

La Comédiathèque

Horizons

Jean-Pierre Martinez



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Horizons

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In a desolate no man's land that feels like a purgatory, three characters who have lost their memory stare toward the horizon, searching for answers to their existential questions. But which horizon is it, exactly? A tragicomedy blending science and philosophy, a reflection on the eternal cycle of life and death.

Characters

Ben

Dom

Max

The characters are of unspecified gender.

Possible distributions: 3M, 3F, 2M/1F, or 1M/2F.

Scene 1

Three gender-neutral characters (in this version, three men) stand facing the audience on an empty stage, bathed in an unreal light. They are called Max, Dom, and Ben. Dom, at the centre, has his hands and feet bound. The three of them stare straight ahead, towards the back of the theatre, as if gazing at the horizon.

Max – Can you see anything?

Dom – No.

Ben – Nothing at all.

Dom – Well, yes, we can see... the horizon.

Max – Right. But beyond the horizon...?

Dom – Beyond the horizon, there's nothing to see. That's what the horizon *is*, isn't it?

Ben – Everything that lies beyond the horizon is invisible. That's just how it is.

Max – It's because of the curvature of the Earth.

Ben – Proof that the Earth is round, not flat.

Dom – Who ever said the Earth was flat?

Ben – I don't know...

Max – People say so much rubbish.

Ben – And there are always a few idiots ready to believe it.

Dom – And among them, one idiot slightly less idiotic than the rest, who turns that rubbish into religion and crowns himself king of the idiots, by divine right.

Ben – I don't know if artificial intelligence has any limits, but natural stupidity definitely doesn't.

Max – Yeah... If stupidity could generate electricity, we'd have done away with fossil fuels ages ago.

Ben – We'd have solved the climate crisis, and wouldn't be in this mess...

A pause.

Ben – But if the Earth really were flat, we'd be able to see to infinity, right?

Max – In theory, yes. On a clear day...

Dom – On a clear day... There are countries where you can't even see the sun anymore, hidden behind factory smoke.

Max – In any case, we could only see what light still reaches us.

A pause.

Dom – OK. But the Earth *is* round, right?

Ben – Yes. Last I heard...

Dom – So we can't see what's beyond the horizon.

Max – And those on the other side can't see us either...

Dom – Whatever's behind the horizon, that's none of our business.

A pause.

Ben – And if we cross the horizon... do we end up on the other side?

Dom – No, of course not...

Ben – What do you mean, "no"?

Max – Because the horizon keeps moving away as you approach it.

Ben – Ah, right...

Dom – And it's the same for those facing us.

Max – I suppose so... I've never gone to check what's on the other side of the horizon. At least, not that I can remember...

Ben – The other side of the horizon... It's a bit like the afterlife. I don't know anyone who's come back from there to tell us if it's really any better.

Dom – Or even if there *is* anything on the other side at all.

Max – The horizon itself doesn't exist. It's an optical illusion, the shifting boundary between the visible and the invisible.

Ben – So the horizon moves along with us.

Max – Like the beam of a car's headlights. You can always see about a hundred metres ahead, but as the car moves forward, it's never the same view.

Dom – Yeah... But we're stuck here, so our horizon isn't likely to change much.

A pause.

Ben – How far away is the horizon, anyway?

Max – It depends...

Ben – Depends on what?

Max – On the height of the observer, mainly... and the point of observation. For a child standing on the beach, the horizon's about four kilometres away. For an adult on top of the Himalayas... or passengers in a plane flying ten thousand metres up, it could stretch to four hundred kilometres.

A pause.

Dom – So if there were people on the other side of the horizon, under the same conditions, they'd see the same horizon as we do?

Max – Yes. We'd be their horizon, and they'd be ours.

Ben – So we're always someone else's horizon.

Dom – As long as there's someone looking our way, at least...

A pause.

Max – OK. So we're all here, on the same side of the horizon, but...

Ben – What are we doing here...?

Dom – I was afraid to ask...

Ben – I don't know. You?

Dom – Me neither.

Max – I can't remember.

Ben – Did we ever know, and just forgot? Or...

Dom – Did we never know at all?

Ben – Who knows...

Dom – Sometimes I feel like I vaguely remember something...

Max – Yeah, me too.

Ben – Like when you wake up and try to remember the dream you were just having.

Dom – You still feel as if you're dreaming.

Ben – Except you no longer know what about.

Max – As if you're still conscious inside a reality that's just faded away, one you can't recall.

Ben – Exactly. We've forgotten everything... except the fact that we've forgotten something.

Dom – The opposite of déjà vu, really.

Max – Oh, yes?

Dom – Déjà vu is when something's right before your eyes and you wonder if it might actually be a memory. When you've forgotten a dream, it's the other way round, you know there's something you want to remember, but you've no idea what it is.

Max – Yes... That's exactly how I feel.

A pause.

Dom – Sometimes I get a sort of flash...

Ben – A flash?

Dom – I was on a plane, I think.

Max – A plane, are you sure?

Dom – Or maybe a cruise ship, I don't remember.

Ben – Not quite the same thing.

Max – Still public transport, though.

Ben – A cruise ship? That's not really public transport, is it?

Max – Maybe it was a ferry...

Dom – I don't know why, but I remember having a seatbelt on.

Ben – You don't wear seatbelts on a ship...

Dom – Maybe it was a train.

Max – Do you wear seatbelts on trains?

Dom – Then it must have been a plane. I remember watching the horizon getting closer.

Max – Getting closer...?

Dom – I know, it sounds silly, but... I was afraid the plane was going to crash into the horizon.

Max – Yes... that *is* completely silly.

Ben – Maybe it was just a dream.

Dom – More like a nightmare, no?

Ben – Or maybe it's *now* that we're dreaming.

Max – Dreams always have a hidden meaning.

Ben – Crashing a plane into the horizon... What could *that* possibly mean?

Dom – I don't know, it was as if...

Max – As if, driven by our past, our present were heading straight into a future that no longer moved away as we approached it.

Dom – Yeah...

A pause.

Ben – But were we there too?

Dom – I don't know...

Ben – A plane... I don't remember.

Max – Me neither...

A pause. They look again toward the horizon.

Ben – What if that's what death is?

Max – Or maybe the first moments of life...

Dom – Being aware of existing without knowing who you are, in a world that makes no sense.

Max – It seems existence really does come before essence...

Dom – And even when you've run out of essence, you still exist.

Ben – Yes... I feel like an old banger out of fuel, stranded in the desert at night, headlights on, scanning the horizon, hoping to see someone coming with a jerrycan in each hand.

Dom – Waiting for the battery to die and the lights to go out for good, before the arrival of the Saviour.

A pause.

Max – But us...? Do the three of us actually know each other, or...?

Ben – I don't think so... Do we?

Dom – I've got a vague sense of déjà vu, but...

Max – You don't look familiar to me at all.

Ben – Me neither.

Max – To be honest... even my own face doesn't ring a bell.

Ben – What's your name, anyway?

Max – I don't know... I haven't got one. What would be the point? I'm always here...

Dom – All right... But how do other people call you?

Max – Other people? What other people? I only know you two. And even then, I'm not sure I really know you. What do *they* call you?

Ben – I don't know... I've never heard anyone call me anything.

Dom – Me neither. Or maybe I didn't hear. Either way, I've never answered.

Max – OK. So we don't have names either.

Ben – Why would we need names if we're already here?

Max – And we can't go anywhere, anyway.

Dom – Especially me...

Max – You?

Dom – Haven't you noticed?

Max – No.

Dom – I'm tied up!

Max – Oh, right... He *is* tied up...

Ben – Ah, yes, I... I hadn't noticed.

Dom – So...?

Max – So what?

Dom – Now that we've been introduced... would you mind untying me? If it's not too much trouble...

Max – Yes, yes, of course, we'll... we'll untie you...

Max moves to untie him.

Ben – Wait, not so fast...

Dom – What now?

Ben – Why were you tied up in the first place?

Dom – Why? How would I know... I'm like you, I don't remember anything...

Ben – Yeah, but...

Dom – But what?

Ben – That's a bit too easy...

Dom – Easy...?

Max – If you've been tied up, there must be a reason, right?

Dom – A reason...? What reason?

Ben – I don't know... You don't just tie someone up for no reason.

Dom – Oh, come on, untie me!

Max – Maybe you're dangerous...

Dom – Dangerous? To whom?

Max – To others...

Ben – Meaning, to us...

Dom – Right... Or maybe *you're* the dangerous ones.

Ben – Us?

Dom – Maybe it's *you* who tied me up.

Ben – And why would we have done that?

Dom – How should I know... Maybe you kidnapped me, for ransom, or... something else.

Max – Yeah, that's a possibility...

Ben – But it's also possible that *you're* a dangerous lunatic. Or even a repeat offender.

Max – Just to be safe, we'll keep you tied up for now...

Ben – You're right. Better safe than sorry.

Dom – You're joking, right?

Ben – Maybe something will come back to us later, and then we'll see.

Dom – Something? Like what?

Max – A memory, perhaps... I don't know.

Ben – Maybe something, or someone, will appear on the horizon...

Max – Though for now, we have to admit it's pretty quiet out there...

Ben – Yes... The calm before the storm, or maybe...

Dom – The calm before the even calmer.

Blackout.

Scene 2

Lights up.

Max – Bloody hell...! I just had a flash too...

Dom – Oh, here we go...

Ben – And?

Max – I was driving a car...

Dom – A car, are you sure?

Max – No...

Ben – Were you wearing your seatbelt?

Max – No... I don't think so...

Dom – Then it probably wasn't a car.

Ben – Maybe a plane...

Dom – Driving a plane?

Max – I said *driving*, but... maybe *piloting* is the word. That's it, I was *at the controls* of a plane.

Dom – And then...?

Max – Everything was fine, and then... suddenly, all the warning lights came on at once. The Christmas tree, as we say in the pilot's jargon...

Ben – The Christmas tree...?

Max – When all the warning lights start flashing, and you just know things are about to go up in smoke.

Dom – I hate Christmas. It's supposed to celebrate a birth, meaning life. To me it's always evoked death, don't you think?

Max – In Eastern philosophy, life and death are part of an endless cycle. We only die to be reborn, in another form, but always here on Earth. Only in Western thought that death is seen as a final departure to some supposed beyond, and therefore a total end for those who don't believe in heaven...

Dom – Maybe that's why Christmas smells of death... Even the divine infant is already a corpse in waiting.

Ben – Right, so you were flying a plane... And then?

Max – Nothing... I don't remember anything else...

Ben – If you were the pilot, maybe *you're* the reason we crashed.

Dom – You mean you were on that plane too?

Ben – I don't remember. Not yet, anyway...

Max – Do you think we could've crashed?

Ben – It would explain a lot...

Dom – You think so?

Max – It would explain the fact that we're dead.

Ben – You think we're dead?

Max – As long as we're wondering if we're dead, we're probably not, right?

A pause.

Ben – Don't you hear something...?

Dom – Something?

Ben – Like the sound of running water.

Max – That's it. Like the soothing sound of a spring bubbling in the countryside.

Ben – Or like the hiss of oxygen in a hospital, passing under pressure through a humidifier before you breathe it in.

Max – Yes... that too...

Ben – It's true, they sound quite similar.

Dom – So we might be in a hospital?

Max – In a coma...?

Dom – Or with Alzheimer's... in the terminal stage...

Ben – Yes, that's a strong possibility...

Max – Maybe they tied you up to protect you from yourself.

Dom – From myself?

Ben – So you wouldn't fall... or...

Max – So you wouldn't try to escape...

Ben – Or harm yourself.

Max – All the more reason not to untie him.

Dom – Thanks... That's very thoughtful of you, worrying about my safety.

Ben – Yes, but what about us...? Why aren't *we* tied up?

Max – Maybe we're not as far gone as he is.

Dom – So we'd be sharing the same hospital room?

Ben – Three to a room seems a bit much, doesn't it?

Dom – Guess our health insurance wasn't great...

A pause.

Ben – Maybe we just came to visit him in hospital.

Max – Yes... To be with him in his final moments.

Ben – To say goodbye before he sets off on his last journey to the beyond.

Dom (*ironically*) – Touching. Thanks a lot.

Ben – But then why don't we remember anything either?

Dom – None of this makes sense.

Max – No... Even we can barely stand up.

A pause.

Ben – Oxygen...

Max – There's oxygen on planes too... those masks that drop from the ceiling in an emergency.

Ben – Yes, that's what the flight attendants say, anyway. But no one's ever actually seen one drop.

Max – Or if they have, they're not around to tell the story...

Dom – An emergency... You mean a crash risk...?

Ben – That still doesn't explain why we didn't fasten our seatbelts...

Max (*to Dom*) – And are you really sure it was a seatbelt...?

Dom – What else could it have been?

Max – I don't know... A belt of explosives...?

Dom – A belt of explosives...?

Ben – That would explain the plane crash.

Max – And if you're a dangerous terrorist, that would explain why you were tied up.

Dom – Before or after I blew myself up...?

Ben – Why would anyone blow themselves up on a plane, anyway?

Max – Who knows...

Dom – Maybe to protest against the disastrous carbon footprint of air travel... (*The other two stare at him in horror*) I'm joking...

A pause.

Max – You said earlier you were afraid we'd crash into the horizon line.

Dom – Yes... It was a metaphor, I suppose...

Max – And what if it wasn't a metaphor?

Ben – What do you mean?

Max – Maybe they tied him up... so he wouldn't vanish beyond the event horizon.

Dom – The event horizon...?

Max – It's quite a fascinating concept in astrophysics. The event horizon is the edge of a black hole... the boundary beyond which, if you get too close, the black hole swallows everything. The matter of an entire star, for instance... and even its light.

Dom – So where does that matter go?

Max – Nobody knows... What we do know is that when you fall into a black-out...

Ben – You mean a black *hole*, I suppose...

Max – Isn't that what I said?

Dom – No, you said "black-out."

Max – Ah, really...? I don't remember saying that...

Ben – Anyway... and then?

Max – What's certain is that nothing that enters a black hole ever comes back out.

Ben – Not on this side of the event horizon, at least.

Max – Right...

Ben – Maybe you come out the other side.

Max – Maybe... if there *is* another side.

Ben – There has to be another side, doesn't there? If nothing's ever lost and nothing's ever created, there must be something at the far end of the tunnel.

Dom – So a black hole's a bit like death, really.

Ben – It's true, people often describe it as a tunnel.

Dom – You have to wonder why, since no one's ever come back from that so-called tunnel to describe the entrance... let alone the exit.

Ben – Just another way of speaking...

Max – Yes... We don't know where that tunnel leads, or even if it exists, but what's certain is that you never come back out the same side you went in.

Ben – Maybe they tied you up to stop you being sucked into that tunnel.

Max – Or into that black hole, if you prefer.

Dom – What...?

Ben – You said you were in a plane, strapped into your seat with a seatbelt...

Max – Maybe to stop you being sucked out into the void in case of depressurisation.

Dom – In that case, you'd better untie me. Because honestly... this isn't much of a life, is it?

Ben – It's better than nothing.

Dom – You think so? We keep repeating the same nonsense over and over again.

Ben – We've forgotten almost everything, except that there are things we ought to remember.

Dom – I'd rather be sucked into the void once and for all. And if, at the end of the tunnel, it all starts again exactly the same, at least I won't remember a thing... and I'll rediscover the pleasure of surprise.

Ben – He's not entirely wrong, you know... At best, we're somewhere between life and death. You can't stay in that state forever. We might as well end it now and hope that after death, another life awaits us. What have we got to lose?

Max – The risk that the life waiting for us is even worse than the one we're about to leave...

Ben – Let's untie him.

They untie him.

Dom – Thank you.

Ben – And now?

Dom – What?

Ben – Nothing's happened at all.

Max – No. The void hasn't sucked you in. And neither has it taken us.

Ben – Death hasn't carried us away.

Dom – And we're still here.

Ben – Or maybe we're already dead, all three of us, and we've already crossed to the other side...

Max – Sadly, that's also a serious possibility...

Ben – I think I remember something, too...

Dom – Oh, yes...?

Max – You're not just saying that to make us feel better...?

Ben – Wait... No... It's gone again...

A pause.

Dom – Still nothing on the horizon.

Ben – No. No one with a jerrycan or even a little can of petrol.

Dom – What would we do with it anyway?

Ben – We haven't even got a car.

Max – If this is the event horizon, nothing will ever come from this side again.

Dom – In that case, we're in for one hell of a boring eternity... *(The other two glare at him, offended)* What? It's true, neither of you are exactly a laugh riot.

Ben – It's true we're a bit short on perspective, aren't we?

Dom – Yes, you could say our horizon's well and truly blocked.

Max – They say time slows down as you approach a black hole.

Dom – Then we must already have fallen in, because it feels like time's stopped altogether...

A pause.

Max – Did you know that beyond a certain limit, the universe moves away from us so fast that its light will never reach us?

Dom – Here we go again...

Ben – So most of our universe will remain forever out of reach... and unknown?

Dom – Are you an astrophysicist?

Max – No, I don't think so. I must have read it somewhere.

Ben – You've got some strange reading habits...

Max – Anyway, that particular horizon, we'll never be able to cross it.

Ben – And those on the other side will never be able to see us either.

Dom – So, it's the scientific version of the afterlife, then.

Max – Yes...

Ben – But there's no guarantee we'll go there once we're dead, either.

Dom – Who knows...

Max – Did you know that a single particle can exist in two places at once, depending on who looks at it first?

Ben – A bit like truth, really...

Dom – Sorry?

Max – I forget who said it: "What is true on this side of the Pyrenees is false on the other."

Dom – The worst thing about quotations is when you can't even remember who you're quoting.

Ben – Reality's the same for everyone, but depending on who looks at it, it can appear as truth here and illusion elsewhere.

Dom – You're really starting to give me a headache.

A pause.

Max – Why do I remember what the event horizon is — but can't remember my own name?

Ben – Maybe as we approach death, we only remember the things that really matter.

Dom – And you don't think our name matters?

Max – Our name... it's like a number we're given at birth. A social security number, or...

Ben – A hotel room number.

Max – A room number's really only useful for getting breakfast in the morning.

Ben – It's breakfast that forces us to remember the room number.

Dom – And that number helps us find our way back to the room to sleep at night.

Max – When we finally leave, we hand in our key at reception — and forget the number...

Dom – To blend back into the crowd on public transport.

Ben – Until we find another room in another hotel.

Dom – Or another house in a new neighbourhood.

Ben – On another planet...

Max – With a new number.

Ben – And neighbours to remind us who we are and what we're called.

Max – It's true. From the moment we're born, it's mostly others who decide our identity. Our civil status.

Ben – Like those particles you mentioned earlier. It's the ones who observe us that determine the way we exist.

Dom – Parents, mostly. Family.

Ben – They decide who we are.

Dom – What we're called.

Ben – Where we live.

Dom – What language we'll speak.

Max – What religion we'll follow.

Ben – To know who we are, all we have to do is ask others.

Dom – The ones who know us, anyway.

Max – And even when we've forgotten who we are and what our name is, there's always someone who hasn't forgotten, and can tell us.

Ben – Even when we've lost our memory.

Max – Even when we’re in a coma.

Ben – Even when we’re already dead.

Dom – Until the day when everyone who ever knew us is dead too.

Max – Yes. We are, for the most part, only what others decide we are.

Ben – And we barely know any more about ourselves than others know about us.

Max – Sometimes even less.

Ben – “Become who you are,” they say... More like “become who everyone expects you to be.”

Dom – A good parishioner.

Ben – A good citizen.

Max – A good little soldier.

Ben – Who was it who said, “I is another”?

Dom – I can’t remember. But he’d have done better to keep his mouth shut.

Ben – Anyway, we’re born, we die...

Max – And after death... we melt back into the crowd.

Dom – When we go, we take nothing with us... least of all the memory of having been.

Max – And when we come back to life, we show up again at reception to be given a new number...

Ben – A new me...

Blackout.

Scene 3

Lights up.

Max – What time can it be...?

Ben – No idea...

Dom – What does it matter? You got a train to catch?

Ben – Maybe a plane...

Max – You're right. If we're dead, we don't need watches anymore...

Dom – Anyway, I've never known anyone ask to be buried with their watch.

A pause.

Ben – This time, I remember...

Dom – Remember what?

Ben – My room number!

Dom – Oh, for God's sake...

Ben – It was 2108.

Dom – Really...?

Ben – I can see myself arriving for breakfast at the airport hotel buffet, proudly announcing to Cerberus at the door: "Room 2108."

Dom – Proudly?

Ben – I remember it because I was born on the twenty-first of August. So, 21/08.

Max – Ah, right...

Dom – So you remember your date of birth.

Ben – No, but I remember my room number matched my date of birth — 2108.

Max – And which year was that?

Ben – No idea... The room number only had four digits.

Dom – That still doesn't tell us if you were on that plane with us.

Ben – I think I was, though.

Dom – You're not just saying that to cheer us up, are you...?

Ben – Because if that plane really did crash...

Max – What makes you think you were on it?

Ben – I remember my seat number.

Dom – Ah yes, you do seem to have a thing for numbers...

Ben – I remember because it was number 666.

Max – I thought airlines never used that number for any seat.

Ben – Apparently, it's not a strict rule. I even asked the flight attendant if I could change seats.

Dom – Changing seats on a plane to ward off bad luck is like rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic to avoid the sinking...

Max – Either way, seat number 666 didn't do you much good.

Dom – You could even say you jinxed the lot of us...

A pause.

Ben – I can't hear the oxygen anymore...

Max – Maybe there's not enough left for everyone.

Ben – On Earth, you mean?

Max – Or in this hospital...

Dom – Maybe we're getting better and don't need it anymore.

Max – Or maybe we're dead and don't need it anymore.

A pause.

Ben – You mentioned the Himalayas earlier...

Max – Did I...?

Ben – Talking about the distance to the horizon.

Dom – So what?

Ben – I don't know... I've got this image in my head. The three of us, roped together, on the roof of the world.

Dom – The roof of the world?

Max – That's what they call the Himalayas, I think.

Ben – Doesn't ring a bell for you?

Dom – No... nothing at all.

Ben – At twenty-six thousand feet, oxygen gets scarce.

Max – And that can cause hallucinations...

Dom – So now we're on top of the Himalayas, are we...?

Max – That would also explain the rope...

Ben – The rope...?

Max – If we were roped together with him...

Ben – I see... Maybe he fell and we cut the rope to stop ourselves being dragged down with him...

Dom – Thanks... Some friends you are...

Max – So he'd be the only one of us who's actually dead...?

Ben – Unless, in the end, he dragged us down with him anyway...

A pause.

Ben – How do you know when you're dead?

Dom – You don't.

Max – Being dead is like being stupid: you don't know it. It's only hard for everyone else.

Dom – I'm sure I've heard that stupid line before.

Ben – Yes, me too...

Dom – That's our fate, to keep repeating the same nonsense as our contemporaries.

Ben – Or the same nonsense our ancestors were repeating before us.

Max – Each of us thinks we're a unique individual, but how much of us is truly individual?

Ben – People complain about artificial intelligence, but even our natural stupidity isn't really ours. We inherit it from all the idiots before us — and all those around us.

A pause.

Ben – So if we're dead, we'll soon be given a new room number.

Dom – You mean a mortuary number?

Ben – I was thinking more of... a new identity. A new existence...

Dom – A blank page to write a new story.

Max – Consciousness without memory.

Ben – Like a quantum computer that's been wiped clean — reformatted before being handed over to someone else.

Max – We'll soon find out.

Dom – Yes, but when?

Ben – When we've forgotten everything, I suppose. When we're completely dead.

Dom – Completely dead...? You're either dead or alive, aren't you?

Max – You can be both, at the same time. Like Schrödinger's cat.

Ben – You mean those cats that are said to have nine lives?

Max – I'm talking about that scientific and philosophical mystery at the heart of quantum physics. As long as you haven't opened the box, the cat inside can be both dead *and* alive.

Dom – I didn't understand a word of that... except that you're starting to repeat yourself too.

Ben – It's like you said earlier: it's others who define who we are. We're only the elementary particles of a collective consciousness.

Max – And what if one day there *are* no others?

Dom – No others...?

Ben – When the sun engulfs the Earth, in five billion years, and humanity's gone.

Dom – Or much sooner... when humankind finally succeeds in making uninhabitable the only planet it can live on.

Ben – Then it won't just be the death of a man, or a billion men... it'll be the death of humankind. The death of collective consciousness.

Max – And if, as some fools believe, we're the only intelligent beings in the universe, that would mean the death of consciousness itself.

Dom – Hard to imagine that consciousness wouldn't be reborn somewhere else, in another form.

A pause.

Ben – It's coming back to me now... It wasn't a plane... it was a spaceship.

Max – I was the captain.

Ben – And I was your first officer.

Dom – There were only three of us on board.

Ben – The last surviving members of a dying humanity.

Max – We'd set course for a potentially habitable planet...

Dom – Which turned out to be a black hole.

Ben – Probably a miscalculation by the onboard computer.

Max – Unless it did it on purpose.

Dom – On purpose?

Max – An artificial intelligence determined, once and for all, to rid itself of what remained of humanity.

Ben – In any case, by the time we woke up from our long hibernation, it was already too late to escape the pull of the supermassive black hole.

Max – So we're about to be swallowed up by that black hole...

A pause.

Dom – There's still one mystery left...

Ben – What's that?

Dom – Why did you have seat number 666 if there were only three of us on board...?

Max – Good point... The mystery deepens...

Dom – Were we in a hospital room about to die, on the slopes of the Himalayas about to fall into an abyss...

Ben – On a raft about to sink... after trying to cross over to a better world.

Max – On a plane about to crash, or in a spaceship about to be sucked into a black hole?

Ben – Is it one or the other?

Dom – Or all of them at once.

Max – It's all getting mixed up in our heads.

Dom – Like wastewater swirling down a sink, sucked into the vortex that carries it to the sewers before the great recycling.

Ben – Our pasts.

Dom – Our presents.

Max – Our futures.

Ben – We no longer know.

Dom – We don't know.

Max – We don't yet know.

Blackout.

Scene 4

Lights up.

Dom – It looks like the horizon's getting closer again...

Ben – When it finally catches up with us, we'll cross to the other side.

Dom – If there really *is* another side...

Ben – Just a manner of speaking...

Max – Yes... One of those turns of phrase we use as ready-made thoughts.

Dom – Language is a window open to the world. But it's also a grid that traps us inside the only reality our senses can perceive, our mind can conceive, and our words can describe.

Ben – Then we should invent a new language...?

Dom – Or keep our mouths shut... that's simpler still. Where does this urge to talk for the sake of talking even come from?

Ben – Animals stick to essentials. I'm hungry. I want to mate.

Dom – What's the point of knowing anything if, in the end, we'll never know everything?

Max – But once we've started talking, can we ever stop?

Ben – As long as we're talking, it means we're not dead yet.

Max – Then let's keep talking...

Ben – Until the day our words no longer mean a thing.

Dom – Until the day when everything we say will be nothing more than quotations of what's already been said by others.

Max – And everything we do will be no more than a commemoration of what others have already done.

Ben – I'm afraid that day has already come.

Dom – Well, I won't say another word. And I won't listen to you either. Now that I'm no longer tied up, I'm going to walk toward that horizon, whatever it may be.

Ben – Then we won't see each other again? That's a shame, I was starting to get attached to you...

Dom – Really?

Ben – No. I think that was just another figure of speech.

Max – Perhaps we'll meet again, on the other side. But we'll have forgotten everything.

Ben – And we won't recognise one another.

Dom – Every bond that ties us to others will have been undone.

Max – We'll have to tie new ones. To try to exist again, in another humanity.

Ben – If we do meet again someday, at best we'll feel a strange sense of déjà vu...

Dom – Then I won't say goodbye...

Dom prepares to move toward the front of the stage.

Ben – Wait! I'm coming with you...

Dom doesn't look thrilled.

Dom – Are you sure...?

Max – Me too... I'm not staying here all alone... like an idiot.

They take the ropes that once bound Dom and tie themselves together, like mountaineers on the same line.

Dom – Then that's that.

Ben – The end of the story.

Max – Of this one, at least...

Dom – Let's walk together toward that radiant horizon.

Ben – Roped together... hand in hand. For the great leap into the unknown.

Dom – Hoping that horizon opens onto a new world.

Ben – A better one.

Max – Unless it's the same as this one.

Ben – Maybe our universe is just an old sock, turned inside out forever.

Max – And with every turn, the inside becomes the outside. But it's still the same sock.

Dom – At least we'll have forgotten everything.

Ben – And we'll be able to marvel again at being alive.

They move toward the audience, gazing into the distance, as if about to jump into the auditorium. But Dom stops and the others stop with him.

Dom – You'll laugh, but this time I really think I see something on the horizon.

Ben – Yeah, me too.

Dom – Or rather, someone...

Max – An old bearded man with a bunch of keys?

Dom – A bearded man, yes. With a jerrycan in each hand...

They all stare toward the horizon.

Ben – So that's it, then? It wasn't a metaphor after all...

Max – We broke down in the middle of nowhere, and one of us went off to get fuel...

Ben – I thought from the start there were four of us.

Max – Of course, in the desert you get mirages...

Ben – And sunstroke can make you hallucinate too...

Dom – So this is just another hallucination...?

Max – In any case, it seems there are still a few events on the horizon...

Ben – So what do we do?

Max – We still have existence.

Dom – Let's see what happens with a little essence.

The light begins to fade gradually.

Ben – Ah, I think the battery's dying too...

Max – Yes... the headlights are going out.

Dom – Alas, we'll never see our Saviour arrive.

Max – Let's keep faith, all the same.

Ben – You're right... Faith is all that saves us...

Dom – Another ready-made phrase...

Ben – Yes...

Appropriate music (possibly sacred) plays as the stage fades to black.

Blackout.

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 13th
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 13th
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
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

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
Don't panic !
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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