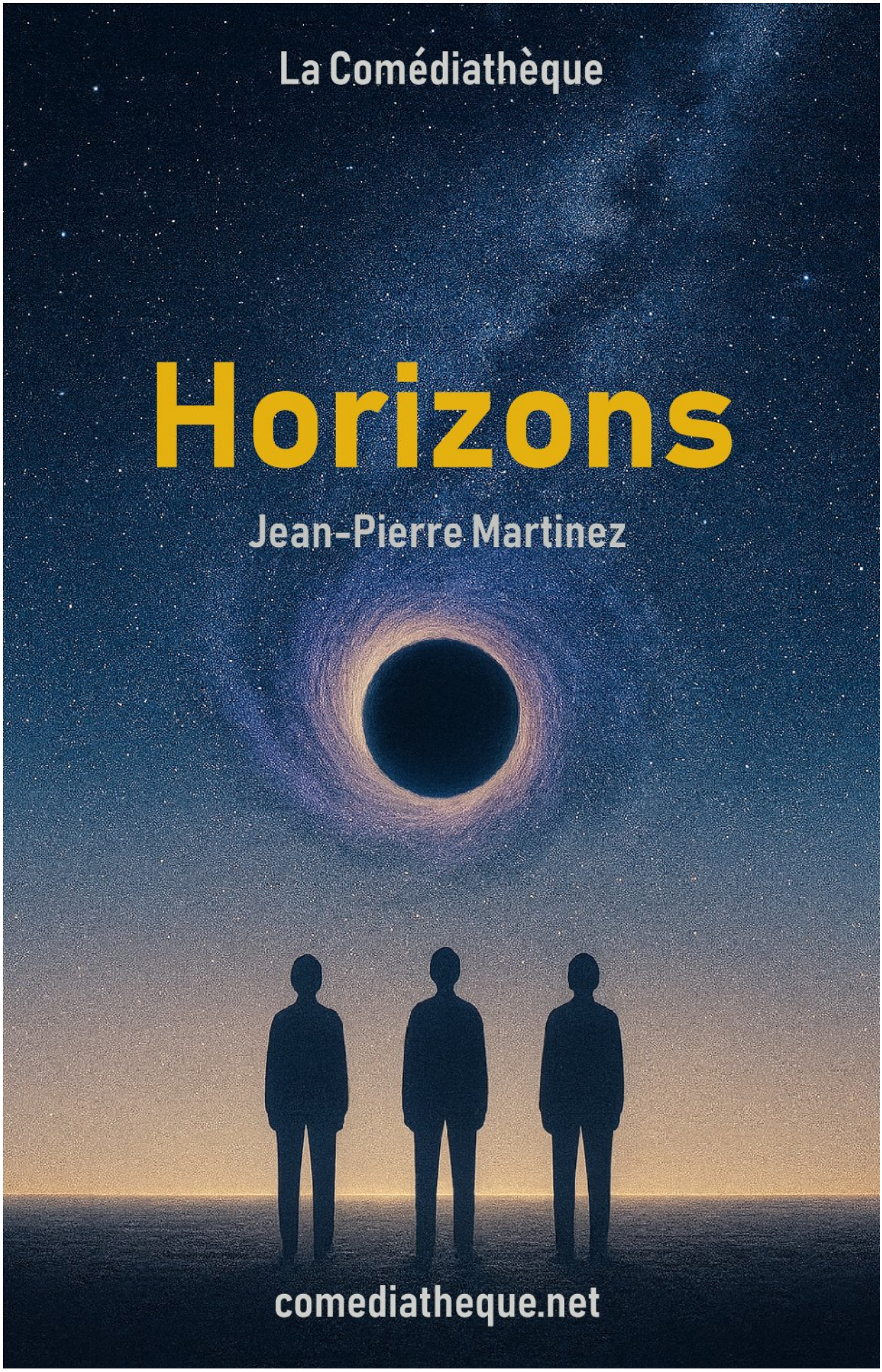

La Comédiathèque
Horizons
Jean-Pierre Martinez
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Horizons

Jean-Pierre Martinez

In a no-man's-land that resembles purgatory, three people who have lost their memories stare at the horizon, searching for answers to life's most fundamental questions. But which horizon are they looking at? A tragicomedy about science, philosophy and the endless cycle of life and death.

Characters

Ben

Dom

Max

The characters are of unspecified gender.

Possible distributions: 3M, 3F, 2M/1F, or 1M/2F.

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Scene 1

Three characters of unspecified gender (three men in this version) stand facing the audience on a bare stage, in an otherworldly light. We shall call them Max, Dom and Ben. Dom, in the middle, has his hands and feet tied. All three stare straight ahead, towards the back of the auditorium, as though gazing at the horizon.

Max – Can either of you see anything?

Dom – No.

Ben – Nothing at all.

Dom – Well, yes... We can see the horizon.

Max – Yes. But beyond the horizon...?

Dom – You can't see anything beyond the horizon. That's the definition of a horizon, isn't it?

Ben – Anything beyond the horizon is out of sight. That's how it works.

Max – It's because the Earth curves.

Ben – Which proves it's round, not flat.

Dom – Who said it was flat?

Ben – No idea...

Max – People come out with so much bullshit.

Ben – And there's always a bunch of idiots ready to swallow it.

Dom – Then one idiot who's slightly less stupid than the rest turns all that bullshit into a religion and proclaims himself king of the idiots, by divine right.

Ben – Artificial intelligence may have limits, but natural stupidity is absolutely limitless.

Max – Yes... If stupidity could produce electricity, we'd have stopped burning fossil fuels long ago.

Ben – Global warming would be solved, and we wouldn't be in this mess...

A pause.

Ben – But if the Earth really were flat, could we see all the way to infinity?

Max – In theory, yes. On a clear day...

Dom – On a clear day... In some places, factory smoke is so thick you can't even see the sun.

Max – Either way, we'd only see things whose light was able to reach us.

A pause.

Dom – Right. But we agree the Earth *is* round?

Ben – Yes. Last time I checked...

Dom – So we can't see what's beyond the horizon.

Max – And the people on the other side can't see us either...

Dom – Whatever's beyond the horizon is none of our business.

A pause.

Ben – And if you crossed the horizon... would you finally reach the other side?

Dom – Well, no...

Ben – What do you mean, no?

Max – The closer you get to the horizon, the farther away it moves.

Ben – Oh, right...

Dom – Same goes for anyone looking towards us from the other side.

Max – Yes. I suppose... I've never actually been to the other side of the horizon. At least, not that I remember...

Ben – The other side of the horizon... It's a bit like the afterlife. I don't know anyone who's come back to tell us whether it's any better there.

Dom – Or whether there's *anything* there at all.

Max – Strictly speaking, the horizon doesn't exist. It's an optical illusion. A moving boundary between what we can see and what we can't.

Ben – So it moves with us.

Max – Like a car's headlights. You can always see a certain distance ahead, but as the car moves, you're looking at something different.

Dom – Yeah... But we're stuck here, so our horizon isn't going to change much.

A pause.

Ben – How far away is the horizon, anyway?

Max – That depends...

Ben – On what?

Max – First on how tall you are, and above all on how high up you're looking from. For a child standing on a beach, the horizon's about four kilometres away. For an adult on a Himalayan summit... or passengers on a plane ten thousand metres up, it could be as far as four hundred kilometres.

A pause.

Dom – So someone on the other side, with the same vantage point, would see the same horizon as us?

Max – Yes. We'd be their horizon, and they'd be ours.

Ben – So we're always somebody else's horizon.

Dom – Provided somebody's looking in our direction...

A pause.

Max – Right. So here we are, all on the same side of the horizon, but...

Ben – What the hell are we doing here...?

Dom – I didn't dare ask...

Ben – I don't know. Do you?

Dom – Neither do I.

Max – I can't remember.

Ben – Did we ever know and then forget, or...?

Dom – Did we never know?

Ben – Who knows...

Dom – Sometimes I almost feel as if I remember something...

Max – Yes, me too.

Ben – Like waking up and trying to remember the dream you were having.

Dom – You still feel as though you're dreaming.

Ben – Only you have no idea what the dream was about.

Max – As though you're still conscious in a world that's just dissolved, leaving you with no memory of it.

Ben – Exactly. We've forgotten everything... except the fact that we've forgotten something.

Dom – The opposite of déjà vu, then.

Max – Really?

Dom – With déjà vu, you see something right in front of you and wonder if it's a memory. With a forgotten dream, it's the opposite. You know there's something you want to remember, but you don't know what.

Max – Yes... That's how I feel too.

A pause.

Dom – Sometimes I get a flash...

Ben – A flash?

Dom – I think I was on a plane.

Max – A plane? Are you sure?

Dom – Or a passenger ship. I can't remember.

Ben – They're not exactly the same thing.

Max – They're both forms of public transport.

Ben – A passenger ship? Is that really public transport?

Max – Maybe it was a ferry...

Dom – For some reason, I remember wearing a seatbelt.

Ben – You don't wear seatbelts on ships...

Dom – Then maybe it was a train.

Max – Do people wear seatbelts on trains?

Dom – Must have been a plane, then. I was watching the horizon getting closer.

Max – Coming towards you...?

Dom – I know it sounds stupid, but... I was afraid the plane was going to crash into the horizon.

Max – Yes... That *is* incredibly stupid.

Ben – Maybe it was a dream.

Dom – More of a nightmare, surely?

Ben – Or perhaps we're dreaming *now*.

Max – Dreams always have a hidden meaning.

Ben – A plane crashing into the horizon... What could *that* mean?

Dom – I don't know, it was as if...

Max – As if our past were pushing our present towards a future that would no longer retreat as we approached it.

Dom – Yeah...

A pause.

Ben – But were we there too?

Dom – No idea...

Ben – A plane... I don't remember.

Max – Neither do I...

A pause. They gaze towards the horizon again.

Ben – What if this is what death feels like?

Max – Or the very beginning of life...

Dom – Knowing you exist without knowing who you are, in a world that makes no sense.

Max – It seems existence really does precede essence...

Dom – And you can still exist even when there's nothing left in the tank.

Ben – Yes... I feel like an old car that's run out of petrol, stranded in the desert at night. Headlights on, searching the horizon for someone coming with a fuel can in each hand.

Dom – Waiting for the battery to run down and the lights to go out for good, just before the Saviour arrives.

A pause.

Max – But what about us...? Do the three of us know each other?

Ben – I don't think so... Do we?

Dom – I've got a vague feeling of déjà vu, but...

Max – Your face means nothing to me.

Ben – Neither does yours.

Max – To tell the truth... my own face doesn't mean much to me either.

Ben – So what's your name?

Max – I don't know... I never call myself. Why would I? I'm always here...

Dom – Fine... But what do other people call you?

Max – Other *people*? What other people? I only know the two of you. And I'm not even sure I know you. What do people call you?

Ben – No idea... I've never heard anyone call me by name.

Dom – Neither have I. Or perhaps I didn't hear them. Either way, I've never answered...

Max – Right. So we don't call each other anything.

Ben – Why would we call each other when we're all already here?

Max – And can't go anywhere anyway.

Dom – Especially me...

Max – You?

Dom – Haven't you noticed something?

Max – No.

Dom – I'm tied up!

Max – Oh, yes... He *is* tied up, isn't he?

Ben – Oh, right... I hadn't noticed.

Dom – Well...?

Max – Well what?

Dom – Now that we've been introduced... Could you untie me? If it's not too much trouble...

Max – Yes, of course, we'll... We'll untie you.

Max moves to untie him.

Ben – Wait. Not so fast...

Dom – What now?

Ben – Why were you tied up in the first place?

Dom – How should I know? I can't remember anything, just like you.

Ben – Yes, but...

Dom – But what?

Ben – It's a bit too convenient...

Dom – Convenient...?

Max – There must be a reason someone tied you up, surely?

Dom – A reason...? What reason?

Ben – I don't know... People don't tie people up for no reason.

Dom – For God's sake, untie me!

Max – You might be dangerous...

Dom – Dangerous to whom?

Max – To other people...

Ben – In other words, us.

Dom – Yeah... Or maybe you're the dangerous ones.

Ben – Us?

Dom – Maybe *you*'re the ones who tied me up.

Ben – Why would we do that?

Dom – How should I know? Maybe you kidnapped me for ransom... or something else.

Max – Yes, that's possible...

Ben – But you might also be a dangerous lunatic. A repeat offender, even.

Max – In that case, we'd better leave you tied up for now...

Ben – Absolutely. Better safe than sorry.

Dom – Are you taking the piss?

Ben – Perhaps our memories will come back later. Then we'll decide.

Dom – Memories? Of what?

Max – A memory, perhaps. I don't know...

Ben – Perhaps something, or someone, will eventually appear on the horizon...

Max – Though we have to admit it's pretty quiet out there at the moment...

Ben – Yes... The calm before the storm, or...

Dom – The calm before even more calm.

Blackout.

Scene 2

Lights up.

Max – Oh, fuck... I've just had a flash too...

Dom – Oh, here we go...

Ben – Well?

Max – I was driving a car...

Dom – A car? Are you sure?

Max – No...

Ben – Were you wearing a seatbelt?

Max – No... I don't think so...

Dom – Then it probably wasn't a car.

Ben – Maybe it was a plane...

Dom – Driving a plane?

Max – I said *driving*, but... I mean *piloting*. Yes, that's it. I was *at the controls* of a plane...

Dom – And then...?

Max – Everything was fine, and then... suddenly all the warning lights on the instrument panel came on together. A Christmas tree, as we pilots say...

Ben – A Christmas tree...?

Max – All the warning lights flashing... Looks festive. But it means you're heading straight for a wooden box.

Dom – I hate Christmas. It's supposed to celebrate a birth, which means life. But all it makes me think of is death. What about you?

Max – In many Eastern philosophies, life and death form an endless cycle. We die only to be reborn in another form, here in this world. In much of Western thought, death is seen as a final departure for some other world. And for anyone who doesn't believe in heaven, it's the absolute end...

Dom – That must be why Christmas smells of death... Coffins are made of pine, after all. Even the holy infant is a corpse in the making.

Ben – Right. So you were flying a plane... What happened next?

Max – Nothing... I can't remember anything else.

Ben – If you were the pilot, maybe *you're* the reason we crashed...

Dom – You mean you were on the plane too?

Ben – I can't remember. Not yet, anyway...

Max – You think we might have crashed?

Ben – It would explain quite a lot...

Dom – You think...?

Max – It would explain why we're dead.

Ben – You think we're dead?

Max – If we're still wondering whether we're dead, surely that means we aren't. Yet.

A pause.

Ben – Can you hear something?

Dom – Hear what?

Ben – Water. Like a spring.

Max – That's it. The gentle sound of a spring in the countryside.

Ben – Or oxygen hissing through a hospital humidifier before a patient breathes it in.

Max – Yes... That too.

Ben – They sound quite similar, actually.

Dom – So we're in hospital?

Max – In a coma...?

Dom – Or in the final stages of Alzheimer's...

Ben – That's certainly possible...

Max – Perhaps they tied you up to protect you from yourself.

Dom – From myself?

Ben – To stop you falling, or...

Max – Trying to escape...

Ben – Or hurting yourself.

Max – All the more reason not to untie him.

Dom – Thank you... How kind of you to worry about my safety.

Ben – Yes, but what about us? Why aren't *we* tied up?

Max – Maybe we're not as badly off as he is.

Dom – So we're sharing a hospital room?

Ben – Three patients in one room? Isn't that a bit much?

Dom – Our health insurance must have been rubbish...

A pause.

Ben – Maybe we've just come to visit him in hospital.

Max – Yes... To sit with him through his final moments.

Ben – And say goodbye before his last journey into the great beyond.

Dom *(drily)* – Thanks. I'm deeply touched...

Ben – But then why can't we remember anything either?

Dom – None of that stands up.

Max – No... We can barely stand up ourselves.

A pause.

Ben – Oxygen...

Max – Planes have oxygen too. Masks drop from the ceiling if there's an emergency.

Ben – That's what the flight attendants say, anyway. But nobody ever seems to have seen one actually drop.

Max – Or anyone who did isn't around to tell us about it...

Dom – An emergency...? You mean a plane crash?

Ben – That still doesn't explain why neither of us had our seatbelts on...

Max *(to Dom)* – And are you quite sure yours was a seatbelt?

Dom – What else could it have been?

Max – I don't know... An explosives belt?

Dom – An explosives belt...?

Ben – That would explain the crash.

Max – And if you're a dangerous terrorist, it would explain why they tied you up.

Dom – Before or after I blew myself up?

Ben – Why would anyone blow themselves up on a plane in the first place?

Max – Who knows...

Dom – To protest against the appalling carbon footprint of air travel, perhaps... *(The other two stare at him in horror.)* I'm joking...

A pause.

Max – You said earlier that you were afraid we'd crash into the horizon.

Dom – Yes... A metaphor, I suppose.

Max – But what if it wasn't a metaphor?

Ben – What do you mean?

Max – Maybe they tied him up... to stop him disappearing over the event horizon.

Dom – The event horizon...?

Max – It's a fascinating idea in astrophysics. The event horizon marks the boundary of a black hole. Once you get too close, the black hole swallows everything: the matter of an entire star, for example, and even its light.

Dom – And where does all that matter go?

Max – Nobody knows... What we do know is that when you fall into a memory hole...

Ben – You mean a black *hole*, surely?

Max – Isn't that what I said?

Dom – You said a memory hole.

Max – Did I...? I can't remember...

Ben – Anyway. What were you saying?

Max – What we do know is that nothing ever comes back out of a black hole.

Ben – Not on this side of the event horizon, anyway.

Max – Right...

Ben – Maybe it comes out on the other side.

Max – Maybe... If there *is* another side.

Ben – There must be. If nothing is lost and nothing is created, then there must be something at the other end of the tunnel.

Dom – So a black hole is a bit like death.

Ben – People do often describe death as a tunnel.

Dom – Strange, really. Nobody's ever come back from this supposed tunnel to describe its entrance... never mind its exit.

Ben – It's just a figure of speech...

Max – Yes... We don't know where the tunnel leads, or even whether it exists. But we're certain of one thing: you never come out the same way you went in.

Ben – Maybe they tied you up to stop you being sucked into the tunnel.

Max – Or the black hole, if you prefer.

Dom – What...?

Ben – You said you were strapped into a seat on a plane...

Max – Perhaps to stop you being sucked out into the void if the cabin lost pressure.

Dom – In that case, you'd better untie me. Honestly... This is no way to live, is it?

Ben – Better than nothing.

Dom – You think so? We just keep repeating the same meaningless phrases for ever.

Ben – We've forgotten almost everything, apart from the fact that there are things we should remember.

Dom – I'd rather be sucked into the void once and for all. And if everything starts again exactly the same at the other end of the tunnel, at least I won't remember any of it. I'll be able to enjoy being surprised again.

Ben – Well, he does have a point... At best we're somewhere between life and death. We can't stay like this. We might as well get it over with and hope there's another life waiting for us. What have we got to lose?

Max – The risk that the next life will be even worse than the one we're leaving...

Ben – Let's untie him.

They untie him.

Dom – Thank you.

Ben – Now what?

Dom – What do you mean?

Ben – Nothing's happened.

Max – No. The void hasn't sucked you in. Or us, for that matter.

Ben – Death hasn't carried us away.

Dom – And we're still here.

Ben – Unless we're already dead, all three of us. And we've already crossed to the other side...

Max – Unfortunately, that's a real possibility too...

Ben – I think I'm starting to remember something myself...

Dom – Really?

Max – You're not just saying that to cheer us up?

Ben – Hang on... No... It's slipped my mind again...

A pause.

Dom – Still nothing coming over the horizon.

Ben – No. Not a soul with a fuel can. Not even a small can of petrol.

Dom – What would we do with it?

Ben – We haven't even got a car.

Max – If it's the event horizon, nothing will ever come back this way.

Dom – Then we're going to be bored shitless for eternity... *(The other two look offended.)* I mean, no disrespect, but neither of you is exactly a comedian.

Ben – We do seem to be short of perspective...

Dom – Yes, and our horizon's looking pretty bleak.

Max – Apparently, the closer you get to a black hole, the slower time passes.

Dom – Then we must already be inside it. It feels as if time's stopped altogether...

A pause.

Max – Did you know that beyond a certain distance, parts of the universe are moving away from us so fast that their light will never reach us?

Dom – Here we go again...

Ben – So most of the universe will always be inaccessible to us? Completely unknown?

Dom – Are you an astrophysicist?

Max – I don't think so. I must have read it somewhere.

Ben – You read some strange things...

Max – We certainly won't be crossing that particular horizon.

Ben – And anyone beyond it won't ever be able to see us either.

Dom – So it's the scientific version of the afterlife.

Max – Yes...

Ben – Though there's no guarantee we'll go there when we die.

Dom – Who knows...

Max – Did you know that a particle can be in two different places at the same time, depending on who observes it?

Ben – A bit like the truth, then...

Dom – Sorry?

Max – I forget who said it: 'What is true on this side of the Pyrenees is false on the other.'

Dom – The worst thing about quoting people is when you can't even remember who you're quoting.

Ben – Reality's the same for everyone, but depending on who's looking at it, what seems true here may seem an illusion somewhere else.

Dom – You're really starting to give me a headache.

A pause.

Max – How can I remember what an event horizon is but not my own name?

Ben – Maybe when we're approaching death, we remember only what matters.

Dom – And our names don't matter?

Max – A name... It's like a number assigned to us at birth. An identification number, or...

Ben – A hotel room number.

Max – You mainly need your room number to get breakfast in the morning.

Ben – Breakfast makes you remember the number.

Dom – And it's that number that helps you find the room when you want to go to bed at night.

Max – When you leave for good, you hand your key in at reception and forget the number...

Dom – Then disappear back into the crowds on public transport.

Ben – Until you find another room in another hotel.

Dom – Or a house in another neighbourhood.

Ben – On another planet...

Max – With a new number.

Ben – And new neighbours to remind us who we are and what we're called.

Max – It's true. From the moment we're born, other people decide who we are. Even our legal identity.

Ben – A bit like those particles you were talking about. It's the people who observe us who determine how we exist.

Dom – Parents, above all. Family.

Ben – They decide who we are.

Dom – What we're called.

Ben – Where we live.

Dom – What language we'll speak.

Max – What religion we'll practise.

Ben – If we want to know who we are, we only have to ask other people.

Dom – The ones who know us, anyway.

Max – Even when we've forgotten who we are, and what we're called, there's always someone who hasn't forgotten. Someone who can tell us.

Ben – Even if we've lost our memory.

Max – Even if we're in a coma.

Ben – Even if we're already dead.

Dom – Until everyone who ever knew us has died as well.

Max – Yes. To a large extent, we are whatever other people decide we are.

Ben – And we know scarcely more about ourselves than other people know about us.

Max – Sometimes we know even less.

Ben – 'Become who you are'... What a load of rubbish. More like 'Become what everyone expects you to be.'

Dom – A good member of the congregation.

Ben – A good citizen.

Max – A good little soldier.

Ben – Who was it who said, 'I is another'?

Dom – Can't remember. But whoever it was should have kept his bloody mouth shut.

Ben – Anyway, we're born, and we die...

Max – And after death... we merge back into the crowd.

Dom – We take nothing with us when we leave. Least of all the memory that we ever existed.

Max – And when we're born again, we go back to reception and get assigned a new number...

Ben – A new self...

Blackout.

Scene 3

Lights up.

Max – I wonder what time it is...

Ben – No idea...

Dom – What difference does it make? Got a train to catch?

Ben – A plane, perhaps...

Max – You're right. If we're dead, we don't need watches...

Dom – I've never heard of anyone asking to be buried with their watch, anyway.

A pause.

Ben – This time I remember...

Dom – Remember what?

Ben – My room number!

Dom – Oh, for fuck's sake...

Ben – It was 2108.

Dom – Really...?

Ben – I can see myself arriving at the breakfast buffet in an airport hotel and proudly announcing to the dragon guarding the entrance: 'Room 2108.'

Dom – Proudly?

Ben – I remember because I was born on the twenty-first of August. So, 21/08.

Max – Ah, right...

Dom – So you remember your date of birth.

Ben – No. But I remember my room number was the same as my birthday. 2108...

Max – Which year?

Ben – That's the thing... The room number only had four digits.

Dom – Still doesn't tell us whether you were on that plane with us.

Ben – I think I was, though.

Dom – You're not just saying that to cheer us up, I hope...

Ben – Because if that plane did crash...

Max – What makes you think you were on it?

Ben – I remember my seat number.

Dom – You've certainly got a head for numbers...

Ben – It was 666. That's why I remember.

Max – I thought airlines never assigned the number 666 to a seat.

Ben – Apparently it's not a strict rule. I even asked the flight attendant if I could move.

Dom – Changing seats to ward off bad luck is like rearranging deckchairs on the Titanic to stop it sinking...

Max – In any case, seat 666 didn't bring you much luck.

Dom – You might even say you brought bad luck on all of us...

A pause.

Ben – I can't hear the oxygen any more...

Max – Maybe there isn't enough oxygen for everyone.

Ben – On Earth, you mean?

Max – Or in this hospital...

Dom – Maybe we're getting better and don't need it.

Max – Or we're dead and don't need it.

A pause.

Ben – You mentioned the Himalayas earlier...

Max – Did I...?

Ben – When you were talking about how far away the horizon is.

Dom – So?

Ben – I don't know... I keep seeing the three of us, roped together, on the roof of the world.

Dom – The roof of the world?

Max – That's what they call the Himalayas, I think.

Ben – Doesn't that ring any bells?

Dom – No... Nothing.

Ben – At eight thousand metres, oxygen is pretty scarce.

Max – Enough to give you hallucinations...

Dom – So now we're on top of the Himalayas, are we...?

Max – That would explain the rope as well...

Ben – The rope...?

Max – If the three of us were roped together...

Ben – I see. Perhaps he fell and we cut the rope to stop him dragging us down into the abyss...

Dom – Thanks... You're wonderful friends, the pair of you...

Max – So he might be the only one who's actually dead?

Ben – Unless he ended up pulling us down with him anyway...

A pause.

Ben – How do you know when you're dead?

Dom – You don't.

Max – Being dead is like being an idiot. You don't realise it. It's everyone else who suffers.

Dom – I'm sure I've heard that stupid line before.

Ben – Me too...

Dom – That's our destiny: repeating the same old rubbish as everyone around us, for ever.

Ben – Or the rubbish our ancestors were already repeating.

Max – We all like to think we're unique individuals. But how much of us is truly individual?

Ben – People criticise artificial intelligence, but even our natural stupidity isn't entirely our own. We inherit it from every idiot who came before us, and from all the idiots we live among.

A pause.

Ben – So if we're dead, they'll soon give us a new room number.

Dom – You mean a number in the mortuary?

Ben – I meant... a new identity. A new existence.

Dom – A blank page for another story.

Max – Consciousness without memory.

Ben – A quantum computer with all its data wiped, refurbished and sold on to somebody else.

Max – We'll find out soon enough.

Dom – Yes, but when?

Ben – When we've forgotten everything, I suppose. When we're completely dead.

Dom – Completely dead...? You're either alive or dead, surely?

Max – You can be both at once. Like Schrödinger's cat.

Ben – You mean the kind of cat that has nine lives?

Max – No. I mean the scientific and philosophical puzzle at the heart of quantum physics. Until you open the box containing the cat, it can be both dead and alive.

Dom – I didn't understand a word... Except that you're starting to repeat yourself too.

Ben – It's what you were saying earlier. Other people define our identities. We're just elementary particles in a collective consciousness.

Max – And what if one day there *are* no other people?

Dom – No other people...?

Ben – When the Sun swallows the Earth, in five billion years, and humanity disappears.

Dom – Or long before that, once humanity has managed to make the only planet it can live on uninhabitable.

Ben – Then it wouldn't just be the death of one person, or a billion people. It would be the death of humanity. The death of collective consciousness.

Max – And if we're the only intelligent creatures in the universe, as some idiots like to believe, that would mean the death of consciousness itself.

Dom – Hard to imagine it couldn't be born again somewhere else, in another form.

A pause.

Ben – It's coming back to me now... It wasn't a plane. It was a spaceship.

Max – I was the captain.

Ben – And I was your second-in-command.

Dom – There were only three of us on board.

Ben – The last three survivors of a dying humanity.

Max – We'd set course for a planet that might support life...

Dom – Which turned out to be a black hole.

Ben – An error in the ship's computer, presumably.

Max – Unless it did it on purpose.

Dom – On purpose?

Max – An artificial intelligence determined to wipe out what was left of humanity, once and for all.

Ben – In any case, when we woke from our long hibernation, it was already too late to escape the pull of that supermassive black hole.

Max – So we're about to be swallowed by a black hole...

A pause.

Dom – There's still one mystery, though...

Ben – What?

Dom – Why was your seat number 666 if there were only three of us aboard?

Max – You're right... The mystery deepens...

Dom – Were we in a hospital room, about to die? On top of Everest, about to plunge into a crevasse...?

Ben – Clinging to a sinking raft, trying to cross over to a better world...?

Max – In a plane about to crash? Or a spaceship about to be swallowed by a black hole?

Ben – Was it one of those things or another?

Dom – Or all of them at once.

Max – It's all getting mixed up in our heads.

Dom – Like wastewater spiralling down the drain, into the sewers, on its way to the great recycling.

Ben – Our pasts.

Dom – Our presents.

Max – Our futures.

Ben – We don't know any more.

Dom – We don't know.

Max – Not yet.

Blackout.

Scene 4

Lights up.

Dom – The horizon seems to have come closer again...

Ben – Once it catches up with us, we'll find ourselves on the other side.

Dom – If there really *is* another side...

Ben – It's just a figure of speech...

Max – Yes... Those ready-made phrases that do our thinking for us.

Dom – Language is a window onto the world. But it's also a set of bars that keeps us trapped within the only reality our senses can perceive, our minds can imagine and our words can describe.

Ben – So we should invent a new language?

Dom – Or shut the fuck up. That's simpler. Why this need to talk when we've got nothing to say?

Ben – Animals stick to the basics. I'm hungry. I want to fuck.

Dom – What's the point of knowing anything if we'll never know everything?

Max – But once we've started talking, can we ever stop?

Ben – As long as we're talking, we're not dead yet.

Max – Then let's keep talking...

Ben – Until the day our words have no meaning left.

Dom – Until everything we say is just a quotation from something somebody else said before us.

Max – And everything we do is just a commemoration of something somebody else did before us.

Ben – I'm afraid that day may already have arrived.

Dom – Well, I'm not saying another word. And I'm not listening to either of you. Now I'm untied, I'm going to walk towards that horizon, whatever it is.

Ben – So we won't see each other again? Shame. I was just getting attached to you...

Dom – Were you really?

Ben – No. I think that was just another figure of speech.

Max – Maybe we'll meet again on the other side. Only we'll have forgotten everything.

Ben – And we won't recognise one another.

Dom – All the ties that bind us to other people will have come undone.

Max – We'll have to make new ones, to try to exist again. Among another humanity.

Ben – At best, if we meet again, we'll feel a strange sense of déjà vu...

Dom – Then I won't say goodbye...

Dom makes as if to walk towards the front of the stage.

Ben – Wait! I'm coming with you...

Dom doesn't look pleased.

Dom – Are you sure...?

Max – Me too... I'm not staying here all on my own... Like a complete idiot.

They pick up the rope that had bound Dom and tie themselves together, like mountaineers in a climbing party.

Dom – Well, that's everything said.

Ben – The end of history.

Max – Of this one, anyway...

Dom – Let's walk together towards that radiant horizon.

Ben – Roped together... hand in hand. One great leap into the unknown.

Dom – Hoping the horizon opens onto a new world.

Ben – A better world.

Max – Unless it's exactly the same one.

Ben – Unless our whole universe is just an old sock being turned inside out for ever.

Max – Each time you turn it, the inside becomes the outside. But it's still the same sock.

Dom – At least we'll have forgotten everything.

Ben – And we'll be amazed to find ourselves alive again.

They move towards the audience, staring into the distance as though about to leap off the stage. But Dom stops, bringing the others to a halt.

Dom – You'll laugh, but I really do think I can see something coming over the horizon this time.

Ben – Yes, I can see it too.

Dom – Or rather, someone...

Max – An old man with a beard and a bunch of keys?

Dom – A bearded man, yes. With a fuel can in each hand...

They all stare towards the horizon.

Ben – So that was it all along? It wasn't a metaphor...

Max – We ran out of fuel in the middle of nowhere, and one of us went off to get some...

Ben – I thought there were four of us at the start.

Max – Then again, you do see mirages in the desert...

Ben – And heatstroke can make you delirious too...

Dom – So it's just another hallucination?

Max – Well, it seems there are still a few events on the horizon...

Ben – So what do we do?

Max – We've still got existence.

Dom – Let's see what happens when we add a little fuel.

The light begins to fade gradually.

Ben – Oh, I think the battery's finally had it too...

Max – Yes... The headlights are going out.

Dom – Alas, we won't even see our Saviour arrive.

Max – Let's not lose hope.

Ben – You're right... Faith is the only thing that can save us...

Dom – Another ready-made phrase...

Ben – Yes...

Appropriate music (perhaps sacred music) accompanies the gradual fade to black.

Blackout.

End.

About the author

Born in 1955 in Auvers-sur-Oise (France), Jean-Pierre Martinez first took to the stage as a drummer in several rock bands before becoming a semiologist in advertising. He then worked as a television screenwriter before returning to the stage as a playwright. He has written around a hundred scripts for television and 123 plays, some of which have become classics (*Friday the 13th, Strip Poker*). His plays have been performed in more than 100 countries and translated into around 50 languages.

Amateur and professional theatre groups looking for plays to perform can download Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays for free from his websites :

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

However, performance rights, which constitute fair compensation for the author's work, are a legal obligation. Whether you are an amateur or a professional, you must request authorization to perform the play and pay the corresponding royalties for the production.

Jean-Pierre Martinez is represented by the Society of Dramatic Authors and Composers (SACD).

To get in touch with Jean-Pierre Martinez and request authorization to perform one of his works, please use the contact form on his websites.

Jean-Pierre Martinez recently returned to music, writing original songs inspired by his poems and plays.

With **Jean-Pierre Martinez Music**, he extends that creative universe through original songs: short stories in musical form, humorous or melancholy, in which each song sometimes becomes a miniature theatrical scene.

https://jeanpierremartinezmusic.com/

Other plays by the same author translated in English:

Monologues
Happy Dogs
Like a fish in the air
Short Stories

Comedies for 2
A Thwarted Vocation
EuroStar
Heads and Tails
Him and Her
Is there a pilot in the audience?
Last chance encounter
New Year's Eve at the Morgue
Not even dead
Pentimento
Preliminaries
Running on empty
Russian Roulette at the Kremlin
The Costa Mucho Castaways
The Dressing Gown
The Joker
The Rope
The Window across the courtyard

Comedies for 3
A brief moment of eternity
A simple business dinner
An innocent little murder
Cards on the Table
Cheaters
Crash Zone
Fragile, Handle with care
Friday the 13th
Horizons
Ménage à trois
One small step for a woman, one giant leap backward for Mankind
The Ways of Chance

Comedies for 4
A Cuckoo's nest
A hell of a night
A Skeleton in the Closet
Back to stage
Bed and Breakfast
Casket for two
Crisis and Punishment
Déjà vu
Family Portrait
Family Tree
Four stars
Friday the 13th
Gay friendly
Hangover
Happy Hour
How to get rid of your best friends
Is there a critic in the audience?
Is there an author in the audience?
Just a moment before the end of the world
Lovestruck at Swindlemore Hall
One marriage out of two
Perfect In-laws
Quarantine
Requiem for a Stradivarius
Strip Poker
Surviving Mankind
The Deal
The Fishbowl
The Perfect Son-in-Law
The Pyramids
The Smell of Money
The Tourists
The Worst Best Man Ever

Comedies for 5 to 6
All's well that starts badly
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
Crisis and Punishment
Critical but Stable
Dead End Boulevard
In lieu of flowers...
King of Fools
The Castaways of New Year's Eve
The President's Draw
The Rebels
Traffic Jam on Graveyard Lane

Comedies for 7 or more
At the bar counter
Backstage Comedy
Blue Flamingos
Check to the Kings
Christmas Eve at the Police Station
False exit
In flagrante delirium
Just like a Christmas movie
Miracle at Saint Mary Juana Abbey
Music does not always soothe ...
Neighbours' Day
Nicotine
Of Vegetables and Books
Offside
Open Hearts
Reality Show
Save our Savings
Special Dedication
Stories and Prehistories
Such a lovely village
The House of Our Dreams
The Jackpot
The Performance is not cancelled
The Most Beautiful Village in France
The Worst Village in England
Welcome aboard!
White Coats, Dark Humour

Collection of sketches
Apocalypse
Backstage Bits
Blackouts
Don't panic!
Dramedies
Enough is Enough
Ethan and Eve
Every Colour under the Sun
For real and for fun
Funny Stories
Him and Her
Killer Sketches
Lockdown Shorts
Lost time Chronicles
Memoirs of a Suitcase
No Sense Off Limits
Now and then
Of Animals and Men
Open Hearts
Open Letters
Park Bench Shorts
Sidewalk Chronicles
Stage Briefs
Stories to die for

All of Jean-Pierre Martinez's plays can be downloaded

free of charge from his websites:

https://jeanpierremartinez.net/

https://comediatheque.net/

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