

Hail, Absolution!

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A One-Act play

By Jacques Manjarrez

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## SCENE 1

Curtains open to church dressing room with a single spotlight focussed on a couch center stage facing the audience. DESTINED, a pale, gaunt individual sporting an ornate white shirt and matching pants with a pair of aviators shielding his eyes, stands facing the audience with an authoritative presence.

As he gazes down at them, he smokes a lone cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth. He exhales a prolonged drag of smoke and gazes towards the audience before flicking the cigarette aside and breaking out in passionate preaching.

DESTINED

Demons! Hell-spawn! Bastards of the dark lord and the mother hag! Gaze upon me in silent awe, lest ye perish in holy fire, for I see you now!

(gazing over audience)

Oh, yes! Oh yes, I see you now! I see you now with all your black robes and fangs and crowns of rotten Herrings. I see you now with your flaming sabers and bat wings and fingernails that have never been cut and thus curve into the endless golden spiral of oblivion - I see you now! Know me! Know me and fear me for I am your God! (beat)  
And... And...

Destined reaches into his pocket to pull out another cigarette and lighter, while pondering how to continue his sermon.

DESTINED

And...

(under breath)

And what? Sinners... What about the sinners? Rise and grow... Like - like the sun...

Destined lights a cigarette to take a deep drag from it.

DESTINED

(projecting, impassioned)

Rise! Rise now, the sons and daughters of sinners! Rise and pay heed to the master's call. Which master? The ultimate master! The blood master! The master of saints, bishops, light, and archangels! The ruler and king of all that is loved! It is I, the master! Howdy!

(under breath, confused at own words)

Howdy? Nobody says howdy. But then what the hell do kids say nowadays..? Hey, dude..? Bro?

(projecting)

It is I, the master! ‘sup? (beat) You are the next generation! The next generation of lawyers, doctors, and dedicated theists. And as theists you will rise, next generation! You will rise above the nonbelievers and you will show them no mercy for the disrespect that they have shown me, your God! Curse the night and all it’s sinful ways, for with the sun rises a new wave of enlightenment and hope! A new dawn and a world absolved of sin! Praise me! Praise me! Praise me!

Destined rushes to a writing pad on the couch, and begins furiously writing out notes.

DESTINED

Boom! That’s how you do it! That’s good. I need to remember that, yeah. (beat) Should add one extra “praise me” for dramatic effect - emphasis - yeah. I like that. Yeah.

Destined approaches the edge of the stage, cigarette in hand, and faces the audience.

DESTINED

(projecting)

Projection.

(projecting louder)

Projection! Power! Pacing! Hand motions! Passion! Love! Love and fear - no - love, fear, and hate! Hatred for the enemy. Hatred for the sinner. Hatred for the dark nightmare whose blood runs black and thick, like - like - tainted mucus.

(softly, confidently)

Tainted mucus. Yeah, yeah. Oh Destined, you’re so good at this.

Destined again rushes over to the note pad to scribble down some notes before turning his head slightly, facing offstage.

DESTINED

(shouting)

Ms. Emilia!

(shouting louder)

Ms. Emilia!

MS. EMILIA  
(offstage, shouting kindly)

Is that you, Destined?

DESTINED  
Bring me my prayer cloak, Ms. Emilia!

MS. EMILIA  
(offstage)

Your what?

DESTINED  
(shouting)

My prayer cloak!

MS. EMILIA  
(offstage)

Which one do you want?

DESTINED  
(under breath)

Which one do I want?

(shouting)

The white one!

MS. EMILIA  
(offstage)

...They're all white, dear!

DESTINED  
(frustrated)

The whitest, one! Come on now, Ms. Emilia!

MS. EMILIA

Alright, you don't have to shout.

Enter MS. EMILIA from offstage carrying a folded white cloak. Ms. Emilia is a older woman in her late 70s, dressed in a winter coat and scarf. She walks as if stumbling through every step, tripping on her low-hanging clothing. Her face, although showing the calluses of long hours and scars of age, retains the innocent smile of a kindly grandmother.

As she enters, Destined continues to look forward, admiring himself in the mirror in the fourth wall.

She approaches him, and as she does so, Destined consciously turns his back to her, still standing. She sighs and latches the white cloak around Destined's neck. He admires himself in the mirror, flourishing the cloak as he does so. Following him, she looks at herself in the mirror next to him, combing her hair back in an overall disappointed fashion. She then pulls her skin back to flatten the sags under her eyes. She releases and then retracts.

MS. EMILIA

(turning to Destined)

Practicing for today's sermon, Destined?

Destined refuses to look at Emilia as he takes another drag from his cigarette.

DESTINED

Practicing, Ms. Emilia, would be to challenge the whispers of the angels. They await me at the podium, ready to inform me of the happenings in my humble world.

MS. EMILIA

Then what was all that passionate preaching I just heard?

DESTINED

I'm composing a sermon for the graduating class at the local high school. It was a commencement speech, if you will.

MS. EMILIA

Rockridge High asked you to give a commencement speech?

DESTINED

They didn't ask me personally per se, but I'm sure they will appreciate the attendance of their earthly savior as an honored guest and speaker, don't you think?

MS. EMILIA

(jokingly)

Recruiting a little young for the cause these days?

Destined ignores her. He instead goes to check his pockets for more cigarettes, and comes up with an almost empty pack.

DESTINED

As void as the heart of the mother-hag.

(to Ms. Emilia)

Go out and buy ten packs of Marlboros after the sermon.

MS. EMILIA

With what money, dear?

DESTINED

Social security come in this month?

MS. EMILIA

Of course dear - although it would still be nice to have a church budget. We simply don't have enough members to afford your daily cigarette intake.

DESTINED

I have in fact conceived of a method to bring in some new members to the cause. (beat) Do you know of the mortal Tom Cruise?

Ms. Emilia cleans up around the dressing room as Destined takes another drag from his cigarette.

MS. EMILIA

The actor?

DESTINED

I saw how the false church of Scientology managed to attract such a massive following by celebrating the fact that they had such a renowned celebrity as a respected member of their cult.

MS. EMILIA

You want to get a celebrity to join the cause?

DESTINED

I already have. I will be making the announcement today's sermon.

MS. EMILIA

Oh really? Who is it?

DESTINED

(condescendingly)

Patience is a virtue, Ms. Emilia. Patience is a virtue.

MS. EMILIA

Oh Destined, you are just full of surprises!

Emilia smiles and continues cleaning as Destined takes a few more drags from his cigarette. Suddenly, a loud knock is heard offstage.

MS. EMILIA

(gazing offstage)

They're quite early.

DESTINED

Go welcome them into their lord's domain.

Ms. Emilia stumbles offstage as Destined continues to smoke, having never paid her a glance the entirety of the scene. When she exits, Destined does finger guns aimed towards the mirror in the fourth wall in a playful manner as the lights dim.

## SCENE 2

The interior of the church's reception area. Enter Ms. Emilia, stage right. Knocks on a door can be heard offstage left.

MS. EMILIA

(directed to offstage left)

Hello? Mr. Forden, is that you?

SUSIE RUCKA

(from offstage left)

Uh, no. I - I'm a reporter for Rockridge Community Post, formerly the Rockridge Weekly. I was wondering if I could get an interview?

MS. EMILIA

(to offstage left)

Be right there!

Ms. Emilia sprints offstage left. The sound of an array of locks being undone followed by a door opening can be heard. Enter an excited Ms. Emilia, followed by SUSIE RUCKA - a young, female reporter whose eyes inquisitively dart across the room as she speaks.

SUSIE RUCKA

That's a lot of locks.

MS. EMILIA

Yes, well it was either that or trespasser would get stoned - and not in the modern sense either. That Destined, always so protective of his sanctuary.

SUSIE RUCKA

(gesturing around building)

His sanctuary? It was my understanding that this room belonged to the Rockridge community center.

MS. EMILIA

Yes, well Destined set his church up here two decades ago and just decided to settle in.  
(whispering)

Between you and me, I don't think they know we're still here.  
(normal tone of voice)

So you're a reporter?

SUSIE RUCKA

For the Rockridge Community Post, formerly the -

MS. EMILIA

(interrupting)

Rockridge Weekly!

SUSIE RUCKA

Yes! Are you a fan?

MS. EMILIA

Me? Oh no, print paper irritates my skin. What did you say your name was again?

SUSIE RUCKA

I'm Susie Rucka, junior reporter on community living.

Susie offers her hand to Ms. Emilia, who shakes it excitedly.



SUSIE RUCKA

I'm currently doing an article about the events and organizations at the local community center, I was wondering if I could get a short interview with the leader of this organization or...

MS. EMILIA

Oh I'm sorry dear, Destined isn't much one to give interviews.

SUSIE RUCKA

No interviews? Might I inquire as to why not?

MS. EMILIA

He just doesn't feel uh... Comfortable with talking to people unless he's behind a podium of some sort.

SUSIE RUCKA

Oh?

MS. EMILIA

But if you need an interview, I would be happy to offer one. I guess you could call me the second-in-command here... Don't tell Destined I said that. I think he gave that position out to a cherub by the name of Conrad.

SUSIE RUCKA

(scribbling on note pad)

Mr. Destined is the leader of this organization? And your name is?

MS. EMILIA

My name? Marian Emilia-Vandehaus. That's M... A... R... I... A... Space...

SUSIE RUCKA

(scribbling)

Thanks, I think I've got it..

MS. EMILIA

Now if you're thinking of joining our special little spiritual organization then you may call me Ms. Emilia for short.

SUSIE RUCKA

Spiritual organization, ma'am? So what is this, a yoga or meditation group..?

MS. EMILIA

(chuckling)

Meditation group? Oh no, dear. We're a cult.

At that moment, loud knocks can be heard originating offstage left. Ms. Emilia rolls her eyes and walks over to the origin of the sounds. She comes back shortly, followed by three members of the church: DR. ESQUINA - an aged sceptic with large glasses and a pretentious coat that goes well his aura, FORDEN - an anxious schizophrenic who's clothing is dirtied and worn, and MOTHER MARY - an elderly woman who shows little to no emotion and whose gaze seems to be focussed on one spot on the ceiling.

DR. ESQUINA

(inhaling)

Ah! The familiar stench of blind obedience! It overpowers the senses!

MS. EMILIA

(to Susie)

Susie, I present to you our humble congregation!

FORDEN

(to no one in particular)

I don't have wings, so they - they could be flying.

DR. ESQUINA

Ms. Emilia - how are you this fruitful morning?

MS. EMILIA

Fine, Dr. Esquina. How's your book coming along?

FORDEN

(anxiously)

There's more of them here on the ground, I think - yes.

DR. ESQUINA

Oh it is coming along. As a matter of fact, I just finished the chapter on Jonestown!

MS. EMILIA

How wonderful!

FORDEN

(detached, paranoid)

It's much easier to see them without radio waves. My lord, they're everywhere.

DR. ESQUINA

(ignoring Forden)

I'll have to make doubly sure that you and Destined both get a copy.

(coldly)

I'm sure Destined will especially appreciate it. It might give him enough original material for an entire sermon!

Emilia chuckles awkwardly before turning to  
Susie Rucka so as to introduce the new arrivals.

MS. EMILIA

Susie, this is Dr. Esquina - a frequent attendee of our meetings...

DR. ESQUINA

Though not for the reason they'd like. I'm a skeptic of sorts.

MS. EMILIA

(playful)

Ah yes, Dr. Esquina is always trying to find contradictions in Destined's speeches.

DR. ESQUINA

Forty-eight and counting since my first session.

MS. EMILIA

Over here we have Forden, our most... Passionate member.

FORDEN

(frightened)

What radio waves do is that they interfere with the astral medium.

MS. EMILIA

(playfully)

Still hearing those whispers, Forden?

FORDEN

(harshly)

Angels, Ms. Emilia. They're angels. And they don't whisper - they shout.

MS. EMILIA

Of course they do. And lastly over here we have our very own 'Mother Mary' as we call her. She's Destined's mother, you see.

(to Mary)

How's life treating you, Mother Mary?

Mary ignores them completely, her attention focussed on a spot in the ceiling.

MS. EMILIA

(whispering to Susie)

She has been to every single sermon that Destined has ever given. In my time here, I've never heard her utter a word.

(projecting to cohort)

Everyone, this is Susie Rucka. She's a reporter.

DR. ESQUINA

Ah! A fellow seeker of truth. It's an honor and a privilege, Ms. Rucka. I actually wrote a passage in my new book on how your predecessor, the Rockridge Weekly, was completely owned and operated by the 'Jews for Jesus' cult up until the early 90's.

SUSIE RUCKA

Yeah, I don't know if that's a hundred percent accurate...

DR. ESQUINA

I recall one of their columns that asked which was the best rite of passage: either drowning the member or cutting the congregant. Or was it the other way around..?

To this, Susie stares blankly - unsure how to respond. Ms. Emilia's pager begins to vibrate. She side-steps away from the group to gaze at the device.

MS. EMILIA

(pocketing pager, to Susie)

Destined's calling.

(to attendees)

All right everyone, The Church of the Blessed Destined is open! Find a seat and get comfortable. If you're bringing in any food, please make sure to clean up after yourselves, unless you're leaving sacrifices. If you are, please make sure to drop in the sacrifice bin on your way out. Destined does love his sacrifices.

(to Susie)

I encourage you to stay and see for yourself what we're all about. You know - for the article.

Susie nods as Ms. Emilia wobbles offstage right - leaving Susie stranded in a puddle of eccentrics.

SUSIE RUCKA

(to Forden)

So do... Do you read the post?

FORDEN

Shh... There's one behind you.

Susie looks awkwardly at the void behind her.  
Lights dim.

SCENE 3

Open to church dressing room. Destined is standing downstage center looking intensely into the mirror in the fourth wall while smoking a cigarette.

DESTINED

(enunciating)

Peter Piper preached to a pack of gullible purgers. Peter piper preached to a pack of gullible purgers.

Enter Ms. Emilia.

MS. EMILIA

Destined? You called, dear?

Destined pauses to take a drag from his cigarette.

DESTINED

Abominable or eradicable.

MS. EMILIA

What about them dear?

DESTINED

Which word do you find more potent?

MS. EMILIA

... I would say eradicable, dear.

DESTINED

Well then you'd be wrong. Eradicable starts with "e" - a letter in the vowel club that aspires to be an A, leading the vanguard of the most powerful words. "

E” should know it’s place at a last and penultimate letter - It is simply not worthy to carry a word of such magnitude as the one that I am seeking.

MS. EMILIA

You always have had a certain way with words.

DESTINED

Yes, well you’ve got to in my line of work. Honestly - not enough people recognise the skill set required to be a God.

Destined smirks. He begins to pace around the room, admiring himself in the mirror as he walks.

DESTINED

So... What’s the head count for today’s sermon?

MS. EMILIA

The head count?

DESTINED

How many attendees, Ms. Emilia?

Ms. Emilia turns behind her to count the number of attendees one by one.

MS. EMILIA

Three? Yes, three.

Destined stops in his tracks.

DESTINED

(tinge of disappointed overshadowed by false confidence)

Just three? Really? (beat) Likely due to the, uh, Zumba class next door. Yes. I’m telling you, we have to coordinate our schedule around that. Nobody can miss Zumba.

MS. EMILIA

(half-attentive)

Of course, dear.

DESTINED

(suddenly anxious)

Even I will, on the occasion, fantasize about indulging in said Zumba courses.

They are, uh, too tantalizing to ignore, but I resist the urge to attend for the sake of the angels that gave me a purpose. If I am to be the savior of this world, I cannot afford to distract myself with such forms of high-energy synchronized dancing.

MS. EMILIA

(looking behind her, at mass)

Oh, silly me! There are four attendees. Yes, there's also a reporter from the Rockridge Community Post. She's asking for an interview.

DESTINED

An interview?

Destined shakes his head as he chuckles to himself.

DESTINED

Ms. Emilia, I'm ready to start the sermon now. Please ready the mass for my arrival.

Ms. Emilia nods kindly and leaves Destined, who stares solemnly at the mirror in the fourth wall. Just as she leaves, Destined takes a few short drags from his cigarette before breaking out in short, tearful sniffles.

DESTINED

Four people. (beat) Four is fine.

Destined nods, wiping his tears with a jacket sleeve. He looks at his face in the mirror as a fabricated smile is painted across his cheeks. He then takes a deep drag from his cigarette before exiting to the sermon.

SCENE 4

Scene opens to the main church assembly, where a series of chairs, empty save the four occupied by the three churchgoers and the reporter are stationed facing a podium. Enter Emilia stage right. She approaches the podium, takes out her eyeglasses and, reading off of a slip of paper speaks to the congregation.

MS. EMILIA

(reading)

Presenting his holiness, your God, Destined.

At Ms. Emilia's introduction, Forden stands up and applauds loudly. After realizing that no one followed him, he awkwardly sits back down as Ms. Emilia moves away from the podium to sit among the rest of the churchgoers.

Enter Destined stage right, donning his majestic white cloak over his shoulders and sporting the aviators that blind him to his painful reality. Approaching the podium, he takes a deep breath and brings out from his pocket a small leather book, which he begins reading to the assembly.

DESTINED

(reading)

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was...

(licking finger and turning page)

... Light.

Destined chuckles to himself and tosses the book over his shoulders, where it lands offstage.

DESTINED

(projecting)

Lies! Lies and falsehoods! Congregants! Cover the ears of innocents and babes, for what I speak now is a terrible reality. The truth is that you, congregant, have been wasting your life in the futile pursuit of meaning. Meaning in technology, meaning in wealth, meaning in love! I am here to tell you that it has all been for naught!

FORDEN

(exclaiming)

I knew it! I knew it!

DESTINED

The Hebrew bible says that I created the world you presently live in. Now do any of you think that I would offer you the chance to pursue a life absent of meaning if you were living in a world of my creation? Never! In my world, when it is complete, mortals will have but one purpose: to honor me.



By doing so, there lives will be granted the gift of meaning - the meaning all men seek.  
 (beat) Welcome, my mortal servants. Welcome to the four-hundred and twelfth sermon of  
 The Church of the Blessed Destined. I... I'm Destined.

(mumbling)

'Sup?

FORDEN

(shouting)

Bless us, Destined! I am your mortal servant!

DESTINED

(ignoring Forden)

We are, all of us I mean, within one reality in which I am chosen...

Mother Mary brings out from under her a large  
 bag of chips. Still focussed on the ceiling, she  
 begins to loudly eat the chips - disrupting the  
 sermon

DESTINED

(trying to ignore her)

And... It is within this reality, the one in which we currently exist... That...

Mother Mary ignores Destined and continues to  
 eat. Destined groans and marches down from the  
 podium to forcefully grab the snacks from his  
 mother and throw them behind him. Her gaze  
 remains fixated on the ceiling.

DESTINED

As I was saying: This is a sanctuary for the lost lambs of the flock of society. To the loyal  
 among you, I hereby decree that you will be offered the opportunity to be saved - to be  
 absolved of all Earthly sins. (beat) An angel spoke to me of a day not far from this one  
 when those that aren't saved by my grace will be washed away from the beach of existence  
 like granules of sand. This world and everyone in it will be turned to dust, save those who  
 have been saved.

DR. ESQUINA

It'll be a real small world if the only people that will be spared have had your blessing.

MS. EMILIA

(slightly annoyed)

And what exactly do you mean by that, Dr. Esquina?

DESTINED

(trying to get a word in)

From the ashes and rubble, I will create a new utopia...

DR. ESQUINA

(ignoring Destined)

What I mean, Ms. Emilia, is that this church for the last decade has held a steady dedicated congregation of all of..

(gesturing to Forden)

One...

(gesturing to Mother Mary)

...And a half people. A number like that simply cannot sustain an ego like Destined's. I want to know: what exactly has our so-called-lord done to remedy that?

MS. EMILIA

Well, it's funny that you brought that up, Dr. Esquina! Our Destined here has thought of a way to attract some new faces. He's going to bring in a celebrity.

DR. ESQUINA

(sarcastic)

A celebrity? Brilliant. And who, pray tell, has our lord Destined invited to join our noble cause?

The congregation looks towards Destined for an answer.

DESTINED

Uh, well...

Enter from stage left MAXWELL MCGEE, in glasses and a pressed suit.

MAXWELL MCGEE

Hey, everybody! I'm Palo Alto Superintendent Maxwell Mcgee! And I am privileged to have been invited to this beautiful rural Midwestern town to join y'all! I'm sure we'll have a swell time together!

The congregation is silent for a brief moment as they star silently at the superintendent behind them before Dr. Esquina breaks out in a fit of laughter.

MAXWELL MCGEE

Is it something I said?

Dr. Esquina continues to laugh manically.  
Destined becomes enraged.

DESTINED

(enraged)

How dare you, infidel! I am your lord and savior! These seats you see empty are filled with angels! Attentive angels that hang onto my every word, which to them is law! I am as much their God as I am yours!

DR. ESQUINA

(chuckling)

“God” - you keep calling yourself that. Well then tell me oh mighty great and powerful Destined - lord of lord of lords of all that is holy - speaker of truths and savior of the righteous: Do you know any miracles?

DESTINED

I'm sorry?

DR. ESQUINA

Miracles. You know, what gods tend to be able to do. Can you walk on water? Split a red sea? A blue sea? An orange sea?

MAXWELL MCGEE

An orange sea? Wouldn't that be like a Fanta-sea? Because of the soda..? That joke would kill at the board meetings.

FORDEN

(interrupting, to Dr. Esquina)

You fool! Destined is God! He speaks divine truths echoed by the angels in my ears.

MAXWELL MCGEE

Does anyone know where I can find the nearest 'Best Western'?

DR. ESQUINA

Forden... Do you - Do you mind if I ask when was the last time you took any medication for your - uh - ailment?

FORDEN

Ailment? Our lord Destined informed me that (beat) that what I hearing were angels speaking truths and not illusions speaking lies, and that I shan't silence the angels at the risk of damnation.

A silence creeps over the crowd.

MAXWELL MCGEE

Could really use a continental breakfast.

DR. ESQUINA

(to Destined)

Let me get this straight: In justifying your own insanely arrogant self-image, you told a schizophrenic to stop taking their medication because you said the voices they were hearing were coming from angels?

DESTINED

How dare you think that I would do such a thing? Manipulate my own congregant?

FORDEN

(anxious)

But lord... Oh God...

DESTINED

(to Forden)

Silence! The angels would never converse with like the likes of you, anyhow! You are not worthy! None of you are worthy!

FORDEN

(startled)

God..?

Forden looks at Destined in terror. Dr. Esquina chuckles.

DR. ESQUINA

You... You know in writing my book, I've probably attended about just under sixty distinct cult sermons. I've been to a cult that dedicated itself to the Greek goddess Aphrodite, a cult that worshipped an empowered mule, and a cult that dedicate itself to a picture of an eight-year-old Keannu Reeves on a see-saw. (beat) Of all the cults I've ever seen, I've never been to one where the leader was so blinded by their god-complex that they couldn't see just how spectacular a failure their cause turned out to be. And you know what? The first few times a came here I thought it was pretty funny, actually. I pitied you. But now...

(beat) You're literally keeping a sick man away from his medication. (Standing up) There's a special place in hell for people like you. I'm out.

Dr. Esquina begins to exit stage left.

DESTINED

(going after Dr. Esquina)

Wait! Hey! I haven't dismissed you! You can't... Don't... If you leave, I can't save you from absolution!

Dr. Esquina ignores him and keeps walking.

DESTINED

And... If you - If you take one step closer to that exit I'll have to consider damning you. Yeah! You wouldn't like that, would you? Damnation? You think the Christian hell is bad? You... You can't even begin to fathom what mine's like. Mine's messed up!

Dr. Esquina beckons Forden over to the exit.  
Forden looks back at Destined.

DESTINED

In... In my hell the mother-hag tears at your very soul with obsidian claws and feeds the remains to a pack of rabid hounds that each have the face of your middle-school bully but with their eyes caved in!

Forden, conflicted, begins to follow Dr.  
Esquina's beckoning towards the exit.

DESTINED

And you better not keep going, because that's only level one! There's like fifty levels, each with the hounds having increasing levels of size, agility, and tentacles that they'll use to tear you in half only to have you dragged across a plain of fire and brimstone by your intestines!

Forden looks worrying at Destined.

FORDEN

(confused)

I'm sorry, lord, but I...

DESTINED

That's it! Enjoy level two, the both of you! Have fun falling eternally into the mouth of a titanic Komodo Dragon while the taunting laugh of imps reverberates around you!

FORDEN

(suddenly frustrated)

You never knew me! You never... You never really cared!

DESTINED

How dare you speak to me that way, you insignificant mortal...

DR. ESQUINA

The insignificant mortal that happens to be your last true follower. Now what's a God without followers? Welcome to real world, Destined - you're just one of us.

A depressed and frustrated Forden, accompanied by an irritated Dr. Esquina exit stage left.

DESTINED

(shouting after them, enraged)

Oh my! Looking at level three, fellas! Level four! Level five! What is this, Mario Brothers? Fine! I exile you! I exile you from the one, true church of Destined! Begone, infidels! Begone!

Destined's mother, who hasn't spoken a single word the entire scene and just spent it staring at a single spot on the ceiling, stands to exit.

DESTINED

(choking)

Mother?

Mother Mary makes her way towards Destined, then walking past him, grabs the bag of chips he threw earlier.

MOTHER MARY

There's a crack in the ceiling.

Exit Mother Mary stage left, loudly eating the chips.

DESTINED

Damn you! Damn you! Damn every last one of you!

All exit, save a defeated Destined, a startled reporter, an oblivious Ms. Emilia, and a very confused superintendent.

MAXWELL MCGEE

Oh boy. Flashbacks to the weighted grades fiasco, am I right? (beat) It was, uh, great meeting y'all. Bye.

The superintendent exits stage right.

DESTINED

(quietly)

Damn you all...

SCENE 5

Scene opens back in dressing room. Susie Rucka sits patiently on a small stool adjacent to the couch from the first scene. She has a notebook in hand which she flips through while waiting. After a few seconds of aimless flipping, she notices Destined's own writing-pad on the couch and, with no one looking, begins to flip through it.

SUSIE RUCKA

(reading)

Agenda: grant Mcgee a sainthood...

MS. EMILIA

(offstage left)

You are a very lucky girl. You know that, right?

Susie tosses the writing-pad back onto the couch as Mr. Emilia enters stage left.

MS. EMILIA

You will be the first mortal that has ever had the privilege of interviewing Destined.

SUSIE RUCKA

Ms. Emilia, can I ask you a question? (beat) Do you really believe that Destined is God?

MS. EMILIA

(chuckling)

Of course not, dear. I'm Presbyterian.

SUSIE RUCKA

(confused)

Presbyterian? So then why do involve yourself in any of this?

MS. EMILIA

It's something to do on the weekends, dear - everyone needs a hobby.

Ms. Emilia nods and exits stage right, leaving Susie again alone in the dressing room. Her mind wanders and she begins gazing into the mirror in the fourth wall. Enter Destined stage right, donning his aviators and white clothes save his cloak. Susie does not initially notice him.

Destined sits down on the couch adjacent to Susie. This startles her.

SUSIE RUCKA

(gesturing to fourth wall)

Pretty big mirror. What's it for?

Destined lights himself a cigarette, ignoring her.

SUSIE RUCKA

All right. Well, uh, thank you so much in participating in this interview, Mr. Destined. I'm Susie Rucka, junior reporter on community living for the...

DESTINED

I know who you are.

SUSIE RUCKA

(chuckling)

Great! Perfect! Then let's get straight on with the interview, shall we? (beat) I've... I've never really done an interview with a god before. (beat) I don't know - what's your favorite color?

DESTINED

(hesitant)

All colors are blessed as they are my gift to the artists and visionaries.

SUSIE RUCKA

Uh, okay. Do you like living in Rockridge?



DESTINED

I don't live in Rockridge. Rockridge has grown around me, bathing themselves in my divine aura.

SUSIE RUCKA

(irritated)

Great - okay. Who's your favorite Beattle?

DESTINED

(taking drag from cigarette)

All of them are blessed, (beat) except for Ringo - he can suck it.

SUSIE RUCKA

(annoyed)

Are you capable of giving me one straight answer?

DESTINED

If I was an objective deity, do you think there would be any room for debate in my world? It's not my fault that you're not asking the right questions.

Destined takes another drag from his cigarette.

SUSIE RUCKA

(calmly)

When did you start smoking?

DESTINED

When did I start smoking? Really? That's your divine quandary? Quality reporting right there.

SUSIE RUCKA

I just didn't realize that the lord was affected by simple mortal addictions.

DESTINED

It's not an addiction.

Susie shrugs. Destined glances over at Susie with a slight smile on his face and takes another drag from his cigarette. Something opens in him.

DESTINED

(relaxed)

It was a way to occupy my time, I guess. I just haven't stopped.

SUSIE RUCKA

... Occupy your time?

DESTINED

(Destined leans forward)

My father, he was a preacher like me. Or rather, what I aspired to be. He was a natural. At his peak, he had a congregation of two hundred. I'm still struggling to keep three. Now he and I had a kind of ritual, you see. I mean it was his thing, but I just kind of drove him.

SUSIE RUCKA

Drove him? Where?

DESTINED

The cliffs out by Mulberry. Every Sunday night, I would drive him out to the point overlooking the ocean. Once we were there he would get out of the car and he would uh... He would...

(Destined takes a ponderous drag)

What he would do is he would try to throw himself off the edge. He would grab the corner of the cliff and, uh, attempt to kind of force himself over. He never actually did it. He just had a habit of trying, and I had a habit of watching. And I uh... I just needed something to occupy my time. Didn't take long for me to figure out that there was no real reason to be stressed. Every time he tried it seemed as though there was a kind of invisible force holding him back.

(chuckling)

Maybe an angel.

SUSIE RUCKA

(flabbergasted)

I... Wow.

DESTINED

(jokingly)

Yeah. Try to get that past your editors.

(Destined takes a drag from his cigarette)

He was actually the one that proclaimed me as God. In front of his entire congregation, too. All one-hundred and fifty of them. You can't imagine what that did to my ego. Unfortunately none of them immediately took to worshipping me. Probably because at that point, they'd started figuring out that my father was, uh, kind of going insane. Which, don't get me wrong, he was. He was clinically insane. He stopped doing the sermons and took to walking down the streets shouting "the end is nigh". We had to have him institutionalized.

SUSIE RUCKA

"The end is nigh"?

DESTINED

Like a real mad zealot. That did not help the church's image, having him be actually be insane. But at least I didn't have to spend my Sunday nights watching him contemplate suicide.

Susie collects herself.

SUSIE RUCKA

You still smoke.

DESTINED

Yeah, I guess I do.

SUSIE RUCKA

Why? That stuff will kill you.

DESTINED

I don't know. You're the reporter - what do you think? Go on, analyze me.

SUSIE RUCKA

Well... I mean, if I may... Sounds to me like you're trapped in a cycle you want out of, just like your father. He tried to end it by throwing himself off a cliff, and you're trying to smoke yourself to death. Only difference is, eventually, your method is going to work.

Destined tilts his head towards Susie.

DESTINED

Yeah, no. That's bullshit. I am perfectly happy being God.

(gesturing to cigarette)

The things just help me get through these hellish sermons.

SUSIE RUCKA

But the sermons... surely after all that... you're done now, right?

DESTINED

You're asking if I'm done? Ms. Rucka, I'm never done. There will always be people looking for something to believe in - I'll have a new congregation by next week. Better I got rid of this one, anyway. Another couple of months with them and I'd be ordering down a classic smiting.

Susie laughs nervously.

SUSIE RUCKA

(jokingly)

Not literally?

DESTINED

No, of course not.

SUSIE RUCKA

Right, okay. You got me worried for a second there.

DESTINED

(chuckling)

No, yeah.

Both Susie and Destined share a chuckle.

Tensions ease. Susie begins to stand.

SUSIE RUCKA

I should get going.

DESTINED

Please don't publish anything you just heard, by the way. I've got a - uh - a certain reputation to uphold.

SUSIE RUCKA

A reputation? Do you genuinely think you're God?

Destined pauses.

DESTINED

How does one become God, Susie? In reality, I don't know. I really don't know. I mean, who wants to say that they've wasted their last two decades on a lie? My best chance right now is to keep believing whatever I believe and not join my dad in the asylum.

Susie nods and gestures to Destined's cigarettes.

SUSIE RUCKA

You know, I was a heavy smoker back in college. I know it's a nasty cycle, smoking. It's like you know it sucks but you keep doing it because it feels so good in the moment and at times, it may seem impossible to quit - but you can. You can quit. I know I did.

Susie exits stage left just as Destined finishes his cigarette. He stands up to reach for another one and puts it between his lips. Just as he is about to light it, he hesitates. He then tosses away the cigarette and lighter.

DESTINED

God damn it.

Lights dim.

End.