

SCENE FOUR - THE BEAKED MEN

The operating room of the Beaked Men, the King's Highest Order of Physicians. Prisoner 1, Prisoner 2, and the third man sit waiting the arrival of the doctors. A drumming is heard, and a low muffled murmur. From all sides, the Beaked Men enter. They are plague doctors, dressed in the historical garb - long over-coats, brimmed hats, and bird-like beak masks. They chant softly. One beats the drum.

THE BEAKED MEN

The Beaked men appear to treat the curse,
 First scalpel, herbs, but finally with the hearse.
 Blood dark black lunged with filthy dirt in vein,
 The plagued men appeal to live again.
 With knives, and screws, and tort'rous, twisted heart,
 The Beaked men arrive to do their part.
 But black is black and will be till the end,
 so Beaked Man is no sick beggar's friend.
 The plagued men aspire toward freedom dreams,
 But Beaked men enjoy their patient's screams.

It ends. The Master Beaked Man steps forward.

THE MASTER

Patient Number 1.

They point to the third man. He walks tentatively over to the operating table. Prisoner 1 and 2 watch in fear as the Beaked Men set up a plastic tarp around the table and huddle around to begin the operation. The Beaked Men on the outskirts continue chanting.

THE BEAKED MEN

First slice, then twist, then pull upon the skin.
 Cut legs, grind teeth, and lacerate the chin.

(The Beaked Men take out scalpels and slice into the flesh of the third man. Lots of blood and screaming.)

The black it waits all hidden in the chest,
 rots ribs, spoils spine, subtraction would be best.

(The Beaked Men yank furiously at the man's chest as he screams. Ribs and spine shatter and are removed and tossed aside onto the ground.)

Dig deep, good friends, and see what you can find.
 Dark plague escapes to heart, kidney, and mind.

(The arms of the Beaked Men
 plunge into the body and rip
 out a heart, kidney, and
 brain. The body goes
 still/limp. The screaming
 stops. The organs are thrown
 to other Beaked Men who begin
 to examine them.)

Oh joy, what fun, to medicate the dead,
 Such glee, oh mirth, when left with just a head!

(The Beaked men hold up, with
 pride, the decapitated head.)

His blood, I fear, has mostly now run dry.
 It's time to give some new patients a try!

All the Beaked Men slowly turn to face
 the prisoners. Silence.

PRISONER 1

What, us?

PRISONER 2

I'm actually feeling much better.

PRISONER 1

Yes, much better.

PRISONER 2

I don't think it was the plague at all.

PRISONER 1

More of an allergy sort of thing.

PRISONER 2

It's that time of year.

PRISONER 1

The dust.

PRISONER 2

The grass.

PRISONER 1

The bunnies. Bunny rabbits. Rabbits.

PRISONER 2

Itchy eyes and things of that nature. Definitely not...
 plaguey symptoms.

PRISONER 1

Definitely not the plague. So. We'll be off.

They attempt to exit.

THE MASTER

Stop now, dear friends, there's nowhere you can run,
before the Beaked Men's work here is done.
Then please, my friends, if still you wish to go,
The Beaked Men will send you down below.

Brief silence. The prisoners make a run
for the door. They are stopped by
force.

THE MASTER

Alas, dear boys, it seems I've not been clear,
I say there can be no escaping here.
The plague has found a home within your blood,
We'll rip it out and mix it with the mud.
For plague is dark and we doctors know best,
prescribe death for you, so life for all the rest.

PRISONER 2

Oh yes! The issue of the plague.

PRISONER 1

Indeed. A real issue.

PRISONER 2

But what is the plague?

PRISONER 1

Exactly. The real question. The heart of the matter.

PRISONER 2

Is it bacteria?

PRISONER 1

I don't feel like we have conclusive evidence.

PRISONER 2

Is it germs?

PRISONER 1

I don't think science can really say, can it?

PRISONER 2

How does it travel--

PRISONER 1

-- from here to there!

PRISONER 2

Lots of questions.

PRISONER 1
Not many answers.

Pause. The Beaked Men are unimpressed.

PRISONER 2
But I have a hypothesis!

PRISONER 1
Please, share. Please do

PRISONER 2
About the nature of plague.

PRISONER 1
I need to know. We all do.

PRISONER 2
That MAY interest you doctors.

PRISONER 1
THE SUSPENSE IS KILLING US.

PRISONER 2
And make you think twice about cutting out our hearts.

PRISONER 1
Or thrice. It may make you think thrice.

PRISONER 2
Yes.

Silence.

A BEAKED MAN
Well?

PRISONER 2
If the plague is in my heart, you cut out my heart. Yes?

ANOTHER BEAKED MAN
Yes.

PRISONER 2
If the plague is in my brain, you remove it, yes?

A THIRD BEAKED MAN
Precisely.

PRISONER 2

And, just to be clear, just to make sure I understand your methods, if the plague was in my small intestine, you would take your scalpel and tongy things and you would do what you do and all of a sudden I would be here, and my small intestine would be there, and there would be some blood in between the two of us, no doubt. Accurate?

THE MASTER

Completely.

PRISONER 2

But. What if the plague is in something that you CANNOT remove? Something more abstract than a heart, or a brain, or a small intestine. Something less tangible, though no less real.

CONFUSED BEAKED MAN

Like what?

PRISONER 2

Like... Like...

PRISONER 1

Suppose the plague was within a cloud. Or in the steam from your tea. Or perhaps the plague had terribly infected the philosophical construct of justice.

SCANDALIZED BEAKED MAN

Preposterous!

PRISONER 2

No! Not so. Not so. For it *is*.

PERPLEXED BEAKED MAN

What, the plague? In the clouds?

PRISONER 1

Yes!

PRISONER 2

No!

PRISONER 1

No!

PRISONER 2

Don't be silly. But... it is my belief that the origin of the plague is found in something abstract, something intangible, though still something real: Civilization. And how do you cut out civilization? How do you drain it of its life-blood?

SKEPTICAL BEAKED MAN

The plague is in civilization?

PRISONER 2

Of course. Even worse, the plague STARTS because of civilization. Think of it. What is more spotty than civilization? What else could be the source of the black?

AMIALE BEAKED MAN

He has a point.

CONTRARY BEAKED MAN

It all seems very circumlocutory to me.

THE MASTER

Prove it.

PRISONER 1

What?

THE MASTER

Prove that civilization started the plague.

PRISONER 2

And if we do?

THE MASTER

Then we will have a greater concern to address than that of your individual hearts.

PRISONER 2

Fair enough. A moment please.

Prisoner 1 and 2 counsel through whispers. They reach an agreement. They usher Beaked Men away from the table and climb atop it.

PRISONER 1

Presenting... "The Spotty Pageant!"..

PRISONER 2

... An analyzation, examination and appreciation of the inherent sickness within our modern civilization...

PRISONER 1

... Using a combination of the scientific method and our own flavor of dramatic whimsy...

PRISONER 2

... to prove, beyond reasonable doubt, that all mankind is blackened.

PRISONER 1

"The Spotty Pageant!"

PRISONER 2

We begin.

PRISONER 1

Darkness. Void. Emptiness and loneliness. No Earth, stars, sun, or sky. And then.

They jump and land loudly on the table.

PRISONER 2

A large boom.

PRISONER 1

A gargantuan burst.

PRISONER 2

A big bang.

PRISONER 1

And suddenly... Earth.

PRISONER 2

And on Earth, the first two humans.

PRISONER 1

(Taking on the role of Adam)

Adam...

PRISONER 2

(Likewise)

... and Napoleon Cromwell Augustus Aristotle Arthur Uther Luther Bonaparte King Junior.

PRISONER 1

They have many virtues. Like good memories.

PRISONER 2

"In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue."

PRISONER 1

And good table etiquette.

PRISONER 2

"The two forks always go to the left of the plate, and the spoon and the knife to the right."

PRISONER 1

A good understanding of the formal rules of chess.

PRISONER 2

"A rook can move any number of vacant squares, either horizontally or vertically, until it meets an obstruction in the form of another piece."

PRISONER 1

A good sense of humor.

PRISONER 2

"To get to the other side!"

PRISONER 1

And such, and so forth, and so on, and etc.

PRISONER 2

"I before E except after See Spot Run Run Rudolph con Habsburg-Lothringen died July 1831 3 5 7 11 13 17 gun salute."

(Brief pause.)

But they also had their vices. The greatest of these was curiosity.

PRISONER 1

"Who, what, when, where, how???"

PRISONER 2

Adam and Napoleon. A bite of an apple. 5 billion BC. The Fertile Delta, Mesopotamia. With their mouths, specifically with their maxillary molars and incisors.

They chew on imaginary apples in silence.

PRISONER 2

(An aside)

For dramatic effect, friends, when I say the word "dark," be so kind as to cover your eyes. You may uncover them upon the phrase "the blindingly horrible visage of a cruel and merciless God."

(Back to the story)

AND SUDDENLY IT ALL WENT DARK.

The beaked men cover their eyes.

THE BEAKED MEN

Ooooooh!

PRISONER 2

I'm very afraid, Adam.

PRISONER 1

I'm very afraid, too, Napoleon.

The two quickly dismount from the table. 1 climbs on 2's shoulders. They drape the bloody tarp around their shoulders. 1 holds up the decapitated head of the third patient.

PRISONER 2

AND SUDDENLY THEY WERE FACED WITH THE BLINDINGLY HORRIBLE VISAGE OF A CRUEL AND MERCILESS GOD.

The Beaked Men uncover their eyes.

THE BEAKED MEN

Ahhhhhhh!

PRISONER 1 AND 2

(With the voice of a cruel and merciless God)

FOOLISH MORTALS. YOU HAVE BETRAYED MY TRUST. NOW I CURSE THEE. I CURSE THEE WITH COUGHING, I CURSE THEE WITH NOSE BLEEDS, I CURSE THEE WITH MUMPS, WITH BUMPS, WITH DYSENTERY, WITH SCABIES, WITH RABIES, WITH HYPOCHONDRIA, WITH PNEUMONIA, WITH THE MEASLES, AND I CURSE THEE WITH THE HICCUPS.

The Beaked Men gasp!

PRISONER 1 AND 2

AND IF YOU ARE WONDERING IF THERE IS ANY WAY TO ESCAPE THIS CURSE.... WELL.... THERE IS... YOU HAVE 6 BILLION YEARS TO PROVE TO ME THAT YOU ARE NOT TOTAL DICKS... OR ELSE YOU WILL BE CURSED WITH THE BUBONIC PLAGUE FOR ETERNITY... 6 BILLION YEARS... STARTING... NOW.

Prisoner 1 dismounts Prisoner 2 and throws the props aside in a flurry. They're rushing now, as the future generations of mankind, to prove that they're not total dicks.

PRISONER 1

And for the next 6 billion years, the descendants of Adam and Napoleon set out to prove that they weren't total dicks. But every time they came close to doing something wonderful or beautiful or honorable... something got in the way.

PRISONER 2

Hi! I'm an Egyptian! And I have a beautiful idea for architectural triangles that will use artistry to both glorify a higher spirit AND prove the willful determination of man!

PRISONER 1

Hi! I'm Civilization, and I have a great idea: you should use slaves to make your pyramids!

They high-five. Prisoner 1 holds up the head.

PRISONER 1 AND 2

(As God)

THAT WAS A DICK MOVE.

PRISONER 2

Hi! I'm a Catholic. And I really believe in love, charity, and the spirit of forgiveness.

PRISONER 1

Hi! I'm Civilization, and I have a great idea: you should slaughter a whole bunch of people over there because of an issue with semantics!

They high-five and mime slaughtering a bunch of people. Prisoner 1 holds up the head.

PRISONER 1 AND 2

(As God)

THAT WAS A DICK MOVE.

PRISONER 2

Hi! I'm a pilgrim, and I really want to start a new life for me and my family in the New World, where we can live as up-standing citizens.

PRISONER 1

Hi! I'm Civilization, and I have a great idea: You should steal everything from the Native Americans and then give them small-pox and alcoholism!

They high-five. The head.

PRISONER 1 AND 2

(As God)

THAT WAS A DICK MOVE.

PRISONER 2

Hi! I'm just a member of the male sex, and I really love my wife, and I think I should make her my equal in everything.

PRISONER 1

Hi! I'm Civilization, and I have a great idea: Ignore that impulse.

They high-five. The head.

PRISONER 1 AND 2

(As God)

THAT WAS A DICK MOVE. THAT'S IT. TIME'S UP! I CURSE THEE NOW WITH... THE BUBONIC PLAGUE! SUFFER, PEASANTS!

