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**An American Book of the Dead\***

**The Game Show†**

**by Paul Mullin**

Cast Size of 13 - Multi-ethnic, non-gender specific

**Synopsis:** Plucked from the audience, three contestants live and die their way through a myriad of American incarnations as they compete for the ultimate prize, perfect enlightenment. The entire history of the United States becomes the playing field, from Jamestown to the World Trade Center attack and beyond, as they struggle towards their individual goals. In between lives, the contestants visit the bardo realms, wacky worlds between death and rebirth where Stonewall Jackson and Harriet Tubman are husband and wife; and people reincarnate as corporations. When things seem like they couldn't get any weirder, as the contestants start to be born as each other and the understanding begins to dawn that enlightenment is now here and nowhere; a trillion light-years and just a blink away.

**Love in the Insecurity Zone**

**by Mike Folie**

3 males, 3 Females

**Synopsis:** In a future U.S. characterized by Security Zones, personal bar code tattoos, and armed commuters, Gayle finds life either boring or terrifying. Her mood is improved by a sudden romance with Hank, a secretive government agent on a mission to find very happy women. When Hank meets Gayle's sister, the perennially happy Pearl, he spirits both women off to Washington, D.C., where they become entangled in a sinister government plot to bottle happiness.

# MAIN DRAG

BY JASON AARON GOLDBERG

## Characters:

JEFF- A young man on his way home.

FLOYD- The tow truck driver. Older and over weight.

EARL- The napping guy. He has been there for quite some time.

HOSS- The owner of Bartum Tire and Breaks.

JERRY- HOSS' right hand man.

KUTT- (Pronounced "Cut") The Mechanic. A truly strong man.

BOB- A frequent customer.

ROBIN- HOSS' daughter. Young and vivacious.

*(The stage is a box set. The back wall has a counter where orders are placed. Directly behind the counter is the door to the garage. Above the counter is a sign reading "Credit Cards Accepted Here." Behind the counter Stage Left is the door to the bathroom. Stage Right is the swinging door to the parking lot. Stage left is a wall of tires and a door leading to an unknown area. The rest of the stage consists of chairs and small tables full of magazines. There is a soda machine and a candy machine Down Stage Left.)*

## SCENE 1

*(EARL is sleeping in a chair down stage. No one else is around. He sleeps for a few moments. JEFF enters the shop from outside. He is a young man, dressed casually. He looks around the shop for someone to help him.)*

JEFF: Hello? Is there anyone here? *(Looking at EARL.)* Excuse me? Do you know if there is anyone here? Hey man... are you dead? This is great.

*(FLOYD enters.)*

FLOYD: Where's everybody at?

JEFF: I don't know.

FLOYD: Well hell, that's not like these boys. You just wait here, I'm sure they'll be round. I'll go unload your car from the truck.

JEFF: Be careful all right. Try not to scratch it.

FLOYD: Be sure to scratch it, you got it.

JEFF: No, no. I said—

FLOYD: I heard what you said. You gotta lighten up kid.

JEFF: There are people here, right?

FLOYD: I'm sure they'll be round.

*(FLOYD exits. JEFF stands at the counter waiting for someone. After a moment JERRY enters from the garage. He is a little man with glasses and seems to drink a lot of coffee. He appears to be the only clean person in the shop.)*

JERRY: Well hello there young man. What can we do for you?

JEFF: My car broke down about 25 miles outside of town.

JERRY: That is unfortunate.

JEFF: Yeah. Anyway, I don't know if it overheated or what.

JERRY: Well, we can take a look at it. It's only \$55 for us to check it out.

JEFF: \$55! Just to look at it.

JERRY: Yep.

JEFF: It cost me \$48 just to tow it here.

JERRY: That is unfortunate.

JEFF: I guess I gotta have it done.

JERRY: Okay, it's gonna be about an hour.

JEFF: An hour... before you even get to my car!?

JERRY: That's right.

JEFF: There aren't even any other cars out there.

JERRY: Just because you don't see any cars, doesn't mean they aren't out there.

JEFF: Right. (*JEFF waits a beat trying to figure JERRY out.*) Well I guess I'll get some lunch.

JERRY: Oh, you lookin' for a good place to eat? Here's what 'cha do. (*JERRY comes out from behind the counter and points out the front door at areas to eat.*) Now, right down there on the right is the El Rancho. It was closed down for about six years, but just reopened. They got great Mexican food. Across the street from them, you see that sign that says Café... that's the Café. Prices are real good and they got great Mexican food. Now if you go up the other way you got Ed's. Ed's is great, I eat there quite a bit and they got pretty good Chinese American food and great Mexican food.

JEFF: You like Mexican food a bit don't ya?

JERRY: Ah, Mexican food is great. But, Ed's there, got pretty good Chinese American food too.

JEFF: I'll check it out.

JERRY: We'll be right here waitin' for ya when ya get done.

(*As JEFF goes to leave, FLOYD bumps into him and gives him the keys to his car.*)

FLOYD: All right there young man. Hope your day turns out a little better.

JERRY: Oh, hey there Floyd. How ya been?

FLOYD: Pretty good there Jerry. How's you and the wife?

JERRY: She still got that little problem, but the doctor says things are lookin' better. Oh, young man. We are gonna need your keys to look at your car.

JEFF: Oh right. Don't lose 'em and if you can hurry things along at all I would really appreciate it. I'm kind of in a hurry.

JERRY: We'll see what we can do.

*(JEFF gives the keys to JERRY and exits.)*

JERRY: So Floyd what brings you 'round here?

FLOYD: I just towed in that youngster there.

JERRY: What youngster would that be?

FLOYD: That one there, that just left.

JERRY: Oh, right, right.

FLOYD: I ought to be getting on.

JERRY: Where ya off to?

FLOYD: Who knows?

*(BLACKOUT.)*

## **SCENE 2**

*(JEFF is sitting in a chair by the door. He is very unhappy. EARL is still sleeping. HOSS enters from the garage; he is covered with grease. He sees JEFF and gives him the once over.)*

HOSS: Hey boy, you been helped?

JEFF: Yeah, they said they were gonna look at it.

HOSS: Who's they?

JEFF: I don't remember his name.

HOSS: You sure you got the right place?

JEFF: Yeah, he was a little guy with glasses.

HOSS: I don't know nobody here that looks like that.

*(JERRY enters from the garage.)*

JEFF: That's him. That's they guy.

HOSS: Oh, you mean Jerry. Yeah I guess he's kind of a little guy.

JERRY: Well hello there young man. Did you have a good lunch?

JEFF: No I didn't. I spent an hour trying to find a place that takes credit cards. I spent all my cash on the tow truck. I only have four bucks on me.

JERRY: That is unfortunate.

HOSS: How the hell you expect to pay for getting your car fixed?

JEFF: You guys take credit cards.

HOSS: Who told you that?

JEFF: The sign right there says you take them.

HOSS: The machine is broke.

JEFF: You gotta be kidding.

JERRY: Oh no, Hoss, we got it fixed. Credit Cards are fine.

HOSS: That right?

JERRY: Yea, the fella came in last week and fixed it.

HOSS: I guess we take 'em then.

JERRY: You say you didn't get any lunch?

JEFF: No, no place around here takes credit.

JERRY: We got a candy machine over there in the corner. It's got some good stuff in it.

HOSS: Got that there pop machine too.

JERRY: You said you only had four dollars. You should be able to eat fine on that.

JEFF: Better than nothing I guess. *(JEFF puts a dollar in the candy machine and gets out a bag of chips. He puts a dollar in the soda machine and gets out a soda. He opens the soda and takes a swig. He spits it all over.)* This is warm!

HOSS: Refrigeration's broke on it.

JEFF: You're a mechanic. Can't you fix it?

JERRY: That's a rental. We're not allowed to tinker with it.

JEFF: Right. Well, is my car ready?

HOSS: Which one's yours?

JEFF: It's a blue Ford.

*(HOSS looks into the garage.)*

HOSS: I don't see no blue Ford.

JEFF: What? It has to be there. *(JEFF runs up to the counter and looks through the window in the door that leads into the garage.)* It's right there.

*(HOSS looks again.)*

HOSS: Oh, that blue Ford.

JEFF: Is it done?

HOSS: Don't know.

JERRY: Let me go check and see.

*(JERRY exits into the garage. HOSS lights a cigarette.)*

HOSS: What happened to the car?

JEFF: I don't know.

HOSS: Don't you know nothin' bout cars?

JEFF: Not really.

HOSS: Well what'd you do to it?

JEFF: I didn't do anything to it. The check engine light came on. I pulled over, it started smoking, and something was dripping from under the car.

HOSS: Now that don't sound too good.

*(JERRY enters from the garage.)*

JERRY: Okay.

JEFF: Is it fixed?

JERRY: No. But we can fix it.

JEFF: What's wrong with it?

JERRY: We're not sure yet. But, we got our best guy out there workin' on it.

JEFF: And you have no idea what is wrong with it?

JERRY: He said he should know soon. He's just looking at one more thing.

*(KUTT enters from the garage. He is totally covered in grease.)*

KUTT: All right. After careful calculations I've discovered the root of the problem.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

### **SCENE 3.**

*(JEFF is sitting in the same chair by the door. He is clearly frustrated. BOB enters from outside. HOSS is behind the counter with JERRY.)*

HOSS: Hey 'der Bob.

JERRY: Bob, how the heck are ya?

BOB: Oh, you know.

HOSS: I hear ya.

JERRY: That's too bad.

BOB: What can you do?

HOSS: Ain't that the truth.

JERRY: It'll all work out. What can we do for you?

BOB: Need you to do that thing to the thing.

HOSS: The one thing or the other thing?

BOB: The first thing.

HOSS: No problem.

JERRY: Just have a seat there Bob, gonna be bout an hour. *(BOB goes and sits across from JEFF. HOSS exits into the garage.)* Now, young man. Come take a look at this.

*(JEFF goes to the counter. JERRY shows him a clip board with an order sheet on it.)*

JEFF: What's this?

JERRY: This here is what it's gonna take to fix up your car. Including what we already got, the parts and labor, the grand total is gonna be \$357.35.

JEFF: What's wrong with it?

JERRY: Well, you cracked your water pump and that's what caused the fluid under the car and the over heating. We already sent Kutt out to get the replacement water pump.

JEFF: But \$350 bucks? It's only a water pump.

JERRY: We don't have to fix it. I understand it is quite a bit of money.

JEFF: Well, I gotta get home.

JERRY: That is unfortunate.

JEFF: Just do what you have to do to fix it. I have to get out of here as soon as possible.

*(EARL wakes up and walk behind the counter into the bathroom.)*

JERRY: Hey, where you goin'? What are you doin'?

JEFF: Who is that guy?

JERRY: Were working on his car.

JEFF: How longs he been here?

JERRY: Not quite sure. Couple day's maybe?

JEFF: Couple days? I can't be here for a couple of days. I need to get back to the city as soon as possible.

JERRY: We're workin' on it now young man.

*(KUTT enters from outside with a box in his hand. HOSS enters from the garage smoking a cigarette.)*

KUTT: Got the part.

HOSS: Which cars that for?

KUTT: Blue Ford.

HOSS: 'Bout how longs that gonna take?

KUTT: I'm not 100% sure, but no more than a few hours.

JEFF: Jesus Christ.

*(JEFF pulls out a cigarette from his jacket and lights it.)*

HOSS: Hey boy. You can't smoke that in here.

JEFF: What?

HOSS: *(With cigarette dangling from his mouth.)* I said you can't be smokin' that in here.

JEFF: But you're smoking.

HOSS: I own this place. When you pay the bills you can smoke all you want in here. Till that day comes, you put that butt out.

JEFF: Can I smoke outside?

HOSS: You can smoke wherever you please. Just not in here. *(JEFF goes outside the front door and continues to smoke. HOSS screams from the counter area.)* You take that butt out onto the curb. Get it off my sidewalk.

*(BLACKOUT.)*

#### **SCENE 4.**

*(The stage is quiet. There is no one in the chairs and no one behind the counter. After a moment EARL enters from the garage with a screwdriver. He walks downstage and with the screwdriver opens the candy machine; he takes out a bag of chips. He also opens the soda machine and steals a soda. He takes a seat near a small table. He pours the chips on the table and opens the soda. He begins to eat and drink in peace. The sound of the chips crunching is luminous. After a few moments of eating we hear the toilet flush. JEFF comes out of the bathroom. At the same time KUTT enters from the garage. He carries a water-pump and another unknown part. KUTT and JEFF stare at each other for a moment.)*

JEFF: Are those from my car?

KUTT: Indeed they are.

JEFF: I thought it was just the water-pump.

KUTT: You can never be too sure.

JEFF: What's that other part?

KUTT: Don't worry about it.

JEFF: Hey man, it's from my car!

KUTT: I don't appreciate your tone.

JEFF: Is that right!?

KUTT: That's right.

JEFF: Well I don't appreciate being stuck in this po-dunk town for hours on end while you stupid red-necks fuck with my car!

KUTT: I resent that comment.

JEFF: That's too bad... I can't help that you are a bunch of red-necks.

KUTT: No, I resent that you think we are F-ing with your car.

JEFF: "F-ing" with my car?

KUTT: That's correct. I am a very good mechanic and I would never "F" with anyone's car.

JEFF: Did you go to mechanic college or something?

KUTT: As a matter of fact I did attend a mechanics university. I was trained very well there and I do not "F" with automobiles.

JEFF: Would you just say fuck.

KUTT: No I will not.

JEFF: Why not?

KUTT: I believe using foul language is an excuse for lesser intelligence.

JEFF: What the fuck are you trying to say?

KUTT: I am saying that people use foul language, such as the “F” word because they do not have the intelligence to use other language in it’s place.

*(JEFF is baffled by this conversation.)*

JEFF: Fuck you man!

KUTT: Thank you for proving my point.

JEFF: You don’t sound like everyone else around here. What are you doing in this shit hole place?

KUTT: I’m a mechanic... this is a repair shop. The two go hand in hand.

JEFF: I know that. But you sound like a smart guy. You could be some place better than this.

KUTT: I choose to be here.

JEFF: But there is nothing in this town. Why would you choose to be stuck in this place?

KUTT: You misunderstand. I do not choose to be stuck here. I’m not stuck. I made a choice to be here.

JEFF: This is too much. I need a smoke.

KUTT: Be sure to go out on the curb. You don’t want Hoss catching you smoking out front.

JEFF: Yeah, yeah.

*(JEFF exits out the front door. KUTT goes back into the garage. EARL stands up as if to say something.)*

*(BLACKOUT.)*

**SCENE 5.**

*(JEFF is pacing the room; he has a cigarette behind his ear. HOSS and JERRY are behind the counter going over some paperwork. EARL is watching JEFF pace. JEFF is watching HOSS and JERRY waiting for them to say something to him about his car. He is growing impatient. HOSS looks up to JEFF.)*

HOSS: Don't you be thinking about lighting that smoke in here.

JEFF: I'm not.

HOSS: You better not.

JEFF: I said I wasn't going to light it.

HOSS: Good.

JEFF: Is my car done yet?

JERRY: We're workin' on it young man.

JEFF: But is it done yet?

JERRY: Like I said, we're workin' on it.

*(Just then BOB enters from outside.)*

HOSS: Hey 'der Bob.

BOB: How you Hoss?

HOSS: No complaints.

BOB: Good, good.

JERRY: Got your car ready for ya Bob.

BOB: Real good. Fixed that thing?

JERRY: Sure did. No problem.

JEFF: What is this shit?!

JERRY: Excuse me young man?

JEFF: What the hell is this? He came in way after me and his car is done?

HOSS: Don't you get rowdy with me.

JEFF: Well why is his car done?

HOSS: Because we finished it.

BOB: Is there a problem?

JERRY: No...no problem Bob. This young man is just waiting for his car.

BOB: Gotcha.

JEFF: Answer my question! Why is his car done and mine isn't?

JERRY: Now son, that's just the way it is. Bob is a good customer.

JEFF: What the hell is that?! You don't think I'm a good customer?

JERRY: Well this is your first time here. How can you be a good customer if you've never been here before?

BOB: I'm just gonna be goin'.

JEFF: No! No! You can't leave!

BOB: No, I can leave and that's what I'm gonna do.

JEFF: What is going on here? What is wrong with you fucking people?

HOSS: Now look here boy! You sit down. Your car is gonna be ready when it's ready. We're workin' on it. Bob here is a good man and you got no right to be yellin' at him. I think you should apologize.

JEFF: No.

HOSS: Do you want your car?

JEFF: Yes.

HOSS: Then apologize.

JERRY: He's got you there young man.

JEFF: Stop calling me young man!

HOSS: Apologize.

JEFF: Look! I have to get home. I have a very important appointment and you people are holding me up.

HOSS: Apologize.

JEFF: I don't have time to dick around in this town for days on end waiting for my car to be fixed like this guy. (*Pointing to EARL.*)

HOSS: Apologize!!

JEFF: Fine! Fine. Sir, I apologize for yelling at you. I certainly didn't mean anything by it. I've just been waiting...

BOB: Oh, that's all right young man. Apology accepted. You look hungry. Can I bring you something to eat?

JEFF: I don't have any cash.

BOB: That's fine. My wife Bonnie is at home cookin' up some supper. I'll bag some of it up and bring it on down to ya. You look like you've been put out enough.

JEFF: Well, thank you that would be great.

BOB: No problem. I'll be back in a few.

(*BOB exits.*)

JERRY: Well that was awful nice of Bob.

HOSS: Now you see there boy. You was shoutin' at that man and he offered to bring you somethin' to eat. Now go have a seat and enjoy your supper when Bob brings it to ya.

*(HOSS and JERRY exit into the garage. EARL gets up and goes to the door after BOB. He raises his hand in the air as if to get BOB'S attention; hoping that he can get some food as well.)*

*(BLACKOUT.)*

### **SCENE 6.**

*(JEFF sits at a table in the lobby eating chicken, corn on the cob, and biscuits. He is inhaling the food while BOB, HOSS, and EARL watch him.)*

BOB: Slow down there boy. Chew your food or you gonna choke.

JEFF: Thank you very much; I was starving.

HOSS: Why ain't you go get somethin' to eat before.

JEFF: I tried. I don't have any cash on me remember.

*(EARL signals JEFF to see if it is okay to steal one of his biscuits. JEFF nods and EARL takes them both. KUTT enters from the garage.)*

KUTT: Hey Hoss?

*(HOSS goes over to KUTT. They begin to talk quietly. They point to JEFF a few times. KUTT exits back into the garage.)*

HOSS: Well hey there boy. Kutt tells me that your car is just about done. No need to thank us for stayin' late.

*(Just at that moment a beautiful young woman enters the front door. She is about the same age as JEFF. She has a way about her that makes her look like she is walking on air. JEFF notices her immediately. The young woman wears hospital garb; she is ROBIN, HOSS' daughter.)*

ROBIN: Dad, are you ready to go?

HOSS: Just a few minutes there darlin'. We gotta wait for this young man's car to get done.

ROBIN: Why is it taking so long?

HOSS: Cause it took us a long time to fix it.

ROBIN: Dad, I'm dying of hunger. I'm gonna go get something to eat.

*(JEFF stands up.)*

JEFF: Um... if you're hungry... I have plenty of food.

ROBIN: No thanks.

JEFF: No... really. Bob's wife made all this wonderful chicken. There is more than enough here. Help yourself. I insist.

*(ROBIN walks over to JEFF and inspects the chicken.)*

ROBIN: I hate to break it to you but that is from "Charlie's Chicken."

*(JEFF looks at BOB.)*

BOB: What?

ROBIN: Bob?

BOB: Okay, I finished Bonnie's on the way over. Stopped at "Charlie's" before I came back.

JEFF: Well it's still good. Please, if you're hungry.

ROBIN: Well, how much longer is it going to be dad?

HOSS: Not too long.

*(HOSS exits into the garage. JEFF pulls a chair over so that ROBIN can sit down. She hesitates a moment and then sits.)*

JEFF: Would you like a leg, wing, breast... I mean...

ROBIN: I'll just take a wing until I can go get something else.

JEFF: Would you like a warm soda from the machine?

ROBIN: Thanks, but no. That machine is about five years old.

JEFF: That explains quite a bit. Would you like me to get you a glass of water?

ROBIN: I'm fine.

*(BOB exits into the bathroom. Only EARL remains with JEFF and ROBIN. He quietly watches them, gnawing on his biscuits. JEFF and ROBIN make uncomfortable conversation.)*

JEFF: So... do you like the chicken?

ROBIN: It's not the best in town.

JEFF: Oh... I see you are wearing hospital clothes. Are you a doctor?

ROBIN: Not yet.

JEFF: Not yet? Are you a nurse or something?

ROBIN: I'm a first year med-student.

JEFF: Wow. That's just as good as a doctor.

ROBIN: Not really.

JEFF: Still... that is really something. Do you like it?

ROBIN: You ask a lot of questions.

JEFF: Cut me a little slack. I've been here for a while. Unscheduled layover.

ROBIN: Most of them are.

*(KUTT starts to enter from the garage. He notices JEFF and ROBIN and stops. He can see something is brewing.)*

JEFF: What do you mean?

ROBIN: It's a small town. I figured you weren't from here.

JEFF: Yeah. So... do you like it?

ROBIN: Well, I'd rather be training at a big hospital somewhere, but someone has to take care of my mom and dad.

JEFF: So, Hoss is your dad?

ROBIN: Yeah.

JEFF: He's quite a guy.

ROBIN: Don't let him hear you say that. He doesn't like when people talk about him.

JEFF: He doesn't seem to like a lot of things.

ROBIN: He's a good man. You would be the same if you'd never been more than fifty miles outside of this town.

*(A toilet flushes, KUTT ducks back into the garage, and BOB exits from the bathroom. His pants are not buttoned and he is zipping them up and buckling his belt. It is a bit of a struggle.)*

BOB: Whew! I'll tell you what. I love my wife's chicken, but it runs right threw me.

ROBIN: Thank you for that Bob.

BOB: Oh, sorry there Robin. I didn't mean to be rude.

ROBIN: That's okay. I'll let it go this time.

*(HOSS enters from the garage with KUTT and JERRY.)*

JERRY: Well young man, your car is all done.

JEFF: What?

HOSS: You heard him boy. We done finished it.

JEFF: Well... um... thank you.

*(HOSS pulls a nasty, dirty water pump out from under the counter. It is JEFF'S old pump.)*

HOSS: We like to give the old parts back to the person so they know we ain't scammin' 'em.

JEFF: That's fine. I'll pass on that. I trust you.

HOSS: *(With a tone of sarcasm and bitterness.)* I bet you do.

*(KUTT stops JEFF before he reaches the counter to pay. He knows JEFF has some kind of feelings for ROBIN and speaks very pointedly.)*

KUTT: You might want to go out there and check it. Just make sure everything is the way it should be. You wouldn't want to break down again.

JEFF: Oh, right. I should do that.

KUTT: I pulled it out to the front.

JEFF: Thanks.

HOSS: Hey boy, don't you be takin' off without paying.

JEFF: I won't.

*(JEFF exits out the front door.)*

HOSS: Darlin', what are you doin' over there? Was that boy botherin' you?

ROBIN: No dad. He let me have some of his chicken while I waited for you.

HOSS: You sure he wasn't botherin' you?

ROBIN: Yes dad.

HOSS: Good. Let me just grab a few things and we'll be on our way.

ROBIN: All right.

*(HOSS exits into the garage and JEFF comes back inside.)*

JEFF: Um... it's making a pinging sound now.

*(HOSS bolts back into the room.)*

HOSS: What the hell did you say?

JEFF: It's making a thumping noise, or a ping, or click... or something. It's a noise.

HOSS: I didn't hear no pinging-clicking-thumping noise when we tested it.

JEFF: I'm sorry. I don't know what it is.

JERRY: Well, we will just pull it back into the garage and take a look at it.

KUTT: That's no problem.

HOSS: Son of a bitch. Bob go get some more of that chicken would ya?

BOB: Sure thing Hoss. Keeps Bonnie of my back tonight.

HOSS: Let me get you some cash.

JEFF: *(To ROBIN)* I guess I am going to be here a while longer. Would you mind keeping me company?

*(BLACKOUT.)*