

**PLAYING THE RAPTURE**

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with contributions by John Mellies

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## CHARACTERS

ACTOR 1: MANI  
HIGH-STATUS CLOWN  
SPEAKER 1

ACTOR 2: GREEN  
LOW-STATUS CLOWN  
SPEAKER 2  
LUDWIG

## SCENES

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**PROLOGUE: PART ONE**

(Lights up on MANI and GREEN, standing facing each other. If they were kids on a playground, they would be at the point where someone would have to take the first shove. Each has a clown nose in his hand. They are trying to put these noses on, but they cannot quite overcome their resistance. Only a limited vocabulary of gestures is needed, such as wincing back as if the nose were a spoonful of dreaded lima beans, holding one's breath in order to get the nose on quickly, shadowing the other person's gestures and then suddenly cutting short. While they are at this, they employ a few repeated phrases: "OK" "Let's do this" "Let's go" "Now!" Vocal Viewpoints can be used here. The underlying process is gut-wrenching for them, but on the surface their maneuvers are halfhearted or half complete because their real goal is to fake the other into going first. This lasts an indefinite time, but it should not drag on. When the lights go out, they are almost at the moment of decision.)

**JOHN NELSON DARBY**

(Lights up. Both clowns are now wearing their clown noses.)

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: My name is John Nelson Darby.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: His name is John Nelson Darcy. He is a very...

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (interrupting) John Nelson DARBY.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (tentatively) Darcy?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: DARBY.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (pleadingly) Darcy?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: DARBY!

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (pleadingly) Darcy?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (intimidates him without responding)

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (cringing; hastily) His name is John Nelson Dar... er... Mr. D.

Known to his many intimates as Mr. D.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (coldly) I don't have intimates.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: Friends?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (coldly) Nor friends.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (whisper) Lovers?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (smacking him) Wash your mouth.

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN rubs his sore spot and pouts.)

Now. Continue. "He is a very..."

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN crosses his arms and pointedly ignores HIGH-STATUS CLOWN, who now addresses the audience:)

I am not a violent person.

(He addresses LOW-STATUS CLOWN, encouragingly, as to a child)

"He is a very..."

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (sullenly) He is a very important person.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: Well done. In or about 1832...

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (aside) And dead.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: ...I had a vision... (furiously) *What* did you say?

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: Have some bread?

(HIGH-STATUS CLOWN frowns down LOW-STATUS CLOWN and steps away from him. As he continues speaking, LOW-STATUS CLOWN secretly makes garroting, hanging, stabbing, and other violent gestures towards him behind his back).

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: In or about 1832, I had a vision of the Secret Rapture of the church, when Christ returns to embrace his most faithful followers. In that time was it made clear unto me that the Holy Spirit may speak through anyone, anyone at all. Even mine humble self. All that is required is that one follow the Good Book, as it shows forth to us the seven Dispensa—

(He becomes suspicious and whirls suddenly but does not catch LOW-STATUS CLOWN doing anything.)

Have you been reading your Bible?

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (cautiously) I may have looked into it. Why?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (suspiciously) Which book?

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (confidently) The Book of Rapture.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (coldly) There is no Book of Rapture.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (less confidently) Uh, Rapturation. Rapturonians? Rapturesis?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: It's not even called Rapture in the Bible.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: It's not?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: No.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: But it's in the Bible?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: Oh yes. (pause) Ask me what it says in the Bible about Rapture.

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN promptly turns his back).

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and..."

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (perking up) Oh you're talking about the Last Judgment.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: No

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: No?!

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: It's before that.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: The, er, Second Erection then?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (whacking him) Second Coming!

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: That.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: No

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (becoming exasperated and lampooning HIGH-STATUS CLOWN'S manner) Pardon me. Pardon me, *sir*. Let me see if I have properly understood you, *sir*. The Lord our God himself descends down from Heaven bellowing at the top of His voice, an effect like unto 12,000 simultaneous elephant farts, flattening all and sundry with the very wind of his... "nostrils"... and it's *not* the Second Coming?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: Technically it's not.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (staring at him very hard) 'Technically.'

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: Not.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (still staring) '*Technically*.'

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (defensively) First Thessalonians 4:15.

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN does not respond; just waits).

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in...

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (interrupting excitedly) Trumpets! Trumpets? That has to be the Last Judgment.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: You think God only uses trumpets once in all of creation? Trumpets are just God's way of announcing his presence. "And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (slowly) The dead will rise?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: The dead in Christ will rise first. Then the living.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (slowly) But the dead *will* rise?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: It's *not* the Last Judgment.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: *I* was always taught that the dead rise at the Last Judgment.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: The Last Judgment is the last 'judgment'. Sinners are judged at the last 'judgment'.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (prodding him to emphasize his point) So the dead rise first, so it's still part of the Last Judgment. It's like stage one of the rocket booster falling off.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: Rocket booster?

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: Sorry, I forgot that you passed on in 1882.

(He bursts into convulsive weeping.)

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (pushing him). Stop that. Stop that!

(He adjusts himself).

The Tribulation has to happen first.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (wiping his eyes) And the Secret Rapture is which part of this mess...

(HIGH-STATUS CLOWN raises a hand...)

this plan?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air."

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: So it's like they scored front row seats for the Tribulation?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (resignedly) Something like that.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (pounces) So it *is* the Second Coming of Christ.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: It's the second coming for the *church*. The Rapture of the *church*.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (furious) So it *is* the Second Coming.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: What *you* think of as the Second Coming happens after the Tribulation.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (furious) That would be the *Third* Coming.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (even more furious) *There is no Third Coming*.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (taken aback, gives in) OK.

(pause)

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (very slowly) Before the Tribulation, Rapture. After the Millennium, Second Coming.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: (recovering himself) You're just changing the name to dodge the bullet. (gesturing) Christ... comes... back.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (gesturing differently) He comes halfway back.

(long pause)

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: Are you going to finish the story?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: The story?

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: Your trial?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: Trial? I committed no crimes!

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: No I mean your *trial*. Your terrible *ordeal*.

(With spurious sympathy he puts an arm around HIGH-STATUS CLOWN's shoulders, who just looks confused).

How you came to a knowledge of the Secret Rapture while you were recovering from a *serious injury*.

(HIGH-STATUS CLOWN begins to look apprehensive and tries to squirm away).

How you got this serious injury in a bad fall.

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN pauses and stares off into space).

Now this is the part I have trouble remembering. You had a bad fall.

(He pauses as if waiting for an answer)

A very bad fall.

(pause; encouragingly)

From a...

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: (reluctantly) While out for a ride.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: You, in effect, that is to say, to be quite specific here, adhering to the very highest standards of historical accuracy, you fell off your horse.

(pause)

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: While out for a ride. Ministering to my congregation.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: And hit your head.

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: We don't know that.

LOW-STATUS CLOWN: Maybe it was your horse that hit his head?

HIGH-STATUS CLOWN: At you peril shall you mock the revelations of God!

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN moves away)

Come back, I have more to tell you.

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN pauses and looks momentarily interested).

The Dispensations of God!

(LOW-STATUS CLOWN turns back and continues leaving.)

Where are you going?

(Lights out, noses off.)

**PRAYING**

(There are two computer stations on stage, not too close to each other, and situated so that when the players are at each terminal they cannot easily see each other without craning around. GREEN enters carrying three or four keyboards dangling by their cords, like dead animals. He puts two of them down and examines the third carefully from many angles, sighting along it like a rifle, putting his ear to it and listening, balancing it on one finger, etc. He examines the others similarly at length. In the middle of this process MANI enters and walks around looking at the floor, as if searching for something, finally squatting down in one place not far from the rear wall.)

MANI: (staring hard at the floor) We have to pray first.

GREEN: I'm kinda busy right now.

MANI: You want to lose this one?

GREEN: You pray for me.

MANI: It doesn't work that way.

(Rear wall projection of praying people. GREEN impatiently tucks the keyboard he is holding under his arm, puts his hands together, and bows his head, imitating the wall projection. MANI then rises to his feet; as he speaks a prayer ball appears over his head.)

MANI: Not like that stupid. Like this.

GREEN: What are you doing?

MANI: Praying.

GREEN: No, I mean, what are you doing that's different?

MANI: I'm... praying.

(The prayer ball vanishes.)

GREEN: You're not doing anything.

MANI: Yes I am.

GREEN: I... don't... see... anything.

MANI: Exactly.

GREEN: Oh ha ha knock it off.

(GREEN returns to examining his keyboards.)

MANI: Just do it. Pray. (pause) Pray. (pause; insistently) Pray.

(MANI gets another prayer ball over his head.)

GREEN: Ok ok ok ok jeez.

(GREEN puts down the keyboard, and goes over to stand next to MANI, mimicking his stance exactly. He keeps glancing at the wall to see if he has a prayer ball.)

MANI: Don't imitate me, that's not praying.

(MANI's prayer ball vanishes.)

GREEN: I am praying.

MANI: You're not.

GREEN: How do you know if you can't see it?

(MANI gets another prayer ball over his head.)

MANI: I can see it.

GREEN: You just said it's invisible.

MANI: You said it was invisible, I didn't.

(MANI's prayer ball vanishes.)

GREEN: Are you praying now?

MANI: Of course.

GREEN: Am I praying now?

MANI: No.

GREEN: I'm not?

MANI: No.

(pause)

GREEN: Now?

MANI: No.

(MANI gets another prayer ball over his head.)

GREEN: This is boring.

MANI: That's cuz you're not doing it right.

GREEN: Well how did you learn to do it?

MANI: I just started. One minute I wasn't praying and the next minute I was.

(MANI's prayer ball vanishes.)

GREEN: How could you tell?

MANI: You can tell.

GREEN: How?

MANI: It just feels different.

GREEN: Forget it.

(GREEN leans into MANI, knocking him away from the wall. MANI grabs his arm as he falls, bringing them both down hard. They both scramble to their hands and knees and back away from each other a good distance.)

MANI: Come on, try again. All you have to do right now is try.

(They glare at each other.)

GREEN: I'm doing it now, I can feel it.

MANI: It's not a trick.

GREEN: What does this have to do with anything?

MANI: You have to pray to win.

GREEN: You're going to make them all do this now aren't you?

(MANI does not reply. GREEN gets up and goes over to his heap of keyboards, pulls one out, sits down, and begins playing on it repetitively and rhythmically, like a musician doing warm-up exercises. MANI gets up and goes back to the place where he was squatting.)

MANI: You could do it if you really wanted.

(MANI pulls a handful of colored sand out of his pocket and begins to dribble it in a line on the floor, a long semicircle arcing out from one end of the back wall and returning to it at the other end. He should be on the upstage side of the line, which can't have any breaks in it.)

GREEN: Now what are you doing?

MANI: Drawing a line in the sand.

GREEN: (stating not asking) Sand.

MANI: It's a figure of speech. (pause) Someone has to do it.

GREEN: Why?

MANI: No line, no game.

(MANI stands up and begins walking along the line, back and forth, with increasing anxiety.)

GREEN: We were playing just fine before.

MANI: We were playing but we weren't winning.

GREEN: And?

MANI: I want to win.

GREEN: Ok. You win.

(pause or beat)

MANI: Please. Help me out here.

GREEN: 'Sup.

(GREEN goes over to MANI.)

MANI: Small problem.

(MANI gestures at the line he's drawn. GREEN halts abruptly and stares too.)

GREEN: (sudden realization). If this is about praying again, I'm not biting.

MANI: No. Look. I'm here; the computers are over there.

(pause while GREEN stares at him).

I can't cross.

GREEN: Sure you can.

MANI: (shaking his head) I tried.

GREEN: Make a gap then.

(GREEN drops to the floor and starts moving the sand with his hands.)

MANI: No no no no no no no don't do that.

(GREEN freezes.)

No line no game.

GREEN: (exasperated) Why the hell did you make it way over here?

MANI: I don't know.

(They both examine the floor, the computers, the rest of the space for some seconds).

GREEN: I see, I see. I see the problem. Give.

(GREEN hands MANI his keyboard. He then takes some differently colored sand out of his own pocket and dribbles a new line on the floor that frames the terminals and what will become the floor projection area.)

Island?

(Floor projection comes on, showing a high aerial view of the game map.)

MANI: (nods) Manhattan.

(GREEN dribbles two parallel lines from the central 'island' to MANI's old line)

GREEN: Brooklyn Bridge.

(MANI nods and walks across the bridge to the 'island'.)

GREEN: Ready?

MANI: Set.

(GREEN dribbles a new line dividing the island area roughly in half; this line runs between the two computers, bisecting the game map. Both players must be on their own halves of the stage when the line is complete. When done, they go to their computers.)

## THE FIRST GAME

(MANI plugs in the keyboard GREEN handed him, while GREEN selects a new keyboard and plugs it in. They boot up the computers, adjust their equipment, and begin playing the new computer game they are beta-testing. It is a simulation of New York after the Rapture. Floor projections throughout.)

(Floor projection of a blue recruiter walking down a street.)

GREEN: This is still your Rapture thing?

MANI: Uh huh. Wait'll you see my new features.

MANI and GREEN: (howling in unison) It's a feature not a bug.

(Floor projection: blue recruiter meets someone, recruits them; recruitee follows recruiter down street.)

GREEN: Are you playing already?

MANI: (Looking under the table) Do you think that line will hold?

GREEN: It is sand.

(MANI goes over and dribbles a second line so the 'island' is now bisected by a double line.)

MANI: (announces) So now we have this double line...

GREEN: Why does the Rapture seem so mean?

MANI: Only if you're on the wrong side.

(GREEN moves to floor projection area. Floor projection: blue recruiter at work, converting someone else, praying. GREEN tries out these moves.)

GREEN: I don't know which one I am?

MANI: Those are mine. I'm blue, you're red.

GREEN: Which are the good guys?

MANI: Blue.

GREEN: So I'm the whatchamacallit Antichrist?

(Floor projection: blue-side recruitee kissing feet of recruiter.)

MANI: Hey, he just kissed my feet. Kiss my feet !

(Floor projection: street corner with lots of blue-side auto recruiting and sweater vest guys. GREEN mimics them.)

GREEN: You got like a flock of little ducks there. Don't they have anything better to do? What's with the sweater vests? Is this supposed to be the 1950s? How come there are no old people? How come there are no pets? How come there are...

MANI: (not really listening) New York after the Rapture.

(GREEN returns to his terminal. Wall projection: blue recruiting group passes hot dog stand.)

GREEN: This isn't anything like New York. No pigeons, the cars stop for pedestrians? You got the hot dog stands right, ok, and the steam vents, and everything else is wrong.

MANI: (very upset) The map is *accurate*. That's a *precise* map of midtown Manhattan.

GREEN: People don't live in maps.

(Floor projection: evil musicians sending out red balls at blue recruiter, who runs away.)

MANI: (seriously) You can tell they're evil cuz they're wearing their caps sideways.

GREEN: Probably wrote a song about how peace is good or something. "You pseudo Christians / You ain't so bitchin / Don't want peace among nations / Just some crappy Tribulation."

(Floor projection: blue recruiter now meets and runs from a gang. GREEN and MANI watch and laugh as blue recruiter goes down.)

GREEN: (turning on MANI) Stop picking your nose and convert me.

MANI: How do I buy a building? I'm clicking and nothing is happening.

(Floor projection: building conversion; should be boring imagery here.)

GREEN: It's your game.

MANI: (defensively) I've been so busy writing code I've hardly had time to play.

(Floor projection: game folks standing around doing nothing much.)

GREEN: Oh god what is the object of this!

MANI: (as if explaining to an idiot) Only one thing matters: Saved. Not Saved. (pause) Do you think there is any difference between real belief and the will to believe?

GREEN: (making an important point) Real belief is what they're willing to die for.

(Floor projection stops as MANI and GREEN return to their terminals.)

MANI: (fending off) God exists whether you believe in him or not. (pause; worried) What are you doing? You're sitting on a pile of money aren't you?

(GREEN leaves his terminal to intersect with floor projections showing mob of red-side soldiers doing war cry.)

GREEN: (does silent war cry movement) I've got some nice apartment buildings. It's all about the builder, man. (taunting) The carpenter?

MANI: (probing) Do you have like a bunch of 'copters?

(Floor projection: entire red side moving en masse through the city with tanks and multiple helicopters)

GREEN: I only got one copter. (distraction move) You trying to see if you can fast-track a democracy into a theocracy with this?

MANI: (taking the bait) Have to fulfill the prophecies.

GREEN: (hypothesizing as a ploy to keep MANI in the dark regarding his military buildup) Maybe God doesn't want your belief.

MANI: (assertion) Belief is not a crime.

(MANI gets up and comes on to the floor projection; as he stands up, switch floor projection to hide what GREEN is doing from MANI. Should be a fairly empty view, camera flying through city near street level. MANI 'walks' down the street.)

GREEN: (refuting) Belief has consequences.

MANI: Where are you, I'm gonna kill you.

GREEN: (returning to his terminal; sarcasm) So how do I get the Rapture to happen? Wait, it's already happened?

## LEFT BEHIND

(MANI leaves the terminal and crosses over to a point somewhat behind GREEN, who ignores him. As he speaks the following, MANI takes more sand of a different color, maybe pink, and begins drawing a new, fairly small circle on the floor around GREEN that when complete will isolate GREEN and his terminal. MANI is almost done before GREEN catches on but is able to finish before GREEN can stop him. *Wall projection: blue and red sides meet in the mass battle that was being prepped in last scene; show in slow-mo; gospel singers vs. tanks, etc; both sides decimate each other, as red 'wins' a Pyrrhic victory.*)

MANI: (as if to ask, or challenge God for real assistance) Here's the thing. Last year I lost my sister to AIDS. No health insurance; couldn't afford the drugs. My other sister adopted two of the kids; but then she lost her job. Now they live with my dad on his disability. My uncle on my father's side is in prison. My other uncle was in Vietnam; he's a crackhead. Don't get the wrong idea. This isn't a complaint or you should feel sorry for us. We are ordinary working people. My best friend from high school died in a car crash. Two friends OD'd. None of this is any one person's fault. It's just how it goes down. Most of the people I know are ok. They are. Doing ok. So maybe the Rapture means I go to heaven. Or I don't. A lot of the people I love are gone. Or they're on their way out. Already I've been left behind. I have repeatedly been left behind. For me, the Rapture has already happened. It already started, and it's all around. When my mom died, from the lung, I moved one step forward in the queue. Only my dad stands ahead of me now, he has Type 2 diabetes and circulation problems. Don't knock the Rapture! That's the promise, that's where hope... We are all walking dead, waiting to fall down. Every person who goes to the grave brings a world of sorrow behind them. Our hearts are already breaking each and every day. I don't even have the energy to imagine anything worse. It can't be a mistake. It has to all be for something. We are all hoping to wake up.

## CHEATING

(Wall projection: frozen final still from last scene's apocalyptic battle. MANI goes to stand just outside GREEN's circle, watching as GREEN idly fiddles with the game. The action here should go from the computers to the wall projection and back to the computers, with lots of physical mimicry)  
GREEN: (critiquing battle just ended) You put unarmed gospel singers up against my machine guns? You can't be serious.

(He sings, mimicking first the blue side, then the red.)  
He's got the whole world in his hands, blam blam blam blam blam blam.  
MANI: The gospel singers can win if they play right.

GREEN: Only if you really stack the deck.  
MANI: It's all about the power of faith, the power of music and song.  
GREEN: (shaking his head; softly) Blam blam blam blam blam...

MANI: Start over?  
GREEN: I'm sick of this. (provocation) All games are the same, kill this to get that.  
MANI: No line no game.  
GREEN: (taunt) Doesn't this game have any cheat codes?  
MANI: No.  
GREEN: No?

(He stands up and steps over the sand circle enclosing his terminal.)  
MANI: (almost panicked) NO! For the love of god, go back to your own side.

(They face each other down; pause.)  
MANI: (giving in) Let's just mess around then. Let's blow some stuff up.  
GREEN: (without moving) All right.

(Floor projection: overhead view of the park.)  
MANI: Meet on the same block as before?  
GREEN: (sarcastically) Is that the one with all the tall gray buildings?  
MANI: They're all tall gray buildings.  
GREEN: No kidding.  
MANI: Fine, by the park then.

GREEN: (considering the floor) I don't want to live in their world even if I do have to die in it.

(GREEN returns to his terminal. Wall projection: images of blue-side nurses and other women-- no men at all. MANI goes over to the wall and joins his women walking and praying.)

MANI: (long pause) But what if they're right about the Rapture?

GREEN: (resigned) What you want me to do?

MANI: Let's party. You bring your rapper girls and I'll bring my soul sisters and we'll see how they get along.

GREEN: Are you gonna ambush me?

MANI: (excitedly) Cat fight bitch!

(Wall projection: women from both sides fighting. GREEN jumps up from his terminal and goes to join MANI and both take part: praying/swearing, fighting moves.)

GREEN: Your girls are slappers. Mine use their nails.

MANI: Wish they could get naked.

(Blue side women eventually win by completely wiping out their opponents. GREEN does dying move that puts him on the floor.)

GREEN: Thought this was supposed to be a nonviolent game?

MANI: Ha all yours are dead. Now *that* is the power of prayer.

(Wall projection: a huge number of red-side soldiers arrive and wipe out the much smaller number of blue-side women. GREEN slowly gets to his knees to watch the action while MANI takes part and finally does a dying move that puts him on the floor also.)

GREEN: Aw, look at that, all your little bible thumpers are all dead.

MANI: Wait, where did they come from? You can't have that many.

(An angel appears; GREEN rises.)

GREEN: You can if you have the code.

MANI: I told you there aren't any cheat codes.

GREEN: I hacked it. I'm not playing by your rules.

MANI: (rising; with immense disapproval) Can't have two sets of rules.

(Wall projection: several short or fast reruns of red soldiers wiping out blue women. MANI imitates halfheartedly at first, then gives up and returns to his terminal. GREEN continues shadow fighting, aiming his moves to taunt and harass MANI.)

GREEN: You're mistaking the premise. It's not about winning the game, it's about owning the rules. Your idea is the Rapture side always wins. But isn't it cheating to know how the game comes out? Isn't it cheating to have a formula for winning? Isn't playing the Antichrist kinda messed up? If your goal is to spread the idea of being on God's side?

MANI: I hate this game.

(Projection goes to black.)

GREEN: You're just saying that cuz you got your ass kicked.

MANI: They need to know what they're up against.

GREEN: You could have made it so the computer plays Antichrist and all of us players are Christians. But you didn't. (beat; revelation) Payback. This is about payback.

MANI: (rejecting) God's wrath is a frightening thing.

(Floor and wall projection: mass praying event with 'patrolling' figures, lots of colored lights.)

What the hell is that?

GREEN: Your game.

MANI: *My* game?

GREEN: My version.

MANI: How did you do that?

GREEN: God is mercy. God is mercy and love.

MANI: (mesmerized by the images) And faith.

GREEN: God is mercy and charity and love, amen. Praise the Lord...

(GREEN begins vocal viewpoint and physical work using the phrase "Praise the Lord". He is joined shortly by MANI. Floor and wall projections: mass praying event with 'patrolling' figures, lots of colored lights. At end of voice section, MANI hesitates, then leaves the floor and return to his console; GREEN stays, immersed in a sea of 'patrolling' figures.)

MANI: (agreeing with exception) God cares what happens to them.

GREEN: (crushing) And you don't have to help fix their world. For the ones who are left. It's all... disposable.

MANI: The Rapture turns their shitty world into something good.

GREEN: They love their shitty world.

(Game freezes. MANI reboots. GREEN stays where he is for the following monologue.)

## **BELIEF JUNKIE**

(GREEN steps away from his game and begins to speak to the audience.)

GREEN: Right from when he was small he was drawn to the sheer power of belief. Nothing to it.

He didn't grow up with all the advantages. Belief and believers were everywhere. The playground. Waiting for the bus. The dinner table. Church. The church. Where stories about Christ's promise to come back for his followers abound. "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." John 14. "I will come again." It was just so *easy*. Well, the first one's always free.

The creed of choice: Amillennialism. Basically believing that Christ has *already* returned to earth. *Spiritually speaking*. Christ reigns through his church right here and right now. A great training belief. Kid stuff.

After awhile it wore off. He wanted more to believe in. Needed more. It wasn't long before he had his first taste of Postmillennialism. Down the slippery slope, like going from cigarettes to marijuana. To Christ's spiritual reign he added the idea that Christ has not yet come back. Won't be coming back anytime soon. Not until after the Millennium, just in time for the Last Judgment. It felt good, very good. So good that he craved something stronger. A little was good; more was better.

Big-time belief. Was the millennium really still ahead of us? Maybe the clock was already running? These were deep waters. The Bible. He knew right away he'd found the hard stuff. Corinthians. *Revelations*. Told himself he could stop anytime he wanted. Told himself he was still in control of his believing. Until he sampled Premillennialism for the first time. Didn't tell anyone that it was *Post-Tribulational* Premillennialism until it was too late. The Second Coming happens *before* the Millennium? Christ resurrects the dead and reigns in glory until Judgment Day? He was high for weeks, the kind of jacked-up and speeding high that makes

you think you'll never come down. "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Yeah, he was in over his head and he didn't know it yet. Hanging on to the myth of "recreational believing".

Next thing you know, some store-front minister supplies a belief so potent it blows his mind. Jesus comes back not once but *twice*. Two Second Comings. The first is the Rapture, when Christ returns to take away all Christians: "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." Then after the Tribulation, Jesus comes back again to rescue everyone who converted during the time of trial. Everyone! It's an utter rush of the spirit. Mainlining pure Pre-Trib *Dispensational* Premillennialism and it's all he can think about.

This is where things begin to get complicated. He stops seeing his old friends, skips work. His family intervenes, try to talk him down with stories of Mid-Tribs. Maybe the faithful don't get exempted from the Rapture. Maybe they have to endure it for 42 months. He can't understand why they're doing this to him. Trying to confuse him. Make him go cold turkey.

But it's too late; he can't cope without belief. Has no will of his own left. It's only a matter of time before he succumbs to that final belief, that soul-altering, life-testing belief to pass all other beliefs. He locks himself in his apartment. He's beyond help, just him and his own personal Jesus. Takes it pure and uncut: *Three Second Comings*. Three. Not two, not one. Three. A holy trinity. As the ecstasy takes him, he sees it all: The Tribulation. The first Second Coming for the dead. Further Tribulation. The second Second Coming, that is, the Rapture of the living. The Millennium. The third Second Coming, for the entire church. Kick Antichrist's butt, Last Judgment, and out. Soaring far beyond earth on wings of belief, he knows himself to be the world's first and only Peri-Tribulational Tri-Parousial Millennialist. He is ready now. He will never come down.

**PHRASES FOR AN END TIME**

(When GREEN finishes, he goes over to the double line, kneels down, and creates a huge gap in the line with a sweep of his arms, pushing the sand away to either side. He then strews more sand in a random pattern in the open area, creating a field effect. The lighting should be broken or dappled to emphasize the change here. When GREEN is done, he lies down in the sand and makes 'snow angels'.

At the same time as GREEN is creating a gap in the line, MANI begins Vocal Viewpointing. GREEN joins in at some point.

(Options: GREEN and MANI can switch back and forth making snow angels. More sand can be strewn part way through.)

MANI: The line in the sand.

The Power and the Glory.

The long goodbye.

The big sleep.

GREEN: The final countdown.

MANI: End of the line.

MANI AND GREEN: The long line

GREEN: Over and out.

MANI AND GREEN: The final out

(pause)

MANI: Nightfall.

GREEN: Lights out.

MANI: No exit.

MANI AND GREEN: Exit city

GREEN: Closing time.

MANI: Tap city.

MANI AND GREEN: Tap time

GREEN: Six feet under.

MANI AND GREEN: Lights under

MANI: Class dismissed.

GREEN: That's all she wrote.

(Short silence.)

GREEN: Cash in your chips.

MANI: Go to your last reward.

GREEN: Settle your accounts.

MANI: Bow out.

MANI: Kick the bucket.

MANI AND GREEN: Cash the bucket

GREEN: Buy the farm.

MANI AND GREEN: Kick the farm

MANI: Bite the dust.

GREEN: Turn up your toes.

MANI AND GREEN: Settle your toes

MANI: Give up the ghost.

GREEN: Take a dirt nap.

(They switch places here. Wall projection: crowd scene of avatars with lots of light.)

MANI: Go home in a box.

MANI AND GREEN: Buy the box

GREEN: Rest in peace.

MANI: Meet your Maker.

(Lights out.)

**PART TWO**

**PROLOGUE: PART TWO**

(Lights up on MANI and GREEN. They are completely out of breath as if they have just run a mile cross-country, but in an upbeat mood.)

GREEN: Now what?

(MANI shrugs.)

MANI: (annoyed) It's your turn.

(GREEN stares at him as if thinking, maybe slowly shaking his head, not in a refusal but in uncertainty.)

MANI: (annoyed) Think of something.

(Lights dim and out as they stare at each other.)

## RAPTURE CYNIC

SPEAKER 2: Evangelicals claim that you'll know the Anti-Christ because everyone will love him! Yeah, he'll be a charismatic leader who tries to bring peace to the world. If that's the Anti-Christ then what is Jesus, a total asshole or what? Watch out for anyone who wants peace!! They're the devil! And these people can't wait for the Rapture, the world can't end fast enough for these morons. A few of 'em think it's already happened. Like maybe all these lights that we think are UFOs are actually cosmic taxis sent to pick up the Evangelicals. That would explain all the UFO abduction stories — but why on earth would God anally probe people?. I'm pretty sure God is against that sort of probing. Just ask Ted Haggard. I tell ya though, I'll betcha the Rapture *has* already happened, but Jesus came down to earth and decided he didn't want to take any of these assholes with him. “Nuke it Dad, they're all losers!” Problem is, many of these fanatics have infiltrated our government. Bush is a Rapturist. He believes he's been chosen to lead. Does this frighten anyone? A guy who wants the world to end is handling our foreign policy? Because, guess what, these are some of the same geniuses that got us into this mess in Iraq. When the towers fell Jerry Falwell said it was God's punishment for homosexuality. A bishop in England said the same thing about Hurricane Katrina destroying New Orleans. Don't you think God is smart enough to know that gay people live in San Francisco? But as far as I know the weather in San Francisco has been beautiful. Come to think of it, though, *Texas* was flooded and hit by two hurricanes last year. Maybe God is angry with the Bush family. Or maybe God isn't angry with anybody. MAYBE SHIT JUST HAPPENS!

## HERE WE ARE

(The two SPEAKERS lean forward as the talk; they are eager to tell their story. [Wall projection: box art from "Eternal Forces".](#))

SPEAKER 1: In 2006, Tyndale House released "Left Behind: Eternal Forces", a computer game based on a series of popular novels. Both the game and the original "Left Behind" books are set in a world where the Christian Rapture has taken place.

SPEAKER 2: The people "left behind" on earth have to decide whether to fight the Antichrist or join forces with him.

([Wall projection: photo of LaHaye and book cover from "Left Behind" series.](#))

The sixteen "Left Behind" books were coauthored by Tim LaHaye, a prominent American evangelical minister, and a ghostwriter named Jerry Jenkins.

SPEAKER 1: Over 60 million books have been sold since the first one was published in 1995, and three "Left Behind" movies have been made.

([Wall projection: trailer stills from "Eternal Forces" game.](#))

SPEAKER 2: "Eternal Forces" the game puts the player in a post-Apocalyptic New York.

SPEAKER 1: (makes quote gesture with fingers) "For those left behind, the apocalypse has just begun!"

SPEAKER 2: In single-player mode, you are a member of the Christian forces, but in multi-player mode you can play as either a Christian or as the forces of the Antichrist.

([Wall projection: more stills from "Eternal Forces" game showing ordinary people.](#))

One of the basic principles embedded in the game is that no one can remain neutral.

SPEAKER 1: All game characters who do not convert to Christianity are fair targets for destruction. When "Eternal Forces" was released in November 2006, just in time for the Christmas rush, it had already been the subject of intense controversy for more than six months.

SPEAKER 2: Preview versions of the game received mixed reviews both for its "convert or be killed" version of Christianity and for its gameplay.

([Wall projection: photo of Talk to Action website.](#))

SPEAKER 1: Gamers were content to mock the game, but "Eternal Forces" made some Christians furious at what they saw as misrepresentations of their faith. A coalition of both conservative and progressive Christian organizations boycotted the game.

(Wall projection: Tyndale House web site.)

SPEAKER 2: They even campaigned to have Tyndale pull the plug on it before its scheduled release date.

SPEAKER 1: This move failed, but the outcry led Tyndale to drop early plans to mass distribute sample copies of the game through evangelical mega-churches. In the year following the game's release, Tyndale stock plummeted from \$7.44 a share to 7 cents.

(Wall projection: Operation Straight Up web site.)

SPEAKER 2: Then, early last year, an evangelical organization called Operation Straight Up gained the Pentagon's blessing to distribute care packages to U.S. soldiers in Iraq that would have included copies of "Eternal Forces".

SPEAKER 1: After public outcry over proselytizing of the military, the plan to include the game in the package was dropped.

(Wall projection: close up of game terminal showing expac.)

SPEAKER 2: In late 2007, Tyndale released a sequel: "Tribulation Forces."

**EXPANSION SET**

SPEAKER 1: (with evident sincerity, not cynicism) *Are you ready? Are you?* Are you ready, *Tribulation Forces*? Yes, the expansion set for *Left Behind*, is now out! And what an expac! Five new missions, 2 new multiplayer modes, and a new American Militia faction featuring 8 new units! You gamers are gonna love this. Better graphics, way better special effects! Same great strategic gameplay. This will put the naysayers in their place. Too violent, they said. Wrong, wrong, *wrong*. The good guys win mainly by converting, not killing. It's so much less violent than popular strategy games like Starcraft, or even the original books, which by the way people *love*. We have only clean killing—no decapitation, no blood splatter, no severed limbs, *no visible intestines*. No cop-killing, no prostitute-bashing. No abortion clinic stalkers. You can kill nurses and medics only if they are helping the evil side. Why? Christians are taught to turn the other cheek and to love their enemies, but no one should forfeit their lives to an aggressor who is bent on inflicting death. Apparent contradictions are often the result of placing greater importance on the message than on caring for others. Oh no, they say, it's too intolerant; it pits Christians against non-Christians. Of course it does; that's the way it's going to go down in the end. And hey, a world without gays, feminists, satanic rock musicians, and other non-Christians wouldn't be so bad, right? Our mission at LBG is to convert the nonbelievers out there, and you don't do that by respecting false religions. We at LBG have a responsibility to show the truth of biblical prophecy. But believe me we are not living in the dark ages: in our "Found" segments you will see a fair, point-by-point comparison between the truth of Intelligent Design and the falsehoods of Evolution Theory. Our ultimate goal is to provide positive inspirational content. There are those who complain about stereotypes in the game: like how all the good guys look like they're white. Or rock musicians are evil. Or women can't be soldiers and builders. But let me tell you this, it is women who can attain the very highest ranks of spirituality possible in the game, as recruiters and musicians. We think of this as role modeling, not stereotyping. And you know what? It's a game. Get over it.

(lights out)

## **RAPTURE DAN**

('Tribulation' is pronounced 'Turbulation')

SPEAKER 2: The End Times are upon us and Biblical Prophecy is unfolding before our very eyes and you never know when you might get R-R-Raptured on up into the sky! It could happen at any moment and you've got to Be Prepared at *all* times. So come on down to Rapture Dan's Rapture Emporium for the latest in Rapture gear and accessories. We've got tote bags, prophecy calendars, Jesus Spotter Scopes, Rapture Ready Mood Rings. For the serious Rapturist we've got Break-Away Rapture pants and jackets. When you feel that Rapture coming on, just give a tug and ascend on up to God's Kingdom the way the good Lord intended; in your Birthday Suit. Mom and Dad, how about something for the kids? Check out our End Times Playset complete with poseable figurines and spring-loaded Rapture Action – now you see 'em, now you don't. But Rapture Dan, you ask, what if the Rapture doesn't take me and I get left behind to endure the Great Tribulation? We have everything you need: Locust Repellant, Freshwater Purifiers, M-16's, Hand Grenades, and shoulder-fired Rocket Launchers. Or suppose you'd like to help our Chosen friends in Israel find the Lord Jesus Christ? You'll want Rapture Dan's Convert-A-Jew Kit. Each kit converts up to *five* Jews! So grab the kids and hurry on down to Rapture Dan's Rapture Emporium, where every sale is a Going Out of Business Sale.

## HOW BAD CAN IT GET

(Both GREEN and MANI are back at their terminals, talking at first in hushed monotone through headsets. Atmosphere and lighting are reminiscent of submarine: dim, slightly spooky, echoes. *Grayed-out text* should not be spoken aloud, but its intentionality should be indicated through gesture, innuendo, or other indirect means. *Wall projections throughout of major street battle; towards the end, the action is obscured by smoke and fire and there are only flashes of visible action.* GREEN is deliberately manipulating the impulsive MANI throughout.)

MANI: All right, let's battle.

GREEN: Throw everything in.

MANI: Meet at that big intersection.

GREEN: I'm gonna bring all of my people, all my tanks, all my choppers.

(GREEN makes chopper noises.)

MANI: Gonna bring my bitches and my preachers.

GREEN: Hold on, almost there.

MANI: Did you conjure this demon? He's attacking me!

GREEN: He's melting your guys.

MANI: (angrily) Burning their faces off! Loser demon.

GREEN: (gloating) Aw, too bad.

MANI: How many guys I have left?

GREEN: (incredulously) Damn, now he's braining *my* guys.

MANI: Ripping open their chests and ohmygod he's eating their hearts.

GREEN: I can't see around all these bodies.

MANI: Now he's making them eat shit.

GREEN: Vomit.

MANI: Wormy puke garbage. Warm rotten meat puke garbage.

GREEN: (with pleasure) This is sick.

MANI: (agreeing) Yeah, sick.

(Wall projections become increasingly abstract. Pace of following dialogue gains momentum; they must not have space to pause and think about what they are saying.)

MANI: They're trying to crawl away.

GREEN: There's nurses hiding under that tank. See them? They're laughing at you.

MANI: They have evil eyes.

GREEN: Animal eyes.

MANI: Hey girlie, come to papa.

GREEN: She won't answer.

MANI: She's an animal.

GREEN: Let's get her, catch her quick.

MANI: Tie her up, tie her arms.

GREEN: Behind her back, it hurts more.

MANI: Real tight.

GREEN: Oooh she likes to struggle, she wants to play.

MANI: Down girl. I'm gonna tickle her with my knife.

GREEN: Careful, don't kill her too quick.

MANI: No one will stop us.

GREEN: Burn her face... that'll teach her to laugh.

MANI: Gimme a match.

GREEN: She screams real high.

MANI: Cut out her tongue.

GREEN: Gag her.

MANI: Gag her with her underwear.

GREEN: Strip her.

MANI: Do her.

GREEN: Hack the legs, they're in the way.

MANI: Now fuck her, fuck her.

GREEN: Fuck her til she's almost dead.

MANI: Cut off her head.

GREEN: Not yet, not yet, bayonet first, right up her cunt.

MANI: Up her ass and *then* up her cunt.

GREEN: Now rip her guts out.

MANI: Make a necklace with them, she'll like that, won't you girlie?

(Pause; GREEN's frenzy begins to drain away.)

GREEN: Is she dead?

MANI: I feel so strong.

GREEN: She made you do it.

MANI: I can do anything now.

GREEN: Are there any more?

MANI: I don't see any more.

(pause; MANI comes down from his high)

Now it's just us?

(Lights out)

**PART THREE**

**PROLOGUE: PART THREE**

(In the glow of the monitors we barely see MANI and GREEN sprawled on their chairs or slumped at their terminals or lying on the floor. They have been awake for 30 hours straight playing their game and are all strung out and barely coherent. Possible background sound: a drone.)

MANI: Who's ahead?

(pause)

What time is it?

GREEN: Oh god.

MANI: (knowing this is not true) I *am* winning.

GREEN: That was... before.

(pause)

MANI: I have ants in my eyes.

GREEN: Think it's a tie.

MANI: (drawn out) Crawling.

(pause)

(not meaning it) Fuck you.

(pause)

I'm ahead.

GREEN: (in despair) Uh uh.

MANI: When we were... that other time... that doesn't count...

(long pause)

GREEN: (stalling but resigned) In a sec...

(They stay where they are without moving. Lights fade slowly out.)

## THE DETAILS

(At this point, nobody has won and nobody has lost. Both are strung out and exhausted. MANI, in frustration, wishes to evade responsibility for his creation. He is thinking about scrubbing the game. GREEN plays along to mess with his head. *Wall projections: Bare gray city shots.*)

MANI: I can't believe... We really played for 30 hours?

GREEN: More like 32.

MANI: I'm tired of, of, of trying to, of deciding...

GREEN: (starting to interrupt) That's your...

MANI: (gesturing to hold him back so he can finish his own point) ...if I have to decide between, between true things and not.

GREEN: (wearily) It's your job.

MANI: From now on let's, let it be, let it all be true. Always.

GREEN: (sardonically) I'm looking forward to this.

MANI: (ecstatically) Let the Rapture be true, and the, all the other religions, those other kinds of Christianity, Unitarians or what, or like Buddhism and Baha'i and, and, and fake religions like Wicca and like cults, like Scientology and atheism. And whatever. What you call yourself.

GREEN: (perking up) Whoa, I can't wait for the new Jehovah's Witness game to come out. You go door to door handing out copies of *The Watchtower*. It's got totally sick graphics. The Buddhists have a game too: see who can meditate the longest, that's who wins. It's actually a Nintendo Wii game, you just sit and hold those little controllers perfectly still for like eight hours. I can't get past level one. The Hare Krishna game is fun – see how many flowers you can hand out. Ten stunningly detailed airports to choose from! Or the Mormon game—it's a marriage simulation game, your avatar has to learn how to manage multiple households at once. It's called 'Take My Wives, Please!' Of course the Scientology game has been around the longest, since the Seventies: Space Invaders. They were going to make a Jewish game, but as soon as you start playing, you've already lost. I tried playing that Muslim game once, but I still can't figure out which side I was on.

MANI: Exactly. That's exactly.... I won't spend any more energy on going, on separating myself, distancing myself from... things.

GREEN: (in disbelief) You are jumping into the great flow feet first?

MANI: (on the edge fatigue-induced hallucination) Head first.

GREEN: (egging him on) Bottom first.

MANI: Breech birth into the, into the great river!

GREEN: If you look at a spiritual map from above, you know, if you study the topography, if you look down on it all spread out before you, the whole kingdom come, you will see it is more like a giant omnidirectional lava flow. Light and heat, light AND heat.

MANI: It's a river and a... a lava flow.

GREEN: Does the river boil away? or does the lava cool to solid rock?

MANI: Oh! Both!

(long pause; GREEN stops to think)

GREEN: (sudden reversal) Don't you see, it's ruined if it's all true?

MANI: No, it was just as absurd before. What is more absurd than a lava flow? A river?

GREEN: (uncertainly, as though the words don't belong in his mouth) We must choose between the absurdities?

MANI: Or? Or?

GREEN: Or we fail.

MANI: Is that a threat? (gleefully) You're threatening me now?

GREEN: No.

MANI: (provoking and insane) We can't fail. The universe continues. No matter what.

GREEN: There are provisions for the universe coming to an end.

MANI: (dismissively) We don't have to worry about that. A few billion years is a lot of lead time.

GREEN: But you spend most of your time working on how the world ends (gestures in reference to the game and game terminals).

MANI: That's why I'm tired. Binding the present, all the infinite possibilities of the present, to one outcome. One far distant outcome. Game over. (pause.) If it's all true...

(He breaks off. Both MANI and GREEN notice the **wall projection: slow-motion game footage of a demon; the image should jerk to emphasize the 'frame by frame' imminent crash of the system.**)

... anything can happen.

GREEN You are skipping the details.

MANI: (depressed) The details hardly matter.

GREEN: (desperate).The details matter to the details .

MANI: Matter itself is just a detail.

GREEN: (starkly) If everything is true all the time, there is no room left for movement. There is nowhere left to go, and nowhere that anything can come from. You achieve only stasis. You unbind the future only to annihilate it.

MANI: (recognizing their impasse) Don't make me go back.

GREEN: We're not done here yet.

MANI: We need help.

GREEN: (signifying that he agrees to help) OK.

(Lights out. In the dim light of the **demon projection fading slowly to black**, MANI dresses GREEN as LUDWIG and when done they take their places for the next scene. Projection out.)

## HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT WE KNOW

(MANI is upstage and LUDWIG is downstage. There is a spotlight on each. When LUDWIG speaks, he faces the audience for the most part but occasionally turns to look at MANI. At the top of the scene, MANI's focus is on his terminal. MANI interrupts GREEN repeatedly as he tries to come to terms with his fears. Floor projection: Washington Square park area from the game. Wall projection: throughout the following exchange a slide show of pictures of war, famine, natural disasters, and human suffering...)

LUDWIG: If someone believes that he has flown from England to America in the last few days, then I believe he cannot be making a mistake. As for example I have just flown to New York to carry out certain negotiations required by the Reich Office for Research into Ancestry. A large sum of money will suffice to declare my grandfather "of German blood" and erase my Jewish ancestry. In this case, it is not necessary to believe, only to act. And just the same if someone says that he is at this moment playing a computer game, I believe he cannot be making a mistake. (LUDWIG strikes his forehead) But I am a fool. You do not even know who I am. Ludwig Josef Johann Wittgenstein, born 1889, died 1951, aged 62 years and 3 days. Formerly a philosopher, formerly alive. Although this is doubtful: I find myself haunted by thoughts of suicide, but I believe that should not be possible at this point. If someone believes that he has recently flown to America and simultaneously that he is dead, can he be making a mistake or must he be insane?

(LUDWIG looks at MANI but not as though expecting a reply.)

Or drugged?

MANI: Or playing a game?

(LUDWIG turns back to the audience.)

LUDWIG: Did you notice how much younger I look in profile? I cannot account for this at all.

MANI: I know what will happen if we go back. One of us will win and one of us will lose. Or we will stop playing. I am afraid of what might happen. We can't go back. We can't go over there.

LUDWIG: I cannot help seeing every problem from a religious point of view. During the First War, I kept the Gospels with me. I was the man with the Gospels. Still I felt ... empty.

MANI: How do we know what will happen if we go back to the game. Logic tells us if we go back we will be able to play. We will see who will win or lose. This shit can't go on forever.

LUDWIG: I failed in my great task of philosophizing. So now I must ask myself: what is to be the task of my death? Soren Kierkegaard wrote that his father once set him a task as a boy, and he suddenly felt that his responsibility for that task transcended death itself. Nothing could take it away. His duty in death and his duty in life remained the same. What would it mean if this were true?

MANI: If I say that I know Christianity is the one true religion, and it is true, how is that different from saying that I know Christianity is the one true religion, and being wrong? That something *seems* so doesn't mean it *is* so. Is the game really over there?

LUDWIG: I admired Kierkegaard. His name, you know, that means 'church garden' in Danish. Kierke-gaard. And I worked in church gardens myself. Twice. Two times a gardener. I liked gardening because the labor was hard and it was highly regular.

MANI: I don't think there is any way for it to have vanished. We were over there just now. But we've been wrong so many times.

LUDWIG: When you work with the living world, it imposes its structure on you. You must answer to it, do certain things at certain times, or not at all. You must submit.

MANI: Could we just hypothesize that everything here, including the game, does not exist? Then we would not have to go back.

LUDWIG: The problem arises when you speak of gardens in the plural. This world is all one garden, all one wilderness. All one. Eden, here and now and everywhere. (pause) Broken.

MANI: (desperately) You remember that we were playing? Is that memory grounds for belief or grounds for doubt?

LUDWIG: I doubt that it is possible to restore Eden in just one place.

MANI: How much doubt can I support?

(LUDWIG turns his head to look at MANI.)

I doubt the earth was created 4000 years ago. I doubt the earth was created 4 billion years ago. Are these doubts equal? Does it only depend on what we accept as evidence?

(LUDWIG turns his head to the front; pause; then without speaking,

LUDWIG shakes his head and turns back to MANI.)

MANI: Are we just stalling? I guess we could sit here and talk all day and not play the game.

(LUDWIG turns his head back to the front, nods.)

LUDWIG: This is the great flaw in Western religion. We do not see the divine in nature. We cling to the illusion of dominion over "every living thing that moveth upon the earth". We do not see that what I call gardening is not a luxury. It is a necessity.

MANI: I can doubt my senses; I can doubt your memory. If there are just two of us, the doubt is easier. What if there is a whole crowd of people who saw us playing a little while ago? Does that make it more real? Or just more probable?

LUDWIG: It is written in the Book of Revelations: "The time has come for destroying those who destroy the Earth."

MANI: If I doubt... what did you say?

LUDWIG: Yes. "The time has come for destroying those who destroy the Earth."

MANI: (pause) If I think I know something to be true, what will convince me I am wrong?

LUDWIG: People thought I was a good philosopher. I was a better gardener. My flaw was... I could not stick to it. I played at it. Yours is ... you are still hoping to be rescued at the last moment.

(LUDWIG turns his head to look at MANI.)

By technology or by the Rapture.

MANI: Why do I call certain beliefs 'knowledge'? What if there is no test that can convince me I am wrong? In that case, what does it mean to say *I know*?

LUDWIG: Suppose the Rapture is delayed; suppose you survive global warming and global war. Still, you are on your way to being burned up in the sun. This will happen in 30 million human generations.

MANI: Can we really believe in any thing so remote?

LUDWIG: The Bible describes our future this way: "The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

The scientist this way: "The sun will transform into a red giant, consume the earth, and then collapse into a white dwarf." On the face of it these sound equally like myths.

MANI: What *exactly* is it that we know, and what is it that we believe?

LUDWIG: (shrugs) I can speak to you now because from this perspective of the far future we are equally dead; the dead speaking to the dead.

MANI: People say they believe something in order to *stand for* something. Is that what we want? Not to know, really, not to believe, really: but to value... something? anything?

(LUDWIG turns his head to look at MANI.)

LUDWIG: The "new heaven and new earth" promised by Revelations?

(MANI does not speak but looks hopefully at LUDWIG.)

If we stand for "a new earth," what then do we stand against?

(They look at each other. Lights down and out.)

## REHEARSING THE RAPTURE

MANI: I know it's going to happen, I just don't know when. That worries me. There's so much going on out there, people moving around. Why don't they stop.

Stop.

It's not a peaceful world.

In my own lifetime.

In yours.

Get ready for the Rapture.

Don't want to blow it when it comes.

GREEN: Come on, let's play again.

MANI: (Not breaking rhythm or looking at GREEN). Six months of food, cash in the safe. Give away the cat, no one liked it anyway. Don't bother with insurance; they'll deny it under the Act of God clause. Label all your clothes with a permanent marker so that people will know who was taken. They will know it was you and not some... nobody. Stop driving. Do you really want your last act to be you killed some poor soul when your driverless car went out of control? With God watching? Me, I always sit by the window on the bus, and when I am in someone's home as well. I believe that if I just happen to just turn my head at exactly the right moment I will see it coming. I will see the Lord in his glory before I am taken. With these eyes. It's important to think of these things. It's important to think of those others. It's like we're being spied on all the time and we know Who's watching but we can't see. And then suddenly one day... (he gestures)... Rapture.

The first thing is your hearing goes dim, you lose all the sensation in your toes, and then smell, or maybe smell goes first but anyway.

To those left behind it's like bang, gone, but inside you're the hero of the day, you're nailing that long hail mary pass. It's being there and it's getting the instant replay all at once. I can see your faces all stretchy and I'm doing the victory wave and it's all perfect, high, white, and wide.

Once it starts you know time slows down inside.

You're suddenly naked and you're being shot dead with an invisible bullet all in super duper ultra mega astro slow motion.

In the twinkling of the light.

The last thing is your vision shuts down, it goes into telescope mode and everything recedes from you at the speed of light so you want to throw up. It's like this long build-up to a gigantic belch. Or hurling the greatest beer you ever had.

Flash ! Frozen solid in a walk-in cooler.

And then starting to melt, your face trickles down your neck and your fingertips drip on the floor.

Crack! Out of the ice and into the pond.

You're just some fish to these beings in a higher dimension and they just scoop you out on the bank flop flop flop flop flop flop flop.

flop flop flop. flop.

flop. (pause) flop.

(MANI partially drops out of the fantasy for a moment.)

The old me back there... what was he thinking? He didn't want to stay and he didn't want to leave.

(MANI re-enters his fantasy but with a new focus.)

I want it to come so bad. I want to help it happen if I can, if I can have that privilege. (This next bit is a secret that is being revealed for the first time...) I've come close before, I've seen it coming. It just takes practice. It has to be done right. First put out the alcohol and the cotton balls. I just love little cottony balls. On a tray with the knife and the folded hand towel, that has to be just damp. Set them to the left if you are right-handed, or the reverse if you are on the other side. Now hold the knife lightly between just your first two fingers and your thumb and wait for the quiet time. When you feel the tunnel begin to open at your heart that's when you bring it on. You can make the Rapture come to you.

I'll be sitting right there and then what? I won't be sitting there.

It's good where I feel safe. I feel nothing so I am safe. I am safe.

GREEN: (genuinely disturbed) Step AWAY from the Rapture.

MANI: No.

(Lights out.)

## NOTES AND SOURCES

"Expansion Set": Some material adapted and quoted from Tyndale House publicity materials pertaining to the "Left Behind" games.

"How Do We Know What We Know?": Some material adapted and quoted from Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Wiley-Blackwell, 1991).

Projections: For many scenes, these are machinima videos constructed using screen capture footage from "Left Behind: Eternal Forces." Other videos include found footage of various kinds.