

# THE BEST PLAY EVER, GUARANTEED

## By Alan Haehnel

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## CHARACTERS

WRITER	A clever kid
OTHER	The Writer's clever friend
REJECTORS 1-8	
B.S. PRODUCER	Big Shot Producer
ASSISTANT	Assistant to above B.S.
CRITICS 1-5	
FANS 1-5	
AUDIENCE MEMBERS 1 and 2	
HE	
SHE	
VILLAINESS	
FRIENDS 1-3	
VARIOUS OTHER CHARACTERS	To come and go and generally fill the stage
MONOLOGUIST	
SECURITY GUARDS 1 and 2	
BATTLERS 1-4	
WILDE 1 and 2	
CRACKER 1 and 2	
COMPELLING 1-19	

*2 F, 1 M, 55 either. Doubling, Tripling, Quadrupling not only possible but highly recommended.*

## SET

Wide open with possibilities. This could be minimalist or it could be extravagant--same is true of the costumes, the props and every other aspect of the production because the actual content of "The Best Play Ever Written, Guaranteed" remains unknown.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have never written a more open-ended play. The look? Number of characters? Style? Costumes? And, most important, pacing? It's all up to the individual director: I provide virtually no specifics about the features of "The Best Play Ever" the Writer envisions. Spectacle is key, though, and for that reason I suggest as large a cast as possible.

# THE BEST PLAY EVER, GUARANTEED

by  
Alan Haehnel

**Lights up on a CHARACTER in a beanbag chair, with a notebook. We'll call him WRITER. Another CHARACTER enters—OTHER-- and sits in the other beanbag beside the WRITER. THEY are both far downstage right, in front of the closed main drape.**

OTHER: Hey, watcha doing?

WRITER: Just finishing.

OTHER: Finishing what?

WRITER: Hang on. *(Adds a flourish to whatever is on the page.)*

There.

OTHER: Done?

WRITER: Done.

OTHER: With...?

WRITER: I just finished writing The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed.

OTHER: Wow.

WRITER: Yeah. Feeling pretty good.

OTHER: Just curious—um, given the likes of such people as, say, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Chekhov, not to mention some of the moderns like Shaw, Pinter, Wilder, Miller—I mean, some pretty heavy-hitting names in the drama world...

WRITER: How do I know I've just written The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed?

OTHER: Pretty much, yeah.

WRITER: *(handing over his notepad)* Check it out.

OTHER: *(taking it, reading it)* Oh. Clever.

WRITER: Indisputable, right?

OTHER: You've written the words "The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed!"

WRITER: All in caps, for emphasis.

OTHER: *(flipping through pages)* And that's... all you've written.

WRITER: Not true. Keep looking.

OTHER: I don't see... *(looking closely, reading)* Gorilla smack.

WRITER: Page 18, gorilla smack. Exactly.

OTHER: What does that have to do with anything?

WRITER: Precisely nothing.

OTHER: Why did you write it?

WRITER: Precisely no idea. However, "gorilla smack" randomly placed on page 18 does nothing to diminish the fact that I have, in fact, written The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed.

OTHER: With a by-line.

WRITER: By moi. Correct you are.

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OTHER: Quite an accomplishment.

WRITER: Not bad for one day. Think I'll take a nap. (*WRITER leans back, closing his eyes.*)

OTHER: While you're doing that, maybe I'll just go ahead and write The Best Novel Ever, The Best Poem Ever and The Best Chemistry Lab Report Ever.

WRITER: All Guarantee?

OTHER: Naturally.

WRITER: Knock yourself out. Just don't put them on the same page as mine.

OTHER: Oh, a separate page for each. They deserve that.

WRITER: Indubitably.

*(Silence for a moment. The WRITER contentedly sits with his eyes closed. OTHER looks at the notebook.)*

How's it coming?

OTHER: Writer's block.

WRITER: Mm. Shame. Well, some of us have it, some of us... you know.

OTHER: Plus I don't have a pen.

WRITER: I do.

OTHER: Fabulous.

WRITER: But I am disinclined to share.

OTHER: Tragic.

WRITER: Opportunity knocked, nobody was home.

OTHER: I was so inspired by your success, too. What do you suggest I do with my all-but-wasted life?

WRITER: A nap, even a quasi-one like I'm experiencing, is generally a fabulous idea.

OTHER: I shall join you, then.

WRITER: Feel free. Plenty of room in Napville.

*(OTHER drops the notebook.)*

Careful. That's The Best Play Ever, you know.

OTHER: How could I forget?

*(OTHER closes his eyes. Another long silence.)*

WRITER: It is possible.

OTHER: What's that?

WRITER: It's entirely conceivable.

OTHER: I don't doubt that, though I'm a bit concerned that I don't know what you're talking about.

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WRITER: I mean, granted, I only wrote the words "The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed," and that was a bit of a joke. You caught that, right?

OTHER: The humor was subtle, dry and delightfully understated, but I got it.

WRITER: Think of it, though. I'm a person.

OTHER: That rumor has been well substantiated.

WRITER: With a brain.

OTHER: Either that or your head is stuffed with mud perfectly impersonating a brain.

WRITER: And I have imagination.

OTHER: Agreed. Check. So you do.

WRITER: And time. I have time on my hands.

OTHER: Your numerous naps attest you have time not just on your hands, but smeared over your entire person.

WRITER: Given those assets, then, I could, indeed, write The Best Play Ever.

OTHER: Uh...

WRITER: You doubt me?

OTHER: Uh...

WRITER: Why do you doubt me?

OTHER: Well, let's see. Given the fact that billions of individuals have lived and are living with brains and imaginations and time, yet only a miniscule percentage has ever attempted to write a play, an even smaller percentage has finished, and the percentages only decrease as we work toward plays produced, plays recognized as quality, plays seen as classics, and, finally, the perhaps dozen plays critics world-wide would agree could actually vie for the title of best... given all that, I guess I find your assertion that you are eminently qualified to write The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed, just a tad... dubious.

WRITER: And I thought you were my friend.

OTHER: I am your friend. Only your friends will tell you when your assertions are dubious.

WRITER: But think of it! (*picking up the notebook*) Blank pages in one hand; a pen in the other!

OTHER: The one you were disinclined to share.

WRITER: (*bringing pen and paper together*) One meets the other, one scrawls symbols on the other, one fills the pages of the other and... viola!

OTHER: Viola-la-la!

WRITER: The...

WRITER and OTHER: Best Play Ever, Guaranteed!

WRITER: Applause!

OTHER: Acclaim!

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WRITER: Prizes!

OTHER: Fame!

WRITER: Women!

OTHER: Jack Russell Terriers! I always wanted a couple of those guys. I think they're the perfect blend of cuteness and energy.

WRITER: It wouldn't be that hard. It really wouldn't.

OTHER: Oh, wouldn't it, though?

WRITER: What mean you by this disparaging remark, my friend?

OTHER: Only this, my friend: Historically, artists—particularly writers—have been known for their suffering. It almost seems a prerequisite for greatness.

WRITER: Oh, I would suffer.

OTHER: I should hope so.

WRITER: The Best Play Ever would be etched in my blood.

OTHER: I'd hate to replace the cartridge on that printer.

WRITER: And after I had toiled and tortured myself for...

OTHER: Decades!

WRITER: Well...

OTHER: Years!

WRITER: I'm not...

OTHER: Months!

WRITER: Probably more like...

OTHER: A long holiday break!

WRITER: Yes! For the entire vacation, I would live a life of deprivation.

OTHER: Deprivation vacations. Could catch on.

WRITER: No sleep, no television, no sustenance but Mountain Dew and Ring Dings...

OTHER: No naps.

WRITER: No naps!

OTHER: No video games.

WRITER: No... wait a minute—I'm talking deprived, not dead.

OTHER: No more than 20 hours of video games.

WRITER: Yes, yes, yes. And by the end of that long and gruesome struggle, I will have produced *The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed*. It will be a tome!

OTHER: *(sung in the rhythm and tones of the classic dramatic riff)*  
Tome-ta-tome-tome... tome!

WRITER: That was cute.

OTHER: I fancied so.

WRITER: Don't ever do it again.

OTHER: 10-4.

WRITER: And then...

OTHER: And then?

WRITER: And then...

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OTHER: And then?

WRITER: And then... I would send it out.

OTHER: Where it would be heralded as the greatest creation since Hot Pockets!

WRITER: No! Where it would be rejected.

OTHER: Ah, yes—the rejections.

*(REJECTOR 1 comes out, struggling under a pile of manuscripts.)*

WRITER: I would spend my last dime and E-bay off my entire collection of classic Pokemon cards just to afford the postage.

OTHER: Would now be the time to confess my secret crush on Gardenia? I loved her green booties.

WRITER: I would send it to hundreds of agents and theaters and publishers where it would go unread!

*(REJECTOR 2 enters to see REJECTOR 1.)*

REJECTOR 2: Where're you going with those?

REJECTOR 1: The Dumpster.

REJECTOR 2: Nothing good?

REJECTOR 1: What are the chances? I'm chucking the whole pile.

*(REJECTORS 1 and 2 exit while REJECTORS 3 and 4 enter.)*

WRITER: It would be misunderstood!

REJECTOR 3: *(holding up a manuscript)* Hey, did you read this?

REJECTOR 4: That tome? I didn't get it.

REJECTOR 3: Neither did I. Where's the Dumpster?

*(REJECTORS 3 and 4 exit while REJECTORS 5 and 6 enter.)*

WRITER: Misplaced!

REJECTOR 5: Hey, did you read that tome I gave you to look at yesterday?

REJECTOR 6: I started to, but then I left it in the backseat of my boyfriend's car and he loaned it to his cousin who got in a wreck and totaled it so I imagine it's about to be put through the crusher and end up as a cube of metal destined to be recycled. Why?

REJECTOR 5: No reason. Forget it.

*(REJECTORS 5 and 6 exit while REJECTORS 7 and 8 enter.)*

WRITER: Thrown out on a technicality!

REJECTOR 7: Hey, did you check out that tome I sent over?

REJECTOR 8: The one written in blood?

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REJECTOR 7: Yeah, that one.

REJECTOR 8: You know I'm a vegan reader—vegetable-based ink only. I threw it in the Dumpster.

REJECTOR 7: Oh, okay.

*(REJECTORS 7 and 8 exit.)*

OTHER: Wow. How ever will The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed, see the light of day?

WRITER: Serendipity.

OTHER: Seren-who-do-what?

WRITER: Dipity, compadre, dipity. A chance, happy discovery.

*(A manuscript gets tossed out onstage from the wings. It lands with a thud.)*

It's an essential ingredient of all great works.

OTHER: And here I thought it was fresh basil.

*(BIG SHOT PRODUCER enters with her ASSISTANT in tow.)*

ASSISTANT: And then you have a meeting with the execs at the Met.

Oh, and Andrew Lloyd Weber called again.

B.S. PRODUCER: That hack. Stall him!

ASSISTANT: Yes, Ma'am.

B.S. PRODUCER: *(seeing the manuscript)* What's this?

ASSISTANT: It looks like a tome that got dropped on the way to the Dumpster.

B.S. PRODUCER: *(picking up the manuscript)* Hm. Appears to be written in blood.

*(SHE opens the manuscript and reads for a second. As SHE does so, the WRITER sings the stereotypical wordless tune of angelic discovery.)*

Holy Cow!

ASSISTANT: What is it, Ma'am?

B.S. PRODUCER: Cancel all my appointments! Book me a solitary hotel room!

ASSISTANT: But... what about the execs at the Met?

B.S. PRODUCER: Forget the Met execs! I need time and solitude to read this script immediately! If the rest of this lives up to the promise of the opening lines, I just... I just... catch me while I faint.

*(The ASSISTANT catches her.)*

Good. I'm over that. Put me back.

*(The ASSISTANT does as commanded.)*

Why are you still standing here?

*(The ASSISTANT gets to work on her hand-held computer.)*

Have you cancelled my appointments? Have you booked me my hotel room? Who else knows about this? Don't you understand what this means? Good glory, this could be the big one! What are you doing? Where is my...?

ASSISTANT: Sheraton, Suite 315, the most solitary room they have.

B.S. PRODUCER: And my...

ASSISTANT: All appointments cancelled through next Tuesday. It's just you and that blood-etched tome, Ma'am.

B.S. PRODUCER: And my case of Diet Pepsi with lime.

ASSISTANT: Of course. There's the limo now.

B.S. PRODUCER: *(exiting with ASSISTANT)* Take me to solitude!

WRITER: Are you seeing it?

OTHER: Uh-huh. I do believe you put the dip in the serendip-dipity.

WRITER: And then The Greatest Play Ever, Guaranteed, will explode upon the waiting world!

OTHER: Critics and fans alike will struggle to find words to capture the experience!

*(A GROUP of TEN CRITICS and FANS enters.)*

CRITIC 1: It's like...

FAN 1: It reminds me of...

CRITIC 2: I want to say...

FAN 2: It's just so...

CRITIC 3: Fabulous? No.

FAN 3: Heavenly? Weak, weak!

CRITIC 4: Earth-shatteringly magnificent? Not even close!

FAN 4: I can't get over it! It was just so....

CRITIC 5: So...

FAN 5: So...

ALL CRITICS and FANS: Awesome!

WRITER: *(in a reverie)* The money, the fame, the women, the power, the money, the houses, the jacuzzis with the perfect views of the wide-screen plasma 3-D capable t.v.'s, the...

OTHER: Uh, excuse me.

WRITER: The interviews, the invitations, the celebrity endorsements.

"Hi, I wrote The Best Play Ever Written, and for my delicate face, I use..."

OTHER: Hey!

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WRITER: What?

OTHER: The fantasy was diverting, but to the reality: What would The Best Play Ever Written look like?

WRITER: Right! Right. What would it actually... Well, it could look like... nothing.

*(The curtain opens to blackness.)*

OTHER: Nada. Ex nihilo. Tabula rasa.

WRITER: Exactly. It could rely entirely on the audience's ability to project the images in their minds onto the stage.

OTHER: Ah-ha!

WRITER: Or...

OTHER: Or! One of the seven great coordinating conjunctions made famous by that odd but memorable acronym FANBOYS—for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so!

WRITER: Are you done?

OTHER: Unless you want me to sing a snippet of "Conjunction Junction, What's Your Function"?

WRITER: Negative.

OTHER: Then I'm done.

*(From this point on, whatever WRITER describes comes true onstage. The WRITER and OTHER often move amongst the action onstage while THEY converse. In order to accommodate both the onstage action and the dialogue of WRITER, OTHER and AUDIENCE MEMBERS, the onstage action might be frozen or might proceed in slow motion at various points in the play. WRITER and OTHER might also pause in their dialogue to shift maximum focus to the stage action.)*

WRITER: Or... the light could come up slowly, revealing a complex, brooding, evocative set.

OTHER: Any particular time or place?

WRITER: No. It's any time, any place—it is the epitome of possibility.

OTHER: Rrreoawrr.

WRITER: Affirmative. And when the audience first sees it, they gasp at its artistry and wonder.

*(From the front row, TWO AUDIENCE MEMBERS gasp.)*

AUDIENCE MEMBERS 1 and 2: Gasp!

WRITER: They are filled with acute anticipation, wondering which world they are about to be thrust into.

AUDIENCE 1: I feel like I am about to be thrust into a world.

AUDIENCE 2: I wonder which one.

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AUDIENCE 1: I don't know. But I'm filled with acute anticipation.

OTHER: And then?

WRITER: And then.... He enters.

OTHER: He?

WRITER: Yes. He enters, and his costume... his costume...

OTHER: Is non-existent?

WRITER: No!

OTHER: Hey, it's theater. Naked is the new clothed.

WRITER: No, his costume compliments his body perfectly, but again, it speaks of no particular time and place, but somehow reminds the audience of so many times and places.

AUDIENCE 2: His costume reminds me of the neoclassical influences of the Baroque era during the reign of Napoleon.

AUDIENCE 1: Really? It reminds me of my cousin Sammy, who had a really big goiter.

OTHER: And does He speak?

WRITER: No. He looks as if he's on the verge of speech. He's filled with incredible yearning.

OTHER: Wow. Yearning Dude. I'm seeing it.

WRITER: Can't you, though? And then, She enters.

OTHER: Oh, boy. Another yearner?

WRITER: Absolutely.

OTHER: For each other?

WRITER: Inexorably.

OTHER: You mean they're in...?

WRITER: What else could they be?

OTHER: And the audience is...

AUDIENCE 1: I love her!

AUDIENCE 2: I love him!

AUDIENCE 1 and 2: I want to be them!

OTHER: Good golly, the place is saturated with yearning!

WRITER: You've got that right.

OTHER: And do *they* speak?

WRITER: Yes.

OTHER: Yes.

WRITER: And when they speak, the words are like...

*(As THEY speak this dialogue, HE and SHE come closer, ending up holding one another, almost kissing.)*

HE: I am speaking to you now, using words in ways they have never been used before.

SHE: The language bending, blending...

HE: Transcending!

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SHE: Every sentence destined to become a timeless quote.

HE: I am speaking to you now.

SHE: I am replying to you now.

HE: I am speaking more to you.

SHE: I am replying more to you.

AUDIENCE 1 and 2: I want to talk like that!

HE: Eloquence.

SHE: Beauty.

HE: Truth.

SHE: Poetry.

HE: I am speaking, and not one word is out of place.

SHE: I am replying, and my every syllable soars.

OTHER: All right, all right, but is that it? The two of them—yearning and talking, talking and yearning?

WRITER: Oh, no—no, no, no! There's a villain! An antagonist!

OTHER: He enters?

WRITER: Not he—She.

OTHER: She! An evil she! Descended from a long line of female malevolence—Medusa, Lady Macbeth, Cruella DeVille, and Charlie Brown's teacher—comes this vixen with a taste for blood and a talent for cruelty.

WRITER: Charlie Brown's teacher? You mean the wa-wa woman?

OTHER: Invisible but nonetheless creepy, in my opinion.

WRITER: Interesting.

OTHER: So anyway, what's this witch's business?

WRITER: What else? She's the antagonist, so she...

OTHER and WRITER: Antagonizes.

VILLAINESS: I'm here to antagonize you.

WRITER: But she does it with such class...

VILLAINESS: (*classily*) I hate you.

WRITER: Such subtlety...

VILLAINESS: (*subtly*) I hate you.

WRITER: Such wit...

VILLAINESS: (*wittily*) I hate you.

WRITER: Such complexity...

VILLAINESS: (*complexly*) I hate you, sort of, but love you, in a way, but I am simultaneously jealous, bored, excited, homicidal, needy, maternal and desperately wishing for a new hair color.

WRITER: The audience won't know exactly how to feel about her.

AUDIENCE 1: She makes me nervous.

AUDIENCE 2: She makes me want to shout.

AUDIENCE 1: To cry.

AUDIENCE 2: To giggle.

AUDIENCE 1: To hide.

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AUDIENCE 1 and 2: Just what are we feeling?

OTHER: So, I'm seeing this amazing set.

WRITER: Check.

OTHER: And these yearning lovers.

WRITER: 10-4.

OTHER: And this complex antagonist.

WRITER: Affirmative.

OTHER: Is that all the characters?

WRITER: Are you kidding me?

OTHER: I don't believe so.

WRITER: The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed, with only three characters?

OTHER: That's what I'm asking.

WRITER: Are you kidding me?

OTHER: That, apparently, is what you're asking. To your question, I answer, "No, I am not kidding you." And to my question, you answer...

WRITER: Are you kidding me?

OTHER: That would be, unfortunately, a reiteration, not an...

WRITER: No! Three characters only? No, Dude, no!

OTHER: I may be mistaken, but I believe you are replying in the negative to my query.

WRITER: You're darned tootin' I'm replying in the negative. The Best Play Ever will have the stage filled with characters—coming, going; going, coming—forming alliances, breaking alliances, increasing the intrigue, raveling and unraveling schemes...

*(During WRITER's above description and continuing through the dialogue with OTHER and WRITER, various CHARACTERS enter and exit, occasionally pantomiming brief interactions with one another. The lights may change to indicate shifts in scenes.)*

OTHER: Is raveling actually a word?

WRITER: Hey, if you can unravel, you have to be able to ravel, right?

OTHER: I'll have to look that up.

WRITER: But we digress.

OTHER: Digress we do.

WRITER: Can't you just see it? The lights shift, and there She is with three of her friends.

FRIEND 1: Here I am, with you, the big She of the play.

FRIEND 2: And here I am as well.

FRIEND 3: And me, never to be forgotten, your third friend; I am also here.

SHE: We're talking.

FRIEND 1: Yes, and I am saying something very wise and helpful.

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SHE: And I am practically crying at how wise and helpful you're being.

FRIEND 2: I'm warning you, with language inimitable, to be careful of the antagonist.

FRIEND 3: Yet I, as the third member of the group, am projecting a slightly jilted persona, foreshadowing that I will, in fact, soon be in cahoots with the antagonist.

*(The action onstage continues silently as WRITER and OTHER converse.)*

WRITER: Are you seeing it? Are you hearing it?

OTHER: Well, yes, but...

WRITER: But? Are you dishing me a "but" at this moment? When we are observing, in our minds' eye, The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed, you are handing me a "but"?

OTHER: Dishing, handing, offering, faxing, sending via carrier pigeon—I'm not sure the delivery system is the salient issue, my friend. And replace "but" with "however" if you'd prefer. The point is, I am seeing something; HOWEVER, BUT, YET AND NONETHELESS, I have some concern that what I am seeing may not be what you are seeing.

WRITER: Is that the salient issue?

OTHER: I believe it is.

WRITER: You realize, of course, that if we were to further pursue this course of discussion, it could quickly devolve into the all-too-common philosophical query, "How can I know that when I call something green and you agree the thing is green, how can we know we are both seeing the same color?"

OTHER: And the answer to that query, of course, is...

WRITER: We cannot know! Your green may not be my green though we both call it green.

OTHER: Hence, therefore, ergo and in conclusion...

WRITER: Your internal vision of The Best Play Ever may, in fact, not be the same as mine.

OTHER: Try as we might to come to commonality?

WRITER: Try as we might. Your green, my green; your play, my play. Tomato, tomato, potato, potato...

OTHER: You're not proposing we call the whole thing off?

WRITER: Indeed not. I am proposing I alter my question. Will you take an amendment?

OTHER: Yea, indeed, quite gleefully I will.

WRITER: New version of the question, then: Are you *feeling* it? Are you?

OTHER: Oh, I believe I am.

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WRITER: Does it fill you with a sense of possibility?

OTHER: Definitely.

WRITER: Of excitement?

OTHER: Unquestionably.

WRITER: Of orgiastic jubilation?

OTHER: That's a bit beyond the...

WRITER: Agreed. I was testing the outer limits.

OTHER: Have we digressed again?

WRITER: More than slightly.

OTHER: It's a habit.

WRITER: It's a problem.

OTHER and WRITER: Back to the play!

OTHER: What do you see... er, feel happening now?

WRITER: Action. Action! A play is words, yes, but just as important—  
more important!--is action. Movement! The characters walk, run,  
crawl, jump, sashay, pirouette! And the pace! It's breakneck! It's  
furious! The audience can barely catch its breath! They're on the  
edge of their seats!

*(AUDIENCE 1 cries out.)*

AUDIENCE 2: What's the matter?

AUDIENCE 1: I could barely catch my breath! I fell off the edge of my  
seat!

WRITER: Then, suddenly, it all stops. A character steps forward. The  
lights settles on him.

OTHER: Or her?

WRITER: Or her. Whatever. She begins the most memorable  
monologue ever muttered.

OTHER: She mutters?

WRITER: I said it for the alliteration. Don't get technical.

OTHER: What's the monologue about?

MONOLOGUIST: Everything. Everyone. Everywhere. Though I speak  
within the context of this particular story, I conjure images with  
universal force and import. My rhetoric spins, expands, captures,  
wrecks, releases. My story tortures the audience deliciously, sends  
them out on a metaphorical sea, lone swimmers nearly drowning.  
And just at the point of despair, my utterances become a buoy they  
embrace. I hold them there, adrift but safe, and then snatch that  
safety away again! They sink under the waves of my words, can  
barely breathe, are almost dead, when I swoop under them,  
dolphin-like, and bear them to the surface again, and beyond! And  
beyond! My narrative lifts them into the air and holds them there,  
gasping and wet! I give birth to the audience!

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AUDIENCE 2: *(trying to get onstage)* Mama! Mama, don't drown me again!

*(TWO burly SECURITY GUARDS rush out and pull AUDIENCE 2 back to her seat, then stand in front of the stage, arms crossed.)*

OTHER: The Best Play Ever needs security guards?

WRITER: At every performance, for the safety of all involved.

MONOLOGUIST: They become my children. I raise them, I teach them, I embrace them, I challenge them, I send them out into the world to make their way and then... I kill them. By the end of my monologue, every audience member has experienced a journey complete—from slime in the primordial ooze through the twisting gauntlet of evolution to squalling infants to fully actualized beings, past the arc of physical perfection to the slow dissolution of age to that point when, inevitably but gorgeously, I burn them as corpses and blow them back into the dust of the universe.

AUDIENCE 1: My gosh, this is incredible! How are you feeling?

AUDIENCE 2: I don't know—somewhere on the spectrum between primordial ooze and quintessence of the universe.

AUDIENCE 1: I was definitely quintessence-ing.

OTHER: All that from one monologue, huh?

WRITER: It'll be a doozy.

MONOLOGUIST: Gorilla smack.

OTHER: You really think you can get that in?

WRITER: I have full confidence.

OTHER: And then we're back to the action, right?

WRITER: Right back to it.

OTHER: Fight scenes?

WRITER: Oh, fight scenes galore.

OTHER: Weapons?

WRITER: Of various types. Fists, guns, swords, cannons...

OTHER: Light sabers?

WRITER: Possibly.

OTHER: All in the same play?

WRITER: Seem unlikely? Seem ambitious? Seem like it's never been done before?

OTHER: I don't want to be negative.

WRITER: Oh, no; you're not being. For The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed, will seem, moment by moment, to have achieved the impossible!

OTHER: "Onstage before your very eyes, the impossible made possible." Now there's a blurb.

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WRITER: And all of the skirmishes will coincide and coalesce into the most grand and significant battle ever staged, bringing to mind every conflict ever known to mankind, from the great World Wars to the squabble you had with your twin sister over who should blow out the last birthday candle.

OTHER: Do you remember that? To this day, I do not comprehend how she could justify just hopping out of her chair on our sixth co-birthday party, stepping on my favorite purple balloon, and then blatantly blowing out that last candle, knowing very well that I proceeded her in birth by a full 45 minutes and I have a strong feeling I'm digressing again.

WRITER: The battle! It rages! It roars! And incredibly, through it all, the actors speak lines of transcendent stupendousness!

BATTLER 1: Though my spleen is shattered and my collarbone turned into a broken pile of Lincoln Logs, I still say a line so profound it is canonized and anthologized the moment I utter it.

BATTLER 2: I attack with deadly force and pithy social commentary!

BATTLER 3: Take that gash to your gut and this blow to your intellect!

BATTLER 4: I die, spouting blood and poetry!

WRITER: And so it rages! And so it...

OTHER: Uh?

WRITER: You "uh"-ed?

OTHER: I did. One question: Could The Best Play Ever Written... be a comedy?

*(The tremendous battle onstage freezes.)*

WRITER: A comedy?

*(EVERYONE onstage turns his or head to face the audience with a quizzical look.)*

OTHER: Yeah.

WRITER: What kind of a comedy?

OTHER: I don't know. Maybe a Marx Brothers sort of thing? Pokes in the eye, bops on the head, near-misses, prat-falls, slips, slaps, kicks, jabs, jokes, gibes, and other comic jazz? What do you think?

*(The battle onstage suddenly turns comic for a few seconds, with the CHARACTERS enacting a variety of physical gags.)*

WRITER: I'm not seeing it.

OTHER: Or, you know, it could be sort of an Oscar Wilde battle of the witticisms.

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WILDE 1: Well, my dear, I am saying something witty and erudite, and I dare you to keep up with me.

WILDE 2: Do tell, darling--are you limited to witticisms or can you make a cucumber sandwich as well?

WRITER: A comedy, you say.

OTHER: Yes—I mean, imagine something so funny that... Well, did you know that, in 1962, there was a laughter epidemic in Tanganyika, presently known as Tansania?

WRITER: I believe I should issue a tangent alert.

OTHER: Not needed; this Tanganyika anecdote has purpose, if you will have patience.

WRITER: Proceed.

OTHER: Imagine a comedy so funny that the actors themselves, in the midst of their delivery, can't get through it without cracking up.

CRACKER 1: Well, my dearest pigeon, I do believe that... *(CRACKER 1 cracks up.)*

CRACKER 2: *(stage whisper)* Pull yourself together, man!

CRACKER 1: I will, I will! Okay, whew. *(Beginning the line again.)*  
Well, my dearest pigeon, I do believe...

*(CRACKER 2 cracks up.)*

Hey, you told me to hold it together!

CRACKER 2: I know, but I just... when you say that word "pigeon," combined with all of the other hilarity that has led up to this moment, I can't help it!

CRACKER 1: Well, then you should just...

*(CRACKER 1 and 2, along with the rest of the cast, cracks up. The stage is filled with ACTORS unable to stop laughing. WRITER and OTHER talk over this.)*

WRITER: And the audience?

OTHER: The audience is convulsing with laughter. Apoplectic with it!

*(AUDIENCE 1 and 2 begin convulsing with laughter.)*

AUDIENCE 1: I can't... I can't...

AUDIENCE 2: I know! I can't stop convulsing with laughter!

*(AUDIENCE 1 and 2 along with the CAST of The Greatest Play Ever howl and writhe with laughter to a point where THEY seem to be in pain.)*

WRITER: Wow. That's a lot of yucks. That might even be over the top!

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OTHER: Audience, cast, stage-hands, reviewers, ushers, janitors waiting to clean up: All will be overcome with paralyzing paroxysms of panting punch-drunked-ness! Just, incidentally, as in the 1962 Laughing Epidemic of Tanganyika that closed schools and disrupted communities for six months!

WRITER: Wait a minute, wait a minute—closed schools?

OTHER: Who could teach over the noise?

WRITER: Disrupted communities?

OTHER: That's what I said!

WRITER: Well, then, who's to say a play that funny might actually close theaters for health reasons?

OTHER: It's conceivable!

WRITER: The play might laugh itself into oblivion!

OTHER: A distinct possibility!

WRITER: Not to mention cause complete and utter exhaustion!

*(The CAST and the AUDIENCE MEMBERS ALL collapse, breathing heavily. One CAST MEMBER squeezes out a couple more giggles.)*

OTHER: If The Best Play Ever, Guaranteed, were to be a comedy, my nap-prone compadre, we might have to anticipate such self-destruction. What think you?

WRITER: Me thinks—nay!

OTHER: Pray tell, nay what?

WRITER: The Best Play Ever shall not be a comedy. Thus sayeth I, the Lord of this dance.

OTHER: Amen and amen.

WRITER: This is serious stuff!

*(The CAST MEMBERS jump back up, picking up where THEY left off, doing battle.)*

Are you seeing it? Feeling it? Living it?

OTHER: All of the above, good buddy, and more, I do believe!

WRITER: Testify, brother, tes-ti-fy!

OTHER: It's a maelstrom! A swirl of conflict and intrigue, ebbing and flowing...

WRITER: Flowing and ebbing...

OTHER: Sucking the audience into its ever-compelling, ever-evolving themes and motifs, its rhythms and its rhyemes!

COMPELLING 1: Themes universal...

COMPELLING 2: Questions of mankind...

COMPELLING 3: Who is good?

COMPELLING 4: Who is bad?

COMPELLING 5: And who gets left behind?

EVERYONE ONSTAGE: We're deep, profound, and highly, highly moving!

COMPELLING 6: Searching for the answers.

COMPELLING 7: Struggling to be known.

COMPELLING 8: Morality...

COMPELLING 9: Or not to be...

COMPELLING 10: The existential groan!

EVERYONE ONSTAGE: So deep, profound, and oh-so-very moving!

COMPELLING 11: Failures and successes...

COMPELLING 12: Learning from the past...

COMPELLING 13: The self-fulfilling prophecies...

COMPELLING 14: That kick us in the...

COMPELLING 15: Asking to the heavens...

COMPELLING 16: Pleading with the gods...

COMPELLING 17: What is our worth?

COMPELLING 18: How can we know?

COMPELLING 19: And who controls the odds?

EVERYONE ONSTAGE: Getting deeper and profounder and inevitably moving!

*(AUDIENCE 1 stands, screaming.)*

AUDIENCE 1: Aaah!

AUDIENCE 2: What's the matter?

AUDIENCE 1: I'm being sucked in by the ever-compelling, ever-evolving themes and motifs!

AUDIENCE 2: Oh, my gosh—so am I!

*(THEY BOTH act as if THEY are being sucked onto the stage. The SECURITY GUARDS wrestle them back to their seats and sit on them.)*

OTHER: Whoa. You really do need those guys.

SECURITY 1: Hey, I'm being pulled in, too!

SECURITY 2: Dude, so am I!

*(AUDIENCE 1 and 2 grab the SECURITY GUARDS, holding them back from the stage.)*

AUDIENCE 1: Hang on!

AUDIENCE 2: Stay away from the light!

WRITER: You've got it now, don't you? The power of it...

OTHER: Oh, yeah.

WRITER: The gravity...

OTHER: Big pull!

WRITER: The supercalifragilisticexpialidocious-ness of the whole thing?

OTHER: You're talking out-disneying Disney here; out-googling Google.

WRITER: I'm talking out-oprahing Oprah, if you really want to know.

OTHER: But...

WRITER: Yes?

OTHER: But...

WRITER: Proceed!

OTHER: But how ever will it end?

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