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Screwups: Little Plays About Big Mistakes

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SCREWUPS
LITTLE PLAYS ABOUT BIG MISTAKES
BY JUSTIN WARNER

PLAYS

HEAD GAMES: In ancient Judea, Herod returns with the ultimate gift for Salomé: the Head of John the Baptist. But maybe he should have kept the receipt.

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CAST BREAKDOWN

It is possible to perform SCREWUPS with a cast as small as 7: (4M, 3W)

Male 1 – 30's - Herod/The Reading Man/Jack

Male 2 – 40's - Ed/Voice/Eugene Grendel

Male 3 – 30's-40's - Grant/Mysterious Stranger/Vito

Male 4 – 20's - Mike/Brad/Robbie (quick change between the latter two roles)

Female 1 – 20's - Salomé/Marcy/Jennifer

Female 2 – 30's-40's - Herodias/Sal/2nd voice/Cheryl

Female 3 – 30's-40's – Sally/Librarian/Linda

Maximum cast is 22 (12M, 10W)

HEAD GAMES

Characters

SALOMÉ, a beautiful and over-privileged young maiden

HEROD ANTIPAS, her uncle and stepfather, Tetrarch of Judea

HERODIAS, her mother, Herod's wife

(A solarium in King Herod's palace, circa 30 A.D. SALOMÉ, about 16, effortlessly beautiful, is reclining on a plush chaise lounge, reading a magazine called "TimeOut Judea." She eats from a selection of tea cakes, pastries, and other goodies laid out on a coffee table.)

(HEROD, mid 30's-early 40's, enters. He is disheveled and bloodied, but he keeps his spirits high. He has a sword in his belt. He carries a wicker basket, sealed with a lid, that contains something about the size and weight of a bowling ball.)

HEROD: Ahem. *(No response)* Hello there. *(No response.)*
Salomé!

SALOMÉ: Uncle Herod! You're back! *(A beat.)* Did you get my present?

HEROD: Yes, well, I ran into a few complications and it took quite a bit of effort to pull it off but... here it is. Just like I promised. *(He holds out the basket toward her)* The head of John the Baptist.

SALOMÉ: Oh, good! Just put it right there on the table.

(A beat.)

HEROD: Excuse me?

SALOMÉ: Put it right there on the table, next to the snack tray. *(A beat. HEROD hesitates)* Go ahead.

HEROD: Um...okay.

(He sets it down on the coffee table, awkwardly shifting some of the cakes out of the way.)

SALOMÉ: Watch out, don't crush the bear claws. *(Noticing the basket)* Weren't you going to bring it on a plate or something?

HEROD: I tried a bunch of different plates but to be honest it doesn't really stay put. These things have a tendency to roll.

(He finds a spot for the basket and steps back.)

SALOMÉ: That's weird. Did you try flattening out the bottom?

HEROD: Flattening... the bottom?

SALOMÉ: You know, with a knife.

HEROD: *(At a loss)* Um...

SALOMÉ : Nevermind, I can fix it later. *(She returns to her magazine. Herod continues to wait, dumbstruck.)* Can you believe they put Caiaphas in the Top Ten Most Eligible Pharisees? It's like, hel-lo, the man's as queer as a three-denarii coin. *(Notices Herod is still waiting.)* What?

HEROD: You're welcome?

SALOMÉ: Oh, Uncle Herod, I'm sorry. Thanks for picking this up for me. *(Pats the basket.)* You're a sweetie-pie.

(She returns to her magazine. Silence. Herod waits. No response.)

HEROD: Aren't you even going to *look* at it?

SALOMÉ: Well, not before dinner. I don't want to *totally* spoil my appetite. *(A beat. She takes another bite of pastry.)* I know if I even *look* at it I won't be able to think about anything else.

HEROD: Okay, I can appreciate that... but...

SALOMÉ: But...?

HEROD: I guess I thought you'd be a little more... *demonstrative*.

SALOMÉ: What do you want, another dance? Five of my veils are still at the cleaners.

HEROD: I went through a lot of trouble to get that.

SALOMÉ : Of course you did.

HEROD: You put me in a really awkward position.

SALOMÉ: If you didn't want me to have it...

HEROD: That's not the point! You did your dance of the seven veils, everyone loved it, and I gave you my solemn oath in front of the whole court that you could have anything you wanted, didn't I? Didn't I?

SALOMÉ: That's what you said. So I don't get...

HEROD: It's just that this was kind of a *tall order* and under the circumstances, I think I deserve a little more appreciation for keeping my word!

SALOMÉ: Okay, okay! (*Vaguely sing-song*) Thank you, Uncle Herod, for the head of John the Baptist. It was very thoughtful of you and I *really* appreciate it. Really really really. Is that enough?

HEROD: (*Unsure*) Fine. (*Another pause. SALOMÉ returns to her magazine.*) So you're just going to leave it there? On the table?

SALOMÉ: What's the big deal? It'll keep for at least a week. And believe me, it won't be around that long.

HEROD: What do you mean?

SALOMÉ: Trust me: I could put away one of those babies in fifteen minutes on an empty stomach. (*Pause. HEROD backs away slowly.*) What?

HEROD: You're a monster!

SALOMÉ: Oh come on, it's not even that big.

HEROD: I just had no idea... I mean, when you asked me to bring it to you that was bad enough... but the idea that you'd actually *eat* it...

SALOMÉ: Well, what did you *think* I was going to do – use it as a doorstep? (*Beat. A shift.*) Oh, I get it. Don't worry, you can have as much as you want. I'll share.

BUM STEER

Characters

ED, fortyish, a big eater

SALLY, his wife, a big talker

(A casual dinner party, after the meal. ED and SALLY are seated, facing the audience, having cheesecake and coffee. They are in a living room, not at a dining table. Virtually all of their dialogue is directed outward, toward the audience, as if we were the other guests at the party. Sally is wide-eyed, cheerful, and very friendly. She might wear a sweater with glitter, sequins, or some kind of puffy, raised design on it. She laughs constantly while she talks, especially in awkward moments. Ed is robust and affable, neither strapping nor slovenly. He is definitely not a Jabba-the-Hutt-like behemoth. He smiles and chuckles too, though not quite as vibrantly as his wife. He would not necessarily be talking quite so much on his own accord. They both speak briskly, and their sentences overlap without hesitation.)

(Sally has a thin sliver of cheesecake. She has barely made a dent in it. Ed has a grotesquely thick piece, of which he has already eaten quite a bit. As the lights come up, Sally takes a microscopic bite of her cheesecake. One wonders how she can actually taste it. Ed shovels his in, forkful by heaping forkful, without restraint.)

SALLY: This cheesecake is wonderful. Isn't it, Ed?

ED: *(Mouth full)* Fabulous.

SALLY: Look at him go. I don't know how he does it. If I ate like that I'd weigh four hundred pounds.

ED: There she goes again. She's one of these low-fat fanatics.

SALLY: I have to be. Fat is everywhere.

ED: *(Another forkful)* Fat is good.

SALLY: Maybe for you. I have to watch my figure.

ED: Don't worry, I'm watching it for you. *(He gives her knee a playful squeeze. Both laugh affectionately, but outward, to the other guests, not to each other.)*

SALLY: It takes a lot of willpower, being married to him. He's such a big eater.

ED: (*Eating*) I like food.

SALLY: He likes food. You don't know the half of it. Remember when we went to that restaurant?

ED: (*No pause*) The Carnivore Corral.

SALLY: The Carnivore Corral. You know, carnivore, like meat-eater. Because it was a steak house, right? So they put Carnivore right up there in the name.

ED: And Corral. That's also a steak word.

SALLY: Right. Because corrals are where you keep

ED: the steer.

SALLY: The steer. Before they chop 'em up and turn 'em into little steaks. So this is a serious steak place, right, just from the name of it. Ed picked it out.

ED: It was my turn to pick.

SALLY: We take turns picking restaurants for our anniversary. Usually I pick someplace nice like the Olive Garden.

ED: She likes the cheesecake there.

SALLY: It's so rich I can only have a couple bites. But on our anniversary, what the heck, I get it. Ed eats what I don't finish.

ED: Last year we took it home and she ate it later.

SALLY: (*Laughing through embarrassment*) Shh! (*Outward*) Just this once, I took it home. I hardly ate anything for dinner. I was hungry in the middle of the night so I had some.

ED: (*Laughing*) I come downstairs and she's hunched over the kitchen counter, scarfing down this huge hunk of cheesecake like a starving animal. She didn't even have a fork. She was just shoveling it in with her bare hands.

(Pause. Ed backs off slightly, vaguely aware that he's said something inappropriate. Sally is embarrassed but keeps smiling.)

SALLY: *(Outward)* It was really good cheesecake. *(Laughs. Indicating the cheesecake she has now:)* Kind of like this. *(Another molecule-sized bite. Reacts as if she just snorted a thick line of coke.)* Wow. Sugar rush.

ED: Back to the steakhouse...

SALLY: Right. So this year Ed decides to go to the Carnivore Corral. I hardly ever eat steak, myself, but this was his year to pick, so what could I do? We go in and the place is just crazy.

ED: Tell them about the antlers.

SALLY: I'm getting to the antlers, honey, let me finish. We went in and I asked where we could hang our coats, and they pointed to the wall and there were these

ED: Antlers.

SALLY: *(As if the word hasn't been mentioned yet)* great big antlers. Like on a steer.

ED: Everything in the place was cattle-themed.

SALLY: The seats were made of cowhide. Black and white spots. I felt like I was sitting on a real cow.

ED: And the waiters. With the numbers.

SALLY: All the waiters had numbers, *branded* on the backs of their shirts.

ED: When the orders were ready they'd ring this cowbell.

SALLY: You've got cow on the seats, and cow on the menu, so of course they use a cow *bell*. *(Laughs)*

ED: It was a neat-looking place. *(Very brief pause.)* Of course, the dinner was another story.

MICROCOSM

Characters

GRANT, a research scientist

MARCY, his student assistant

SAL, a brash, tough-talking salmonella bacterium (female)

MIKE, an earnest, nervous young microbe

(A medical research laboratory. GRANT, a senior scientist, peers through a microscope. He is fiftyish, bald, with a severe expression, and a forehead that's wrinkled from decades of tension. MARCY, a graduate student, preps other slides. She is almost gratingly cheerful. She can't help glancing over at GRANT, who seems very absorbed in his work. GRANT tends to wince whenever MARCY opens her mouth.)

(Long pause before first line.)

GRANT: This is a total wasteland. *(He backs away from the scope in disgust)* Look at this. There's nothing here!

(MARCY peers into the scope.)

MARCY: *(With great pluck)* We've got to find it sooner or later. Bacteria don't just sneak out from under the slip covers.

GRANT: *(A low, seething growl)* Mmmmm.

MARCY: Have you noticed the shape of the cell membranes? They're completely intact. We can put that in the paper.

GRANT: Nobody cares about the membranes. This is the fastest-acting respiratory infection ever recorded, and nobody knows what causes it. If we don't find the pathogen we've got nothing.

MARCY: Well, it killed this guy, so it's gotta be in his lungs somewhere.

GRANT: *(Under his breath)* I should have taken that job with the Tobacco Institute...

MARCY: What?

GRANT: Nothing. You keep looking. I've gotta figure out how to write off our expenses.

(GRANT goes and examines some papers. MARCY puts another slide in the scope.)

(We see what she sees: SAL, a large, energetic salmonella bacterium, and MIKE, a small, meek, innocuous-looking microbe. SAL paces furiously in what seems to be a confined space. MIKE hangs in the background.)

SAL: This is a total wasteland. Look at this. There's nothing here!

MIKE: There has to be a way out. Maybe there's a capillary around here somewhere...

SAL: Well why don't you look it up on the map?

MIKE: I didn't bring the map.

SAL: You didn't bring the *map*?

MIKE: You told me to travel light.

SAL: *(A low, seething growl)* Mmmmmm.

MIKE: You said: No extraneous baggage of any kind. I thought you knew where we were going.

SAL: So that's it. You just left it all up to me. Serves me right for letting a greenhorn tag along on a professional job.

(MARCY looks up from the scope. GRANT is absorbed in his paperwork.)

MARCY: Dr. Grant?

GRANT: Shh! I'm *adding*.

(MARCY shuts up. SAL and MIKE continue to survey their surroundings.)

MIKE: (*Amiably*) These cells have really interesting membranes, Sal. Have you noticed the membranes? It's really nice workmanship.

SAL: Nobody cares about the membranes. You know what kind of cells these are, Mikey? They're *lung* cells. This is *lung* tissue you got us lost in.

MIKE: Well, lungs are vital organs. I'm sure we can cause some kind of infection as long as we're here.

SAL: Mikey, I'm *Salmonella*. I'm trained in gastrointestinal warfare. What the hell am I supposed to do in the lung? I might as well be in the ass-fat. (*Wistful*) My dad always told me, try and go dormant in the ass-fat. It's safe. It's warm. It's sturdy. I should've listened to him.

(*MARCY looks up again.*)

MARCY: Dr. Grant, I think I see something.

GRANT: Is it a fingerprint?

MARCY: (*Very brightly*) Is a fingerprint a ciliated prokaryote with independent motility?

GRANT: No.

MARCY: Then it's not a fingerprint.

(*GRANT steps over to the microscope and takes a look.*)

MIKE: You know, when I signed up for this mentorship program, I kind of hoped I'd get a little more moral support.

SAL: Welcome to the real world, bucko. You're not going to get moral support when you're face to face with a killer T cell. And wait till they hit you with the antibiotics. I got friends who got ruptured pulling rookies like you out of the penicillin.

GRANT: I need more light.

(*He flips a switch. The light on the microbes intensifies.*)

MIKE: Don't you think it's weird the way the light keeps changing?

SAL: Probably fell asleep with his mouth open. Happens all the time.

(GRANT steps away.)

GRANT: You mean that thing? That's *Salmonella*. What did you do, leave an egg salad sandwich out on the prep table?

MARCY: *(A bit flustered)* I followed normal procedures. I must have.

(GRANT rolls his eyes and goes back to his figures.)

MIKE: Sal, I know I haven't been out much, but I'm starting to wonder if maybe I killed the guy.

SAL: Killed the guy? You haven't *done* anything!

MIKE: I was hungry on the way and I kept munching on these little round mitochondria. I couldn't help it. They're addictive! You can't eat just one.

SAL: Don't flatter yourself. You didn't kill him. You don't even know your own pathology. For all you know, you're some kind of genital wart virus.

(MARCY looks up.)

MARCY: Dr. Grant, you should take a look at this.

GRANT: Mmmmmmm.

(He gets up and takes the scope from MARCY.)

MIKE: Do you ever get the feeling that we're being watched?

SAL: Don't be paranoid.

MARCY: You see? There's a smaller microbe that's orbiting the salmonella.

PAGE-TURNER

Characters

VOICEOVER, narrating a book

THE READING MAN

A MYSTERIOUS STRANGER

A LIBRARIAN

A second VOICEOVER

(A small reading room in an old-fashioned library. Evening.)

(A MAN enters. He looks around, finds no one, selects a book, and sits in a chair.)

(We hear the narration that's in his head as he reads to himself.)

VOICEOVER: “Chapter One. He was an ordinary man, a man of no great ambition, but one whose character up to this point was virtually unassailable. He had never committed a crime or an act of violence. Indeed the very idea of such actions had always been, in his mind, restricted to the domain of the sensationalistic novels in which he occasionally indulged himself.”

VOICEOVER: “And yet beneath that gentle exterior, with his graying temples, woolen sweater, and conservative spectacles*, lay the potential for great danger.”

(A slight pause. The MAN READING THE BOOK also has thinning hair, a woolen sweater, and conservative glasses. He chuckles gently and reads on.)

VOICEOVER: “He was the only soul about in the library that night. Or so he thought.”

(Another slight pause. The READING MAN shifts uncomfortably.)

VOICEOVER: “And yet he swore he heard the sound of footsteps in the hallway.”

(Footsteps outside in the hallway. The man pauses. The footsteps stop abruptly.)

* NOTE: This line may be adjusted to suit the actor’s appearance and/or wardrobe.

VOICEOVER: “Footsteps that stopped whenever he stopped to listen, only to resume when he allowed himself to disregard them.”

(The footsteps resume. He stops to listen. The footsteps stop.)

(He waits. Nothing.)

(He exhales and returns to the book. The footsteps start again.)

(He opens the library door. Looks out. No sign of anyone.)

(He turns to look at the book.)

(He approaches it cautiously, sits, and opens it again. The audible narration resumes.)

VOICEOVER: “Insanity begins in the most innocuous ways, and he began to question whether his mind had already begun an irreversible descent into darkness. And yet curiosity overcame his fear, for each turn of the page promised a surprise...”

(He turns the page. As he does, a book falls off the shelf behind him. He jumps, startled. Realizing it is only a book, he returns to his own book and continues.)

VOICEOVER: “...much like the copy of Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, which had just fallen from a shelf behind his chair, startling him momentarily.”

(He goes to check the title of the book on the floor. Confirming that it matches, he backs away slowly. He looks around to make sure nobody else is in the room. He dives back into his chair and continues reading, with his reactions ranging from amused to incredulous to deeply embarrassed.)

VOICEOVER: “He had always been easily startled, ever since he was a child, when his younger brother accidentally set off an explosion in their basement during a failed attempt to build a rocket-powered tricycle. He saved his brother’s left pinky finger that day, earning him the Safety First Junior Medal of Honor at the Pierce County Police Department’s annual banquet. Little did he know it would be the high point of an otherwise bland and unremarkable life, from his job as a systems analyst for the National Association of Systems Analysts, to his tepid, sexually unsatisfying marriage to his wife Jennifer, who he met at a church coffee hour when she dropped a jelly doughnut on his

shoe. How he longed to tell Jennifer that he fantasized nightly about dressing up as a go-go dancer and playing submissive to her impersonation of James Bond, from the Sean Connery or possibly George Lazenby era, greedily fellating her .45 caliber pistol as she downed martini after dry martini straight from a cocktail shaker. But Jennifer's tastes in the bedroom ran more toward the pedestrian, and so his secret desires became mere fuel for so many furtive bouts of masturbation in the tenth floor employee men's room, after the rest of the staff had gone home to more fulfilling lives."

(He slams the book shut, infuriated. Again, he hears footsteps. He listens more closely and they stop. He starts to leave, then looks at the book, pauses, and then returns to the book, against his better judgment.)

VOICEOVER: "...Because at heart, he had always been a coward. Consider the book in his hands. He knew well the story it told. But would he dare find out how it ends?"

(A pause. He looks up from the book, flips the pages toward the end, cracks it open, but then closes it again before he can see the words. He sits motionless for a moment. Then he turns back to the page he left off on.)

VOICEOVER: "No. He chose the security of ignorance. And yet he could not resist the temptation to turn ahead just a bit, to catch just a quick glimpse of the near future, perhaps to see if there were any impending threats to be avoided..."

(Alarmed, he begins to flip ahead but then catches himself and shuts the book, irritated. He gets up from the chair and looks at the book defiantly. He turns and leaves the library.)

(After a few moments he re-enters, angry with himself but unable to resist. He sits, opens the book, flips ahead several pages, and reads.)

VOICEOVER: "Blood. Blood on his hands, on the floor of the library, covering the body of the dark-haired stranger lying beneath him, soaking through his green parka** , the gun still clutched in his stiffening fingers as the only evidence of his now-obvious intention..."

**NOTE: Again, adjust according to your actor & wardrobe. Unlike Reading Man's, however, Stranger's identifying article of clothing should be very distinctive.

(But just then a dark-haired STRANGER, wearing a green corduroy jacket, walks in the room. The READING MAN slams the book shut in a panic and stares at him, frightened. The stranger smiles meekly and begins browsing through the book collection.)

(The stranger is not very different physically from Reading Man, perhaps slightly bigger and more imposing, but nothing unusual. He chews gum and seems preoccupied with his book search.)

(The READING MAN cautiously opens the book back toward the beginning, and picks up where he had left off earlier, always keeping one eye on the stranger.)

VOICEOVER: "...to see if there were any impending threats to be avoided. And now he knew. Unfortunately, it appeared that his fate was all but sealed. For a dark-haired stranger in a green parka** had entered the library."

VOICEOVER: "But was the stranger really sinister? Nothing about him looked as if he had come with evil intentions. And even if the stranger were psychotic, a madman on a hair trigger, what could happen in this peaceful environment that might set off his lust for blood?"

(The STRANGER snaps a book shut. The READING MAN jumps in his seat, startled. The STRANGER notices, but soon turns back around and returns to the shelves. The READING MAN returns to his book.)

VOICEOVER: "‘Oh, now I’ve done it,’ he thought to himself. ‘He knows that I’m afraid. It’s those little glimmers of weakness that give a killer an opening to strike.’"

(The STRANGER turns again and looks at the READING MAN. The READING MAN averts his eyes.)

VOICEOVER: "He told himself to keep calm, but how could he when the fateful page was fast approaching? He scanned the room for instruments of self-defense.

(He does so.)

THE FACE OF GOD

Characters

EUGENE GRENDEL, 40's - 50's, trying not to appear impatient.

BRAD, 20's, trying not to appear overwhelmed.

JENNIFER, 20's - 30's, trying not to appear resentful.

(Lights up on BRAD, a young man in a shirt and tie, sitting behind a desk and slogging through paperwork. He sorts swiftly through various documents, sometimes rubber-stamping them, sometimes moving them to other piles, occasionally staring blankly at them, but always maintaining an appearance of efficiency. The desk has a phone with an old-fashioned intercom. Across from the desk is an empty chair. A sign reads: "Welcome to Eternity -- No Soliciting.")

(Presently EUGENE GRENDEL, middle-aged, ordinary and non-threatening, wanders on. He wears stereotypical golf clothes and carries a driver. BRAD notices him.)

BRAD: *(With a slightly canned friendliness)* Hello. Welcome to Eternity. I'm God.

GRENDEL: *(Taken aback)* My Lord!

(GRENDEL backs away, averting his eyes. BRAD appears slightly amused, and accustomed to the routine. He gently motions for Grendel to come closer.)

BRAD: Please. That's not necessary. Have a seat. Would you like some coffee?

GRENDEL: You have coffee?

BRAD: Sure do. I'll have my assistant bring some in for you. *(He hits an intercom button.)* Jennifer!

(JENNIFER, a young but somewhat world-weary administrative assistant, appears behind Brad instantly, startling him.)

JENNIFER: Yes, Lord?

(GRENDEL carefully peeks, then straightens himself up.)

BRAD: Could you get us some coffee?

JENNIFER: We're out. Starbucks just called; they got held up in Purgatory.

BRAD: Of course. Purgatory traffic. *(Aside, to Grendel)* That's all it is in Purgatory, you know. Traffic. *(To Jennifer)* Well, when they get here, have them bring a venti mocha for Mr...

GRENDDEL: Grendel. Eugene Grendel.

BRAD: Mr. Grendel. *(Aside, to Grendel)* You do like mocha, don't you, Mr. Grendel?

GRENDDEL: *(Impressed)* Why, yes.

BRAD: *(Confidently)* Thought so. And don't skimp on the whipped cream, it's not like he needs to count calories! *(He laughs. GRENDDEL laughs nervously. JENNIFER simply exits, rolling her eyes.)* She's a real sparkplug, that one.

GRENDDEL: You know, Lord, forgive me for saying this, but... I had no idea you'd be so...

BRAD: *(Smoothly)* Young? Yes, well, our market surveys did suggest that a youthful exterior helps put people at ease. Now, let's get down to your final judgment for all eternity! *(Takes out an enormous ledger)* If you'll just be patient for one second while I find your record... *(He begins flipping through the pages.)*

GRENDDEL: Of course, Lord. Take your time. *(He smiles awkwardly.)* You know, Lord, I hope I won't be penalized for dying early. I was really just starting to...

BRAD: *(Blandly; not looking up)* Turn your life around?

GRENDDEL: Yes. Exactly. And I'm sure you know I've made some choices, some bad choices, that if I had more time I would have definitely made up for...

BRAD: Mmm-hmm. *(He finds a place in the book.)* Ah, here we are: Grendell, G-R-E-N-D-E-double-L, from Akron?

GRENDEL: Um... no. I'm Grendel with one L. From Sacramento.

BRAD: Right. I knew that. *(He scans a few more pages and then looks up.)* I'm sorry, Mr. Grendel, you're not on the list.

GRENDEL: Excuse me?

BRAD: You're not on the list. Apparently we're not expecting you here. I can check Hell for you. *(He dials the phone.)*

GRENDEL: Well, I don't want to cause any trouble...

BRAD : Don't worry. No trouble at all. *(He listens.)* It's ringing. *(Someone on the other end picks up.)* Yeah, you guys expecting a Eugene Grendel? Uh-huh? Sure, I'll hold. *(Motions helpfully to GRENDEL that it'll "just be a second." A pause.)* Oh, yeah? *(Sounds interested)* Oh, you do? *(GRENDEL squirms)* No, no, just one "L." *(GRENDEL is obviously relieved. Another pause)* ... Okay, then. *(Hangs up. To Grendel:)* Nothing. You're coming up blank.

GRENDEL: What does that mean?

BRAD: Must be some kind of administrative error. I'll have to order a comprehensive search. *(Hits intercom)* Jennifer?

(JENNIFER appears instantly, again startling BRAD.)

JENNIFER: Yes, Brad?

BRAD: Your *Father Almighty* would like a comprehensive search on Grendel. First name Eugene. From Sacramento. One "L." It seems his record his missing.

JENNIFER: Did you make sure the pages weren't stuck together again? ... *Lord?*

BRAD: Yes, Jennifer, I was very careful. Could you just run the search?

JENNIFER: Yes, Father.

(She exits)

FAT NAKED TRUCKERS

Characters

JACK HENDERSON, a wholesome suburban dad

LINDA HENDERSON, his wholesome suburban wife

ROBBIE HENDERSON, their wholesome suburban kid (played by an adult)

CHERYL, a cheerfully professional telemarketer

VITO LOWENSTEIN, a menacing thug

(The Hendersons' cheery, bright suburban kitchen. The Henderson family, including father JACK, mother LINDA, and young son ROBBIE, is starting dinner. Robbie is played by an adult in kids' clothing.)

JACK: Honey, these corn muffins are the best you've ever made.

LINDA: Why, thank you, sweetie. I know they're your favorite.

JACK: Robbie, did you have a good day in school today?

ROBBIE: Sure did, Pop. We learned fractions!

JACK: *(sincerely)* Fractions! Now that's exciting!

ROBBIE: *(enthusiastically)* Yeah, they're like big numbers, only smaller...

(Phone rings. JACK rises to answer it.)

JACK: Hold that thought, Sport. *(To phone)* Hello?

(CHERYL, a perky telemarketer, is on other end. She wears a smart blazer and speaks on a phone headset.)

CHERYL: Hello. May I please speak to Mr. Jack Henderson?

JACK: That's me.

CHERYL: Good evening, Mr. Henderson, my name is Cheryl. I represent *Fat Naked Truckers* magazine. We were hoping you'd take advantage of our special offer...

JACK: (*interrupting*) Excuse me, who did you say you represent?

CHERYL: *Fat Naked Truckers*, the leading erotic photojournal of overweight men in the trucking and shipping industry? You've heard of it?

LINDA: Who is it, honey?

JACK: Nobody, sugarplum, just a telemarketer. (*To phone, politely*) I'm sorry, ma'am, I'm not familiar with your publication, and I don't think I'm interested...

CHERYL: Well, that's interesting, because we consider you a valuable potential customer...

JACK: I'm sorry, I'm just not interested. Now goodbye...

CHERYL: (*Ominously*) Don't hang up, Mr. Henderson. We know you want this magazine.

JACK: Now just a godda... (*ROBBIE looks shocked; JACK catches himself*) ... goshdarn minute! You don't know what I want! You can't tell me what to do! This is my house and I want to have my dinner with my family! Now please don't call here again!

(*He hangs up triumphantly*)

ROBBIE: You tell 'em, Dad!

JACK: Gosh, those people are rude.

LINDA: Well, you were right to tell them off. I don't want them taking up any more of our dinner time.

(*VITO, a menacing, Mafia-esque thug, kicks in the kitchen door and strides in. He wears a dark suit, power tie and dark glasses. He's followed by CHERYL, the telemarketer, still wearing the headset. She carries an attaché case.*)

VITO: All right, dirtbags, everyone on the floor! NOW!

CHERYL: Do as he says, folks. This will only take a few minutes.

(ROBBIE, LINDA, and JACK drop to the floor.)

VITO: Not you, maggot.

(He pushes JACK into a chair and handcuffs him to it.)

JACK: What do you want?

CHERYL: As I mentioned, Mr. Henderson, we represent *Fat Naked Truckers* magazine. I'm Cheryl, your customer service agent, and this is our information manager, Vito Lowenstein.

VITO: That's *Mister* Lowenstein to you, scumbag.

LINDA: Jack? I don't understand. Fat Naked Truckers?

JACK: It's just those telemarketers, honey. They're obviously a little persistent.

VITO: Persistent enough to pound your face into Cream of Wheat, you pathetic piece of trash!

CHERYL: Mr. Lowenstein's got a way with words, doesn't he? What he's trying to say is that we're very confident you'd be interested in our product, and we're disappointed that you won't take a few weeks to look it over. You're under no obligation...

JACK: There must be some mistake. I would never be interested in a magazine about... fat naked truckers!

LINDA: I can vouch for that! I know my Jack better than anyone!

VITO: Frankly, ma'am, you don't know your own ass from the Holland Tunnel!

ROBBIE: Mommy! He said the A-word!

LINDA: *(Cradling ROBBIE protectively)* Yes he did, Robbie. He's a bad, bad man.

CHERYL: I find it hard to believe you're not interested in our magazine, Mr. Henderson. Considering how often you access our Web site, fatnakedtruckers.com.