

**The Roman Forum Project**

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SCENE 1.14 FANTASIA IN BLACK AND WHITE Petronius, Poppaea

## **CHARACTERS** (in order of appearance)

**Quintus Roscius**, Roman comic actor, 1st century C.E.

**Poppaea Sabina**, mistress and later second wife of the Roman emperor Nero (d. 65 C.E.)

**Petronius Arbiter**, Roman author of the *Satyricon* (d. 66 C.E.)

**Marcus Tullius Cicero**, Roman philosopher and Senator (d. 43 B.C.E.)

**Germania Servius**, Roman slave from the northern borders of the Roman empire, 1st century C.E.

## **SCENE 1.0 FROM BONDAGE TO BONDAGE**

*Projection: text animation while last of the audience is entering the house. Final section of text can stay up during first part of next scene but should fade out by end.*

"A democracy cannot exist as a permanent form of government. It can only exist until the voters discover that they can vote themselves money from the public treasure. From that moment on the majority always votes for the candidates promising the most money from the public treasury, with the result that a democracy always collapses over loose fiscal policy followed by a dictatorship. The average age of the world's great civilizations has been two hundred years. These nations have progressed through the following sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to great courage, from courage to liberty, from liberty to abundance, from abundance to selfishness, from selfishness to complacency from complacency to apathy, from apathy to dependency, from dependency back to bondage."

—Lord Alexander Tytler

## **SCENE 1.1 WHO WON?**

*Stage dark; dressing area illuminated as needed. Romans begin in the dressing area as they finish their prep and walk onstage during this scene, except Quintus and Petronius who remain at their dressing tables.*

QUINTUS

Maybe they'd find out that Americans actually *do* vote in high numbers if they didn't throw them all out.

POPPAEA

Ye gods, they might all have voted for me!

QUINTUS

You can't be elected Empress of Rome by renters!

POPPAEA

This is America, babes! Anyone can vote. Blind, illiterate. They are equal opportunity imbeciles here. Got a pencil? As good as a toga.

PETRONIUS

(*to Cicero*) Who do *you* think won?

CICERO

I suppose Gore lost the election, and Bush stole it.

POPPAEA

Oh, Gore would have stolen it if he could.

CICERO

Certainly.

GERMANIA

Evend *Nader* beat Gore. Nader made Gore lose to Bush.

CICERO

Bush didn't win, he was appointed by the Supreme Court.

PETRONIUS

They both lost, and the presidency was given away as a bad-conduct prize.

GERMANIA

America loves an underdog but hates a loser.

## SCENE 1.2 THE ORACLE

*Spotlight?*

POPPAEA

There will be a feast where everyone eats and no one is satisfied. There will be a struggle between two who are as one in which both will lose and one will gain. Those who count will be counted in, and those who recount will count for nothing. Those whose role it is to judge will not judge but will be themselves judged. One will speak for fifty, and nine will speak for a multitude, but in the end only five will be heard. For it is written that in the end the swift will stall and the strong will fall and the dust flow over all.

## SCENE 1.3 VOTING FOR THE DEAD

*Poppaea and Cicero try on accents of various cliché American types, in front of a side-scrolling projection of an endless panorama of ink-drawn American landscapes.*

CICERO

*(normal)* This last election saw yet another dead candidate elected. People didn't bat an eyelash. They walked into the polls in an orderly fashion and voted for a dead man.

POPPAEA

*(normal)* Puppet, dead man, what's the difference? *(Irish)* My dear departed grandfather, C. Poppaeus Sabinus, from the day he was made a citizen of this august Republic—every presidential election, he walked religiously to the polls and wrote in the name of Norman Thomas.

CICERO

*(normal)* Who?

POPPAEA

*(southern/Scarlett s)* Norman Thomas, the Communist Party candidate for President of the United States. My grandfather did this till the day he died. Norman Thomas predeceased Gramps by about 35 years. Does that make him a man of principle or a fool? Or a principled fool? He knew Norman Thomas was dead. It was a matter of principle. And what did it get him?

CICERO

*(Colonel Flagg)* Vermont, now; Vermont is about as far from Rome as you can get—like Moesia, where your grandfather was governor but in the other direction. The margin of this civilization. Maybe the closest thing we have to a glimpse of how the Republic used to be.

POPPAEA

*(Yiddish-German)* What exactly is the principle embodied by voting for a dead man? For a dead man who stood for undoing the republic and replacing it with another system of government? Emigrate to America and turn it into communist Russia! Just don't make me eat pickled herring!

CICERO

*(yankee-Maine)* I actually registered to vote in Vermont. You know why? I thought I would see what it might be like. They have town meeting days still, and they have a very small population, divided up in such a way that they practice democracy as it used to be.

POPPAEA

*(Brooklyn-Bronx-Russian)* He was born in Danzig. Citizens of the margins of civilization are big on lost causeways. Perpetual margin machines. You must let them know up there in the Capital—what you think! Seems too late now. Perhaps he would have voted for Nader this time around. But voting for a dead man— now there's a fashion statement.

CICERO

*(Puerto Rican)* And I had to go to city hall in Burlington, where I lived at the time, and they made me raise my hand and promise to vote my conscience and not be persuaded by anything else. It was worded so simply and beautifully... sincerely. I wept.

*(normal)* It was the essence of the idea, to see what the common people thought, the ones who wanted to vote and took the time to think about things.

POPPAEA

*(normal)* And did you ever actually vote?

CICERO

*(John Wayne-cowboy)* You see a really functional voting is not about how many bodies you can get to punch card. It is about how many people care to study the problems of this country and make an informed choice.

POPPAEA

*(Miss Kitty)* So, what... we should break the Empire into warring states all the size of Vermont? Balkanize it?

CICERO

*(Tonto)* We could do worse. Maybe we're too big to function as a whole.

#### **SCENE 1.4 THE BIG SLEEP**

*Quintus and Petronius still at the dressing tables.*

QUINTUS

We choose to be in a big sleep, and we pick leaders who won't wake us up.

PETRONIUS

Somebody usually gets killed for doing that.

QUINTUS

Gore for instance. Gore had to die.

PETRONIUS

What?

QUINTUS

People kept saying Gore had to concede so Americans could have “closure”. So we could “move on”. They even said, “concede with dignity.” This is how you talk about death.

PETRONIUS

Not just death, suicide. It was an assisted suicide.

QUINTUS

Yes, and not just the Bush side, Gore’s own supporters. They all told him to concede. Die graciously, die with courage, but die already.

PETRONIUS

Keep to what wakes you, boy.

QUINTUS

I’m an actor, Petro. A divided being.

## SCENE 1.5 WHERE ARE WE THEN?

*Cicero speaks in front of a green-screen; elsewhere in the space we see him mixed with projections of still images from the campaign, conventions, election, and post-election period.*

CICERO

Where are we then? Isn't Nero a republican?

I'm sorry, I'm a solitary man, living alone, reading my books—and I don't watch the news.

What happened to the Republic?

I'm confused—Roman republicans, American Republicans. I was a moralist and humanist; I pointed the finger at Republic and democracy alike.

What I denounced was the lie of pretended leadership, pretended virtue, the faking of representative government through puppet senates, bribery, et cetera.

I stood for the rule of law with the senate really functioning and against absolute power as vested in kings and empresses.

But democracy can't even get you good leadership—how could it get you good laws?

The idea of the *Roman* Republic is that the privileged consider the whole and the needs of the many. Which is why I made such a fuss.

Here is what I believe: that those with money and power should work for those without—

that's the Republic.

I want both—an election process by the people *and* the powerful showing their right to rule by high moral standards.

I refuse to be cynical. There is such a thing as good leadership, and I refuse to pretend I see it in any form of government.

Good people trying to do good things for the whole is the goal. I am an idealist.

And I am stubborn.

#### **SCENE 1.6 COUNTING THE BALLOTS**

*Two clowns, one of whom is trying to teach the other how to count ballots properly.  
Projections on various screens: ballots, images from the Florida recount, etc.*

QUINTUS

What's that?

PETRONIUS

It's a Florida ballot.

QUINTUS

It looks an awful lot like a thousand dollar bill with holes.

PETRONIUS

Oh, wait, wrong ballot, that's the one they sent to, ah, never mind that; here's the one I mean. Now, they call this a butterfly ballot because it looks like a book.

QUINTUS

Not like a butterfly?

PETRONIUS

*(waves it in his face)*

QUINTUS

Not like a butterfly.

PETRONIUS

It was specially designed to help older voters in Palm Beach. You see, this larger type they used, that made the presidential candidates spread over two pages. Bookwise.

QUINTUS

I heard it helped a bunch of voters mark Buchanan instead of Gore.

PETRONIUS

Yes, yes, very effective. Now hold it up to the light... No, that's the wrong way around... No, back to front. Now, a hole equals a vote.

QUINTUS

A hole equals a vote. *(nods)*

PETRONIUS

So what's this? *(holding up a chad)*

QUINTUS

A dead vote?

PETRONIUS

A chad! Definition of a chad: the portion of a paper ballot that voters punch out to indicate their candidate of choice.

QUINTUS

But it's not punched out.

PETRONIUS

Not all the way.

QUINTUS

It's still a vote?

PETRONIUS

Depends. There are different types of chads. Plain chad, clean hole, counts as a vote.

Hanging chad, one corner still attached to the ballot, counts as a vote?

QUINTUS

Yes?

PETRONIUS

Yes. Swinging chad, two corners still attached to the ballot, counts as a vote?

QUINTUS

Yes?

PETRONIUS

Yes. Tri chad, three corners still attached to the ballot, counts...?

QUINTUS

Yes!

PETRONIUS

No. Dimpled chad, indented but still attached to the ballot all the way around, counts as a vote?

QUINTUS

Yes!

PETRONIUS

No! Well, sometimes, but mainly no. Pregnant chad, pierced but still fully attached to the ballot ?

QUINTUS

Yes!... No!.. Yes!

PETRONIUS

No! Not!

QUINTUS

But pregnant means giving birth, a baby, a little vote.

PETRONIUS

Idiot. (*clouts him*) Now, how do we count the votes on the ballot?

QUINTUS

Count the holes! (*notices Petronius's glare*) ...and chads.

PETRONIUS

How?

QUINTUS

Hold them up to the light?

PETRONIUS

No! First we run them through a machine. The machine counts the votes.

QUINTUS

But wouldn't the machine make some of those one-corner thingies fall off?

PETRONIUS

So what? Anyway, the point is the machines reject a lot of votes, and if they reject too many votes, there can be a hand recount. Now, show me how you'd do a hand recount.

QUINTUS

one, two, three (*mimes counting money and dealing into a single pile*)

PETRONIUS

Hold it up to the light! Look for the holes, look for the chads. Bush vote? Put it in this pile. Gore vote? Put it over here. Voila.

QUINTUS

What if I can't tell?

PETRONIUS

What did I just tell you? Hole, vote, hanging chad, vote, swinging chad, vote, dimpled chad, no, pregnant chad, no. (*counting on Quintus's fingers*)

QUINTUS

Right. Got it.

PETRONIUS

No! Dimpled and pregnant chads should count as votes! (*lifts two of Quintus's fingers*)

QUINTUS

But you said...

PETRONIUS

Listen up. I'm 82 years old, I retired to Florida to tan my liver spots, statistically I've been dead for four years, I go in to vote, I punch that Gore hole but I'm not so strong anymore, face it, I'm as weak as a lame-duck president, I'm even weaker than this paper ballot, I strain myself pushing and all I make is this weensy stretch mark.

QUINTUS

Dimple.

PETRONIUS

Dimple. But you agree I obviously *meant* to vote for Gore?

QUINTUS

Sure. So I do count these other kinds of chads.

PETRONIUS

Not officially.

QUINTUS

*(gets a flash of insight)* Maybe? Is there a maybe pile?

PETRONIUS

What good would a maybe pile be?

QUINTUS

Well, when we're done we could count them up and divide by 2 and give half to Bush and half to Gore!

PETRONIUS

Listen, I'll let you in on a little secret. There's the official Palm Beach rules for recounting, I told you those already.

QUINTUS

Right, vote, vote, vote, no, no. (*counting on fingers*)

PETRONIUS

Forget that, the only rule you need to know is this: Every... vote... counts. Every vote is a Gore vote. Pregnant or dimples, it's a Gore vote. In fact, you see any marks anywhere on the ballot, even on the back, it's a Gore vote... Only if the ballot is *completely blank* is it a Bush vote.

QUINTUS

So, so, how did Bush win if he didn't get any of these votes?

PETRONIUS

Ah, you're forgetting the overseas ballots! Military votes count for Bush.

QUINTUS

Automatically?

PETRONIUS

Of course. In fact, some of them count double.

QUINTUS

Double?

PETRONIUS

Yes, because servicemen are voters *and* patriots, they get to vote once for their candidate of choice and once for their country.

QUINTUS

How do I... what do I... I write a giant 2 on the ballot then?

PETRONIUS

No, rip it in half, both halves in the Bush pile.

QUINTUS

There's no postmark on this one.

PETRONIUS

Doesn't matter.

QUINTUS

And it's not signed

PETRONIUS

Doesn't matter.

QUINTUS

And, look, it's not even dated. How do we know it wasn't cast after the election was over?

PETRONIUS

I'm telling you, it doesn't matter! Military votes, special rules.

QUINTUS

Says who?

PETRONIUS

Bush's lawyers.

QUINTUS

But how can I even tell it's a military vote?

PETRONIUS

Look, a guy in a uniform shows up with an attaché case full of votes, they're military votes, they all go in the Bush pile. Got that?

QUINTUS

Look, here's one from someone who's not even registered to vote.

PETRONIUS

Military?

QUINTUS

Yeah... All right, all right, Bush pile.

PETRONIUS

Look, if you mess up and reject one of these military ballots? Just cross out the "rejected as illegal" stamp and slip it in the Bush pile. Easy as stuffing a turkey.

QUINTUS

How come none of these ballots we have to recount are Nader ballots? Only Bush, Gore, Buchanan?

PETRONIUS

*(condescendingly)* No one actually voted for Nader. They just added his 3 percent to the totals at the end so it wouldn't look suspicious.

QUINTUS

But this is ridiculous. They should reform it!

PETRONIUS

Why? This way, every vote counts. Democracy in action.

QUINTUS

Only some votes should count.

PETRONIUS

Like whose?

QUINTUS

Maybe only people below the poverty line should be allowed to vote. They have the most to gain from a change and the most to lose from a mistake.

PETRONIUS

Ain't gonna happen. Who's gonna pay? These punch cards are cheap and fast. You think anyone's gonna spend 500 million to gain a few more votes when the same dough will buy a whole lot more votes on tv?

QUINTUS

A vote is a very, very small thing.

PETRONIUS

Especially when hidden under a pile of money.

### **SCENE 1.7 LAMENT OF THE REPUBOCRACY**

*Cicero stands in front of back projections of imagery from the World Trade Center cleanup site. Spoken in a Rastafarian accent in what seems like one long breath.*

CICERO

Junk now this Earth this noisy globe this spinning where no eyes are minute lump of congealed dust where I see from this vacuum I see Athens city of Athena city-state giver

of democracy pure democracy by which I mean a society consisting of a small number of citizens who assemble and administer the government in person<sup>1</sup> one man one vote women are not men slaves are not men the poor are not men not yet dogs but time stretches distance and men cannot all gather at one time and place it is seen with fatigue that a very extensive country cannot be governed on democratical principles on any other plan than a confederation of a number of small republics<sup>2</sup> beware the people duped by demagogues follow my leader the gullible are horses for tyrants to ride my own city beloved Rome a Republic not long a Republic dead within 500 years dead now 2000 years holding at its heart the Senate a hundred men elected from 35 clans original clans gens bound by family by ties so pleasing to the gods ties of kinship more than wealth aristocracy slides into oligarchy Rome the Republic becomes Rome of the Corrupt impossible to see this happen without horror and disgust do you hear the footsteps born in Rome its new master one-two the paid professional army three-four loyalty goes to those who pay fuck the Senate fuck the people fuck the Republic for so long as we are paid so long may you rule Caesar pretend Republic dying empire Holy Roman British Empire the sun never sets on the year 1792 the American people will not have a strong central government on the British model the American people call for the party of the common man the American people call for Jefferson Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans respond Democans Republicrats delude they delude themselves they cannot sing for democracy and republic both for local for federal their toy cracks America turns backward there is left only this broken thing this single this Democratic Party turns backwards thinking it moves forward rolling toward the Pacific with slavery in its tide but now cry other voices some Whigs some abolitionists some renegade Democrats cry for slavery's end cry remember Jefferson, cry slaveholding Jefferson who stands for equality the administrators of every government ever are actuated by private interest and ambition to the prejudice of the public good the only effectual method to secure the rights of the people and promote their welfare is to create a mixed government an opposition of interests between the members of two distinct bodies in the exercise of the powers of government and balanced by those of a third<sup>3</sup> and so is born the Republican Party born to speak for freedom end of slavery free speech women's suffrage black suffrage a Republican or free government can only exist where property is pretty equally divided in

such a government the people are the sovereign when this ceases to be the case the nature of the government is changed an aristocracy monarchy or despotism will rise on its ruin<sup>4</sup> rise in uncivil wars the Civil War limps on the Republicans need money for guns steal the South from the Democrats white Dixiecrats to this end are the means chosen presto changeo exit the Republicans enter bowing the neutral the unassuming National Union Party unionist expedient but not national show 'em the door jack bring back the grand old party not so grand not so old the highest responsibility is to be attained in a simple structure of government for the great body of the people never steadily attend to the operations of government and for want of due information are liable to be imposed on<sup>5</sup> all things come into being by the conflict of opposites and split the Republicans Liberal Republicans Radical Republicans northern carpetbaggers wave the bloody shirt stomp the Democratic South point to scandals in Grant's administration won the war lost the peace condemn corruption condemn nepotism the cronies worse than the family anyway but despite Reconstruction still a republic by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation<sup>6</sup> takes place which derives all its powers directly or indirectly from the people and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure for a limited period<sup>7</sup> black Americans vote Republican African-Americans enter Congress as Republicans stay Republican until 1935 seventy years of bloc voting in the war's wake the South controlled by white racists legacy of loss and fear white Democrats against black Republicans seventy years essential to such a government that it be derived from the great body of the society not from an inconsiderable proportion or favored class<sup>8</sup> the century turns a slow shift in the body politic midwestern farmers are Republican manufacturers are Republican businessmen are Republican the poor are Democrats immigrants are Democrats the cities flooding with new blood workers are Democrats labor Democrats urban politics Democrats socially liberal policies Democrats two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are first the delegation of government in the latter to a small number of citizens elected by the rest secondly the greater number of citizens and greater sphere of the country over which a republic may be extended<sup>9</sup> Republican Roosevelt Reformer Roosevelt give the country a square deal rein in big business it doesn't last capitalism flourishes socialism withers ignore the Sherman Anti-Trust Act drop wartime taxes to help the rich business as usual the

business of America is business as society is produced by our wants so is government by our wickedness<sup>10</sup> Black Friday the Great Depression stock in the Republican party crashes ideological collapse Republicans lose the cities all but businessmen lose power bases in New York and Ohio keep the rural states farmers in decline isolationism on the rise the proper function of government is to do for the people those things that have to be done but cannot be done or cannot be done as well by individuals the most effective government is government closest to the people<sup>11</sup> Second Reconstruction post World War II Republicans need the South again move into South move against civil rights pro segregation Democrats win black votes Reconstruction in reverse a hundred years of turnabout we believe in equal rights equal justice and equal opportunity for all regardless of race creed age sex or national origin we believe in fiscal discipline tax cuts retirement security democratic capitalism college education victims' rights strong laws mental health civil rights opening markets building government republican capitalism valuing work ending violence supporting families fighting crime protecting citizens supporting innovation battling terrorism investing in America.<sup>12</sup>

## **SCENE 1.8 THE FURIES**

*Germania in front of the green-screen. Elsewhere we see projections of Germania mixed with slow-mo video collage of imagery from the 2000 political conventions.*

### **GERMANIA**

We have a shadow president now. Every move Bush makes, people wonder what Gore would have done. Gore is always there beside him, his invisible twin. Re-elect Gore in oh-four. Remember, remember, remember. In classical tragedy, it was the role of the Furies to pursue wrongdoers without rest, wherever they went, and punish them for their crimes. Children who spurned their parents, hosts who harmed their guests, leaders who wronged their people, the Furies would scourge them all with brass-studded whips. Break their hearts and lay waste their lives. You think the Furies are after Bush? Bush is the fool whose luck will one day run out. Remember Oedipus, King of Thebes? His land was laid

waste because he gained the throne by violating universal law. Thebes suffered all kinds of horrors from having an illegitimate ruler. Remember the night of the Supreme Court decision? Those few seconds when only about two dozen people in the entire country knew who was going to be president? And everyone else, knowing that they didn't know. *Liking* that they didn't know. It was actually a relief to have no one be president for awhile. As good as no one. It wasn't that we couldn't decide between them—we just didn't want either one. In our hearts we voted for no president at all. Like looking at Paradise in the rear-view mirror.

### **SCENE 1.9 EAGLES UP!**

*(Cicero, standing in for someone like Sen. Robert Byrd, and Petronius, standing in for someone like Trent Lott, are circling in a kind of shadow combat and hurling taunts at each other. Germania and Quintus drift over to watch. Poppaea stays to one side, pretending to be above it all. Floating video projections of plasticized heads of Byrd-Lott types.)*

CICERO

Republican!

PETRONIUS

Democrat!

CICERO

Prince of pork!

PETRONIUS

Filibuster king!

CICERO

Irresponsible warmonger!

PETRONIUS

Cowardly peacenik!

CICERO

66!

PETRONIUS

83!

CICERO, PETRONIUS

*(simultaneously) Old boy! (They pause briefly to high-five each other, then return to their circling positions.)*

PETRONIUS

*Third* in line to replace the president!

CICERO

Not even *in* the line of succession!

PETRONIUS

Voted against the Civil Rights Bill!

CICERO

Segregationist!

PETRONIUS

Former kleagle of the Ku Klux Klan!

CICERO *(breaking concentration, annoyed)*

I walked away from the Klan.

PETRONIUS

You took that oath til death.

CICERO

*Still* saying that segregation is a good thing!

PETRONIUS

*(annoyed in his turn)* Well, I apologized.

CICERO, PETRONIUS

*(simultaneously)* Closet racist! *(They pause briefly to high-five each other, then return to their circling positions.)*

GERMANIA

*(to Quintus)* Closet, closet nothing! Those bastards kept me from voting.

CICERO

Remember the Tonkin Gulf!

QUINTUS

*(to Germania)* Sh!... what?

PETRONIUS

Remember the Gulf War!

GERMANIA

*(to Quintus)* They put me on the Florida scrub list.

CICERO, PETRONIUS

*(simultaneously) Oil! (They high-five each other, then return to their circling positions. Germania and Quintus watch them.)*

CICERO

Friend of ENRON!

PETRONIUS

Protectionist!

QUINTUS

*(to Germania, quietly) You're a felon?*

CICERO

Friend of WorldCom!

GERMANIA

*(loudly) No, stupid, I've never even been to jail. Slave? must be a felon. Felon? can't vote. Too bad, bye bye.*

PETRONIUS

Luddite!

QUINTUS

*(to Germania, hissing) Keep it down!*

CICERO

Insider trading!

GERMANIA

*(quieter) I could just about kill them.*

QUINTUS

*(to Germania, softly and intensely)* Shut... up!

PETRONIUS

Stagnation!

CICERO

Recession!

PETRONIUS

Government waste!

GERMANIA

*(speaking to the audience?)* You know, they checked in my county after the election was over. Number of disqualified "felons": 694. Number of those that could be verified: 34.

CICERO, PETRONIUS

*(simultaneously)* Office of Homeland Security! *(They high-five each other, then return to their circling positions. They make a few false starts but are distracted by Germania and Quintus)*

QUINTUS

*(to Germania)* So... you're back on the lists?

GERMANIA

*(ignoring Quintus)* That's 660 false felons in one county alone. And Bush only won by 537 votes.

CICERO, PETRONIUS

*(simultaneously, turning on Germania and Quintus) Shut up, get over it! (They high-five each other, then return to their circling positions. Quintus and Germania freeze.)*

PETRONIUS

*(to Cicero) No offense man, but you are a moron!*

CICERO

*(to Petronius) Get a life, you troll!*

CICERO, PETRONIUS

*(simultaneously) Eagles up! (They high-five each other, then return to their circling positions.)*

QUINTUS

*(pulling Germania away) But what about you? You can vote again?*

GERMANIA

Not in 2000.

### **SCENE 1.10 BABBALOG**

*The stage Romans speak their lines more or less simultaneously, with much overlapping, as shown here. Projected on the various screens is live text input from the online Romans, improvising on different themes each day. The stage Romans pace themselves according to the improvisational energy of the Viewpoints' "kinesthetic response" in response to each other, the projected text, and the sound environment. Each performer's text is shown in a vertical column below.*

POPPAEA	QUINTUS	PETRONIUS	GERMANIA	CICERO
<p>Don't laugh-- I'm practicing wearing a burka.</p>	<p>Heya, Scribbles.</p>	<p>Hello, Quintus</p>	<p><i>(helps Poppaea with her burka)</i></p>	
<p>I like to be prepared for all changes of regime.</p>	<p>Who are you cultivating as Nero's most likely successor?</p>	<p>I don't think it's supposed to be hemmed up to your thigh?</p>		
<p>Why, myself of course! They'll never know it's me. Behind the burka.</p>	<p>I don't think women are allowed to rule out there in the desert.</p>	<p>Iraqis Claim Crash is the Vengeance of Allah!</p>	<p>Columbia Lost!</p>	<p><i>(entering hastily)</i> Sorry I'm late.</p>
<p>Columbia Lost?</p>	<p>The Indian babe was heartbreaking.</p>	<p>The market.</p>	<p>Shh, I'm reading the headlines.</p>	<p>What crash?</p>
<p>Things fall apart.</p>	<p>She looked so happy.</p>	<p>There were bits on ebay within hours.</p>	<p>The shuttle.</p>	<p>Oh, you mean the great distraction.</p>
<p>One way or other, death is gonna getcha.</p>	<p>And then you die</p>	<p>Very small scavengers this time.</p>	<p>Last Message from Shuttle: Roger, and Then Silence.</p>	
<p><i>(to Germania)</i> That's not a new kind of find in Texas.</p>	<p>And then the scavengers move in.</p>	<p>Never go up in a vehicle put together by low bid.</p>	<p>Multicultural Space Crew Gets Used Shuttle.</p>	
<p>Unlikely it survived being exploded at 200,000 feet.</p>	<p>Technology is no longer the hope of the world. Since the NASDAQ tanked.</p>	<p>Yeah, magical,</p>	<p>Someone in Texas found a charred torso and skull.</p>	
			<p>"The magical thing was, it fell apart in the no man's land between outer space and the Earth's</p>	

<p><i>(Poppaea hums "Columbia Gem of the Ocean"; the others listen briefly)</i></p> <p><i>(sings)</i> "The home of the free and the brave."</p> <p><i>(breaking off)</i> Why aren't the rest of you singing?</p> <p><i>(sings)</i> "Home of the Free-ee and the Bra-ave."</p> <p><i>(to Cicero)</i> I'm appalled at your lack of vision.</p> <p>I have a thing for guys in face paint.</p> <p>I just logged off my investments page.</p> <p>Is that an economic prescription?</p> <p>Death sells?</p> <p><i>(softly)</i> kill kill</p>	<p>What's Columbia mean again?</p> <p>Rise above it all?</p> <p>So are minds.</p> <p>It's all a big connect-the-dots.</p> <p>Space! The Final Frontier!</p> <p>Above this madding crowd!</p> <p>Though apparently the best way to get there is with bombs.</p> <p>No one wants to talk about the economy when they can talk about war instead.</p>	<p>the next hundred missions are going to be splatting up against the pieces.</p> <p>Bodies are over rated.</p> <p>They're connected.</p> <p>I hear Nero was very pleased that one desert barbarian went down in the crash.</p> <p>Nero would claim credit if he could... but he didn't do it.</p> <p><i>(to Quintus)</i> Isn't the final frontier way out beyond Jerusalem?</p> <p>Weren't we supposed to be discussing the economy?</p>	<p>atmosphere."</p> <p>Back to building aqueducts.</p> <p>Pack extra windex.</p> <p><i>(to Cicero)</i> Who do you think created the Columbia distraction?</p> <p>I wanted to be an astronaut.</p> <p>Or a nun.</p> <p>Or a fireman.</p> <p>I know that I will be reborn as Emperor Franz Joseph one day.</p> <p>Beyond Afghanistan!</p>	<p>It's all a big distraction as far as Nero is concerened</p> <p>When things are getting too embarrassing for the empire they create a distraction for the people so they won't look their way.</p> <p>The entire space race is the distraction. Get us to look up while they rob us of our faith in government. They spend money on anything, as long as it's not for the poor.</p> <p>The final frontier is peace. <i>(everyone falls momentarily silent)</i></p> <p>What separates us from animals is 5 things.</p> <p>Humor</p>
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<p>kill buy buy buy</p> <p><i>(softly)</i> kill kill kill buy buy buy</p> <p><i>(softly)</i> kill kill kill buy buy buy</p> <p><i>(softly)</i> kill kill kill buy buy buy</p> <p><i>(loudly)</i> KILL KILL KILL BUY BUY BUY</p> <p>Quintus, you could be my campaign manager!</p> <p>Take a good look at Cicero: that's the opposition.</p> <p>Let's not save anyone unless they promise to vote for me. For the KILL KILL KILL BUY BUY BUY ticket!</p> <p>I have a thing for courage.</p> <p>Of course, we'll</p>	<p>Rumor</p> <p>Lunch</p> <p>Nine.</p> <p>Call for a recount.</p> <p>Very catchy.</p> <p>It's just another distraction.</p> <p>Tho plenty of deals for the rich.</p> <p>Id like to see a</p>	<p>Greed</p> <p>Eight.</p> <p>Lunch doesn't count.</p> <p>Render unto you know who.</p> <p>It's the new world order.</p> <p>But do we want to save humanity?</p> <p>Where there's a shortage, there's a market opportunity!</p>	<p>That's six not five.</p> <p><i>(to Cicero)</i> So how <i>do</i> we get out of this recession?</p> <p>Nothing will save humanity.</p> <p>Idealists cause all the trouble.</p> <p><i>(to Cicero)</i> <i>You're</i> prescribing war?</p>	<p>Imagination</p> <p>Eroticism</p> <p>Spirituality</p> <p>Rebelliousness and Aesthetics</p> <p>The trouble is we are bean-counting instead of considering our assets.</p> <p>We can use our imagination in better ways.</p> <p>It's what makes us human.</p> <p>And what makes us human will save humanity.</p> <p>We don't have enough ideals.</p> <p><i>(tiredly)</i> If you really want to get out of recession, have the war and be done with it.</p> <p>It always works. <i>(everyone pauses for a beat)</i></p>
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<p>have to gear up to replace all those body bags.</p> <p>I have about had it with the barbarian tribes everywhere.</p> <p>Do I have to remind you of the Great Good of the Roman Empire?</p> <p>Pax Romana!</p> <p><i>(to Cicero)</i> Darling, have you read any of those proclamations from our dear brothers and sisters in the East???</p> <p>The Siccari, the Zealots... they're all losers. They love me though. The empress.</p> <p>Because they have no clue, is why.</p> <p>Look at Rome's record. Law. Order. Taxes. It's easier to blame us than their hideous</p>	<p>real economic solution, not just another stupid third-party ticket.</p> <p>We can't.</p> <p>War will always be with us</p> <p>Pax Universa?</p> <p><i>(to Germania)</i> Keepin' it real?</p> <p>I would be hung and dried in the sun in one of those countries.</p> <p>I am sick of this bushwhacking around in inconvenient locations.</p> <p>You don't think exploring space is a better national aspiration than being the world's cop?</p>	<p>Just say no to capitalism.</p> <p>Pax Americana?</p> <p>You and me both.</p> <p>I hate sand. I like togas. What more does one need to know?</p> <p>Perhaps world domination isn't worth the trouble.</p>	<p>So how do we stop the war?</p> <p>Buy our shit or we will kill you.</p> <p>BUY BUY BUY, KILL KILL KILL</p> <p>If you're so lovable, why do they keep attacking you?</p> <p>Hot news flash: world stupid</p> <p>You've been taxing Judaea to</p>	<p>We can only do something about ourselves and try to influence those we can for good.</p> <p>I refuse to feel threatened just because other people do.</p> <p>I think we should back out of the Eastern Empire and let all those local tribes fight it out among themselves.</p> <p>I think we should back out of everything and contemplate the ills in our own country before we spend money on space.</p> <p>Helping the poor, the unemployed, the disenfranchised in Rome is a better aspiration. World domination is a diversion.</p>
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<p>local bosses. Papa Doc Duvalier. Marcos. Idi Amin. That Panamanian turd.</p> <p>It's also three degrees of non-separation from being their own fault.</p> <p>We need a war goddess.</p> <p>Victory!</p> <p>Victory for Rome!</p>	<p>Everything is only six degrees of separation from being our fault.</p> <p>We need a better audience.</p> <p>Symbolism!</p> <p>Nike?</p> <p>Life is a distraction.</p>	<p>Against whom, as you recall, we did <i>not</i> go to war.</p> <p>We need better actors.</p> <p>We need to equip the audience with tomatoes.</p> <p>Epitaph for Rome.</p>	<p>death so you can wear those tacky dresses?</p> <p>We have an almost spotless record of not going to war against local bosses.</p> <p>US Troops in Afghanistan Pray for Crew.</p> <p>Bush Prays for Crew at Curch Service.</p> <p>Roger, and then silence.</p> <p>But from what?</p>	<p>There are no real acts in Rome today, only symbolic acts</p> <p>Very well staged, if poorly acted.</p> <p>We need to turn off the tv.</p> <p>So easy to pray for the dead.</p> <p>It's the living who need help.</p> <p>Politics is a distraction.</p>
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## SCENE 1.11 COMMITTEE ON THE SUPREME COURT

*Germania, Poppaea, Quintus, and Petronius represent the 9 members of the Supreme Court. Germania stands for the liberal minority on the court, Poppaea for the straight conservative axis. Petronius represents the more cynical conservatives who recognize that there was no solid intellectual basis for the decision that was made. Quintus stands for the court's swing vote(s). They share a single large costume, like a many-headed beast intent on savaging itself. Scene takes place in a kind of elevated boxing ring. Multiple names indicate when 2 or 3 members of the court answer more or less simultaneously.*

GERMANIA

State our name, please.

POPPAEA

The Supreme Court of the United States of America.

GERMANIA

Are we also known as Justices Breyer, Ginsburg, Kennedy, O'Connor, Scalia, Souter, Stevens, Thomas, and Chief Justice Rehnquist?

POPPAEA, QUINTUS, PETRONIUS

Yes. Yes. Yes.

GERMANIA

We are appearing today, your Honors, in response to a subpoena that was served upon us by the Roman Republic?

PETRONIUS

We do not acknowledge the authority of that body.

GERMANIA

Let it be stated for the record that we have been delegated this authority pro tem by the people of the United States of America. Please raise your right hands. Do we solemnly swear that the testimony...

QUINTUS

Excuse me, we wish to affirm instead.

PETRONIUS

Swearing implies that we sometimes don't tell the truth.

GERMANIA

Do we solemnly affirm that the testimony we are about to give before this committee will be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

POPPAEA, QUINTUS, PETRONIUS

Yes. Yes. Yes.

GERMANIA

Are we represented by counsel?

PETRONIUS

We *are* counsel.

GERMANIA

We are representing ourselves?

QUINTUS, POPPAEA

Yes. That's right.

GERMANIA

Fine. Now, were we also the Supreme Court in the year 2000?

POPPAEA, QUINTUS, PETRONIUS

*(Grimacing or snarling silently at each other)* Yes. Yes. Yes.

GERMANIA

And did we, on December 12, 2000, hand down a decision in the case of George W. Bush, et al., petitioners, v. Albert Gore, Jr., et al.?

POPPAEA

Actually, we handed down several decisions that day. There was a per curiam and five others. Six altogether.

GERMANIA

And did this decision, or did these decisions, determine who would be the next president of the United States?

QUINTUS

In effect, they did.

GERMANIA

And were these decisions unanimous?

POPPAEA

No, we split 5-4.

GERMANIA

Have we ever before taken up a case that could decide the presidency?

POPPAEA

No, we have not.

GERMANIA

What was the gist of these opinions of December 12th, if we had to boil it down to one sentence?

POPPAEA

Well, in short, we held that the manual recounts in Florida were unconstitutional because Florida's judges did not set clear and uniform standards for deciding what constitutes a legal ballot, and that in turn violated voters' 14th Amendment rights to equal protection under the law.

QUINTUS

Wait, we weren't saying that the manual recounts were illegal?

POPPAEA

Oh no. Most of us believed the manual recounts were legal. The problem was with the *standards* being applied to the counting.

GERMANIA

Wouldn't you say we were overstepping our bounds to take this case at all? I would remind your Honors that the 12th Amendment to the Constitution gives *Congress* the responsibility to decide any fights over the election. Not the courts.

PETRONIUS

Bush and Gore brought their problem to *us*. Not to Congress.

GERMANIA

You don't have to take any case you don't want to. You don't even have to give a reason. You turn down 99 out of a hundred as it is.

PETRONIUS

*(bored)* Issue of national importance.

POPPAEA

Congress wouldn't have dealt with the constitutional issue—the equal protection issue.

GERMANIA

And what did equal protection have to do with anything?

POPPAEA

Some counties counted votes differently from others. That's simply not fair.

QUINTUS

Wait, are you talking about the unfairness of the butterfly ballot, you know, the one that caused some voters to accidentally vote for Buchanan?

POPPAEA

No, no, no, we're not talking about mechanical breakdowns, we're talking about the postelection recounts. Manual recounts. Only.

GERMANIA

What about the fact that many Democratic voters in poorer counties were disenfranchised because the punch-card systems used there result in more disqualified votes than the optical scanners used in richer and largely Republican counties? Isn't that an equal-protection issue?

POPPAEA

Maybe, maybe not.

PETRONIUS

*(almost simultaneously)* Not the issue in this case.

GERMANIA

Even though the several percentage points of difference in Democratic vs. Republican disqualifications may have swung the election to Bush?

POPPAEA, PETRONIUS

Right. Yes yes yes.

GERMANIA

Let's look for a moment at our normal practices as a court. Is it not true that normally we, as a generally conservative body, do not try to extend the coverage offered by the equal protection clause? That, in fact, we despise the equal protection clause.

POPPAEA

*(almost simultaneously)* Oh yes.

QUINTUS

*(almost simultaneously)* That would be an overstatement.

PETRONIUS

*(almost simultaneously)* Mischaracterization.

*(Petronius savages Poppaea.)*

GERMANIA

*(to Poppaea)* Yes? Yes, you despise the equal protection clause?

POPPAEA

Well. It was, there was a, an issue...

*(Quintus and Petronius both savage Poppaea.)*

GERMANIA

And didn't we say that our decision in *Bush vs. Gore*, with respect to the equal-protection clause, was limited to *only this one situation*?

PETRONIUS

I don't recall that.

GERMANIA

Let me refresh your memory of our written decision, and I quote "Our consideration is limited to the present circumstances."

QUINTUS

Did we write that?

*(Poppaea and Petronius both savage Quintus.)*

PETRONIUS

What's the question?

GERMANIA

Isn't this a big departure from our normal practice of not using equal protection as a reason for *anything*?

POPPAEA

Yes.

PETRONIUS

No.

*(Poppaea and Petronius savage each other.)*

QUINTUS

Wait...

POPPAEA, PETRONIUS

(to Quintus) Flipper!

(*Poppaea and Petronius savage Quintus.*)

GERMANIA

Was this not actually a *political* question such as we have refused to take up in other cases? Didn't we decide what constituted a legal ballot in Florida? And didn't we declare December 12th the deadline for counting the votes?

POPPAEA

Hold on, you've got that wrong. December 12th isn't the counting deadline, that's January 6th.

GERMANIA

It is?

POPPAEA

Oh yes. It's perfectly legal to keep counting votes up to January 6th. December 12th is just the deadline after which Congress can't challenge the results.

GERMANIA

So all the votes counted between December 12th and January 6th might just as well go in the wastebasket?

PETRONIUS

Yup.

QUINTUS

It all goes back to the Tilden-Hayes fight in 1876.

GERMANIA

You're saying the electors have to be picked in December even if the vote count isn't complete until January? But wouldn't that mean that the wrong man could be elected president?

PETRONIUS

*(smugly)* Yup.

GERMANIA

So did we decide that the Florida Supreme Court acted illegally by extending the recount deadline past December 12th?

PETRONIUS

No, what we found was that the Florida Supreme Court was wrong not to have adopted clearer standards. More uniform standards.

GERMANIA

Clearer standards for what, exactly?

PETRONIUS

For counting votes. The Florida Legislature says that the only legal standard for counting a vote is the quote *clear intent of the voter* unquote. So what the Florida Supreme Court should have done was to set uniform, statewide standards for determining that.

GERMANIA

But do we not agree that only the Florida *Legislature* has the right to set new standards with respect to its own elections?

PETRONIUS

Of course.

GERMANIA

So if the Florida Court *had* adopted new standards, that is, done some ad-hoc rewriting of the law, wouldn't we have had to overturn that decision?

POPPAEA

Probably.

QUINTUS

*(almost simultaneously)* Possibly.

PETRONIUS

*(almost simultaneously)* No.

*(Free-for-all among Poppaea, Quintus, and Petronius.)*

GERMANIA

*(trying to separate them; they turn on her too)* Yes?

PETRONIUS

No.

POPPAEA

Yes.

QUINTUS

I don't know.

GERMANIA

Let me get this clear. If the Florida Court had set clearer standards, we would have overturned their decision because it changed rules that only the Legislature is allowed to change. And since it did not, in fact, set clearer standards, we overturned it for *not* changing the rules?

QUINTUS

Yes?

POPPAEA

No?

PETRONIUS

*(going after Quintus and Poppaea)* Yes.

POPPAEA

Yes.

QUINTUS

No.

PETRONIUS

Yes.

GERMANIA

No matter what the Florida Supreme Court did, some legal votes *could never, ever have been counted?*

PETRONIUS

*(turning on Germania)* Well, what constitutes a legal vote?

GERMANIA

(*snarling back*) I'm asking the questions here.

POPPAEA

The vice-president asked for a *machine* recount, and he got it. And that should have been it. The minute you go to *hand* recounts, you create a new system because you are looking at votes that would not normally be counted, that would normally be disqualified.

GERMANIA

But hand recounts are perfectly legal in Florida. And the law holds that no vote shall be disregarded if it clearly reflects the intent of the voter.

POPPAEA

Well we decided that Florida law couldn't reasonably be thought to require the counting of improperly marked ballots.

GERMANIA

Even where they clearly reflected the intent of the voter?

POPPAEA

Even then.

GERMANIA

I want to read something into the record here. "Having once granted the right to vote on equal terms, the State may not, by later arbitrary and disparate treatment, value one person's vote over that of another." Anyone recognize this passage from our majority decision?

POPPAEA

We'd like to request a recess.

QUINTUS

Wait...

PETRONIUS

*(attempting to leave; Poppaea also tries to leave; both fail.)* We're in recess!

GERMANIA

*(shoving Poppaea and Petronius back in place)* We're not. Now. What do we say to the charge that we, that is, the majority of us, five of us, decided what result we wanted to reach and then manipulated our reasoning to get that result?

POPPAEA

We refuse to answer such an insulting question.

GERMANIA

I direct us to answer the question.

QUINTUS

Are you questioning our integrity?

GERMANIA

You refuse to answer the question?

PETRONIUS

Would you care to step outside?

POPPAEA

We did this country a great service, we saved it from constitutional chaos.

QUINTUS

*(following up eagerly)* That's right. Sometimes you just have to take responsibility. You have to step up to the plate.

PETRONIUS

*(bored again)* Violence in the streets...

QUINTUS

Revolution, even. That 1876 election, Tilden versus Hayes? The federal government had to use troops to keep the peace, that's the kind of thing we're talking about.

GERMANIA

Let's stick to this century, shall we? Isn't it true that what really happened in 2000 is that the liberal minority among us were trying to find some way to allow the manual recounts to continue? While at the same time the conservative majority were trying to find a legal basis to stop them?

POPPAEA

Absurd.

PETRONIUS

You can't prove it you know. That's the beauty of secret deliberations.

GERMANIA

Isn't it true that our vote split along political lines? That the conservative majority all voted for Bush and against Gore?

POPPAEA

Coincidence.

PETRONIUS

*(to Germania)* And don't forget, you're one of us.

GERMANIA

Isn't it true, Mr. Justice, that at the time of the decision you had two sons working as lawyers for Bush?

PETRONIUS

I don't recall that.

GERMANIA

And you, Mr. Justice, isn't it true that your wife was working at the Heritage Foundation, reviewing resumes for potential Bush staffers?

QUINTUS

Irrelevant.

GERMANIA

Why didn't you recuse yourselves on grounds of conflict of interest?

QUINTUS

Our decision was not affected by those peripheral matters.

PETRONIUS

What he said.

GERMANIA

Isn't it true that if either of you had recused yourselves, the Florida Supreme Court decision allowing recounts would have been affirmed and the recounts would have continued?

POPPAEA

That is so.

GERMANIA

And Gore might have been elected?

QUINTUS

We don't know that.

GERMANIA

I have no further questions.

### **SCENE 1.12 WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?**

*In the first part of this scene, Cicero plays a Roman lawyer and Germania a Christian slave. In the second part, they are a Roman military officer and a Jewish rebel. In the third part, they are a U.S. military officer and a U.S./Roman soldier. Petronius plays a guard throughout. The three are distributed in different areas of the space.*

CICERO

Where's that CO? Bring him in.

PETRONIUS

He's not a CO, *she* is a Jew.

CICERO

A Jew?

PETRONIUS

One of those Christian Jew slaves. You know, " I am the first and the last, I am the honored and the scorned, I am the whore and..."

CICERO

Oh. *(with distaste)* A Gnostic.

PETRONIUS

Yeah, one of them.

CICERO

She's the one who passed the plate?

PETRONIUS

One of them.

CICERO

Bring her in then. *(Petronius escorts Germania into the room.)* You, what's your name?

GERMANIA

Germania Servius.

CICERO

You are charged with insurrection.

GERMANIA

I didn't do anything, I was just walking down the street.

CICERO

*(ignoring her)* Specifically, you're one of those jokers who passed a collection plate so "poor Florus" would have money to send back to Nero.

GERMANIA

Nero was going to confiscate the Temple's treasure!

CICERO

What do you care? You're a Christian. Of a sort.

GERMANIA

It's still wrong. And I didn't have anything to do with it anyway.

CICERO

You've been arrested for it.

GERMANIA

Your men just grabbed anyone they saw off the street. I was going to market.

*(sarcastically)* To buy food?

CICERO

*(to Petronius)* Is that true?

PETRONIUS

*(woodenly)* No sir.

CICERO

*(Cicero looks consideringly at Petronius; pauses.)* Well. You might have done it. You might do it another time. You can't expect us to just wait until someone attacks us?

GERMANIA

I didn't *do* anything.

CICERO

"It is the right of every sovereign state to protect itself by preventing a condition of affairs in which it will be too late to protect itself." Elihu Root said that. 1914 I think it was.

GERMANIA

Who?

PETRONIUS

*(alarmed, warningly)* Sir!

*(All three freeze momentarily; Germania gets up and goes out; Cicero and Petronius resume positions from beginning of the scene.)*

CICERO

*(shaking his head to clear it)* My memory's not what it used to be. Where's that Christian? Bring her in.

PETRONIUS

She's not a Christian she's a Jew. One of those Sicarii. Found her at the bottom of a well with some kids.

CICERO

Bring her in then. *(Petronius escorts Germania into the room.)* You, what's your name?

GERMANIA

Germania Servius.

CICERO

You are charged with insurrection. Specifically, with leading armed forays from Masada to attack the Roman state. Not that I care, but I could also charge you for the attacks against your fellow Jews in En Geddi.

GERMANIA

It wasn't insurrection, it was anticipatory self-defense.

CICERO

What?!

GERMANIA

We knew you Romans were going to attack us, so why should we sit there and take the first blow? Force can't be our last resort. Not when there are so few of us.

CICERO

Exactly. So few of you. How good an idea was it to start something you couldn't finish? If it hadn't been for you Jews we wouldn't have had to level Jerusalem. Masada too—your fault.

GERMANIA

*You* had the weapons of mass destruction, *you* used them.

CICERO

We—the what?

GERMANIA

*(sarcastically)* Rams? Siege towers?

CICERO

You call those weapons of—what about fire? You're the ones who burned all the storehouses. What about most of your fellow rebels committing suicide? You wouldn't call suicide a weapon of mass destruction would you? (*sarcastically*) Or is suicide "anticipatory self-defense"?

GERMANIA

It was certainly a form of pre-emption. Suicide instead of crucifixion, who wouldn't?

CICERO

What, you think we should have taken prisoners? Who would buy a slave you couldn't turn your back on?

GERMANIA

Can I ask you something? Just how big a threat did you think 900 Sicarii were to the world's only superpower?

CICERO

Let me put it to you this way. If you had been us, wouldn't you have attacked Iraq on Sept. 10th 2001?

GERMANIA

Who?

PETRONIUS

(*quietly, warningly*) Sir!

CICERO

Osama Bin Laden, I mean. Not Iraq, Osama bin Laden.

GERMANIA

Who?!

PETRONIUS

*(loudly, warningly)* Sir!!

*(All three freeze momentarily; Germania gets up and goes out; Cicero and Petronius resume positions from beginning of the scene.)*

CICERO

*(shaking his head to clear it)* My memory's not what it used to be. Where's that Jew?  
Bring her in.

PETRONIUS

She's not a Jew, she's a CO.

CICERO

Bring her in then. *(Petronius escorts Germania into the room.)* You, what's your name?

GERMANIA

Germania Servius.

CICERO

You are charged with... Oh. You want a discharge?

GERMANIA

Yes, sir.

CICERO

You're a, you've become a conscientious objector?

GERMANIA

No, sir.

CICERO

You're *not* a CO?

GERMANIA

No, sir.

CICERO

(*to Petronius*) You said she was.

PETRONIUS

(*woodenly*) I misunderstood.

GERMANIA

I'm a Catholic, sir.

CICERO

What does that have to do with anything? (*sarcastically*) Have you been wondering "what would Jesus do"?

GERMANIA

No sir. Permission to speak freely?

CICERO

Granted.

GERMANIA

We Christians have mostly decided we can't live by what Jesus said. Or we couldn't go to war at all, ever. (*shrugs*)

CICERO

As you say. Thank god for the just war doctrine. So what *is* your trouble?

GERMANIA

It's just that, the just war—the catechism, sir.

CICERO

Compassionate war.

GERMANIA

There are three conditions... what war?

CICERO

No such thing as a just war. Compassionate war, that's the ticket.

GERMANIA

Anyway. There are three conditions under which I as a Catholic can take part in a war of national defense, sir. And by the way that's another thing. It has to be a war of national *defense*. I'm not clear...

CICERO

*(interrupting)* Soldier, we both know that the best defense is an offense.

GERMANIA

That's certainly the argument Hitler used to take the Sudetenland. Sir.

CICERO

We're not talking about Hitler, we're talking about the coming war with the Jews.

GERMANIA

The...?

PETRONIUS

*(warningly)* Sir!

CICERO

I mean, the Arabs, I mean, Iraq. *(impatiently)* Go on.

GERMANIA

Sir, according to what I understand, the damage we have suffered or will suffer must be quote *lasting, grave, and certain* unquote. Certainly the Towers fall under that—but it wasn't *Iraq* who did that.

CICERO

*(shrugs)* It's easier to go after states than nonstates. And—there's more isn't there? Let's hear it all.

GERMANIA

All other means of putting an end to the problem must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective—that would be the UN inspections, sir, I don't have quarrel...  
The military can get you in but it can't get you out?

CICERO

*(impatiently)* Never mind all that. I'm all for thinking, but we can't delay action just to think about things forever. The time to go after Viet Nam was about nine months ago.

PETRONIUS

*(warningly)* Sir!

GERMANIA

Bin Laden?

CICERO

I mean Iraq, *Iraq*.

GERMANIA

Sir, plain speaking, there's about a billion people out there who feel humiliated by the Roman empire. (*Petronius glances at her as if to speak.*) Who hate the unfair taxes, the corruption, the unemployment—we could just make things worse by acting like this. The military can get you in but it can't get you out?

CICERO

The United States.

GERMANIA

(*puzzled*) The United States, what, sir?

CICERO

We have a responsibility to act unilaterally. We are the world's policeman.

GERMANIA

If we can act unilaterally so can everyone else. The Parthians, the Persians, the Vandals, the Franks, the Goths (*Petronius glances at her and then at Cicero, who gestures him back.*) Everyone's going to have weapons of mass destruction.

(*As she speaks Poppaea and Quintus appear like a Greek chorus and begin to speak in unison. The others continue through them, but distractedly, as though disturbed by a noise they can't locate.*)

POPPAEA, QUINTUS

I am the knowledge of my inquiry,  
and the finding of those who seek after me,  
and the command of those who ask of me,  
and the power of the powers in my knowledge  
of the angels, who have been sent at my word,  
and of gods in their seasons by my counsel,  
and of spirits of every man who exists with me,  
and of women who dwell within me.

I am the one who is honored, and who is praised,  
and who is despised scornfully.

I am peace,  
and war has come because of me.

And I am an alien and a citizen.<sup>13</sup>

CICERO

You think we're setting a bad example?

GERMANIA

Yes, sir. Unilateralism is just a new form of isolationism.

CICERO

Now you listen to me. We are going to put down the rebellion that that ass Gessius Florus  
has provoked in Judah.

PETRONIUS

*(warningly)* Sir!

CICERO

Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Persians, Cubans, they all have to learn to fear Rome and  
love her.

PETRONIUS

*(louder)* Sir!

GERMANIA

*(lost)* Cubans?

CICERO

But I don't want any half-assed Christians in my front lines. You'll be spending a nice warm winter guarding Herod's Palace.

PETRONIUS

*(exasperated)* Sir!

GERMANIA

Sir?

CICERO

And while you're walking guard duty in Jerusalem—and don't forget to keep an eye peeled for Zealots—I'm sure it will cheer you up to remember that your commander-in-chief is a Christian too. In fact, I once heard the emperor say that Jesus is his favorite political philosopher.

GERMANIA

What?!

PETRONIUS

*(frantically)* Sir!

CICERO

What did I say? *(All three freeze; lights out.)* My memory's not what it used to be.

### SCENE 1.13 APOLOGIZING FOR EVERYTHING

*(Quintus as Bush makes one of those video wills. To be delivered in the most absolutely sincerely abjectly sorrowfully apologetic manner possible. Quintus, in front of the green-screen, is wearing a green-screen-colored stocking mask with large holes for mouth and eyes. Live video of Quintus is mixed with slowed-down, partly transparent video footage of Bush from the 2003 State of the Union address.)*

#### QUINTUS

*(Turning camera on from in front and then backing up about 6 feet.)* Ok, is this on? Testing, one to three, testing, testing. Ok. *(Goes back to camera, rewinds, replays the foregoing segment, and then rewinds again and sets it to record.)* Hello everyone. I mean, goodbye. This is, this is my last will and testament. I leave everything to you. Everything. *(Takes a deep breath.)* Wow, I'm more nervous than I was for my State of the—my State of the Union—or state—my speech to the nation, whatever you want to call it, speech to the nation. Ok. This is a bit difficult to complain—explain. It's like this. When I was coming up, it was a dangerous world, it was us versus them, and it was clear who they were. Today we are not so sure who they are, but we know they're there. And I want to say, I'm sorry I don't have more to leave you. I'm sorry they underestimated me, they miscalculated me as a leader. I think we agree, the past is over. I'm sorry about it. The last chapter of the 20th—20th—the 21st century, most of us would rather forget. Sorry. I tried to have a foreign-handed—a foreign policy. I told them, you disarm, or we will. I'm sorry I let terrorists and rogue nations hold us hostile. I'm sorry there's no cave deep enough for America or dark enough to hide. I wanted to get the framework—the groundwork—not framework, the groundwork to discuss a framework for peace, to lay the—never mind that. It all has to do with the fact that more and more of our imports come from overseas, and I apologize for that. See, with the trade deficit I got kind of behind... sorry. I accepted some lousy bills out of the United Nations Senate, I tried to get an energy bill that encourages consumption. I'm—and about Enron and WorldCom and all those others, I'm sorry, I know you can't have it both ways. You can't take the high horse and then claim the low road. If you say you're going to do

something and don't do it, that's trustworthiness. And I'm sorry about the life of children living in, you know, the dark dungeons of the Internet. About racial profiling, which is illiterate children, sorry. And I'm sorry to say this but some people want the federal government controlling Social Security like it's some kind of federal program. I'm sorry. I know how hard it is for you to put food on your family. We ought to make the pie higher. Did I say I'm sorry about that? I'm sorry that expectations rise above that which is expected. I want anybody who can find work to be able to find work. Before finality has finally happened. Sorry. Sorry. I spent the tax refund, you know. See, I am a person who recognizes the fallacy of humans. Maybe you thought, maybe you hoped I'd have more to leave you. It was just inebriating what being president was all about then, I'm sorry, but there's not enough people in the system to take advantage of people like me. Sorry. Please listen to what has been said here, even though I wasn't here. I suspect hope is in the far distant future, if at all. And I'm sorry. *(pause)* You're on your own now. You gotta preserve. *(long pause)* Can someone *please* turn this thing off!?! *(He stands absolutely still as if waiting for someone to turn the camera off.)*

#### **SCENE 1.14 FANTASIA IN BLACK AND WHITE**

*Darkness, except for a lit rear-projection screen. Behind the screen we see two shadow figures in profile, facing away from each other (Petronius and Poppaea). They move back and forth erratically. They are both dead, though they don't know it yet; Petronius perhaps suspects it. They are waiting because they know that the unstoppable Empire, Roman or American, is on its way to rescue them, willy-nilly. From the Empire's perspective, they might as well be dead. The Empire is not brutal; it does not wish them either dead or alive; it is something worse, it is absolutely indifferent.*

#### **SHADOW PETRONIUS**

Have they come yet?

SHADOW POPPAEA

No.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

Are you sure?

SHADOW POPPAEA

Yes.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

We might have missed them?

SHADOW POPPAEA

No.

*Pause.*

SHADOW PETRONIUS

It's *called* a surgical strike.

SHADOW POPPAEA

They haven't come yet.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

What if they went by so fast we didn't notice them?

SHADOW POPPAEA

Wait. Just wait. They'll get here.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

They always come.

SHADOW POPPAEA

Count on it.

*Pause.*

SHADOW POPPAEA

*(calling)* Slave! *(Pause)* Slave! *(Pause)* Where is that slave? I need some wine.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

*You're* the slave.

SHADOW POPPAEA

*(sarcastically)* Ha, ha.

*Pause.*

SHADOW PETRONIUS

I'd like to be the emperor.

SHADOW POPPAEA

I'd be in Capri by now.

*Pause.*

SHADOW PETRONIUS

What if they don't come?

SHADOW POPPAEA

Bored?

SHADOW PETRONIUS

Cold.

*Pause.*

SHADOW PETRONIUS

*(pulling at his clothing)* I wish my wife would fix this damn hole.

SHADOW POPPAEA

Get a new toga.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

With what?

SHADOW POPPAEA

*(leaning down and peering at SHADOW PETRONIUS's torso about chest level)* It is pretty big.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

I told you.

SHADOW POPPAEA

I can see the aqueduct. *(reaching out)* Hey, I can put my hand right through.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

*(sharply, moving away)* Cut it out. *(Pause)* Are they coming yet?

SHADOW POPPAEA

*(leaning down as if using SHADOW PETRONIUS as a telescope)* I spy... I spy with my little eye... turn a little to the left... uh uh.

*Pause.*

SHADOW PETRONIUS

Is there blood? I'm afraid of blood.

SHADOW POPPAEA

Not any more.

SHADOW PETRONIUS

I guess we can wait a little longer.

—END—

*Notes*

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<sup>1</sup> "a society consisting of ... the government in person": James Madison, "The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection." *Federalist Papers* No. 10 (cont'd from No. 9). *The New York Packet*, Nov. 23, 1787.

<sup>2</sup> "a very extensive country... a number of small republics": "Centinel" No. 1. Oct. 5, 1787.

<sup>3</sup> "the administrators of every government ... balanced by those of a third": "Centinel" No. 1. Oct. 5, 1787.

<sup>4</sup> "a Republican or free government ... despotism will rise on its ruin": "Centinel" No. 1. Oct. 5, 1787.

<sup>5</sup> "the highest responsibility ... liable to be imposed on": "Centinel" No. 1. Oct. 5, 1787.

<sup>6</sup> "by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation": James Madison, "The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection." *Federalist Papers* No. 10 (cont'd from No. 9). *The New York Packet*, Nov. 23, 1787.

<sup>7</sup> "which derives all its powers ... for a limited period": James Madison, "The Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles." *Federalist Papers* No. 39. Jan. 16, 1788.

<sup>8</sup> "essential to such a government ... favored class": James Madison, "The Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles." *Federalist Papers* No. 39. Jan. 16, 1788.

<sup>9</sup> "two great points of difference ... may be extended": "The Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection." *Federalist Papers* No. 10 (cont'd from No. 9). *The New York Packet*, Nov. 23, 1787

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<sup>10</sup> "as society is produced by our wants so is government by our wickedness": Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*. 1776.

<sup>11</sup> "the proper function of government ... closest to the people": U.S. Republican Party Oath (2003).

<sup>12</sup> "equal rights equal justice ... investing in America": Elements from the platforms of the U.S. Republican and Democratic Parties, 2003 (mixed together).

<sup>13</sup> "The Thunder, Perfect Mind," trans. George W. MacRae. Online at the Gnostic Society Library, November 2002:  
<<http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/thunder.html>>.