

A Bridge Without A River

A Mild Encounter with Cosmic Horror on the Side of the Road

By Jacob Ethington

Contact:
Jacob Ethington
2010 Whitaker St.
Savannah, GA 31401
(810) 280-8007
jacobeth@comcast.net

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CHUCK, a burly man in his mid 40s

SETH, a wiry man in his mid 30s

TIMMY, a wiry man in his early 20s

SPECTER, a human bloodied and destroyed by a long fall, a prophet for the purging of violent men finding its purpose

SETTING

Side of the highway in mid-Michigan, present day

PRODUCTION NOTES

While the set design should be sparse as possible, the few set pieces should feel textured and rough, whether it's through the coarseness of a broken slab of concrete or littered wild grass yellowed by the summer sun. Also, while the Specter's design is obviously exaggerated to a point, the gore make-up should look realistic and disgusting. The final note on the Specter is that virtually any actor can be cast as the Specter. There are no specifications on gender, age, race, and so on. Do as you will.

Also, while the names of the scenes are never mentioned in dialogue by the characters, it is worth noting that they are all lyrics from the song "I Seen What I Saw" by the alternative country group 16 Horsepower, recorded in 1996 for the album *Sackcloth 'n' Ashes*, released by A&M. This is not essential to the plot. However, the song's lyrics inspired each scene in the play in one way or another. The song can be, and should be, used as inspiration accordingly.

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Politicians are the same all over.
They promise to build bridges even
when there are no rivers.

-Nikita Khrushchev

SCENE 1 - I SEEN WHAT I SAW

Setting: The stage is the side of a highway. A few clumps of wild grass, a slab of broken concrete, and some littered beer bottles on the ground mark out the implied space off to the side of the highway. The lighting is dark, but with strange highlights. The rest of the theater itself, namely the audience seating, is meant to represent a dried out riverbed nearby.

At Rise: A bloodied human with a bone sticking out of its left arm stands on stage in a spotlight to itself, the SPECTER. Its body is so mangled that it barely resembles a human. When it tries to speak, blood falls out of its mouth. It slowly looks up.

SPECTER

I was hoping my head would hit the ground first. If I jumped, you know. I wasn't sure where I was going to land, but dammit, it just had to be on my arm. A perfectly good left arm. I never had a good head, I was hoping that'd crack open first. Turns out, I cracked open all over. But mostly on my left arm. That cracked the most. My legs, my ribs, my spine, and eventually my head, all cracked too. My left arm first though. My left arm first. I wasn't sure if I wanted it to crack at all. I was standing on the edge, wondering what to do, and where to go. And then I saw you. You came up to me. And I thought it was so strange when you reached out your left hand, as if to shake. And we shook hands. Your left hand was so warm. I don't know what to think of you. I'd almost call you a friend. But I know better. Or I will know better.

In time.

(The spotlight goes off of the Specter as it seemingly vanishes from the stage. After the Specter has vanished, the lighting changes to a golden color, like the setting sun.

Two men, dressed in filthy construction clothing, walk towards the stage from the audience aisle. CHUCK, the older of the pair, is in excellent shape. The other man, SETH, is thin and wiry, carrying a six pack of beer bottles. As the men walk down the aisle, they crack open beer bottles and begin to speak.)

SETH

What a fuckin' faggot.

CHUCK

Who?

SETH

I didn't say who's a faggot, I said what a faggot. We both know who's a faggot-

CHUCK

Shut up.

(The two men get onto stage and plop themselves on the concrete slab.)

SETH

He's probably not even gonna show.

CHUCK

If he doesn't, then he doesn't. If he does, then at least try not to be an asshole.

SETH

Why?

CHUCK

Why what?

SETH

Why not be an asshole to the guy? Isn't he a college dropout or something-

CHUCK

And we weren't?

SETH

I don't know about you, but I'm not a college dropout. I wasn't dumb enough to go in the first place.

CHUCK

Just... Fuck it.

(The two men finally start drinking, Seth sipping, Chuck periodically gulping.)

SETH

Yep. Fuck it.

(As they continue to drink, a third man, also wearing a dirty construction outfit, enters from the audience, also carrying a six pack of beer. This is TIMMY, and he's the thinnest of the three men.)

TIMMY

(yelling)

Sorry I'm late.

SETH

Shit.

CHUCK

Shut the fuck up.

TIMMY

What? Did you guys say some-

CHUCK

Just bring the beer over, nice and easy.

(Timmy sits down on the slab with the three men.)

SETH

Told you he'd be late.

CHUCK

We're well aware of it Seth. Thank you. At least he got the right stuff.

TIMMY

I wasn't going to grab Rolling Rock anytime soon, not after what he said.

CHUCK

What did I say?

TIMMY

Huh?

CHUCK

What did I say?

TIMMY

Something along the lines of shitting in a man's mouth
tasting better than anything brewed outside of the state.

CHUCK

Close enough. Cheers.

*(Timmy pulls out a bottle and cracks it open. Chuck and Timmy
clink bottles. Seth reluctantly joins them.)*

SETH

Cheers.

TIMMY

You don't like me too much, right?

SETH

Right.

TIMMY

Why?

SETH

Cause you're a faggot.

TIMMY

Oh. ... Not to make a fine point of it, but I'm not gay-

SETH

I didn't say gay. Wouldn't give a fuck if you were gay. I've
known cocksuckers in this town my whole life, never bat an
eye. But it's the way you say things. Like, "not to make a
fine point of it." Just faggy shit. And your name... Jesus
man!

(Seth starts cackling.)

CHUCK

Did I say "try not to be an asshole"-

SETH

You did, and that advice went straight out the window.

(The three men take swigs in silence.)

TIMMY

You stole that joke.

CHUCK

Huh?

TIMMY

Not you. Seth. You stole that joke, about faggots and gays.

SETH

Yeah? I stole it?

TIMMY

Yeah. Louis CK. Does a joke about the difference between a gay and a fag.

CHUCK

Wait, you stole that one? You've been saying that for years! All this time?

SETH

All this time.

CHUCK

Huh.

(A pause. The three men take swigs.)

SETH

You like comedians?

TIMMY

Sometimes.

SETH

That's good enough for me. But tell me one thing: Have you listened to Andrew Dice Clay?

TIMMY

Who?

SETH

Godammit. Of course you don't know who he is. He was a god back in the day-

TIMMY

When was the day?

SETH

Huh?

TIMMY

Like, when you say "back in the day"-

SETH

Mid-80s to late-80s. Anyhow, he was brutal, just a mean guy. And I loved that. He had a bit that he built up over the years where he would take nursery rhymes and ruin them. Like... Hold on. Give me a minute...

CHUCK

Wasn't that the guy who had the hickory dickory dock-

SETH

(imitating Andrew Dice Clay)

"Hickory dickory dock, some chick was sucking my cock, The clock struck two, I dropped my goo, I dumped the bitch on the next block! OH!!"

(The joke bombs. Chuck doesn't even chuckle. Timmy just stares.)

SETH (CONT'D)

Figures. But that's comedy man.

TIMMY

I guess. I mean, that's kind of funny.

SETH

You should look up more of his rhymes. That one's all right, but they only get better from there.

(A pause. The three men take swigs.)

TIMMY

So... What do you guys do here? I mean, besides drink.

CHUCK

I mean, we drink. And we kick back, relax, unwind, all that jazz. And watch the sun go down.

(Chuck points out into a back corner of the theater where the "bridge" is.)

CHUCK (CONT'D)

See that bridge? The sun sets exactly in the middle of the bridge. Sun pours through the suspension cables. It's a good way to end the day after wading through shit.

(Chuck puts his hand down. Timmy leans forward to get a look at the "bridge.")

TIMMY

Wow... That's a beautiful bridge.

SETH

Of course you said beautiful.

TIMMY

Yep. I mean, look at the tension on the cables. Look at the angles for the supports. The way they hug the drop off. The symmetry of the whole thing. That's beautiful.

SETH

Hm. I can get behind that.

CHUCK

Same.

(A pause. The three men take swigs.)

SETH

Damn. I'm almost empty. Drained about half of it on the way here.

(Seth finishes the bottle off and tosses it.)

CHUCK

So, where you from Timmy?

TIMMY

Is this your "get to know me" exercise? Should I grab some name tags and a sharpie?

CHUCK

I guess it is. I mean, I'd like to think this is a bit different than that-

SETH

Chuck, you had to interview the kid, shouldn't you know where he's from?

TIMMY

His name is Chuck?

CHUCK

Wait, you didn't know my name? I hired you!

TIMMY

Yeah, you did. You never said your name and I kind of forgot to ask. I mean, the ad said just talked about the wrecking crew-

CHUCK

Did you know Seth's name?

TIMMY

I mean, yeah. Kind of announced himself when we were clearing the foyer of the syringes.

(The men take swigs. Chuck's bottle is empty. He tosses it. Chuck grabs a new bottle and cracks it open.)

CHUCK

Yeah. Those syringes were bad.

TIMMY

Yeah.

SETH

Oh shit. You bothered Chuck.

TIMMY

What?

CHUCK

He's right. You bothered me.

TIMMY

Oh. ... Sorry to hear that.

SETH

Ask him.

TIMMY

Ask him what?

SETH

Ask him what you did to bother him.

TIMMY

What did I do to bother Chuck?

SETH

That's a great question. Don't ask me though. Ask him.

TIMMY

I'm assuming this is a sort of hazing thing-

SETH

Honestly it's not. I have no idea what Chuck's about to say. Could be anything. I'm on the edge of my seat. Now ask.

(Pause. The three men take swigs. Timmy finishes his bottle. He doesn't toss it, but places it next to the slab, gently.)

TIMMY

What did I do to bother you?

CHUCK

You accepted an invite from a man you didn't know.

(Pause.)

SETH

Wait, that's it? I thought you were about to bust his balls, roast him, something!

CHUCK

You've done enough roasting. And I'm very serious. Look at me. I can snap a guy's body in half like a fuckin' twig. I look like a shady character. And you blindly accepted an invitation to the side of a highway to drink with that shady character.

TIMMY

I didn't go in blind. I met you.

CHUCK

If I met Hitler on the street I'd think he was an all right guy. I wouldn't know he was a sack of shit until I heard his name. For all you know, my name was Bin Laden. Luckily for you, it's just Chuck Greenwood. His name is Seth Matlock. And your name is Timmy... Timmy... Fuck! What's your last name again?

TIMMY

Bin Laden.

(Chuck and Seth scoot away from Timmy slightly.)

CHUCK

No fuckin' way.

TIMMY

No fuckin' way indeed. It's actually Henderson. Timmy Henderson.

SETH

Oh thank Christ.

CHUCK

I'm not gonna lie, you got me. Hell of a straight face.

(Pause. Chuck and Seth take a swig, Timmy remains without a bottle. All of the men take turns opening their mouths as if to say something, but nothing comes out. Timmy glances towards the bridge, squints, than jumps up, pointing at the bridge.)

TIMMY

Holy shit, is that guy gonna jump!?

(Chuck and Seth take their time standing up.)

SETH

So, whose this week's contestant?

TIMMY

Contestant?

CHUCK

It's a joke. But not. Don't mind his joke though. Someone's threatening to jump.