

ACTS OF GOD

A DIVINE COMEDY

ACTS OF GOD

Indicia

Written and Perpetrated by Gremlin

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For Dad, 1921-1943-1981-1999: a lawyer by trade, and a revenant by habit.

If there's a heaven, he's probably there, lamenting the admittance of morons.

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Also by Gremlin:

News of the Stoopid [NotS]

Paroxysm

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Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of the desert.
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

—William Butler Yeats
The Second Coming, 1920

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall
be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth
shall be loosed in heaven.

—Matthew 18.18

H. Conclusion

The proper application of both the endorsement and Lemon tests to the facts of this case makes it abundantly clear that the Board's [Intelligent Design] Policy violates the Establishment Clause. In making this determination, we have addressed the seminal question of whether ID is science. We have concluded that it is not, and moreover that ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents.

—Judge John E Jones III

TAMMY KITZMILLER, et al. v DOVER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, et al
20th December 2005

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Prologue

I

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.

All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

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When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains:

Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house:

Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.

And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!

But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:

For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not.

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Behold, I have told you before.

Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken:

And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

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Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh:

So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark,

And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?

Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;

And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

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And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

II

And Jesus went off the record, and departed from the regional vernacular: and his disciples listened still, yet they understood not.

And Jesus said unto them, It's gonna be so cool;

Totally;

Totally, utterly cool.

Dig this:

This is how I see it going down.

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PART ONE
THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

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Chapter One

I

‘Mister Damon!’ the first of the reporters called; her eruption was echoed by those of a dozen others, their pleas degrading to meaningless whimpers: *over here* truncated by *what are your thoughts* trumped by *what could this mean for*. Reporters had been likened to parasites, feeding off the actions of those who actually accomplished things in the world; to Adam Damon, they seemed more like spoiled children asking for cookies again and again in the incessant hopes that the answer might eventually change. He ignored them until they got his name right.

Finally:

‘Doctor Damon! Would you call today’s ruling a victory for your cause?’

He stopped walking, eyes shifting to the one among them whose brain worked well enough to correlate a doctorate of jurisprudence to an evolution of title. He smirked at her.

‘I would,’ he announced, loudly enough for the rest of the brats to hear, provided they were bothering to stop demanding cookies from him long enough to listen, ‘The primary intent of this case was always to effect precisely the changes made to precedent here today. Our auxiliary objections were in all honesty largely fluff—to give the court something to shoot down, resulting in this compromise.’

‘So your objection to the days of the week,’ the clever brat spat out before hers could be lost among the deluge of followups; Damon nodded, indicating that he got the gist of the question.

‘That the days of the week are named for deities—Wednesday for Odin, Thursday for Thor, et cetera—and therefore logically disallowed by the Establishment Clause, was a bit of a red herring. In application—as per today’s ruling—the month of March in name does not glorify the deity Mars in any substantial and impermissible way; and that’s the crux of the issue: that Mars and March, and Thursday and Thor are inextricably related is only as good a fact as

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its advertising. Words have to come from somewhere. Our primary objection is and has always been the impermissible sponsorship of those deities still worshipped by the majority: that Jehovah, as a specific and generally worshipped deity, has become in recent centuries synonymous with the, ah “harmless” monosyllable of “god”, indicates a direct sponsorship—intentional or otherwise—by the American government of this particular mythology within the pledge of allegiance, upon our currency, and elsewhere in our culture.’ He concluded with a casual grin: ‘Prior to today’s ruling, of course.’

‘But—’ The same reporter; the clever one who knew that a JD was a doctorate. ‘Doctor Damon: How do you respond to those who claim that “god” effectively depicts other deities, such as Al’lah?’

‘That goes back to the issue of common understanding. Based on my research, Al’lah and Jehovah were two entirely different deities, which, if that were the general consensus, would simply favour islam, christianity, and judaism over, say, mithraism and hindism. As is the case, though, Al’lah and Jehovah are generally misunderstood to have been the same animal, though separate from hindi cows, again implying an impermissible sponsorship of religion by our definitively secular government.’

‘Do you expect this ruling to be overturned at a later date?’

Damon nodded quickly. ‘It’s not impossible. Though, as all evidence to date suggests, this ruling was in fact made by the highest court. I think we’ll be okay for a while.’

‘A final question, Doctor Damon.’

He smiled at her.

‘What, if any, deities do you personally worship?’

‘I don’t believe in deities,’ he told the camera, adding, ‘I don’t believe in Santa Claus or the Tooth Fairy either. I’m undecided on goblins.’

‘Mister Damon!’

‘No further comments, thanks. I’ll get an official statement written up on my blogue as time allows.’ He hurried toward his waiting car.

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II

‘...As we’ve just seen, Counsel for the Plaintiffs Adam Damon has just left the scene in his limo—’

The car bounced slightly, snowing the satfeed from CourtTV within; Adam turned up the volume.

‘—see it pulling away into traffic now. Let’s go to Analyst Mitchell White here in the studio for a moment. Mitchell: What could today’s landmark ruling really mean for the country. Do you think we’ll be seeing—’

‘Well, Tammy, the—sorry.’

‘Go ahead, Mitchell.’

‘The implications of, as you called it, this landmark decision are staggering. I mean, I was fully expecting the rulings on weekdays and calendar months and Anno Domini years to go the way they did. I mean, the basic conventions of time, whether religious in origin or not, *far* predate the constitution—are even *used* in the constitution. Demanding that we stop glorifying gods with things most of us have on our wristwatches and microwaves...’ he paused to reassess his thoughts, laughing nervously, ‘I mean...I’d say that those issues go well beyond constitutional law and border on simple arrogance. And, I’m happy to say, the Justices agree with me on that point.’

‘And, regarding the issues for which they agreed with Doctor Damon.’

‘Yeah. I’d...I can see his point, of course: that God is found on our money and in our pledge of allegiance—and let me take a moment to point out that both of those issues have been to court before—most recently just a few years ago, in two thousand three, I think, when Doctor Newdow attempted to remove the pledge—or, I shouldn’t say “remove”, so much as—we’ve seen these issues before the Supreme Court in the past. What happened *today*, different than the history to date, was that Doctor Damon had made a—I would say—*brilliantly* compelling argument showing some of these issues to violate the Establishment Clause, and, based on his arguments, I’m compelled to agree with the Supreme Court in their decision today, in *favour* of disallowing these religious elements from being printed on currency and pledged in our schools and so on. Now, when—’

‘So—sorry; go ahead.’

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‘When I say that I agree based on the argument, Tammy, I mean exactly that. That the argument *itself* is sound and shows these religious endorsements to violate the Establishment Clause. That’s my legal opinion. My *philosophical* opinion—’ He laughed nervously again. ‘Philosophically, I’m just about outraged, being a christian myself and therefore happy to see my god being credited with the creation of the universe, and so on. But I do concede that my philosophical outlook will necessarily differ from those of people in other religions—and of people without religions at all. And, based on that fact, I do agree that, legally speaking, our currency and public schools are the wrong place to glorify *any* gods. We have churches for that; they’re not on the taxbased teat, and they’re doing well enough without governmental subsidation—*subsidiarisation* and endorsement.’

‘So the Supreme Court’s decision today was legally sound, while morally reprehensible.’

‘I—’ Another laugh. ‘Well, I don’t know if I’d go so far as calling it “reprehensible”, Tammy; I don’t generally think of the Supreme Court Justices as immoral reprobates; but—’

‘You may be a member of a dying group, Mitchell.’

He laughed. ‘*Touché*. But, seriously, I...the function of the Supreme Court is to uphold the laws of the constitution. And they did that job today. So...I guess—’

‘So they did the right thing.’

‘They—yeah; I’d say that...I guess my point is that the Supreme Court operated today within their job description; and, if that’s immoral, Tammy, I think we’re all in trouble.’

III

Adam Damon shrugged his unused trenchcoat down his arm into his hand, hooking it deftly onto his coatrack and loosening his tie by another inch in a fluid motion toward the endtable; he hit the POWER button on the remote, bringing the HDTV’s CourtTV feed to life on his way toward the kitchen. He was assaulted instantly by what could only be described as a baptist accent.

‘Well, I’ll tell ya: what the Supreme Court did t’day was just about the worst thing I personally’ve ever seen happen to this great nation. To—this country is One Nation under *God*, after all; t’ have these atheists and jews and—let’s just wrap’em all up into the label

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of “troublemakers” t’ keep it simple. They—it was bad enough when chris’mas become “Happy Holidays” and “Seasons Greetin’s” all them years ago; but we let’em have their way: now it’s all “Happy This” and “Holiday Wishes That” cos a bunch of whiny liberal activists couldn’t stand to remember the reason for the season: our Lord and Saviour Jeezuz Christ. That was one thing. But t’ *make it illegal* now t’ mention God in a public school—and I’ll tell ya where this is gonna go: we’re not talkin’ just about a pledge of allegiance here, y’know; we’re gonna start seein’ detention an’ suspensions and evict—expulsions o’ students who casually remark “O God” in ev’ryday conversation. Mark my words on that.’

‘Okay, but—I think I see your point, Reverend—but, regarding a student casually remarking “O God”...isn’t—wouldn’t that equally violate *biblical* law? Which commandment is it—taking the lord’s name in vain. And—’

‘Well, sure; but—’

‘And—let me just get in—for that matter, isn’t a sculpture—whether it’s in a public building or *anywhere*—isn’t a sculpture of the ten commandments *itself* a graven image,’ she laughed slightly, ‘ironically enough outlawed in the embossed text of the sculpture itself?’

‘Well...,’ the reverend faltered, ‘Lemee address those two points sep’rately for a moment, since they’re two different commandments. In the first case—for the most part—yes: “O God” could be a use of the lord’s name in vain, certainly. But—in fact, let’s assume for the sake of argument that a child did use the lord’s name in vain, in a school. Now, we all trust God to handle that sorta in house, okay? I mean: you don’t supplement the Divine Will of the Omnipotent Designer with detention. Do you? Yes, people’ll slip and break a commandment now and again; but we don’t need the federal govament comin’ in and enforcin’ biblical law.’

‘Um...they’re not. They’re enforcing *constitutional* law. That’s the point here.’

‘Well, and lemee address your next point as well, though. You brought up Exodus Twenty verse Four: that thou shalt not make unto thyself a graven image. But—well, I shouldn’t have to tell you about legal meanings an’ intent an’ whatnot. The question arisin’ in *my* mind is “what constitutes a graven image, *in the spirit of God’s Law*”, which—’

‘Well, if it helps, I have the verse itself right here. I could read it to you.’

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‘The—what’s that, Exodus Twenty verse Four?’

‘Yeah. It reads, and I quote, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth”. Now, correct me if I’m wrong, as I’m sure you will, but wouldn’t the bible itself, opened to Exodus Twenty, constitute a likeness of a thing in the earth beneath?’

‘Ah. You are wrong, and I’ll explain why.’

‘Please.’

‘If you’ll notice—and lemee get out my own bible here, just to be absolutely—yup—if you’ll notice, in that verse...no: the bible is not a thing in the earth. Because: in this verse, “earth” ain’t capitalised. What it means in fact is that you couldn’t have a statue of somethin’ in the earth—in the dirt—like, say, a worm. And that’s fine, cos...who wants a worm sculpture, anyway! Now, if bibles grew outta the soil like cabbages, you’d have a violation of Exodus Twenty verse Four.’

‘Genesis—I’m reading from the same bible now—Genesis One verse One has “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”—lowercased “earth”; so, in fact, we’re not being told that He created the planet, just its soil?’

‘Um...well, He created both, see. We know that because, later on, He creates Adam outta the soil—the small earth—having obviously created the capital planet Earth for the soil to be on. The reason you see “earth” lowercased in Genesis One verse One is to kinda let you know, later, that God had created not just the planet, but also the core materials to make Adam from. Make sense now?’

‘Not really. But, for our viewers, we should probably explain that we’re talking here about Adam in the Garden of Eden, and not Adam Damon, otherwise in the larger topic of the news today.’

‘Yeah,’ Adam muttered to the fridge, whose contents were failing to thrill him, ‘Be sure to keep us apart.’

‘Well, I’m not sure that troublemakin’ lawyer is bigger news’n Adam th’ First Man today or any other day, but—’

Reverend: I hate to cut you off, but I’m getting a commercial sign here from my producer; we’ll have to see if we can address more of these issues when we return.’

Adam noticed with some amusement that it took a further five seconds to cut to an advert, the producer having indicated no such immediate need. The baptist backpeddler silenced, his brain

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locked quickly onto the bottle of V8 on the top shelf; he grabbed it and shut the door.

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Chapter Two

I

‘Moe!’

‘I’m right here.’

His mother spun round from the sink. ‘Oh. Are you *ready* yet? Mister Caruthers said “eight”, right?’

‘Yeah. I’ve got ninety minutes. I’m good.’

Moe was a dying breed: fourteen and oversheltered beyond recovery; he didn’t have a learner’s permit; he didn’t have a girlfriend; he’d never been in a fight; the MPAA had wanted him to be thirteen before seeing most films, but his parents had held out for an extra year; he’d never played a videogame.

‘Ahem,’ his mother said.

‘What.’

‘Don’t take that tone of voice, Mister. You’re *what?*’

‘I’m...what’s the question.’

‘You’re *well*,’ she told him, ‘You’re not *good*. “good” is an adjective; the adverb is “well”; you’re smarter than this—I’m sure of it.’

‘I was being colloquial and hip.’

‘Not in this house. Once you’re eighteen; you can go be illiterate all day outside these walls. In here, you’re *well*.’

‘Well,’ he echoed, indignant—his jewish mother routine, for his jewish mother.

‘And why aren’t you dressed yet. It’s six *thirty*.’

‘I am dressed. See? Dressed.’

‘Tone, Mister. And you’re not dressed. I laid out your clothes for you, didn’t I?’

‘You laid out clothes for a funeral, Mom. I don’t need to wear a suit this time.’

‘You think you don’t need a suit for the first day of your first job, but—’

‘I think I don’t need a suit to stock the backroom of a deli; I think that, in a few years, when robots do this job, they won’t wear a tie either.’ He picked up the waiting glass of milk from the table

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without sitting down—something else she'd complain about, he had no doubt.

'In a few years, that may be the case. Today, as of two thousand seven, it's still perfectly all right to wear a—' She shrieked even before the sight fully registered in her mind, if it ever could. The glass fell to the floor, followed in microseconds by Moe's entire outfit—right for the job or not.

Moe himself simply no longer was.

II

'You're late.'

'Couldn't get a cab.'

'Ha, ha.'

McCormick dropped into his chair, already rolling up his sleeves for the day, staring at the caseload still on his desk from yesterday. The small digital readout of his clock caught his eye:

07/07/07

7:07

'Huh.'

'What's that.'

07/07/07

7:08

'Nothing. Why am I here on a Saturday....'

'Crime never sleeps.'

'Then crime's gonna win. Is any of this from today?'

'This is from today,' Myers said, brandishing another dozen folders, 'Missing Persons since midnight.'

'Anything simple? Or interesting?'

'Oh yeah. The latter. Some nut claiming that her kid vanished.'

'Yeah; we never get that one. And?'

'Not "went missing": "vanished".'

'What, "poof"??'

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'Yeah: "poof".'

'Givit.'

III

By eight, McCormick was at the scene. Inasmuch as there *was* a scene. Uniforms hovered about, mostly enjoying Sheila's coffee and keeping their obvious jokes at a low volume. One of them nodded as he walked in the door. 'Hey Mac.'

'Hey yourself...Rogers. I got a report about a missing kid. But—'

'I know. "poof".'

'And this poof was witnessed?'

'By the mother. Nice lady. In the kitchen, I think. Back that way. Also our, uh, "crimescene".'

'And there's coffee?'

'Gallons. This ain't a house, Boss: it's a convention hall.'

'Works for me.' McCormick approached the kitchen and found the mother standing within, flanked by three more uniforms each holding coffee and some sort of cake on cocktail napkins. 'Hello?'

'Yes?' the mother replied, 'May I help you?'

'I'm hoping to help *you*. Iggy McCormick, Missing Persons.'

'A detective?'

'Yes Ma'am.'

'Well. Let me get you some coffee, Detective McCormick.'

'Um...thanks. I—the report I got was a bit—sometimes it's too important to get it on my desk to finish filling in all the details. You think you could just run through the basic event as you witnessed it for me? It'd help—'

'He vanished,' she said, 'Before my eyes. I know that's not generally a police matter, as such; you'd rather hear that he ran away, or got abducted, or anything, but...he was standing right here, wearing these clothes, drinking that milk; then he just popped out of existence and it all fell to the floor. It's crazy; I know.'

'It's...yeah: it's kinda crazy. But, for argument's sake, we'll pretend that kids evaporate every minute of every day. My problem now is trying to follow up on this. The best we can really do—with *any* disappearance—is to look around for where the missing person actually wound up. Um, don't take this the wrong way, but: dead or

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alive. Now, in cases, we have leads to go on: you saw a guy in a green sedan pull your kid into the car and speed away; you saw your kid running off to the west; that sort of thing. That you saw your kid lose his basic molecular structure—crazy or not—kinda leaves us with not enough information. Right?’

She nodded. ‘Right. I know. I’m telling you something impossible and asking you to believe me. *I* wouldn’t believe me. Although, if you’ve got the time, I suppose you could look through my lack of crazy, timewasting calls to the authorities to report crazy, impossible things. I know how this sounds, Detective. I wish I could just describe a car and tell you to go find it. But I can’t. He was here, then he wasn’t; I haven’t touched anything since.’

‘Okay. And good: this job got a lot easier the day everyone in America tuned in to “CSI” and stopped touching things for us. But...lemee state that I don’t disbelieve you, okay? I’m not gonna just humour you long enough to coax you into thinking that calling me every ten minutes would be rude. I’ll go ahead and accept as basic fact that your eyes told your brain that your son disappeared into thin air. Is that enough from me to set you at some sort of ease?’

‘It’s a good start,’ she said, ‘And a good idea. Allow that I hallucinated the whole thing. That would be a rational explanation, I suppose.’

‘Right. But: I can’t chase hallucinations. So, so I’ll have something I *can* chase, we’ll go ahead and allow that, maybe, you actually did see what you saw. Though we’ll still favour rational explanations to cover it. Okay?’

She nodded. ‘So, probably, he wasn’t zapped by Bigfoot. I’ll agree with that.’

‘Perfect. So. We need to track down rational causes for a, uh, poofing. You say you never touched the clothes here after the event?’

‘I got within three feet of them before realising that touching them wasn’t going to solve anything. So I haven’t touched them. If the milk is likely to be unrelated, I’d like to get it off the floor though.’

‘It might be unrelated. But let’s not rule anything out yet. We’ll—in fact, gimee just one minute and I’ll call in a team. The CSIs, basically. We’ll let them clean up the milk; they can run all their little tests on it. Who knows: maybe the milk’s funny, and it causes people to shrink instantly down to a nanometre in height. Why not.’

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She laughed. ‘Meaning that he didn’t vanish: he drowned in an ocean of milk on the floor.’ She suddenly began to cry, loudly.

‘Okay, just...yeah. Lemee call this in and we’ll get it all handled. I seriously doubt that the lab results will show a microscopic naked kid drowned in what’ll prove to be perfectly normal milk.’

Sheila Feldman nodded—distraught, but in relatively good humour. ‘Leaving us,’ she said, sniffing back her emotions to make room for the logic beneath, ‘with “poof”.’

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Chapter Three

I

Poof. And He was among them.

As a matter of practicality, Ehieh didn't look like anything, or sound like anything; He lacked a chemical makeup: technically brainless, in the biological sense, lacking biology itself, His thoughts and emotions could have been backtraced to a superphysical source somewhat above the universe—if, that was, His creations had developed the technology and equipment required to *detect* superphysical signatures, let alone to follow them up beyond the invisible borders of Reality. As a matter of practicality, detecting the Mind of God in 2007 was every bit as simple as detecting an Internet Protocol Address in biblical times.

He was not, as a matter of practicality, male. Not that He was female either. But the majority of His creations had forced a label upon Him, despite his utter lack of Y chromosomes. As a similar matter of practicality, ships weren't actually female, despite the conventions of maritime nomenclature.

As a further matter of practicality, He'd arbitrarily taken the basic aesthetic form most often misapplied to His essence: Caucasian—in fact, paler than most—tall and thin, a certain look of wisdom held aloft by a quirky sense of humour.

As a final matter of practicality, He wore no robes, as that would have been tacky in the twenty-first century; instead, He wore a trenchcoat of fine animal skins, black as sackcloth, in the sweltering haze of July in Manhattan.

Specifically, in Central Park.

His integration into reality had been witnessed by nearly a hundred people—most of them lurking in the shade eating lunches out of sacks. Now, He addressed them, for the first time in nineteen hundred and seventy-five years.

'People of Earth,' He began, smirking slightly. He'd always been a whore for effect; somewhere nearby, He'd have to find some water to walk on once he had a larger audience.

ACTS OF GOD

‘The hell are you,’ one of the New Yorkers demanded, casually.

‘Excellent question,’ He allowed; his accent, as a matter of practicality, was generally American: almost Californian, with the snappier elements of Chicago.

‘So?’

‘Yeah. I’m the Lord thy God. I Am That I Am.’

‘You’re Popeye?’

‘I’m...you’re not getting it. I Am.’

‘You are.’

‘Right. I Am. That I Am. Ever go to Sunday School?’

‘Not lately.’

‘Skip it. I Am. I’m Ehieh. Okay?’

‘Kinda stupid muslim shit name is that.’

‘No. Ehieh. I Am. I’m the One who created this. All this.’

‘You’re with the City Planner’s Office.’

‘No. I’m the One True God. Ehieh. I Am.’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘Look: let’s start over. People of Earth: I am the Lord thy God. Okay? No. All right. As it is written, the Day is upon you. No? Fine. Once upon a time, I built the universe. Today, I’m dismantling it. I thought you should know.’

‘Good luck with that.’

‘Okay. I’ll take a different approach. Notice how I appeared from thin air a minute ago?’

‘Not really.’

‘Not—are you *joking*? You saw the whole thing; I know you did; I’ve got this omniscient spidersense thing going on.’

‘So you’re ripping off David Blaine. Whoopity shit. I’m on my lunchbreak; go away.’

‘I’m not a magician. Well, not as such. I’m your Lord “Jeezuz Christ”. Essentially. Though you wouldn’t believe how much is wrong with that sentence.’

‘Okay, Guys,’ an approaching cop began, ‘What’s the story here; I could hear you two from the sidewalk.’

‘No story,’ Lunchbreak said, ‘This asshole thinks he’s Charles Manson.’

Ehieh grinned. ‘Manson; Son of Man; tomayto; tomahto.’

‘All right,’ the cop decided, ‘Let’s break this up before I hafta do any paperwork.’

GREMLIN

‘Okay,’ Ehieh said, ‘Usually, I work on faith alone. But I get that it’s a sophisticated, cynical world now. Drink your coffee there.’

Lunchbreak looked at his Starbucks cup and shrugged, taking a sip; he spat it out. ‘The fuck!’

Ehieh nodded knowingly. ‘Water to wine is easy; wine mixed with coffee *tasting* good would take some preproduction.’

‘Can you arrest this fuck for assaulting my coffee?’

‘He never touched your coffee,’ the cop said, ‘There’s nothing to arrest him for. Unless you wanna pull a Citizen’s Arrest, or something.’

‘I sure as hell don’t want wineflavoured coffee. The hell’d you—*damnit*.’ In his gesticulations, the guy had squeezed the cardboard, allowing the plastic lid to come unsealed; overheated coffee and wine had sloshed out onto his hand, reddening the skin.

‘My bad,’ Ehieh said, striding over and touching the guy’s scalded thumb. The trauma disappeared instantly. Another show-stopping trick from the old days. ‘Better?’

‘Oh hell yeah,’ the guy said, ‘*That* was assault, *right?*’

The cop sighed, nodding. ‘To get technical; yeah. You’ll have to come with me, Mister; I’m placing you under arrest.’

‘Oh,’ Ehieh said, ‘Nuts.’

II

He sat in an interrogation room, drumming His fingers lightly on the table, waiting for Monroe. Smirking, He looked up just before the door opened. ‘Detective Monroe,’ He said.

Monroe stopped short. ‘Was someone in here to see you already?’

‘Not since I sat down; no.’

‘But someone gave you my name.’

‘Creepy, isn’t it. Sorry. I’m omniscient.’

‘I see. Then maybe you can help me figure a few things out real quick.’

‘I could help you figure a few things out instantly. But I’ll let you work at your own pace. Did you want to ask Me your questions, or should I just go ahead and answer them outright. I know your answer already, but I’m big on free will.’

‘By all means: tell me what I need to know.’

ACTS OF GOD

'I'm right again. Okay. For our purposes here, you can call Me Ehieh, meaning "I Am", since I *Am*, and all. You won't find Me in your database by name, fingerprints, genotype, or prior convictions. Though I have, in fact been arrested, tried, and convicted in the past. The time I served was about four hours; then I died, for a while. Am I going too fast for you? You've got this over behind the mirror on a Panasonic MiniDV, I know; but within your own mind, you're kinda zoning out a bit; I can clarify these points for you, according to your free will.'

'Um. So, whatever I'm thinking, you just know—before I ask it.'

'Right. Six.'

'What num—nice. How'd you do that.'

'I'd rather not reveal all the details of that. But it might amuse you to know that, in terms of pure effort? Building Alpha Centauri in its entirety took less. Weird but true.'

'So, you're claiming to be Christ, back from wherever after two thousand years.'

'Um...nearly. Not Christ *per se*, since that was just a title—not actually a flattering one, in fact. And, where you're calling this two thousand seven, it's actually been one thousand, nine hundred seventy-five years, granting that your clock is slow. It has in fact been one thousand nine hundred seventy-*nine* years. And there's actually a funny story behind all that, too: I'd intended to wait for precisely two thousand years, but...the simple answer is that I changed My Mind; the less simple answer is that, if I'm gonna start over on all this, the best time to do it is early next week—that's My time, not yours, since your time will have ended by then.'

'I see.'

'You really don't. But I forgive you. Metaphorically speaking, that is. You guys only just worked out nonlinear equations in the last fifty years or so. The math involved in creating a universe...even *calculators* don't help.'

'So, your story is that you're a god by any other name, and that you're here because it's the end of the world.'

'In a nutshell.'

'So...where is it?'

'The end of the world?' Ehieh asked, 'It's right here. Right now. Happening.'

'Revelations.'

GREMLIN

‘Well...no. Not really; no. But also yes. Kinda. The Revelation of Whatshisname was a bit...creative.’

‘The Revelation of Whatshisname? I thought you were omniscient.’

‘I try to forget the critics.’

‘Okay. So, the whole rapture thing is underway then, or it’s not.’

‘Already done. First thing.’

‘What’s done, the rapture? The saved all being removed before the tribulation part?’

‘Right.’

‘Okay. Can you give me the names of the saved, so I can follow up on this claim of yours?’

‘Just one. Morris Feldman. Portland, Oregon. Detective assigned is Iggy McCormick. Want the number?’

‘I’ll be able to get that, if he exists.’

‘McCormick exists. For a little while. Moe is now outside your universe. You think I should talk to his mother?’

‘You’re asking me?’

‘I’ve found that it helps to ask for input. You know that Judas sold Me out primarily for ignoring one of his suggestions?’

‘Nope. Didn’t know that.’

‘I know. And it wasn’t actually as simple as all that. But it’s a decent parable.’

‘Great. Morris Feldman, was it? Who else.’

‘No one else.’

‘No one...you had a rapture of *one guy*.’

‘I had a rapture of one hundred forty-four thousand guys—all male, all undefiled by women, one hundred forty-three thousand, nine hundred ninety-nine of whom have been dead for millennia already.’

‘You lost me.’

‘I know. The deal was: twelve thousand guys from each of the twelve tribes of Israel were Elect. As it happens, since you humans have been on this planet for a hundred and fifty millennia now, it worked out that, as of earlier today, the last Elect went poof. Technically, by My own rules, I had to wait until he was over the age of thirteen; not that I can’t change My rules at Will, but...I like things to remain simple.’

‘What happened to John Three Sixteen?’

ACTS OF GOD

'It's still in a book with a talking snake.'

'So, that wasn't part of the deal?'

'You know how the film is never as good as the book? The book is never as good as the Divine Plan. Your zealots rewrote that whole thing over the centuries. You're in law, of sorts: you realise that it wasn't until the year five hundred that the Church voted to let women have souls too? And this was no ERA thing; the whole idea was double taxation: Guy makes X, gives ten percent to Church, gives N percent to wife; wife suddenly has a soul; wife kicks in ten percent of N. Between that sort of thing and compounded interest, I sometimes wonder how soon you guys woulda evolved into deities yourselves.'

'So, you believe in evolution.'

'No: I created nylon-eating bacteria a few years ago out of thin air, but neglected to EMail anyone with a simple "I Am".'

'So, a god can be sarcastic.'

'I can be anything you can be. You're just My reflexion.'

'Okay. Let's take this from the top...'

GREMLIN

Chapter Four

I

‘McCormick.’

‘*Iggy* McCormick?’ asked the phone.

‘Right. Who am I talking to.’

‘Jack Monroe, NYPD.’

‘Oh yeah? What can I do for you. Detective, is it?’

‘Detective; yeah. I got a guy here...I’ll get to that if it matters.

I got a guy claiming knowledge of a case you might be handling there in, uh, Portland. A Morris Feldman?’

McCormick dropped into his chair. ‘Go on.’

‘Well, is that actually a case of yours, or—’

‘Moe Feldman reportedly vanished th’smorning around six thirty.’

‘Great.’

‘So tell me about your guy.’

‘My guy...total Bellevue case. Claims to be Christ on Earth. But this one’s different.’

‘Different how.’

‘He actually *knows* stuff. Like he knows about Feldman out there. And other stuff. It’s like he’s a mindreader.’

‘Okay.’

‘Crazy, isn’t it.’

‘Usually. Not today. Today, I’ve got a kid whose mother saw him vanish before her eyes. When people start teleporting in Portland, mindreaders in New York don’t sound all that nuts anymore.’

‘The kid vanished.’

‘Poof.’

‘Okay: that’s crazier than what I’ve got; you win.’

‘Maybe not. If your guy was involved, how’d he get three thousand miles in...what, three hours?’

‘Concorde, maybe.’

‘He’d still be having his shoes scanned here in town.’

ACTS OF GOD

'I dunno, Man. Maybe a partner on the west coast? Phone-calls, EMail; orchestrating the whole thing from four timezones away?'

'Maybe,' McCormick agreed.

'Not that...'

'What's that?'

'Nothing. Stupid thought. That...not that he couldn't maybe be telling the truth.'

'About being Christ.'

'Stupid.'

'He confessed to the abduction? Did he have a motive?'

'Oh yeah. His motive was the armageddon.'

'The rapture.'

'Yeah.'

'You must have a lot of unmanned cars in Manhattan by now.'

'Nope. Well, maybe. But this guy's saying that Feldman was the only guy living today who got saved.'

McCormick laughed. 'And I'd thought we catholics were calvinistic.'

'Tell me about it.'

McCormick deflated, guiding the Feldman report along his desk beneath his index finger. 'How real is this. I don't wanna go to this kid's mother—jewish, by the way—with this tale of Christ abducting her kid.'

'God; I wouldn't either. You got any real leads out there?'

'Zilch. Kid vanishes; mother sees the whole thing; I've got a file open on a spontaneous evaporation.'

'More than I got. I got a messiah here't technically assaulted a guy in Central Park. My feeling's that it won't go to trial; victim's eating lunch when this guy shows up and...'

'And?'

'Victim claims the guy turned his coffee into wine.'

'That's assault in New York?'

'No. Touching the victim was assault. But I can't imagine this resulting in anything more than a plea to a misdemeanour. Christ here pays a fine, promises to play nice, and goes away again.'

'You can't really hold him on claiming involvement in a kidnapping he'd have to move faster than sound to have been involved in.'

GREMLIN

‘Maybe on a slow day. Noonish Saturday is never a slow day here.’

‘Yeah. It’s probably nothing anyway. Wha’d he say, that some kid named Feldman disappeared in Oregon? Lucky guess, but not impossible.’

‘Actually, he knew the full name, the address, *your* name...he knows something about it; it’s just that his overall story is too nuts to process here.’

‘*My* name. I’ve been on this case for...maybe two hours. It was just after seven when I got the report. That’s, like, ten your time. I can’t even promise I’m attached to this thing in the computers yet. How inside *is* this guy?’

‘Pretty deep, I’d say. The guy knows what number you’re thinking; the guy can identify, like, the seventh word of the seventh line of any book you’re holding open and staring at. He’s done this now with people standing in the next room, behind the mirror. Couple guys here are talking about calling up the Amazing Randi and making a million bucks with this guy.’

‘Huh?’

‘This Randi guy’s got some thing on a website about giving out a million bucks to anyone with evidence of ESP, or something.’

‘So the guy’s a psychic.’

‘A good one. None of the usual “you’ll find the body near water; a large dog lives nearby” you get from the rest of these nuts.’

‘So, he’s confessing to the crime, or offering to help *solve* it.’

‘Neither, exactly. He’s confessing to rapturing the kid. That’s not exactly a crime. And the kid’s yours, not ours.’

McCormick pondered his paperwork. ‘Tell you what. See if you can get a signed confession to this rapturing thing. If you can lock him into something like a conspiracy to abduct, I can extradite him to Portland and deal with him here.’

‘Oh, man, that’s crazy. If there’s really a case here, it’s because you’re about to extradite Christ to Oregon for kidnapping. That can’t be good karma.’

‘If that’s the case, I’m investigating the rapture itself; and we’ve been left behind.’

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II

Ehieh remained in the interrogation room, sketching out ideas on a legalpad. He thought that, maybe, next time, Earth could be a cube, or even a toroid. He'd tried the cube thing in the past, and getting the oceans to hold at right angles without contradicting the basic natural laws He'd already founded had been problematic. But a doughnutshaped planet could be neat, possibly with a downsized sun at the centre, and the moon orbiting the outer rim. Or maybe the moon circuiting in the middle and the sun orbiting the planet in a figure eight, threading daily through the doughnuthole.

He scrapped it. It wasn't workable without rethinking gravity and inertia. Flipping the page, He scribbled out a paragraph of dialogue before looking up at the door, which was about to open.

When the door did open, Jack Monroe entered the room and sealed it again. 'Okay, Mister, uh...sorry; Ehieh, was it?'

'It was. It is. I Am. But it's not really "mister"; and, if it were, you'd be closer calling Me "Mister Esher", maybe.'

'Escher? Like the artist with the staircases?'

'Almost. In English, Ehieh Esher would be, basically, "I'm That".'

'Okay. So...Mister Esher, then.'

'Hi there.'

'So, I called Portland. McCormick exists. And Feldman—well, Feldman *did* exist, prior to about three hours ago. So, yeah: the crime you're kinda confessing to does seem to have taken place. Somewhat. So, if you're still involved in whatever's going on out there in the Pacific Northwest...I guess you've got your paper and pen there; you could write up a quick little, you know, "In the case of the disappearance and presumed abduction of Morris Feldman, I, Ehieh Esher of Wherever, did knowingly assist and conspire to Whatever Aspects of the Crime".'

Ehieh nodded and slid the legalpad across the table to Monroe. It read:

GREMLIN

IN THE CASE OF THE DISAPPEARANCE AND
PRESUMED ABDUCTION OF MORRIS
FELDMAN, I, EHIEH ESHER OF WHEREVER,
DID KNOWINGLY ASSIST AND CONSPIRE
TO WHATEVER ASPECTS OF THE CRIME.

Monroe skimmed it over and shot Ehieh a pained look. 'Yeah. Something like that.'

Ehieh shrugged. 'Free will gets a little sticky here and there, but, if you like, I can leave it like that for now, let you and the lawyers work out the wording on your end, and then fix it in post. I don't have to be here for that.'

'You'd have to be here for processing. Portland wants to extradite you for your involvement in...whatever the hell happened out there.'

'I'm good with that. Save your airfare. I can be there in the blink of a neutrino. You won't even have to read Me My Divine Right.'

'We'll be happy to accommodate you, Mister Esher. If, uh, you don't mind a nice, relaxing ten-hour flight.'

Ehieh shrugged again. 'I'm not late for anything. Y'know...*you're* a cop: would a doughnutshaped planet be offensive, or cool?'

III

'...and I heartily recommend the lobster bisque,' concluded the waiter.

Deadpan, Damon asked him: 'Is it kosher?'

The waiter's brow furrowed tastefully. 'I'd believe not, Sir.'

'I'll pass then. Could I just get a chilidog and a side of nachos?'

The waiter blinked, rather less tastefully. 'Sir: The Russian Tea Room does not *serve* chil—'

'Skip it. Red meat. Just above raw. Steak; burger; whatever: surprise me.'

'Sir: Our filet minion comes highly rec—'

'Groovy. And the bacon's fine too; I'm not actually jewish.'

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‘Very good, Sir.’ The waiter dismissed the lawyer and turned to his companion, expectant look on his overclassd little face.

‘I...the lobster bisque sounds perfect, thanks.’

The waiter nodded curtly, and retreated.

Damon grinned. ‘Could be worse: coulda been Spago.’

‘Geography,’ his agent said, ‘So. The paperback’s broken ten million. We’re fielding competing—*escalating* offers now from Fox, Universal, *and* Paramount.’

‘Fuck Fox. It’ll never be a film. They’ll give it a budget of half a billion, chop it into a twopart mini, and bury it somewhere on Monday night—probably replacing “House MD”. Or, worse, sell it off to Lifetime or Oxygen. If we’re gonna do this, let’s do it in a way that people will actually *see* it.’

The agent—Clyde Rand—nodded knowingly. ‘I was thinking the same thing. Universal’s ahead, for now; they’re pitching a budget of seventy-five and general creative licence within their boilerplate.’

Damon nodded. ‘That’s about what I was expecting.’

‘We’re thinking, if we hold out, we could get up to about ninety. But it would have to be this month. It all rides on having the film shot, canned, and in general release by thanksgiving: late enough to be remembered at the Oscars; early enough to make some of the chris—December cash.’

‘Yup. So, who—if anyone, this early—are they thinking of to play Adam Damon, Esquire?’

‘The usual. Affleck. Spacey. Cusack.’

‘Isn’t Spacey, like, twenty years older than the other two?’

‘Couldn’t tell you. Ten, maybe. Not old. Not really.’

‘Older than I am. Cusack might be older than I am. Wasn’t he, like, twenty during “Better off Dead”? Nineteen eighty-five or so?’

‘The grapevine’s also got Rob Lowe showing some interest. Oh: and Christian Slater, maybe.’

‘They’re still in the business?’

‘Lowe’s getting back into demand. Partly “Austin Powers”; mostly showing up in everything Stephen King’s ever written. Slater...grapevine again: he’s all clean and ready to do something.’

‘Again. Still: that cool JackNicholsonHanSolo type could work out.’

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‘That actually works against the larger scope. More grapevine: Jack’s allegedly open to the part of the judge.’

‘That judge wasn’t Jack.’

‘It’s Hollywood. Jim Carrey wasn’t Andy Kaufman, either. Besides: Jack’s all nice and atheistic; in his own subtle way, by the grapevine, he’s *preddy gawdam habby widda atcom ovva trial, fer crine atlad.*’

‘Don’t do that again.’

‘Sorry. Anyway: it’s all in motion. The word’s out; the studios are bidding; the cast is trying to assemble even before the greenlight—’

‘Before. Meaning that it’s a cinch after all.’

‘Of course. You’ve been on the Times’ bestseller list—twice, in the hardcover and the massmarket now—since the ink was drying on the manuscript. If you were black, and we could have cast Denzel, we’d be shooting by now.’

‘So now I’ve got someone new to sue.’

‘Rise above it, My Nigger. Shit. That was louder than I’d meant it to be.’

‘New York. You might get noticed if you flew into a couple towers; nothing else registers.’

‘Let’s hope. You need some more coffee there?’ Clyde nodded to the waiter in the corner. ‘So. That’s pretty much the haps out west. Just as a formality. And lunch is a writeoff.’

‘What isn’t.’

‘And, now, I fly back to the office, stoke the fires a bit, report that you’re all abreast and still kicking, and settle toward whatever we can get in writing. I assume you’ll want to see that long before we push anything at you with a pen.’

‘You assume correctly. Ah: thanks.’ Waiting for the cup to be refilled, Adam took a quick slurp of new coffee.

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Chapter Five

I

From the bestseller:

7 QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Meier.

8 Mr. Damon, you have four minutes remaining.

9 REBUTTAL ARGUMENT OF ADAM K. DAMON

10 ON BEHALF OF THE PETITIONERS

11 MR. DAMON: To begin with, I'd like to --

12 I -- the, uh, allegation that atheism is a form

13 of religion is, in fact, inaccurate. In fact,

14 atheism is itself a lack of religion. For the

15 sake of clarity, may it please the court --

16 QUESTION: Well, if -- in stating that

17 atheism is a lack of religion, you're no longer

18 arguing an infringement -- the first amendment

19 indicates a freedom of religion specifically,

20 correct?

21 MR. DAMON: It does, yes. However -- if I

22 could illustrate my point here -- Mr. Chief

23 Justice, could I ask you what your social

24 security number is?

25 QUESTION: My -- well, you could ask. But

26 the privacy act of 1974 -- okay.

27 MR. DAMON: And you'd reserve the right to

ACTS OF GOD

1 remain in silence on the matter. That's as an
2 implied extension of the freedom of speech --
3 the freedom to decline to speak is inherently
4 -- you'd be --

5 QUESTION: Are -- I beg your pardon -- are
6 you referring to the fifth amendment now?
7 Because that would apply to matters of
8 self-incrimination under interrogation.

9 MR. DAMON: It would, yes. But I'm
10 referring precisely to the first amendment,
11 which guarantees the freedom of speech and the
12 freedom of religion. By guaranteeing the
13 freedom of speech, the first amendment
14 implicitly guarantees -- frankly -- the freedom
15 to shut up, at one's option. Similarly --

16 (Laughter)

17 MR. DAMON: Similarly, the freedom of
18 religion implicitly guarantees the freedom to
19 -- well -- to grow up and stop believing in
20 deities.

21 (Applause)

22 QUESTION: The courtroom will be cleared
23 if there's any more clapping. Proceed, Mr.
24 Damon.

25 MR. DAMON: So, atheism being a lack of
26 religion, as silence is a lack of speech, the
27 -- atheism is logically protected by the first

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1 amendment, yes. However --

2 QUESTION: Your point is made.

3 MR. DAMON: Thank you, Mr. Chief Justice.
4 Now, to address the issue of -- I guess I'd
5 like to ask another hypothetical question as a
6 sort of litmus test of this lack of importance,
7 as my opponent called -- supposing we allowed
8 that the phrase -- In God We Trust -- were
9 harmless and -- to use the precise language --
10 meaningless -- suppose we kept the meaningless
11 essence of the phrase on our currency, but --
12 maybe for the next fifty years or so -- we
13 replaced it with -- In Satan We Trust. Would
14 anyone be likely to --

15 QUESTION: Well, I can tell you right now
16 that Satan -- being a very specific -- I
17 hesitate to call Satan a deity, though I'm sure
18 some would -- I think the difference there
19 would be contrasting a specific entity with a
20 more general sort of deital concept.

21 MR. DAMON: May it please the court, the
22 Satan is not, in fact, a specific deity, but
23 itself a general concept of opposition. Where
24 God is -- and any devout Christian will confirm
25 this, I'm sure -- very specifically the primary
26 Judaeo-Christian benevolent entity. Now, the --

27 QUESTION: So the issue is that we have --

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1 In Specific Deity We Trust -- on our currency?

2 MR. DAMON: The issue is that we have
3 deities on our currency at all. Again, this is
4 an affront to atheists -- both strong atheists
5 who actively believe that deities do not exist,
6 and weak atheists who simply decline to believe
7 that any do -- and it's an affront to
8 polytheists, who would prefer -- perhaps -- In
9 Gods We Trust.

10 QUESTION: All right. I think I understand
12 that point as well. And, yes, I see that it
12 would apply equally -- by your argument -- to
13 currency, the pledge of allegiance, the
14 weekdays, the calendar months, et cetera.

15 MR. DAMON: Correct, Mr. Chief Justice.

16 QUESTION: I see that your time is about
17 up. Was there anything further?

18 MR. DAMON: May it please the court, only
19 that Mr. Meier did concede that a number of
20 these infringements do in fact constitute
21 endorsement of religions by the spirit and the
22 letter of the first --

23 QUESTION: So noted. Thank you, Mr. Damon.
24 The case is submitted.

25 (Whereupon, at 12:01 p.m., Tuesday, June
26 6th, 2006, the case in the above-entitled
27 matter was submitted.)

GREMLIN

II

Ehieh set the book on the table and glanced at the uniformed cop standing by the door. 'Because...sorry: habit; go ahead and ask first.'

'Uh...I was just wondering...kinda thinking that...why *today*, exactly?'

'Lots of reasons,' Ehieh said, 'One: it's Saturday. The sabbath. The end of the week. And, *this* week, also the end of the universe. And, of course, because, by the calendar you guys have adopted, it's the seventh day of the seventh month of the seventh year of the century; it's Seven the Seventh, Two Thousand Seven. It just looks all cool. Doesn't it?'

'I guess so. I just...I always figured that, if this day was gonna come during my lifetime, it woulda been at the end of nineteen ninety-nine.'

'Meaningless. The penultimate year of the millennium. But also the third. Someone screwed up somewhere; it's now been two thousand eleven years since "BC" came to a close. And, loosely on the subject, there was never a year zero.'

'So, why today?'

'Why today? My lunch with Zeus got cancelled.'

'Your what?'

'Just kidding. Because yesterday seemed too soon and tomorrow seems too late. Today's the day. Like I really need a reason anyway: I built this universe. You ever played SimCity and waited for a *reason* before unleashing a tornado on your town? Same thing applies here. Except that I didn't build the universe with polygons.'

'Why end the universe at all?'

'Because that's how the book ends?'

'The bible.'

'Read it, did you?'

'Never all of it; no.'

'Just as well. Most of it was fluff. Bad fluff. Just above bad FanFic, really. Twelve-year-olds with hormonal imbalances in Idaho have written better SlashFic about Starsky and Hutch.'

'I thought the bible was supposed to be the greatest book ever—'

'You'll want to move: Monroe's about to hit you with the door.'

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‘What? Ow!’

Monroe pulled the door back toward its frame. ‘Shit. Sorry. You okay?’

‘Yeah. Doorknob caught my wrist, is all. I’ll live.’

‘For today, anyway,’ Ehieh said casually.

Monroe looked at the messiah. ‘We’ve got a problem with you.’

‘Nothing I haven’t already explained.’

‘Be that as it may, you’re not a citizen. You never entered the country—legally, anyway. The feds and INS are heading in to get this all worked out.’

Ehieh nodded. ‘How does that affect the transfer to Portland?’

‘You don’t know?’ Monroe asked.

‘*He* doesn’t know,’ Ehieh said, flicking an eyebrow in the other cop’s direction.

The other cop shrugged in concession.

Monroe pulled out a chair and sat down at the table. ‘I’m not sure I know myself, just yet. You’re part of an open investigation in Portland. That you’re *here* kinda makes that a federal matter anyway. As for INS: they’re involved for all the usual reasons; an illegal alien in the US—especially in New York—admittedly involved in an interstate crime...you’ve landed in the machine here. Now, Homeland Security gets all official and slow.’

‘You want Me to recant My confession.’

‘If it would even help, at this point.’

‘I’m not above recanting; I’ve done it before. Quick impression for you: “Why have You forsaken Me”; it didn’t work then, either.’

Monroe shook his head quickly. ‘The whole messianic defence would probably do some good, but...’

‘It would? You’re into divine profiling now? I think I’d rather have you treat Me the same as you’d treat any suspect, regardless of age, ethnicity, or autofecundation.’

Monroe blinked at Ehieh.

‘Selfimpregnation,’ the other cop told him.

Monroe nodded, understanding.

Ehieh pondered for a moment. ‘I should probably make My phonecalls now.’

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III

Adam Damon was setting his EnV into the tray at the security gates when it rang at him. He retrieved it and took the call. ‘Yeah.’

‘Doctor Damon.’

‘Yup. Who’s this.’

‘No one you know. Someone you have, in fact, disproved to exist. But that’s okay. We need to talk.’

‘I’m about to get on a plane to DC. And I’m not sure I’d want to play games like this in any case.’

‘I know. My name is Ehieh Esher. I’m currently in the custody of the New York Police Department, held on charges of assault and interstate—go ahead.’

‘I tend to stick of civil law. Have they offered you a public defender?’

‘After a fashion. I have my own legal staff, of course. But I wanted to let you know what was going on here.’

‘And what’s going on here.’

‘The end of the world, for one thing.’

‘I’m getting on the plane now.’

‘Doctor Damon: You of all people should be a little more interested in the fact that the NYPD have just arrested the messiah.’

‘I suppose I might be, if that were a fact. Instead, it’s the baseless assertion of an unknown party over a mobilephone I’m about to surrender to get through the metal detector. So, if there’s nothing further....’

‘I know. You’ve got a flight to catch, and it won’t wait for you. Time, it’s been said, waits for no man. Fortunately, that’s incorrect.’

‘I’m sure it is. However...’ Damon stopped talking as it dawned on him that the aeroport had frozen to death. Surrounding him were hundreds of people, all balanced curiously in midstep. The final digit of the nearest digital clock was awkwardly displaying both 1 and 2, the opacity of its unshared bars dropped to fifty percent. Beside him, a man preparing to walk through the next metal detector fumbled for his keyring in freeze-frame: its keys splayed out in all directions, the whole balanced impossibly upon the tip of his ringfinger like some absurd sculpture in modern art. Curious, Damon

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reached for the keys; gravity caught them and they dropped a couple of inches toward the floor before freezing into the solid air again.

Over the phone, Ehieh explained: 'I've stopped time throughout the universe. Though I took the liberty of leaving you a small pocket of realtime, so you'd be able to breathe. It may also interest you to know that the line of reception from my phone to yours is currently folding space through a wormhole; I'd explain, but, frankly, the math on all that is really icky.'

'You have my attention now,' Damon said. Not so much because it was true, but because it sounded like the thing to say. In fact, his attention was still wrapped up mostly in the keyring frozen in the air on its way toward the floor.

'I'll take it from the top,' Ehieh said, 'I'm the messiah, for want of a better word. And I'm in town—in New York; also, I'm on Earth. Because it's time for the world to end. Meanwhile, I'm in custody. And I'd like very much to talk to you, face to face. Provided you can abort your flightplans for a few hours.'

'You've stopped time. I suppose I have none to kill either way.'

'I'd have to start it up again. And you'd have to turn back and come to Me. Then we could talk.'

'About what? Aren't you able to walk out of the building? I can walk around here just fine; I could walk straight to the plane without being searched, and no one could stop me. Right?'

'Right. You could—if you really wanted to—walk straight to the District of Columbia in less than the blink of an eye. Because you've got free will. I just set up the choices you're able to make.'

'So, you lack free will?'

'No. But I'm contractually obligated to remain in custody until released.'

'You lost me.'

'There's a neat little oneliner in the bible. One I did actually happen to say, in so many words. As a lawyer with an interest in theology and all its idiocy, I'm sure you've encountered it already. Being omniscient, I happen to know that you have. Matthew Eighteen: eighteen.'

'I know it. Whatsoever is bound on Earth shall be bound in heaven.'

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‘That’s the one. It was my attempt to give you guys a bit of control over your own lives. Your laws are effectively divine; they have been for a couple thousand years now.’

‘Our divine laws can actually affect you.’

‘Of course. Remember: heaven wasn’t a specific location; it was simply everything beyond Earth. The plane you were about to board would technically penetrate heaven on its way to DC.’

‘Earth’s laws are the universe’s laws.’

‘Pretty much; yeah.’

‘What about life on other planets, if any; are they bound to our laws?’

‘In pure theory. Good luck apprehending ET, though.’

Damon collected his bags from the conveyor and turned back from the gates. On a whim, he tossed the bags out in front of himself; they froze in the air and waited for him to catch up before moving forward by an inch at a time. ‘So, having given mankind the power to make divine law, you’ve now broken divine law, and you’re retaining me as counsel?’

‘Nearly. I have my own team, as I’ve said. But I’d like to retain your services in any case. I think we’d do better talking about this in person, though.’

‘I’m heading back toward the street now. This isn’t my town, though. I’ll probably need directions to your location.’

‘Excellent. I’ll leave time frozen until you’re out of the building. Then you can hail a taxi. Just be sure not to be in the road when the cars go from zero to forty in plancktime...’

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Chapter Six

I

Sheila Feldman grabbed at the phone. 'Morris!'

'Sorry, Babe. Morris can't come to the phone right now. But you're close: Ehieh Esher; I abducted your kid.'

'You bastard! I...let me talk to him. Please.'

'That was a good guess. I suppose I am a bastard, in the autopoietic sense. But there's a lot more to it than that. In any case, I'm in New York. Iggy McCormick knows a bit about all that; give him a call when we're done here. I think you should be here too.'

'My son's in New York?'

'No. But I am. And leaving to go to Portland won't be entirely easy. By the time you get here, it won't make much of a difference anyway.'

'Meaning what?'

'Not like that. Moe's already out of the picture. Out of the *universe*, in fact. Dead, in the simplest yet inaccurate word. That's not going to change.'

'Oh God!'

'I get that a lot. What's left to deal with is your justice system. I'm currently calling from a phone in the New York Police Department, pending trial. Somewhat. I'm getting ahead of these people again. I think you should be here for this. I think it would simplify everything.'

'I can't! I...!'

'Sheila. Stop hyperventilating. Pay attention. I know money's an issue these days. Go out to the front porch. There's a gift for you there.'

'A...what is it?'

'A surprise. Go. Before someone *else* gets surprised.'

Carrying the cordless phone, she walked on uncertain legs to the front door and pulled it open.

'It's in the milkbox out there. Go pick it up.'

'It's a head, isn't it.'

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‘Smaller. Go see.’

She pushed against the screendoor and all but toppled out onto the front step.

‘Just open it,’ He said.

She did. She stared inside and said nothing.

‘It’s worth about fifty thousand anywhere in the country. Keep it; sell it; whatever. But fly to New York. Today. Call McCormick first. I gotta go now. See you soon.’

Sheila ignored the click of the phone and the dead air replacing the conversation. After a moment, a dialtone cut in. She tapped the button absently to clear the line and bent slowly down to collect the diamond sitting in her milkbox.

II

‘McCormick.’

‘I...it’s Sheila Feldman.’

‘Ah. Hi. I was meaning to call you: we may have a lead on...it might be nothing.’

‘He called me.’

‘Who called you.’

‘The kidnapper. From New York. He gave me a diamond.’

‘Hang on. *Who* called.’

‘The—he gave me his name, but...it didn’t make any sense.’

‘What didn’t make sense about it.’

‘It sounded like...unless I misheard it, it was the Hebrew name for...he said he was in custody in New York, and that you’d know about it. Do you?’

‘I’ve been in communications with the NYPD. They’ve got a guy in custody who claims to have been involved in our case. But...it’s probably nothing, really. Still, we’re readying all the redtape to extradite him to Portland.’

‘He mentioned something about that. And he said it wouldn’t be easy.’

‘He was right about that much. Are you still waiting at home?’

‘For the moment. He asked me to fly to New York. To simplify things.’

‘The *suspect* did?’

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'Right. He said that getting to Portland would be difficult, and that it would simplify things if I came to him. And he said to call you.'

'I'm glad you did. But I'm not sure what I can...he called you from the precinct?'

'So he claimed. And, crazy though it sounds, I can't think of a reason not to fly to New York and walk straight into that building. Except that he didn't tell me which building it was.'

'It could have been a prank. Or an accomplice calling to...I can find that out, I think. Can I put you on hold for a minute or two?'

III

'Monroe.'

'Hello again; it's McCormick, in Portland.'

'Damn. I'd meant to call. We're having problems on our end. INS, FBI; the usual.'

'Not a problem. I just had a quick question. Your guy: has he made any calls since his arrest?'

'Two, actually.'

'Can you see whether one happened to be made to Portland?'

'Yeah; I can do that. The calls were made to...this first one's two zero two; that's Washington. The next is five four one; I'm not sure where that is.'

'That's Portland. He called here.'

'Did you want the number itself?'

'I already have it. It's the number at the house of the kid he abducted.'

'Um...yup: you're right; it's right here in my report. Sheila Feldman. Son of a bitch.'

'She called me to tell me about it,' McCormick said, 'He apparently invited her to New York.'

'How thoughtful.'

'She says he says it would simplify things.'

Monroe exhaled. 'I'm not sure things *can* be simplified. The brass are heading in to pull him up to federal levels.'

'That happen a lot out there?'

ACTS OF GOD

'Every day, Friend. New York's just a federal net. The only cases we get to keep are the ones small enough to slip through the holes.'

'I think I caught some of that on "Law and Order".'

'Not really. "Law and Order" goes from crime to arrest to trial to conviction in an hour, with room for commercials. A New York Minute's not *that* fast.'

'Heh.' McCormick pondered his own file. 'Listen, Monroe: I've got Sheila Feldman—the mother—holding on the other line. But thanks for keeping me up to date on all this.'

'Anytime, Man. Least we can do over the phone like this. Maybe we'll hook up in person sometime.'

'What makes you think so?'

'This guy called your victim and said so; he's suggested similar things to me, here in town. He might be playing us, but...for now, it's all we've really got.'

IV

'Okay, Sheila? Still there?'

'I'm here.'

'This Esher guy New York's got in custody did in fact call your house with one of his two calls. Now, that doesn't make it not a prank; but it does tell us who's doing what.'

'I'm going to New York.'

'I know. And I don't even think it's necessarily a bad thing. Hell: I'm tempted to go myself. But...well, that's about that, isn't it.'

'Thanks for your help, Detective.'

'It's Iggy. And hang on a sec. Gimme ten minutes here and I'll give you a call back. I'm gonna talk to the captain about maybe requisitioning a couple tickets to Manhattan. If this really is our guy, we need to go do something about it before the FBI pull him out of circulation. Okay?'

'Okay. But just make sure you're *allowed* to go to New York, with or without a taxbased ticket. I'll cover the airfare.'

'That's not your job.'

'It's my pleasure. I want to go to New York and see this bastard. And I want you to come with me.'

'Ten minutes. I'll let you know.'

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Chapter Seven

I

Ehieh Esher had as a matter of course been transferred to Rikers Island; He was sitting calmly in an interrogation room when Monroe arrived.

'You called Sheila Feldman,' Monroe announced, even before the door was pulled shut and locked behind him again.

'My second call.'

'Who was the first?'

'An attorney.'

'So, you've got your priorities in order, at least. What the hell were you thinking, calling her.'

'I got two calls. The first completed My larger objective. Why waste the second?'

'You didn't waste the second. Now you've added interstate harassment to your list of charges. Proud of yourself?'

'Sure: I saw that it was good.'

'Okay. This messiah shit? It's got to stop now.'

'Are you joking? You know how many fans I've got in here? A decent percentage of these people are *named* after Me. Of course, they pronounce it "Hesu", not 'Jeezuz''.'

'Are you building an insanity plea, or what; it won't work, you know; it hasn't worked since Manson tried it.'

'It's not about pleading insanity. Or even about getting away with anything. You'll understand when My lawyer gets here.'

'From your first phonecall.'

'Oh, hell no. I'm not recruiting Adam Damon into My defence.'

'You're not. Then why call him? How, for that matter, did you get his mobile number?'

'Omniscience; we've covered that exhaustively. As for My reasons: I work in mysterious ways.'

'So, where's your *real* lawyer. Or have you got one at all.'

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'I've got one. The best there is, in fact. The best there is *outside* of fact, too. He's on his way; he stopped off to pass a few bar exams.'

'Your superlawyer isn't licensed to practise?'

'Not yet. Soon.'

Monroe sat down. 'Y'know...however you wanna play this is fine by me. But I'd take all this a little more seriously, if I were you.'

'No you wouldn't. If you were Me, you'd see the larger picture. Although, I am actually taking this seriously, in the greater context.'

'You really think you're a god. Don't you?'

'Of course. Don't you?'

'I don't think you act much like *my* god.'

'Really. What's yours act like?'

'Not like a criminal. That's for sure.'

'You're joking. Storming a stripmall and upsetting the applecart in a terroristic, theopolitical demonstration? Convicted and sentenced to death? When would your mythical saviour start being a criminal, exactly?'

'You're not a criminal when your criminal actions are against a criminal state.'

'Thanks for the exoneration.'

'Not you specifically.'

'He said, to the suspect awaiting apprehension by the INS for exercising his right to travel.'

'That right is reserved for Americans.'

'Which, for all you know, I in fact am. Short of proving that I've entered the country illegally. Since I can't be shown to have entered the country at all, let alone to have set foot in any other country on the planet, that's a bit of a presumption.'

'That's for you to work out with the lawyers. I'm just a cop. I just know that you assaulted a guy, claimed involvement in a kidnapping, and then called your damned victim. To me, that makes you a criminal.'

'Why did you come here?'

'You don't know? You're omniscient, aren't you?'

'*You* don't know. You don't know why you came here. You thought it was to scold Me for making My legally guaranteed phone-calls. Now you're starting to doubt that. So: why did you come here?'

'You know what? I don't know. So I'm leaving now.'

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‘Wasted trip?’

‘Yeah: wasted trip. I’m a cop, not a Roman. I thought I could help you. Or at least understand you. But I can’t. So I wasted a trip.’

‘So you’re back to thinking I’m the messiah.’

‘I don’t know what you are. You’re not normal; that much is obvious. You know what I’m thinking before I do, let alone before I say it. Beyond that...I have no idea what you are. But, no: I don’t think you’re the messiah. I think the messiah would be...different. Or something.’

‘I’m abnormal, but not different.’

‘You’re not normal. The messiah’s not normal. You’re not the messiah.’

‘So, what am I, do you think.’

‘Maybe the devil. How should I know.’

‘You’ll know. Soon enough. My lawyer just received his licence.’

II

Adam Damon had tracked the messiah down to the precinct, and further to Rikers; he’d taken a taxi to the latter and begun the process of reaching the interrogation room.

Once cleared, he was let in to see his prospective client.

‘Adam Damon,’ he announced, walking through the door, ‘Are you interrogating this suspect, Detective? Without the counsel he’s demanded.’

‘I’m not,’ Monroe said; ‘I’m...we’re in a theological debate.’

‘The debate’s over. Mister Esher? Good to meet you. Let me advise you to remain silent from this point onward.’

‘Advisement taken,’ Eshieh said, ‘And rejected.’

‘It’s your call, of course. But, if—and this really is an “if”—I’m going to represent you, I’ll need your cooperation.’

‘You’re not.’

‘Not representing you? Then why call me.’

‘To save you a roundtrip. You’re prosecuting Me. To a degree.’

‘I’m not a district attorney.’

‘You’re a civil attorney, about to be retained by the plaintiff.’

‘And the plaintiff is?’

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‘The world.’

Damon laughed and took a seat next to Esher. ‘You’re being sued by the world. All of it?’

‘After a fashion. A civil suit. A class action: United States versus The Entity Called Ehieh Esher.’

‘Ambitious. And you’re citing me as the enemy lawyer in this case.’

‘As counsel for the plaintiff; yeah.’

‘If that were the case, I couldn’t talk to you.’

‘It’s not the case yet. We’ve got some time.’

‘I’m still a bit confused,’ Damon said, ‘You’re expecting to be the defendant in a civil case, where I’ll be with the plaintiffs. But you’re interested in retaining me as defence in the criminal proceedings?’

‘No. My own lawyer will handle both trials. Not that the criminal trial is much of an issue.’

‘So, again, I’m not getting why you’d call me.’

‘You like magic tricks?’

‘Not especially.’

‘In your briefcase. There’s a press release. You’ll probably want to read it in front of the cameras.’

‘I might. Or I might not. It might be in there, by the same basic magic allowing time to stop. But...I’d like to understand more about this before I have a look at it.’

‘Looking at it will explain it in great detail.’

Damon glanced at Monroe, who shrugged. ‘It’s just how he does things, I guess.’

Damon nodded. ‘All right. Let’s see this press release then.’ He opened his briefcase and found it atop the rest of his papers. He glanced it over before his eyes levelled on Ehieh again. ‘This is your idea?’

‘Most ideas are, to be honest.’

‘What’s his idea,’ Monroe asked.

Damon glanced at the papers again, shrugged, and handed them to the cop. Monroe read aloud.

“‘Ladies and gentlemen of the press, of New York, of America, and of the world: today being the first of the great tribulation, we the people hereby state our intention to file suit against Ehieh Esher, also known as the messiah, also known as the supreme being, for serious and ongoing violations of the following laws, codes, or-

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dinances, et cetera, pursuant to the citizens suit provisions of the United States of America. The alleged violations are:” Monroe began to read the rest in silence, then to skim over the various laws, then to flip the pages while keeping a rough count of the total. ‘There are laws for these things?’

‘There are laws for everything,’ Ehieh told him, ‘For most things, there are several laws—mostly in contradiction to each other. Which, of course, My lawyer loves to prove.’

‘You realise I couldn’t read that to the press,’ Damon said, ‘Not only would it take hours to read that out loud, but I’m the guy who effectively proved the supreme being mythical last year.’

‘I’m aware of both. Which is why you’ll also find it on disc in your briefcase. You’ll be able to announce the suit, and direct people to your website for the details.’

‘Which doesn’t address my history of proving deities mythical.’

‘You have no such history. Deities were always mythical, by definition of the word. You simply reminded people that deities were necessarily characters within traditional, ancient stories about supernatural beings which serve fundamentally within people’s worldviews, as by explaining elements of the natural world or delineating the psychology, customs, or ideals of society. To reiterate the definition of “myth” itself. That said, there’s no conflict of interest inherent in going from reminding everyone that they worship myths to suing a factual deity. It would be like going from suing a body-shop for painting a car the wrong colour to suing Ford for failing to recall a bunch of SUVs with bad brakes before someone got killed.’

‘Perhaps. But there are other issues. Like having to wait for the world, as you put it, to hire me to represent it.’

‘I’m hiring you to represent it.’

‘The defendant can’t hire counsel for the plaintiff. Guess why.’

Ehieh nodded, and turned to Monroe. ‘You became a cop primarily because your dad got gunned down when you were twelve; his killer has never been caught.’

‘Don’t bring that into this,’ Monroe said, ‘That’s a *very* strong warning.’

‘The killer was acting as an agent of evil. Is that plausible, in your worldview?’

‘It’s probable.’

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‘I created evil. I already confessed to that in the bible. You’ll find it in Isaiah Forty-five: seven: “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.” Thusly: I’d be the one you’d want to go after for wrongful death in your case, murder itself having no statute of limitations.’

‘Um,’ Damon said, ‘Murder itself having no statute, there are limitations on civil suits over wrongful death. And, if this happened when the detective was twelve, I’d say it’s about over by now.’

Ehieh rested His elbows on the table, and his forehead on the heels of His hands. ‘Why did I ever leave lawmaking to your species. Okay: Detective Monroe is a childmolester. Got that? Last I knew, the statute of limitations on defamation was longer than a day.’

‘I’m not actually a childmolester,’ Monroe said.

‘In point of fact,’ Ehieh told him, ‘you really are. And you just proved it. Damon here is someone’s child; you just molested his thought process—meaning that you altered it—with your very denial of the fact. QED. Now hire him and prove Me wrong.’

‘If—and with no offence to you—’ Damon told Monroe, ‘the detective could afford to hire me, that still wouldn’t equate to a class action for all these crimes you’ve potentially committed.’

‘So lie about it. You’re a lawyer.’

‘Not to deny that I might hide elements of the truth in a courtroom, but I’d hesitate to borrow a lie from the defendant I’d be suing.’

‘It’s not a lie anyway. Both of you have your reasons to sue Me. And you’d find another hundred interested parties on your way out the door.’

‘Why do you want this to happen. Are you hoping to lose and get crucified? Again? Or are you trying to win and teach the world some sort of lesson?’

‘I knew you were clever. But, actually, it’s neither. It’s more because the world is ending, and I want everything to be wrapped up nicely before I go off and do it all over again.’

III

‘I don’t like it,’ Damon told Monroe as the two were heading out of the building, ‘At all. A criminal defendant trying to hire the plaintiff’s

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lawyer in a civil action which isn't even underway...the ethical problems are only the beginning.'

'He brought up a decent point though. If he really is the supreme being, and therefore created evil, wouldn't he be accountable for...something?'

'That's a matter of philosophy. Any firstyear student could cite free will and shoot down the inventor of evil as an excuse. About like these morons trying to sue Remington for making the shotguns and allowing criminals to pull the trigger of their own accord.'

'Or like the tobacco companies making the cigarettes before smokers inflicted evil upon the world through secondhand smoke. That's all up to a jury, isn't it?'

'Sure. And juries are notoriously stupid animals. The problem is when you're up against a decent lawyer. Though the jury itself is also an element. Who would you stick on a jury? Theists? Atheists? I'm not sure which would be madder at a known deity.'

'You'd have to show him to be who he says he is first, wouldn't you?'

'It would certainly help.'

'How would—' Monroe turned back, having caught a couple of names spoken behind him. 'McCormick?'

McCormick turned toward the voice. 'Hello?'

Monroe approached him. 'Detective McCormick? Iggy? From Portland?'

'Yeah. That's me. How—who—Monroe?'

'Yeah. I heard you mention your name to the clerk. And Feldman. Is this her?'

'We, uh...we caught a tailwind,' Sheila said.

'A tailwind,' Monroe echoed.

'The flight,' McCormick explained, 'We got into the air, and...we made three thousand miles in twenty minutes.'

'That's impossible.'

'I know. But it happened. We landed, and...it was too weird to worry about, I guess. The FAA wrote it off as some computer error. They figured we'd left six hours earlier, and someone had mistyped something. They couldn't hold us for anything. So here we are. To see your suspect.'

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‘I suppose you could. Or we could fill you in. It’s really getting weird. Weirder than a tailwind pushing you three thousand miles at nine thousand miles per hour.’

‘Fine by me,’ McCormick said, ‘I wasn’t planning to see him today at all; I thought we’d get here late enough to check in at a motel and do it all tomorrow.’

IV

‘Technically,’ Ehieh mentioned as the door opened again, ‘You weren’t moving at nine thousand miles per hour. Technically, you folded space ten minutes away from one runway, and ten minutes before landing at the next. Einstein would have claimed that your speed limit had been one hundred eighty-six thousand, two hundred eighty-three miles per second; but he’s dead and he never believed in Me anyway.’

‘Meet our resident messiah,’ Monroe said.

Sheila looked Him over, then sat down in silence. Noting that, McCormick sat next to her. Monroe and Damon joined them off to the side.

‘So,’ Ehieh began, ‘There’s some debate over what My last words were on the cross; in fact, the last thing I said was “This is a hell of a way to spend easter weekend”.’

‘I’ve heard it,’ Damon said.

‘Yeah. Tough room,’ Ehieh declared.

‘This is the man who abducted my son,’ Sheila said quietly, mostly to the table.

‘Not really,’ Ehieh said, ‘I mean: yeah; I did. But, I’m not actually male. I’m not even a mammal. I just ran with this form because...you know...it’s what people have come to expect. Last time, I looked like Gene Simmons got all suntanned. Minus the tongue, I suppose.’

‘Okay, so...,’ McCormick paused, deciding what to say, ‘The claim here is that you are in fact the supreme lord, nailed to a cross two thousand years ago, and back on Earth to rapture exactly one kid before wiping everything out once and for all.’

‘Surface details,’ Ehieh said, ‘There’s more to it than that. But your oversimplification gets the basic point across. Kinda like saying that the sun came up today is simpler than explaining that the planet is spinning while orbiting a star which itself is ultimately orbit-

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ing a supermassive blackhole at the centre of the galaxy while the galaxy is slowly yet supersonically circling a central point in the universe which orbits the keystone central point of the universe which is itself one of countless universes within the multiverse; that the sun came up is weak and inaccurate, but it relays the idea to the observer.'

'He's got this divine plan, see,' Monroe explained, 'And telling us what it is would either mean educating us in fortieth century physics, pulling the details outta his ass first, or both.'

Ehieh smirked. 'The majority of the human animal can't even work out the most basic twenty-first century physics. That's why most of you morons add cold milk to pre-existing boiling tea, only to scald it to death. I can't explain why you're unable to walk through walls while you're still doing *that* sort of thing.'

'Try me,' Damon said.

'Okay. Adding a small amount of cold milk to a large amount of hot tea will cause it to curdle itself halfway to cheese; adding a large amount of hot tea to a small amount of cold milk, though, is no problem at all. It's a gag. Something I did to keep the English all unhappy and catholic. Though, I should admit, it didn't fully work. Now they're just unhappy because they expatriated their prisoners to warm sunny Australia and stayed behind in cold damp England.'

'So, you're not going to tell me.'

'You're that upsetting sort of guy who gets ten minutes into a film before asking everyone who may or may not have seen it already how it ends. Aren't you. "Ooh. Does *he* die? What's the purpose of the establishing shot on the *matchbook*? I'm sure *that'll* be important later. Oh get *real*: what mobilephone downloads HD quality QuickTime in two *seconds!*" Someone on the ark was secretly carrying the blathering nitpicker gene.'

'Never happened,' Damon said.

'No, of course not. Who'd believe that a boat pushing five hundred feet could hold two to fourteen of every sort of animal, let alone avoid snapping and sinking under its own weight. Oh, but it was made of *gopherwood*, which of course grows only in places like Kentucky, where the Black Sea happens not to be. Milk into tea, and faith into stupid fables; I shoulda reformatted the universe in the year six sixty-six after all. And you spelled your name wrong.'

'I did?' Damon asked, 'Which one.'

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‘The middle one.’

‘There isn’t a middle one.’

‘That’s kinda where I was going with that. Your agent suggested that “Adam Damon” was a bit boring and commonplace, so you should go with a middle initial. Except you’d never had one. One Abbot and Costello Skit later, you’d replied casually with “kay” and it stuck as the initial you’d never had.’

‘So, I should have spelled it out as KAY?’

‘Skip it. You’ll understand later. Ooh. Is that foreshadowing? Does the matchbook *die* in the end? Iunno; could be.’

‘So you *are* in fact insane,’ Damon said.

‘Not really. Oswald was working alone; you landed on the moon in nineteen sixty-nine; muslims flew Boeings into the twin towers. I’m not crazy; I’m just eternal.’

‘And nevertheless, you’re looking for someone to prosecute you into life in prison.’

‘Nah. No prison time. Just a civil suit. Incarceration is merely revenge; suing the hell outta someone is revenge with kickbacks. And that’s what your species needs from Me these days.’

‘But, being omniscient, you’d have to know how long the trial you’re proposing would take. Even if you were to settle out of court—’

‘Which I’d never do.’

‘Even if you did, it would take weeks or months to gather the plaintiffs into a class action, work out all the counts against you, get anyone in authority to take the suit seriously enough to allow into a courtroom...you’re setting yourself up to sit around here for what could be years. What happened to reformatting the universe? You’re pending that and maybe getting back to it after the trial?’

‘Essentially. Though, in fact, the suit will be a factor in the armageddon itself. It’s all about trial and tribulation.’

‘But, being freewilled, I could decline to represent the plaintiffs. Does your worldending plan allow for that contingency?’

‘It’s a dead issue. You’ve already made your decision. And that’s good, because it allows Me to postpone the ragnarok until afterward; otherwise, I’d do better to scrap it now and build a new universe which might contain a lawyer willing to sue Me at its end.’

‘Naturally.’

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‘Supernaturally, actually. But, anyway: as much as I’d like to explain all this to you, I’m not going to. My lawyer just got here. I’ll have to wait and see you in court.’

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Chapter Eight

I

‘And your name, Sir?’

‘Astaroth.’

‘Sorry: Roth, was it?’

‘Asta...yeah: Asta Roth. Attorney at Law.’

‘Now *that’s* an interesting name. Asta? I want to say that might be Persian in origin?’

‘You’re half right. It’s in origin.’

‘Sir?’

‘It’s a long story. Even longer when I’m actually *in* it. I’m here to see Mister Esher, if I may.’

II

‘Astaroth.’

‘Hello again,’ the daemon replied, ‘You sent for me? Finally?’

‘I did. Got this thing. How was the trip?’

‘You ever tried riding a wolf through Manhattan?’

‘Y’know,’ Ehieh said, ‘Being omnipotent, I’ve never technically *tried* to do anything; that said...no; no, not in the slightest. I take it it’s a bad thing?’

‘It’s a jungle out there. Makes me miss the office.’

‘How’s that working out for you. I’d meant to stay in touch better.’

‘Not so hot. Or, in fact, extraordinarily hot. But it’s a dry heat. Gave Kinison a job. He insisted. He’s all like “C’mon, Man: I *joked* about this; people coming down here are gonna *expect* it from me; I’m fuckin’ *Kinison!*” So I caved and gave him westblock of Co-cytus. He’s happy there.’

‘Cool.’

‘Utterly. SubNine’s mostly ice, You know. Which reminds me: Judas has been whimpering lately.’

‘The recovered gospel, no doubt.’

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‘Still says he was just doing his job.’

‘So was Satan the Perpetual Airconditioner. Rules are rules.’

‘That’s about what I said.’

‘Yeah.’

‘So. As Your lawyer,’ Astaroth began, sitting across from Ehieh, ‘what in hell—figuratively—is the Divine Plan here.’

‘To wrap things up. Babylon to Eschaton: game over.’

‘That could be difficult, You know. Remember that conversation we had about all this?’

‘I remember everything. It’s My job.’

‘The one Satan was a bit loud in.’

‘Oh yeah. Like it was yesterday. Or, really, *seven* days ago.’

‘And one of his points was that, if You gave the humans free will, there’d be no guarantee that they’d inadvertently follow the Divine Plan You’d never actually clued them in on?’

‘Yup.’

‘So, he’s wrong?’

‘Nope. It could backfire. In fact, for the moment, that’s what it’s doing. But only for the moment.’

‘Your genetically lustful, prideful, greedy envious gluttonous wrathful humans are shying away from suing You?’

‘And slothful. Don’t forget slothful. Like the lazy little bastards are gonna hurry to sue Me when they’re sitting happily in their tenth year of waiting for HDTV to go universal.’

‘Ahem.’

‘Oh. Right. Slothdaemon. I suppose you *wouldn’t* forget.’

‘I’ve tried. How in hell—less figuratively—am I supposed to be both the Agent of Sloth *and* the Grand Duke of Hell and Prince of Inquisitors. It’s like being the janitor *and* the CEO.’

‘So it’s an SCorp. Only a third of the angels, after all.’

‘Speaking of sloth. I’m expecting to see Gabriel’s horn on eBay one of these days. And what’s *Michael* up to, apart from a BodyMass Index of thirty-five.’

‘It’s CasualDay up there. Last day of school. Sit there and play hangman on the blackboard. It’s not like there’s really a lot left to sort out.’

‘And *our* division?’

‘You’re on the clock. We’ve got a lawsuit to defend. But, after that, we’re good again. Back into the collective; resistance is futile.’

GREMLIN

‘Tell that to the morningstar. Oh right: You did.’

‘Betcha he believes Me now.’

‘So, again: what’s the Divine Plan. You want to get sued, but You want me to defend You.’

‘It’s infinitely more complex than that. But...well, wouldn’t you rather be surprised?’

‘Yeah, because going into a courtroom with no idea what’s going on—without even knowing if the plan is to win or lose—is *always* a good strategy.’

‘Have faith.’

‘I’m a daemon.’

‘Have anxiety.’

‘What’s the difference.’

‘None that I’ve ever found. Just trust Me.’

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PART TWO
BABYLON TO ESCHATON