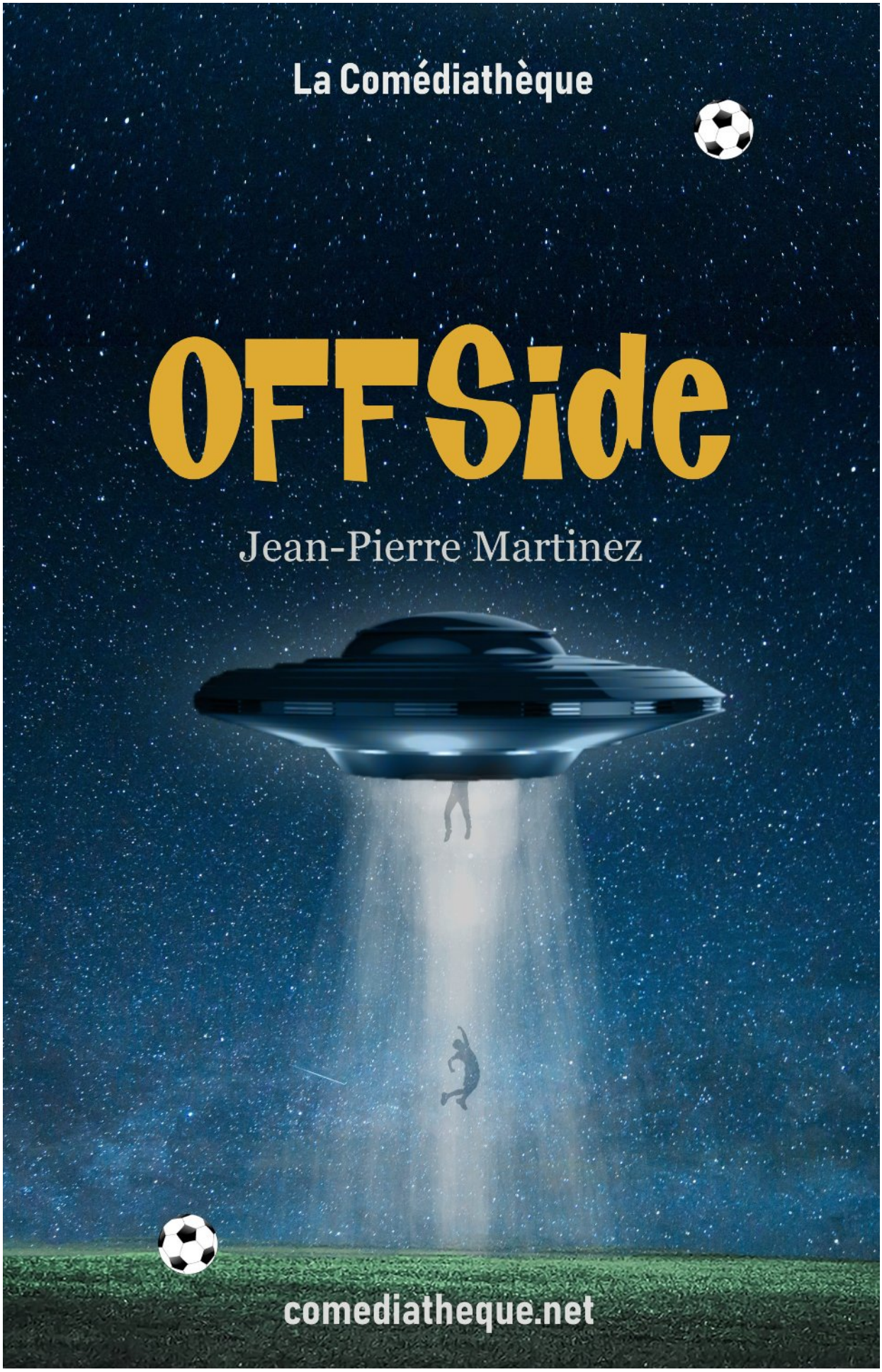

La Comédiathèque
OFFSide
Jean-Pierre Martinez
comediatheque.net

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Offside

Jean-Pierre Martinez

Five strangers who have never met, and seem to have nothing in common, wake up trapped in an unfamiliar place. Who brought them there, and why? The arrival of their two kidnappers raises more questions than it answers. To make it into extra time, the hostages will have to put their differences aside and play as a team. And avoid being caught offside.

Characters

Fred: unemployed comedian (man or woman)
Manu: chef (man)
Alex: environmentalist politician (gender ambiguous)
Carla: sex worker (may be played by a cross-dresser or a transgender woman)
Béatrice: nun
Alpha: extraterrestrial (male)
Oméga: extraterrestrial (female)

7 characters
Possible casts:
2 men/5 women, 3 men/4 women, 4 men/3 women, 5 men/2 women

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Manu (a man), Fred (a man or woman, played here as a woman) and Alex (apparently a woman) lie unconscious in three futuristic chairs at the back of the stage. Fred wakes first. Dressed casually but fashionably, and not especially graceful, she rubs her eyes and staggers to her feet as though suffering from a hangover. She slowly realises she has no idea where she is. The sight of the other unconscious bodies alarms her. She searches in vain for an exit. While her back is turned, Manu wakes and stands, just as disoriented. He is a blunt, macho man in conservative clothes. Fred turns, sees him and jumps in terror.

Fred – Don't come any closer! I did karate, you know!

Manu is surprised to find her there, but shows no fear.

Manu – Who the hell are you?

Fred *(hesitating)* – I don't know. Well, yes, I do know who I am, but… where are we?

Manu – Well, this isn't my place. *(Looking around.)* You sure it isn't yours?

Fred – Wouldn't I know if this were my place? Besides, what would we be doing here together?

Manu – That's what I'd like to know.

Fred – Besides, we're not alone.

Fred points to the third person slumped in the remaining chair.

Manu – Do you know him?

Fred bends cautiously over Alex.

Fred – Isn't that a woman?

Manu comes closer.

Manu – Maybe.

Fred – Do you think he's dead?

Manu is still looking round the room.

Manu – Who?

Fred *(pointing)* – Him! Or her…

Manu – How would I know? I'm not a pathologist!

Fred – So what do we do?

Manu – Try mouth-to-mouth. If it's Sleeping Beauty, she might wake up.

Fred – And if it's a man?

Manu – If it's a man and you give him a big wet kiss, he'll wake up too.

Fred – Maybe someone's drugged us.

Manu gives her a puzzled look.

Manu – That's enough. I'm out of here.

He heads towards the wings.

Fred – There's no exit.

Manu – We'll see. I've kicked down plenty of doors in my time.

Fred – Oh, I believe you. You look the sort who kicks doors down. Even when they're already open. *(As Manu searches on either side.)* Only here, there's no door to kick down.

Manu stops, taken aback.

Manu – No doors? How can that be?

He checks again, then has to admit defeat.

Fred – No doors. No windows.

Manu – Whoever brought us in must have come through somewhere!

Fred – So you think somebody brought us here?

Manu – Do you remember coming here under your own steam?

Fred – No.

Manu – Then someone brought us. Stands to reason.

Fred – Logic? There's nothing logical about the two of us being here. Or three of us.

A pause.

Manu – Why would anyone drug us?

Fred – I don't know. It would explain why we remember nothing.

Manu – Really?

Fred – I've read about this drug called GHB.

Manu – GHB?

Fred – The date-rape drug.

Manu – You know a suspicious amount about drugs. What kind of rape drug?

Fred – The sort a rapist slips into your drink. In a nightclub, maybe, in a whisky and cola. The victim becomes helpless and remembers nothing afterwards. You didn't put something in my drink, did you?

Manu – Are you out of your mind? I don't even go to nightclubs. I'm married, for your information. Besides, why couldn't you be the one who drugged me?

Fred – Are you serious? Why on earth would I?

Manu – I'd rather not find out.

Fred – If I'd drugged you, I'd remember.

Manu – Not if you'd drunk some yourself.

Fred – Drunk what?

Manu – That rubbish you were talking about! The whisky and cola!

Fred – I think somebody drugged both of us.

Manu – But why me? Rapists aren't usually after men, are they? Certainly not men like me.

Fred indicates the third body.

Fred – There's her, too.

Manu – We don't even know whether she's a woman. We should wake her up and ask.

Fred – Ask if she's a woman?

Manu – Ask her if she knows anything!

Fred approaches and gently shakes the unconscious person.

Fred – Hello? Can you hear me?

Manu sighs impatiently.

Manu – Here, let me. *(He shakes Alex hard and bellows.)* CAN YOU HEAR ME?

Alex jerks awake and leaps out of the chair.

Alex – It wasn't me! I swear!

Alex could be an effeminate man or a masculine woman, dressed in a smart trouser suit. Her actual sex should remain uncertain, though these directions use female pronouns. Wide awake physically, she at first speaks and moves like a sleepwalker.

Alex – Sorry. I must have had a nightmare… Ignore me. I'll just go and freshen up.

She circles the room, unable to find a door.

Alex – Could you tell me… where the toilets are?

Fred – Men's or women's?

Alex stares at her. Manu pretends to applaud such a delicate question.

Manu – There aren't any toilets.

Alex – Oh. A budget airline. I'd better go back to sleep, then. Wake me just before landing.

Fred and Manu exchange bewildered looks as Alex starts to sit down again.

Fred – I assure you, this isn't a budget airline.

Alex looks at them curiously.

Manu – In fact, there's a good chance we're not on a plane at all.

Alex – I see.

She begins to return to reality, perhaps putting on her glasses.

Alex – So you're not flight attendants either.

Manu – Exactly.

Alex *(alarmed)* – But where are we?

Fred – We were rather hoping you'd tell us.

Alex circles the room again, growing increasingly frantic.

Manu – Forget it. There's no way out.

Alex – No exit? But I'm claustrophobic! *(She disappears to one side, pounding on a partition and shouting.)* Let me out!

Manu rolls his eyes and signals to Fred to fetch her. Fred returns supporting Alex by the arm.

Fred – You'll be all right. Calm down.

Alex – I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me.

Fred – So you have no idea what the three of us are doing here either.

Alex – Do you two know each other?

Manu – No.

Fred – We might as well introduce ourselves. Perhaps that'll help us work out why we were kidnapped.

Alex – You think we've been kidnapped?

Manu – We didn't choose to come here and we can't leave. Call it what you like.

Fred – Fred. Short for Frédérique. And you?

Alex – Alex.

Fred – And Alex is short for…?

Alex – Alex. That's it.

Fred – Right.

Alex – And you?

Manu – Manu. Short for Emmanuel.

Fred – Perhaps they decided to kidnap people whose names are shortened.

Alex – Who do you mean by “they”?

Fred – Them. I don't know… whoever brought us here. Someone must have, surely?

Manu – Yes, but why? That's what matters.

Fred – Maybe it's connected to our jobs.

Manu – What do you do?

Fred – I'm… a comedian.

Manu – A comedian?

Fred – Mostly an unemployed one, these days.

Manu – Who'd want to kidnap an unemployed comedian?

Alex – And in your act… did you make jokes about religion?

Fred – No, not especially.

Manu – If we've been kidnapped by Islamist extremists, we're certainly going to need your sense of humour.

Alex *(terrified)* – Islamic extremists? Do you really think so?

Manu – No! I just said it. It was a joke.

Fred – And what do you do?

Manu – I'm a chef.

Fred – Oh, really? Funny. I'm not surprised.

Alex – What kind of chef?

Fred – A head chef? Or just a big head?

Manu – A chef! A cook! I run a restaurant.

Alex – Oh? You'll have to give us the address.

Manu – If we get out alive.

Alex – A comedian and a cook… This makes no sense.

Fred – And you?

Alex – I'm an elected local councillor.

Fred – A male councillor or a female councillor?

Alex – Either will do.

Fred – I see.

Alex – Green Party. And deputy mayor in charge of street cleaning, if you must know.

Manu – An unemployed performer and a Green councillor… If I weren't here myself, I'd think they were trying to rid France of all its parasites.

Alex – Excellent. What a subtle analysis. That'll certainly help us.

Fred – Oh, and you consider yourself essential to society, do you? I can't afford to eat in restaurants. I doubt yours is a soup kitchen.

Manu – At least I pay taxes.

Alex – I have a feeling this comedy will end very badly.

Fred – A comedy that ends badly? I call that a drama.

Manu – We still don't know why anyone kidnapped us.

Alex – For ransom?

Fred – Ransom?

Alex – Maybe it’s just a straightforward kidnapping for ransom.

Manu – I'm no billionaire. I've only just opened my restaurant. All I have so far is debt.

Alex – And you, the comedian, are hardly rolling in money, I imagine.

Fred – Asking an unemployed performer for ransom is like asking a bald man to lend you his comb.

Manu – You get paid for holding all those elected positions, don't you?

Alex – I'm comfortable enough. Still…

Manu – None of that explains why all three of us were taken.

Fred – We haven't a single thing in common.

Manu – No. We couldn't be more different.

They think for a moment.

Alex – Well, we are all French.

Fred – French? I hardly call that something in common.

Alex – You don't?

Fred – I mean, everyone's French, aren't they? In France, I mean.

Manu – If only that were true.

Fred – I see. So you don't like foreigners either.

Manu – I was simply saying that living in France doesn't automatically make you French.

Alex – We're definitely French. We might be about to have our throats cut on camera, yet we're already at one another's throats over national identity.

Fred – You're right. We have nothing in common. But if we want to get out alive, we have to stick together.

Alex – Hold on. Perhaps that's why!

Manu – Why what?

Alex – Perhaps we were chosen precisely because we're so different.

Fred – What do you mean?

Alex – I don't know. I'm trying to make sense of it.

Manu – Lovely. But what's our next move?

Fred – What do you suggest?

Manu – Of course! We can phone someone!

Alex – Yes. Call the police.

Fred – We don't even know where we are! What would we tell them?

Manu – They might be able to locate our phones.

He gets out his mobile and dials.

Alex – Strange they didn't take our phones away.

Manu – Shit. No signal.

Alex – I'll try mine.

Fred – Me too.

They take out their phones and try them.

Alex – Nothing.

Fred – Same here.

Manu – Well, that explains why they didn't bother confiscating them.

Alex – Where could we be with no signal at all?

They exchange worried looks.

Fred – A desert, perhaps.

Alex – Or a cellar.

Fred – A nuclear shelter?

The others stare at her in horror.

Manu – Wherever we are, we can't contact the outside world.

Alex – So what can we do?

Fred – Nothing.

Alex – Just wait, then.

Manu – Wait?

Fred – Whoever kidnapped us wants something. Sooner or later they'll show up.

Alex – Then we'll try to negotiate.

Manu – Let them show up. I'll give them a lesson in negotiation.

Manu makes a threatening gesture that Alex tries to stop. A ridiculous, low-budget science-fiction sound effect is heard. Fred, Manu and Alex freeze. The lights fade as far as possible. In the gloom, a woman drags in another woman, unconscious, and puts her in one of the chairs before collapsing into another. The lights return, revealing Carla (dressed like a sex worker and potentially played as a cross-dresser) and Béatrice (in a nun's habit). The three original captives start moving and speaking again, oblivious to the two newcomers.

Alex – Violence isn't always the answer. If we want to survive, we'll need diplomacy.

Manu – Diplomacy? We don't even know who abducted us or what they want!

Fred – Well, I hope they hurry up. I'm starving. Aren't you?

Alex – How can you think about food at a time like this?

Manu – We've been kidnapped, and you're worried about room service?

Fred – Sorry, but I skipped lunch. Sometimes I skip meals just to save money.

Manu – Such is the artist's life.

Alex – Everybody calm down. If we escape this mess, we're escaping together.

Manu – Fine. If we get out by tonight, I'll treat you all to dinner at my restaurant. Promise.

Alex – Come to think of it, we don't even know what time it is.

Manu *(checking his watch)* – My watch has stopped. What does yours say?

Alex – Mine's stopped too. Yours?

Fred – I don't wear a watch.

Manu – Of course you don't.

Alex – This is ridiculous. There must be a way out somewhere.

She turns to search once more, then jumps when she notices two unconscious bodies in the chairs.

Alex – What on earth is that?

Fred – What?

Manu and Fred turn round and discover the two bodies.

Manu – Fuck!

Alex – What a nightmare.

Manu – How did they get here? Did either of you see anything?

Fred – No.

Manu – And we never heard a sound.

Alex – Something very strange is going on here.

Fred – You don't say.

Manu goes over to examine the bodies.

Manu – They're both women.

Fred and Alex join him.

Fred – One of them seems to be wearing a burqa.

Alex – Well, that's reassuring, at least.

Fred – How do you mean?

Alex – Why would Islamist extremists kidnap a woman in a burqa?

Fred – That's not a burqa.

Manu – Bloody hell, it's a nun!

Alex – What about the other one?

Manu – The other doesn't look much like a nun.

Fred – This is insane.

Manu – What did they bring these two in for?

Fred – Maybe they want to see if you can breed in captivity, like the great apes.

Alex – With a nun?

At that moment the nun regains consciousness.

Béa – Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Where am I?

Alex – Not in heaven, Sister. Unless heaven's very different from what I imagined.

Fred – And it's too cold for hell.

Béa – Purgatory, perhaps.

Manu – And what exactly are you meant to do in purgatory?

Béa – If it's purgatory, all you can do is wait.

Alex – Thank you, Sister. That's enormously helpful.

Manu – Providence has sent you to us, clearly.

Béa *(missing the irony)* – You're very welcome. If I can be of any comfort in the ordeal God has sent us… I'm Sister Béatrice.

Fred – Delighted to meet you, Sister.

Béa – But I still don't understand how I got here.

Fred – The Lord moves in mysterious ways.

Béa – The last thing I remember is the clinic.

Manu – Were you a patient?

Béa – No. I work there as a nursing assistant. Our Lady of Good Help Clinic.

Alex – I see.

Béa – I was at morning prayers in the chapel, listening to our chaplain's sermon. I must have had an accident. That's it! I'm dead, and God has sent a poor sinner like me to purgatory.

Alex – What sort of accident can you have listening to Mass?

Fred – Especially a fatal one.

Manu – You might choke on the communion wafer. Food going down the wrong way. Happened once to a customer in my restaurant.

Fred – Maybe she fell off her kneeler. They're quite high, those things.

Alex – But she's right about one thing. Let's all try to remember what we were doing just before… What's the last thing each of you remembers?

Manu – I can see myself in my restaurant kitchen, making truffle mayonnaise.

Béa – A really good mayonnaise isn't easy to make.

Manu – The trick is to add a drop of…

Fred – Perhaps now isn't the time to swap recipes. I'm hungry enough already.

Alex – And what were you doing?

Fred – Well, I…

Manu – Can't remember, can you?

Fred – I can. But I'd rather keep it to myself, if that's all right. It wouldn't help you anyway.

Alex – I see.

Fred – What about you? What were you doing?

Alex – I… The last thing I remember is… oh yes, I was at the hairdresser's!

Fred – A men's or women's hairdresser?

Alex – Is that really going to help us find out why we're here?

Carla, a sex worker who may be played as a cross-dresser, regains consciousness. Bewildered, she stares at Sister Béatrice. Carla may speak with a foreign accent.

Carla – Hello, Sister. Did my operation go well?

Béa – I couldn't say.

Carla – Aren't you a nurse?

Béa – Yes…

Alex – You said you were a nursing assistant.

Fred – Pride is a sin, Sister. No wonder you've landed in purgatory.

Carla – If you're a nurse, I must be in hospital. I came in for… well, you know.

Béa – No, I don't.

Carla – As the French writer Simone de Beauvoir once said, 'One is not born a woman; one becomes one.'

Béa – I see… Though I'm not sure Our Lady of Good Help offers that particular operation.

Manu – That's all we needed.

Carla – Who are those three?

Béa – I haven't the faintest idea.

Alex – I'm beginning to wonder if this isn't a psychiatric hospital.

Manu – That would explain a lot.

Carla stands.

Carla – Will someone tell me what's happening? Where are we, and why am I here?

Fred – You tell her.

Alex – All of us woke up here. None of us knows where we are or what we're doing here.

Fred – This is beginning to sound like a play by the French existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre. What was it called? Dirty Hands?

Alex – No Exit.

Fred – Exactly. Except there are five of us.

Manu – So far.

Alex – I know this is going to end badly.

Carla takes a few steps.

Carla – This is a joke, isn't it?

Manu – I'm afraid not, sir… I mean, madam.

Carla – My name is Carla.

Fred – And what do you do for a living, Carla?

Carla – Isn't it obvious?

Fred – Sorry. Just checking.

Manu – A nun and a tranny…

Carla – No need to be vulgar. I prefer 'transgender', if you don't mind.

Manu *(to Alex)* – I think you may have been right.

Alex – About what?

Manu – About somebody gathering people with absolutely nothing in common.

Fred – Except we're French.

Manu – If you insist.

Béa – Could we be on a kind of Noah's Ark, waiting for another flood?

Alex – Sorry?

Béa – Noah! In the Bible! He took animals of every species aboard before the Flood. Maybe somebody's collecting a sample of the human race.

Carla – Some sample. More like a carnival of freaks.

Manu – Purgatory, Noah's Ark, now a parade of freaks…

Alex – More like the French painting The Raft of the Medusa, with those desperate shipwreck survivors.

Fred – Who knows? Perhaps we'll end up eating one another.

Carla – Did they do that on the raft?

Fred – All I know is I'm absolutely starving.

Béa – Or perhaps it's a reality television show.

Alex – One that's going to end badly. I can feel it.

While everyone looks towards the audience, Alpha (male) and Oméga (female) enter unnoticed behind them. Both wear cheap unisex science-fiction jumpsuits with toy-like ray guns at their belts, resembling hairdryers. They move like robots. Their appearances are so similar that they might easily be confused, despite their different sexes. Their names are clearly printed on their suits.

Alpha – Greetings, people of Earth.

The others all turn together.

Oméga – Welcome aboard our humble flying saucer.

Manu – What the hell is this circus?

Fred – Who are these clowns?

Alpha and Oméga approach centre stage.

Béa *(crossing herself)* – Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Oméga – We are your hosts. You are our guests.

Alpha – For the moment, anyway.

Carla – And they're taking the piss out of us.

Béa – You can't go round kidnapping people!

Alex – We could have you arrested for abduction and false imprisonment, you know.

Alpha – We sincerely apologise for these minor inconveniences.

Oméga – We wished to speak to you before making an important decision.

Alpha – Important to you, at least.

Manu – What do you want, then?

Alpha – We wish to… get acquainted. That's all.

Oméga – Learn a little about your customs.

Carla – So you're tourists?

Alpha – We'll explain. Don't worry.

Manu – We don't want an explanation! We want to get the hell out!

Carla – Where did you come from, anyway?

Fred – How did you get in? There isn't even a door!

Alpha – We… descended from the sky.

Manu – Right. Down the chimney, like Santa Claus.

Oméga – Not quite.

Béa – So you're angels?

Alpha – Not quite that either.

Alex – Then who the hell are you?

Alpha – I realise you'll find it hard to believe, but…

Oméga – On your planet, you call us extraterrestrials.

A stunned silence.

Carla – Oh, I get it. It's a joke.

Manu – Hidden cameras? Is that it?

Fred – Some reality show? Where are the cameras?

Oméga – There are no cameras.

Béa *(crossing herself)* – Lord preserve us… The devil sent them.

Fred – Extraterrestrials!

Everyone except Béatrice laughs nervously. Alpha and Oméga look on with interest.

Alpha – So this is what you call laughing?

Oméga – Apparently.

Alpha – It's certainly very loud.

Alex – Martians? Oh, come on! You could at least have tried harder with the special effects.

Fred – Must be a very cheap television channel.

Manu – You look exactly like us!

Carla – We don't necessarily expect green skin and antennae instead of eyes, but still.

Manu – Everybody knows aliens don't look exactly like humans!

Alpha – Quite right. We are unlike you.

Oméga – Very unlike you. You might be surprised.

Alpha – We adopted human form so as not to frighten you.

Oméga – And learned your language so we could talk.

Manu approaches threateningly.

Manu – Enough of this nonsense. I'm going home.

Alpha – Unfortunately, that isn't possible at present.

Manu – Oh, really? And who's going to stop me? You?

Manu steps forward. Alpha draws his pistol and aims it at him.

Alpha – I wouldn't do that, if I were you.

Manu – What, are you going to stop me with a hairdryer? Where did you get this stuff? An old Star Trek episode?

Manu advances. Alpha fires. Manu falls, his body jerking in spasms.

Béa *(crossing herself)* – Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Martians!

Oméga – Don't worry. No permanent damage.

Manu gets up, dazed. Béatrice rushes to help.

Fred – So this isn't a joke.

Alpha – What is a joke?

Carla – You don't know what a joke is?

Oméga – That's exactly why we're here.

Alex – Why did you abduct us? We haven't done anything to you!

Alpha – We're simply trying to understand.

Fred – Understand? Understand what?

Oméga – All those things about you that are a mystery to us.

Béa – You aren't going to cut us up like laboratory rats, are you?

Alpha – Certainly not. Don't worry.

Oméga – We've done that already.

Alpha – To other humans, of course.

Carla – Oh, that's a relief.

Oméga – But it didn't help us understand.

Manu – Understand what, for fuck's sake?

Alpha – What makes life worth living, in your eyes.

Oméga – Love, laughter, good food…

Alpha – The French art of living.

Fred – Told you! They've kidnapped us because we're French.

Oméga – Don't people say 'as happy as God in France'?

Alex – Actually, it's a German saying. It means living the good life.

Carla – Mostly a pretext for invading France twice a century.

Alpha – In any case, we'd like to know who God is.

Oméga – And what happiness is.

Carla – You kidnapped us to learn about French charm, French humour and French cooking? You can't be serious.

Fred – Then you can release me at once. I haven't had sex for so long I've forgotten how, my agent says I'm not funny, and I'm a terrible cook.

Alpha – Ah, cooking! We've been neglecting our duties as hosts.

Oméga – We'll bring you something to eat.

Alpha – We're not barbarians, after all.

Oméga – We wouldn't want you to starve.

Fred – You won't hear me complaining about that.

Alpha – We can continue our conversation after you've had some food.

Oméga exits.

Alpha – We don't cook nearly as well as the French, but I hope you'll enjoy it.

Oméga returns carrying a large cooking pot.

Alpha – Bon appétit! Is that how you say it?

Manu – Er… yes.

Alpha and Oméga prepare to leave.

Béa – Aren't you going to eat with us?

Oméga – Well…

Alpha – We don't know what eating feels like.

Oméga – And we don't need to eat.

Alpha – We run… on batteries.

Béa – Oh!

Carla – Are you saying you're robots?

Alpha – It's rather more complicated than that.

Oméga – Some of your people already have battery-powered body parts, don't they?

Béa – You mean sex toys? *(All eyes turn to her.)* I've only heard about them!

Alpha – We were thinking of an artificial heart, after a transplant.

Carla – The heart and the cock are the first two male organs that can easily be replaced by electrical devices.

Béa – I wonder why.

A pause.

Oméga – That's more or less how we work.

Alpha – Except that all our organs run on batteries.

Oméga – Of course, when we say 'batteries'…

Alpha – It's just an expression.

Carla – Of course.

Oméga – Anyway, enjoy your meal!

Alex – And if we need to contact you, for whatever reason?

Carla – To use the toilet, say?

Alpha – We'll know.

Oméga – And we'll come when you call.

Alpha and Oméga leave.

Béa – Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Cyborgs!

Everyone stares at Sister Béatrice again. They remain speechless for a moment.

Alex – Could it still be an elaborate joke?

Manu – That laser gun was no joke. Trust me.

Fred – Could've been a stun gun.

Béa – If this is purgatory, they're demons sent by God to test us.

Carla – Can't you do something with a crucifix or a clove of garlic, like they do in vampire films?

Béa – Unfortunately, they've taken the cross I wore round my neck.

Carla – That's a shame.

Béa *(to herself)* – Or perhaps I lost it during the match.

Manu – What match?

Béa – Oh, never mind. Sorry.

Alex – Maybe they're extremists playing a nasty trick on us.

Fred – They're not exactly famous for humour, those people.

Manu – I can't see extremists dressing as aliens just to make us laugh before cutting our throats like sheep.

A pause.

Carla – But suppose it isn't a trick?

Manu – You mean they're really from another planet?

Béa – I must say, if I had to choose, I'm not sure which I'd prefer.

Carla – If aliens have actually landed on Earth, I suppose they have a lot to ask us, don't they?

Manu – I don't give a damn about their philosophical questions. I want out! I've got a restaurant to run!

Alex – It's going to end badly. I know it.

Béa – They didn't seem especially hostile.

Fred – They even brought us dinner.

Manu – Easy to say when you weren't the one they electrocuted.

Fred – I'm starving. Shall we carry on arguing over dinner?

Manu – We're stuck here anyway. We'd better keep our strength up. We may need it.

Manu lifts the lid of the pot.

Carla – What's that? Something from their planet?

Béa – Couscous?

Manu peers inside.

Manu – Looks more like cabbage soup.

Fred – They must have watched that French film.

Carla – Which film?

Fred – Cabbage Soup! The French film where a farmer makes soup for an alien. A classic!

Alex – They could at least have given us cutlery.

Carla – We're not eating with our fingers.

Béa – Not if it's soup.

Manu – No, there's meat in here. More like a stew.

Carla – Stew it is, then.

Fred – What's in this stew, exactly?

Alex – Does it matter, in our situation?

Béa – We'll have to take pot luck, then!

Fred – Sorry, I don't eat pork.

Manu *(suspiciously)* – Are you Muslim?

Fred – No. I'm not Muslim. I just don't eat pork.

Béa – Muslims aren't the only people who avoid pork.

Manu – Oh. I see.

Fred – Is that a problem as well?

Manu – Not at all.

Alex – So what does this stew look like?

Béa – It smells lovely. May I say grace?

Manu puts a hand into the pot, then freezes.

Manu – Well, at least there's no pork in this. Anyone who doesn't eat pork can tuck in.

He pulls out a human hand. Then a human foot. They all recoil.

Alex – This is monstrous!

Carla – They're dangerous lunatics!

Béa *(crossing herself)* – Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Cannibals! An abomination!

Alex – We can't just sit here and wait for these nice people to boil us alive.

Fred – You're right. We have to do something.

Manu – Such as? If you have a brilliant idea, now's the time.

Carla – We catch them off guard and knock them out. There's only two of them.

Alex – They don't look particularly strong.

Béa – And they run on batteries.

Manu – Good. *(To Fred.)* You said you knew karate. Time to show us.

Fred – Well, I stopped after the first week. I was afraid of getting hurt.

Manu – Even if we knock them out, then what? Take over this flying saucer and ask air traffic control in Paris for permission to land?

Fred – Perhaps a flying saucer isn't all that hard to drive.

Béa – I haven't got a driving licence. Though I sometimes drive Mother Superior's little old car around the clinic grounds.

Manu – I've got a helicopter pilot's licence, but…

Alex – This will end badly. I can feel it.

Fred – Will you stop saying that? You'll bring us bad luck.

A pause.

Béa – Then there's only one thing left to do.

Carla – What?

Béa – Pray!

Béatrice clasps her hands and mutters a prayer. The others sigh in exasperation.

Alex – We still need a plan.

Carla – While they're away, let's prepare for the return match.

Fred – Return match? Why did you say 'return match'?

Carla – I don't know. I meant a counterattack.

Alex – Our only hope is to take them by surprise.

Manu – Good luck with that.

Carla – Why?

Manu – Didn't you hear them? 'If you need us, we'll know.'

Béa – You mean…

Carla – They're listening to us?

Alpha and Oméga quietly re-enter behind them.

Alpha – Well? Hungry?

The others jump.

Béa – Sweet Jesus!

Carla – Don't creep up on people like that!

Alex – You nearly gave me a heart attack!

Oméga – Sorry.

Alpha – You didn't enjoy today's special? *(He lifts the lid.)* You haven't touched it.

Oméga – And we followed the recipe so carefully.

Alpha – With a few changes. We didn't have all the ingredients.

Alex – We don't eat human beings!

Alpha – You don't eat cabbage?

Manu holds up the foot.

Béa – We're decent Christians! We aren't cannibals!

Alpha – Sorry. We thought you'd like it.

Oméga – I told you humans stopped eating one another ages ago.

Alpha – Our apologies. A small misunderstanding.

Carla – A SMALL misunderstanding?

Béa – Who is it, anyway?

Alpha – Who?

Carla – In the pot!

Oméga – Some of your predecessors.

Alpha – People who failed to answer our questions.

Oméga – Quite respectable people, in fact.

Alpha – Really nice, as you would put it.

Alex *(aside to Fred)* – We'd better negotiate.

Fred – And be very careful not to upset them.

Carla – We can't afford to be caught offside.

Manu – You mean we can't afford a mistake?

Carla – Oh, you know what I mean.

Alex – So those really are the questions you want answered?

Carla – Love and all that other crap?

Oméga – Among other things, yes.

Alpha – There are so many mysterious things we'd like to discover about Earthlings.

Oméga – Especially the French. Things like…

Alpha – Existentialism.

Oméga – Beaujolais Nouveau, the young French wine.

Alpha – Cubism.

Oméga – Endless quarrels between French political parties.

Alpha – God.

Oméga – Anal sex.

Fred – Well, that's quite a list.

Béa *(crossing herself)* – Dear Lord.

Alex – But why choose us, if you don't mind me asking?

Manu – We're just ordinary people, you know. Nothing special about us.

Fred – Below average, some of us.

Carla – Why not ask the experts?

Manu – Philosophers, politicians, artists, television celebrities…

Alpha – We already did.

Béa – And?

Carla – Where are they?

Oméga – In the cooking pot.

Alex – Their answers weren't entirely satisfactory, I gather.

Fred – Don't tell me those were a famous French philosopher's feet and a TV celebrity's brain in the stew!

Béa – Oh God, there was a brain as well?

Alpha indicates the pot.

Alpha – Are you quite sure you won't try some?

Oméga – It might help.

Alpha – They say eating brains is good for the memory.

Oméga – We read that in one of your cookbooks.

Alpha – And a philosopher's brain must be especially good.

Oméga lifts the lid.

Oméga – On second thoughts, it doesn't look very appetising.

Alpha – Perhaps the philosopher had dirty hands.

Oméga – Yet you French say that old pots make the best soup.

Alpha – You'll have to find something more convincing than this.

Carla – Convincing?

Alpha – Religion, philosophy, politics… Admit it, none of this is particularly substantial.

Oméga – And your scientists, alas, have very little to teach us.

Alex – Convince you of what?

Alpha – That Earth should be saved.

Béa – This is a nightmare. Please, Lord, let me wake up.

Carla – Save the Earth?

Béa – Why should poor sinners like us be able to save an entire planet?

Oméga – Because you're French!

Carla – French? I'm not really French, you know. Not by birth, anyway.

Manu – French? We needed half the world to help free France from two invasions in a single century. How are we supposed to save the planet on our own?

Alpha – But don't you French consider yourselves the highest achievement of civilisation?

Fred – Well… that's what the French say. Don't take our word for it.

Alex – There's China as well.

Béa – An ancient civilisation.

Carla – Or somewhere nearer, try Belgium.

Fred – That's true. People often take French-speaking Belgians for French.

Alex – The best people the French claim as their own often turn out to be Belgian.

Carla – The singer Jacques Brel was Belgian. And French celebrities keep moving to Belgium to avoid paying taxes…

Béa – Belgians, the lot of them.

Alex – Seriously, you should try Belgium instead.

A pause.

Carla – And if we can't explain why life is worth living?

Béa – Will you cook us as well?

Oméga – To be completely frank…

Alpha – We were sent to find out whether Earthlings deserve to keep living, or whether we can use your planet as a rubbish dump.

Manu – A rubbish dump?

Alpha – We produce waste products of our own. Toxic ones, as well as excrement.

Oméga – And we can't leave it just anywhere, can we?

Alex – Of course. As an elected environmentalist and deputy mayor responsible for waste collection, I understand perfectly.

Oméga – Good.

Alpha – We'll give you a little more time to think.

Alpha and Oméga exit. The others stand in stunned silence.

Béa – Do you realise? The fate of humanity rests on our shoulders! God has given us a mission!

Fred – We need to get out of here. Fast!

Manu – There's no door! Those two can walk through walls.

Alex – And what if this really is a flying saucer?

Carla – Well, that's their story.

Fred – It looks remarkably like a theatre stage to me.

Béa – Do you think these agents of Satan might be actors?

Fred – Who knows? 'All the world's a stage,' Sister. Shakespeare said that.

Carla – Right, what do we do?

Fred – We could at least eat the cabbage.

No one even acknowledges the suggestion.

Alex – We have no choice.

Fred – No choice about what?

Alex – We'll have to explain the meaning of life to them.

Manu – Explain what?

Béa – The meaning of life!

Carla – The French version of it, anyway.

Alex – Suppose we escape and go back to our little lives. What good will that do if the next morning the Martians dump their nuclear waste on our heads?

Carla – They mentioned excrement too. Imagine being bombarded with alien shit.

Fred – I'd prefer the Hiroshima version.

Carla – There's more dignity in an apocalypse like that. Don't you agree, Sister?

Manu – Fuck. We're in deep shit.

Carla – Quite literally.

Fred – Is life on Earth worth living? How the hell should I know? No one asked me if I wanted to be born.

Alex – Perhaps not, but we're here now.

Carla – So how do we go about it?

Béa – We could split into two groups and give each a subject to work on.

Carla – Were you a summer-camp leader before you became a nun?

Alex – Actually, each of us knows more about one subject than the others. Perhaps that's why they chose us.

Béa – You see? We are the chosen ones!

Alex – I'm only deputy mayor in charge of waste separation. I don't claim to have found the Holy Grail.

Carla – Sister, perhaps you could explain what the Pope is for.

Fred – And why that makes life worth living.

Manu – Fuck. This isn't going well.

Carla – Must you begin every sentence with 'fuck'?

Alex – Come on. We have to start somewhere.

Carla – Let's try the easy subject first.

Béa – Which one?

Carla – I don't know. Cooking, perhaps.

Manu – French cooking, simple? Try telling that to a Michelin Guide inspector!

Carla – Easier than God, surely. At least we know beef stew exists.

Fred – True. No philosopher has devoted a lifetime to proving that beef stew exists.

Alex – So what is cooking?

Manu – Cooking is an art. You learn by doing. Eventually you acquire faith in it.

Béa – Rather like religion, then.

Carla – And quite unlike love, Sister. Believe me.

Fred – We're never getting out of here.

Manu – Besides, I have nothing to cook with!

Fred – And if those aliens really are robots…

Alex – Well, judging by what they served us…

Carla – Their sense of taste isn't exactly refined.

They think for a moment.

Alex – What about laughter? It’s supposed to set us apart from animals. The French philosopher Bergson even wrote a whole essay about it.

Fred – Bergson! Just the man to teach these Martians how to laugh. Have you seen what they do to philosophers? Do you want to end up in a stew?

Manu – Or in a luxury couscous.

Béa – Do you think the aliens are Muslims?

Fred – What did you expect, Sister? That aliens would all be good Catholics?

Alex – We can't explain laughter, but perhaps we can make them laugh.

Carla – How? Tickle their batteries?

Manu – Make an alien laugh? You think you can do that, funny woman?

Fred – I've never managed to make a Parisian laugh. But I'll have a go at a Martian.

Carla – That's reassuring.

Alpha and Oméga appear without warning.

Alpha – Well? Have you got a good joke for us?

The others jump again.

Manu – For God's sake!

Fred – Can't you ring a bell like normal people?

Oméga – Sorry. We didn't mean to startle you.

Alpha – We have plenty of time, after all.

Oméga – One hour, say.

Carla – One hour?

Béa – Well, come on, then! What are we waiting for?

Alex – Brace yourselves. This is going to be hilarious.

Manu – We have a brilliant professional comedian with us.

Alex – She's performed on the finest stages in Paris. And even Marseille.

Everyone turns towards Fred. Taken aback, she improvises.

Fred – Right. Have you heard the joke about the Martians?

Alpha – What's a Martian?

Oméga – What's a joke?

Béa – We're not off to a promising start.

Manu – You'll love this one.

Fred – An astronaut lands on Mars and sees two Martians telling each other jokes.

Alpha – There isn't anyone living on Mars.

Oméga – We stopped there on our way here.

Alpha – Martians don't exist.

Fred – It's a joke! You have to play along!

Oméga – All right.

Alpha – Continue.

Fred – An astronaut meets two Martians telling jokes. One calls out a number—forty-two or sixty-nine—and the other bursts out laughing. 'Why?' asks the astronaut. 'Saves time,' says the Martian. 'We've given every joke a number. Now we only have to say the number.' He calls out 'Four hundred and thirty-five!' and the other laughs again. 'Brilliant!' says the astronaut. 'Can I try?' He picks a number at random: 'Seven hundred and fifty-three!' Both Martians roar with laughter. And one of them says, 'That's fantastic! We've never heard it before!'

No one laughs. Then the humans force themselves to laugh.

Alex – Excellent.

Carla – Hilarious.

Manu – Yes. New to me too.

But Alpha and Oméga remain expressionless.

Alpha – We didn't understand it.

Oméga – What's supposed to be funny?

Alpha – What does 'funny' mean?

Manu – Could you give us another five minutes?

Alpha and Oméga withdraw to the far end of the stage. The others whisper together.

Fred – It was originally a joke about computer programmers. I changed it to Martians.

Carla – So laughter's a lost cause, then.

Fred – I thought that if a joke can make a computer programmer laugh, it might work on a Martian.

Alex – They don't have any sense of humour whatsoever.

Manu – To be fair, that was a terrible joke.

Béa – I didn't laugh either.

Carla – Now what?

Alex – There's no point trying God, is there? Even we don't believe in him.

Béa – I do!

Carla – An hour ago I didn't believe in aliens. So who knows?

Manu – What have we got to lose?

Alex – Sister, if you think you can convert Martians to Christianity, here's your chance.

Fred – Mind you, they could prove even harder to convert than the Native Americans.

Béatrice approaches Alpha and Oméga.

Béa – God loves you too, my brothers, even if the Devil possesses you. His mercy is infinite. *(In a frenzy.)* Satan, leave these two innocent bodies!

Béatrice makes a great sign of the cross, as though striking with karate. Alpha feels threatened, draws his ray gun and shoots her. She collapses, convulsing. The others watch without much concern.

Carla – They're not quite ready to turn the other cheek.

Béatrice slowly recovers and stands. The aliens go out.

Fred – Politics, then.

Manu *(to Alex)* – Do you really think you can explain the purpose of a local councillor to a Martian?

Carla – When you put it like that…

Fred – That leaves love.

Alex – We can't explain love. But perhaps, as you said, we can make them… feel it.

Fred – Feel it?

Manu – And who gets that job?

All eyes turn to Carla and Béatrice.

Manu – We can't ask Sister Béatrice to do it.

Béa – I know only the love of Our Lord. I'm married to Jesus.

Everyone turns towards Carla.

Carla – Hang on. Are we talking about love, or sex? Because the only kind I know comes with a price tag.

Alex – But love is your business, isn't it?

Carla – You expect me to sleep with a Martian?

Alex – We're talking about saving humanity.

Fred – With a capital H.

Manu – This isn't a job for amateurs.

Carla – All right. I'll give it a try. But there's a slight problem.

Manu – What?

Carla – Well, technically, I'm still a man.

Fred – You're joking!

Carla – I had an appointment at the clinic for the operation, but then all this happened.

Béa – Lord have mercy.

Alex – Well, they're aliens…

Fred – I suppose.

Manu – Who else, then?

Alex – I'm married.

Fred – To a man or a woman?

Alex *(to Fred)* – How would you like to save humanity?

Manu – The comedian? Even aliens have standards!

Alex – Then there's only one solution.

All eyes turn back to Béatrice.

Béa – Me? You can't be serious!

Manu – Think of it as the ultimate sacrifice, Sister.

Béa – And what if I got pregnant? What would I tell Mother Superior when I returned to Our Lady of Good Help Clinic?

Alex – Tell her it was a close encounter of the third kind… with the Holy Spirit.

Fred – Then start a new religion!

Manu – It's been done before.

Alex – To be fair, some of the older religions are looking rather dated.

Fred – Let's face it, Sister: the Catholic Church is like the French Socialist Party. Hardly anyone believes in either any more.

Alex – You can't keep making something new out of something ancient.

Béa – All right, suppose I agree. How on earth does one make love to a Martian?

Manu – How to make love to an alien. Now there's a question.

Fred – Sounds like an exam question in French philosophy.

Carla – Except this examination is practical.

Alex – If they've taken human form, I imagine all the necessary equipment comes with it.

Béa – Your joke didn't make them laugh.

Fred – Their brains aren't properly developed, I suspect.

Alex – We're not talking about brains here.

Carla – If an unfinished brain meant compulsory celibacy, every transgender sex worker in Paris would be out of work.

The aliens return.

Oméga – Well?

Alpha – Ready for one final experiment?

Fred – Believe me, this will be one hell of an experience.

Béa – But there are two of them. One male and one female, aren't there?

Alex – You're right. Equal opportunity.

Fred – And twice the chance of success.

Carla – In that case I'll volunteer too.

Béa – God will reward you.

Carla takes both extraterrestrials by the hand. Béatrice follows.

Carla – Come along, my darlings. Mummy's going to show you the secret of life.

Béatrice and Carla disappear with Alpha and Oméga.

Fred – Our last chance.

Manu – Think they'll manage?

Alex – A transgender sex worker and a nun teaching two aliens about love. Don't ask me to be wildly optimistic.

Blackout. A pause in the action. Lights up. Béatrice and Carla return.

Manu – Already?

Béatrice's clothes are in disarray and she has green stains around her mouth, as if she'd stepped straight out of the horror film The Exorcist. Carla has a black eye.

Alex – Well? How did it go?

Carla – What do you think?

Manu – And you, Sister?

Béa – It was… strange.

Alex – Strange for a nun, you mean?

Carla – You should have seen her. She was possessed! As far as love's concerned, they've experienced the Alpha and the Oméga.

Fred – Béatrice, you deserve to be beatified.

Manu – Did they say anything?

Béa – Nothing.

Alex – I'm not sure that's a good sign.

Manu – What do we do now?

Alex – We prepare to be dinner for the next batch?

They pause to think.

Manu – You know something? I've just remembered!

Alex – Remembered what?

Manu – The last thing I was doing before they took me.

Carla – Really?

Manu – I was at the Stade de France, the national football stadium near Paris.

Béa – No!

Manu – Marseille against Paris Saint-Germain. Two fierce rivals in French football.

Alex – That's incredible. Now you mention it…

Manu – What?

Alex – I was there too!

Carla – You know, it's coming back to me now. So was I!

Alex – That must be where they abducted us.

Béa – So we were all supporting Paris Saint-Germain?

Alex – Don't tell me you were too, Sister.

Béatrice nods silently.

Fred – I'd remembered already, but I didn't dare say it. I hate football, and everything associated with it.

Alex – I don't even know the rules.

Fred – Do you?

Manu – Not really.

Fred – Looking at you, I'd have said you were a typical Paris Saint-Germain fan.

Manu – See? You shouldn't trust appearances. I prefer rugby.

Carla – Then why were you at the national stadium for a football match?

Manu – A Paris Saint-Germain player often eats at my restaurant. He wanted a very special little treat at half-time.

Fred – A special treat?

Manu – Sea snails with truffle mayonnaise. You know what football stars are like.

Alex – And what about you, Sister?

Carla – Yes, why would a nun be at a football stadium on match night?

Béa – We treated a Paris Saint-Germain player at the clinic after an injury. I looked after him. It helped so much that he insisted I massage his thigh again at half-time.

As if in a waking dream, everyone freezes except Béatrice, who mimes to a sensual song about footballers in the changing rooms; a suggestive video may be projected behind her, or the director may choose another suitable song and video. The scene then resumes.

Manu *(to Carla)* – Are you a football fan too?

Carla – I was there to provide the after-match entertainment. So you and I are in much the same line of work, Sister.

Everyone looks towards Alex.

Alex – I went to keep my voters happy. When an election's coming, being seen at a stadium is always good publicity.

Fred – So none of us actually likes football! That's what we all have in common!

A pause. Alpha and Oméga return, their clothes also somewhat dishevelled.

Fred – Well? Happy now?

Alpha – Let's say…

Oméga – We're prepared to give you one last chance.

Manu – You can count on us to score this time.

Alex – We're listening.

Alpha – When we teleported you, you were attending a peculiar ceremony in a building shaped like a spacecraft.

Béa – From above, the Stade de France does look rather like a flying saucer.

Oméga – That's what attracted our attention in the first place.

Manu – The Stade de France is a cathedral of football.

Oméga – Certainly more people attend it than Mass.

Alpha – We want you to explain this mystery.

Manu – What mystery?

Oméga – The passion people on Earth have for football!

Carla – Of course! Football!

Alex – I think the Aztecs invented a game rather like it.

Fred – But the English wrote the modern rules, naturally.

Blackout. Time passes. Lights up.

They watch an imaginary television screen, placed at the back of the auditorium, drinking beer and eating peanuts. A football match may be heard on the soundtrack, complete with excited commentators.

Alex – How on earth are they receiving that sports channel without a subscription?

Béa – Their technology is centuries ahead of ours, remember.

Fred – They should teach us that trick.

Béa – Hard to tell whether they like it. They never say anything.

Carla – They aren't exactly expressive, are they? Even earlier…

They watch the match for a while.

Fred – Thank goodness they brought peanuts. I was so hungry I nearly ate that stew.

They continue watching in silence.

Alpha – Which team do you support?

Manu – Paris Saint-Germain, of course!

Alpha *(shouting)* – Come on, Marseille!

Fred – They've certainly grasped the basic idea.

Carla – It's a start.

They watch on.

Oméga – Why have they stopped?

Fred – A free kick.

Carla – Isn't it a penalty?

Alex – No, wait, it's half-time.

Alpha – Oh.

Béa – Let's hope Marseille wins, then.

Carla – Or perhaps the match is already over.

Oméga – So who won?

Fred – No, that's…

Alpha – I thought it had finished!

Manu – Actually, it's extra time.

Alpha – Goooal!

Oméga – So Paris Saint-Germain won?

Alex – I knew this would end badly.

Manu – No! The commentator says it was offside.

Béa – Saved by that prick… *(Quickly correcting herself.)* I mean, by the referee! For now…

Oméga – Offside? What does offside mean?

They exchange looks.

Fred – Offside is difficult to explain to an alien. Especially a female one.

Oméga – Harder than anal sex?

Béa – About the same.

The commentator continues.

Carla – They're taking penalties now.

The commentator announces that Marseille have won.

Alpha – So Marseille won?

Alex – Yes, absolutely!

Alpha rises.

Alpha – Champions! Champions! Marseille are the champions!

Oméga – There wasn't any offside.

Alpha – What do you mean, no offside?

Oméga – Paris Saint-Germain should have won.

Alpha *(mechanically)* – Champions! Champions! Marseille are…

Oméga draws her ray gun.

Oméga – I support Paris Saint-Germain.

Alpha – And I support Marseille.

To everyone's horror, they fire their ray guns at each other and both collapse.

Carla – At least that's got rid of them.

Manu – I'm not sure that's good news. Who's going to get us back to Earth?

Alex – We have to revive them somehow!

Manu shakes the aliens gently.

Manu – Wake up! Come on!

Fred – Maybe their batteries have run down.

Béatrice approaches.

Béa – Let me do it. I'm a nurse.

Alex – Nursing assistant.

Béatrice gives Alpha a passionate kiss. He gradually wakes.

Alpha – What was that?

Oméga also wakes.

Oméga – What's happening?

Alex – Don't worry. Everything's fine.

Alpha – Where are we?

Oméga – Who are you people?

Alpha – Have you kidnapped us?

Manu – Oh, fuck. No.

Fred – If they don't remember anything, we're in deep shit.

Alex – You kidnapped us!

Béa – You're extraterrestrials!

Oméga – Extraterrestrials?

Alpha – Oh! Yes, I remember the match now.

Oméga – Who won?

Alex – Well…

Carla – A draw. Let's call it a draw.

Fred – I hope they remember how to fly a spaceship.

Oméga – A spaceship?

Alpha – What is that?

Oméga – Oh yes! That's what they call… our vessel.

Alex – Thank goodness. Their memories are coming back.

Alpha and Oméga get to their feet.

Alpha – Sorry. I don't know what came over me.

Oméga – Must be the football.

Alpha – Football seems to make people stupid.

Fred – Well, they've understood that much.

Alex – So? What are you going to do with us?

Alpha – Football, football, football…

Carla – I hope he isn't having a short circuit.

Oméga – We'll return you to your planet.

Béa – You aren't going to turn the Earth into a rubbish dump, then?

Fred – Never mind. We'll do it ourselves.

Alpha and Oméga walk about stiffly until fully recovered.

Alex – They're not terribly bright for extraterrestrials, are they?

Manu – Well, on the other hand…

Fred – What?

Manu – They were sent here to take out the rubbish.

Alex – So?

Manu – Perhaps they don't send their brightest minds to empty the bins.

Fred – Very clever. Really.

Manu – I'm kidding! It's a joke!

Béa – Just think of it! We've saved the world!

Carla – You certainly gave everything you had, Sister.

Alex – Wait till we tell our friends!

Alpha and Oméga are back to normal.

Oméga – Sorry, but you won't be telling anyone about this.

Fred – So we are going into the stew after all?

Oméga – We could try a different recipe. *(The others look horrified.)* Oh, I'm joking! That's humour!

Carla – Hilarious.

Alex – Very funny indeed.

Fred – Then what are you going to do?

Alpha – A quick blast from the hairdryer and you won't remember a thing.

He fires his ray gun, knocking them all out.

Blackout. Time passes.

Lights up.

Alex and Fred sit watching a television assumed to be at the back of the auditorium, beyond the spectators. They wear Paris Saint-Germain football shirts. It's the most ordinary of evenings with friends watching a game.

Alex – Think we stand a chance tonight?

Fred – As long as we don't collect one or two red cards.

Carla arrives carrying beers.

Carla – Anyone fancy a beer?

Fred – Go on, then.

Alex – You can't watch a proper match without a beer.

Manu arrives, also wearing a Paris Saint-Germain shirt.

Manu – Haven't missed kick-off, have I?

Fred – No, you're fine.

Carla – The rematch! No room for mistakes this time.

Alex – It's not going to be easy.

Fred – Especially with Marseille playing at home.

Manu – Isn't Béa here?

Carla – She's on her way.

Manu – I hope so. She's bringing the peanuts.

Alex – It's lovely to be together like this.

Carla – It is.

Manu – How did we meet, by the way?

Alex – Strange. I can't remember at all.

Carla – Neither can I.

Fred – Yet we're such good friends.

Alex – Even though we're all so different.

Carla – We all support Paris Saint-Germain, don't we?

The doorbell rings.

Alex – Ah! Here come the peanuts.

Fred – I'll open it. *(She goes out, calling offstage.)* Béa! We've been waiting for you like the Messiah!

She returns with Béatrice.

Béa – Hello, everyone!

Alex – Hi, Béatrice.

Carla – Put your coat over there.

Béatrice removes her coat to reveal a Marseille football shirt and an unmistakably pregnant belly.

Alex – Well, well. You've been keeping a secret from us.

Béa – You mean that I support Marseille?

Fred – That you're pregnant!

Carla – How wonderful!

Manu *(to Carla)* – Wasn't she a nun before?

Carla – Oh yes, but that was before. When I was still a man.

Fred – So who's the father?

Béa – You'll laugh, but… I honestly don't know.

Fred – Did you sleep with the entire Paris Saint-Germain team at once?

Béa – I'm a virgin.

They all burst out laughing.

Alex – Oh, come on, tell us! Who put the baby Jesus in your manger?

Carla – Don't tell me it was the postman!

Béa – Excuse me. I need the bathroom. You know what it's like… when you're pregnant.

She goes out.

Alex – Oh, Béa…

Manu – I wonder what the baby will look like.

Carla – Especially as we don't know the father.

The doorbell rings again.

Manu – Are we expecting anyone else?

Fred – Perhaps it's the postman after all.

Carla – To acknowledge the baby as his.

Alex – Or collect his Christmas tip.

Manu – Unless it's the Three Wise Men.

Alex – Christmas isn't far off, after all.

Carla goes to answer the door.

Carla – Not the Three Wise Men. There are only two of them.

Alpha and Oméga arrive in their old jumpsuits, now with Marseille shirts over them. They still move a little mechanically. Everyone stares at them. Oméga, too, appears pregnant.

Fred – Must be the bin collectors.

Alex – Have you come round collecting Christmas tips?

Béatrice returns.

Alpha – We're here for the rematch.

Oméga – Are we offside?

The others stare in bewilderment.

Blackout.

The End

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th, Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites.

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues
Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2
A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3
A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

Comedies for 4
A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6
All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more
At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe ...
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches
Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

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