

THE (SECOND-to-)LAST JUDGEMENT

BY ALEX GUNN & AMY HEMSWORTH

DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

Unless stated otherwise, the characters can be played as any gender. Casting is gender-blind for all roles.

John of Patmos (male)

An Angel of the Lord

Jesus Christ (male)

Satan

1st Evil Soul

2nd Evil Soul

1st Demon

2nd Demon

1st Good Soul

2nd Good Soul

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Not The Blessed Virgin (female)

The Choir

THE ONLY ACT, THE ONLY SCENE

The action for this opening part takes place off to one side (stage left), slightly away from the main part of the stage.

A cave on Patmos, sometime in the first century AD. JOHN, prophet-to-be, is leaning over a scroll, scribbling furiously. The ANGEL has just imparted the Revelation to him, and JOHN is trying to make sure he has got it all down. The ANGEL looks somewhat impatient.

ANGEL:

Are you quite finished? I do have other appointments, you know.

JOHN [scribbling faster]:

I... think so... yes! [Stops writing and looks up triumphantly] All finished!

ANGEL:

Hm... I suppose we'd best be sure. Read it through for me.

JOHN [looking quite pleased with himself]:

'The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John...' [to ANGEL] Hm. Does that sound alright?

ANGEL:

Of course it sounds *alright!* It's divinely inspired!

JOHN:

Well, I know, but it's always difficult starting something off, even with divine inspiration. It's like when you start with 'Dear Sir or Madam' but then you worry you're excluding people so you change it to 'To whom it may concern' but then you remember that no one understands the word 'whom' anymore—

ANGEL [interrupting]:

Let's just continue, shall we? As I'm sure you've realised by this point in the proceedings, we haven't got forever.

JOHN:

Hm. Alright, so we got to... [ANGEL looks increasingly frustrated] ah, yes, 'his servant John: who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.'

ANGEL [looking slightly pained]:

Actually, I'm sure the precise phrasing doesn't matter too much - half of it'll get lost in translation anyway [JOHN looks slightly offended] - so let's just do a quick summary, make sure you've got all the main points, and I'll leave the rest to your, ah, artistic licence.

JOHN [looking a bit pleased with himself to be trusted with such important work]:

Alright then.

ANGEL:

Wonderful. I've got a checklist here from the Almighty...

Pulls out scroll which is excessively long and rolls across the ground. Reading, glancing at JOHN after each item:

ANGEL (cont'd):

Tell churches of Asia they're on bloody thin ice [JOHN checks his paper and nods]; Throne of God; Seven Seals...

JOHN [interrupting]:

Yes, I'm not sure I quite understood this part... why do they have to be seals? Will sea lions do? I don't think anyone really knows the difference, to be honest - I certainly don't.

ANGEL [with exaggerated patience]:
No, nobody does. However [glaring], most people *do* know the difference between seals [clapping like a seal] 'arf arf!' and seals [miming stamp on hand].

JOHN:
Oh, *that* kind of seal! Makes much more sense. Sorry.

ANGEL [trying to conceal his exasperation]:
Where was I? Oh, yes, that's the bit with the Four Horsemen...
[notices JOHN looking confused again] What is it now?

JOHN:
Well, it's just... I don't really see how opening a seal on a scroll can have the kind of results you're talking about. I mean, you say, for example, that, when the sixth seal is opened, 'there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind...'

ANGEL:
Yes, and?

JOHN:
Well, you don't see anything... *strange* about that?

ANGEL [staring in disbelief]:
You do remember who sent me here, yes? Our Lord God, Lord of all, Creator of the Universe and all of its pesky inhabitants... You don't think He's capable of something like this? Because I can certainly find another prophet if you aren't fully committed to accepting the glorious power of the Lord.

JOHN:
No, no, of course not. [Laughs nervously, shooting alarmed looks at audience] So, ah... the next part?

ANGEL:
Yes... [consults scroll, nods] The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: white, red, black, and pale...

JOHN [somewhat sycophantically]:
That does sound quite exciting.

ANGEL:

It will be, in a really terrifying way [looking sadistically pleased at the idea]. I was meant to show it to you, but unfortunately we haven't got the space or the time or, honestly, the budget for it.

JOHN:

Shame. I'd love to see that.

ANGEL:

Don't worry, you will – in two thousand years or so. It'll fly by. It's only like waiting for the next season of *Sherlock*. [JOHN looks confused] Oh, right, after your time. [Returning to his checklist] Okay, then there's the trumpets...

A **TRUMPET** sounds; they both jump.

JOHN:

I forgot they do that.

ANGEL:

Every time. Then there's the Dragon...

JOHN:

Check.

ANGEL:

...the Beasts...

JOHN:

Check.

ANGEL:

Then lots of fighting, seven plagues upon the earth, blahblahblah, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb...

JOHN:

Oh, yes, I've got that, but you didn't give me the full menu, and we really should be thorough, shouldn't we? Is the lamb being served with mint sauce, or redcurrant jelly?

ANGEL [staring at him, aghast]:

The Lamb is the one getting married, John!

JOHN:

Oh. Well, then serving him up for supper seems a bit inconsiderate, doesn't it?

ANGEL:

It's a clear – and very clever, if I may say – metaphor for Jesus! The union between the Son of God and the Church of Man [JOHN looks even more baffled] – you know what, never mind. People will get it. [To audience] Honestly, aren't writers supposed to understand this stuff?

ANGEL takes a deep breath, then continues.

ANGEL (cont'd):

Then there's the False Prophet [looks to JOHN for confirmation], Dragon pops up again [JOHN nods], Defeat of Satan... oh, make sure you've got that, it's very important that we reassure people that everything will turn out alright in the end.

JOHN:

But... won't most people have died by this point? You know, what with the plagues and everything. Also, you said before that the defeat of Satan is only after he's been imprisoned for a thousand years, and the average human lifespan is actually quite a bit shorter than that.

ANGEL [airily]:

Oh, yes. But that's alright, because you'll all be brought back to life again to experience it, or part of it, at least. Anyway, I really must be off soon, so let's get this wrapped – or indeed, *rolled* – up [indicating scroll]. We haven't got much left. You've got the Judgement, I'm sure? Before the Great White Throne? The Last Judgement...

Grandiose, he turns to the audience; with heavy Miltonic syllables, he intones:

ANGEL (cont'd):

Where reassemble all the human souls,
The righteous and the reprobate, as deemed;
Whence God shall herd them each their doomèd way,
Exalted unto Hea'en, or damn'd to burn...

JOHN:

Hmm, yes! I do have that here. [Similarly grandiose] 'The dead are to be judged.'

*A pause, while the ANGEL waits for the rest.
The 'rest' does not come.*

ANGEL:

Is that all you have?

JOHN [very abashed]:

Well, erm... You were mid-flow, so I didn't like to interrupt, but this mysterious writing implement you gave me [holds up cheap biro] stopped working at the start of that bit. Terribly sorry.

ANGEL [facepalming]:

Why wouldn't you just tell me?

JOHN:

Well, you are quite scary when you're imparting revelations, what with the wings and the glowing eyes and the flaming sword. And the halo. It's quite intimidating if I'm honest.

ANGEL:

Right, I'll get you something a bit more reliable, then.

The ANGEL produces a quill and holds it up for the audience's perusal. He does not produce an ink pot. He gives the quill to JOHN.

ANGEL (cont'd):

Oh, it'll take ages to go through it all again - I'll have to just show you.

JOHN has been examining the quill the ANGEL gave to him, and tests it on his parchment. It is clear that there is no ink. He tries to get the ANGEL's attention, but it is too late.

ANGEL (cont'd) [straightening jacket, looking apprehensive]:

Let's see, how does this begin? A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away... wait, no, that's not quite right...

ANGEL steps out into the centre of the stage, gesturing to JOHN to stay back. He looks like he's been waiting for this moment for centuries, as, indeed, he has.

ANGEL (cont'd):

Now we've reached the end, dear John,

- The End, indeed, in every sense -

The Seals all bust, the Plagues have come...

The atmosphere is... pretty tense.

Four HORSEMEN – white, red, black, and pale, in rubber horse masks, clip-clopping with coconuts, in smack-you-round-the-face homage to Monty Python and the Holy Grail – canter across the stage.

ANGEL (cont'd):

We witnessed have the horsemen four,
The seas and rivers turned to blood,
Some Beasts, False Prophets, Bab'lon's Whore:
Now God will judge the bad and good.

That which must shortly come to pass,
In vision I'll reveal to thee.
I warn thee: careful notes amass:
To all man's fate thou holdst the key.
No pressure.

ANGEL withdraws, moving to the back of the stage to JOHN's cave, overseeing it all. Enter two EVIL SOULS, looking morose.

1ST EVIL SOUL:

O, war and famine, pestilence and death!
'Pon all the world strikes smoke and fire and wrecks it.

2ND EVIL SOUL:

O, for a single fresh, sulphur-less breath!
This is worse than even No-Deal Brexit.

1ST EVIL SOUL:

Then to the bottle. What else is there left?
Of all that's good and hopeful we're bereft.

2ND EVIL SOUL [stopping 1ST EVIL SOUL]:

But isn't drunkenness itself a crime?

1ST EVIL SOUL:

Mate, look around. We've missed repentance time.

*They sit down and start drinking. **TRUMPETS** sound, they jump and spill alcohol everywhere.*

2ND EVIL SOUL [extremely melodramatically]:

Alas, the horn that calls us to our doom,
All us upon this godforsaken rock.
Even the dead [indicating audience] dragged from their dusty
tombs

2ND EVIL SOUL (cont'd):

To stand before th'Almighty in the dock.

1ST EVIL SOUL:

As if it's not already enough that they
Probably died young and in a painful way!
O terror, terror, and nowhere to run –
The glorious wrath of God is now begun.

*There are a few frantic moments, and then their
panic subsides into reflective despair. They
sit down, almost nonchalantly.*

2ND EVIL SOUL:

To sit and watch, though, might be quite exciting.
Chill with a pint, while angels do their smiting?

1ST EVIL SOUL:

At least justice of Heaven must be better
Than earthly justice – spirit or in letter.
Sure, we're both damned, but judged will be all,
And get what we deserve, to rise or fall.
No bloody lawyers getting them acquitted,
We'll all be judged for the crimes we have committed.

*The EVIL SOULS sit down to drink, with
resigned, but somewhat resolute, looks on their
faces. They drain their drinks; then, as they
realise they have run out of alcohol, they
manage a further couple of seconds of calm,
before exploding into hysteria once more.*

2ND EVIL SOUL [standing suddenly, throwing arms to Heaven]:
Oh, all our lives have been lived but in vain!
And now to face Him whom we have disdained.

1ST EVIL SOUL [standing also; pacing restlessly]:
The way was there before us all along,
How will we face Him, when we were so wrong?
No time now our situations to review.
We'll be mere burgers on God's blessed barbecue.

2ND EVIL SOUL:

(NB: metre changes to (roughly) dactyls)

Mind you, you can't say it's not a fair cop.
We were awful in life, and we still haven't stopped.
I mean, if it comes down to a choice between us
I won't hesitate hurling you under the bus.

1ST EVIL SOUL *looks momentarily offended, before realising that they would do exactly the same back. So they merely shrug. There follows a ponderous pause.*

1ST EVIL SOUL [reflectively]:

(NB: Metre returns to iambic pentameter)

But cruelty to *mankind* was just the start:

We never let the Lord into our hearts.

We never prayed or praised him when we might.

What hope, when we tripped at a task so slight?

TRUMPETS. *Panic ensues.*

2ND EVIL SOUL:

Alas! We near the hour of despair -

All we whose deeds the Good despise -

Our sins the Lord shall soon lay bare.

Some catalogue will they comprise!

They sit back down, looking bleak, and begin to contemplate their many sins.

1ST EVIL SOUL:

Great idleness my soul did guide.

2ND EVIL SOUL:

I only ever thought of me.

1ST EVIL SOUL:

Time and time again I lied.

2ND EVIL SOUL:

I caved each day to gluttony.

1ST EVIL SOUL:

I coveted our neighbour's wife.

2ND EVIL SOUL:

And from the needy did I steal.

1ST EVIL SOUL:

I cruelly took another's life.

2ND EVIL SOUL

And I, alas, I voted Leave -

1ST EVIL SOUL *looks suddenly horrified and edges noticeably away from 2ND EVIL SOUL. They continue their confessions apart.*

1ST EVIL SOUL:

I thought that I had done no ill; I thought I had no stain;
I don't profess to saintliness but nor was I a Cain.
I thought, in truth, that on the whole, my passions I'd
restrained -
And my incriminating search hist'ry kept carefully contained.

2ND EVIL SOUL:

Mandy, coke, and ketamine I shovelled down in droves,
My Sabbath spent hungover, O! the lads and I were oafs!
I could have spent my Sundays reading of the fish and loaves,
And not *The Daily Mail* - there is no respite for my woes.

The ANGEL, who has been waiting anxiously for his cue, returns to centre stage. He is trying to affect a nonchalant, bored demeanour, but is in fact excited to be on stage, and keeps glancing over at JOHN to see how he's reacting. Clearly, this guy doesn't get out much. The EVIL SOULS look confused, but when the ANGEL brings out his sword, this changes to terror.

ANGEL:

Right, all of you - line up - quick, quick!
Present your passports, will ye, please.

They look mortified; they weren't prepared for this; they start frantically patting all their pockets. The ANGEL quickly stops them.

ANGEL (cont'd):

I'm kidding. [To JOHN] Christ, aren't mortals thick?

JOHN nods eagerly, then looks confused and a bit sad. ANGEL turns back to EVIL SOULS.

ANGEL (cont'd):

Where you're going, you won't need IDs.

To God's right hand, the good shall go,
Yea, Heaven's stairway may ye climb;
Ye wicked souls, wend ye below
On His left hand. It's Judgement Time.

A great, awe-inspired hush as JESUS appears from stage right, wearing sunglasses and a sharp suit. He strides to centre stage, commanding the attention of all. The CHOIR files onto the stage behind him.

JESUS:

Ladies and gentlemen – the Ending's impending. Therefore, I'm back! I'm once more descending. Yes, it's all true, folks. [To CHOIR behind] – can I get a little more choir?

The CHOIR harmonise a single chord of angelic purity.

JESUS (cont'd):

Be ye sinner or saint – I am your Messiah!

JOHN waves frantically at the ANGEL, who sighs in frustration and waves a hand. Everyone but JOHN and the ANGEL freeze, like a TV show being paused.

ANGEL:

What do you want, Jonathan?

JOHN:

I'm sorry, it's just... didn't you say the Judgement is before a Great White Throne? And that the Lord sits on it?

ANGEL [impatiently, not happy to have his mistakes pointed out]:

Yes, yes.

He clicks his fingers at the EVIL SOULS, who unfreeze and go offstage, returning with the Great White Throne (a tacky white plastic lawn chair which has undoubtedly seen better days) before retaking their positions.

ANGEL (cont'd):

Happy now?

JOHN nods his assent. The ANGEL waves his hand to unfreeze the scene – the scene restarts, Groundhog Day-style. JESUS seats himself upon the Great White Throne.

JESUS [decidedly less energetically than the first time]:
Ladies and gentlemen – the Ending's impending.
Therefore, I'm back! I'm... [glancing at JOHN and ANGEL] *once more descending.*
Yes, it's all true, folks.
[Half turns to choir behind – then rapidly changing mind]
– No need for the choir.
Be ye sinner or saint – I am your Messiah!

NOT THE BLESSED VIRGIN:
He's not the Messiah! He's—

JESUS:
Erm, actually, I sort of am, this time. Please don't make me do that whole spiel *again.*

He resumes, standing.

JESUS (cont'd):
My Father in Heaven the End wills it be,
So I'm back to throne myself in majesty.
That old crown of thorns we're exchanging for gold
And a *heavenly* bod, for that torn one of old.
I'm a sight to behold.

For five thousand years, now, the Earth's been in flower,
And it'll be ending in...
[Checks watch. Slight eyebrow raise.]
'Bout half an hour.
Now comes the moment of truth, I'm afraid.
The good we must sort from the ones who have strayed.
[To EVIL SOULS] If you'd have just... prayed?

TRUMPET *sounds. JESUS gestures flamboyantly at the ANGEL, who chases the EVIL SOULS offstage, wielding his flaming sword.*

JESUS (cont'd) [Aside. He shrugs]:
Dears, I've the right to be a *little* showy –
My Dad created David Bowie,
And He, the Lord of Sky and Sea
Invented Freddie Mercury.
And, since we are a Trinity,
Well, therefore, that was also me...?
You see?

JOHN *looks up from his notes in confusion.*

JOHN:

Well, no, I don't see, actually!

ANGEL [passing a hand over his face in horror]:

Did. You. Just. Interrupt. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?

JOHN:

Oh, I thought he'd finished. [Addressing JESUS] Terribly sorry.

JESUS:

Don't worry, I was done. [Sitting back down on Throne]

ANGEL [freezing the scene. To JOHN, with exaggerated politeness]:

Is something the matter, O esteemed prophet?

JOHN [nonplussed]:

Well, it's probably just me being silly, but I'm struggling a little bit with understanding the idea that Jesus is also his own father.

ANGEL [superciliously]:

Well, you see, he isn't. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but they aren't *each other*. [The ANGEL's expression makes clear just how farcical *that* unlikely scenario would be.] It's One God in Three Persons. It's really very clever how they manage it. Make sure you get that down.

JOHN:

Oh! I see! Three Gods... [goes to write it down]

ANGEL [facepalming]:

No. That's simply not what I said, is it?

JOHN [looking back down at his notes]:

Okay... So it's all one God...

ANGEL:

Yes...

JOHN:

...in three, sort of, *modes*?

ANGEL:

No, you see, you almost had it, but now you've lost it, and you've gone into the heresy of Modalism. In a thousand years or so you'd be burnt for saying that.

JOHN [looking alarmed]:
Okay, so it's one God made up of three component beings?

ANGEL:
Heresy of Partialism.

JOHN:
Right... so Jesus is God's 'son'... Oh, I get it, you mean he was his first and greatest *creation*!

ANGEL:
Arianism.

The ANGEL looks as though he would very much like to put his hands over JESUS's ears, to prevent his Lord and Saviour from hearing such abhorrent heresy.

JOHN [grasping at straws]:
Oh silly me, I forgot: Jesus was *human*, born in a barn, Mary and Joseph, yada yada. So God chose Jesus and made him divine?

ANGEL [through gritted teeth]:
Adoptionism!

JOHN: Oh, so—

ANGEL [interrupting with a sigh]:
You know what, John, we really don't have time for this, I'm sure the humans will work it out for themselves eventually. Why deprive them of the opportunity to hold a few councils? It'll be great for Nicene tourism...

JOHN:
Okay, fair enough. I'll just put 'divine mystery beyond the realms of human understanding', that'll keep them guessing.

ANGEL [tersely]:
Great. May I continue, or do you have any more questions?

JOHN [blithely oblivious to the ANGEL's threatening tone]:
No, I think I'm alright, thank you.

The ANGEL waves his hand and the figures unfreeze. Very calmly, absolutely in control of the proceedings, JESUS strolls offstage, followed by the CHOIR.

Enter two DEMONS, wearing red. They carry scrolls containing ridiculously long lists of names: names of the damned.

1ST DEMON:

Ah! the end is now beginning...

2ND DEMON:

Fire, brimstone, doleful dinning...

1ST DEMON:

Cower ye, whose lives spent sinning...

2ND DEMON:

Time for dire disciplining...

BOTH DEMONS:

The end is begun

And doomsday is come!

TRUMPET *blares. They're used to it by now but they still jump slightly.*

2ND DEMON:

Bloody hell – why, I wish those damn'd trumpets would stop!
And just 'cause the Boss Man is having a strop.

Stops, looking nervously at the source of the trumpets. Reconsiders the wisdom of badmouthing their extremely powerful and somewhat unscrupulous employer within hearing distance of his trumpets. Tries to style it out.

2ND DEMON (cont'd):

Better round up these rascals while we've still got time:
Every sinner must suffer as warrants his crime.

1ST DEMON:

They say *demons* are bad – and in fairness we are –
But just take a look at mankind's repertoire!

[Unrolling scroll]

Pickpockets, shoplifters, burglars, and thieves;
Those who start fires and those who deceive;
Vandals and hoodlums and loit'ers and louts—
Hey, what the Hell are you laughing about?

2ND DEMON *[stifling smug giggles]:*

Really, is that all you've got? What a shame.

2ND DEMON (cont'd):

A *hundred* more souls were damned in *my* name.

[Indicating own scroll]

These make *A Nightmare on Elm Street* seem tame.

Contrasted with *mine*, your sinners be lame -

O honey, O sweetie, do *please* up your game.

1ST DEMON:

I grant you, your lot might beat mine in a fight;

Your thieves and your murderers might cause more fright;

But really, are your sinners as much of a blight

As those bastards who don't load the dishwasher right?

2ND DEMON *recoils, visibly horrified.*

1ST DEMON (cont'd):

Can your rollicking reprobates kindle more wrath

Than Americans insisting on calling it 'math'?

Or housemates who don't rinse their hair out the bath,

Or those pillocks who pause in the middle of the path?¹

2ND DEMON *groans viscerally.*

2ND DEMON:

Pray, do not speak of such dastardly deeds!

Your culprits are worse, I'm compelled to concede.

2ND DEMON *crumples up their list in disgust.*

1ST DEMON [shakes head]:

These reprobates sure have some stories to tell.

But we should probably hurry and send them to Hell:

If we're late then Beelzebub's going to yell...

TRUMPET. *All jump.*

1ST DEMON (cont'd):

I haven't seen him so mad since from Heaven he fell!

2ND DEMON:

You're right, fellow demon; get ready to work.

We better get going - no time now to shirk!

¹The rhyming words for these four lines are to be pronounced with a short 'A' sound, as if in a Northern or Midlands accent, as this is the proper way of speaking. We apologise for the unfortunate Americanisation of 'wrath' (somewhat ironic in the context), but needs must when the devil drives.

1ST DEMON [Nodding. Nostalgic for their old recreational lurking sessions]:
Past is the time for a leisurely lurk -
Best gather these souls lest the boss go berserk.

Enter SATAN. The two DEMONS look at each other in confusion, not recognising him at first.

1ST DEMON:
Who's he think *he* is?

SATAN looks at them in disgust before sweeping majestically to the front of the stage.

SATAN:
I'm one *hell* of a guy; yea, quite without peers -
Your lives just got better because I am here.
Who am I? ye ask, all you fortunate ones:
I do the work that each of you shuns.

He strolls forward, commanding the space. The DEMONS behind remain sceptical but signs of interest slowly begin to appear as his speech progresses.

SATAN (cont'd):
I've added to our hand of souls, I dare say,
More than ten thousand in an *hour* of a day.
Some at Fever I found; others in Park End...
A very high number did Cambridge attend.
Thus brought I to hell.
Thus worked I so well.

2ND DEMON:
All us ye excel - be this then thy claim?
Well, then, pray tell, how attained thee this fame?

SATAN:
Alas, is it true, my skill thou dost doubt?
If this be the case, I'll straighten it out.
[Gestures to the audience.]
Just look at these souls: they're open to sin!
I'll show you how quick I can make them give in,
Just watch.

DEMONS step back.

(This part would then be ad libbed by the SATAN actor; what follows is a vague outline which amused us.)

SATAN:

Have we got any murderers in?

No one responds (we assume).

SATAN:

Really? Not even you, sir? Well, I have to say you really look like the type. Maybe do something about that haircut? It's just a bit... stabby.

Laughter (we hope).

SATAN:

Alright, so no murderers... any violent criminals? Thieves? Anyone associated with the 2019 motion picture *Cats*?

We assume that the audience will say 'no', here, but who can really say? The world is a strange and unlikely place.

SATAN:

You're not really giving me much to work with here, are you? Okay, okay. Who thinks I'm hotter than Jesus? You do, don't you, sir? You can admit it – I won't tell anyone.

Audience laughing (hopefully).

(Ad lib section ends; normal script resumes.)

SATAN turns to JOHN.

SATAN: Hm, what about you? You seem like you'd have one or two... bad habits? *[Plucks sleeve of John's cassock.]*

SATAN steps back to the centre front of the stage and goes back into verse.

SATAN (cont'd):

Ye lubbers and liars, and all ye who thieve,
Ye foul-tempered knifers, who cause men to grieve,
Wreckers, extortioners, welcome receive,
The lawyers and bankers, who t'simony cleave,
[He suddenly slows down. Very drawn out and dramatic.]
Wel – come – to – Hell.

Seeing his speech is over, the DEMONS surge forward in reverence, still not realising who he is, but now in great admiration.

1ST DEMON:

With awe thou dost fill us
But now thy name tell us!

SATAN looks at them with cold amusement, and extends a Eurovision-worthy pair of magnificent red wings. Horns grow from his head, and his eyes become whirling vortexes of infernal darkness.²

SATAN:

They call me Diabolus,
Satan, Arch-fiend.
Of my pow'r all are jealous,
As has just been seen.

A bit of a pause, surveying the scene. He has time. He commands the space, and he commands everyone's attention. Then he begins his terrible backstory, with the smug air (by the end) of Nigel Farage the morning after the Brexit vote.

SATAN (cont'd):

I once was the greatest of God's favoured sons,
Universally praised for the things I had done.
On the council of angels I held mighty sway,
Bringing light to the heavens, like Earth's break of day.
I was God's biggest fan, though I'm loath to admit it –
But then Heaven went wrong, and I wanted to quit it.
God had too much power; Dad, Spirit, and Kid.
I was knocked from my pillar, and I wanted rid.
So then, to convince all the rest of God's sons
That He was a tyrant, but I was the One
Who'd lead 'em to freedom, become independent,
Break free from the shackles of He, the Transcendent –
So, channelling all of my pow'rs of deception,
I played upon fears and I spread misconception.
My su'ttlest trick – *could've conned any believer* –
That that earned me the title of Greatest Deceiver;
That that made 'em betray as would Judas Iscariot:
[Dramatic pause]

²We understand that performers may not be able to pull off *quite* this effect, but, honestly, don't be cowards.

SATAN (cont'd):
Printing my lies on the side of a chariot.

*Beckons for applause. The enamoured DEMONS
clap heartily. He cuts them off again with a
curt gesture.*

SATAN (cont'd):
With *fifty-two percent* of the angels behind me,
It was clear to the Lord that he'd now have to mind me...
And mind me he did. So we *crashed out* of Heaven,
And suffered in Hell. Meanwhile, in days seven,
The Lord Eden made, and I plans for its fall.
With my best fiends' support, then, I started to crawl;
Made my way out of hell – well, as much as I could –
And I went up to Eden, that God said was good:
I reasoned, if I'm spending All Time in Hell,
I might as well scupper the humans as well.
Tempting Adam and Eve, well, that was a hoot.
A bit of a hiss and they'd swallowed the fruit.
And now look at 'em all. Damned in the silliest ways –
Like that daft Oxford pair writing blasphemous plays.³

1ST DEMON:
But what happens now, O my master infernal?
Now the Earth's stopping running its old course diurnal?

SATAN:
Now we find those who must suffer eternal
In each of Hell's circles, as deemed the Supernal:
The more frightful the sin, the deeper internal.
Not an inkling of hope. No, not even a kernel.

*Another **TRUMPET**, the DEMONS look terrified
because they know they're late for work.*

2ND DEMON [to SATAN, awe-inspired]:
Th'art peerless 'mongst devils that ever knew I,
It's almost a shame that the Ending is nigh.
But I guess we must carry these souls off to die...

1ST DEMON [also awe-inspired]:
And once our work's done, to your feet we shall fly!

DEMONS and SATAN leave, stage left. **TRUMPET**
again. GOOD SOULS enter from stage right,
looking sheepish. Enter JESUS.

³I.e., us.

JESUS:

There isn't long now, dears, and this is the big one:
It's time to decide now if you were a good one
Or bad one; now must I make the divide,
For you all picked a side. It isn't much fun,
But it has to be done.
And if you have any theological queries,
If this kinda scuppers some well-thought-out theories,
We're happy to hear all your questions and cares —
But don't talk to me, but the Big Man Upstairs.

Now it begins.

He turns to the GOOD SOULS.

JESUS (cont'd):

You good souls are each of you souls who would feed
And house, and clothe, and care for me.

1ST GOOD SOUL:

Lord, when hadst thou so great a need?

2ND GOOD SOUL:

Hunger or thirst, how could it be?

JESUS:

Whatever you do for another, darlings, you have done for me.

[Turning to EVIL SOULS]

But where were all *you*? Content in your glee,
While suffered I so great a need,
And from the prison raised my plea?

1ST EVIL SOUL:

But how, pray, were we able to feed?

2ND EVIL SOUL:

In prison, how were we to see?

JESUS:

(NB: metre change: anapaests)

All this kindness you owed to the people you knew,
That old man down the road and the boy without shoes.

(NB: metre change: iambic tetrameter)

And that poor fam'ly that you spurned;
And all this time you never learned,
And now I *really* have returned—

SATAN *re-enters with the other DEMONS to organise the damned. SATAN finishes JESUS' line.*

SATAN [gleefully]:
And each of you shall now be burned!

JESUS *and SATAN glare at each other for a moment, then SATAN eventually caves. He moves towards the EVIL SOULS as the DEMONS enter and join him at the front of the stage.*

1ST DEMON:
Hurry up, please, it's time! We've not got all day.
Form a single-file line; minimise the delay.

2ND DEMON:
It won't be long now till you're all on your way.
[Looking exasperatedly at 2nd EVIL SOUL who has put his hands together, frantic.]
Oh, *come on*. Don't you think it's a *bit late* to pray?

SATAN:
For a good time, not a long time, was each of you here.
Now a long time and bad time must each of you fear.
If you've any complaints, let us know, do not slumber,
Six-Six-Six is the customer service's number.

SATAN *and the DEMONS lead the EVIL SOULS offstage. The EVIL SOULS might wail. The GOOD SOULS remain, gazing up at JESUS.*

JESUS:
Ye good souls are saved, to Heaven you're sent -
[Regretfully] Unlike those, who are damned to eternal torment.

JOHN *looks scared and confused. The ANGEL notices and pauses the scene.*

JOHN:
Just - just hold on a sec. What's happening?

ANGEL:
Oh, for *Heaven's sake*, Jonathan, it really couldn't be any clearer. Are you blind as well as ugly? Hm... that *would explain the outfit*.

JOHN [looking affronted]:

No, I can see what's happening, but — why? Why are these people being damned? Eternity in hell is a bit — disproportionate, don't you think? And I thought Jesus was all about forgiving people? How is he alright with this?

ANGEL [pacing]:

Well, you see — [breaks off, looking confused, and paces the other way] ah, well [turns again] — I mean, erm—

JESUS [unfreezing himself]:

If I might perhaps interrupt, humble servant?

ANGEL [grovelling]:

Of course, Lord, of course! It's not that I don't know the details, or anything like that, I mean, I've definitely been briefed, I know how it all works— [He very clearly does *not* know how it works.]

JESUS *gently cuts him off and turns to JOHN.*

JESUS:

I am the Son, the Father's sole begotten;
I came to Earth for to redeem the rotten;
To lend the poor and vulnerable a hand;
And 'gainst oppressive tyranny to stand;
Forgive trespass, to all a second chance;
To love in every single circumstance.

(NB: metre change)

This [gesturing around at the scene] is but one possible interpretation

Of the book they will call John's Revelation.

It's vital to see that it's only a slice

Of a huge set of texts with conflicting advice.

It's going to be hard to make sense of it all —

But the thing to remember is not to build walls:

It's easy to fall into fear and to hate

Of that which is unknown, and to discriminate:

The world's so much simpler as 'us versus them',

When it's just sheep and goats, or just devils and men;

To be quick to condemn those who don't fit your frame...

But remember, we don't all see all things the same.

(NB: metre change)

Be cautious with the written word. Don't use

An ancient text your misdeeds to excuse.

Listen to me, the Word, when I ye tell

JESUS (cont'd):

Just love. And everything shall turn out well.

With one last look at JOHN, and the audience, JESUS exits. The ANGEL goes over to stand with JOHN in his cave.

ANGEL:

Right, well, that's that I suppose. I do hope you've got all of that down now. It's a very important job. (Threateningly) Lots of people might do lots of terrible, terrible things to each other if you don't make it all very, very clear. I'm sure you wouldn't want *that* on your conscience. Not to mention it won't reflect well on you when the big day does finally come.

JOHN's reaction throughout this speech - rapidly mounting anxiety - makes it very clear that he is less than happy about this. Something has obviously gone very wrong.

ANGEL (cont'd) [his tone becomes much lighter - almost breezy]:

But I'm sure you'll have no trouble now, seeing as I went to the effort of imparting divine wisdom through a direct vision. That stuff really doesn't come cheap, you know. Probably knocked a good few years off your lifespan.

JOHN:

What?

ANGEL [hurriedly]:

Well, anyway, must be off! Lots to do before the big day... good luck with the book, and I'll see you for fire and brimstone before you know it! Tarra!

ANGEL exits. JOHN walks to the centre of the stage, parchment and quill clutched to his chest. He looks sheepish.

JOHN:

I suppose I should have mentioned this before... there was just never a good opening... but, erm, he didn't give me any ink.

JOHN turns his parchment around to the audience, showing that it is blank. For the full duration of the ANGEL's divine vision, he has been only pretending to write.

JOHN (cont'd):

But, erm, [forcing a nervous laugh] I'm sure I can go by memory. Just as soon as I find some ink. I'll go and look for some ink.

With some nervous nodding, JOHN wanders off looking for ink.

FIN.