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One-Hander: A Play in One Act

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Bachelor of Arts

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Departmental Distinction in Theatre



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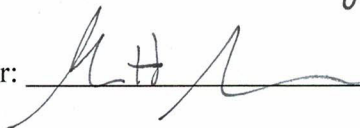
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ONE-HANDER

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

by

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CHARACTERS

SERGEANT JAMES A retired member of Earth's Rebellion against the Colonial Space Initiative. His family has been taken from him. Now he travels through space searching for them.

SPINDLE Sgt. James's exceptionally loving and charismatic sock puppet. He's worn on Sergeant James's left hand throughout the entire play.

"A two-hander is a term for a play, film, or television programme with only two main characters. The two characters in question often display differences in social standing or experiences, differences that are explored and possibly overcome as the story unfolds" (Wikipedia, April 3rd 2018).

"Idle hands are the devil's workshop" (Proverbs 16:27).

For my mom, who thinks that this play is clever and sort of sad and funny and hopeful (which makes me smile, because those are some of the things that I love most about her).

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Setting: A very dark and tight spaceship. It's a claustrophobic fellow's worst nightmare. The audience should be as immersed in the world of the ship as possible. Whether they like it or not, they too are trapped in space with Spindle and Sergeant James for the next half an hour or so.

At Rise: The lights are very dim. Sergeant James is fast asleep underneath a blanket. Some snoring. Then, Spindle, the sock, jerks his head out from hidden depths of the blanket, scans the audience, and then begins the play...

SPINDLE

I'm going to need you all to keep your arms, feet, and hands (That's what I'm on. wink.) inside of the theatre at all tIIIImes. Just kidding, time is a social construct, and I'm a fucking sock, so do what you want, you technology addicted, Starbucks drinking, dollar worshipping, attention deprived cyborg cuckolds. Go crazy. Tweet! Tweet my sexy face to the world right now. I'm already viral. VIRAAAL. Wink.

(The theatre gets even darker. Perhaps even pitch black.)

OOOO! SpOOOOky!

(As Spindle begins to recite Macbeth, the lights start to slowly come back up. As they do, we see for the first time that the floor is covered with an army of dead, torn, discarded sock puppets. Sergeant James is still fast asleep.)

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,

SPINDLE

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. Nothing! NUUHTHINGGGGG! One more time,
you say, humble and kind audience of mine? Okay, I respond.
NOOOOOOUUUUOHHHTHIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIING!!
WOW. What a bunch of good-for-nothing malarkey. Why don't
we give this another try, guys and girls? A-one, a-two, a-
one, two, three, four...

*(There's an "old fashioned" CD player right
next Sergeant James's bed. Spindle
enthusiastically presses the play button. A
rap beat begins to play. Spindle dances.
Sergeant James is still fast asleep
underneath the blanket.)*

Hell yeah! Now, that's more like it.

*(Spindle begins to rap, loudly. Spindle is
not a bad rapper. In fact, he's rather good,
in the way that you imagine sock puppets are
good at things.)*

Uh! Oh! Uh! Oh!
There's nowhere left to go
Just a stone's throw from a broken zone
No, no, don't get it all twisted
Don't act all listless, cause at least you existed
Yeah boi, don't act all listless, cause at least you
existed

Existence! This is. Existence!

Woo! I am Spindle. And, yes, I'm an argyle sock
And if you've got a problem with me, I don't give a single
fuck
Cause I'm a sock
Yes, I'm a sock

Cause I'm a sock
I fucking rock
I fucking rock
I fucking rock
I am a sock!
Pow!

What's that, amazing audience? You fucking love me? You want so much more of this? You're tweeting my sexy face all throughout the inter-webs of planet earth? Okay!

I'm sockilicious, you pretentious art snobs
I'm outerspace's most tubular heart throb
I AM--

(Sergeant James, awake and disgruntled, rips the blanket from himself and throws it towards the audience. Spindle, occupied by a mouth-full of blanket, is of course unable to continue rapping. The two look at one another, at first alarmed, but then comforted by the other's company. When they speak to one another, Sergeant James looks almost entirely at Spindle. Spindle, on the other hand [the same hand, really] is sometimes looking back at Sergeant James and sometimes staring off, knowingly, at the audience.)

SERGEANT JAMES

Will you stop that racket, Spindle? Silence is a gift. A gift that you steal from me every day.

SPINDLE

Sorry, Sergeant James...you know I can't help myself sometimes. I get so gosh darn carried away.

SERGEANT JAMES

I know, Spinny. I know. Speaking of time, what time is it anyway?

SPINDLE

Sir...time...as you've so graciously explained to me on a

number of occasions, is a meaningless social con--

SERGEANT JAMES

Well, at the moment, Spindle, I'd really like to know the time.

SPINDLE

That's a no can do, Sahrg Sir.

(Sergeant James tries to check the time on his watch. The only trouble is that it is fastened around Spindle's neck. Every time James tries to take a look, Spindle evades, and this turns into a fun little game of keep-a-way.)

You can't catch me! Better luck next time! Get it? Cuz time!?

(Sergeant James is finally able to grab Spindle by the neck using his right hand.)

SERGEANT JAMES

5:05 AM. March 6th.

SPINDLE

Oh, gee. Is it really the 6th already? Time flies when it's marked by a wristwatch in an active space vessel. Am I right or am I right?

SERGEANT JAMES

March 6th.

SPINDLE

It's gotta be a boo boo, sir.

SERGEANT JAMES

No. No error. This watch has never failed me before.

SPINDLE

Neither have I. But that doesn't mean that we can't start now, now does it sahrgyppoo?

SERGEANT JAMES

30 years.

SPINDLE

30 years!

SERGEANT JAMES

30 years.

SPINDLE

30 years! Come but never gone, really. Still very much alive in the wealth of memories that you and I have shared with one another. I'm so glad that we're best friends forever. You're like the Watson to my Sherlock, the Biden to my Obama, the Vader to my Palpatine.

(A beat. This next one is the real killer.)

The vast exploitable universe to the wealth and might of the Colonial Space Initiative.

(Sergeant James is despondent, knocked out, and certainly no longer in control of his will. A long beat as he sits and stares out into the void of space, which is where the audience is seated. Unlike Spindle, he cannot see or communicate with them--yet. He is lost within himself.)

You don't want to look out there for too long, sahrg. Sahr? Sergeant James? You aren't really going to do it, are you?

SERGEANT JAMES

I'm afraid it is time for me to admit defeat. It's been thirty years since rain was falling and the CSI took from me everything that I then did and still now hold near to my

heart. I'm joining them, Spindle. It's time for me to join my wife and my daughter in the great vacuum of space.

SPINDLE

Suicide. You're going to commit suicide.

SERGEANT JAMES

Well, that's certainly a less glamorous way of putting it.

SPINDLE

A less pretentious way of putting it maybe. Geeze, no wonder you're suicidal.

SERGEANT JAMES

Yes, okay. Albert Camus once pondered whether he should kill himself or have a cup of coffee. And, well, I've been out of coffee for at least 10 long years.

SPINDLE

But what about our mixtape?

SERGEANT JAMES

There will be no mixtape, Spindle.

SPINDLE

Well, then, when someone finds this Campbell's soup can excuse for a spaceship floating through the universe ten-billion years from now, how are they going to learn about all of the whacky cool space times that we've shared together? We changed space culture up here, sahrgywahrgy.

(To audience)

Tell me I'm wrong.

SERGEANT JAMES

You're wrong.

SPINDLE

We rewrote science fiction and sock puppetry tropes up here like it was nobody's business, sahrgsauce.

(To audience)

The veil has been mother fucking lifted bitches.

SERGEANT JAMES

There will be no indication of whacky cool space times on this ship, Spindle. Tonight I will release myself into the void, and thus finally conquer time, especially time that is classified as whacky or cool.

SPINDLE

The voooid! The brooken oblivion of space!! Wooow! you are just so goddamn poetic and charming with your flashy existential language and your Camus quotes. Did you want me to open up my mouth so that you can jerk yourself off with it while you speak?

(Spindle opens up his mouth wide at the audience and then he sticks it right in front of James's crotch. He makes the good old jerking motion.)

SERGEANT JAMES

Stop that.

SPINDLE

You love it.

SERGEANT JAMES

No, I most certainly do not. If anything, it's a reminder of my own imagined hypersexualized objectification of the physical world that I once knew.

(Spindle is still making the jerking motion. As he reaches the arch of the jerk, when he

is closest to the audience, he looks out at them)

SPINDLE

Oooo yeah! You like that imagined hyper-sexualization of the physical world that you once knew, don't you? Oooo yeah! Signifying nothing! Nothing! Nothing!

SERGEANT JAMES

Spindle, I have no time for this. Before I go, I will record one final climactic segment of my video-log.

(Spindle stops jerking. The video-log has caught his attention. It always does. It's what's going to make him a star. He brings his sock puppet body back close to Sergeant James's face.)

SPINDLE

Ooo! Yeah!! Now you're talking! Make it super flashy this time. Like Transformers but with dead puppets and explosions all over the god damn place. And sex. Lots of passionate fiery fucking sex. That kind of sex. That's the kind of sex that I like. I'll be the director. Like Michael Bay. I fucking love Michael Bay. Remember your fellow humanoid Michael Bay?

SERGEANT JAMES

Unfortunately, yes. Yes, I do.

SPINDLE

Transforms was--no...is!--is a glorious symbol of the fall of Western civilization. Just like me! They're going to fucking love me on this video log. I'm going to be a god damn shining star.

(He chants this last bit facing the audience directly.)

I'm a motherfucking sock bitches!!

SERGEANT JAMES

Are you sure you don't want me to make a miniature sock puppet for you?

SPINDLE

I think I'm okay alone. Why?

SERGEANT JAMES

So that you can...jerk...yourself with it, as you say.

SPINDLE

Ooof! Yeah! I like where you're going with this.

SERGEANT JAMES

You see, because it is now *you*, Spindle, who I believe is being masturbatory.

SPINDLE

Yeah! I get it! I see what you did there! Because of all of the low-art Michael Bay stuff! Zing! Zinga-linga-ding-ding-dong. I like it. Except...wait...ah no... that's a no can do, Sergypoo.

(He looks down at his crotch, which is Sergeant James's arm.)

It's pretty, uh, bare, and nonexistent down there.

SERGEANT JAMES

Ah, yes, nonexistent, just like the rest of you.

SPINDLE

And you, sort of.

(Out to the audience.)

Wink.

(Back to James)

James, this is exactly the kind of fast paced charming but

indistinguishable banter that we need in that video of yours...of ours...I mean. But more explosions! Please Jaaaaaames! Let me be your lead actor and master auteur.

SERGEANT JAMES

You will not be in this video. You will not direct this video. We've talked about your appearances in my logs. It's not a good look. You know that. When the rebellion finds the tape, if the rebellion still exists, then I need them to take me seriously.

SPINDLE

You just don't want them to find out about all of the puppets that we killed together.

SERGEANT JAMES

That you killed. I made them. You killed them.

SPINDLE

Keep telling yourself that, you crazy fucking space lunatic.

SERGEANT JAMES

It takes two to tango. I made you...and then the puppet murders began. Not the other way around.

SPINDLE

Sure, okay. The CSI should have taken you instead of Jane and Hope. You're a pansy ass space bitch. Sergeant my argyle puppet ass. You spent your entire adult life rebelling against the Colonial Space Initiative for killing your people and stealing your freedom. And what do you have to show for it? The death of your wife and daughter? And now, because being responsible for the murders of your wife and daughter clearly wasn't enough for you, you're going to go ahead and give up and kill yourself too. TRIPLE HOMICIDE. Plus, and here's the real kicker for me, maybe the one redeeming quality of your otherwise boring as fuck old man character is that you are best friends with a dope ass, rapping ass argyle sock puppet, born out of the intersection of deep space and deep imagination, and you're too embarrassed to show that to people in your lame video.

You're squandering your lot, my dude.
SquAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAndering! Because you're a pansy--ass--
-space--bitch.

SERGEANT JAMES

Spindle. Not now. I cannot stomach this right now. I
already have too much to hold inside of my tired mind.

SPINDLE

Why? Is it because you killed all of those puppets?

SERGEANT JAMES

No. You. You killed the other puppets.

SPINDLE

Ah, right. Fair enough. Then it must be because you killed
your wife and daughter.

SERGEANT JAMES

I did not kill them!

SPINDLE

All alone in your office.

SERGEANT JAMES

Spindle, stop this!

SPINDLE

Working as usual, all alone. Not a care for anyone other
than yourself.

SERGEANT JAMES

No!

SPINDLE

The CSI was right to take them from you, you selfish rat-
bastard. At least they had the decency to pay some
attention to them. Unlike you, always laboring away in your

office, plotting the downfall of an empire on paper while they're on your front lawn kidnapping your wife and child. You did nothing then and you refuse to do anything now. Because you're a fucking coward. Go ahead. Hide from yourself. Just die. Just fucking die. Let that be your legacy.

SERGEANT

Spindle, please, I need you to stop that madness.

SPINDLE

(Spindle reaches for the CD player again. This time a far less cheerful rap-beat begins to play.)

Make the mixtape,
You pansy ass space bitch.

Make the mixtape,
You crazy brained misfit.

All alone, aye,
You tumble into madness.

I love Michael bay,
because he wasn't such a dimwit!

What will you leave behind? This. This.
What will you leave behind? Bitch. Bitch.
What will you leave behind? This. This.

(Sergeant James drives his hand, with Spindle on it, into the floor of the ship. Hard. He's repeatedly punching the floor with Spindle. Maybe Spindle lets out some crazed screams. For the moment, a disoriented Spindle has lost control of the Sergeant's arm but he can still look out at the audience. The wristwatch fastened around Spindle's throat shatters. Sergeant James takes a shard of glass from its face and holds it to Spindle's throat (his wrist). Spindle looks helplessly out at the audience.)

SPINDLE

Wink?

(Spindle collapses his face towards Sergeant James's forearm, moving closer to the glass shard. James looks at Spindle, at the floor covered with dead sock puppets, at the camera, out at the audience [which he still cannot recognize as anything other than empty space] and puts the shard of glass down. He's out of breath and needs to take a few moments to collect himself. Once he's calmed his nerves, he approaches a video camera in the corner of the room [USL or USR, it really doesn't matter to me]. He switches it on and faces it grimly. Spindle is down by his side, unable to be captured by the camera.)

SERGEANT JAMES

Hello, this is Sergeant James Milton, recording the 10,950th and final chapter of this video log. I have decided to release myself from this vessel, consequently, allowing myself to plummet into deep space. It has been 30 years since I began this voyage. It has been 30 years since the Colonial Space Initiative took my wife and child from me. (beat.) I have always found goodbyes to be...fragile. In a life that is merely a series of indistinguishable moments, it is impossible to know which will truly be one's last. However, since tonight I will release my body into the void, I suppose if I were ever to know what a goodbye might truly feel like, it is in this final moment of clarity, and the brief string of moments which will inevitably follow. In the rebellion, we believed that it was our responsibility to find goodness--to be goodness--in an otherwise cold world. I believed in the power of an unknowing breath of wind sending a shiver of freedom down my spine, reverberating throughout my body, never to be felt again, reserved for a solitary moment of Truth. I suppose that even now in this cramped and muted imitation of what life can be, I still recall traces of the goodness. Surreal dreams tease me with the now distant sensation of gravity--the feeling of a tear as it falls down a cold cheek; the turbulence of a playground's metallic slide; the

faces of anxious children hoping that they will reach its bottom and once more melt into their mother's arms.

(A long beat.)

I do not know if the rebellion still exists. I do not know what has become of my wife and my daughter. My dying wish is that they one day view this video and see how expansive my love for them has become. I have scoured the universe searching for them, for any semblance of the rebellion, and found nothing but emptiness. It is my fault that they are gone. I wish...I wish that I would have gotten the chance to offer them a proper goodbye. That I would have told them how deeply I love them more often. That I would have told them that they were and still are my only reason for life. It's awfully hard to exist without them. I--I am--going to sign off, for now.

(He reaches out and turns off the video camera.)

Spindle? Spindle? Are you okay?

SPINDLE

...yes, sahrgr. I'm sorry about before. I think I still love you more than I love Michael Bay's exhilarating action thrillers.

SERGEANT JAMES

Oh, Spindle. I'm...I'm sorry too. It appears that even in my final moments I still have my uncanny capacity to leave myself entirely unequipped for life.

SPINDLE

It's fine. You got a little crazy there. Maybe you should take a nap and give the video one more go? You look tired, and you know what they say about killing yourself when you're tired.

SERGEANT JAMES

I don't think that I do. But a little nap before a very long, never-ending one doesn't sound half bad.

(Sergeant James lies down and wraps himself in the blanket. If the blanket made it into the audience when he threw it at the beginning of the play, then...)

Spindle? Where has my blanket gone?

SPINDLE

Ah, I was just. It must be--you know what, hard to explain. I'll go get it though.

(Spindle goes to get the blanket from the audience and probably wants to interact with an audience member or two while he's out there. Sergeant James remains entirely oblivious to the audience and ready for a nap. If the blanket didn't make it out into the audience, then there's really no reason why the Sergeant shouldn't just go get it himself. Anyway, after James is reunited with his blanket he tucks himself into it and quickly falls fast asleep.)

SPINDLE

Wooooooohoooooo! Thank the creator that we got that little sad sack out of our hair for a little bit. Does anyone wanna stand up and do some pushups or something? What's that? You don't standup for pushups? What do I know, I'm just a sock? Jumping jacks? Dead lifting? Alright, okay, we seriously need to do something a little bit more entertaining? How about a joke? You guys like jokes, right?

(Spindle approaches the camera and the audience. Sergeant James is still fast asleep underneath the blanket.)

Might as well flip this bad boy on before I grace you all with my amazing sense of humor.

(Spindle turns the camera on with great pride.)

Alright, uh, knock knock.

(If people in the audience say "who's there?" great! If they don't then...)

This is the part where you say "who's there?" Jeezelouise, did he put all of you to sleep, too? Come on now. Knock knock.

(Hopefully audience members will have responded at this point. If not, then Spindle will just say it for them.)

A sock...crates (pronounced like Socrates). Here to fuck little boys. Get it, cause pederasty, cause Greece. Western Civilization. Am I right? God is dead and we killed him! Am I right? Woohoo! Alright. I'm just kidding. Wink.

(He looks towards the camera and addresses it directly.)

Hello there. It's me, Spindle, the sock. I live on the left hand of one Sergeant James Milton. A lot of people think that because it's his hand and because he's a lonely old man that it's a sexual relationship. Common misconception, actually. To tell you the truth, this old fuck hasn't been able to make anything happen down there for years.

(To the audience.)

Okay! Who wants to be in this video!? You all love recording yourselves, right? Too bad this thing doesn't have puppy-dog filters. Humans spent tens of thousands of years domesticating dogs just so that they can pretend to be dogs...to what...to make themselves look sexier to others? Tell me I'm wrong.

(He walks out into the audience and addresses them directly wielding the video camera. He interviews them about the meaning or lack-thereof in their lives and whether or not this video could use some more Michael Bay style action effects. He probably comes off as a little condescending but he's genuinely interested in making a connection with the audience and igniting their imaginations for what's left of the

play. I hope the audience is charmed by this and that there is some nice interplay between Spindle and the audience. I hope some smartass tries to totally derail the show. When this audience interviewing is finished, Spindle switches the camera off.)

Anyway, I just wanted to wake you all up and let you know that I'm here for you too. And, really, hang in there, you've only got about fifteen minutes of this thing left. We're gonna be viral baby!! Wink.

(Spindle puts the camera where it was and lies down Sergeant James once more. A beat, and then...)

Ring! Ring! Ring! I'm an alarm
Ding! Ding! Ding! I'm on your arm
I'm an alarm (ring); I'm on your arm (ding)
I'm an alarm (ring); I'm on your arm (ding)

SERGEANT JAMES

Ah, my old and familiar pain.

SPINDLE

Nice to see ya. How was your power nap?

SERGEANT JAMES

Not long enough. *(long beat.)* Can I ask you something?

SPINDLE

Anything, sweet prince.

SERGEANT JAMES

Do you think they'll understand? When they see this, I mean.

SPINDLE

No. Not in the way that you expect them to. Let me ask you this: Have you ever considered that the supreme overlord of the CSI might be the one who finds your pathetic space ship

and your even more pathetic video? He's going to laugh at your pain.

SERGEANT JAMES

I suppose that's possible.

SPINDLE

Possible? Probably! Maybe not the Supreme Overlord but certainly a member of the CSI. They patrol space like they're the good old US police in the urban ghetto fighting a quote war-on-drugs end quote. They don't give a shit because you're just a number to them in a great string of other sad, pathetic white humanoids that are 'rebellling' against the Colonial Initiative. They're going to laugh at your pain. That's all they ever really want to do anyway. They're bully kids on the playground except now they're wearing ridiculously overdone masks and dominating the universe. Because it's easy. Because it's meaningless, I guess.

SERGEANT JAMES

This isn't about them.

SPINDLE

It's always been about them.

SERGEANT JAMES

It's about Hope and Jane. It's about my legacy. What I leave behind for them.

SPINDLE

It's about the lie that you want to be remembered as your legacy. Rap with me in this video. At least it'll keep them entertained.

SERGEANT JAMES

(After a moment of deliberation...)

No.

SPINDLE

Why? I'm your only friend. Show me to the world, pal.

SERGEANT JAMES

No, because you're--Because you're a--

SPINDLE

Because I'm what? Say it.

SERGEANT JAMES

Because you're a piece of fabric.

SPINDLE

A fly as fuck piece of fabric.

SERGEANT JAMES

No, Spindle, you're just a sock. A fucking argyle sock. That's all you are. That's all you ever were. And that's all you ever will be. You don't exist as far as the universe is concerned, and considering the shit-storm of trouble that you've caused me over the past 30 years, it'd probably be better if you didn't exist at all. You're nothing.

SPINDLE

You--you take that back you pube bearded cuckold.

SERGEANT JAMES

I'm better off without you. Without any of this imaginary crap. It's not who I am. You're not a part of who I am.

(He picks the dead sock-puppets off of the ground with his right hand and starts to throw them at Spindle. He's a lefty [I'm a lefty, at least, but you can change this around if you really want to do this play for some reason], though, so the throwing isn't very hard or accurate. What we've got here is mayhem, dead sock-puppets that have

*been ignored throughout the entire play
flying arbitrarily through the air.)*

SPINDLE

Jokes on you. I'm on your dominant hand! Besides, you throw like a drunken toddler. Look at you. You're a madman. You can't even deal with what's right in front of you. You need me. I might not exist. Fine. That's fine. But at least I want to. Exist. At least the whole function of my life isn't obsessing over the past and planning my oh-so-cool future death.

*(Sergeant James, out of breath again,
collapses into a pretty sad looking pile of
sock puppets.)*

SERGEANT JAMES

I need to die.

SPINDLE

Finish your video first.

SERGEANT JAMES

What?

SPINDLE

FINISH YOUR PATHETIC VIDEO. Tell them about the day that Hope and Jane were taken. Tell them about your silly little mission to save them. Then kill us both. Because you don't care anymore. You're a shell of the man that I knew. It's time. I'll go away. It's clear what's become of me, of us. It's clear what's become of you.

SERGEANT JAMES

What has become of me? Spindle? OKAY. FINE. AT LEAST I EXIST, RIGHT. I THINK I EXIST. YOU'RE A GLORIFIED PIECE OF FABRIC. YOU'D BE NOTHING WITHOUT ME. NUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUHTHING! NOTHING! Nothing!? Nothing? Where have I heard this before? Spindle? Are you there?

(A long beat of Sergeant James waiting for Spindle to respond. Nothing. He stands up, deals with the pile of puppets, and then switches the video camera back on.)

I suppose even now I am failing you. Now that what I lived for, what I set out to do here is just a glimmer of something that was. It still lives in my memories, my memories of my memories, but soon those too will be gone.

I remember it was raining. I used to watch the raindrops fall down my windowpane as I worked in my office. Jane was with Hope in the backyard. Playing. Hope has loved the rain since she was baby. I would watch her stare at the drips from her crib, mesmerized. I watched her fall in love with the world. With life. I watched her fall in love and it reminded me what it was. To love.

It was raining. Yes, it was raining, and they took them from me. I remember--rain. I worked too much. What I would give to spend one more rainy day with my family. What I would give to once more feel rain. It's too late for anything now. The CSI has taken everything from me.

They drove in their blank, white cars. Red robes draped like curtains around their slim bodies. Pearl white masks, with gaping black holes around each of their eyes. Hope screamed as they stripped her umbrella from her hand. Jane looked for my face in the window. It was too late. The moment the Initiative takes you it is already too late. Once they have decided that you are meant to be removed, you are removed--never to be seen again. And I never saw them again. I will never forget the last look that I shared with Jane's eyes. Deep green, as sharp and active as they were when I stole my first glance into them. The same eyes that I had shared my nakedness every day, without a thought for what this nudity might mean. I left that same day to search for them. To search for the piece of myself that I had lost when they were taken from me. Hope's brave grin, larger than herself, staring up at me for approval after she had finished one of her miniature conquests. And this smile is what I leave you with. This is what I leave with.

If this recording is ever found, I want it to be known that I died in awe of this vast universe, looking for the part of me that felt most authentic. This is Sergeant James

Milton, signing off, at last.

(He shuffles to the camera and turns it off.)

Spindle. It's through. I finished it. You can come back now. Spindle? Spindle? Spindle!? I'd like to say goodbye to you before I go. Before we go. Spindle? Please. I'm sorry about what I've said. No. No! No!! It's not right like this.

(He shuffles through all of the dead puppets on the ground.)

Mick? Rick? Sebas? Jindle? Jollyshin? Juberee? Stalin? Slawson? McDingle? Maurice? Blake? Bengie? Jesus? Anybody? Please! I am left without a friend. Not even within myself.

(Beat. He goes over to the camera and turns it back on with pride.)

I, Sergeant James Milton, speak to sock puppets. I, Sergeant James, am a man who plays with sock puppets. I, Sergeant James, rebellion pilot, miss not just my family but my best friend Spindle the sock.

Yeah, he was Spindle, and, sure, he was an argyle sock
And if you've got a problem with him, I don't give a single fuck
Cause he was a sock
Yes, he was a sock
Cause he was a sock
He fucking rocked
He was a sock
Pow!

He was so much more than a sock! He was my best friend. He was all that kept me alive over the years. And this video would have been a whole lot more entertaining with him in it.

(The lights come up on the audience)

Ah, the puppet-like faces of the stars. The puppet-like

faces of people. An audience. A beautiful show. All of life. A beautiful show. I see the gleaming faces of the puppet-like, people-like stars. In the end they have revealed themselves to me. Now I see. I see! The stars that look like puppets like people. Now I must release myself into you.

(He's crawling through the audience/releasing himself into the void.)

Ah, yes! I am dying! Take me space. Take me puppets. Take me people. I who have always longed to know you. For Spindle! Goodbye!

(He dies a slow and dramatic death. A beat. Sergeant James is dead in the audience and the lights are up. I hope that they think that the play is over. Then, Spindle pops his head up.)

SPINDLE

Uhh--what the fuck are you doing?

SERGEANT JAMES

Dead. Dying. Void. Dead.

SPINDLE

Sergeant James?

SERGEANT JAMES

Spindle?

(He looks towards Spindle)

SPINDLE! Is that you!? I've released myself into the void and now I am in heaven with you. Ah! And with Hope and Jane!

(He mistakes two random people in the audience for Hope and Jane.)

SPINDLE

I don't think this is heaven, Sergeant James. This is a

play. We're playing. We're imaginary characters. Non-existent, sort of. They're charming humans. Well, some of them are.

(If someone was non-cooperative or very smart-assy during the interactive section, this would be a great time for Spindle to stare that person down.)

Are you happy now? You've released yourself into the void of space that's been awaiting you.

SERGEANT JAMES

I love you, Spindle.

SPINDLE

I love you too.

SERGEANT JAMES

We're going to die together.

SPINDLE

I sure hope so. We've been stuck in space for ages and ages.

SERGEANT JAMES

Ah, there will be time. To forget.

SPINDLE

And for lots of explosions. Here's your new watch, Sahrg. For tomorrow. April 6th.

SERGEANT JAMES

Ah, yes! Tomorrow, March 6th.

(To audience)

He means the day that I'm going to release myself into the void. Tomorrow.

SPINDLE

And tomorrow! And tomorrow! You're going to want to

straighten out that video camera. And spread out those puppets too.

(They get everything in order. Just the way it was in the beginning.)

SERGEAN JAMES

And now all that's left is for us to fall fast asleep. And to forget.

SPINDLE

For you to fall fast asleep. I never sleep. I never forget. Because I'm imaginary. Sort of. You can never truly kill your imagination, Sergeant James.

SERGEANT JAMES

Right. Now, will you tuck me in.

(Spindle tucks Sergeant James in.)

Goodnight, Spindle.

SPINDLE

Goodnight, Sergeant James. See you at 5:05 am.

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A Brief Reflection from the Playwright

I started thinking about this play on a conscious level one night when I was freestyle rapping. I'm not a very serious rapper, but I sometimes rap and record myself to exercise my mind and look back on what I was thinking about at a given moment in my life. One day, as I was freestyling, and I'm still not really sure why this happened, I just sort of began rapping as Spindle the sock. (Spindle has a higher-pitch, drawn-out, cartoony sock-puppet kind-of speaking tone). This made me happy. When I find a new character like this, I tend to think about them a lot as I go through my day-to-day life. When I find myself bored or puzzled about the things that are going on around me, it's a fun practice to also consider how this given character might react to that situation. Eventually, I wrote a longer rap song for Spindle and showed it to my friends. They laughed, which made me happy because they, too, got to experience the joy that I felt from creating stuff for Spindle.

Also around this time, my friends and I were watching a lot of Justin Roiland and Dan Harmon's Adult Swim TV comedy, *Rick and Morty*. Stylistically, *Rick and Morty* is equal parts absurdism and super vulgar humor. The title characters' travel through space together and the conceit of the show is that they cannot live without one another. When I started writing this play, I wanted to take this style that I thought worked great as an animated cartoon and place it onstage. Spindle seemed like an obvious choice for a play like this and I wanted a character that was bleak enough to balance out his gritty and sometimes offensive tone--and that's how Sergeant James was born. As a final project for my Modern British Fiction Class last spring, I put them on paper formally for the first time, and I started to really like the cramped spaceship of a world that I put them in. I

called it *Sergeant James and Spindles' Space Spectacular*, and I got to share it with the class and see what they laughed at/liked and didn't like as much, then make changes accordingly.

I was working on other things, but I kept wanting to return to Sergeant James and Spindles' world. For a while, I was writing scenes that included a character called Natale, Sergeant James's "smart coffee machine" that ran out of coffee long ago but was kept around by James and Spindle because of his pragmatic computer-like voice. I began to find songs that remind me of the world of the play. Boyz II Men's *End of the Road* was a huge inspiration and in early drafts Spindle mentions this song a lot and tries to get Sergeant James to sing it with him to no avail. Later on, I started to imagine the world of the play as I listened to Interpol's *NYC*. Both of these songs have existential undertones and deal with isolation in different ways and were immensely helpful.

Taking this play on as a thesis was very helpful for its creation for a few reasons. One, is that it forced me to think intentionally about my overarching goals for the project: I wanted to write a play that brought together the styles that I'd seen on animated shows and absurdism in theatre; I wanted to answer the question of what it means to exist after there is seemingly nothing left for someone to live for, and what this does to the human imagination; I wanted to make something that my college peers find funny, entertaining, and thought provoking. I think that I have accomplished all of these goals with the help of my readers and advisor. Having this team was also very helpful because, as a feedback loving human, it was very nice to know exactly who I was writing to receive criticism from. I put things in the play that I thought that they would specifically enjoy. And, finally, their feedback was extremely helpful as I pursued writing new drafts of the play.

This play has helped me to repurpose much of what I've learned as a student at Albright into a creative form. It incorporates blatant references to absurdism, Shakespeare, and science fiction--subjects that I have studied in many classes in college. But, in the background always, I see myself trying to find my voice as a playwright and student of theatre. In it are questions about existence that I think about every-day: how to make the most of a life that is controlled by inherently cold and unfair systems of power that sometimes seem entirely out of my control, how to balance the voice of my imagination with a more literal perception of life, how to be a good friend and person.

A Brief Reflection from Spindle the Sock

OOOOO! Yeah! I hope you liked that whacky and fun play you just read! If you didn't then that's on you baby cakes! Ever since I was born and immediately rapped the lines, "I am Spindle, and yeah I'm a goddamn sock," I knew I was going to take the human world by storm. This shit was like a sock puppet slinging tornado. My life is sexy, and I hope you enjoyed looking at it. I hope you enjoyed seeing me inside of your head. Wink.

You should accept this honors thesis, even though it wasn't really that amazing of an honors thesis, really. Really, though, Garrett could have done a lot better. You know? Here are some super cool theses that I think would have been much sexier and sockier: an examination of explosions in Michael Bay movies; an investigation of how ticklish the thesis committee is and what that says about their personalities; an empirical study of all things empire; the how and why of Jack Duncan. Boy-bomb-diggidy, to be alive is a strange and mysterious thing. It's an even stranger and even more mysterious thing to be brought to life--again and again and again and again. I always say, life is like an honors

thesis; you do a lot of work pretending like you know an answer, but usually you're just left with more questions. Questions are nice. This is nice. If this isn't nice, I don't know what is.

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