

La Comédiathèque



# Don't panic!



Jean-Pierre Martinez

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# **Don't Panic!**

## **Jean-Pierre Martinez**

A sketch comedy in the form of a literary game. Each of the fifteen two-character scenes in this collection begins with the same line: Promise me you won't panic...  
An opportunity to humorously tackle the most absurd topics...  
often revealing our deepest humanity.

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## 1 – First Flight

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – We've just lost an engine.

**Two** – No...? How many engines does this plane have?

**One** – Two.

**Two** – And can we fly on just one?

**One** – Yes... As long as that one doesn't fail too.

**Two** – And what are the chances of both failing at the same time?

**One** – About the same as winning the lottery, I'd say...

**Two** – Right.

**One** – See? No reason to panic.

**Two** – You think so?

**One** – Do you play the lottery?

**Two** – Yes.

**One** – Have you ever won?

**Two** – No.

**One** – There you go... No reason to panic.

**Two** – OK... So, what do we do now?

**One** – Well... We turn around and head back to land.

**Two** – Have you ever landed this thing on one engine?

**One** – No.

**Two** – And to think it's my first time on a plane.

**One** – Yes...

**Two** – Some first flight... I just hope I don't get the last rites thrown in for the same price.

*A pause.*

**One** – Promise me you won't panic?

**Two** – What now?

**One** – We've just lost the second engine.

**Two** – No...? Can a plane like this fly without any engines?

**One** – It can glide.

**Two** – So we can still land, even without engines...

**One** – If the airfield isn't too far away, yes. But...

**Two** – But...?

**One** – We're too far to glide all the way there.

**Two** – I don't know... Maybe we could land on a road or a field. Like in the movies...

**One** – We've been flying over mountains for the past fifteen minutes.

**Two** – I'm never getting on a plane again.

**One** – Unfortunately, that might indeed be a serious possibility...

**Two** – So what do we do?

**One** – There's a road, but it's very winding. And packed. It's the weekend, people are heading to the ski resorts.

**Two** – Do we still have a chance?

**One** – It's not obvious, but... Do you trust me?

**Two** – Do I have a choice?

**One** – No.

**Two** – OK... Is there anything I can do?

**One** – Do you have a signal?

**Two** – You want me to call for help?

**One** – Unfortunately, it wouldn't make any difference.

**Two** – Then why are you asking if I have a signal?

**One** – In case you want to make one last phone call.

**Two** – One last phone call? To whom? My lawyer?

**One** – I don't know... your wife.

**Two** – What would I say to her?

**One** – That you love her, for instance.

**Two** – We're in the middle of a divorce. I found out she was having an affair with my best friend.

**One** – Call your best friend, then.

**Two** – To tell him I love him?

**One** – To insult him.

**Two** – What's the point?

**One** – You're right. Better to keep your dignity to the end.

**Two** – Yes...

**One** – You could always call him to say you forgive him.

*A pause.*

**Two** – That's strange. I still hear a kind of humming on both sides of the plane...  
What is it?

**One** – The two engines.

**Two** – But then...

**One** – What day is it today?

**Two** – The 31st of March, why?

**One** – The 31st of March... are you sure?

**Two** – Yes. It's my birthday. I treated myself to a first flight.

**One** – The 31st of March...? Oh, damn... Sorry, I thought it was April Fool's Day...

*Blackout.*

## 2 – Pink Smoke

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – The Pope is dead.

**Two** – No way... But how old was he?

**One** – A hundred and two.

**Two** – You see? It's always the best ones who go first.

**One** – Sorry?

**Two** – No, I mean... Sometimes it's the worst who go last. Well... you know what I mean.

**One** – As they say up there: the first shall be last.

**Two** – We'll miss him, you'll see.

**One** – Yes, because there's no telling what the next one will be like... You know what you've got, you don't know what you'll get.

**Two** – A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

**One** – He was a progressive Pope, though.

**Two** – He stood for world peace and love between men.

**One** – Yes, well... love between men...

**Two** – True, he was against gay marriage.

**One** – And against condoms, even to prevent AIDS.

**Two** – Against abortion, even in cases of rape or incest.

**One** – But still... He was a progressive Pope... compared to his predecessors.

**Two** – True, the Church has evolved on many issues.

**One** – It no longer burns witches at the stake.

**Two** – Yes... Nowadays, witches can move freely.

**One** – Or even start their own business.

**Two** – The Church has given up on crusades.

**One** – It no longer openly encourages religious wars.

**Two** – Even if religion remains the root of most of them.

**One** – The Church calls for a ceasefire in the Middle East.

**Two** – And has been for nearly a century. No result yet... but still...

**One** – It's the thought that counts.

**Two** – They say the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

**One** – The Church has given up on Inquisition tribunals.

**Two** – Yes. Nowadays, a scientist can freely state that the Earth revolves around the sun without risking prison, like Galileo.

**One** – Isn't that progress?

**Two** – Yes...

**One** – Actors are no longer excommunicated. They're allowed to be buried in the cemetery.

**Two** – To think that Molière almost ended up in a mass grave. Without the intervention of King Louis XIV...

**One** – That's progress too.

**Two** – And the Church has also evolved a lot regarding politics.

**One** – Yes. In the event of a coup d'état, the Church no longer automatically sides with the dictatorship. Like in Mussolini's Italy, Franco's Spain, Pinochet's Chile, or Videla's Argentina...

**Two** – It's true that there are fewer coups nowadays, but still...

**One** – On social issues too...

**Two** – The Church still forbids the ordination of women and still enforces priestly celibacy, but...

**One** – It now discreetly reprimands priests who've abused minors.

**Two** – After the statute of limitations, but still... it's a start.

**One** – And it generously offers compensation to victims... using the church collection.

**Two** – No, you can't say the Church isn't evolving, but...

**One** – You can't say it's ahead of its time either...

**Two** – No, you can't say that either.

**One** – Let's just say it's only a century or two behind.

**Two** – Maybe after half a dozen progressive popes, it'll finally catch up with modern times.

**One** – In any case, this one has just died.

**Two** – Let's hope they don't replace him with someone even more conservative, because at this rate...

**One** – Yeah, we'll never get out of the woods.

**Two** – Can you imagine what it would be like after half a dozen traditionalist popes?

**One** – Even today, in the United States, some people claim that the Earth is flat and that the first humans lived alongside dinosaurs.

**Two** – Yes. If there's a return to tradition, like in Poland, witches and doctors who perform abortions could be in real trouble.

**One** – They say there's no smoke without fire... When it comes to witchcraft, for the Church, it's more like no fire without smoke.

**Two** – In the meantime, we'll just have to watch for the white smoke...

**One** – What, popes get cremated now?

**Two** – The white smoke! The one that announces the election of the new pope.

**One** – Ah, right... Let's hope it's another progressive pope.

**Two** – You mean an old, celibate, senile man, elected by a hundred other old men in robes... who will tell young women what they can't do with their bodies?

**One** – Yeah, it's not looking good...

**Two** – I'll believe in the Church's progressiveness the day the smoke is pink. To announce that the new pope is a woman.

*Blackout.*

### 3 – The Bees

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – There's a wasp sitting on your ear.

**Two** – Oh my God! I'm allergic to wasp stings. Last time, I ended up in the emergency room. I nearly died.

**One** – Exactly why I told you not to panic.

**Two** – So, what should I do?

**One** – Above all, no sudden movements. It might just fly off the way it came.

**Two** – I can feel it now...

**One** – Yes, it moved. Looks like it's trying to get into your ear.

**Two** – That's horrible...

**One** – Yes. Absolutely terrifying.

**Two** – I preferred it when you were telling me not to panic.

**One** – Yes, but now I'm the one panicking...

**Two** – You should be telling the wasp not to panic. Because if it panics, it's going to sting me.

**One** – I can't see it anymore.

**Two** – Did it leave?

**One** – Or it went into your ear. Can you feel anything?

**Two** – No...

**One** – Ah, I see it coming out.

**Two** – Good thing it didn't decide to build a wasp nest in my ear.

**One** – Do wasps make honey?

**Two** – No. Maybe that's why we're less forgiving when they sting.

**One** – If it makes you feel better, if it stings you, it'll die too.

**Two** – Sorry?

**One** – Wasps die after they sting, right?

**Two** – I think it's bees that die after stinging.

**One** – What's the point of stinging to defend yourself if you die afterwards?

**Two** – I suppose it's to protect the hive. Bees are social insects. It's a kind of sacrifice.

**One** – Like a soldier sacrificing himself to save his country.

**Two** – Fortunately, not all soldiers die after firing a shot.

**One** – Would you sacrifice yourself to save me?

**Two** – I should say yes... but the truth is, I don't know.

**One** – At least you're honest.

**Two** – What's the wasp doing now?

**One** – It's rubbing its hands. I mean, its legs. Like bees do after collecting pollen from a flower.

**Two** – First time I've been pollinated by a wasp.

**One** – And yet you don't make pollen.

**Two** – Luckily. I'm also allergic to pollen.

**One** – Are you sure wasps don't make honey?

**Two** – Yes. But ears do make wax.

**One** – That must be why it's rubbing its legs.

**Two** – Are you sure it's not a bee?

**One** – I'm not sure. Yes, maybe it's a bee. (*Approaching*) Oh my God! It looks like it's pulling out its...

**Two** – Its what?

**One** – Its sting!

**Two** – I'm going to die...

*The other slaps them hard on the ear.*

**One** – Sorry...

**Two** – Are you out of your mind!

*The other looks down.*

**One** – Phew! It's dead. I feel kind of bad... Especially if it was a bee.

**Two** – Still... it was either it or me.

**One** – Yeah...

**Two** – In a way, you saved my life.

**One** – Yes...

**Two** – What?

**One** – I said yes...

**Two** – I can't hear anything anymore. Do you think it stung me anyway? I think my ear is starting to swell, and I hear a sort of buzzing...

**One** – Don't worry, it must be the slap...

**Two** – Are you sure?

**One** – No... I just said that to reassure you. But we'd better call the emergency services...

*Blackout.*

## 4 – Invasion

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – They just announced on the radio that a spacecraft of unknown origin has entered Earth's orbit.

**Two** – When you say unknown origin, do you mean they don't know which country launched it?

**One** – Apparently, it's more that they don't know which planet it came from...

**Two** – No way?

**One** – That's what they said on the radio.

**Two** – Are they sure?

**One** – It's a craft the size of the Eiffel Tower. No country on Earth can launch something that big into space.

**Two** – The Eiffel Tower? You're kidding...

**One** – The size of the Eiffel Tower! I didn't say it looked like the Eiffel Tower.

**Two** – Oh, right... Because a UFO shaped like the Eiffel Tower orbiting Earth...

**One** – So, it doesn't surprise you that much?

**Two** – Yes, yes, of course... It's crazy... Did they say anything?

**One** – Who?

**Two** – Well, the Martians... I mean, the aliens.

**One** – Not yet. We're still waiting for them to make contact.

**Two** – Damn... So what do we do?

**One** – What do you mean, what do we do? What do you expect us to do?

**Two** – I don't know...

**One** – Apart from waiting...

**Two** – Maybe we should go get some groceries.

**One** – Groceries? Aliens are landing, and you feel like going shopping!

**Two** – I'm not talking about shopping! I mean stocking up. Filling the fridge. Taking some cash out.

**One** – You think?

**Two** – I don't know. It's what our great-grandparents did when they saw the Germans coming, I guess. You've got to do something...

**One** – If everyone does like us, there's going to be panic.

**Two** – Yes... But if we don't do like everyone else, tomorrow we'll have nothing to eat.

**One** – What do you think they want?

**Two** – How should I know? Maybe the same thing Christopher Columbus wanted when he landed in America.

**One** – That's not very reassuring.

**Two** – You think?

**One** – The Spaniards exterminated the Native Americans and forced the few survivors to convert to Catholicism.

**Two** – You think these aliens will force us to convert to their own religion?

**One** – If their civilisation is advanced enough to get here, I imagine they've moved past that nonsense.

**Two** – Yeah...

**One** – But as for exterminating us and taking our place... unfortunately, that's a real possibility.

**Two** – Unless they enslave us, like white people did to Africans.

**One** – Or put us in cages to fatten us up and eat us, like we did with the descendants of the dinosaurs.

**Two** – The descendants of the dinosaurs?

**One** – Chickens!

**Two** – Chickens are the descendants of dinosaurs?

**One** – You didn't know?

**Two** – No.

**One** – Or they could put us in zoos so their kids can throw peanuts at us on Sundays.

**Two** – In the end, everything that aliens could do to humans, humans have already done to other humans.

**One** – Or to animals.

**Two** – Yeah... If they're really that smart, we're in trouble if they see us as just not very evolved social animals.

**One** – Like how we see bees.

**Two** – Except we don't make honey.

**One** – No, we're more the kind to saw off the branch we're sitting on.

**Two** – Like termites, eating through the beams until the roof collapses on them.

**One** – You're right. I think we'll go get some supplies to fill the freezer.

**Two** – Yeah, wouldn't surprise me if we end up in another lockdown.

**One** – Let's get some toilet paper too, just in case.

**Two** – You're right. If we're going to get eaten by aliens, we might as well have clean bums...

**One** – I'll go get my credit card...

*Blackout.*

## 5 – Voyeurs

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – Honestly, I can't promise you that.

**One** – I just found out that the neighbour is a voyeur.

**Two** – Which neighbour?

**One** – The one across the street, there!

**Two** – I can't see anything.

**One** – The window, over there.

**Two** – That's at least a hundred metres away. How can you tell he's watching us?

**One** – With a telescope.

**Two** – The neighbour is watching us with a telescope?

**One** – No, not the neighbour, me! I used a telescope. Otherwise, how do you expect me to see that he's watching us from here?

**Two** – So you spied on the neighbour with a telescope to find out that he was spying on us.

**One** – Yeah.

**Two** – And how does he manage to see us from that far away?

**One** – With binoculars.

**Two** – Right... So you're watching a voyeur with a telescope who's watching you with binoculars.

**One** – Otherwise, how else could I tell he was spying on us?

**Two** – Let me get this straight. The first time you looked at him with the telescope, was he already watching you with the binoculars, or did that come after?

**One** – After, I think.

**Two** – Right...

**One** – I see what you're getting at...

**Two** – Maybe when he saw the reflection from your telescope, he thought he was being watched. And since he couldn't see anything, he went to get his binoculars.

**One** – In that case, I would be the voyeur.

**Two** – That's a real possibility...

**One** – Or maybe we're both voyeurs.

**Two** – Now... a voyeur watching another voyeur... Is that still voyeurism?

**One** – I need to stop using that telescope.

**Two** – Sounds like a good idea.

**One** – On the other hand... I won't know if he keeps watching us.

*Blackout.*

## 6 – The King of Fools

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – Donald Trump has just been elected President of the United States.

**Two** – Donald Trump? But I thought...

**One** – Donald Trump Junior.

**Two** – Right... So, here we go again.

**One** – I've always wondered why fools are so successful in politics. To the point of founding dynasties...

**Two** – The problem with fools is that most voters see themselves in them.

**One** – And fools have short memories.

**Two** – It's true that Hitler didn't leave a good impression, yet there are still Nazis today.

**One** – Trump Senior didn't leave a great impression either. His son promised he'd learned from the past, but still...

**Two** – Dictators are like ayatollahs or popes: even when they call themselves progressive, there's still plenty of room for progress.

**One** – Which probably explains why, throughout history, religions have always gotten along so well with dictatorships.

**Two** – When it's not the religious leaders themselves who seize power to establish a theocracy.

**One** – Like in Iran or the Vatican.

**Two** – The Vatican is a theocracy?

**One** – Well... I think so, right?

**Two** – What else could the Vatican be, if not a theocracy?

**One** – I don't know... A tax haven?

**Two** – Yeah. Actually, it already is one, isn't it?

**One** – You think?

**Two** – Nobody pays taxes in the Vatican, do they?

**One** – So where does all that money come from?

**Two** – They've got a massive real estate portfolio around the world, and the Vatican Bank holds loads of financial assets.

**One** – I'm telling you, it's a tax haven. They're swimming in money, and poor people from all over the world still send them donations.

**Two** – You're right... They've hit the jackpot. All they're missing is a casino, a football club, and a golf course.

**One** – As for golf, the Pope already has the little cart.

**Two** – It's true, a golf course or a football pitch in Saint Peter's Square would be quite something...

**One** – In the past, the Church used to sell indulgences so the rich could go straight to Heaven despite their sins. Now the Pope could sell passports to his tax haven.

**Two** – Like the Prince of Monaco.

**One** – If I were the Prince of Monaco, I'd start a religion too. He already has the casino and the football club.

**Two** – And poor people from around the world would send him their savings.

**One** – That said, I'd rather be in the Prince of Monaco's shoes than the Pope's.

**Two** – Oh yeah...?

**One** – I'd rather marry Grace Kelly than spend my life in a dress.

*A pause.*

**Two** – Still, Donald Trump Junior... It's unbelievable, isn't it?

**One** – You know, in America, they already had Bush the son after Bush the father.

**Two** – In the name of the Father, the Son, and why not the Grandson. Might as well crown the King of Fools and bring back hereditary monarchy.

**One** – Yes... People are really taken for fools.

**Two** – But then again, aren't people actually fools?

**One** – Anyway, that wouldn't happen here.

**Two** – True. We're not big fans of hereditary power.

**One** – Unfortunately, in politics, foolishness isn't always passed down directly.

**Two** – Which is why, in the end, despite everything, we always end up ruled by the King of Fools.

*Blackout.*

## 7 – Shipwreck

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – There's a metre of water in the hold.

**Two** – You told me earlier there was barely ten centimetres.

**One** – Yes. But now the water's up to my knee.

**Two** – Oh my God! Does that mean we're sinking?

**One** – That's why I told you not to panic.

*A pause.*

**Two** – I mean, we're only on a small canal. It's not exactly the Titanic.

**One** – No.

**Two** – Worst case, we'll just look like fools.

**One** – Yeah... There are already quite a few people watching us.

**Two** – Go back and check the hold.

**One** – OK.

*The first one disappears. The second one smiles, trying to stay calm. The first returns.*

**Two** – Well?

**One** – Now it's up to my neck.

**Two** – Yes, I can feel we're sinking...

**Two** – The deck is already underwater.

**One** – It's too late to head back to shore.

**Two** – So what do we do?

**One** – There are more and more people watching...

**Two** – Let's at least try to keep our dignity.

**One** – You're right.

**Two** – Smile!

**One** – I'm doing my best here.

*Blackout.*

## 8 – Chimeras

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – I just saw a unicorn go by.

**Two** – Are unicorns dangerous?

**One** – Not that I know of.

**Two** – Then there's no reason to panic.

**One** – Yeah... Besides, it looked pretty skittish. It bolted as soon as it saw me.

**Two** – Maybe it had never seen a human before. The first time must be quite a shock.

**One** – Right. Imagine being told your whole life that humans don't exist... and then suddenly seeing one.

**Two** – It must have freaked out.

**One** – Still... What was that unicorn doing here? Humans and unicorns aren't supposed to meet, are they?

**Two** – No, it's weird.

**One** – Yeah...

**Two** – Yesterday, at the beach, I saw a mermaid.

**One** – A mermaid?

**Two** – Not on the beach, lying on a towel... In the water!

**One** – How did you know it was a mermaid if it was in the water?

**Two** – I was scuba diving. I was chasing a squid, and suddenly, I came face to face with a mermaid.

**One** – She must have been surprised.

**Two** – Yes. Just like your unicorn.

**One** – And what did she say to you?

**Two** – Nothing. She looked at me with wide eyes and then swam away calmly.

**One** – That's crazy.

**Two** – Yeah. These kinds of encounters are getting more common, aren't they?

**One** – Must be climate change.

**Two** – Yesterday, in a bar, a guy told me he saw a dragon.

**One** – A dragon?

**Two** – I'm not sure if it's true.

**One** – But a fire-breathing dragon?

**Two** – I didn't think to ask.

**One** – Honestly, what kind of world are we living in?

**Two** – Yeah... You know, if a centaur or a harpy walked by right now, I don't think I'd even flinch.

**One** – Harpies are still less rare than mermaids, aren't they?

*A pause.*

**Two** – So, how was your trip to Rome?

**One** – Great. I even saw the Pope.

**Two** – You met the Pope?

**One** – No, he didn't grant me a private audience. I saw him passing through the crowd on Saint Peter's Square.

**Two** – That's something... And what did he look like?

**One** – In a robe, with a skullcap on his head and a tube in his nose. In a sort of golf cart.

**Two** – Ah, yes.

**One** – I was incredibly lucky to visit the Vatican that day. The next day, he was dead.

**Two** – Oh yeah, quite the timing.

**One** – Unfortunately, I couldn't stay for the funeral. With low-cost flights, the tickets can't be changed.

**Two** – Miracles don't happen that often.

**One** – Yeah... (*A pause*) Look, the unicorn just went by again...

**Two** – Maybe it's starting to get used to us.

*Blackout.*

## 9 – Skull

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – I found a skull in the garden.

**Two** – A skull? You mean...

**One** – A human skull, yes.

**Two** – But how...?

**One** – I was digging a hole to plant those bamboos we bought at the market. And I came across a skull.

**Two** – That's incredible... Are you sure it's human?

**One** – There was a mobile phone right next to it.

**Two** – So it's not ancient remains. I mean, it's not a Neanderthal skull. Was it a recent model?

**One** – The skull?

**Two** – The phone!

**One** – Ah... Uh... I don't know... It's an iPhone. (*Handing the phone*) Here, take a look.

*The other hesitates before taking the phone.*

**Two** – You picked up the phone?

**One** – Would you have preferred I brought you the skull?

**Two** – I don't know... It's a crime scene, isn't it?

**One** – A crime? You think so?

**Two** – How could someone end up buried in a garden with their phone if it's not a crime?

**One** – Fair point.

**Two** – And more importantly, how could someone bury a body in our garden without us noticing?

**One** – We've only had the house for two years. It must date back to the previous owner.

**Two** – Maybe it's his wife.

**One** – Why his wife?

**Two** – It can't be him, since we saw him at the notary's office.

**One** – It's true we didn't see his wife that day.

**Two** – But that doesn't mean he buried her in the garden...

**One** – That doesn't make sense. You don't bury your wife in the garden and then sell the house. Sooner or later, someone would find out.

**Two** – Then what?

**One** – We'd need to date the body. What model of iPhone is it?

**Two** – There's a bit of dirt on it, but... It's the latest model.

**One** – No way...

**Two** – That means the body was buried very recently.

**One** – Damn...

**Two** – We should call the police.

**One** – Yeah, but we could get into trouble.

**Two** – Trouble...?

**One** – What if they think we did it?

**Two** – Now that we've found the skull, we can't just act like nothing happened.

**One** – You think?

**Two** – Concealing a body. Failure to report a crime. That's serious.

**One** – OK... We'll call the police.

**Two** – Go ahead.

**One** – I don't know what I did with my phone...

*The phone found next to the skull starts ringing. They both freeze.*

**Two** – This can't be happening... It's a nightmare.

**One** – Who could it be?

**Two** – Who knows...

**One** – The killer, maybe.

**Two** – What do we do?

**One** – Well, answer it...

**Two** – Hello...? Yes... Yes, I'll put him on... Your mother.

**One** – Mum... Can I call you back...? OK...

**Two** – So it's your phone.

**One** – It must have fallen out of my pocket when I bent down to look at the skull.

**Two** – Right. And are you still sure it's a human skull?

**One** – Well... That's what I thought when I saw the phone. But now I'm not so sure.

**Two** – Let's go take another look.

**One** – OK.

**Two** – I vaguely remember the notary saying he had just buried his dog.

**One** – I didn't think much of it at the time, but yeah, I remember now...

**Two** – He just forgot to mention he buried it in the garden.

**One** – Yeah.

**Two** – Still, there's quite a difference between a dog skull and a human skull. It's not the same size.

**One** – It must have been a big dog.

**Two** – Or maybe... it's a child's skull...

**One** – You think?

**Two** – The good news is you found your phone.

**One** – Yeah...

*Blackout.*

## 10 – The Secret of the Universe

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – They just announced it on Facebook. Chinese scientists have finally discovered the ultimate secret of the universe.

**Two** – The ultimate secret of the universe?

**One** – You know! Where we come from, where we're going, why there's something rather than nothing...

**Two** – What?

**One** – The Big Bang, black holes, antimatter...!

**Two** – And?

**One** – Well, it turns out, none of that actually exists.

**Two** – Oh, really...

**One** – We are fictional characters in a gigantic video game, created by an artificial intelligence to entertain the children of a highly advanced civilisation.

**Two** – Chinese scientists...?

**One** – Yes, Chinese.

**Two** – On Facebook?

**One** – What difference does it make?

**Two** – None.

**One** – And that's all it does to you?

**Two** – What?

**One** – This! Finding out we're fictional characters in a video game. You don't seem that surprised.

**Two** – I always suspected it.

**One** – You always suspected it?

**Two** – Yeah, I knew... Didn't you?

**One** – No... And if you knew, why didn't you tell me?

**Two** – I thought you knew.

**One** – Well, no, I didn't.

**Two** – Well, now you know. So, what's for dinner?

**One** – What's for dinner?

**Two** – I'm starving. Aren't you?

**One** – Doesn't seem to kill your appetite, anyway.

**Two** – So? What are we eating?

**One** – After all that, I don't feel like cooking. I'll order Chinese.

**Two** – Fine...

**One** – But if we're fictional characters, how can we even be hungry?

**Two** – Games are super realistic these days. Characters feel all kinds of stuff.

**One** – You think so?

**Two** – Look at prehistoric humans. A few tens of thousands of years ago, it was pretty basic. You were hungry, you killed a mammoth and ate it raw. You wanted company for dinner, you knocked a woman out and dragged her back to your cave by the hair. Now...

**One** – You get married, call Uber Eats, and order Chinese.

**Two** – We get updated regularly. As technology evolves, so does the game.

**One** – I never suspected any of this.

**Two** – Yet it's pretty obvious.

**One** – Yeah...

**Two** – And how did the Chinese figure it out?

**One** – They noticed a glitch in the game.

**Two** – A glitch? What kind of glitch?

**One** – This one. At some point in the game, the characters realise they're characters in a video game.

**Two** – Right. So I'm not the first one to figure it out.

**One** – No.

**Two** – And are they going to fix the glitch?

**One** – We don't know...

**Two** – Now... is it really a glitch?

**One** – What do you mean?

**Two** – Maybe it's part of the game.

**One** – I see... The characters themselves gain a kind of self-awareness and realise they were created by a higher power.

**Two** – Exactly...

**One** – And what about God in all this?

**Two** – Einstein said God does not play dice. He never said He doesn't play video games.

*Blackout.*

## 11 – Heroes

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – As if I were the panicky type.

**One** – Your shoelace is undone.

**Two** – Oh my God! That was a close one...

**One** – Yeah, you could have killed yourself.

**Two** – I step on it with the other foot, trip, fall onto the tracks, and the train runs me over.

**One** – Luckily, we're in our living room, but still...

**Two** – Basically, you saved my life.

**One** – "Saved your life" might be a stretch, but... Yeah, you could say that.

**Two** – No, no, you deserve a medal.

**One** – Maybe not the Legion of Honour, but...

**Two** – Some people have gotten it for less.

**One** – Corrupt politicians, drug lords, paedophile priests...

**Two** – At least we haven't hurt anyone.

**One** – We're not heroes, but... that's only because the opportunity never came up.

**Two** – We just didn't get lucky, that's all.

**One** – We were born in peacetime. What could we possibly resist?

**Two** – We've resisted bad weather.

**One** – We've resisted temptation, sometimes.

**Two** – You're right, we are heroes, we just haven't had the chance to prove it.

**One** – What we need is a good war. Then the whole world would see who we really are.

*A pause.*

**Two** – If I fell into the water, would you dive in to pull me to shore?

**One** – I can't swim.

**Two** – Yeah. Better not, then.

**One** – And you can swim, right?

**Two** – Yeah.

**One** – Imagine... You fall in, I dive in to save you, and you end up dragging me back to shore.

**Two** – Yeah, that'd be stupid.

*A pause.*

**One** – But I did still tell you your shoelace was undone.

**Two** – Yeah.

**One** – You should really tie that damn lace. Because if I warn you, and you don't do anything...

**Two** – You're right, I need to. But I can't bend down.

**One** – I'd tie it for you, but... I can't bend down either.

**Two** – I wonder if it's already too late for us.

**One** – Too late?

**Two** – To become heroes!

*Blackout.*

## 12 – Resurrection

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – I just ran into Mr. Martin at the convenience store.

**Two** – Mr. Martin? But that's impossible! We buried him last week...

**One** – That's why I asked you not to panic. But I have to admit, it was a shock when I saw him.

**Two** – Are you sure it was him?

**One** – He waved at me from a distance. But it was definitely him, I swear! I saw him as clearly as I see you now!

**Two** – Did he say anything?

**One** – I was so petrified. I didn't dare go closer.

**Two** – He couldn't have come back from the dead.

**One** – Especially since he was cremated.

**Two** – Yes... Cremation makes bodily resurrection a lot less likely.

**One** – Imagine if they had cremated Jesus Christ after the crucifixion.

**Two** – Rising from the tomb three days later would've been a lot less convincing.

**One** – Can you picture Jesus Christ emerging from his urn...?

**Two** – Like a genie coming out of a bottle.

**One** – Yeah, it would have given Christianity a more oriental flair.

**Two** – I'm not sure the story would have been quite as successful.

**One** – Anyway, that's not the point.

**Two** – So what is the point, exactly?

**One** – Mr. Martin was cremated, and I just saw him in the frozen food aisle at the convenience store! That's the point.

**Two** – It can't be a miracle. Why would God, if he exists, resurrect Mr. Martin?

**One** – Yeah, especially since he wasn't exactly the sharpest tool in the shed.

**Two** – You could even say he was a bit of an idiot.

**One** – And nobody else in the store seemed surprised?

**Two** – I even heard the cashier say, “Hello, Mr. Martin, how are you today?”

**One** – In that case, I see only one solution. Mr. Martin isn't dead.

**Two** – Not dead? But then... whose funeral did we attend last week?

**One** – Who knows.

**Two** – Yet we did receive a death notice, didn't we?

**One** – Yes.

**Two** – Where is that notice?

**One** – Well... I didn't keep it. I mean, if I kept every notice I got...

**Two** – At our age, we are getting more and more of them, aren't we?

**One** – Mostly death notices.

**Two** – So, Mr. Martin isn't dead.

**One** – Apparently not.

**Two** – But then who did die?

**One** – No idea.

**Two** – Can you believe it? Someone we know died, we went to their funeral, and we don't even know who it was.

**One** – Yes. Someone close enough to us for us to receive a notice.

**Two** – And since you didn't keep the notice, there's no way to find out who it was?

**One** – That's really awkward... Imagine bumping into the downstairs neighbour and asking how her husband is doing. Only to realise we attended his funeral a week ago.

**Two** – And since he was cremated, we can't even go check the name on the grave.

**One** – Yeah... I've heard of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, but this...

**Two** – We know the deceased is someone we know, but we have no idea who...

**One** – Anyway, it's not Mr. Martin. I definitely saw him at the convenience store.

**Two** – We'll just have to make a list of everyone we meet. Eventually, the one we never see again will probably be the one who died.

**One** – Let's do that...

**Two** – We might as well start now. Who else did you see at the convenience store?

*Blackout.*

## 13 – Drinks

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – I invited the neighbours over for drinks.

**Two** – No...? You didn't do that?

**One** – I don't know what came over me... We bumped into each other on the stairs. I didn't know what to say. We started talking about the weather. At some point, I ran out of things to say. I was really embarrassed. And then I heard myself say: "One of these days, you must come over for drinks."

**Two** – And what did they say?

**One** – They answered right away: "Why not Saturday evening?"

**Two** – Saturday evening?

**One** – Saturday evening...

**Two** – And what did you say?

**One** – I said... alright.

**Two** – No way?

**One** – They looked delighted.

**Two** – But we've never invited anyone over for drinks!

**One** – No.

**Two** – How are we going to manage?

**One** – I don't know.

**Two** – How do people do it?

**One** – I have no idea. No one has ever invited us for drinks either.

**Two** – I think we got invited once, but we said we weren't available.

**One** – Yeah... We panicked...

**Two** – Drinks... I have no idea how we're going to handle this.

**One** – First, we need something to drink.

**Two** – Like what?

**One** – For drinks... People usually have whisky, I think.

**Two** – Whisky, you think? And where are we going to find that...?

**One** – And something to nibble on.

**Two** – Maybe olives? Once, in a café, I saw people eating olives while drinking whisky.

**One** – Olives... Black olives or green olives?

**Two** – You should have asked them which they preferred.

**One** – I could always call them.

**Two** – Do you even have their number?

**One** – I don't know what came over me. I gave them our number, and they gave me theirs.

**Two** – You gave them our phone number?

**One** – A moment of madness...

**Two** – We'll get through this, don't panic.

**One** – At worst, we can always move out without leaving a forwarding address and change our phone number.

**Two** – By Saturday?

**One** – What day is it today?

**Two** – Friday.

**One** – That's going to be tight...

**Two** – And we just moved in. Last time, we had to move out to avoid the neighbours' party. And now you're inviting the new neighbours over for drinks!

**One** – I know... I'm ashamed...

**Two** – Look, we'll get through this together, okay? We're married, after all. For better or for worse.

**One** – So we're not moving out?

**Two** – Drinks... It can't be that bad.

**One** – You think?

**Two** – No. I was just saying that to make you feel better.

**One** – I'm going to ask ChatGPT how to host drinks with friends.

**Two** – With friends?

**One** – Let's say with next-door neighbours.

**Two** – Don't forget to ask about the olives...

**One** – The olives...?

**Two** – Black or green!

**One** – I'll also ask for a list of conversation topics.

**Two** – Good idea. Meanwhile, I'll look up a moving company and a storage unit.

**One** – Yes... Just in case we really start to panic...

*Blackout.*

## 14 – Time

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – I barely dare tell you.

**Two** – I'm already starting to panic.

**One** – We change the clocks tonight.

**Two** – No way? Are you sure it's tonight?

**One** – They said it on the radio.

**Two** – But wait... do we move the clock forward an hour or back an hour?

**One** – That's exactly why I asked you not to panic.

**Two** – What now?

**One** – This year, it's not one hour, it's two hours.

**Two** – No way? They're trying to kill us...

**One** – Next year, it will be three hours... and so on.

**Two** – We'll be having breakfast at sunset...

**One** – And going to bed when the sun rises.

**Two** – It'll be a topsy-turvy world.

**One** – We'll be living on Washington or Tokyo time.

**Two** – Depends whether we move the little hand forward or back.

**One** – So?

**Two** – I still don't know... They say we'll gain two hours of sleep.

**One** – Gain two hours of sleep...? What does that even mean?

**Two** – That we'll get up later, I guess.

**One** – I don't get it. Especially since they always do it on Saturday night, and anyway, on Sunday, we always get up later.

**Two** – They're trying to kill us, I'm telling you.

**One** – Couldn't they wait until all the old folks are dead before changing the clocks?

**Two** – It's not when we're dead that we'll get up later, that's for sure. We won't get up at all.

**One** – They're a pain... Especially since they got rid of the speaking clock.

**Two** – So what?

**One** – Well, if the speaking clock still existed, we could call tomorrow morning to find out the time and set our watch.

**Two** – I liked the speaking clock.

**One** – Yeah, it was like company.

**Two** – Sometimes, when I was bored, I'd call the speaking clock. Just to hear its voice.

**One** – Yeah, with the speaking clock, you were never alone. You always had someone to talk to.

**Two** – It didn't talk back, but still... You could hear a voice.

**One** – At the fourth beep, it will be exactly...

**Two** – Was it the fourth beep or the third beep?

**One** – I can't remember...

**Two** – On the radio, it's the fourth beep.

**One** – Right after the weather forecast.

**Two** – They're a pain, with their weather forecast, every half hour.

**One** – As if we needed to know the weather twice an hour.

**Two** – Yeah... If they got rid of the weather on the radio, the shows would be half as long.

**One** – And what do we care about the weather at the other end of the country?

**Two** – What we want to know is the weather here.

**One** – And to know the weather here, all you have to do is look out the window.

**Two** – The weather, you say... We don't even know what time it is!

**One** – They're a pain, I'm telling you.

*Blackout.*

## 15 – Early calling

**One** – Promise me you won't panic...

**Two** – What?

**One** – Our daughter just told me she wants to be an actress.

**Two** – No way?

**One** – Yes.

**Two** – She just said that, out of the blue?

**One** – Yes.

**Two** – It wasn't after an argument? Just to annoy you...

**One** – No. It was this morning at breakfast. She was eating her cornflakes. She looked at me and said: "Mum, when I grow up, I'm going to be an actress."

**Two** – Right... So, it's serious.

**One** – She's only five, but... You know her, she's quite determined.

**Two** – Good grief... What did we do to deserve this?

**One** – I was speechless.

**Two** – But afterwards, you tried to reason with her, right?

**One** – Of course. I told her it's not a real job, that no bank would ever give her a mortgage, she'd never have private health insurance, and she'd get a pittance when she retires...

**Two** – And what did she say?

**One** – Nothing... She just went back to eating her cornflakes.

**Two** – Do you think we should punish her?

**One** – You know her, it would only make her more determined.

**Two** – Well, anyway... She's only five. She's got time to change her mind.

*The other one checks their phone.*

**One** – Look, she just sent me a message.

**Two** – Maybe to apologise.

**One** – She's asking me to sign her up with a casting agency.

**Two** – No way? A casting agency? She doesn't even know what that is!

**One** – Apparently, she does. She sent me a list of agencies, ranked by preference.

*The other looks stunned.*

**Two** – We've created a monster.

*A pause.*

**One** – Then again... The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

**Two** – What do you mean with that ridiculous saying?

**One** – Well... We're both actors, aren't we?

**Two** – Yes, but... It's different for us. We didn't choose it. We couldn't do anything else.

**One** – Yeah, but... She sees that we don't do much all day, we have a big house with a pool, a fancy car, and a maid...

**Two** – You don't say “maid” anymore, you know?

**One** – Oh, really?

**Two** – It's not politically correct.

**One** – So what do you call it now?

**Two** – A domestic worker, I think.

**One** – But it's still a maid, isn't it?

**Two** – Of course.

**One** – Isn't "domestic worker" more for people who take care of dependent persons?

**Two** – We can't do anything around the house... You could say we're dependent.

**One** – I think for people like us, it's more like... housekeeper.

**Two** – Whatever. Let's just keep calling her the maid.

**One** – Anyway, the thing is, when our daughter sees that we're basically useless, but people ask for our autographs in the street, she figures acting's not a bad plan.

**Two** – Not all actors are rich, though. I'm not sure she knows that.

**One** – You're right. We should put her in a boarding house with struggling actors to show her what the job really looks like.

**Two** – Do you know any?

**One** – What?

**Two** – Struggling actors.

**One** – Not personally, but... I could look into it...

**Two** – Anyway, I've got to go. I'm playing golf with a Danish producer who absolutely wants me in his next film.

**One** – And I've got therapy at ten.

**Two** – I swear... The day's off to a great start...

**One** – We're definitely putting her in boarding school.

**Two** – Yeah... But we'll also have to let the housekeeper go.

**One** – Also?

**Two** – What?

**One** – You said, "we'll also have to let the housekeeper go." We're keeping the maid, right?

**Two** – Yes, we're keeping the maid, don't panic.

**One** – You scared me...

*Blackout.*

**The End**

## *About the author*

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez was first a drummer for several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then began a career writing television scripts before turning to theatre and writing plays. He has written close to a hundred scripts for television and as many plays, some of which have already become classics (*Friday the 13th*, *Strip Poker*). He is one of the most produced contemporary playwrights in France and in other francophone countries. Several of his plays are also available in Spanish and English, and are regularly produced in the United States and Latin America.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his website La Comédiathèque (<https://comediatheque.net/>). However, public productions are subject to SACD filing.

## Other plays by the same author translated in English

### 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  
The Costa Mucho Castaways  
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  
Cheaters  
Crash Zone  
Fragile, Handle with care  
Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>  
Ménage à trois  
One small step for a woman,  
one giant leap backward for  
Mankind  
The Way 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 13<sup>th</sup>  
Gay friendly  
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  
Strip Poker  
Surviving Mankind  
The Deal  
The Fishbowl  
The Perfect Son-in-Law  
The Pyramids  
The Smell of Money  
The Tourists

### Comedies for 5 to 6

All's well that starts badly  
Christmas Eve at the Police  
Station  
Crisis and Punishment  
Critical but Stable  
In lieu of flowers...  
King of Fools  
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  
the savage beasts  
Neighbours'Day  
Nicotine  
Of Vegetables and Books  
Offside  
Open Hearts  
Reality Show  
Save our Savings  
Special Dedication  
Stories and Prehistories  
The House of Our Dreams  
The Jackpot  
The Performance is not  
cancelled  
The Worst Village in England  
Welcome aboard!  
White Coats, Dark Humour

### Collection of sketches

Backstage Bits  
Enough is Enough  
Ethan and Eve  
For real and for fun  
Him and Her  
Killer Sketches  
Lost time Chronicles  
Open Hearts  
Sidewalk Chronicles  
Stage Briefs  
Stories to die for

### Monologues

Happy Dogs  
Like a fish in the air

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Avignon – May 2025  
ISBN: 978-2-38602-348-4  
<https://comediatheque.net/>  
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