

TINSELTOWN
Three Short Plays
By Joe Hanrahan

THIRD PLAY

SHOOT IN SANTA MONICA

Characters: ACTOR (Richard Hoffman - when camera's off he speaks with a British accent)
DIRECTOR (Susan Dimitri)

His costume is that of an Interplanetary Commander.
She is in working on-set Directors gear. Script usually in hand,
lens finder around her neck.

Setting Can be very spare, or somewhat expanded. Green screen behind.
Couch upstage. Table center stage. On table is a few scattered documents.
A Director's Chair may far left or right for Ms. Dimitri to use.

Lights Up
Dim light middle of the night

Man is sleeping at a table
He wakes with a start. Realizes he's back in reality, moans, buries face in hands.
He gets up slowly, walks downstage, peers into the void (as if he's staring into space,
which, when SFX are added, he will be)

ACTOR: Who could have imagined? After centuries of...nothing...of silence from the stars.
Who would have thought...that they'd be...out there.
Moving slowly...ever so slowly...towards us.
With weapons we could never have imagined.
And a cruelty that...

DIRECTOR: (from back of house) CUT! CUT! Sorry. Audio problems. Keep your place.
We'll go right away.

ACTOR: (moving quickly offstage) I'm just going to grab my script, take a look.
(he comes back on edge of stage, looking over lines, reciting to himself. After a bit...)

DIRECTOR: Richard. RICHARD!

ACTOR: Yes, are we...

DIRECTOR: Ready?

ACTOR: Ready. Yes.

DIRECTOR: The script.

ACTOR: The script, yes. (He places it just off stage)

DIRECTOR: Let's take it from the top.

ACTOR: Waking up...?

DIRECTOR: No, from the window.

ACTOR: The porthole?

DIRECTOR: The por...yes.

(ACTOR moves into position)

DIRECTOR: (moves to back of house; after a few moments) All right. ACTION!

ACTOR: Who could have imagined? After centuries of...nothing...of silence from the stars. Who would have thought...

DIRECTOR: CUT. It's the audio again. Richard, take five.

(ACTOR moves off to grab his script. Comes back, sits at table. Goes over lines. After a bit, DIRECTOR comes to table, sits or leans on it. ACTOR looks up, smiles, goes back to script.)

DIRECTOR: Richard, sorry about the delays. (She's watching work around the set while she has the following conversation with RICHARD.)

ACTOR: Oh, that's all right. That's making a movie, huh?

DIRECTOR: Not always.

ACTOR: But can I ask something, Susan...these lines of mine here...that I've just been doing...aren't they a bit...reminiscent of...Wells? H.G. Wells, and his setup for WAR OF THE WORLDS?

DIRECTOR: Uy, yeah, maybe...

ACTOR: Should we worry about...

DIRECTOR: No, no, this entire script is reminiscent of a lot of many other, successful scripts. That's how movies get made.

ACTOR: Oh...K. Susan. Let me ask. We haven't had a lot of time to talk about this script...or this character...or to rehearse....

DIRECTOR: Rehearse. Richard, you're not in the West End anymore.

ACTOR: But, am I doing all right? Is there anything....uh, different I can give you?

DIRECTOR: No, you're doing fine, fine.

ACTOR: All right. Good. (buries his head in script)

DIRECTOR: (starts to walk away, stops, looks at him, then back) Richard, don't worry about the script. If you fuck it up, tape is cheap. And if you say something different and better from the script, it's a keeper.

ACTOR: Well, yes, thank you. I just want to get it right. My first Hollywood movie.

DIRECTOR: Uh, yes, well, Richard. (laughs) Again, no worries, you have a featured role in this, and no matter what happens with it, you'll survive.

ACTOR: Yes, but this is my first film...here. I want it to be a success.

DIRECTOR: But you've done film before. Right? London?

ACTOR: One film. A little telly. It's not the same. Coming to Hollywood. Here. The studio. The lot. With the palm trees...the palm trees, and the sun, and everything.

DIRECTOR: That's Hollywood.

ACTOR: Hollywood. The dream of every boy...actor! The big screen. The glamour.

(DIRECTOR looking around, looking for some glamour.)

DIRECTOR: Oh, yeah...

ACTOR: The sun...the palm...

ACTOR & DIRECTOR: ...trees.

ACTOR: Especially a boy actor...in the gloom of the English countryside.

DIRECTOR: I always thought the English countryside was kind of...sunny...or...

ACTOR: Well, in my memory, it's gloomy. Dickens, you know. And now, coming here...Hollywood...all the great, historic films. All the great, great stars. I feel like I have an obligation.

DIRECTOR: An obligation? To who?

ACTOR: To the great actors. Spencer Tracy. Frederic March. Montgomery Clift. And all the others. Brando, Paul Newman...goes on and on, doesn't it? Just as, in England, when I first played the West End. The obligation I felt I had to Olivier. Gielgud. Richardson.

DIRECTOR: Casting said you did a lot of theatre over there.

ACTOR: Yes...

DIRECTOR: A lot of theatre.

ACTOR: My whole life. And that's why I feel so lucky to be here. I've always wanted to...work here. Hollywood. And to get my first chance? Now? At this stage of my life?

DIRECTOR: That's...Richard, it's a well-worn Hollywood tradition. Bringing stage-trained European actors over here to do villain roles, or...character parts - uh, Alan Rickman, Christoph Waltz, Mark Rylance...

ACTOR: Yes, yes, yes...but it's the lady Brits who are getting the plum parts, huh? Emily Blunt, Keira Knightley, Kate for God's Sake Winslet. Not just character parts...

DIRECTOR: Those character parts are always going to be needed in movies. The super villain, or the kindly uncle, or the assassin mentor, or...like this role. The President of Consolidated Planet Earth.

ACTOR: Yes.

DIRECTOR: And if this role hits for you, there's no end to the wise, mysterious older villains, or uncles, or...

ACTOR: Yes, yes.

DIRECTOR: But now, right now, Richard, this is the first day of shooting, so let's get a shot in the can before lunch, huh? (She starts to walk off, is stopped by Richard)

ACTOR: But Susan, honestly, I am feeling a bit at sea here...is there anything you can tell me, anything to help me with this character...please, I...

(DIRECTOR sighs. Calls for her director's chair. Has to go get it herself. "I'm only the director of this damn movie..." Sits.)

DIRECTOR: All right, Richard, You, uh...your character...You have power...uh, but sensitivity.

ACTOR: Yes.

DIRECTOR: A man of action, all your life, but still, now, with some years on the job, you're thoughtful. Having gained wisdom, from experience.

ACTOR: Yes.

DIRECTOR: What else? Uh, but still, with the impulsiveness of the passionate young space rebel you once were...

ACTOR: Impulsive. Passionate. When I was a young space rebel. That's going to be a flashback, right?

DIRECTOR: Yes, but the script is still evolving. The studio might be looking at a prequel. If this one works.

ACTOR: Prequel. Ah. So there's probably no role for me...in...

DIRECTOR: Probably not. But it was good you asked. You're learning. Always ask about roles. Every chance you get.

So, where were we?...the impulsive, passionate yada yada, but with experience of a true leader...

ACTOR: Yes.

DIRECTOR: A man with the qualities needed to, literally, save the human race.

ACTOR: Because of the imminent attack of the...the, uh...uh...space vampires?

DIRECTOR: Yes.

ACTOR: Have we seen anything on them yet...the space vampires...how they're going to look...any special effects...?

DIRECTOR: No, that happens post.

ACTOR: I did see some concept drawings.

DIRECTOR: That's all changed. It's evolving.

(DIRECTOR hears something offstage. Stands. Nods)

Evolving...like the space vampires themselves...(mutters to herself)...and this script.

(DIRECTOR grabs chair, starts to move towards back of house)

ACTOR: (standing) So. Powerful. A man of action. Impulsive. A man who can save the human race!

DIRECTOR: OK.

ACTOR: But sensitive and wise, yes?

DIRECTOR: Whatever.

ACTOR: I think I've got it!

DIRECTOR: Richard, I'm making this all up as we stand here.

ACTOR: Oh. Ah. But what you said...it makes sense.

DIRECTOR: Good.

ACTOR: I think it was very helpful.

DIRECTOR: Good. Great. So let me see some of that this time, OK? We've got to save the fucking human race here already! (to the crew) Today! Sometime! (Walks away to back of house)

ACTOR: Uh...OK.

DIRECTOR: AUDIO SET? YOU'RE SURE? OK. ACTION!

ACTOR: I'm sorry. Same place?

DIRECTOR: SAME PLACE!

(ACTOR moves to hurriedly to window)

DIRECTOR: Richard! The script! On the table!

ACTOR: Ah, yes. (Moves it offstage)

DIRECTOR: ACTION!

ACTOR: Who...Who would...Who could...sorry, I...

DIRECTOR: CUT! Do you want to look at the script again, Richard?

ACTOR: No...no, I'm good, I...

DIRECTOR: All right, then. Ready?

(ACTOR nods)

DIRECTOR: And...ACTION!

ACTOR: Who could have imagined. After centuries of nothing...of silence...

DIRECTOR: WHERE'S MY BACKLIGHT? CUT! CUT!

(ACTOR stands still where he is for a bit. Then shuffles off to get script. He stands in corner of set, studying his lines. After a bit, DIRECTOR comes to him)

DIRECTOR: We've having some...kind of...problems...with...we're just going to go to the end of the scene. (Starts to walk away)

ACTOR: (panicking, paging through script.) End of the scene?

DIRECTOR: (Stops) Yes.

ACTOR: (looking at script) But that's...with the other actors...are they here?

DIRECTOR: No, we're just going to do your close-up. Get that done. We'll do pickups with the other actors later.

(DIRECTOR starts to walk away, and continues to try during the next few lines)

ACTOR: But...but I think I need some...some...build-up?...I mean, some motivation, something...to get me...

DIRECTOR: Hey, this is just like a play. You don't always rehearse chronologically through a script, do you? Same thing here.

ACTOR: But I...

DIRECTOR: We got a minute. Just get ready. I'll be back.

ACTOR: I've barely looked at this...

DIRECTOR: You're a stage actor. You memorize whole plays, right? Memorize!

ACTOR: Wha...?

DIRECTOR: We got a minute. Look at the scene.

(DIRECTOR walks off. ACTOR studies script for what turns out to be less than a minute, when DIRECTOR returns.)

DIRECTOR: All right, now in this...

ACTOR: That was a minute?

DIRECTOR: A Hollywood minute. Now in this scene...and this is all on you... you're at the table. Go. Today, please.

(ACTOR moves to table)

DIRECTOR: Sitting. (ACTOR sits) You've just had this intense argument with your top military aides. The space vampires are just about to attack. You've been urged by your aides to find a diplomatic solution. But it's come down to...you just don't trust them...

ACTOR: The aides?

DIRECTOR: No, the space vampires! You've seen what they've done to other planets. You see what they've started to do to our planet. And this is their ultimate invasion, they're coming

at you with everything they've got. So you've made the decision...no negotiation, no surrender. We're going to fight them, and save the planet! Got it?

ACTOR: So the aides want me to negotiate with the space vampires...?

DIRECTOR: I don't know! Yes! Don't ask me to explain this damn script.

ACTOR: All right. But...the lines...

DIRECTOR: Take a look. We got a minute. We'd like to get something in the camera today.

(DIRECTOR walks away again. back of theatre)

ACTOR: Oh, God. God. (frantically memorizing. After a bit...)

DIRECTOR: ALL RIGHT, RICHARD! READY TO ROCK?

ACTOR: Yes. Cheers.

DIRECTOR: DUMP THE CHEERS. GET IN CHARACTER. GET RID OF THE SCRIPT.

ACTOR: I wondered if I could leave it here...I could see...I heard Brando...

DIRECTOR: GET RID OF THE SCRIPT. AND GET RID OF BRANDO.

ACTOR: Yes. (up and tossing script offstage.) Yes. (Back to table.)

DIRECTOR: OK, RICHARD. OR SHOULD I SAY LORD MELVILLE, PLANETARY COMMANDER.

THIS IS GOING TO BE A PUSH-IN. RIGHT AT YOU. IGNORE THE CAMERA. LOOK JUST ABOVE IT. THAT'S WHERE YOUR AIDES WILL BE STANDING.

ACTOR: Got it.

DIRECTOR: ALL RIGHT. EVERYBODY GOOD? AND ACTION.

(DIRECTOR creeps towards ACTOR, as if accompanying a camera.)

ACTOR: So you want negotiations, do you? You want to sit across the table from space vampires...and...and...dammit, what? Line.

DIRECTOR: KEEP ROLLING! YOU NEED THE SCRIPT, RICHARD? THIS IS A TWO-MINUTE SCENE.

ACTOR: No, no...

DIRECTOR: BECAUSE EVEN FILM ACTORS CAN LEARN TWO MINUTES OF DIALOGUE, YES?

ACTOR: Yes. I've got it. I've got it.

DIRECTOR: AND RICHARD, IN HOLLYWOOD, WE DON'T CALL FOR LINE. OK? ALL RIGHT. LET'S GO AGAIN. AND ACTION.

ACTOR: So you want negotiations, do you? You want to sit across the table from space vampires, and...negotiate? Well, I looked in their eyes...vampire eyes...and I...

(He stops)

DIRECTOR: RICHARD, WHAT'S WRONG? DO YOU NEED THE SCRIPT?

ACTOR: No, I...

(THE DIRECTOR comes up on set, next to him.)

DIRECTOR: What?

ACTOR: I...I...we never had a chance to talk about the script, this speech here...

DIRECTOR: We don't talk about the script. We shoot it!

ACTOR: I just...hate these lines.

(DIRECTOR stares at him for a long time.)

DIRECTOR: What?

ACTOR: These lines...this...I mean, maybe they look like space vampires, I don't know, but I just hate saying the phrase...space vampires...and...I don't know if I can do this...

DIRECTOR: (stares at him a bit) You hate these lines. And you don't know if you can say them?

ACTOR: Yes, I'm sorr...

DIRECTOR: No, no, I do, too I hate these lines, too. By the way, we call it dialogue here. I do. I do hate this script. I hate this movie. But what we have to do - today - is shoot a scene, where you're going to get tough, and tell your military that you're not going to negotiate with the spa...with them. You're going to fight!

(DIRECTOR'S silent for a moment.)

DIRECTOR: Richard, this film will be a massive piece of shit. But It's my first chance to direct. And it's a space movie. Which means it will probably do OK Box Office. Which means I'll finally be able to do my movie about Georgia O'Keefe.

ACTOR: Georgia O'Keefe. Ooooh. Wasn't one done already about her...?

DIRECTOR: Yeah, So? That was a while ago. Didn't do well

ACTOR: Oh, sure.

DIRECTOR: But we've got a name to play Georgia. Beverly Montclair.

ACTOR: Beverly Montclair? That'll be a stretch.

DIRECTOR: She's been working on it. Even painting.

ACTOR: Aaaaah. What's it going to be called?

DIRECTOR: Working title is HER DESERT FLOWER.

ACTOR: Ah. That...could...sound...provocative.

DIRECTOR: It's just something for the studio to change. I'll pitch it, they'll say that can't be the title, I'll fuss a bit, then I'll agree, and they'll think I'm cooperative and that they've made a major contribution to the whole thing. Then we'll just call it GEORGIA.

ACTOR: The other one?

DIRECTOR: That was GEORGIA O'KEEFE.

ACTOR: Ah.

DIRECTOR: And...And, Richard...Richard, now that we're talking about it...there's the role of a gallery owner. Georgia's friend. In London...He's British.

ACTOR: Ah, well...

DIRECTOR: So let's do this. Richard, I'm asking...as a favor...from one artist to another...let's get this scene down and get this movie done. And you'll get a lot more roles. In Hollywood. With the palm trees. I guarantee it. And I'll get my GEORGIA movie. With the possible role for you of...

ACTOR: Her gallery owner friend. Yes.

DIRECTOR: I'm so stoked about it. I have a friend of mine...Teenah Davis, doing a song for it.

ACTOR: Yes, I remember her.

DIRECTOR: She's making a comeback now, big soundtrack album, it's going to great.

ACTOR: So. Georgia's gallery owner friend...

DIRECTOR: We'll talk about that later. After we've got this scene. So, You hate these lines, You can't do them. Have you have got...can you do, can you think of...something else? Anything?

RICHARD: Besides the script? But what...?

DIRECTOR: Can't you improvise? You theatre guys improvise a lot, don't you?

ACTOR: We try to avoid it when we can...

DIRECTOR: Improvise something. Anything. Listen. You're the Planetary Commander. You're responsible for the safety, the lives, of your people. There is an overwhelming invading force headed towards you...of spa...an overwhelming force. And it's up to you to convince everyone...to fight for their lives. Do something. Anything. For me.

(DIRECTOR starts to walk away, comes back.)

DIRECTOR: And you don't have to say "spa...". You know.

(DIRECTOR heads to back of house.)

(ACTOR, stands, has been thinking. Then an idea lands. He looks around. As if he's assessing the educational background of the film crew. Thinks, goes back and forth, finally figures "why not?")

DIRECTOR: READY TO HIT IT, RICHARD? THIS IS THE BIG ONE! READY TO ROLL?

ACTOR: Susan?

DIRECTOR: (comes back impatiently) Yes?

ACTOR: So, there's an overwhelming force coming to attack...and I have to convince my people to fight for their lives? Their country?

DIRECTOR: Their planet.

ACTOR: Their planet, yes. I think I might have something. Now I'm thinking of paraphrasing something that...

DIRECTOR: Richard. (pause) I don't care. Just do it. Now.

ACTOR: But, Sue...I'm paraphrasing something...actually stealing something...

DIRECTOR: Richard, in Hollywood, we don't steal. We borrow.

ACTOR; This is from one of the great leaders of my country, who faced a similar...

DIRECTOR; Great leader? Perfect.

ACTOR: See, there was an overwhelming force coming, and he...

DIRECTOR: Great, great! I love it!

ACTOR: But see, this is his speech, Sir Winston Churchill...

DIRECTOR: Churchill? Oh yeah, Gary Oldman. He was great.

ACTOR: Yes, he was.

DIRECTOR: Now...can we do this? Please?

(ACTOR looks up. Nods. Sits at table.)

DIRECTOR: ALL RIGHT, PEOPLE, WE'RE ROLLING. AND...ACTION!!!

ACTOR: Gentlemen. Ladies. We shall not...negotiate. We shall...FIGHT! We shall...fight...
in...in space! And on...our planet...if necessary.
We shall fight on the seas and oceans. Perhaps.
We shall fight...with growing confidence...and growing strength in the air. Of space.

(ACTOR stands)

We shall defend our...planet, whatever the cost may be.
We shall fight them on the beaches. If they attack our beaches.
We shall fight them in the fields and on the streets. If it comes to that.
We shall never surrender!
You ask, what is our aim?
I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror,
victory, however long and hard the road may be.
Victory!

(ACTOR stands, holds up his hand, V for Victory)

DIRECTOR: AND.....CUT! RICHARD...

(DIRECTOR rushes forward, gives him a hug. ACTOR stands.)

Richard, that was brilliant. Brilliant, as you British say, right? Just great.
(hollering off) DID YOU CHECK THE GATE? GOOD? EXCELLENT. PRINT IT.
Richard, I've never heard anything quite like...just brilliant. Gave me chills.
(hollering to everyone) ALL RIGHT! THAT'S LUNCH!

(DIRECTOR walks off. ACTOR watches her go. ACTOR, looking around, waiting for someone to catch him on his Churchill plagiarism. Then goes offstage, picks up script, takes it back to table, starts to read. This time, he takes out a pen, and starts making changes.)

DIRECTOR: And Richard...the gallery owner. In GEORGIA. That's YOUR role.

(ACTOR preens. Happy. Satisfied. Hopeful)

13

ACTOR: I love this city.

THE END

CURTAIN MUSIC

"It Never Rains In California" Albert Hammond