



"Ahem... Hey..."

"Hey, this is your... God? Sure, let's roll with that, whatever you believe."

"Your doomsday is coming."

"Look, it's on you for not having a unanimous language or whatever. You'll hear this message in like... Hundreds of languages."

"It's gonna be quick and painless. Like one of them solar eclipses."

"I made them a while back just to, like... Joke around with you, people, but I think it's gonna be cool to end things like this."

"You have a day. Do whatever you want, and I mean anything... With an exception: don't hurt a living soul. I don't want any problems."

"Uh... Yeah. Yeah. That's it. You know. Bye."

Sounded like a big joke.

"Not a joke, by the way. Dead serious."

That was proof. What more could you want?

"No pun intended. Don't panic, by the way."

Of course, after being told not to panic in a situation like this, humanity, realistically, would panic even more.

In times of despair, people need a hero. A team of heroes.

A lawyer, a British boxer and a gardener ex-hitman walk into a bar. Oddly specific, but it's a nice ice breaker.

Jimmy, George and Peter were good friends.

They certainly had their differences, but that wouldn't keep them away. Especially in terms of occupation.

Jimmy Woodman was a lawyer. Not the one you'd trust, and for a reason. He was a smug-looking man in his mid 30's with dark brown hair and a light, shaved face. Rocked a pair of glasses, which really made him look more well-intentioned than he was most of the time. Plus, usually wore a suit, which added to his "trustworthy" persona. Really, though, Jimmy indulged in... Any kind of scheme there is.

George Hughes was a boxing champion back in England, had everything he could possibly wish for, but for the sake of it wanted to try out his luck in the US. Clearly, it had ran out, because things never really took off. Illegal boxing was his second "best" option - with no other choice, George did exactly that. The guy was the youngest of the three, being 32. Looked pissed off most of the time, had deep blue eyes, light eyebrows and dirty blonde, very short hair. He didn't stand tall, but had seriously wide shoulders.

Last of this trio was Peter Colon (suspected not to be his real name at all) - oldest, 46. He really was a hitman once. Not a bad one, at that. After one "incident" in particular, though, and with enough money, the man quit altogether. Instead, Peter pursued gardening - his true passion. Now he took care of some posh old married couple's garden outside their mansion. He enjoyed his job quite a lot. Definitely looked a bit older than he actually was. Peter's hair was already grey, likely from the endless murders he's witnessed and initiated. He had tired, grey eyes which always looked a little surprised and a thin mustache above lips even thinner.

The friends had decided to get unmistakably wasted their last night on Earth. Who cared they would spend the last *day* with a total hangover and a migraine?

"Drink, drink, drink!!" - Jimmy and George chanted in unison as they watched Peter chug down what they called "Not A Crime". It was a horrific mixture of 6 types of liquor (of specific brands), which even they could not name. The recipe, in fact, changed each time they tried it out. Tonight it consisted of rum, whiskey, the strongest beer the bar had, vodka and brandy. The way those drinks were chosen - each of the three named a drink. Then they turned around to the strangers closest to them and asked them to name two more. As simple as that!

"Bah..." - Peter had to take a sharp breath - it was difficult because his throat was basically burning away.

Jimmy and George's turns followed.

The trio was filthy rich and they had nothing else to live for at this point, so why the hell not, they figured!

To “keep it down” though, they continued with regular champagne... And still got awfully drunk, of course.

“SHUUUSH-shshshshhhh... Georgie..! Buddy! Buddy-booy!” - The lawyer interrupted his younger friend, speech slurred. - “I SAY... We save the world!”

“Of course, yeah! Mess with the guy up there and we'll regret it later!” - The boxer immediately replied, at first mocking and then stern.

“Who says we're messing with him! We're gonna negotiaaaate!”

“Wait-wait-wait-wait... Hold on... That's your thing, that's the thing!” - Peter joined in support of Jimmy's peculiar plan.

“Hell YEAH, that's my thing! Lawyerrr, I'm a lawyer and I negotiate! HUMANKIND is INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY!” - Humanity was guilty of so, so many things. - “CHUG IT DOWN. PETE, because we're gonna LIVE FOREVER!”

“FINE, fine, you're lucky you're convincing, Jim! WE'RE GOING OUT THERE!” - It didn't take long for George to give in, it seemed.

Soon enough they were out of the bar and walking down the (uncharacteristically) busy street towards a bench. Laughing and constantly bumping into each other, they were talking absolute nonsense - only they understood each other, really.

Nobody batted an eye. It was normal people would rather panic about *their* lives and *their* inevitable doom, rather than some drunkards' midnight shenanigans.

George, like in an old-timey slapstick movie, as ridiculous as it was, tripped on his own foot and went face-down to the ground. Peter and Jimmy went right after him against their own will.

The men laughed about it until they passed out entirely. Quite the depressing sight for any passer-by, but then again... Nobody cared.

*Tick-tock, tick-tock*, went the clock. Had no numbers - an odd choice. Minimalists be damned.

Right under it was a tv. No channels or anything - it was those you'd see in a fast food chain showing whose order is ready and who's still waiting. In the middle of the room - a white sofa, pure white, like the walls. A useless lamp next to it.

The last thing, on the wall opposite of the tv, were three identical doors. Only one had a “STAFF ONLY” sign on it.

A few people were hanging out there. Seemed rather chipper. That was, at least, Peter's observation. Everybody around him knew he was horrible with social cues.

“Morning.” - George was next to him. So was Jimmy.

“Morning to you too.” - he didn't have that usual rasp in his voice after a hangover.

"The more I stare at this clock... I'm starting to feel it's going all over the place." - The lawyer said, his tone was low and oddly calm. He wasn't wrong. After George and Peter stared for half a minute in silence, they were starting to see it, too.

The boxer averted his gaze and found the strength to get up from the sofa. Wasn't so hard, now that he thought about it.

Now that they all thought about it... Not only were their clothes in perfect, shining condition, they also... Had no symptoms of a hangover whatsoever. No migraine, no urge to vomit, not even the tiniest headache! It was great, of course, but undeniably odd.

Only now did the three start paying attention to what everyone else around them was doing. A group of three women, who looked like your stereotypical cat ladies with knit sweaters and cat fur sticking from those very sweaters. They were chatting with two old gents, dressed, respectively, like actual gentlemen - perfectly ironed, striped suits.

One man cracked a joke and they laughed audibly. They were completely unbothered by their surroundings and the question "Where the hell am I?" wouldn't dare to pop in their minds.

At the opposite side, leaning against a wall, were 5 teenagers. They all looked fairly traumatized, wouldn't really speak to each other, by the looks of it.

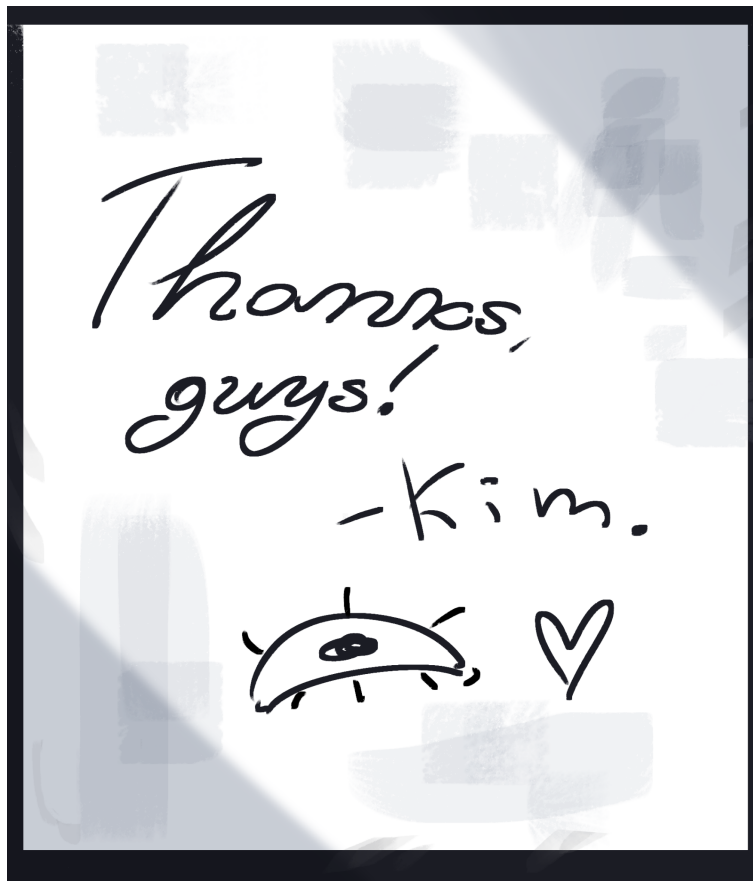
It was just a little ridiculous, since they were all dressed like political figures from America's history, specifically the ones featured in the musical "Hamilton". Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson respectively. In the middle was King George III.

It seemed like they were kids, doing a stage play, a musical. God knows what led them here.

If this was, allegedly, the place where you went when you died... Where was everyone? Over 100 people die each minute, so how is this place not flooded? Perhaps there are hundreds of rooms like this.

Those were all Jimmy, George and Peter's shared thoughts.

Pondering, interrupted by one of the three doors opening up.



"FFG3PL. If this is the code, written on your ticket, please, come through." - The voice, and it wasn't hard to tell, was basically, pre-recorded letters, numbers and syllables played automatically.

"That's our stop, girls!" - One of the elderly women announced to her friends. "Girls" didn't exclude the two old guys. They were all more ready for the end of the world than ever, but not in the way you'd think. The bright, nearly blinding, light, coming from the door, was clearly hinting they were going to Heaven. Maybe that's why they couldn't care less.

"Purgatory." - Hughes, coming to terms with their current situation, scratched at his nose.

"Guess so. But like... Why? Why did we have to go early if we had just one day to live anyways?"

"We would've been in a crazy hangover if we were still alive, we would've wasted it anyways." - Peter had a good point.

"Hate to agree..."

"Pete's right, Pete's right... I'm glad I get to die with you pals."

"We've only ever gotten so sentimental." - The oldest made another cogent remark.

Not even 15 minutes later, they had to watch some of the cast of the unofficial rendition of "Hamilton" walk through the door to heaven.

Within the time span of another hour, about 20 people came and went. Old people, young people, middle-aged people, whatever people. It was either heaven or hell.

Couldn't even chat with the person before the robotic-like voice spoke up. But it was just enough time to get to know their name, occupation and what was the last thing they ate.

There was one guy they spoke to for a while - Michael Dawson, a stand-up comedian. A scheduled show was a scheduled show - according to his own words. Even if more than half of the seats in the venue were empty.

He had a heart attack on stage, while the small audience there thought it was all part of the act. They were laughing up until a point. It was just too late.

Cracking a joke after telling about the rather saddening end of his life, Michael was shown the way to heaven. And he was the last guy that could be company!

Having given up on the clock, the friends had lost track of time completely. They were all out of sweet, sweet memories to recollect, since they never expected it to take... This long.

Some of the people were out of the "waiting room" in less than 10 minutes, so what was the problem?

Peter, Jimmy and George also each had a ticket, each with a unique code, yet on the TV those very codes wouldn't move from the category "In Progress".

It was impossible to nap due to the uncomfortably bright, white lights - much to the gardener's dismay.

Woodman waved goodbye to the new friend he made in less than a minute - some balding guy with strict glasses and a cheap suit. Whatever criminal thing one can put their mind to - they've bonded over exactly that.

The guy, of course, went to hell. The lawyer only got to know his surname - Hastings. Hastings didn't seem bothered over getting sent to hell.

The code O93L69 got erased from the program.

George grunted. He's been watching the TV this entire time. At this point, he wasn't paying attention. The man didn't notice tickets N27S45, ND005Z and N925A1 weren't even present in the database. Not in the "In Progress" section, not in the "Now Ready" one.

He blinked. He wasn't seeing things.

"Our bloody numbers!"

"What about them..?" - Colon, with his head thrown back, asked.

"They're gone! We've been waiting for so long and they're gone now!"

"That means we're up next, my guy!" - Jimmy cheerfully turned their way.

"The code, whatever, is supposed to be in "Now Ready", it's not there! OI, you've got a glitch in your system, we're up next!" - George had stood up to shout at whoever could hear him outside the room (though it was no guarantee there was anybody).

Determined, he started knocking on each door.

"Hear me?!"

"I hear you, I was away for a second!" - A voice called out. There was nobody else in the room, so it came from the outside. Or must've been an invisible speaker.

"We find this treatment unfair, Mister!" - Jimmy spoke for all three.

"Don't have all day, you see." - Peter added in a half-sarcastic tone.

"You people broke my system, give me a break! Of course something malfunctions the day I decide to start a new chapter in my life..."

"System, what kind of system is there to this, eh?!"

"You get sorted to heaven or hell with the help of an algorithm I built, as simple as it gets. Shut up for a minute!"

A minute did not pass.

"I, like, genuinely give up. What do you want?"

"Well, to get started-" - The lawyer began, only to get interrupted.

"Who are you?!"

"Your creator... Guy... God... Whatever thing."

"Mhm." - George seemed unamused by the answer, but had already realised they were speaking to the man all of humanity heard back on Earth.

"Cool, uh, let me get you out of here, a little... Change of surroundings."

The third door, logically leading neither to heaven or hell, but somewhere else, opened right in front of the Englishman. It would've slammed his face if he hadn't stepped back a second prior.

The room they entered was an awfully disappointing sight. Not the classic idea of God's Palace. More like... If God's Palace was a public bathroom in far-from-perfect conditions with one open, working stall out of 4 and 3 (hopefully) safe-to-use pissoirs out of 6. The sinks were fine, at the very least.

"I couldn't think of a better way to hide my face, but... I bet this hits home for you!" - The voice came from the stall. If one kneeled to look, they would see a pair of hairy legs with pants pulled all the way down - someone sitting on the toilet there.

"Of course..." - Peter sighed. - "So... How did we break the system?"

“By being, and correct if I'm wrong on the term, morally gray.”

“What..?” - George knew what that meant, but still. He wouldn't guess it applied to real people, at least not in this way.

“Not too good, not too bad. You've done as many “morally bad” things as “morally good” things, basically. Morals were never my idea, but it was easy to build an algorithm based on those, because, trust me, good and bad is much more complicated where I'm from!”

“You know what I've prepared for you? A short introduction. I tell you everything you may have asked yourself until now and I send you back to your universe! You've got some time to spend with your families!”

“Well, neither of us rea-” - Jimmy was about to correct their creator - neither of them had an actual wife or children. And each of them had a reason not to be able to see their parents.

“- Aalright, a speed round, what do you say?”

“Call me Kim, my actual name's something your ears can't perceive. Yes, I'm your creator and if you ask yourself how it came to that - it's my job - Sub-universe Creation and Maintenance District. SCMD for short.”

“Right now you're in a small space I've created just between the objectively good heaven and the objectively bad hell! You may have noticed it's a waiting room.”

“Uh, what else... The reason why outer space is the way it is in your universe is, because humans were never meant to go there, so I just sprinkled in whatever looked nice. It was fun seeing you try and explore it, though.”

“Why I'm destroying- well, no... Erasing your universe is because I'm tired of this project, I wanna start anew, you should get me better than anyone!”

“Of course we do, Mr. Kim, but you don't have to destroy us!”

“Erase. Quick and painless. Not an apocalypse, hahah!”

“Right. Don't have to erase us. Just... Set us aside or something and then start something new!”

“That's the exact opposite of what I want to do!”

“Horrible advice, Jim.” - The blond mumbled, crossing his arms at his chest.

“We're not so different, you and us, Kim...” - A classic persuasion technique.

“As if.”

“I write, Kim.” - Peter stepped in. - “I mean I write short stories. I-I don't publish them. Take it from me. Our universe is an unfinished project. Starting a new one won't... Fulfill you.”

“Not about fulfillment! It feels soulless!”

“Oh...”

"Not another word, Peter, or you'll miss the point." - George cast a look at his friend that said the same thing, it was almost a warning. Their lives did depend on this.

"It's quite the opposite, mate. This universe has a soul so big... You can't begin to imagine. You have any other projects?"

"An old one, yes. Lasted almost as long as this one did."

"What happened to it?"

"Nothing. It was perfect. Perfect to the point of becoming lifeless and mechanical. And you with all the... AI you're inventing - you're going down the same path, I don't want that to happen to a universe of mine ever again."

"You can't prevent big companies from doing whatever they're doing - they're the soulless ones. You know what art is?"

"Of course."

"Would people pour their souls out into art if they had none?" - Jimmy loved how that sounded coming out from his mouth.

"Do they, really? And I don't really keep up with the art field."

"Countless people do!"

"Forget humans! Animals and plants, they're as unique as it gets!" - The Hughes interjected.

"Tell me about it, I'm not sure what I was thinking about when making the hairy frog." - It seemed to be working, Kim was already sounding more cheery compared to a few minutes ago.

"Peter here's a gardener, he'll tell you all about those flowers and bushes and whatnot!"

"Yeah, yeah, no problem... My God, they're fascinating, I... You came up with each and every one?"

"I take creative inspiration, but, uhm... You could say I did."

"Thank you for cacti, thank you."

"That's just Earth, mind you! The rest of the solar system? The other galaxies? Just as impressive! That's as much soul and creativity as it gets, Kim!" - Woodman had to expand the subject - it wasn't just about their planet. - "Anything you have to say about aliens?"

"Oh, those exist, just... I might've been neglecting them. A little. T-they're microorganisms anyway, it's gonna take a while for them to evolve."

"See? They haven't even evolved yet! So you can't abandon this entire universe now! Nobody, Kim, nobody I know has ever created something so... Inspiring, so creative!"

"... You're saying I poured my own soul into this?"

"Yes! Yes!! Unlike your previous project, which... Could've been rushed, could've been done out of necessity!"

"Both those things are true actually. I got... Handed this big guide, book of rules, "Sub-Universe Creation 101", by a certain... Well, guy, you can't hear his name. He's a reaaaal big deal where I'm from. How do I put this in your terms... CEO of CEOs. He brought to our world something extremely close to your capitalism, I guess? The idea itself."

"And that was thousands of years ago, by the way. In... Your years."

"What he had in this book was great in theory, horrible when done by him."

"I want to make a change. That's why I care so much about soul, to put it simply. And before you say anything I KNOW it's impossible to do something like this alone. There are private universe creation companies and... I've been meaning to join one."

"Can't quit your current job?" - The oldest man asked politely.

"Oh, no, I can. And I can take my universe with me. I'm afraid to."

"Don't be a pussy, Kim." - Hughes asserted.

"Wha-?"

"I said don't be a pussy! Go get that new job, get a change of scenery and open your bloody eyes! If you have any!"

"I have AN eye. It's best I don't open it."

"Metaphorically! Open your eye metaphorically and REALISE this company you're working in has been draining you and stopping you from doing the thing you love, mate!" - He got closer to the stall door, putting his fist up against it.

"Be a winner, Kim!" - Jimmy exclaimed.

"I can be. I can be one!"

"YES, YEEES! WE'RE GONNA LIVE FOREVER!" - The man, without realising, said the same phrase for the second time in his life.

"Ohh, no-no-no... No... Having immortal beings in a universe is punishable by law. You're a lawyer, right?"

"Riiight, but surely-"

"You don't want to live forever, Jimmy." - Colon spoke the truth...

"Gonna send us back now?"

"What? No, not anymore at least. You're best off as ghosts."

"N-no redemption, no second chances? We just gave you a motivational speech!" - Which the boxer was quite proud of.

"Yes, and thank you! Don't worry, there's ghosts roaming on and about... You won't get lonely! They're just like you!"

"What, morally grey? I thought we were unique."

"You are! I just... Might have exaggerated."

"Screw this, and I felt special for talking to God!" - Jimmy stormed out of the bathroom - the door led him back to the waiting room.

"This is goodbye?" - The gardener was surprisingly timid when asking.

"Uhhh, yep! Ahem... What can I say... Thank you. Again."

The "STAFF ONLY" door wouldn't open again, after George and Peter left.