dialogue in such a way that only the Olsen Twins can play the leads. I'll add in a cute dog and make him talk. I'll set the entire movie in Cleveland.

TERENCE. No! *(He throws back his head in anguish.)*

(DEATH laughs, and SATAN joins in. Beat. Then MILES, DELIA, and BOB join in the laughter.)

(Soft freeze. Soundstage lights up. NURSE enters, still dressed as production assistant, holds up slate/clapper.)

NURSE. Take one hundred eleven.

(Blackout. Static on TV.)

iii.

(Scene: same as beginning of scenes 1 & 2.)

BOB. It's perfect. Can you get me the rewrites by tomorrow?

TERENCE. Do I have a choice?

BOB. No.

(TERENCE throws his hands up in the air.)

TERENCE. I can't take this anymore.

(DELIA enters and sits.)

DELIA. Did I miss anything important?

TERENCE. I assume so. Like third through twelfth grades?

DELIA. Huh?

TERENCE. *(Depressed:)* God, I feel like I've been here for an eternity.

(A door slams off-stage.)

MILES. Shit. Here comes the boss. Let's give him something good, got it?

(Murmurs of assent. SATAN enters.)

SATAN. Okay. I'm here now. What do you have to show me?

(DELIA jumps up and faces SATAN.)

DELIA. I want a bigger role. Every time I turn around I have a smaller role and less lines. I'm a damn good actress and I've been to more parties than anyone here and I've paid my dues and I shouldn't be treated like this. *(She becomes sickeningly over-dramatic:)* When I reprised Linda Hamilton's role in that TV remake of The Terminator I almost got an Emmy nomination! You know that? And when I spent three days in *(Way over-the-top:)* Canada filming an Ivory soap commercial, they loved me. They *appreciated* me.

SATAN. Delia, my darling, calm yourself. Of course everyone loves you. You are the light the world crowds around. You are the sun. Your skin is— what do they say in the Ivory commercials?

DELIA. Ninety-nine and forty-four—

SATAN. Ninety-nine and forty-four one-hundredths percent pure.

DELIA. *(Beat, smiles, stares into SATAN's eyes:)* Thank you.

SATAN. I want you to meet someone. He's just flown in.

TERENCE. And boy are his wings tired.

DELIA. Huh?

TERENCE. Nothing.

(DEATH enters, walks up to DELIA. No one seems to recognize DEATH except DELIA.)

DELIA. Hey, you're that asshole that gave me a bad review for Nights in White Spandex. Where the hell do you get off?

DEATH. Perhaps you are thinking of someone else. Those whom I cut down never rise up again.

DELIA. Yeah, so full of yourself. Critics are all alike, I swear.

DEATH. I call them as I see them. I make no special compensations or exceptions. All are judged the same.

DELIA. Right. Uh-huh. *(Beat.)* So hit me now. Tell me what you think of me as an actress. Do your worst. I got thick skin.

DEATH. *(Rattles them off quickly, in succession; other characters cringe at each.)* Her lack of control of the English language is astounding. I've seen better emotion in an e-mail. It was a good thing she was topless during that scene or I'd have had to look at her face. Makes Melanie Griffith seem like Audrey Hepburn in comparison.

DELIA. *(Beat, crying.)* Isn't there one nice thing you can say about me?

DEATH. *(Beat.)* Hers is a performance I would never miss.

DELIA. No! *(She throws back her head in anguish.)*

(DEATH laughs, and SATAN joins in. Beat. Then MILES, TERENCE, and BOB join in the laughter. SATAN takes DEATH aside.)

DEATH. Don't they ever get tired of this?

SATAN. *(Aside:)* That's what I don't understand. They don't seem to. It's like they can do the same thing over and over again for years and yet they think it's new and refreshing every time. They never get tired of hearing themselves talk.

DEATH. Artists.

(Beat.)

SATAN. Any suggestions?

DEATH. *(Shrugs.)* I did my part. I've spent too much time here as it is. I have much to do, many souls yet to deliver.

SATAN. Yeah, sure. Thanks for your help.

(DEATH starts to walk off-stage then stops, turns.)

DEATH. There is one more thing you could try.

(Soft freeze. Soundstage lights up. NURSE enters, still dressed as production assistant, holds up slate/clapper.)

NURSE. Take six hundred sixty six.

(Blackout. Static on TV.)

iv.

(Scene: same as beginning of scenes 1, 2 & 3.)

BOB. It's perfect. Can you get me the rewrites by tomorrow?

TERENCE. Do I have a choice?

BOB. No.

(TERENCE throws his hands up in the air.)

TERENCE. Anyone have a gun? *(To audience:)* Anyone? Please?

(DELIA enters and sits.)

DELIA. Did I miss anything important?

TERENCE. You always miss everything.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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