

Planet for Sale

The characters:

God

He is certainly God the All Powerful, creator of the earth and of life, but his authoritative and brusque character reminds us of the divine figures of Greek mythology rather than the benevolent God of Christianity; and moreover we see very quickly that in his position he is confronted with all kinds of problems (like we humans) which complicate his life, so be it eternal.

An Angel

God doesn't have a PA, but an Angel - that is to be expected. But this Angel has a few surprises in store for us, compared to the usual ideas about angels.

Lucifer

From the start, the character of Lucifer conforms to his classic image: cunning, fearing neither God nor man, (*without faith or morals*,) seducer and crook, always on the lookout for a good deal, deeply evil. But gradually this 'standard' character becomes rather more complicated, notably when we see that he deals with God in the most natural way possible: until we no longer know whether he submits to God's authority or not, and finally, we see that he too can be fooled (taken in).

Joan of Arc

The most earthbound of the heavenly characters. She loves human beings, and sets out to protect them, whatever their faults. Her character conforms to that of the real Joan of Arc: that is to say, it is a long way from the innocent little shepherdess invented by Michelet. Energetic, impulsive, quick to anger, without any complexes about God, she doesn't mince her words or try to hide her manner of thinking. Just one mention of Lucifer throws her into a rage, and when she finds herself in his presence...

Siddhartha

Siddhartha Gautama, otherwise known as Bhudda, is part of the team of prophets who make up the staff of the Kingdom. All of them are very occupied with Heavenly business, and only Siddhartha takes the trouble to listen to Joan. Here again, the character differs from his usual portrayal: he is closer to the young prince who belongs to the first part of his earthly life, or even the man of business in the novel by Hermann Hesse, rather than the wide-awake character retained by Buddhism.

Yasser

Yasser has just arrived in Heaven. On Earth, he was a lawyer in Palestine, well known for his ability and honesty. He is an intellectual with a pragmatic side to him, and a man with his feet on the ground. When he is asked to defend human beings, his professional reflexes return immediately, and he rapidly constructs a good plea

(*speech for the defence*). But, perhaps from an excess of rationalist judgement, he overlooks one important aspect, and so he is responsible for compromising the results of his intervention.

Sarah

She also has just arrived in heaven, as the result of an accident. As a single mother, her life on earth was no sinecure, far from it; but she is a fighter. She loved her life as a suburbanite, and was totally committed in order that her son, at least, should lead an upright life.

Lao-Zi (a Chinese philosopher)

Lao-Zi is the author's philosophical messenger. He could join the team of Prophets, but he prefers a more marginal position, trying, more or less, to reform the Kingdom of Heaven. Everyone accepts and appreciates him, despite his habit of quoting himself, not always in the clearest manner.

The Action

The action of Planet for Sale takes place in the Kingdom of Heaven. God succeeds in running his business as best he can, with his team made up of the chief prophets: Jesus, Mohammed, Siddhartha, and Moses. One problem in particular thwarts him at the highest level: the poor profitability of the Earth. The number of entrants to Paradise is in decline, which is contrary to the object of its creation.

Lucifer, who has always dreamt of taking over the Earth, takes advantage of this situation by making an offer to God to exchange Earth for another planet, still in an unsullied state, where He would be able to start over again on a new basis. God is tempted....besides, things on Earth are not working out, because Mankind never ceases to create new problems.

When Joan of Arc learns about Lucifer's new manoeuvres, she assumes her 'saviour of the world' outfit and mobilises the prophets to oppose the diabolical project. But matters become even more complicated, to the point of catastrophe, and finish up very differently from what Joan had envisaged....

Presentation

We are in the Kingdom of God, who is running his enterprise - for better or worse - with his team, consisting of the principal prophets. He is notably confronted with a problem which thwarts him at the highest level: the poor profitability of Earth in terms of the number of entrants to Paradise.

Lucifer, who has always dreamt of taking over the Earth, takes advantage of this situation, and comes to make God an offer: to exchange Earth for a magnificent and

unspoilt planet, where He would be able to begin His creation again, on a completely new basis...

Act 1

Scene One

A business meeting room - everyday, typical, clean. Venetian blinds cover the glass partitions; cheap framed pictures hang on the walls; a green plant wilts in a corner. God, sitting at one end of a table, consults a file; as he turns the pages, he makes comments to himself...

God

Hmmm... ...I don't know how he found it, but I must say it doesn't look too bad

.....

Oh yes, that's magnificent !

There are definitely lots of possibilities. And moreover, I'm sure I could...

Scene Two

Enter an angel with a file. She comes to a halt in the middle of the room.

Angel

Mm..may I ?

God

Closing the file hastily

Yes, yes, dear Angel, carry on. But make it quick, because I have a meeting with the Prophets any moment now.

The angel opens her file

Angel

To begin with, we have a lawsuit concerning procedure at the Tribunal of the Last Judgement

God

What's happening then ?

Angel

It concerns the wives of Muslims: they are asking who should judge them, if their original religion was Christian: the Muslim tribunal or the Christian one ?

God

Oh for goodness sake ! what is all this ? I'm so tired of their quarrels over minarets.

If they spend their time posing similar questions, we shouldn't be surprised that the Tribunal is overloaded.

Angel

And... how should I reply ?

God

That they should share the work half and half.

Angel

Without taking religion into account ?

God

Certainly ! What does it matter, her original religion ? Just ask yourself ! All these different religions - that's already a problem on Earth. It seems to me that here, at least, there should be no more talk of that kind.

Next ?

Angel

I have a request for a miracle...

God

A miracle ? It's been ages. Here we are again! In my opinion, it's badly timed: I'm not really in the mood to work miracles.

Angel

The service of Guardian Angels is asking for a cure at Lourdes. They wish to revive the controversy over miraculous cures.

God

What ? It's really not the right time to engage in that kind of debate. What are they getting themselves into ? The least they could have done would have been to speak to me first. No, no, request turned down !

Angel

I'll move on to the prayers coming directly from Earth.
First a prayer from all the inhabitants of a Tibetan village for a little girl suffering from cancer

Silence

God

All the inhabitants ?

Angel

All, with no exceptions. A monk managed to gather them all into the Temple: 385 persons.

Silence. God reflects

God

Mmm... is there anything else ?

Angel

Yes. I have dozens of millions of people from all countries who have prayed for the victims of the earthquake which has just devastated Armenia.

God

Its all very well for them to pray, but they would do better to go and help the victims. Natural catastrophes are for Earth dwellers to worry about. Myself, I can't do anything : you know that, don't you ?.

Angel

Yes, yes, I know - but I have to acknowledge all their prayers.

God

Quite right. Anything else ?

Angel

No, that's all... but... for the little girl ?

God

We must support this monk: re-uniting a whole village in prayer, in this day and age, that's worth something - the village deserves a boost. Tell his guardian angel that I will do something.

Angel - *satisfied*

Thank you !

She leaves

Scene Three

God returns to his consultation of the file. After a moment, he gets up and goes to draw a dramatic downward graph on a flip chart. While he is busy with this, Joan and Siddhartha enter, and sit themselves down.

Scene Four

Having finished his graph, God turns around. Joan continues to gossip with Siddhartha in a low voice. God watches her, waiting for her to finish.

God

When you're ready Joan, when you're ready !

Joan jumps, and positions herself properly, scowling

God

And we're missing half our people: Mohammed and Jesus aren't with you Siddhartha?

Siddhartha

They're coming ! Jesus told me that they would be late, and that we should start without them: they were finishing their audience with the Last Judgement.

God

And Moses ?

Joan of Arc

He is at a conference on Heavenly Law - the Ten Commandments. He cannot come.

God

Oh well !... All the same, it's really annoying. We shouldn't be wasting time, just because we've got all Eternity before us

One meeting per centuries of centuries - that's surely not an impossible task !

Siddhartha

They're up to their eyes in the Last Judgement

God

Up to their eyes ! Oh well...

Too bad, we'll start without them.

So, I have just become aware of the latest figures concerning Earth communicated by Angelic Services. As you can see from this graph, it's a very bad situation. In spite of strong population growth, we are experiencing a regular decline in the rate of entrants to Paradise. If this pattern continues, within three or four earthly centuries, profitability will be down to nothing.

I would remind you that the whole purpose of creation is to allow humans to enter to paradise . After all the effort and investment that I have put in through the ages - for a result like this - it's really not worth it .

It is absolutely necessary to increase the yield, and I am relying on you to find solutions.

Silence

Otherwise...

Joan of Arc and Siddhartha

Otherwise ?...

God

Otherwise...er...

We'll see, we haven't reached that yet. For the moment, we must try to understand what's going on down there.

Siddhartha

It seems to me that many have lost the “medium way” that I have taught them: either they abandon themselves—to all of their desires, without any limit, or they become sectarian - or entirely fundamentalist.

Joan of Arc

I think we have let it too much be. I end up a bit on the side of Mohammed: it may be necessary to redefine directives more clearly and strictly. In my time Religion dictated the rules, and they followed them.

God

We can't hold their hands for ever. It's time for them that they get by on their own, no ?

Siddhartha

Actually, they have too many different messages. In my opinion we should simplify all that. We could try, for example, to unify all these religions.

God

Unify the religions ? I'm all for that. But right now, when we're in this kind of mess - how should we do ?

Siddhartha

We could send a new prophet with this mission.

God

Oh no ! no ! Send one more prophet - I really can't agree with that. We've done that kind of thing once too often. Prophets it did work once, but now, in my opinion, some other way has to be found ...

Joan of Arc

It's very sad, but in the end, one could say that a new world war might resolve the problem. In general, a war - that makes them think... afterwards.

Siddhartha

Aha ! That's really your kind of idea, Maid of Orleans ! But maybe you aren't wrong, after all.

And besides, with all the problems between Islam and the Christians, it's a real possibility.

God

Mmm... I don't like that kind of solution. And then, the problem with all those nuclear weapons, they really are capable of blowing themselves up.

Joan of Arc (*ironic*)

Very well ! That's their fantasy: Adam and Eve all over again.

God (*pensive and provoking at the same time*)

Yes...But in that case, we'd better really start again from zero: let's take a new planet and make new species and a new humanity. After all, that would be another idea, don't you think ?

(the silence of Medusa; they look at one another, stunned at the idea of remaking Creation)

OK. Forget that. In the meanwhile, talk it over with the others; come up with some solutions and we'll go through them again later. But you haven't got a million, million years - we need to find a solution soon. We've got to sort this out, let's say ... within a hundred Earth years at most...

They watch Him, waiting for the conclusion

...and tell Jesus and Mohammed that I would prefer it if they came to meetings before they are over.

Joan of Arc and Siddhartha leave. God opens a file and looks at it.

A scream is heard (from an angel) . The angel enters, overwhelmed.

God

Now what's the matter ?

Angel

It's... it's Lucifer ! He's right there, and he ...

God

Ah ! Yes, I've got a meeting with him, show him in. And don't put yourself in such a mood .

Scene Five

The angel goes out again. She returns, trembling, accompanied by Lucifer, carrying a briefcase. The angel stays - fascinated by Lucifer

God

Lucifer, how are you ?

Lucifer

Oh, things are OK. And...

God

Now, dear Angel, why do you stand there ? Off you go, leave us now.

Exit Angel

Lucifer

Tell me now, how many ages since we saw one another ...

God

Good heavens ! I don't even remember. But it's like that now: one no longer has time for anything. At the moment, I'm so preoccupied by Earth that I never touch sky.

Lucifer

Same with me. But it's not because of Earth: I don't even have to worry about it : they do all the work at my place.

God

Don't talk to me about it ! I even asked myself whether you might intervene, it really is quite beyond the limit sometimes.

Lucifer

Not at all ! They get by quite well without me down there, and that brings me in a tidy return without my having to do anything, I assure you.

God

Mmm, let's admit...

But tell me about that planet... in the file you sent me. I took a look - it's not uninteresting.

Lucifer

That's exactly what you need !

God

How did you discover it ?

Lucifer

On my way back from another universe, where I'm about to launch a new Hell. A dreadful thing, by the way. You'll have to come and see; I feel certain that there will be some interesting spin-offs for you too.

God

Let's just talk about your planet for the time being !

Lucifer

Yes.. do excuse me. It's quite exceptional: completely virgin, and in an almost perfect environment.

God

Are you really sure ?

Lucifer

I've examined it from top to bottom myself. I remember Earth, at the period when you told me that there were some really odd things going on, and you asked yourself whether that wasn't going to create problems. On this one, you can rest assured; you could do exactly as you want, without any interference from whatever...

God

Then why are you selling...? You could exploit it for yourself.

Lucifer

Oh no, no, no ! I simply haven't got the time just now: it would take too much effort.

And in any case, pure creation, that's never been my kind of thing. Besides, it's very complicated, and what's more, I can see that it works very well just to cash in on things that don't work in the creations of others.....that's not very wonderful, but what do you expect... it brings in the dough.

God

And what proof is there that you have left (this planet) *it* perfectly untouched ?

Lucifer *pretending to be shocked*

Ah ! You have no confidence in me ?

God

No, think about it !

Lucifer

I'm only joking: of course I know that you don't trust me...and besides, you're dead right.

I was expecting your reaction. The contract that I have prepared will be guaranteed by the Commission of Divine Law. If there is any trickery, I am forbidden to take advantage for ten thousand million years.

He pulls the contract from his briefcase

God

You went to see the Commission just for that ! You really do want to sell your planet, don't you.

And they granted you the guarantee !

Lucifer *placing the contract before God*

Absolutely ! Look...: here are the clauses... everything is laid out in detail... and here is the seal of the Commission... all is in order. Really, I assure you, knowing what you're like, I wouldn't have come without having something perfect...

God inspects the contract carefully, surprised and impressed

God

Well then !

Good, and how much do you want for your miraculous planet ?

Lucifer

Listen ! When I came across it , I knew immediately that it would interest you, but I didn't have time to consider the price...

I don't know: make me an offer.

God

You say you haven't had time to reflect ! How much do you want ?

Lucifer

I've been told that a planet like that, it could make somewhere in the region of ten billion.

God

Ten billion ! For a virgin planet, which won't be productive for twenty or thirty thousand years. That's far too much. But in any case, how would you like me to...

Lao-Zi enters. Both of them freeze

Lao-Zi

Ah ! Here as well: occupied !

God

As you can see.

Lao-Zi

I'm looking for a large room for our conference on Alternative Spiritual Philosophy. Would you believe they are all taken, so...(with irony) Good Heavens, it's Lucifer !

Lucifer

Have we met ?

Lao-Zi

Lao-Zi said: "Everyone can recognise that which is beautiful; from that one can deduce what is ugly. Everyone can recognise that which is good; from that one can deduce what is evil."

A stunned silence

God

Well, well, I'm sorry, ! But we have things to do, and we still need this space for a while (yet).

Lao-Zi

It doesn't matter. If you'll excuse me, I'll leave you...

He salutes and exits

Lucifer

Who is that ? he reminds me something

God

Lao-Zi. He's a bit weird, but on the whole he is cordial

Lucifer

Oh yes ! I remember - Yin and Yang - that's what it's all about.

God

That's him. It was a good philosophy, I liked it, but it hasn't really taken off.

Lucifer

Happily for me ! It was not so bad, his idea, and I think it could have upset my business.

God

That's quite possible !
But let's get back to the price of your planet.

Lucifer

Oh yes... I don't know... just for comparison, how much is Earth worth at the moment ?

God

Actually, a bit more than six billion...maybe six and a half billion...

Lucifer

Yes... six and a half billion, that's not enormous.

But I have an idea I propose that we do an exchange: my planet for the Earth !

God

What's this ? You want me to leave a planet, completely finished, with six and a half billion souls, in exchange for one where there is nothing ?

Lucifer

Ha Ha ! We'll see what your souls are worth; from all quarters I've heard say that Earth is rotting, and that it can no longer produce anything.

God

No way is Earth done for ! It's true that it produces fewer entrants to Paradise than it used to; but for the most part souls are going to Purgatory, not Hell.

Lucifer

Yes, and that's why Purgatory is completely full up, and you' can't get over it

God *taken aback*

How do you know that ?

Lucifer *delighted*

I have my informants...

No, seriously, if I regain the Earth, I too would have to improve the yield according to my aims. It wouldn't do for me, six and a half billion souls recovering in Hell like that. We'll have to go on thinking about this.

God

No, that's too expensive. Besides, I could never convince the Prophets to abandon Earth like that.

Lucifer

You are wrong there. The way it goes, your Earth will soon not be even worth a single ghost If I were you, I would take advantage of the deal, while it is still worth something.

God

You're not me, and that's a good thing ! If you are interested I have another planet where Creation is almost finished...

Lucifer

No. No, I've had my say: the only businesses I'm interested in are those already up and running - if they're not, I wouldn't know what to do. The Earth, exactly as it is, that would suit me just fine.

God

Listen, why don't we go away for a while and reflect, each in his corner. I'll send Gabriel, let's say... in half an age, to let you know how I am situated. Then perhaps we'll find common ground.

Lucifer

Send Gabriel by all means, but me, I'm only interested in Earth. And I warn you, with a planet of such quality, I won't have any problems to find a taker.

Let's go ! Nice to meet again, see you soon !

They say goodbye, and Lucifer leaves the room

Scene Six

God *in a soliloquy*

Oh ! What a dirty crew we have there !

It is true that Earth gives me lots of worries, but that devil doesn't take into account all that goes into a Creation. All the same, I can't just hand over the result of so much hard work, in exchange for a planet where there's everything still to do...

On the other hand... To begin over again with a virgin planet, that's tempting ! And then, when that devil says the Earth won't be worth much very soon, maybe he's not so wrong, unfortunately...

God sits down again to think things over. He reopens the file on that other planet, and flips through the pages.

Yes, it's tempting alright.

I'll just think it over a little longer...

Darkness falls

Interlude

Three angels sing...

Oh, la la, God is not happy

because in Paradise so few sign up
Oh, la la, God is thwarted
They say that men have deceived him

La la la , oH Oh Oh lala...

And more - it's not by chance,
Ah what a bastard, dirty mongrel
Just the moment Lucifer chose
To exchange the Earth

La la la , oH Oh Oh lala...

Oh, la la, they're off to a bad start
Someone must come to help out.

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 1

The room is empty. Enter Joan and the Angel

Joan of Arc

Are you sure ?

Angel

I told you ! You should have seen it ! A huge sea full of islands; two suns in the sky; and at night an enormous moon with a multi-coloured halo. Really magnificent.

Joan of Arc

And Lucifer wants to sell it to Him ?

Angel

Yes ! I didn't understand why we had that file. And then, the other day, when Lucifer came out of the meeting I asked him why he looked so happy. He replied that he was going to exchange the Earth for another planet. It made him laugh, and when I told him that God would never accept that, he said to me " But of course he will accept; he's dying of envy; He's finished with Earth, it no longer brings Him any profit."

Joan of Arc

Hand over Earth to the Devil ! But that's....

God *off-stage*

Dear Angel !

Joan of Arc

Something must be done ! This has got to be stopped ! Hurry - find the Prophets - and tell them to meet me here.

The angel leaves in a hurry

Scene 2

God enters

God

Dear ... Ah! Joan.... Oh...everything alright ?

Joan of Arc *icily*

No !

God

Not alright ?

Joan of Arc

It seems that you have designs for Earth ?

God *His plans coming unstuck...*

What designs ?....

Joan of Arc

It seems that you want to sell it.

God *annoyed*

Who told you that ?

Joan of Arc

Your angel told me everything.

God

My angel talks too much. Lucifer made me a proposition, that's all. After all, he's right to do so...

Joan of Arc

Lucifer ! I don't understand how you could possibly discuss with that deceitful, that two-faced so-and-so, that scoundrel...

God

It takes a lot to make a world.

Joan of Arc

May be ! But to me, the world would do better without such a piece of rottenness.

God

Less easily than you would believe.

Joan of Arc

Anyway, as for me I won't accept that the Earth should be sold !

God

And I'm telling you again that nothing's done.

Joan of Arc

What's wrong with Earth anyway ? I've just come from there, and I can tell you that all's well..

God

That's all of six hundred years since you were there last. Believe me, it has changed since then. And not for the best !

Joan of Arc

Well then ? As soon as there's something not quite right - hey, let's drop it ! Is that why I was allowed to be burnt at the stake ? Me ! And only nineteen years old ! If it was just to be flogged off after that, there was no need to send me to my fate.

God

Precisely: now look, all that they remember of your life is this “ A little shepherdess saved the French nation.”

Was that why you wanted to go ?

Joan of Arc

Certainly not !

God

You see, that's what's wrong: they don't understand the messages.

Joan of Arc

Well, if they don't understand the messages, the messages will have to be repeated - or - I don't know - change them somehow, put them into the modern idiom. No matter what - but we shouldn't just give up like that. If it was really necessary, I would be ready to go back.

God

No, no, no. I told you, I've given up on that idea.

Joan of Arc *in a fury*

So, what are you going to do ? Nothing ? That's it - you've decided ? If that's the truth - say it openly.

God

Joan ! I assure you that nothing has been decided. I even asked you to look for solutions.

I must leave you now: I've got some work to do.

Exit God, leaving Joan all alone, shattered.

Scene 3

Joan of Arc

Holy Michael ?

Voice of Saint Michael

Yes, Joanie, I'm here.

Joan of Arc

Have you heard the news ?

Voice of Saint Michael

Of course !

Joan of Arc

But what can we do about it ?

Voice of Saint Michael

Lucifer has always had his eye on the Earth.... Now he's got the chance, he won't leave it alone. And he is crafty: he'll take advantage of God being out of sorts with men.

Joan of Arc

Oh dearie me ! You can see that He has never been down there. Look - He really should go Himself: perhaps that would make Him change His mind.

Voice of Saint Michael (*appalled*)

Joanie !

Joan of Arc

So ! Why not ? I went there !

Scene 4

Enter Siddhartha

Siddhartha

So, Joan, what is all this ? I understand that the Earth is to be sold.

Joan of Arc

Not "is to be sold" ! He is going to sell. He wants to do an exchange for planet that Lucifer has come up with - God knows where from - *with irony* "Very beautiful and utterly unspoiled"!

Siddhartha

Now I understand His allusions, and His really odd manner during the meeting.

Joan of Arc

This must be prevented at any price.

Siddhartha

You realise, if men have accumulated too many bad Karmas, we can't do much about it. That's the law of Vipaka: every action has a consequence. I tell you, they have abandoned the middle way, and now they are under the rule of the Niyamas.

Joan of Arc

Could you just translate that ?

Siddhartha

Put plainly, with such a poor return, if He finds a taker for Earth, one might understand why He should wish to get rid of it.

Joan of Arc

There you are - it's no more complicated than that. As for you, you'd run away : Mister Buddha is above all that.

Siddhartha

It's His creation, and so He decides. He asked us to see if we could improve the return: OK ! But then, if He decides to sell, that's no longer our concern. It's not for you to get involved !

Joan of Arc

And if I don't make it my concern, then who will ? You - you'd just leave things as they are, without saying anything ? The fate of several hundred millions of Buddhists - you'd just wash your hands of all that ?

Siddhartha

But it's like that: it is the incessant/ unending cycle of rebirths. Everything must come to an end, and then be reborn. It's the wheel of fate - you can't do anything to prevent that.

Joan of Arc

You really annoy me with your convoluted formulas ! You can't just throw away people like that. We can't let them fall.

I shall go and speak to Moses about this, and I am sure that he will find some legal whastit to prevent this.

Enter an angel; he sweeps the room with his eyes

Angel

Oh! He's not here ?

Joan of Arc

No, why do you ask ?

Angel

Well....there's a bit of a problem on Earth...

Siddhartha

Again !

Angel

Baroukstan has invaded its neighbour, and they have set about massacring the Muslims. We must stop them - if not, they will all be exterminated.

Siddhartha

I'm really sorry, we don't know where He is. Why don't you take a look in Purgatory.

The angel leaves in a hurry

Scene Five

Siddhartha

You see ! It never stops ! There are times when ...

Joan of Arc

Stop this ! You know full well that it's this dirty business of Lucifer's that's hoodwinking Him. If he hadn't arrived, as if by chance, with this dream planet, no one would ever have thought about abandoning Earth. Are we really going to let Lucifer succeed ? You don't have the right to say that this thing is beyond us.

An annoyed silence

Siddhartha

Anyway, Lucifer or not, the deserving will always go to Heaven. If He sells Earth to the Devil, it will still be possible - just a bit more difficult.

Joan of Arc

You know very well that's not true, and that as soon as he has the right, Lucifer will arrange to send them all to Hell.

Enter Lao-Zi

Lao-Zi

I see that...

Joan of Arc

Ah ! Lao-Zi, just in time. We are looking for a means to convince God not to hand over Earth. Have you got an idea ?

Lao-Zi

Quoting Lao-Zi: “ If there is no will to intervene, anything can be achieved. Only this abandonment allows one to be master of his destiny. One who wants to intervene at any price will never master anything.”

Joan of Arc *noticeably irritated*

OK, OK, but I just want to prevent Earth being ditched.

Lao-Zi

You cannot “prevent”. All you can do is to try to make Him choose the decision which you would prefer, by putting the arguments in front of Him. For example, you could arrange for Him to meet some worthy people: the kind of people who wouldn't deserve the fate awaiting them if He abandoned everything to Lucifer.

Joan of Arc

Yes, you're right: at the time of Sodom and Gomorra, that worked, and the total destruction of two cities was avoided.

Siddhartha *sceptical*

Rubbish !

Joan of Arc

No ! It's a really good idea, we should try it !

Siddhartha *with irony*

How can you always be so stupid ! After all, if it is your Karma to re-save the world: let's go for "The Return of Joan, Maid of Orleans"

Joan of Arc *at first enthusiastic, then annoyed*

But then !

How would we do that ?

Siddhartha *showing her his list*

I was just in the middle of preparing for the next audience: working on the list of new arrivals. For each one, there is a summary of their life, with the most important facts to be judged. Let's go and find one whom we can put up first.

Joan of Arc

Good ! Let me have a few pages from your list, and we can share the work. Lao-Zi - do you want to help too ?

Lao-Zi

I will never get over with my congress... oh well, alright, ... give me some...

Siddhartha

Here ! *(He gives a handful of pages to Joan and Lao-Zi)*

But I warn you, you're really going to have to hunt through this lot ! They're not a very exciting bunch.

They start to run through their listings

Joan of Arc

Mmm, you are right - it's not cut and dried...

they continue

Siddhartha

Ah ! Listen to this, I think I may have found something: " aged 61 - French - a journalist - when he was 38, founded a charitable association to finance cancer research - president of the association right up to his death..."

That could be interesting, someone like that, don't you think ?

Joan of Arc

Yes, maybe...

Siddhartha

Hey ! wait... Oh dear me ! Here are a few details: died unexpectedly of a heart attack during his trial for an abuse of social security benefits; forgery and making use of same; misapplying funds for personal gain....etc....etc
In my opinion, Lucifer can have this one for nothing !

Joan smiles and shrugs her shoulders

Joan of Arc

OK, we know...corruption, that's nothing new. Continue...
But what kind of person are we looking for exactly ? We really ought to have some criteria...

Lao-Zi *with irony*

Considering the mean level, I think that a person who has not killed someone, who hasn't swindled too many people, or tried to fill his pockets with the proceeds, that'll work very well. If you can't convince him that way...

They run through the list. Every now and then there is a reaction, showing that they have just come across another case very like the first one

OK ! Here: Politician. Deputy, then Minister three times. Known for his integrity. It was popular demand that he should stand as a candidate for the presidency of his country - but he refused because he thought that he could never put together a team of people with the same integrity as himself.

Siddhartha

Oh yes...and he didn't cheat or kill anyone ?

Lao-Zi *continuing to read from his list*

It seems not.

Joan of Arc

Yes, my foot ! All the same, he's not very convincing: when people asked him to help, he cleared off.

Siddhartha *laughing*

Oh, that's not like you ! You don't need an excuse / or you don't wait to be asked before you turn up.

Joan of Arc

Very funny !

Siddhartha

And then, when the Maid of Orleans comes charging down, she's not too fussy about the details: come on lads, let's chop up the English in pieces !

Joan of Arc *to herself*

All the same, I had 'em well and truly, the English

They all got back to reading the list

Siddhartha

If we only pull out someone of merit, we run the risk of not being convincing enough. Maybe we need someone really special. For example, a Religious who was known for her goodness and charity.

Joan of Arc

Er... a Religious, no I'd really rather not.

Siddhartha

Why not ?

Siddhartha

Since my time on Earth, I've rather learned to mistrust that sort, you see.

Siddhartha

I'm sorry, I forgot about that.

Lao-Zi

Well, we could try a writer.... or a philosopher. Someone who knows humankind well, and who'd know how to plead on their behalf.

They take up their search again

Siddhartha

Ah ! I've found what we need: Palestinian lawyer; he made no distinction between his defence of Jews and Arabs. He asked payment from people according to their means, and worked pro bono for the poorest. His office was open day and night. Note from Angelic Services: "Ascetic, he lived modestly in a small apartment adjoining his office and he gave all his money to an institution which looked after war orphans."

A lawyer ! He will know how to speak on behalf of mankind and Earth, and morally, this one has an air of real goodness. What do you think ?

Lao-Zi

A lawyer ? yes, that seems a good idea to me !

Joan of Arc

There - you see, you can get there when you want to !

Siddhartha

Maid of Orleans, what would we not do for you !

Good, if that's alright with you, I'll send an angel to find him. As for me, it's time I went: it's not a big deal, but St. Peter is waiting for me in Purgatory...

He gets up and leaves

Scene Six

Joan of Arc

What's your version ? Why aren't things working down there ?

Lao-Zi

I think we made a mistake with all this business of multiple religions. They've been mixed up in all this for hundreds of years.

Joan of Arc

Explain !

Lao-Zi

One thought that a better return would have been produced by multiplying the religions and adapting them to local cultures. The idea was that people could find

their path more easily. But in no time at all, they began to make internal divisions in their religions, and then they began to confront one another. With all this mess, do you really think that Lucifer would miss a chance to stoke the fire ?

Joan of Arc

Filthy bugger !

Lao-Zi

Indeed ! And hasn't he managed that well: now they are all caught in a hellish spiral, and all he has to do is wait till everything rots by itself, and then take over Earth.

Joan of Arc

That's outrageous ! I don't want to see them abandoned: I love them, and I want them to be left to carry on, whatever they may get up to.

Lao-Zi

That's my opinion too, and if I can help you, I will.

They leave. Darkness

Interlude

The Angels sing

Oh Joanie, how great she feels,
How lucky she's there for them
Perhaps things can be fixed
Lao-Zi has a good idea

La la la oH Oh Oh lala...

But they just have to stop
this bloody awful mess
it blows our mind
For Yasser to get on with his work
they'll have to toe the line

La la la oH Oh Oh lala...

Oh la la they're off to a bad start
unless Yasser can get them off the hook

End of act two

Act Three

Scene One

Joan all alone

Joan of Arc

How can we explain to him what we expect from him ? We certainly can't tell him that God intends to sell Earth.

...

On the other hand, if we want him to have any effect at all, it would be better for him to know what he's getting into.

...

It's not worth beating about the bush. We'll tell him the truth !

...

And then... how are we going to introduce him to God ?

Scene Two

Siddhartha enters

Siddhartha

That's it then ! I have reluctantly passed my audience to Jesus. Poor chap, He's not out of the woods yet.

I've seen the file on our lawyer. He's called Yasser. He was a very good advocate, known and respected throughout the Middle East. He'll be arriving any moment now.

Joan of Arc

How did he die ?

Siddhartha

Assassinated by a madman.

Joan of Arc

That's a really bad habit down there

Siddhartha

Why do you say that ?

Joan of Arc

As soon as a good guy comes along, trying to make a difference, they assassinate him. Just look at recent events : Gandhi, Jean Jaures, Martin Luther King, Itzhak Rabin: its quite weird, don't you think ?

Scene Three

The angel enters accompanied by Yasser. Yasser is rather dazed. He looks around him, astounded

Yasser

What is this ? But...but what is this ?

Siddhartha

Come in Yasser. Welcome to the Kingdom of God. I am Siddhartha Gautama, otherwise called Buddha.

Yasser continues to look all around him, incredulous

Yasser *distractedly*

Buddha ?

Joan of Arc

Welcome, Yasser ! I'm Joanie – known as Joan of Arc.

Yasser *still the same*

Listen: they made me understand that I was dead, and that really does seem to make sense to me. But could you just explain what's going on there and what's coming next...

Joan of Arc

Don't worry. Normally you would go before the Tribunal of the Last Judgement: you know - to be directed towards Purgatory, Heaven, or even Hell. Whave brought you here because we have a favour to ask of you.

Yasser

I don't see how I can be of help in a world as unreal as this.

Joan of Arc

This world, as you call it, is no more or less unreal than the one from which you come.

Siddhârta

But anyway, the problem which we face is not in this world; it is rather on Earth, where the behaviour of mankind displeased God very much.

Yasser

Till now, I didn't believe in God. But if he does exist, what you are saying is not so surprising.

Joan of Arc

Yasser, do you know this song ? : (*singing*) "We'll all go to Heaven, we'll all go to Heaven" That's what men believe today - more or less. But they are mistaking and if nothing is done, it isn't to Heaven that they'll be going, but to hell.

Yasser

And why that ?

Joan of Arc

Because if we do nothing, God will sell Earth to the Devil and, he, believe me, will remind them that there is something else than paradise.

Yasser

God will sell the Earth to the Devil ! What's all this about ? You're making fun of me! Come on, send me to your last judgement, and let's finish up with it.

Siddhartha and Joan look at one another, bothered. Yasser looks uncomfortable.

And even if this is all true, what the h... what can I do about it ?

Siddhartha

We have seen that you were an excellent lawyer. So, we thought that you could plead the case for Mankind before God, and convince Him that there are still enough good people down there to make it worth His trouble to continue...

Joan of Arc

This would buy us time to try and help them, and to redress the situation.

Yasser

But I know nothing about ...

Scene Four

God suddenly bursts into the room. They all gaze at Him, mouths wide open.

God

I'm looking for Moses...

Joan of Arc *reminding Him of the facts*

He is attending a conference of celestial law..

God

Oh ! That's true... how very annoying. I really must see him urgently about a problem...a contract

But, what's going on here ? You look weird....

Noticing Yasser

Low and behold: who has the honour of presenting himself before God ?

Joan of Arc

Yasser, who has just arrived among us.

God

Very well, Yasser, welcome to my Kingdom.

Yasser greets Him

Joan of Arc

There ! We have been thinking...about your project concerning Earth...

God

And so...?

Joan of Arc

So, we thought that it would be interesting for You to meet directly with people, real people

God

Why not ? that seems like a good idea to me.

Siddartha

But... we're not quite ready. Before presenting Yasser to You, we were just going to explain the situation to him.

God sits down

God

No, no, on the contrary, I would prefer to have some spontaneous opinions. It would interest me to listen to someone who has just arrived from down there.
Provided that Yasser agrees, of course.

Siddartha

Yasser is a lawyer. He lived in Palestine, where he specialised in defending poor people, Jews and Palestininans.

God

Very well. Then, its humankind that you can defend, now.

Yasser

As a young lawyer, I was ambitious, and I wanted to defend the biggest cases.
But this ! The defence of humanity before...*(he doesn't manage to pronounce "God")*

God

God - you can say that without any problem here.

Yasser

So be it. I don't think I have any choice. But first, it will be necessary for You to tell me what you hold against mankind, if you are thinking about sending them to the Devil ?

God

What do I have against them ?

God considers

Tell me, Yasser, when you were on Earth, did you believe in Heaven and in Hell ?

Yasser

Er...frankly: no

God

Then why did you choose to defend poor people ? With all your diplomas you could have made plenty of business, and earned lots of money. What difference would that have made ?

Yasser

I wasn't interested in making my fortune. I don't know: I liked to help people, that's all.

God

I'll tell you what I hold against mankind. It's this: that they don't know what they can do and what they cannot do. They no longer believe in Heaven or in Hell, and now it's all just the same to them.

Yasser

It's true that many people are putting religion aside now.

God

That's not the problem : I've had it with religions. All I want from them is that everyone should believe that his lives have a purpose. Without that, it can't work and my creation will be no use at all any more.

Yasser

And according to you, why do they no longer believe in Hell and Heaven ?

God

Life is a lot less difficult if one thinks that these things don't exist.

Cutting short the discussion

But there: you know what the charges are. Now, let's get down to it: I'll hear your defence.

Yasser begins to pace up and down, staring at the ground: he is constructing his speech for the defence. He comes to a halt and stands in front of God.

Yasser

Mr Pres... er

He regains his composure

Lord God - *he turns furtively towards Joan to see if this is the right formula; she indicates that this is OK* - I come before you in the defence of Humanity; I shall demonstrate that Mankind cannot be held responsible for the situation in which they find themselves; and that in any case it would serve no purpose to abandon them in order to make a new Creation.

Joan signals to Siddhartha that Yasser has started well. God looks impressed.

Firstly: on the question of responsibility

What has caused the aberrations with which they are charged ? It is their intelligence which confers on them the exclusive faculty of being able to evolve and make progress. That has been true from the beginning, and in the last few centuries this ability has accelerated in spectacular fashion. As a result men have been seized by a compulsive need for scientific explanation: so much so that at the start of the twentieth century a significant group of scientists were persuaded that their work was very soon going to be at an end.

God *with irony*

Do you follow that ?

Yasser

Scientific success has given men the impression that they can understand and control everything. This translates into an ultra-materialist culture, which has methodically eliminated all the moral and spiritual points of reference within society. What state or country can really possess moral principles in a world regulated entirely by the laws of mechanics, which apply with immutable logic in all situations ?

Siddhartha

You're right, Yasser. For them, now, everything is governed by science. I've seen that some pretend to do Paradise engineering.

God

What's that you say ?

Siddhartha

"Paradise engineering". They maintain that they are able to fabricate a system which places people in a permanent state of Heaven. By scientific means, of course !

God

They're mad.

Yasser, your case seems very difficult to defend.

Yasser

Not if you ask yourself where their intelligence comes from. For, if I am not mistaken, it rightly comes from You, who wished to create man in your own image.

God

That's true. I bestowed on them the qualities which ought to have enabled them to enter Heaven: understanding and a sense of right and wrong. But it was never my intention for them to lose themselves in scientific research, which they did. They worked away furiously to dissect the details of the working of the Universe, instead of trying to comprehend the meaning behind it. I am not a clockmaker and my Creation is not a mechanic.

Yasser

So be it: but how can you possibly condemn Mankind for the consequences of the qualities which you yourself have endowed them with ?

Silence. Yasser observes the effect of his argument. God does not react. Joan and Siddhartha look at one another, ill at ease.

Yasser *linking up his ideas to take advantage of the situation*

Before concluding, I would like to discuss the second point which has already been touched on: the abandonment of Earth in favour of a new Creation.

In the unlikely event that the attenuation of the responsibility of Mankind should not be retained, the abandonment of Earth to Lucifer, in order to recommence Creation, could not possibly provide a solution. Indeed, considering that the final aim remains

to realise the greatest possible number of entrants to Heaven, the new creation envisaged would also have to base itself on a Humanity in the image of God. Otherwise, as in the material world, the same causes produce the same effects. The new humans would inevitably end up in a situation similar to that of Earth today.

God

Alas ! that could indeed happen.

Yasser

Allow me then to put my conclusion.

Taking into account the objective of Creation, you have bestowed on Mankind some of your abilities. They cannot be held entirely responsible for the fact that they manage these abilities badly; this could lead another kind of Humanity into the same mistakes. It would therefore be unjust and useless to hand over Earth to Lucifer: I have the honour to ask You to reconsider your plan.

God looks at Yasser thoughtfully - as if He may come out in favour of the argument

God

A good defence... good defence....I ought to say that...

An angel enters briskly

Angel

Lord ! Lord ! Come quickly

God *getting up and leaving the room with the Angel, to talk with him outside*

What is it then ?

Joan of Arc *in an undertone, so that God shouldn't hear*

Well done Yasser ! That worked. He's about to change His mind. You are on the way to convincing Him.

Siddhartha

Yes. Your arguments appear to carry the day. Putting it first, that Mankind was created in His image - that's a good idea !

God returns

God *speaking of the problem which has just been brought to Him*

When we don't have a problem down there, the angels manage to create one up here !

I have to say that your arguments hold up, Yasser. They merit reflection, even if, anyway they won't resolve the current problems.

Yasser

This won't be the first time in their history that they have gone astray. In the Middle Ages it was the opposite: an excess of religion paralysed scientific development. They found a way out. This time they will find a way out too.

God

And they'll start all over again a few centuries later !

Yasser

Probably ! But each time things will be different. And each time they will make a little progress !

God

Maybe you're right, but I don't know if I can go on supporting this kind of switchback progress indefinitely.

Yasser

There might be a way out of this...

God *astonished*

?...

Yasser

I think there is something which shocks men of goodwill , and which facilitates the arguments of others.

God

Ah ? what would that be then ?

Yasser

Well: men sometimes have difficulty in understanding all that they are told: “ God is good, God is love, etc...” while all around them, every day, they see so much suffering and misery.

Joan makes a face and tries to attract Yasser’s attention. He doesn’t understand what she is trying to signal to him, so he continues. God seems to get more and more nervous.

Besides, the atheists won’t deprive themselves of the pleasure of dwelling on the question, saying: “ If God exists how could he allow all these injustices ?”

It seems to me that if less weight were given to that argument, it could certainly help those who believe in you, and who hope to go to Heaven.

A long silence. God is manifestly annoyed/bothered. The Prophets are petrified with worry. Yasser doesn’t understand all this.*

God *furiously ironical*

That’s it then ! (*Yasser shudders and takes a step back*) You’ve found the solution: I should prevent anything that would stress them, and in return they will believe in Me.

Yasser

That was not what I intended to say...

God

Yes, of course you are right. All these injustices, accidents, diseases, natural catastrophes, it’s much too hard for them. In the end - I should have thought of this straight away. Quite simply, if I were to shield them from all this, no one could deny that God is good; and what’s more, as they are already half way there, they’ll believe in Heaven too.

Fantastic !

A heavy silence - caustic

But if one takes a closer look, all the same, there are some things which I find upsetting/worrying* in your solution.

First of all, I would like an explanation: what will they make of their tranquil mini-existence in this oh-so-safe world ? Hey, Yasser, what will they do all day, and with a 120 year life span for lack of stress ? Will they play golf ? Will they do the cross-word puzzles ? Will they watch the telly ?

Joan of Arc

Sure, some of them will dream about a life like this, but...

God

Furthermore, I believed that their greatest pride was their freedom. It's true, isn't it Yasser, freedom – it is the dignity of humans, isn't it ?

Yasser

Er... Yes, yes, indeed.

God

So, there's a problem here, d'ye see ? In order to shield them from all these "inconvenients", I would have to intervene all the time. And if all what happens is up to, I cannot see that they will have much of their liberty left.

These aims are in complete contradiction. In reality, what makes them afraid - it's not suffering, misfortune or injustice; what makes them really afraid - is freedom. They pretend they want it, but it's not true. They claim for a world without risks, without difference, without contradiction and a world like that is a world without any freedom.

All very well, but I don't agree with it. The world which I have created is dangerous, unequal, unforeseeable and brutal, and it's not by chance. It is designed so, so that they can love one another, be creative and live freely. You can't take only half of it : they had to take it like it comes. In the kind of softie world they are calling for, there is no freedom and no love. And that wouldn't work at all for me.

He gets up

I'm going to leave you now. I must go and busy myself with the problem of the moment.

You defended them well, Yasser. But apparently I haven't copied my image properly.

He leaves

Scene Five

They are all wiped out. After a long silence...

Siddhartha

It's a catastrophe. It is THE subject not to broach with Him.

Yasser

In my lifetime I thought like that. And this was my chance to tell him.

Joan of Arc

He gets furious when men complain about their condition.
I tried to tip you off, but you didn't see me.

Yasser

Yes, I saw you, but I didn't understand what was happening.

Joan of Arc

That's a real shame, because you put the case well, and He was beginning to come round to our way of thinking.

Siddhartha

I'm so sorry, Joanie, we did our best, but now...(*getting up*) Yasser, I'll take you back.

They all leave, except for Joan

Scene Six

Joan of Arc *addressing herself to Saint Michael, sadly*

We've lost everything: it's even worse than before. Did you hear ?
He said "They had to take it like it comes". He's going to sell, I'm sure.

Michael the Archangel

That's really not the thing to say. It's going to be difficult to make him change His mind now.

Joan of Arc

I would never have believed this... after all that we've done on this Earth

Michael the Archangel

Perhaps I've got another idea... but I would rather not say anything to you now - we'll see...

Darkness

Interlude

The angels sing

Oi, Oi, this time it's catastrophe
Yasser has said what he didn't ought to.
He is furious, all hell is going to break loose
It's looking really bad for Humanity

La la la oH Oh Oh lala.....

No one knows what to do any more
to stop this scoundrel Lucifer
It's awful: we love them so
We don't want them to go to the Devil

La la la oH Oh Oh lala.....

Oh la la they're off to a bad start
There's no one left to help them

End of act three

Act Four

Scene One

*Lucifer paces in a circle: he is waiting for someone
Joan enters briskly: she stops short on seeing Lucifer*

Joan of Arc

Ah ! Lucifer ! What are you doing here ?

Lucifer

Behold ! The Maid of Orleans ! What a pleasure...

Joan of Arc

Speak for yourself !

Lucifer

Oh dearie me ! How aggressive you are ! Myself, I'm happy to see you: I always find you sooo... delectable. *He comes closer to Joan*

Joan of Arc *drawing back*

Keep away from me...

Lucifer *continuing to approach her in order to make her step back further*

What a shame , a pretty girl like you ! If you had listened to me just a little bit, instead of going your own way, you could have had some real pleasure down there...

Joan of Arc

Vade retro ! If you so much as lay a finger on me...

Lucifer

Don't worry, little maid, I'm not going to rape you.

Still...a luscious little virgin like you, all fresh - mmm ! I wouldn't say no.

Joan of Arc

Don't dare to hope : obnoxious demon. What are you doing here ?

Lucifer

What I am doing here is no concern of yours, and in any case, it's way beyond you.

Joan of Arc

I know very well what your latest little scheme is, scumbag. Go back to hell and roast yourself in your own furnaces. Go on - beat it !

Lucifer

Certainly not. I've got a meeting with God, right here, don't you see. And I'm hoping to conclude an important piece of business.

Joan of Arc

I 'm well aware what your "important" piece of business is....and I'm telling you that He won't sell Earth to you...

Lucifer *imitating Joan and making her appear ridiculous*

"I'm telling you" ! And what do you know about it, little menace ?

Joan of Arc

I'll stop Him !

Lucifer *laughing spitefully*

Ah ! Ah ! Ah ! You'll be the one will you, Joan of Arc, who's going to prevent me doing a deal which will bring me more than six billion souls ? A deal that I've been dreaming about for so many centuries ?

I'm not the English; I'm not frightened of you, little Maid of Orleans. (*Becoming extremely spiteful*) Not only am I going to buy the Earth, but I intend to wreak havoc there, and without any bother from you !

Joan of Arc

What are you going to do, scumbag ?

Lucifer

Very easy: first I shall take advantage of the fact that they have messed up the balance of the ecology. In the state that they have got themselves into, it will only take a little something to upset the lot. By giving it a little push, I can make their lovely planet absolutely uninhabitable.

Joan of Arc

You don't have the right to do that: the law forbids you to intervene.

Lucifer

Oh yes I do, ignoramus ! The moment that I can prove that I had nothing to do with the initial situation, I have the right to hasten along matters once they have started.

Joan of Arc

You're a brute.

Lucifer

Yes !

Let me explain my plan to you. With everything in disequilibrium / or out of kilter* and getting more so, climactic catastrophes will build up a rhythm of their own, to such an extent that everything will go right out of control. All their fine modern societies won't be able to withstand the shock for very long. Complete disorganisation will follow: no country will be able to cope. (Jubilant) - and just imagine what will happen after that.

Joan of Arc

That won't happen. These are just the fantasies of a(n) hysterical demon.

Lucifer

Oh yes it will ! In the midst of all this general disorder, they will have more and more difficulty in getting the wherewithal to survive: a power supply, shelter, food, water even. Then, in the absence of any state organisation, they won't have any choice: it'll be every man for himself. And - "every man for himself" - won't I just love that !

I don't need to sketch things out for you: just imagine how many I'll send to Hell. At this stage I would already have realised my investment. Anything after that would be a bonus for me.

Would you like me to tell you what will happen next ?

Joan of Arc

That's enough. I don't want to hear any more. And no more dreams: it isn't yours yet.

She leaves

Scene Two

Lucifer (*once more alone*)

Ah so ! I don't understand what she sees in them, to defend them like that. That little thing is much too sensible.

Besides, its something like their common fault down there.

After a little while...

OK - what's He going to do. For how many eternities is he going to keep me hanging about like this ?

God enters

Scene Three

God

I'm sorry for the delay, it's a perpetual race.

Lucifer

Well then ? Have you been thinking it over ? Have you spoken to the Prophets ?

God

Yes. In fact it was the Prophets who spoke to me, and it wasn't exactly a success.

Lucifer

Certainly: you have to know when to call a halt, with a business that is no longer profitable. When things aren't working, there's no point in carrying on.

God

What's more, I'm starting to have a few ideas - there are some things that I haven't been able to do on Earth, which I might have a go with on this new planet.

Lucifer

I told you: this is an exceptional opportunity for a new creation.

God

Very good. Show me these contracts.

Lucifer (*getting out the documents*)

Here you are. The price is indicated here: 6 billion and 553 million souls and total control over the Earth. In return I hand over to you for eternity the total control of my planet, and I guarantee you a thousand ages without any interference on my part.

Will that suit ?

God

Mmmm...

Lucifer

You must initial every page, and sign here, here, and here.

Producing another document

And here I...

Enter Lao-Zi

Scene Four

Lao-Zi *with irony, knowing very well what is going on*

Ah ! Still busy: no luck. Lately everything's up in the air here: everyone is always in a meeting.

Lucifer

Yes, and you are disturbing our meeting.

Lao-Zi

Gosh ! Lucifer ! The sales rep. of evil; the gatherer of crumbs.
Obviously we see no one but you over there. What's happening ? Are you about to convert ?

God laughs

Lucifer

Very funny. Leave us alone please.

Lao-Zi

Do forgive me, I was joking of course. I can hardly believe that you are here to do good. You are much too lazy for that.

Lucifer *on the defensive*

To each his own. I'm working my fingers to the bone, just like everyone else.

Lao-Zi

Yes: the work of a lazy-bones.

Oh well, I won't disturb you any longer. (*falsely*) Lord God, I will leave you to continue your meeting...and you, Lucifer, I hope I won't be seeing you in the near future.

Lao-Zi leaves

Scene Five

God

That Lao-Zi, he's quite a character, don't you think ?

Lucifer

A pain in the neck, yes. What's he mixed up in ?

Right - let's get on, shall we ? You have the contract, and I have taken out a guarantee for you with the Divine Commission. I would also like to show you the analytical reports. Take a look, it's unbelievable: no trace of DNA, no viruses, no chemical or radioactive pollution: one has to ask how it has managed to stay like that.

God *scanning the report*

Indeed, it's astonishing...quite astonishing

Hmmm !

Lucifer

OK - ready to sign ?

Shouts begin to be heard from outside, getting clearer all the time. A woman cries.

God

What's happening ?

He gets up and goes to open the door

Who is it ?

Sarah enters like a Fury, the Angel hot on her heels. She almost knocks God over, as he watches her, taken aback.

Scene Six

Sarah

It seems that God is here, and I want to see him !

Looking round the room, like Yasser

Oh, come on, is this Heaven ? It's really not that great; reminds me of the offices in that place where I used to work. I really didn't think it would be like this.

God *rather put out*

You're not in Heaven, and you could at least greet us, and stop screaming like that

Sarah *holding out her hand to God*

Yeah. Hi ! *(God, astonished, accepts the proffered hand)*

Please forgive me, but they have just told me that I'm dead, and it's upset me a little.

Lucifer *jovial, holding out his hand*

Good day, I am Lucifer... and you ?

Sarah

Sarah !...

Lucifer ! The Devil ? Then I'm in Hell ! I have to know: just now I was told that I was with the Good Lord, and now I find myself in Hell.

What kind of a circus is this ?

God

You are not in Hell either.

Sarah

Listen ! Heaven or Hell - makes no difference. I must see the Good Lord urgently. So, if you know where He is, be a sweetie, and tell me: then I'll leave you in peace.

God

What do you want from Him ?

Sarah

I need Him to resuscitate / or revive me, it's very important.

God

How did you die ?

Sarah

A motorbike accident. Some bastard in a jalopy pulled out on me. I wasn't able to avoid him, and he pushed me into a lorry on the other side. I just had time to realise that I'd had it. I thought to myself "damn" and then I found myself here.

God

When you are dead, you are dead. Human beings can't be brought back to life. God Himself cannot bring you back to Earth.

Sarah

Oh yes, He will ! He can do anything. I want to see Him.

God

He's standing right in front of you.

Sarah *on the verge of tears*

It's you ! You are the Good Lord ! Oh, forgive me, I.. I.. didn't know.

God

It's not important. But why do you want to get back there at any cost ?

Sarah

But it's for Justin. I was going to fetch him from school when the accident happened. I must get there on time, or they won't want to take him any longer.

She sniffs

Tell me - how long have I been dead ? Have I still got time to get to the school ?

God

Time here you know, it's not like on Earth. And in any case I have told you, I cannot bring you back to life - it's impossible.

Lucifer

Right, but we've got other things to do. We have to get through.

I could bring you back to life, if you like.

Sarah

Can you ? Is that true ?

God

No, he's lying. He can't do it in the way you're thinking of. He will make a fool's bargain with you, and you will end up in Hell.

Sarah

That doesn't matter. If I could only go back and look after Justin, I would gladly go to Hell afterwards. Do it !

God

You don't know what Hell really means !

Sarah freezes for a few long moments, and says nothing

Sarah

Oh no ! And what is it like ? Is it worse than having to put up with being treated like shit all day long by a shabby little boss ? Is it worse than seeing your son in tears because his dear little friends treat him like a dirty Jew ? Is it worse than having to fuck with the neighbour upstairs just to be able to pay the dinner money ?

Don't worry about me. I think I already have some idea of Hell, and it doesn't frighten me.

Lucifer

You're right. It's not as bad as that. Let me explain to you how I could send you back.

God *furious*

It's out of the question ! Can I remind you that you are here in My Kingdom, and I strongly advise you not to intervene.

Pushing Sarah towards the exit

Listen, Sarah, I don't know how you came here, but you cannot stay. The Angel will take care of you. He will take you away, and explain to you why you cannot return to Earth to look after your son.

Reaching the doorway

Dear Angel: would you please take care of Sarah.

Scene Seven

Lucifer

We're never going to make it. That Fury just won't let go.

God

I don't think she's a Fury. She speaks her mind, and she's right to.

Now, let's look at this contract.

He sits down again, and continues to read the contract. He interrupts...

Ah ! If they were all like that girl, we wouldn't find ourselves in this situation.

He takes up the contract again, and again interrupts...

I like that Sarah. It's amazing how much she was prepared to do for her child's sake.

Lucifer

I'm sorry, but we really must get on with the contract.

Scene Eight

Enter an Angel in a hurry

Angel

My Lord ! My Lord !

God

What is it ? I'm in a meeting..

Angel

Excuse me, but we have a problem. A serious problem !

God

Now what's the matter ?

Angel

An enormous chemical factory. There was an explosion, and that started a huge fire.

God *furious*

And then what ?

Angel

There are millions of litres of poison which will pour into the river, and no-one can get close because of the fire.

God

Oh no ! It can't be true ! And why did they send you to tell me all this ?

Angel *trembling*

The... the Angelic Services are asking for authorisation to...to intervene.. urgently. They wish to change the direction of the wind.. so that the firemen can get closer to the fire... and prevent the river being polluted.

God

Divine Intervention ? And what more do you want ?

Angel

The... the river - it's called the Danube. And the poison is dreadful. If nothing is done, all the plants and all the animals will die across several thousand kilometres, and it will go on for decades. And that's not counting the damage to the Black Sea.

God *shattered*

It can't be true. No, really, it can't be true. Will they never stop ? But I cannot just intervene like that: we'll have to call a meeting of the Commission for Divine Intervention.

Angel

They have already assembled. They are only waiting for you...

God hesitates

Lucifer

Let it drop. That is no longer important for you, and as for me - it wouldn't upset me at all if the Danube was done for.

God

No, I'm sorry, this time I think I really should get involved. I must go. In any case, I need to take a little more time to think about these contracts. I'll send a message.

He leaves, accompanied by the Angel.

Scene Nine

Lucifer

A plague on these humans ! He was going to sign. They'll pay me for this once their planet belongs to me.

Darkness

Interlude

The Angels sing

Well then, he was one down.

Without this catastrophe so opportune
Lucifer would have won
and someone's goose would have been cooked !

La la la oh Oh Oh lala...

That's really something to play with
We can't see how they can be rescued
They don't know what's coming to them
And what's worse: he is truly evil

La la la oh Oh Oh lala...

Oh la la they're off to a bad start
We'd rather not see what happens next

End of act four

Act Five

Scene One

Joan, Lao-Zi and the Angel are present

Joan of Arc

What happened, after all ?

The Voice of St Michael

Amazing: the humans managed to save themselves, thanks to one of their catastrophes: the meeting was packed out

Joan of Arc

That's not bad ! Lucifer must be furious.

Look: we have been right to try to hold back the signing

Lao-Zi

That's true. Without that He might well have signed. My intervention has allowed us to gain some time.

The Voice of St Michael

I think that the idea of sending Sarah was quite not a bad one. When I saw her file in Purgatory, I thought God would be more sympathetic to someone like her, rather than that Yasser with his lectures. The signature has been held back, and what's more, it has made God (Him) hesitate.

Joan of Arc

But what did you do for Sarah to get here ?

The Voice of St Michael

Ah ! Well... when the situation is serious, you have to get by as best you can, you know. So I arranged for a little error in the directions, so that Sarah should find herself in the Angel's office...

Lao-Zi

The problem now is that Lucifer won't hold back on this one, and I don't know whether we will have as much luck.

Joan of Arc

What can we do now ?

Lao-Zi

Quoting Lao-Zi “that which has not already happened is easier to prevent”

Joan rolls her eyes heavenwards.

Lao-Zi leaves

Joan of Arc

Now we’re well on our way ! All the same, I think he is something special, don’t you ?

Someone knocks at the door

Joan of Arc

Yes !

The Angel enters

Scene Two

An Angel

Ah ! Joan, there you are !

Joan of Arc

What is it ?

An Angel

It’s about Sarah...

Joan of Arc

What then ?

An Angel

He entrusted in me with taking her to the clerk’s office in Purgatory, but she won’t listen. She wouldn’t stop crying, and she said that she wanted to see God, so that He could re-unite her with her son, and she wasn’t going to give way until she found herself in His presence.

Joan of Arc

Where is she ?

An Angel *pointing to the door*

Over there ! She hasn't moved from my office. And what with the meeting of the Commission, there's no-one left to look after her. I don't know what else I can do.

Joan of Arc

Tell her to come in, I shall speak to her.

The Angel goes to the door

An Angel

Sarah ! Come here, there's someone who wants to talk to you...

Sarah *off*

Who ?

Joan gets up and goes to the door too

Joan of Arc

My name is Joan. You can't stay here. Come along and I'll explain...

Sarah enters and the Angel leaves

Scene Three

Joan of Arc

Why are you crying like that ?

Sarah *sobbing*

I've already said: it's because of my Justin. Now he's an orphan. Why am I dead ? Who did this ?

Joan of Arc

No one did. It just happened, that's all.

Sarah

All the same, when I look back, I remember that I went to church to pray to Holy Mary every Sunday. And just look at the result.

Joan of Arc

You went to church every Sunday ? But you are Jewish ? Didn't you go to the Synagogue ?

Sarah

The church was really close to my home - it was more convenient.

Joan of Arc

And you prayed to the Holy Virgin ?

Sarah

Yes. I like the Holy Virgin. I used to tell her what was going on in my life. She listened to me. She understood me.

But tell me, I've seen the Good Lord here, with the Devil. I thought they had no love lost .

Joan of Arc

It's true - but they are obliged to bare one another.

Sarah

So, what are that they're both getting up to?

Joan of Arc *annoyed*

They're... they're negotiating.

It's obvious that Sarah doesn't understand. Joan makes a decision

In fact, Lucifer is trying to buy the Earth !

Sarah

What !

Joan of Arc

Yes. Up here we are all trying to prevent it, but when you came in, Lucifer was a hair's breadth away from getting God to agree to the sale.

Sarah

But wait ! If Lucifer buys the Earth, what would that mean ?

Joan of Arc

That would mean that Lucifer could do exactly as he wanted with it. And he told me a bit about what he intended to do: it wasn't something to be cheerful about.

Sarah *beginning to understand the situation*

Oh shit ! It's not true...and with my Justin down there all on his own !

The Angel enters

Scene Four

An Angel

Lucifer is coming back ! The Commission has finished the session, and Lucifer has already asked for another meeting.

Joan of Arc

What a bastard ! Are you sure ?

An Angel

We're done for ! I think he will succeed in getting God to sign.

Sarah *aside*

Never ! I will never leave my son in the hands of the Devil.

I know what to do !

Joan of Arc

What ?

Sarah

I shall stay here, and you - go and let Lucifer in. Meanwhile, Joan, do your best to hold back God's arrival. Find something - anything: I need some time alone with Lucifer.

Joan of Arc

But what are you going to do ?

Sarah

I haven't time to tell you now. You'll see. If you can give me enough time with Lucifer, I'm certain my plan will work.

Joan of Arc

But...

Sarah

Please ! He's coming...just...

Joan and the Angel leave together, leaving Sarah alone.

Scene Five

The Voice of St Michael

Sarah !

Sarah *looking in every direction*

What was that ?

The Voice of St Michael

I am Michael the Archangel: you know - the voice that Joan of Arc heard.

Sarah

That's it, and am I hearing voices too ?

The Voice of St Michael

Yes, but up here, it's much more usual. Everybody hears me.

Tell me. Are you sure about what you are doing ? Lucifer is redoubtable, you know. Beware : he really can do harm to you.

Sarah

I'm not afraid. He will not have my Justin. Never.

The angel lets Lucifer come in

Scene Six

Lucifer

Yes, but...

Do you know the price ?

Sarah

I am to go to Hell - that's it ?

Lucifer

Yes, when all's done. And while you're waiting, you must give me your soul. Back on Earth, you won't have a soul. I shall keep it here: it will be mine, not yours.

Sarah

And what does that mean, I won't have a soul ?

Lucifer

I can't explain that to you. You will be a bit like a very intelligent animal: you'll see.

Sarah

I don't understand: will I be able to look after Justin ?

Lucifer *manifestly hypocritical*

Yes, yes, of course you will.

Sarah

OK ! What do I have to do ?

Lucifer

It's just that...

Sarah

What ? Are you able to send me back to Earth - or not ?

Lucifer

Yes, I am able, but I don't have the right, here, do you understand - we are in the Kingdom of God: I can't take over a soul here.

Sarah

I took that in. I arranged for Joan to keep God waiting, so that we could be alone. He won't know anything about this. Do what it takes, hurry up, before He gets here.

Lucifer *He gets out some papers: on one side he places the contracts for the Earth; then he spreads out some other papers.*

Well then ! You are a crafty one, I get the feeling that your soul will really please me.

He puts the papers in front of Sarah, who begins to look at the door of the room nervously.

Aha ! What a good day to be doing business !

Here: sign here for the return to Earth... and here for the sale of your soul.

Sarah is watching towards the door; she needs time...

Come along, get on with it, sign up !

Sarah

Is that all ? Nothing more than my signature ? Where ? There ?

Lucifer

You sign there... and there...and I shall send you back to your Justin. Hurry up !

Enter God. Sarah leans over the papers and signs rapidly. Lucifer makes as if to grab the papers back before she can sign, but it is too late.

Scene Seven

God *just as He enters*

Ah ! I'm so sorry again: Joan...

But Sarah ! What are you doing here ? And what are all these documents ?

Sarah rushes to hand the signed contract to God, with a big smile. Lucifer is petrified.

Sarah *delighted*

Lucifer has made an agreement with me: to send me back so that I can be with my son. Of course I had to sell him my soul in exchange, but it's not important...the main thing is that I am going back to Earth.

God *addressing Lucifer*

How dare you ! How dare you take a soul from here that has already been admitted into My Kingdom.

Lucifer

But...it was her... she...

God *waving Sarah's contract in the air*

I have warned you ! This is quite inadmissible, and I shall drag you before the Divine Commission. With proof like this, believe me, you'll pay for it !

Noticing the contracts lying on the table...

And these ? Are these the contracts for our exchange of Planets ? Right - this is what I think of your contracts (*God throws them in the air, and they fall back in disorder*)

God points the way to the exit

And now go back to Hell: we shall meet again at your trial.

Lucifer miserably gathers up his disordered contracts, stuffing them into his attaché case any old how. Sarah helps him.

Sarah *leaning over, near Lucifer, who is also bent down*

I had you there, eh !

Lucifer *flabbergasted for a moment*

That's as may be, you little bitch, but you signed: just you wait and see what that's going to cost you.

God

That's enough ! Leave it, and get thee behind me Satan !

Enter Joan. She crosses with Lucifer as he leaves with a haughty and offended air.

Joan of Arc

I told you that you wouldn't get it !

Lucifer *shrugging his shoulders*

So now you listen behind doors ?

Scene Eight

God

Sarah, you will pay for what you have done !

Sarah

It worked ! I was certain that You would be so angry that the sale wouldn't take place.

Joan of Arc

But you signed - you are mad !

Sarah

I had to sign so that he couldn't deny what he had done. He would have been capable of making up I don't know what kind of rubbish to get himself out of this mess. I'm familiar with his type: my man was like that !

Joan of Arc

But you are stuck with it now.

Sarah

I don't care ! It worked: Lucifer didn't get the Earth, and he won't get hold of Justin either

Enter Siddhartha with Lao-Zi

Scene Nine

Lao-Zi

What's happening here ? I passed Lucifer as I came in - he was hopping mad.

God

I wish.... He has just been taken in like a greenhorn, and at the same time he has lost a business contract in which he placed enormous faith.

Joan of Arc

Thanks to Sarah, Earth won't be sold after all !

Siddhartha

Thanks to Sarah ?

Joan of Arc

She decided that Lucifer would make a very poor adoptive father for Justin...

God

I admit to you that in the end, even if this other planet was really interesting, I would prefer the matter to end like this.

Joan of Arc

I'm happy to hear you say that !

God

Yes, Joan, but the problems of the profitability of the Earth, and the general behaviour of Mankind are not settled yet. I shall keep Earth, but without question it cannot remain in the state in which we find it now.

Yasser said that they were capable of pulling themselves together / or recovery, and that they might even come out of it stronger than before. So much the better. So I shall give them five of their centuries to get the ecology back into equilibrium, and to get back to a normal return for the number of entrants to Heaven. And not one more !

And they really must get out of this situation by themselves. I shall keep watch to make sure that no-one intervenes, in any kind of way.

And if they don't manage it...

Silence

He gets up to leave

As for you Sarah, I admire what you have done out of love for your son. I congratulate you on your courage, and I promise to do what I can to prevent you from having to spend Eternity in Hell. We shall send Moses to submit your case to the Divine Commission, and he will try to get your contract annulled.

God leaves

Scene Ten

Joan of Arc

Moses is very strong, he'll get you out of this, you'll see. We will all come to support you.

Siddhartha

Lao-Zi, it really surprises me that you don't have a little quotation to suit the circumstances.

Lao-Zi

Quoting Lao-Zi: "Whoever defends himself with love in his heart will be invincible. When the Fates wish to save a man, they give him love to protect him."

Good - and now, you're not going to tell me that the room is still occupied !

All

It's free ! absolutely free !

Lao-Zi

OK: let's go !

Darkness

Finale

The Angels sing

Blimey ! we no longer believed in it.
We really thought it was done for.
But thanks to Sarah, they're saved.

And Lucifer screwed up.

La la la oH Oh Oh lala...

Sarah, they'll have you to thank
You led them out of a real mess
They owe you a fine candle
They'll have to look after your Justin

La la la oH Oh Oh lala...

Right, that's it: the Earth is saved
But it's in their interest to watch out

THE END