

Four Heavy-Handed Modern Parables

For Experimental Theater

Written by

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Preface

In each of the following five short plays that comprise this small collection, the audience will be made to feel like they are taken somewhere else along with the actors. To a rat maze, to the first day of high school, to swimming in the ocean without a life preserver and being asked to take a side Right Now in The Ultimate Struggle of Good vs. Evil. And one of the production options would briefly take the audience to the hit musical "Cats".

These bookend options are fully variable, no one should go to these plays to see the same thing they saw last time. As far as I'm concerned, something different should come out of the wall at the end of Gnaw in every successive production.

One of my visions is that these and perhaps other works by other authors could be linked together, that after each mini-play you actually choose a door to go through to a different play that would be somehow thematically linked in a choose-your-own-play kind of way. I don't find myself ground-breaking or pushing the envelope for thinking of this, I'm sure they do this stuff in New York all of the time somewhere. I dream of being included, maybe being cast in one of my own roles to take the meta up a few notches.

A colleague who gave me some notes suggested that perhaps my moral themes are too obvious. I have considered this and yes, I could rewrite these stories with embellishment in long form. But I don't have time for that and it's difficult enough to get anyone to read anything(that hasn't been on TV...) as it is. I believe our times, 2019 now, call for direct, clear art that doesn't need a lot of academic interpretation. (Ten thousand tons of Art History and Art Criticism aren't helping us much now are they?)

We need art that provokes and incites argument, efficiently spreading ideas outside of the tightly controlled channels of the advertising model.

Society is going through rapid changes, nearly all in the direction of the worst kinds of authoritarianism, and the vast central blob of TV-watchers is the demographic that is still growing the fastest, empowering centralized militarism while they pound the butts of their sporks on their microwave entrees making sound-bite-friendly-but-half-assed political pseudo-demands for marginally easier lives while throwing the Magna Carta, Geneva Convention and Bill of Rights out the window because reading is hard and they are just Overwhelmed By Everything All The Time.

I am primarily interested in art that inspires people to rise to their highest aspirations and best selves while pissing off people that I can best describe as "bad" or "mean." This highly-encouraged cow-like spectator-only lifestyle that doesn't believe something can be worthwhile if it hasn't first been on TV, indirectly but still substantially empowers these bad and mean people.

This will only worsen in 10 years when the Mark IV Brain Implant is unveiled and we then learn, Far Too Late, that we have been incorporated against our will and without our knowledge into a Bizarro Hive Mind with Mysterious Ulterior Motives that we also learn about Far Too Late...and then once you discover this fact The Hard Way no one believes what you say because there is no one left who believes.

Anything.

At all.

How To Build A Boat Out Of Water is admittedly yet another of my attempts to stick my foot out and trip this sort of dystopia on its brisk sprint towards us. I also hope to shed light on difficult topics, reveal malignant ideological roots that need to be chopped at, and distill from the oversimplified word swarm of our diseased video-dominated public culture some of the contradictions that catalyze our woe; for analysis, surgery and ultimately the healing that we so desperately need.

And yes, laughter at the expense of jerks.

Posted: No spectators allowed.

J. Michael Hudson

January 5, 2019

GNAW

Act 1 - Scene 1

Two mice, FULLER(20-30) and LINDY(20-30) slowly enter along the back wall, SNIFFING, examining the back wall of the stage.

LINDY

What are you thinking?

FULLER

It has to be an edge. It has to be.

LINDY

An edge? You're being silly, it's just a wall.

FULLER

No, it's an edge.

LINDY

Who do you think you are? You're a pretty bright mouse but you're making me wonder about you. You're not going to find anything, I don't even know why you're looking.

FULLER

I'm sure of it. There's no other way, I know all the other walls, I have them memorized. This one has no other internal connection. On the other side of this wall there isn't more maze, at least not this one. This is a way out.

LINDY

I hate it when you get like this. It's just too intense, your whole search for an exit. This is just a normal Saturday and I want to relax. Why do we have to go to all this trouble? Sandy and Mandy don't ever have to go looking for this mystery thing you're always talking about.

FULLER

It's not a mystery thing, it's a way out, a way to a different world without all this. Just trust me, please.

(MORE)

FULLER (cont'd)

No one else is around, just help me gnaw at this wall for a while and if we don't find anything, then we'll go do something else and I promise I'll never bring this up again. Promise.

LINDY

A while? How long is this going to take? What do you really expect to accomplish? You're going to get us in trouble. And how could this be an edge? It's just a normal wall like the others.

FULLER

Look, this wall only connects out in two directions. If you go this way, it wraps around to the right. If you go this way it wraps around to the left. I traced both of those walls for for hours. This is the only spot without a connection to a different part of the maze. It's a mathematical fact.

LINDY

Mathematical what? You can't even know that, the maze is too big for us to understand. And if there is one edge there would have to be many edges.

FULLER

I'm not saying there aren't more, I'm saying this is the one that I know for sure. It's right here. The outside, all it's going to take is some gnawing. What do you say?

LINDY

Fine, do what you have to do. I'll watch but I'm not gnawing anything. I'll try to provide some moral support but I'm actually ambivalent about this whole enterprise. Like how do we even know that what would be outside the maze is better?

FULLER

Do you want to live your life camping out a cheese dispenser with the same color of walls?

(MORE)

FULLER (cont'd)
Don't you feel a little more alive
just thinking about transcending your
boundaries? Don't you sometimes wish
you could know the meaning of life,
or just do whatever it took to get
the answer to a big question?

LINDY
Not really.

FULLER
Ok, whatever. I'm going to get
started, you'll see. I don't mind
doing all the work.

Fuller starts GNAWING on the wall. Lindy leans up against
it and rolls her eyes.

After a little while of gnawing, Fuller produces a CHUNK of
wall.

FULLER (cont'd)
See this isn't going to take long at
all.

There is a LOUD BOOM from the wall and both Fuller and Lindy
look at each other.

Enter three new mice, Edgar and his two hench-mice Barnaby
and Ivan who have been trailing their scent.

EDGAR
What's going on here?

FULLER
Did you hear that?

EDGAR
Hear what?

FULLER
Nevermind.

Edgar picks up the chunk of wall.

EDGAR
How did this happen?

FULLER

I don't know, we were just out here trying to get away from everyone for a little while and we wondered what it even was, now I see it's a chunk of the wall. Wow, never seen something like that before.

EDGAR

(to Lindy)

Is that true Lindy? Are you sure you don't know what happened to cause this chunk of the wall to fall off. Lying to the authorities carries heavy penalties and the lifetime designation as a Bad Mouse.

LINDY

(under some duress)

I'm sorry Fuller. Fuller was gnawing at the wall trying to find a way to escape the maze.

EDGAR

You don't say. Isn't that interesting. That means Fuller must have been lying to us, that carries very heavy penalties. And so does gnawing on the wall. That will simply not be tolerated around here. Fuller I have to say I'm not surprised, you always struck me as a bad mouse.

FULLER

I'm not a bad mouse.

EDGAR

Oh yes you are. We caught you red-clawed. You see, we have long known you are mapping the edge of the maze and that you are looking for a way out. I've had Barnaby here following your scent for weeks. We know everything. Your plan is really quite obvious. Barnaby, Ivan, restrain this threat to society while I lecture him on the way things really work around here.

FULLER

That can't be, you spent all that time on just me?

EDGAR

Well you have to admit you kind of stand out in the crowd. You don't see other mice mapping the walls, do you? So we thought, let's really get to know this guy. That's why we sent Lindy. Isn't that right Lindy?

FULLER

No.

LINDY

I'm sorry Fuller.

Edgar pulls Lindy close.

EDGAR

Lindy and I are actually really good friends, aren't we Lindy.

Lindy looks away and Edgar laughs.

EDGAR (cont'd)

So like I said before, how does it feel to be a bad mouse?

FULLER

I am not a bad mouse. You should all want out of this maze, you should all be thankful I'm trying to figure out the nature of your reality.

EDGAR

You know what's on the other side of that wall? Cats. And they are in some kind of spooky cult where they torture mice for as long as possible. This wall keeps those cats out.

FULLER

Have you seen them?

EDGAR

I don't have to, I am a good mouse, I believe the traditions of the good mice. And I'm not going to argue anymore with a bad mouse, and a bad mouse who is a chump at that. And then Lindy and I are going to go on a little getaway for the weekend, aren't we Lindy?

Lindy looks away and shivers.

FULLER
Well then I hope the cats eat both of
you when I tear the wall down. I may
not do it today but I'll do it.

Edgar walks to the wall where there is the piece missing and
HITS it, hard.

EDGAR
See, nothing.

There is a low but much louder BANG. Then another and
another. The ground shakes a little, the wall CRACKS.

A GIANT CAT PAW reaches in and GRABS Edgar.

Barnaby and Ivan RUN. Lindy runs to Fuller but he pushes
her away.

FULLER
I told you so.

LINDY
I always knew you were right.

FULLER
I thought you actually liked me.

There is a deafening MEOW as Edgar SCREAMS in the distance.

LINDY
I don't know. They put me up to it.
I'm sorry. That was mean.

FULLER
Apology accepted. Now we have a
different problem, cats are going to
get into the maze. We have to get
out of here.

LINDY
Right behind you, here comes one!

Fuller and Lindy RUN OUT of the theater through the center
aisle as CATS(actors in costumes) enter from all entrances
and engage the audience with either A. The opening overture
from the hit musical "Cats" or B. run loose through the
audience scaring people, and then exit.

LIMO

ACT 1 - Scene 1

A garage with a WHITE LIMOUSINE(most of which is occluded offstage). The entrance to the garage is Stage-Left and a back door to the garage is Stage-right.

There is a sign that reads, "TONY'S GARAGE".

MAXIM(20-30) and PETE(20-30) are working the night shift in the limo shop cleaning and detailing a WHITE LIMOUSINE.

They both have HEADPHONES on while operating their tools, a VACUUM CLEANER and BUFFER. There are tables, one with a STEREO SYSTEM and MORE TOOLS.

Maxim TURNS OFF his Buffer and sets it down. Then he SLUMPS down next to the tire.

A few moments later, Pete steps out with the vacuum and sees Maxim staring off into space. He turns the vacuum off.

PETE
You ok, man?

MAXIM
(his jaw is dropped,
he is extremely
disturbed)
No. What have I done?

PETE
What? A mistake? That'd be your first that I know of. You can fix anything, I've seen it. Did you waste an hour on the wrong spot or something?

MAXIM
(he presses stop on
his phone)
I did not make a mistake on the car.
I made a mistake in life, we may be
in big trouble.

PETE
What do you mean we? How did you make a mistake in our life, man? We're just working on the car, everything is fine. You having some panic attack?

MAXIM

Do you ever wonder what goes on inside these cars?

PETE

Parties. Business deals. Drinking champagne. Maybe some hooking up. Stuff like that probably. It's none of my business, really, so I don't spend much time thinking about it.

MAXIM

You're right. But I had to know. I was looking for something else. Evidence of how the world really works.

PETE

Where were you looking? What the hell are you talking about?

MAXIM

I found it, how the world really works. What is really going on. What really happens in the limos. It's worse than I thought though.

PETE

Stop leaving me hanging, you were looking for something, where? You found something? What? Enough code or I'm turning the vac on until you figure yourself out.

Maxim walks to the stereo and PLUGS his phone in.

MAXIM

I bugged the limo.

PETE

(jaw drops)
Oh shit. For how long?

MAXIM

A few weeks. I'm not proud of this. I heard other things, but until now it's been, I don't know, normal. I guess? Nothing I didn't expect.

PETE

But you found something this time. And for some reason I'm in danger now?

(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)

How haven't I been in danger the whole time? We work together and you do this shit, and don't even tell me until it goes bad? What's wrong with you jan, if anyone comes around here they are going to think I'm in on it!? I thought we were friends, man.

MAXIM

When you put it like that- I didn't think anything would happen. But now it did and I don't know what to do. You might be affected. What is on this tape could-

(he stands, grabs a
WRENCH and looks out
the door and the
window.)

PETE

(picking up a TIRE
IRON)

You better be pranking me. You're freaking me out.

MAXIM

You should be freaking out. Listen to this. I hope you know what to do, they did something to a bunch of people.

(he presses PLAY on
the STEREO)

The sound of car doors OPENING and CLOSING. Someone is crying.

VOICE 1

You really thought this would work?

Silence.

VOICE 1 (cont'd)

What was this, some sort of plot? If you all just worked together you might escape?

Silence.

VOICE 1 (cont'd)

You must think I am some trickster, a mere confidence artist.

VOICE 2
(terrified, defeated)
How could you know?

VOICE 1
Exactly, how could I know. I told you what I am. That I am more than I seem. I am not some psychotic or storyteller. When you say my name, I hear you. Not just your words, but your entire soul, who you are. I know even when you think about me.

VOICE 3
What are you?

VOICE 1
You will never know and you will never escape.

VOICE 4
Please no, please no.

VOICE 1
It is too late for begging. You know you can't run. You know I can never trust you again. You are mine now, forever. Turn your heads away and look out the window.

VOICE 2
Please no, Victor-, no! No!

CRYING, WHIMPERING. Then CRACKLING, A LOW DULL HUM, SUCKING, CRACKING, CHOMPING, and MORE SCREAMS AND DESPERATE BEGGING, then gradually SILENCE.

Pete and Maxim look at each other.

MAXIM
Whatever you do don't say that name-

PETE
You mean Victor? Well of course.

MAXIM
You idiot!

A LOW DULL HUM begins in the shop, the lights FLICKER and DIM.

PETE
Oh no.

PETE and MAXIM back up against the wall.

MAXIM

Now we're even. I was afraid he would come just because I heard him, but you had to-

PETE

Fine, whatever. I'll admit that wasn't my brightest moment, ok?

The DOORS on both sides of the shop SWING OPEN.

VICTOR enters stage left.

DRAGO enters stage right.

VICTOR

I am not amused. There has been this buzzing in my head the entire day. This recording of yours. You thought it was some game, now you learn it was not.

MAXIM

I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, it doesn't matter really, here you can have the recording-

VICTOR

Doesn't matter really. You poor simple people, you know nothing. Do you know how much I spend in effort and money to be completely unknown? Do you know how many before you I have taken, who now live only inside me?

PETE

I had nothing to do with this!

VICTOR

Life is most certainly not fair. Is this the first you've heard of it? Truly sad that you might think you would find some of this fairness from me. If you only knew.

MAXIM

We could work for you, we could just record every other car and hand you the recordings!

VICTOR

I know everything I need to know
through other means, you are simply
tiny loose strings, dangling. I tire
of explaining the universe to you.
But needless to say you have made a
horrible mistake for which there is
no salvation, and your last words
have been most uninteresting.

CRACKLING SOUND, DIMMING LIGHTS as VICTOR reaches his hand
towards MAXIM and ELECTRICAL ARCS begins to suck his life
force.

MAXIM

No, please, no!

Pete tries to RUN, DRAGO grabs him and THROWS him back
against the wall.

Suddenly, TONY(50) APPEARS at the back door. The HUM is
interrupted with a TRUMPET and SITAR FANFARE.

TONY

Enough! This is my shop and my rule
reigns here. I hereby cast your power
out, Victor.

TONY SHOOTS an ELECTRICAL ARC to MAXIM who SWAYS in between
the power of both, UNCONSCIOUSLY TEETERING

PETE

Tony! Thank God you're here!

TONY

God has nothing to do with it.
Thanks for ruining my vacation.

PETE

How'd you get back so fast?

TONY

No time to explain! Look-

VICTOR

You are a fool to think you can
oppose me alone, why did you return
for your foolish minions?

TONY

I said it's my shop, and I'm done
letting you do whatever you want to
in this city.

(MORE)

TONY (cont'd)
The disappearances, the attacks, your
secret clubs, yeah I know all about
it.

VICTOR
Then you know you are the last?

TONY
No-

VICTOR
Yes. I destroyed them both,
actually, it is more accurate to say
I ate them.

He LAUGHS. Drago stands next to Victor and they focus their
powers on Maxim.

MAXIM CONVULSES AND SCREAMS.

PETE
Do something!

TONY
I need your help, we have to gather
more positive energy or I'll never
hold out. We need everyone here to
chain their energy together and bring
it to me!

PETE
You mean them? They're just
spectators.

TONY
There are no spectators anymore, we
need everyone this time or Victor
will take over the whole city. No
one will be safe.

PETE
You mean I can talk to them?

TONY
Yes! I've used my powers to
temporarily bring down the 4th wall
separating us from the Observers!
Get them to join us! But hurry now
they will no doubt attempt this as
well!

Pete and Drago SIMULTANEOUSLY make their APPEALS.

PETE

Well you heard him! Hurry, come hold my hand! Maxim may not be the best guy but he doesn't deserve this! Tony is the last one in the city who can even help us, if we lose this fight then what? Victor and his cult are going to roam the streets preying on everybody until they control everything. Hurry, we don't have much time, help us! If you care about virtue or humanity at all, Victor will even rewrite history so all of your values never happened. It will be as if human suffering is institutionalized and a permanent overclass of predators rules all humans forever, hurry grab my hand!

DRAGO

Are you going to help these pathetic day laborers and their tiny shop? They're just in this for the money, this Tony guy he doesn't pay his taxes and he probably watches professional wrestling because he's lazy and who cares what he thinks, the good guys are a bunch of hypocrites and losers. This is the same everywhere you go. Why would you want to be on their side? We're the ones with the fun parties. And what else do we do but give the people what they want? You know you want to see these do gooders and their lackeys tortured, hear there screams, don't you! Yeah! And then we are going to set things right in this city, make things run properly. I'm going to buy a big boat and maybe i'll invite you to the first party, we'll see. But c'mon grab my hand! Give me all of your most depraved and morally bankrupt energies! For a world where good and evil don't matter a single bit, where you can do whatever you want so long as Victor approves!

TWO POSSIBLE ENDINGS (A, B):

A. If the audience chooses Victor, then after VICTOR appears to have destroyed Maxim and Tony, it turns out to be AN ELABORATE PRANK ON PETE.

B. If the audience chooses Tony, then Victor and Drago are dissolved in a flash of light after which Tony tells Maxim and Pete to GET BACK TO WORK and casually exits.

First Day

Act 1 Scene 1

A plain classroom with POSTERS on the walls lauding the advantages of Totalitarianism, "Thinking Causes Accidents", "Obedience, the Greatest Value" and "To Ensure the Minimum Penalty, Perform Your Specified Duty Exactly."

A BELL RINGS and several STUDENTS wearing Yellow shirts enter the classroom slowly. They choose chairs and sit down. MISS P stands at a small podium smiling.

NOTE: There are only 4-7 students in chairs but the teacher is facing the audience and the students as if they were all in the class.

MISS PARTRIDGE

Good morning class, everybody take your seats.

When the last student is seated, she continues.

MISS P

I want you to know that I don't just say this as a formality, but welcome to Intermediary Remedial Requirement 571, Northampton-Wilshire Unit. It is of the utmost importance to me that you deeply realize how very much we value you, here at our beloved Unit 571. We have been preparing your lessons for weeks, there won't be another break until next year, so I hope you are ready for the tremendous benefit you are about to receive in the form of one of my favorite things, knowledge.

I would love to get everyone's names but unfortunately we don't have much time to get to know each other because we have so many important things scheduled that will affect the rest of your entire lives. Today is the day you get your new Recognition Symbol and Permanent Identification Expression. You will find them written on your desk.

(MORE)

MISS P (cont'd)

Your recognition symbol is a visual code that can be identified easily on the Permanent Memory Collectors and Handheld Identification Scanners, PMC's and HIS's, you'll learn all about the abbreviations eventually, so don't worry too much about that now.

As of today you are considered adults in the system and in order to remain at school, because it is so expensive to operate, your daily chores here will count towards the 60,000 Credit debit we have placed on your account, which will cover the next year's tuition. Good that we have that out of the way, moving on.

A hand raises.

MISS P (cont'd)

(mildly disturbed)

There will be a time for questions at the end of this lesson, but for now we really need to keep moving on. You will also shortly learn some things about questions that may answer your question.

The hand goes down.

MISS P produces a remote, clicks a button, and a PROJECTOR turns on. The first SLIDE displays a stick figure with a symbol and number next to it.

MISS P (cont'd)

For the sake of explanation, consider this hypothetical student C36M1229HEK. He can consider himself an individual, a single entity capable of independent action and thought. But this would be giving in to a pernicious illusion. His food and water come from other people, his house was built by other people, he transports himself using means operated and constructed by other people. Without others, C36 is simply incapable of much independent action at all and on his own would in short order simply cease to exist.

The next SLIDE shows C36's stick figure dead, with vultures circling.

MISS P (cont'd)

All other systems have been tried at length, which ended in dismal, catastrophic, failure. Now there is only one system, a total system, the one you were born into and the one which is now so generous as to educate you in its functions. All of that history of failure was erased when it became too boring for anyone to even consider, leaving you with only the beauty of our wonderful world. Because it is total, and encompasses everything you will ever see, hear, say, or do, it is known as totalitarianism. The total system for all of humanity.

No one wonders where their place is, or what they have to do, it is all defined with clear instructions. For you, this class marks the beginning of those instructions. The horrible uncertainty of unstructured and wasted time is finally over. What a relief, right?

The next SLIDE shows the stick figure in a pyramid structure.

MISS P (cont'd)

In our orderly system, everyone has a place. Someone above them in the structure who can decide if they are rewarded or punished based upon how well they perform their clearly assigned and enumerated function. Some of you may even have people under them in the structure whose lives you will be called upon to judge in their utility to the system. It's all very natural. As I just stated, everyone depends on everyone, it naturally follows for order that everyone will have a superior, a supervisor.

For example, in this class, I am your supervisor. I have a supervisor and he has a supervisor, and so on.

(MORE)

MISS P (cont'd)

The most orderly natural thing in the world. I know I have to do my job or I will be terminated, you know you have to learn or you will be suffer the appropriate penalty. Easy as pie.

The next SLIDE shows the pyramid next to a stack of cars, TVs, food, and clothes.

MISS P (cont'd)

We live in a post scarcity world, the efficiency and moral purity of the system has solved the problem of want so that there is no hunger or want for lack, only the starvation and privation deemed morally correct, appropriate, penalties for failure by those higher up in our structure. With the most advanced computers and access to all knowledge in the history of the world, our leaders, our beloved leaders always know what is best and for many, many years now we have had enough in our stores that everyone in the system could stop their necessary functions entirely. But that would be immoral and would lead to corruption, degeneracy.

You are probably wondering what the overall form of this system takes by now. What would it be like to take a step back? Look at the whole set of interactions. Our finest analysts have done this for us already and created this set of slides.

SLIDE demonstrating pyramidal and absolutely discrete top-down power structure with hundreds of tiny stick figures.

MISS P (cont'd)

So. Now you understand the nature of the spectacular system that is your inheritance and you are prepared to sign with your fingerprint and receive your permanent Focus Catalyst mark 3.2 Brain Implant. I'm so proud of you.

(MORE)

MISS P (cont'd)
Everybody get in line! Your whole life awaits you as a functionary in the, oh let's see here, dishwashing department at a restaurant called The Steel Square in Galveston. That is going to be a fine life, no stress, not a care in the world. Congratulations!

And you, number R218012, you have been assigned to the Navy! What a wonderful assignment, you'll never have to worry about women, what a relief! They are looking for lads just like you.

These are truly our finest implants, the state of the art. Once you have yours, all those stray concepts that sometimes bother you are just going to fly away like butterflies.

Whose would like to be the first in line?

There are no volunteers.

MISS P (cont'd)
I see. Unfortunate.

She walks to the door where there is a microphone.

MISS P (cont'd)
(into microphone,
under her breath)
Major 85? Yes, Miss P here with the new class. I've explained everything the best I can, but there are no volunteers. I think this is another problem group. I see. I understand. I will inform the class.

MISS P (cont'd)
(facing the class
again, trying to
recover confidence)
Major 85 will be here momentarily. I think you will regret your decision to bring the following unpleasantness upon yourselves. I truly do.

Enter MAJOR 85. A short general in his 50s wearing an overly decorated military uniform and a steampunk monocle. Something square protrudes from the back of his neck.

MAJOR 85

The system. I love the system. It's glorious. It's beyond imagination. A complex interworking of functionaries inside one megalithic entity, it boggles the mind. We all have our place in it. It knows us better than we know ourselves. I have seen so many who at first were, I don't know, overwhelmed and perplexed by the life we have carefully planned for them, one day realize that it was the perfect thing for them.

I have tortured so many people, people just like you. I have ripped their fingernails out, sliced and diced, what have you. It never ceases to amaze me what rejects come to realize when they are faced with the hard facts of what it means to be born here, now, in The System.

Now that we have repaired the bizarre malfunctions of the Focus Catalyst Mk 2 series, and the Mk 1 series, in what we are offering you now, the mk 3 series, life is a breeze. It feels good. I have one in right now. I just chopped off someone's arm, and I feel great!

Oh, now where was I. The Mk 3 series is the best you can find, a direct connection to The Core, the center of all that we do. It's really quite beautiful. Advice on how to perform your duty and the answer to any question you can think of, but it's odd, I never have questions. Questions about what! Life is great! I understand everything with this puppy in my brain!

MAJOR 85 (cont'd)

Oh where was I, the Mk 3 implant, you need it. Can't do without it, I wouldn't trade mine for the world.

Of course, there is the alternative. To be a Class 14. You can walk right out that door, but you'll always from this day on be a Class 14. A reject. Everybody in the entire system hates rejects. You can be shot on sight, we'll sneak into your house and poison your food. You'll basically live in a thatch hut and be used for various forms of cruel and mostly pointless experimentation.

Class 14's are our lab rats. We fly over your house and drop purple chemicals, who knows what research project they're up to over in research, but they will be gathering data on you in ways that are sometimes subtle other times not so much. You won't be able to trust anything, or anyone.

Half the people who claim to be Class 14's are actually Class 15, assigned to spy on the Class 14's and make their life hell by pretending to be friends and then being shitty to them. Fun bunch, Class 15's. They will never know they are also being punished because we simply don't like them. Oh and then there is Class 16 who goes around and baits Class 14's into crimes for which they will be tortured to death if they ever commit, then Class 59 who just constantly points cameras at them and calls them paranoid. Class 105 are the psychiatrists Class 14's go to when they finally lose it. We put it all on broadcast television back in The Actual System. Class 14's are a valuable resource and they don't know it, billions annually in advertising revenue. The most popular shows are just videos of their torture, little known fact.

Oh where was I. So what's it going to be, the Mk 3 in your brain for life, Or Class 14 for life?

I'll give you 30 seconds to make your decision. Whoever decides to stay will be assumed to be ready to take their Eternal Oath of Absolute Allegiance, kneel on the floor and kiss the feet of our beloved national mascot Pyramid-Head. He will provide you with your Mk 3 implant which you will present to the surgeon. It won't hurt much more than having something drilled into your skull normally does, and thereafter you will be permanently connected with the command and control system which will permanently integrate you with civilization, humanity, with all of us.

You will finally be whole, part of something grander than anything your puny individual self could ever be. And when the day comes for your body to be pulverized due to your redundancy or increased demand for constituent particles, you will know you gave your all for something that was truly worthy of your efforts. The best possible system, ever.

Ok, enough of me trying to encourage you to make the obvious choice. Your thirty seconds begin now.

[30 seconds]

One of the students walks out to become a Class 14.

MAJOR 85 (cont'd)

Disappointing, but the system needs its guinea pigs too. Oh well. Miss P, would you bring in our beloved hero?

MISS P

Certainly.

She opens the door and PYRAMID-HEAD enters. He wears a skin-tight body suit with organization charting drawn all over it in elaborate fashion, and on top of his neck instead of a head is a large pyramid with an eyeball drawn on it.

MAJOR 85

Now the oath, than the kissing of the foot, then to the surgeon. Then on to your occupations as, let me see here, as a front line soldier in the african jungle and you, pretty lady, a sexual servant so good luck! You're going to need it. Aren't you glad that is all taken care of? Decisions can be so troubling for young people. Problem solved.

Now, please kneel and kiss the feet of our beloved Pyramid-head to symbolize your absolute obedience, loyalty and submission for the rest of time and universally everywhere.

Let's not take too much time on this, please hurry and set up the video recording system Miss P, we have no time to lose.

Miss P fumbles with a video recorder.

I, repeat your number. Again, I need to hear some enthusiasm. I, number, swear with and upon my own Entire Being to fulfill my determined role in The System and perform my function forever and everywhere, or until I am commanded to do something or anything else. And should I fail, I absolutely demand a horrific and painful execution that is broadcast publicly and I cede the summary broadcast and syndication rights to both my life, torture and death also to Pyramid-Head.

Wait a moment, we'll have to start all over. Someone isn't reciting their oath.

He walks to D8932471.

MAJOR 85 (cont'd)

If you don't say The Oath, you can't get your brain implant. Well, if it takes you longer we may have to give you an outdated model, some of which are known to act up from time to time. You wouldn't want that would you?

D8

No.

MAJOR 85

Good. Very good. So, are you ready to continue?

D8

No.

MAJOR 85

Well why didn't you just leave and admit you are just a Class 14, why are you wasting all of our time.

D8

I refuse that as well.

MAJOR 85

(turning to Mrs. P,
under his breath)

Was there anything in the notes about this one?

Miss P fumbles through a stack of PAPERS.

MISS P

Well, yes, it says that he is a history and rhetoric expert highly trained in combat, and has been known to lash out when backed into corners. What does that even mean?

MAJOR 85

I don't have time for this nonsense!

D8

I don't either.

He SNAPS Major 85's neck, grabs his GUN and stands up.

Miss P points to the camera.

MISS P

What! What are you doing!? It's all recorded, you'll never get away with this! Your only chance is to-

D8 SNAPS her neck and then turns to the rest of the class.

D8

This nonsense has gone on far too long. I know it seems like a lot to ask, but now is the time to bring it all down and start all over. Come with me, we will create a resistance and then a rebellion.

We will live, kill and die together, and free as many others as we can. I need your help. Your other choices will all lead to madness, a complete disconnect from reality and a complete dependance on powers that will always see you as disposable. It will use you up and spit you out, and torture you if you complain. You would never see a woman, you would be a slave to the depraved, I would kill for reasons I abhor.

I challenge you to life. I challenge you to love and hope, I challenge you to think and freely dream. The only thing that has ever changed anything is people who dreamt of something different. We can do it, let's go, we have to hurry. If you stay they'll give you the implant or drive you crazy for their sick pleasures. Please, let's go!

D8 OPENS the door at the back of the stage and urges the audience to come with him, meanwhile a STUDENT who wants to stay and just get the brain implant tries to convince everyone not to cause trouble while another STUDENT stands in the center indecisively before running out with D8.

HOW TO BUILD A BOAT OUT OF WATER

EXT. DAY - OPEN WATER

The Swimmer(30) swims aimlessly in the dark. Something GRABS him from below, he SCREAMS. There is a struggle, SPLASHES. Then calm water for a second before The Swimmer resurfaces, gasping. His LIFE PRESERVER is damaged, but he is otherwise unharmed.

The SUN rises, in the dim light and fog The Swimmer spots a ROWBOAT and a MAN rowing towards him. The Swimmer CALLS OUT and the Man turns.

MAN

Not a good time to be without a boat.

THE SWIMMER

Thanks for the tip. You wouldn't happen to have a spot open?

He grabs on to the side.

MAN

I can let you hang on for a minute, but that's all. I'm headed east, got to find the Queen Marie.

THE SWIMMER

I can help you out there, she sank to the bottom. It was last night, the captain was, there was a-

MAN

(gasps)

What happened?

THE SWIMMER

There was a-

MAN

(interrupting)

It doesn't matter. It's the worst possible news.

THE SWIMMER

Well, I mean, you've got a boat.

MAN

Did the captain survive? He was an old friend of mine.

THE SWIMMER

I'm not sure, we got separated when she went under. It was night, there was a fire, explosions. I don't know how I even survived.

MAN

With a flood like this, every big boat counts. If I find anyone on that crew, I'm going to hold them under lil they go still. They let the captain down, they let everybody down.

THE SWIMMER

The boat was full, we had taken on everyone we could anyway. The captain, he was, well, he wasn't well.

MAN

What, old McGinty? I don't believe it, he is the hardest saltiest steamer Ive ever known. It must have been the crew. Hard to find a good crew these days, that's why I'd rather row alone. My crew took my boat. It doesn't matter, now it's all up to the Queen Anne and who the hell knows where she is.

THE SWIMMER

The Queen Ann is still out there? Really?

MAN

Well, probably. Can't be that far. This whole section of ocean has been drifting East by Northwest, no wait-

The Man pulls out a sextant and a compass, makes a few calculations.

MAN(CONT'D)

Actually, it's difficult to say.

He sits, stares off in the distance for a few moments, then slowly turns to The Swimmer.

THE SWIMMER

I bet. Well where to now? Since you don't have a mission any more-

MAN
(angrily)
Hands off my boat!

The Man hits next to The Swimmer's fingers with an oar.

THE SWIMMER
(dropping away)
Fine! Ok! Is there any chance you had
an extra lifejacket in there? I was
attacked by this huge- I don't know
what it was exactly, but it ripped my
lifejacket in half. I'm having a
little trouble staying afloat.

MAN
NO HANDOUTS!

And he rows away as fast as he can.

MAN (cont'd)
(in the distance)
If I were you, I'd build a boat as
fast as I could.

THE SWIMMER
How do you build a boat out of water?

He sees a piece of wood float past and grabs it.

THE SWIMMER (cont'd)
Well I guess that, it's a start.

EXT. DAY - OPEN OCEAN

He spots a small boat with an outboard motor piloted by TWO
MEN, PHIL(30) and JACK(30) approaching in the distance.
Phil points to The Swimmer and they slightly alter course to
approach. Jack CALLS OUT when they are near.

JACK
We're going to have to ask you to
clear out of this area.

THE SWIMMER
What?

JACK

Yeah. You see, this here stretch of water is staked out and claimed, we have the title right here granted by the council and the decree of the sovereign society of the Queen Ann. You're going to have to move on.

THE SWIMMER

Uh, sure. Which way do I go then?

JACK

You're right in the middle so it'll be about the same any way you head, but you're going to have to hurry so you best get started. We're going to give you a break since you didn't know, but if we see you again, well, we'll have to issue a citation and everything would just escalate from there. You wouldn't want that would you?

THE SWIMMER

Of course not.

JACK

What did you say your name was?

THE SWIMMER

THE SWIMMER.

JACK

(laughing)

Good one! Alright now, just keep moving and you'll be out of our hair in no time.

He smacks the side of the boat twice and Phil powers up the motor and they leave. The Swimmer starts to swim faster, he keeps getting TANGLED in his broken live preserver.

EXT. DAY - OPEN OCEAN

The sun has come up and it's fully daylight now, the fog has cleared. The Swimmer barely catches a reflection and begins to swim towards it. As he gets closer, he spots a SEARAY type craft floating unpowered. A man on deck, DUANNE(45), is fiddling with an antennae on deck. His wife MARA(45) stands next to him with her hands on her hips. The Swimmer swims within vocal range, Duane and Mara look up from what they are doing when they hear him splashing.

DUANNE

Hello there, introduce yourself and state your business!

THE SWIMMER

Hello! I was in the neighborhood, not having a great day. I mean no harm. My name's THE SWIMMER. I'm good at fixing stuff, looks like your having some trouble with that RJ-46 full spectrum antennae?

DUANNE

I'm Duanne, this is Mara. We're dead in the water. We can't getting any reception on our radio either, it could be a few things but I'm running down the issue. Sounds like you may know a thing or two?

THE SWIMMER

I've been trained on antennas, transmitters, Fourier analysis, signals theory, electronics and basic cryptography actually. I'm a pretty handy guy to have around. Want me to take a look?

Duane and Mara look at each other, then do a 360 around the boat to make sure he is alone.

DUANNE

Sure, come aboard. But no funny stuff alright? Keep 3 arms lengths away at all times, we'll get along ok.

The Swimmer swims up to the craft, they drop the ladder and he climbs in. Mara hands him a towel. He's holding his broken life preserver, his clothes are in tatters.

THE SWIMMER

Thanks guys, I was starting to get a little too pruny if you know what I mean.

DUANNE

I bet, how long have you been out there?

THE SWIMMER

Just a little over 24 hours since the ship went down.

DUANNE

Too bad, sorry to hear about that.
Lot of sinkings lately. We're trying
to stay tuned into the Queen Ann,
she's been broadcasting news and
music. Signal's breaking up. Oh,
and the engine is broken. Won't turn
over. Have no idea why.

THE SWIMMER

Sounds like the starter, mind if i
take a look?

DUANNE

Go ahead, it's right down those
stairs, then hook around to the right
for the engine room.

The Swimmer makes some noise in the engine room.

THE SWIMMER

I need a flathead screwdriver, some
wire, and a 1/4 inch socket wrench.

Duane and Mara quickly grabs those things from a toolbox,
hand them down. Duane goes to look over his shoulder.

THE SWIMMER (cont'd)

Starter burned out, just needs to be
recoiled. Try to start it now. I'll
look at the radio.

DUANE

Really? That was fast.

He climbs up to the helm while The Swimmer traces the
antennae cable, finding a fraying area.

THE SWIMMER

Electrical tape?

MARA

Sure.

She grabs a small roll from the toolbox. Duane starts the
boat. The Swimmer cuts the wire, peels back the sheathing,
twists the wires back together, rolls tape around it and
places it back where it was run along the carpet. Mara
turns the radio on and it works immediately.

MUSIC begins to play from the radio.

DUANNE

Look at that! You're really something, that's not just talent, that's skill. We need someone like you around all the time!

THE SWIMMER

Thanks, I'm just glad to help out. You say there will be news from the Queen Anne on this station?

DUANNE

Actually, we won't even need that, there's the Queen Ann now!

He points to the horizon. The Swimmer climbs up on the bow and looks with his hand shielding his eyes from the sun. As soon as he is turned around, Duane PUSHES The Swimmer so hard he falls back into the water, without his life preserver.

THE SWIMMER

(recovering from
swallowing water)

Duane, why did you do that? I helped you!

DUANNE

There just isn't enough room on here for another person, I didn't want to drag it out.

THE SWIMMER

Can you at least throw me a life preserver?

Duane looks to Mara, she SHAKES HER HEAD.

THE SWIMMER(CONT'D)

So I help you and you try to kill me?

DUANNE

Don't be like that.

RADIO VOICE

That was Marcio Valmanuchi's debut symphony, "Escaldrelaria." What a fascinating work. You're listening to Queen Ann radio, hope your day is going swell. News will be on in a few minutes, hope you're keeping your head above water this fine afternoon, now back to the music.

They POWER UP the boat and motor off just as NEW SONG begins to play. Neither Duane or Mara look back.

EXT. DAY - OPEN WATER

The Swimmer is startled awake by a HORN and a BOAT bumping into him. There is a string of several boats tied together being pulled along by the lead boat.

ZANE(20-30) leans over the bow and looks down on The Swimmer.

ZANE

Looks like you could use a boat, am I right?

THE SWIMMER

Well, yeah! That would be great, I don't even need a big one. Just about any would do.

ZANE

Well you are in luck, I have 14 boats here to pick from, big, small, luxury, fast, slow, fishing, transport, you name it. But now is the time, there won't be another chance for these deals. I'm going out of business, unfortunately. But my bad luck could be your good luck!

THE SWIMMER

Going out of business? There are dozens of people out here drowning who need boats, they are the most valuable commodity in the entire world. I don't understand.

ZANE

Well sure, lots of people want boats, but who has the money? I've had to beat people off of my boats, but not a single one of them has had even a down payment.

THE SWIMMER

Wait, you are selling these boats for money? You've got to be kidding.

ZANE

No, you've got to be kidding. I paid good money for these, I'm still in debt up to my eyeballs. I don't see anyone else out here giving away boats like it's some charity.

THE SWIMMER

Well, yeah. But who has money in the water? There aren't any banks, so who do you even owe money to?

ZANE

I don't have time to explain the history of the world to people who didn't go to business school. Without money, civilization doesn't work.

THE SWIMMER

But civilization isn't working, it's collapsed, this is the end of the world.

ZANE

Right, so I bought low, and I'm going to sell high. Only, I don't have enough gas to keep dragging all these boats around, and I can get the insurance money if there is, well, an accident.

THE SWIMMER

Wait, what? You're going to sink these boats for insurance money?

ZANE

Shhhh, keep it down, this isn't exactly above board.

THE SWIMMER

You're going to sink these boats, while I am about ready to die in need of one?

ZANE

I didn't make the world this way, I just make the best business decisions I can in the moment. And right now, I need to cut these liabilities before there is a real accident that I'll be responsible for.

(MORE)

ZANE (cont'd)

Like what if these boats crashed into another boat, they're difficult to control. Then I'd be on the hook for those repairs. It's better not to have an asset than to have an open-ended liability. That's first day of Business 101.

THE SWIMMER

Ok, fine. But if you just give me the one boat, both me and the boat will be out of your hair.

ZANE

Then I'd have to sign the title over to you, and I'd have to have records of payment received that I could substantiate for tax purposes. No can do. I cannot just give you a boat. And since I decided you are my last potential customer before I give up, it's time to simplify my life and get out of the boat business.

THE SWIMMER

Wait, no! Please! No!

ZANE

Chill out man, it's not like you're losing anything. Here goes.

He produces a REMOTE CONTROL and clicks a button. All of the boats begin to slowly sink.

THE SWIMMER

No!

ZANE

Too late now. You had your chance. You should have gone to business school, maybe you wouldn't be in the water.

Zane speeds away, The Swimmer struggles in the wake and climbs aboard a pristine yacht just as it falls to the waterline.

The Swimmer gets back in the water and re-gathers his boards.

EXT. DAY - OPEN WATER

The Swimmer treads water. He finds a PIECE OF WOOD and holds on to it although it isn't anywhere near big enough for him to keep afloat. He finds another PIECE OF WOOD and bundles the two together awkwardly.

He sees a SHARK FIN glide past about 30 feet away. Then he sees a PERICOPE, pointed directly at him, about 5 feet away. The Swimmer tries to grab onto it but it disappears into the ocean.

He sees a SAIL in the distance and CALLS OUT, waving his arms. The SCHOONER turns towards him and drops sails, slowing down.

BERT and his wife TINA are on the bow, three CHILDREN are playing aft.

Bert is The Swimmer's brother.

THE SWIMMER

Bert! Really great timing, I'm in a pretty bad spot.

BERT

Bro!? What are you doing in the water? I thought you were on a ship somewhere! I'll get the ladder.

THE SWIMMER

Well, I was on a ship. Then there wasn't a ship. That was some time ago, maybe a day, maybe a few days, I'm not really sure anymore. Nights in the water are pretty long, plays with my head a little.

Bert drops the LADDER into the water, Tina brings some TOWELS. The Swimmer crawls on board.

BERT

I bet. I see you picked up some wood, we can definitely use that. Do you think you could grab them for me?

THE SWIMMER

Sure, why not.

He dives back in the water and hands up the boards.

BERT

If I need to make repairs these will come in handy. Thanks for the find!

THE SWIMMER

No problem. The last people I ran into, I fixed their whole boat then they stole my life preserver and kicked me in the water by surprise.

BERT

You can't be too careful out here, sounds like you were running with the wrong crowd. That's how you always were, too trusting. At least you're back with family.

TINA

That's right, I'm cooking up dinner, you're welcome to stay for supper.

THE SWIMMER

Oh, supper, that sounds wonderful.

BERT

It's too bad we don't have a place you can stay, but I do have something that's going to help you out there on the open water. All you've got to do is build a boat, that won't take long with a head like yours on your shoulders!

THE SWIMMER

It's the sharks that are the real problem.

BERT

Sharks? There aren't any sharks out there. Tina, have you seen any sharks?

TINA

Nope, and I try to keep a lookout.

THE SWIMMER

I just saw one a few minutes ago out there.

BERT

After a long night in the water, and with an empty stomach to boot, I imagine you're seeing all kinds of things. I know you'd probably like it if I had more to offer, but with these three kiddos, their full time schooling on my hands, and with a small boat like this, well, it would just be too much to handle to have a whole other adult around. I'm sure you understand.

THE SWIMMER

Of course.

BERT

Don't look at me like that.

THE SWIMMER

Like what?

BERT

Nevermind. Just like always.

THE SWIMMER

What?

BERT

Maybe it's better if you just go now. I don't want to relive ancient history.

THE SWIMMER

I'm not going to outstay my welcome but that's not what I'm trying to do here, I just really need a boat or I might not even survive the night.

BERT

Yeah, we were always last on your list until you need something. We're glad to help out where we can, but you know I have 3 other big priorities here to worry about. We have a life preserver and a barrel to offer, but that's it.

THE SWIMMER

If that's what you want, fine.

Tina wheels out a BARREL and throws it in the water with the plank. The Swimmer steps into the barrel. Bert throws the LIFE PRESERVER at him and he catches it.

BERT
There's a walkie talkie in there,
check in if you find the Queen Ann!

The Swimmer floats unsteadily in the barrel. Two SHARK FINS swim by about 10 feet from him.

THE SWIMMER
Did you see those!

BERT
Well, I guess there are sharks out
there after all. Hmm. It's only two
though, you've got some planks to hit
them with, you'll be fine. The Queen
Ann will pick you up soon. Probably.
Don't worry, you'll be in our
prayers!

They hoist the sails, the children WAVE as the boat slips away.

The Swimmer struggles to arrange the board and life preserver in the barrel in such a way that is comfortable, and fails. He SLOUCHES, goes limp and sleeps.

EXT. NIGHT - OPEN WATER

A BRIGHT LIGHT shines on The Swimmer and he wakes up. A HOOK is thrown into the barrel and the entire rig is pulled towards a 30-FOOT FISHING BOAT by a WENCH.

GARY(30), GEORGE(40) and GERALD(50) are at the wench shining their FLASHLIGHTS down into the barrel.

GARY
There's a dude in there.

GEORGE
Hey! Wake up!

The Swimmer is startled awake, confused.

THE SWIMMER
Wha! Oh, hey. What?

GEORGE

Have you seen any large fish around here recently?

THE SWIMMER

There's sharks out here, I've seen three just today.

GEORGE

No, not the sharks. We're talking about something else, it's about 30 feet long, it's teeth are too big to hunt humans. They seem to be attracted to the color orange, just like your life preserver.

THE SWIMMER

Well, now that you mention it. Early yesterday morning, while I was floating not too far from here, I was nearly eaten by something that big. And it tore up my life preserver, tore it right in half.

The three men look at each other.

GERALD

Tell us more about this creature, what color was it.

THE SWIMMER

It was too dark I couldn't see any of it.

Gerald throws his hands up in the air.

GEORGE

Worthless.

THE SWIMMER

The thing nearly ate me, it took me under so far my ears popped. It was the most terrifying experience of my entire life, I have no idea how I even survived. And there's still sharks out here, I'm in a precarious position even-

GARY

You don't get it, how close you came to being eaten doesn't help us. We already know it feeds in the morning and that it eats life preservers.

GERALD

We are going to need your life preserver.

THE SWIMMER

You know, I'd happily let you have my life preserver if I could just be made part of the crew. I'd help you guys find this fish best I could, I seem to have the most experience with it anyways.

GARY

If you don't give us the preserver, why'd we ever consider you to be part of the crew?

THE SWIMMER

What else do I have to do? Is there an application?

GEORGE

Nope, we just need your preserver. If you're agreeable, that's what we're looking for. People who do things without asking too many questions.

GARY

You've got that barrel anyway, you don't need a preserver. And you can swim right?

THE SWIMMER

Well, I guess. I'd love to be part of your crew, I'd do anything you guys needed. Sure here have my preserver.

He HANDS them his life preserver, they grab it. They pull their hook up and Gary PUSHES the barrel away with a long pole.

THE SWIMMER (cont'd)

Guess I didn't get job.

GARY

Nope.

Gerald SLICES a long sliver of orange fabric off the life preserver and sticks it on a HOOK, then makes a long CAST into the ocean as the boat PULLS AWAY at trawling pace.

EXT. NIGHT - OPEN OCEAN

The Swimmer floats alone in his trash bin with his single plank of wood. He sees THREE SHARK FINS. He sees the PERISCOPE again in the distance.

He hears MUSIC getting closer. The sound of GUITAR and SINGING. The shape of a PONTON BOAT emerges from the FOG in the distance with CHRISTMAS LIGHTS draped all over it. The Swimmer paddles closer with the board.

A MAN vaguely resembling Sammy Hagar, JIMMY(60) with a KEYBOARD is singing with backing bass and drum midi tracks. He is singing vacation style light blues music, similar to the style of Jimmy Buffett or the Grateful Dead. Two WOMEN, JACKIE(50) and TAMMY(50) drink margaritas and dance along, laughing.

THE SWIMMER

Hey guys! I'm really enjoying the music, keep it up.

The song comes to an end, Jimmy turns his attention to The Swimmer.

JIMMY

Not the greatest boat I've ever seen but everybody has to start somewhere.

THE SWIMMER

Oh, this isn't where I started, it's just where I'm at. I was on one of the biggest boats in the world two days ago.

JIMMY

That's life ain't it?

THE SWIMMER

What?

JIMMY

Life will do that to you, I call it a 'whammy.' You think you have everything, the biggest thing in the world, you deserve it and it's so big how could it ever disappear? Then it disappears.

THE SWIMMER

A whammy?

JIMMY

Heck, now you could have something twice as good, twice as big, that you really deserve and you'll never even feel like you actually have it. Now you've got to string up barbed wire over everything, use lie detector tests on your friends, get paranoid.

THE SWIMMER

Well, if you ever get back that far. Seems like now I have to build a boat out of water to even ever have that problem again.

JIMMY

Maslow's hierarchy, you have immediate needs that trump any long term planning. If a baby floated by right there I'd warn him about that aspect of life. It's going to happen to you, and when it does, that's how you are really going to be define you more than all the dancing you do on top of the world.

THE SWIMMER

You know, you're the fourth or fifth person today who actually has space on their boat, who just won't let me on board.

JIMMY

Don't get me wrong, I might let you up on here if you were a woman I was attracted to. How do you think I met Tammy and Jackie? But having another guy around here, it would really, really bother me. It takes a lot of energy to deal with everything you'd have to say about everything, and then you might kill me in my sleep. It's pretty stressful actually helping someone out.

THE SWIMMER

Well then do you have any extra building materials, I could get this barrel turned into a bigger vessel if I just had a few more building materials?

JIMMY
We're running pretty lean, I'm afraid
not. You could have a margarita?

TAMMY
Did I see you on the Queen Marie?

THE SWIMMER
Yeah, I was there.

TAMMY
What was that explosion?

THE SWIMMER
You would have to pay me something
for me to tell you.

TAMMY
Oh, look how you are.

JIMMY
I'll give you one margarita for the
secret to why the Queen Marie went
down.

THE SWIMMER
Ok. Fine.

Jimmy hands him a MARGARITA.

JIMMY
I left the salt off, figure you don't
to contribute to your already
pressing thirst problem. If I were
you I'd have bargained for a few
bottles of water. But that is top
shelf stuff, eh, I don't know. It's
likely your last drink anyway, see
all those sharks out there?

FOUR SHARK FINS glide past.

THE SWIMMER
(finishing a large
gulp)
That is pretty good. You know what?

He KICKS away from the pontoon boat.

THE SWIMMER(CONT'D)
I think I'll take the secret with me.

Jimmy shakes his head and squints. Then throws The Swimmer a bottle of water.

JIMMY

It doesn't matter. What matters is it sank. Just like a thousand other boats. Just like the land. Where the hell did all this water come from!? Sweet Jesus what the fuck happened.

He takes a hit straight from the bottle. Tammy stands and hugs him, as they paddle away.

JACKIE

Could you play that one song again?
My favorite?

JIMMY

You know it babe, just let me get plugged back in. That jerk tried to steal my mojo.

TAMMY

He's not a jerk, he's just sharkbait.

Jimmy's boat and music fade into the distance.

THE SWIMMER

I'm not sharkbait! I'll build a boat twice as big as that garbage skiff, just give me another 72 hours. I'll make a comfortable sweaters out of those sharks, all I need is this board. Throw me to the wolves I'll come back leading the pack!

He spots the PERISCOPE again faintly in the distance.

THE SWIMMER(CONT'D)

Oh, you want some too? Fine, hit me with all you got! All guns at my dread trash bin! "Oh I'm cool I have a submarine because someone just gave it to me". You think you're tough, try coming up here, solving everyone's problems and then being treated like all the problems are your fault! I saved the Queen Marie! I don't care if you don't believe me!

CUTAWAY - INT. NIGHT - SUBMARINE BRIDGE

SOMEONE WATCHES The Swimmer RANT M.O.S. through the PERISCOPE

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - NIGHT

The Swimmer spots a SMALL LOG and TANGLE OF PLASTIC and pulls them close to his bin. He works to untangle the plastic and fasten the log to the bin as a form of outrigger. He collects other random floatable objects and affixes them to his craft, like bottles, stuffed animals, and piping until it looks like a strange menagerie of items. It doesn't exactly float, but it doesn't exactly sink either. Days pass.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - DAWN

A MINESWEEPER enters the area and circles The Swimmer's craft before closing in. A HORN blares. A VOICE, that of CAPTAIN WILCOX, calls out on a loudspeaker.

CAPTAIN WILCOX
This is the HMS Manchester, you are
hereby ordered to cease and desist
and prepare for boarding.

The Swimmer puts his hands in the air.

A small rowboat with 4 SAILORS on it comes to him and they take him out of the barrel, leaving it behind. The Swimmer turns back to look at it fondly.

THE SWIMMER
I am ceasing and desisting. I don't
mind coming aboard but I don't want
to lose all my stuff in case you
throw me back in the water, can I
bring all this with me?

THE SWIMMER(CONT'D)
Don't you see? I made a boat out of
water? Who could do that? Don't I
get any credit?

SAILOR
I don't mean to hurt your feelings
buddy, but that's not a boat.

THE SWIMMER
You're going to criticize, do you
have any idea how little I had to
work with? The sharks? Where are we
going?

INT. DAY - BRIDGE

Two Sailors push The Swimmer onto the bridge of the vessel.
CAPTAIN WILCOX(50) steps towards him.

CAPTAIN WILCOX
What's your name?

THE SWIMMER
THE SWIMMER.

CAPTAIN
How did you end up in the water?

THE SWIMMER
Our boat sank.

CAPTAIN
Which boat?

THE SWIMMER
The Queen Marie.

There are audible GASPS.

CAPTAIN
You were on the Marie when she went
down?

THE SWIMMER
Yes. The Captain was out of his
mind, he refused to believe we were
under threat of submarine attack even
after I narrowly averted a torpedo
attack shortly prior.

CAPTAIN
Submarines? You've got to be kidding
me.

There is audible laughter in the bridge.

CAPTAIN(CONT'D)
Something else must have blown up,
have you had your eyes checked out?

THE SWIMMER

It doesn't bother me if you don't believe me. Think it was an engine fire if you want, but I saw a propeller trail, two of them, directly headed towards the Queen Marie and the second one sunk her. And since, I've seen a periscope out in the water. It can't be far, you're probably in danger right now.

CAPTAIN

Our equipment certainly would have detected it.

SAILOR

Actually, our sonar has been offline for a few days.

CAPTAIN

It doesn't matter, there aren't any submarines, ok? What are you some kind of paranoid theorist? Do you always need some kind of bogeyman to motivate you? We are perfectly safe!

There is a HUGE EXPLOSION that rocks the boat and all the ALARMS go off, the ship immediately begins to list. One of the SAILORS is on FIRE and jumps in the water screaming.

The Swimmer runs for the railing, spots his craft then jumps in the water and swims towards it as the MINESWEEPER SINKS IN FLAMES.

EXT. NIGHT - OPEN OCEAN

The Swimmer paddles away from the FLAMES. When he looks ahead he spots a CARGO SHIP brimming with REFUGEES, illuminated by the blaze.

The Swimmer WAVES his arms and tries to warn them.

THE SWIMMER

There's a submarine torpedoing all the big ships! That's what just blew up that Minesweeper! You have to get off that boat! You're going to be attacked next.

One of the REFUGEES shouts back.

REFUGEE

Nice try, enjoy the water by yourself
buddy.

One WOMAN, TESSA(20) disagrees. She is quite beautiful.

TESSA

Don't you see, he just came from
there. If he says it was hit by a
torpedo, we should believe him. What
does he have to gain? I hate this
ship anyway, standing in my own piss
for days at a time is almost as bad
as just being in the ocean anyway.

She JUMPS into the water and paddles towards The Swimmer.

THE SWIMMER

I don't know how comfortable it will
be but there's room for at least one
more aboard, I still do think it's
safer than the ship.

Tessa grabs a hold of The Swimmer's craft and begins to
climb up on it.

TESSA

Thanks for inviting me, think we can
probably find some more stuff in the
wreckage that way to build onto it.
What's your name-

As she is pulling her last leg up onto the boat, a SHARK
lunges out of the water and drags her underwater. Four
other FINS are visible and they all join in.

THE SWIMMER

NO!!!

He tries to reach for her.

TESSA

(gurgling as her head
passes above water
one final time)

N000!!

She disappears under the water as The Swimmer tries to grab
her in vain.

REFUGEE

Stupid bitch.

The REFUGEES LAUGH.

There is a HUGE EXPLOSION and the BOAT SPLITS IN TWO, in FLAMES. The REFUGEES SCREAM in TERROR.

REFUGEES
Help Us! No! Sharks! Arrrgghh!

DOZENS of SHARK FINS appear.

The Swimmer paddles away as fast as he can from the sounds of the calamity and desperation.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - NIGHT

The Swimmer puts some distance between himself and the fire. He pulls out the WALKIE TALKIE and turns it on. The STATIC echoes across the water.

THE SWIMMER
Bert? You out there?

There is a long pause.

BERT
Yeah. Hi THE SWIMMER.

THE SWIMMER
How's Tina? The kids?

THE SWIMMER (cont'd)
Oh she's fine. She's right here. The kids have been pretty good. Tara is losing teeth. Ira is memorizing digits of Pi. Dan is quite the fisherman, which is helping out a lot. What's up with you?

THE SWIMMER (cont'd)
Oh I'm fine. But hey, you've got to watch out. There's a submarine out here just blowing things up. I'm not kidding.

BERT
You sure about that? Why would there be any submarines?

THE SWIMMER
I know it sounds unlikely, but I've seen it.

(MORE)

THE SWIMMER (cont'd)
I've seen it sink ships, hundred of
people died, got eaten by sharks. It
was grim.

BERT
Ok. I'll take your word for it.
We'll keep on the move then for a
while. How are you? How's your boat
coming along?

THE SWIMMER
Well, it's not quite what you'd
usually call a boat, but it's keeping
me out of the water. The barrel was
really helpful, sharks can't quite
get me in here and I can get a little
sleep now and then.

BERT
Well good, you keep working on it and
let me know when you got one so we
can meet up again alright?

THE SWIMMER
Will do. Over and out.

CUTAWAY

INT. SUBMARINE - NIGHT

Several dark figures gather around a RADIO listening to The Swimmer and Bert's conversation.

BERT
Over and out.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - NIGHT

The Swimmer sleeps uncomfortably in the Barrel. He is awakened by a SPLASHING sound and startles awake, grabbing a stick ready to fight sharks.

Instead he sees a CANOE with THREE ELDERLY FIGURES before him, GUS(70), RUTH(70) and HARRY(70). They have PADDLES and are shining a large FLASHLIGHT on him.

GUS
Rise and Shine!

HARRY
Wakey, Wakey!

THE SWIMMER
Fine, ok! I'm awake can you put that
light somewhere else? Please? Thank
you.

GUS
Quite a craft you've got there,
haven't seen anything else like it.

HARRY
And compared to the rest of the
people who were floating out here
yesterday, you still have attached
legs.

RUTH
Cut it out, he's already having a
difficult enough time. Look, THE
SWIMMER is it?

THE SWIMMER
How'd you know my name?

RUTH
It doesn't matter, we know a lot of
things. We're just impressed someone
actually built a boat out of water.
Quite an accomplishment.

HARRY
That's not a boat.

GUS
Sure it is, it's buoyant, it has a
passenger, a shark can't eat him in
it. Apparently. Yet.

RUTH
How'd you do it?

THE SWIMMER
How did I not get eaten by sharks
before I built this? Well,
primarily, my brother gave me this
barrel. That helped a lot.

HARRY
Told you, inheritance.

GUS

So someone gives you an empty barrel now and you are born rich? And then you get judged along with those who were born with a fleet of boats, and get them all sunk?

HARRY

The question is whether or not anyone can pull themselves up by their bootstraps, which you have to do to succeed, and as I continue to see it, this entire generation was garbage. When put to the test, they were all sharkbait. Good ridedns.

THE SWIMMER

How about how much was stolen from me? How about how the person who inherited command of the actual ship I was on, turned out to be the most loony person on the entire ship? How about people stealing and tricking me out of my only life preserver while I'm actually being visibly hunted by sharks? How about the entire system that ruined the world and flooded every damned thing in the first place? Then you want to come in here from your high perch of a stinking paleolithic floating apparatus and make pronouncements about how no one is up to your absurd fantasy standard, your vast self-serving delusion.

Ruth and Gus LAUGH and CLAP

RUTH

See Harry, no one is going to agree with your bitter, jaded assessment.

GUS

Everybody knows Harry, the fish rotted from the head down. The people who ruled the earth went mad, they had all the power in the world to do whatever they wanted, and this is the world they created.

THE SWIMMER

From this angle it looks like the only winners are the sharks, they enjoy millionaires and beggars equally.

HARRY

All misdirection from the real question. Are you tough enough, and you're not. Neither are you two. If it weren't for me, well.

RUTH

It was my canoe, that's the only reason you're out of the water Harry. Don't try to forget that. Could you have made a boat like this, even with a barrel given to you? I doubt it.

THE SWIMMER

So you remember when there was land right?

GUS

Oh yeah.

THE SWIMMER

I find it harder and harder to remember that every day.

RUTH

So do we. And fewer are alive who saw it. And fewer care. And us old people, well, we have to stay on the move or they'll take everything we have.

THE SWIMMER

Isn't the way it's supposed to work that the older people of a species are supposed to have it together and when they have children, they foster them and their lives, and if anything too bad happens, they are able to help out and cushion them from the brute forces of nature?

RUTH

Hey now.

THE SWIMMER

Isn't this entire situation just parents abandoning their children?
(MORE)

THE SWIMMER (cont'd)
Parents realizing that they were
completely unable to care for those
they gave birth to?

GUS
It started a long time before this.
You're going to blame us?

THE SWIMMER
You're the only people I've even ever
met that were around to make any
decisions at all prior to all of
this. I was just graduating from
school when I went on the Queen
Marie, when the great rain came.

RUTH
I see. Well what do you want to do,
hit us with your stick? Would it
make you feel better?

THE SWIMMER
I would like for a second to receive
something, besides an empty barrel,
as my heritage. I would like for the
people who want respect and
civilization to give at least
something if they want me to belong.
I'd like some basic platform of
commonality, that I would know
someone won't bite my hand when I
reach out to shake it. I would like
some credit for work that I have done
and ability to prove my skills. I'd
like some friends and women to go on
dates with. I'd like the people who
manage my work to be sane and fair
people. I want to live close to my
family, not bump into them on the
high seas every few years. I would
like people older than me to impart
wisdom rather than running cheap cons
on me.

RUTH
Well yeah, you want a sane world
because you're still sane. I feel the
same way. I felt the same way before
the flood actually. These two can't
agree on a single aspect of the world
they want back. Gus and I tend to
agree more, but I can't say Harry is
exactly wrong all the time either.

HARRY

That's right you can't.

RUTH

But if I thought that way about the world, I would just let the sharks have me, there's nothing about that world I'd want to live in.

HARRY

People need their illusions.

THE SWIMMER

You're the one with even more illusions. You hold up a ridiculous moral framework over everyone you meet knowing next to nothing about where they have been and what they are capable of. You judge books by their cover and surprise, they all support what you already thought. So good luck with that, if that's what you would teach your grandchildren, they are better off without you.

GUS

Ouch. I told him that last week, didn't get through then and it won't now.

HARRY

You all just gang up on me because you can. We have to keep moving, you know that. We've debated the finer points with this miserable gentleman long enough.

RUTH

Unfortunately he's right, we have to move on. Best wishes.

GUS

All the best.

HARRY

Whatever.

THE SWIMMER

Bye I guess. Thanks for the conversation.

HARRY

Bye, he guesses. What does that even mean?

The three begin to paddle again and the canoe disappears into the fog.

RUTH

Oh, keep an eye out for the zeppelin!
He's nearby, he may take you for a ride. I'd go if he offers!

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - PRE-DAWN

The Swimmer looks up and spots in the distance a LARGE FLOATING OBJECT coming towards him through the fog.

It is a ZEPPELIN. A VOICE calls down. It is the PILOT(50)

VOICE

Hi, I'm the pilot. Grab the rope and I'll take you for a ride so you can get the big picture! I'll bring you back to your, uh, craft after we circle around!

A ROPE descends and hangs above The Swimmer. He grabs it. He's LIFTED out of the boat, up through the fog.

He sees all the BOATS from above. He sees the QUEEN ANNE in the distance. He sees WRECKAGE, FIRES, overturned and sinking craft. He sees the shadows of SHARKS and spots the SUBMARINE, SURFACING.

He calls up to the Pilot.

THE SWIMMER

Do you see the sub?

PILOT

Oh yeah, trying to get away faster. He surprised me this time. He might have us with that gun. Uh oh.

SAILORS jump out of the conning tower of the submarine and MAN a CANNON on its bow. They begin to FIRE at the Zeppelin.

PILOT (cont'd)

Uh oh. Hold on!

The cannon scores a DIRECT HIT. The Zeppelin explodes in flames, The Swimmer FALLS into the water right beside the submarine.

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - DAWN

The Swimmer is pulled out of the water and taken aboard the submarine. He is dragged to it's BRIDGE via the CONN TOWER by SAILORS.

INT. SUBMARINE BRIDGE - DAWN

The Swimmer is handed TOWELS and begins to dry himself as several OFFICERS of the deck look on. But he begins to rant as soon as he steps off the ladder.

THE SWIMMER

You shot the zeppelin down? Why? That was the most beautiful thing surviving! I saw it all, the whole ocean. The Queen Anne, all the ships, the rising sun, all that's left of humanity illuminated for a moment, all together. And then you blew it up. Now I can't even get back to my barely floating rig of garbage I call a boat. Now I've been captured by the people who have been destroying everything just as I discover it, to what purpose I can only imagine. Are you going to kill me now as the punctuation to a sick joke? Put me in the brig? Oh, ask me to join you! Make me a little minion running about swabbing the deck? Something more twisted than sinking a dozen boats and feeding people to the sharks for no reason? Please! I want to hear it! What the hell are you doing!?

One of the Officers SNAPS his finger and The Swimmer is pointed to the periscope. The Swimmer puts his face up to it.

CUTSCENE - PERISCOPE SIGHTS SHOWING THE QUEEN ANNE DIRECTLY AHEAD

INT. SUBMARINE BRIDGE - DAWN

The Swimmer steps back from the periscope.

A MAN(50), dressed in formal military naval dress, steps forward.

CAPTAIN

The Queen Anne is directly in our sights. You can join us, all you have to do is press this button.

He POINTS to a RED BUTTON.

CAPTAIN(CONT'D)

All your problems will be solved. You'll have food, a dry bunk, books to read, a job to do. Just press the button. Destroy the last big ship. Bring down the stinking, rotting remains of what came before. Join us, live with us, be always underwater, always upside down, never right, always wrong, disappear as a way of living. Believe me, it's fun. We have a pretty good time.

THE SWIMMER

No, I am a builder of things, I am a knower of things, and I have seen the big picture and you're just a bunch of scumbags who inherited a powerful weapon, and now it's consumed you. Without this sub you would all eat each others legs off as soon as look at each other. With it, you perpetuate its designed purpose of destruction and chaos. The more you disappear, the less accountable you become, the less human you are. Humanity is responsible for its actions, you aren't humanity. No you're just some faux demonic plague of stupidity feeding people to sharks whose screams you don't even bother to listen to.

CAPTAIN

Whoa that was heavy. I have no idea what you're even talking about but it sounds really deep. Truth is that was a test.

(MORE)

CAPTAIN (cont'd)
We don't want to sink the Queen Anne,
we are the Queen Anne. I am the
Queen Anne, but you can call me
Admiral.

MATE
Admiral, we're prepared to surface

ADMIRAL
Make it so. Follow me.

The submarine SURFACES beside the QUEEN ANNE. They all EXIT
and relocate to her bow.

EXT. DAY - BOW OF THE QUEEN ANNE

The ship is headed straight for the RISING SUN on the
horizon as the group assembles on the fore deck.

SERVANTS, BODYGUARDS, A BARTENDER, BIKINI GIRLS surround the
Admiral and bring a large festive chair for him to sit upon.

ADMIRAL
Bring the new prisoners.

EVERY PREVIOUS SURVIVING CHARACTER is brought out, excepting
his brother and his family. Jimmy, Tammy, Jackie, Ruth,
Gus, Harry, Gerald, George, Gary, Phil, Jack, the Zeppelin
Pilot, Captain Wilcox, and the Man are all gagged and
shackled together along the opposite railing.

ADMIRAL (cont'd)
Had you pressed that fake button to
blow this ship up, I would have
already put you in chains. If I
hadn't seen your resolve and your
ingenuity, and had these fine people
not testified to it when I tortured
them for fun, I'd say the same.
There's something about you, you seem
to actually know things, unlike even
the Captain of the second to last of
the big ships that was even floating.
Bring him out!

The CAPTAIN of the Queen Marie is brought out by a GAURD,
bleeding, heavily injured and delirious.

CAPTAIN
My first mate! I looked everywhere
for you!

The Guard KICKS him and he falls silent.

ADMIRAL

Just as I suspected, the First Mate of the Queen Marie. The actual individual responsible that ship lasted as long as she did. I have been looking for someone who really knows his stuff, knows how things work. This is an identical ship, I have to be frequently away. You seem like a standup guy. But I'm going to need a test of your loyalty. That's a lot of trust. You see, I'd never be able to trust any of these losers because they have nothing I want. I already took it. You do have something I want, and I could take it. But if you gave it to me, it would mean a whole lot more.

The Swimmer shakes his head and starts to open his mouth but the Admiral interrupts.

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

The one ship I can't quite get my hands on, your brothers damned schooner, and of course all of the finer parts of his cargo. Can't catch it with those sails, can't torpedo it because it's too shallow. Believe me I've tried. No surprise at all you two are from the same pod. At any rate, I heard your brother over the radio. I know you can communicate.

All you've got to do is set up a meeting for our trap and voila, you are my new first mate. You wouldn't just have a boat, you'd have the biggest one likely left in the entire world! How's that for a twist of fortune! I'll even sweeten the deal, if you don't call him up right this instant I am going to kill you and my second mate here is going to imitate your voice and do it for you.

(MORE)

ADMIRAL (CONT'D)

So what's it going to be? I don't understand why you are even hesitating, your brother threw you back in the water with only a barrel and a plank of wood to face sharks when he had plenty of room on his ship. If that were my brother, I'd just forget about him. Yet here you are, agonizing. It doesn't matter, rise to the occasion, take what is yours from those who don't deserve it. Would he do the same for you?

He laughs and shakes his head.

The Swimmer pulls the walkie talkie out of his pants and turns it on, sets the channel.

THE SWIMMER

Bert? It's me.

BERT

Hey, how are things?

THE SWIMMER

Hey, you've got to be careful. The Queen Marie is looking for you, she's about four miles south of your last known position. Not sure when I'll see you again, get as far away as you can. The Admiral's a nutjob.

BERT

Got it, thanks. Take care of yourself.

The Admiral GRABS at the walkie talkie and takes a SWING at The Swimmer, who deftly DODGES with a steps back towards the railing.

THE SWIMMER

There's one thing you forgot about me, Admiral-

He THROWS the walkie talkie overboard.

ADMIRAL

Guards, put this imbecile in chains!

THE SWIMMER

-I know how to build a boat out of water.

The Guards move towards him with a set of CHAINS, but The Swimmer, laughing, JUMPS OVERBOARD.

THE END

Production Suggestions

Gnaw

I imagine all the characters in basic or elaborate mouse and cat costumes. A large sheet of paper should cover the back wall, painted to look like a wall. The drama would be supported by diminutive actors playing the mice and when the cat that breaks in were a very large person. It might be funny to play the theme from the musical "Cats" when the cats break in.

My ultimate vision, is for the hole in the paper to lead directly to the next play, and for the entire audience to go through and be seated in the adjacent theater, and for the lead actor in Gnaw to play one of the leads in Limo.

Also, the genders and orientations should be played with across different productions. All women, all gay, breaking out of the maze could be a metaphor for the liberation struggle of practically any repressed culture.

Limo

I imagine a giant cardboard half-limousine sticking out of the left side of the stage and a table with a boombox centered against the back wall. I imagine Victor and Tony entering somehow elevated. A projector could make lighting bolts appear against the back wall. When the audience responds and votes, they will be directed out of the theater to the left or the right, and led to the next theater. On the left side they will be shown news articles about bad things happening in the world that are depressing and upsetting. On the right side, the opposite, although right and left should be switched randomly between production to eliminate the chance of goodness or badness being associated with some irrelevant dichotomy like light and dark. For the same reason, the accents and nationalities of Victor, Maxim and Tony should be changed randomly from production to production. Be creative and reject any repetition, but perhaps try to reflect current events. Or subvert them, or interfere with them, but be playful about it.

First Day

This is pretty cut and dry, but again at the end the audience could choose which door to follow, and the path to the next play would be lined with images, news articles and adjunct crew acting out and reflecting their likely future with that choice. On one side successful revolution, on the other side life under an evil antihuman system.

How to Build a Boat Out of Water

Simulating the ocean on a dry stage is difficult and this requires a pretty large stage, admittedly. "All is Lost" with Robert Redford is what it would look like on screen, but on stage you would need to simulate water at chest height. 2 or 3 large moving wave props covering the entire front of the stage could do this, then the other boats could be made from cardboard and could be wheeled along the back wall.

The swimmer could be a woman, no real reason why not, but I am a male writer and this is about my life experience, how it looks from my perspective, and how it looks living in my time, and that reflects the upside-down world of the late stage Unistat empire. And how this reads right now is how my life has felt and looked to me, so I would like to ask that this be accepted rather than used as an excuse to do gender-gymnastics to prove how non-sexist I or someone else is. But you could, theoretically, flip all of the genders and make the world of this flood into a matriarchy, if you really wanted.

But really, there are 100 scenes I would(will) add to this if I had any assurance that this would not decline the potential readership to zero, as excessively long works by unknown authors are read even less, and that is saying something.

One last idea, in the final scene where the previous characters are brought out in shackles, bring a few audience members on stage in shackles too.

Or shackle the entire audience.