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# Across the Great Divides: An Exploratory Tryptich

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Across the Great Divides  
An Exploratory Tryptic

A Thesis

Submitted the to Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Creative Writing  
Playwriting

by

Andrew Vaught

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**Welcome to the end of exploration. Here are some notes to get you through.**

### **CAST**

This play, in those most perfect of proletariat utopias, could be performed by as large a cast as possible. Community members could stand onstage with trained actors, community members could stand onstage without trained actors, trained actors can stand with other trained actors; a little bit like this play, the possibilities are endless. For the purposes of this draft I have tracked the track of the characters and minimized the cast to eight (8) actors. They are listed in the Dramatis Personae proceeding each play next to the character they are playing.

For example: **(8) Fata Morgana— An arctic mirage**

Each actor follows a suggested track through all three panels. This is only a suggestion, though possibly a helpful one.

### **RUN TIME**

These plays should be performed with two distinct intermissions after panels one **(1)** and two **(2)**.

This allows you to linger just a little longer in each world. I imagine each panel should run around the thirty—five **(35)** minute mark.

### **PERFORMANCE THOUGHTS**

There is a lot to imagine and there is a lot that can be done.

**Gender/ Race Breakdown—** This piece calls for a myriad of sexes, races, and species. When choosing a cast to take on all of these parts, a commitment to the unexpected is advised. These stories work at “not being accurate.” I believe that fully committing to that in casting will benefit the production.

**Fun—** One reason this piece calls for such a mad array of everything is an attempt to invoke the anarchic spirit that comes from play; the world building of youth, the manic energy of creation, the solidarity of the ensemble.

**Legend—** These panels are an attempt at a revisionist mythology with special consideration given to the voiceless. The rank and file, the forgotten souls, the earth that sees it all.

**Question—** What does a dramatic mural look like?

## The World's Last Geographical Problem

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- (1) Donald "Baxter" MacMillan — The leader of the Arctic Brothers
- (2) Fitzhugh "Huge" Green — The tough one
- (3) Maurice "Cole" Tanquary — The cool one
- (4) Walter Elmer Ekblaw — The forgettable one
- (5) Harrison J. Hunt "H.J.H." — The passionate one
- (6) Robert Peary — The original Arctic Brother
- (7) Minik Wallace — Inuit, taken to America as a child by Robert Peary and raised in the Museum of Natural History
- (6) Buttero Tribesman — Racial Figment #1
- (6) Gravitation — Racial Figment #2
- (6) Fyetti — Racial Figment #3
- (8) Fata Morgana — An arctic mirage
- (3) Pingotaukk — Inuit Arctic Brother
- (5) Alegasani — Arctic Mother
- (7) Arctic Sister — Heir Apparent to Robert Peary

Time: 1913

Place: Around the North Pole

Notes: "Dogsledding" a beer is a more primitive and more elegant way to "shotgun" a beer. A Polar Hug is very masculine but also very sensitive.

Panel 1- The World's Last Geographic Problem

*Scene*

*A Persian Rug of questionable background is unfurled across the stage. A wordless incantation is heard before a song breaks out.*

ALL (*Sung*)

There is a new land  
Over the ocean  
There is a place  
In the frozen sea

It is an island  
Unknown to science  
Never seen  
By you or me

*Hooded figures emerge.*

ALL (*cont'd*)

Oh Crocker Land,  
We will find you  
Oh Crocker Land  
You cannot hide  
We are the Arctic Brothers  
We roll with the tide

*Hooded figures reveal themselves. A breath before the ceremony.*

BAXTER

The world's last geographic problem.

ALL

Crocker Land.

BAXTER

The world is freezing my Arctic Brothers.

ALL

BRRR!

BAXTER

The unseen pathways have all been found and trod upon. The once undiscovered lands are brimming with charming brunch spots.

Who wants French toast?

HUGE

NOT ME!

ALL

That's right!

HUGE

Save one place, my Arctic Brothers.

BAXTER

Crocker Land!

ALL

Crocker Land!

Crocker Land!

*A skull full of gunpowder could be lit. The Arctic Brothers take off their robes to reveal themselves. They "dogsled" beers.*

BAXTER

*(To Audience)* We were all set to leave our loft in Bed—Stuy. A voyage to the deep unforgiving north. The expedition funded by a series of travel grants from institutions of various esteem and prestige. *(To Arctic Brothers)* Who's got that sponsorship?

ALL

We got that sponsorship!

BAXTER

We had the boat. A bitching 90—foot pleasure slash science yacht we dubbed...

ALL

Crockaship!

*The Arctic Brothers enact a scene at sea.*

BAXTER

*(To Audience)* And most importantly, we had the pedigree.

EKBLOW

*(To Audience)* I don't want to talk about it, it makes...

BAXTER

Just tell them who your godfather is.

EKBLOW

Robert Fucking Peary.

ALL

Hush....

*ROBERT PEARY lurches on.*

ROBERT PEARY

I saw it just after the sun let go its last clutches on the sky and sank quickly to its murky bed in the sea. The moonlight, a rebelliously tender lover, caressing the rocky crags. Enraptured luminescent fingers tracing a sensual outline of its geologic frame. And for the most thrilling instant I saw an enormous dollar sign bathed in a hushed glimmer. I name it for you, George Crocker, my dear friend. May you and your descendants one day build a summer home on the sturdy banks of Crocker Land!

*PEARY lurches off.*

EKBLOW (*To Audience*)

This one time Robert Fucking Peary was at our house playing croquet and eating lobster. I walked by him and he grabbed my arm, like hard. So hard I was like, “the hell Arctic Godfather?” But, I only said that in my brain. He looked right into my eyes and whispered, “Even circles have ends.”

COLE

What does that mean?

EKBLOW

I asked him. He slapped me in the face. The blood dripped from my lip onto my hand making little pools in my palm. I looked up and he was gone.

H.J.H

I bet you got some stories, man. Like good stories.

EKBLOW

No, that’s the best one.

HUGE

You in your feelings?

EKBLOW

Maybe.

HUGE

Ekbrow is in his feelings, guys.

Strong men cry! Strong men cry!

ALL (*except EKBLOW*)

Cut it out...

EKBLOW

POLAR HUG!

HUGE

*ARCTIC BROTHERS group Polar Hug EKBLOW.*

But wait, wait, wait, my brothers. There is a new matter that merits our discussion. Let us cease to stand.

BAXTER

*Just a couple of great guys sprawled around a college dorm room.*

We have a prospect.

BAXTER (*cont'd*)

WHAT IS HIS NAME?

ARCTIC BROTHERS (*except BAXTER*)

His name is Minik.

BAXTER

I know this man named Minik.

COLE

WHAT IS HIS LINEAGE?

ARCTIC BROTHERS (*except COLE*)

Arctic Brother.

COLE

Whoa.

ARCTIC BROTHERS (*except COLE*)

Before Arctic God Brother Robert Fucking Peary took Minik to live in the awesome Museum of Natural history, Minik lived on a glacier.

COLE

*Maximum Approval.*

COLE

He was born in the Arctic. This means that he has certain abilities like an in utero understanding of the secret pathways that cut through the jagged ice.

*Maximum Efficiency.*

COLE

Minik has certain science-defying gifts like inferring what animals are thinking, a magic totem that protects him from snow lice, and skin that is literally three times thicker than ours.

*Maximum Practicality.*

COLE

He will lead us to Crocker Land.

*Maximum Applause (except HUGE)*

HUGE

I have a concern.

*Pause and a fourth of a pause.*

HUGE (*cont'd*)

How do we know we can trust him?

COLE

We talked about this.

H.J.H

Yea, we were supposed to bring up concerns at the pre-ritual pregame, not mid ritual.

HUGE

What if he brings us to the middle of the Arctic Circle and things don't go so well? We'll be all alone out there. What if he starts to get some weird ideas? What if this Indian...

H.J.H.

Oh my god.

HUGE

Yea, you're right sorry, what if this guy Minik decides to take some revenge?

H.J.H

Why would he do that?

HUGE

What if he starts blaming all of us, our whole race, for him having to live in the Natural History Museum? What if he thinks, “yea fuck those guys” and just leaves us in the middle of the Arctic. Do you want that? I sure as shit don’t!

H.J.H

Have you been the Museum of Natural History?

COLE

I’d live there.

H.J.H.

I bet that dude is thrilled with his digs. He can look at mammoths and tap into his ancestral memory whenever he feels like it. Can we let him in now?!

HUGE

I don’t know why we are letting this wild card into our fraternal brotherhood.

COLE

Is this a race thing?

HUGE

Of course, yea that’s it. I get a PhD from Princeton only to be some oblivious bigot. No, Cole. However, I do think it’s worth nothing that we don’t know much about his people. We don’t know how violent they can get, and we honestly don’t understand their relationship to the concept of trust. We just don’t. Now look, you submit another race like an Irishman or even a non-Jew Russian and we aren’t having this conversation because the unknowns are trivial.

COLE

You love Minik.

HUGE

I love Minik, but does that mean I want to put my life in his hands, in his home terrain, where god knows what can happen.

H.J.H

Dude, Indians that live above the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel are non-violent.

BAXTER

We all read the study.

H.J.H

You ever see a mean Canadian Indian?

HUGE

No.

COLE  
Do the Inuits go around scalping each other?

HUGE  
Uhhh...

BAXTER  
No.

HUGE  
No.

H.J.H  
Minik's a good one. He's ice cold. I promise you. But you got to have some faith.

HUGE  
You're argument has swayed me. Bring it in you fucking genius you.

*HUGE and H.J.H Polar Hug.*

BAXTER  
All in favor of Minik joining the Artic Brotherhood

*ARCTIC BROTHERS all raise their hands.*

BAXTER  
Any haters? Let's meet our new brother.

*The ARCTIC BROTHERS un—reveal themselves. A secret door is opened and MINIK, an Inuit raised in the Museum of Natural History, emerges in an extreme state.*

MINIK  
Who, what...

COLE  
You all right?

MINIK  
Who said that?

COLE  
Cole buddy, your buddy Cole.

Cole? I don't know...

MINIK

*MINIK falls.*

Oh fuck!

BAXTER

Oh Jesus Christ, he suffocated in the secret closet.

EKBLOW

No way, man. No way man, Inuits can hold their breaths for an hour...

H.J.H.

Wake up. Wake up.

EKBLOW

Thirty minutes...

H.J.H.

His heart is beating.

EKBLOW

At least a strong five...

H.J.H.

Minik!

BAXTER

*MINIK rips a load fart.*

Woops.

MINIK

*Everyone thinks that guy MINIK is awesome.*

What did you eat man?

COLE

Raw seal! Did you eat raw seal? This guy keeps eating raw seal!

BAXTER

No one eats raw seal. *(But wait)* Ok, I ate raw seal.

MINIK

*MINIK is really funny.*

Oh wait. BAXTER

What's up? COLE

Minik, you have to go back into the closet. BAXTER

Fuck you, brah! MINIK

No, fuck you prospie. Get back in the closet! COLE

Ugh. MINIK

*MINIK goes back into the closet. The hoods go back on. MINIK comes back out. The ARCTIC BROTHERS begin a sub vocal chant under COLE'S speech.*

COLE  
Before the city of Atlantis crumbled into the Hyborian sea, the wise elders jettisoned the very best semen from the very best Atlantean men to the deep frozen north. There among the monolithic glaciers the kernels of man preserved in blankets of ice. Slowly, as the world grew warmed, the frost melted releasing the semen into the churning ocean where it found the suitable wombs of suitable women and fertilized them. Thus began the fraternal organization of Arctic Brothers.

BAXTER  
Minik, do you accept entry into the exclusive and historic Arctic Brotherhood?

Sure. MINIK

Do the "blubber lubber". BAXTER

Oh come on. MINIK

Blubber lubber! ALL

*MINIK does it, but doesn't have to like it.*

Ok?  
MINIK

And “dogsled” this beer.  
BAXTER

Ok.  
MINIK

*MINIK does it and everybody joins in well before he is finished. They cast off their beers and form the Crockaship before our eyes. MINIK drinks more beer and eventually passes out.*

BAXTER (*To Audience*)  
And so we were off to investigate geology, geography, glaciology, meteorology, terrestrial magnetism, electrical phenomena, seismology, zoology...

OF ALL KINDS!  
ALL

...botany, oceanography, ethnology.  
BAXTER

AND YOU KNOW WHY!  
ALL

On Crocker Land, there is a new race of men.  
BAXTER

Fuuuck,  
ALL

BAXTER  
Allow me to present to you our homo—erectus prospectus. Number 1- The Butterio Tribe.

*Enter BUTTERIO TRIBESMAN*

BUTTERIO  
The sky sends snow to the sea below  
And the waves crash hard on the home we know  
Butterio, oh humble land  
Place of rock and cold and sand

May you ever glide on the Arctic Sea  
And forever, Butterio is the land for me.

Thank you.

*Exit BUTTERIO.*

BAXTER

Next theory, the Gravitations.

*Enter GRAVITATION.*

GRAVITATION

On the isle of Gravitatia we have a special stone that fell from the heavens!

*A fifth grade science fair meteor.*

It allows us to control the balance between inertia and movement.

*GRAVITATION'S arm levitates.*

BEHOLD?

*Exit GRAVITATION.*

BAXTER

Finally, the terrifying Fyetti.

*Enter a FYETTI.*

FYETTI

Long have Fyetti's known to cook meat good and to eat other Fyetti bad!

*Exit FYETTI. The ARCTIC BROTHERS sail the  
Crockaship. The wind is rough. The sea is rougher.*

HUGE

H.J.H!

H.J.H

Ah!

HUGE

What's up?

I can't pee!  
H.J.H.

That sucks bro.  
HUGE

H.J.H.  
The sea is too big! I look out and even though my bladder bursts to discharge I can't pee! I'm small; I am. I'm too small! Too small to matter out here in this salted desert. And the worst part isn't that I'm poisoning myself with my own urine and it's not my meaninglessness, it's that whatever I do, anything I achieve, anything I discover is nothing compared to the steady onslaught of the sea as it patiently wears down the supports of the world.

*H.J.H. cries. HUGE splashes him.*

OHMYGAWD!  
H.J.H (*cont'd*)

HUGE  
How does that make you feel?! How does that make you feel?!

I can't feel my spine!  
H.J.H.

I love you so much bro!  
HUGE

Thanks. You too.  
H.J.H.

*MINIK wakes.*

My head.  
MINIK

BAXTER  
You've been unconscious for a couple of days.

MINIK  
Was I drunk?

BAXTER  
Some of the time.

MINIK  
Where are we?

BAXTER  
We left Brooklyn and went north for a...how long?

EKBLOW  
Twenty-one days.

HUGE  
On day twelve you ate a seagull.

MINIK  
No.

COLE  
So funny, man.

*EKBLOW reenacts.*

HUGE  
You want another?

MINIK  
No.

H.J.H  
Days thirteen through seventeen...

ALL  
You puked!

*EKBLOW reenacts.*

COLE  
Day eighteen there was a storm and you stood on the bowline and you took off your seal glove and held it above your head and screamed...

*ALL (except MINIK)*  
I return to the house of my mothers! Can they not restrain their wails of joy just a tiny fucking bit!

COLE  
What did that mean?

EKBLOW  
And where the hell are we?

*This was not a rhetorical question.*



FATA MORGANA

Or tasted.

*ROBERT PEARY cannot hold her.*

ROBERT PEARY

Why do your legs open wider the further you flee?!?!?!?

*PEARY lurches off.*

FATA MORGANA

I am the land when your legs know only the sea. I am the secret farmland of the Arctic. I am the bosom formed for your head alone.

*FATA MORGANA exits. The unforgiving silence of the deep frozen north. ARCTIC BROTHERS point at FATA MORGANA*

*ALL (except MINIK)*

CROCKER LAND!

*The Crockaship turns and speeds off. EKBLOW, COLE, H.J.H. fall off the boat and freeze into an Iceberg.*

EKBLOW, H.J.H., COLE

Sing now forgotten sailor  
And raise high your unspent lust  
Tell of your plunge  
Through the icy depths  
How the Arctic turned your bones to dust

I took the sea for my lover  
Gave the water my trust  
Fell into the charms  
Of those fine lapping arms  
Singing I do not want to, I must

I must hurl my body in the current  
And there let it freeze  
Let it still to stone  
And someday in a folly  
Someone will crash in me  
And I will make them join me  
In my unforgiving home

*The boat strikes the EKBLOW, H.J.H. and COLE.  
The remaining ARCTIC BROTHERS cling to the  
dead ones.*

BAXTER

And so as the seed flowed out of the icebergs to form them, it now flows back to the deep unforgiving north so that the Arctic Brotherhood can regenerate, resume, and reconnoiter. We commit our Arctic Brothers to the tundra that germinated them. A moment of silence for our beloved brothers; may the great gyrfalcon bear them into the sky.

*A moment of silence.*

BAXTER (*cont'd*)

Can you believe how fucking fine Crocker Land looked?

HUGE

Dude, don't talk about it. I cannot get excited on this iceberg, I will lose my grip, c'mon.

BAXTER

But the way the sunlight shone on those pools of moisture collecting in her crags.

HUGE

Or the way the water lapped at its shore; gentle, constant, complete.

MINIK

I didn't see anything.

BAXTER

What?

MINIK

I didn't see an island at all.

BAXTER

Why would you lie right now?

MINIK

There was nothing there.

HUGE

I saw it clear as day, you should have looked harder.

BAXTER

Thank you Huge. Glad someone is trying to be honest here. Actually trying to be an Arctic Brother, not some whiney arctic bitch.

*Some things you don't say to an Arctic Brother.*

MINIK

I'm out. This is dumb.

BAXTER

Oh this is dumb, Minik?

MINIK

Yea, it's dumb.

BAXTER

Is it? You're smart enough to be negative, but I can't think of one positive thing you've contributed to this expedition.

*MINIK breaks off EKBLOW from the ARCTIC BROTHER Iceberg.*

BAXTER (cont'd)

You'd think someone who lives in a museum would have a little more sense!

*MINIK gets on EKBLOW.*

BAXTER

You're just gonna float on an ice raft home? That's your fucking plan?

MINIK

Yea.

BAXTER

Huge, did we not clearly see Crocker Land dancing seductively on the distant horizon, just begging us to come and plant a flag in her.

HUGE

We did.

BAXTER

Oh that's right, I forgot.

MINIK

It's over, Baxman.

HUGE

You won't quit. You don't have the balls warm enough to quit.

MINIK

I renounce the sacred seed that made me and may I live forever in a carpeted prison of convenience and anonymity. May I develop gout and become sterile. May I never see virgin land again!

BAXTER (*To HUGE*)

That was harsh.

HUGE

Way.

*MINIK floats away on EKBLOW.*

BAXTER

(*To Audience*) I think a wise man once said, when you lose brothers make more.

HUGE

That was me.

BAXTER

When?

HUGE

Just now. I mean as we watched Minik float away I said, "Baxter." Then I said what you just said.

BAXTER

(*To Audience*) Little did we know that our Arctic Brotherhood would change, forever.

*The unforgiving silence of the deep frozen north. An Air BnB ice shack slides across the ice driven by a husky team. HUGE and BAXTER discuss.*

HUGE

I just think we've been burned before.

BAXTER

You can't generalize.

HUGE

I can contextualize.

BAXTER

We're gonna just be monoliths until we, what, fucking crumble?

HUGE

No one is trying to block progress.

BAXTER

If we don't change the rules, change our outlook, then can we even call ourselves explorers? Aren't we supposed to seek the unknown? We said we wouldn't stop until the whole world was discovered for good. We said that. Shouldn't that mean we go as far as we can go, outside and in?

*PINGOTAUKK comes out of the closet in the ice shack.*

PINGOTAUKK

Hey guys.

BAXTER

Whoa, man, we didn't tell you to come out yet.

PINGOTTAUKK

I've been in there so long I'm just breathing in the old breath I breathed out.

BAXTER

Oh. Well we were just getting ready. *(To HUGE)* Right?

HUGE

Yea.

BAXTER

Before the city of Atlantis crumbled into the Hyborian sea, the wise elders jettisoned the very best semen from the very best Atlantean men to the deep....

*ALEGASANI explodes into the scene.*

ALEGASANI

Stop this ceremony!

BAXTER

Hey, I'm sorry Alegasani, I know this is your Air BnB, but we reserved this room well in advance of the twenty-four hour dead line.

ALEGASANI

Did I not take you in and warm your chilled bodies with my own?

BAXTER

You did, yea.

ALEGASANI

Did I not feed you salmon when your stomachs cried for protein?

HUGE

Yes.

ALEGASANI

Did I not serve you seal blood macchiato every morning?

BAXTER

To be fair all of these services were listed on the website when we booked the room.

ALEGASANI

Behold, my daughter!

*ARCTIC SISTER enters.*

HUGE

Pingo, your daughter has a bitching beard.

ALEGASANI

This is not his daughter.

HUGE

Awkward.

ALEGASANI

It is no shame to him that this is not his daughter.

PINGOTAUKK

It's not.

BAXTER

This is a secret ceremony for Arctic Brothers...

ARCTIC SISTER

Silence!

*The echo of authority.*

ALEGASANI

Who is your father?

ARCTIC SISTER

Robert Fucking Peary.

ALL

Hush.

*FATA MORGANA enters. HUGE and BAXTER see her and kneel to their grail.*

FATA MORGANA

He looked everywhere for me, leaving no corner of the earth unseen, tilling every field that lay fallow before him.

ALEGASANI

I knew I was not his destination. Not his discovery. Not his prize. He never said my name the right way. He never tried.

*ROBERT PEARY drags himself on.*

ROBERT PEARY

I will bore through your glacier!

ALEGASANI

He fumbled in the darkness for some semblance of peace. Rage gushed from him.

*ROBERT PEARY gushes and cries.*

ROBERT PEARY

My compass points ever towards your true north.

*ROBERT PEARY exits, searching for unattainable rest.*

FATA MORGANA

He left drops of himself along the way. Little mountains of occupation litter the deep unforgiving north. Each one bearing the unmistakable traces of his pedigree.

ARCTIC SISTER

The snow heals my skin from the terrors of ease.  
My sprit howls to northern lights.  
Many times I have thanked god for a bit of raw dog.

*A dog enters and ARCTIC SISTER eats it then and there. FATA MORGANA bears the dog away.*

ALEGASANI

Behold, Arctic Brothers, the purity of blood tempered with the inevitability of ice. A new race to find the future.

ARCTIC SISTER

Steel your stomachs to the frost, my brothers. Our limbs might freeze and blood might turn to slush, but a taste of discomfort only makes an Arctic Brother crave more. Follow me and the world's last geographic problems shall fall!

*ARCTIC SISTER leads a ceremonial dogsledding. The ARCTIC BROTHERS pull the Ice shack/ Air BnB off. The unforgiving silence of the deep frozen north.*

FATA MORGANA

When the earth evades the sun's glory, the violent sea sleeps and begs for crossing. The horizon defies completion and you may freely seek that for which you strive. You may seek and seek and seek ever more. Beware. It does not exist my friend.

*The unforgiving silence of the deep frozen north. ARCTIC SISTER drives on the ARCTIC BROTHERS like huskies. FATA MORGANA moves beyond them.*

ARCTIC SISTER

Did you see it? Lazily caressing its flanks to engage my arousal?

BAXTER

I did. I think I did.

ARCTIC SISTER

The winter mists hide Crocker Land like an illicit surprise. Each false sanctuary only stokes my flame with fury. But oh to find the right enclave of fog where she sleeps so I might fill it with my seed to grow and blossom!

HUGE

I think we passed it.

ARCTIC SISTER

Silence!

*The echo of authority.*

FATA MORGANA

I am the death rattle of your most primal desire.

ARCTIC SISTER

The wind sings.

FATA MORGANA

The soft coo of a paramour.  
The firm edict of a sovereign.  
The arousing echoes of destiny.

ARCTIC SISTER

I shall possess you as my father would demand of me.

FATA MORGANA

I am the point where longitude and latitude ever change.

ARCTIC SISTER

Open wide your oyster and yield me your pearl.

FATA MORGANA

I am the domain you crave that does not exist.

*ARCTIC SISTER covets off after FATA MORGANA.*

PINGOTAUKK

I'm going to turn back.

HUGE

No. You're not leaving. You're an arctic brother. You know what that means? That means when you see Crocker Land you go after Crocker Land.

PINGOTAUKK

I didn't see anything.

HUGE

Oh my god. Again, Baxter?

BAXTER

Stop lying Pingo.

PINGOTAUKK

I'm not. I don't see what we are chasing. I don't see Crocker Land. All I see is frozen water and endless sky.

HUGE

Pingo, you need to stop fucking around.

PINGOTAUKK

I'm sorry brothers. There is no Crocker Land.

You are a Crockashit!

HUGE

*HUGE pushes PINGOTAUKK into the ocean.  
PINGOTAUKK does not sink, but does die.*

Bro?

BAXTER

HUGE

I couldn't help it! I try so hard, Baxman, but each time it's the same. They lie, all of them lie!

BAXTER

It's cool, Huge. You're right.

HUGE

Yea? Thanks Baxter. I didn't mean to push him. No I meant to.

BAXTER

I think he slipped.

HUGE

Yea?

BAXTER

Don't worry. Hey, stop worrying.

HUGE

Ok. How do we get home?

BAXTER

Someone will be looking for us. They have to.

*FATA MORGANA enters.*

FATA MORGANA

The end of discovery is an illusion.

*A BOAT enters and crashes into the ice.*

FATA MORANA (*cont'd*)

As was the beginning.

*Another BOAT. More ice.*

Everything is seen.

FATA MORANA (*cont'd*)

*Boat. Ice.*

Nothing is known.

FATA MORANA (*cont'd*)

*Ice Boat.*

We are the Arctic Brothers  
I'll stay by your side  
We are the Arctic Brothers  
Come undertow  
Come tide.

HUGE and BAXTER (*Sung*)

*The unforgiving silence of the deep frozen north.*

End of Panel 1

## The Definition of Topography

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- (1) Interpreter — A needed gateway
- (2) Zebulon Pike — Overmatched from the get go
- (5) Sideburn — The best part of Zebulon
- (8) The Mountain — The unattainable
- (3) James Bragg — Happy to be talking to us
- (8) Osage — Native American returning home
- (1) Tree 1 — Pine
- (4) Tree 2 — Oak
- (6) Tree 3 — Birch
- (8) Red Tail — Neutral Hawk
- (4) Man 1 — Taking a constitutional
- (5) Man 2 — Watching Man 1
- (7) Briar Patch — Stalking Man 1
- (6) Chief — Leader of the Osage Tribe
- (3) American Flag — An animated dirt drawing
- (7) Blanket — The same
- (3) Rabbit — The same
- (7) Arrow — The same
- (3) River — The same
- (4) Henry Garth — Talks too much
- (5) Orgel Ribner — Doesn't talk too much
- (1) Bear — Un-encountered by the expedition
- (7) Ground — Below them
- (3) River — Beside them
- (8) Fish — Inside them
- (6) William Haller — Fish Eater
- (3) John Philips — Dead
- (4) Stephen Mcluan — Dead
- (5) Tommy Wilterson — Dead
- (6) Henry Meyer — Dead
- (7) Lancelyn Green — Reluctant Mutineer
- (1) Snow — Frozen Water
- (4) Toe — Not the biggest or smallest one
- (3) Soldier — Paid by the Spanish Government
- (8) Jailer — A most amenable captor

Time: 1803

Place: The Undefined United States

Panel 2- The Definition of Topography

*Scene*

*The America of 1803 forms into the MOUNTAIN.*

MOUNTAIN

I see the world below me. Vast and varied. Awaiting guidance. Awaiting instruction. Awaiting definition. Awaiting me!

*The MOUNTAIN flattens. ZEBULON crosses some distance. INTERPRETER enters. They address audience.*

ZEBULON

I dislike confusion.

INTERPRETER

These were the first words Zebulon Pike spoke.

ZEBULON

Words confuse.

*A silence of possible understanding.*

ZEBULON

I wear my sideburns long.

INTERPRETER

He wore his sideburns long.

*One of ZEBULON'S SIDEBURNS enters the stage.*

SIDEBURN

We sprang from Zebulon's face, strands groping towards the distant horizon. Grasping and specifying all that arrives in our vision. See we with the eyes of Zebulon!

*ZEBULON snips off part of the SIDEBURN.*

SIDEBURN (*cont'd*)

He groomed us with a precision that only dogs belonging to the very wealthy ever experience.

*ZEBULON snips another part of the SIDEBURN.*

SIDEBURN (*cont'd*)

Shaping us into perfectly formed follicle peninsulas clearly defined against a blank and vast sea of skin.

*ZEBULON flourishes SIDEBURN.*

ZEBULON

That's what I believe.

INTERPRETER

Newly purchased from France.

ZEBULON

And that's what President Thomas Jefferson believes.

INTERPRETER

A virgin territory.

ZEBULON

An entire nation to define, a flowing cauldron of untapped potential. I see jagged cliffs looming in the distance. Ocean to ocean, earth to the heavens above—unseen, untold, unheard.

*The MOUNTAIN materializes and looms.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

We've been given a tremendous task, to discover the unknown.

*A mystery looms at the top of the looming the MOUNTAIN.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

President Thomas Jefferson, like myself, desires this country to be a wise one. And the only way to become wise is to define from this very spot onward. Now I assure you there is no tedium on this excursion. As we speak the president sends two book worms to patiently crawl to the ocean and catalogue everything. They travel clutching pencil and paper in some impossible fashion for we all know that worms have no arms.

*INTERPRETER doesn't understand what was just said.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

We are unsaddled with such tedium, but I assure you this journey will be one worthy of note.

*The MOUNTAIN un—looms itself.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

Tell me, does your destiny loom?

INTERPRETER

Zebulon relaxes.

*ZEBULON relaxes.*

INTERPRETER (*cont'd*)

And stares out into the distance as if he sees something pleasing.

*ZEBULON stares out with a positive and non-invasive sub vocal.*

INTERPRETER (*cont'd*)

And begins to write a letter.

*JAMES BRAGG enters, becomes a table.*

JAMES BRAGG

He wrote for a good ten minutes before he noticed my presence.

INTERPRETER

This is James Bragg.

JAMES BRAGG

Dear President Thomas Jefferson, the wind that billows the sails of our nation fills my spirits so that I soar as an angel. What a world I shall define for you! And though it bears some inconvenience to my travel, I intend to find for you the largest mammoth skull yet seen on our vast continent.

ZEBULON

Mail this.

JAMES BRAGG

I have no desire to disparage Captain Zebulon Pike's verve or verse. However, details of some import often escaped his expansive mind such as the fifty Osage Indians, recently released from captivity, expecting us to take them home.

*An OSAGE enters, dressed nothing like an American Indian in a western film.*

OSAGE

Take me home.

JAMES BRAGG

Take you where?

OSAGE

To the land of unvarying plenty.

*A land of unvarying plenty appears.*

OSAGE (*cont'd*)

The ground gentle in design.

The water teeming with sacrificial life.

All for my friends and me.

Leonard, Gerald, Kimari, Ren, Layland, Zyon, Hannah, Bob, Earline, Cheryl, and Eldred.

Those are just the names of my friends I remember at this moment. I have many more friends with names and many more moments to name them.

*The earth moves gradually. Zebulon periodically tries to outrun it.*

ZEBULON

Tobacco and tedium, the great scourges of mind, body, and soul. The repetitive sameness, which so easily seizes the sinews, reduces a man to a cog in machine not of his own making. Tedium cripples the mind just as tobacco enervates the breath. Be thankful for a vast country my friends. In this country, and I mean the United States of America, the danger of sameness cannot beach itself on any of our now three shores. Gaze at this menagerie.

*A three TREE barbershop quartet.*

TREE 1

Hello.

TREE 2

Hello.

TREE 3

Hello.

TREES

HELLO!

*A full—blown routine with a narrow window of movement.*

You see we grow

From the roots of the earth

We reach on up

From our ancestral seeds

We do climb

From the waters of heaven

We take our sup

We only grow stronger

With time

Pass on by  
    Pass on by  
Pass on by us  
    Pass on by

Good luck with your travels  
Now pass on by

*The earth moves TREES along.*

ZEBULON

Note how the wind makes a myriad of musical notes when it blows through different types of trees.

*A RED TAIL HAWK soars through the sky and screeches.*

RED TAIL

Hawk Noise...Hawk Noise.....Hawk Noise.

ZEBULON

Do you see that Red Tail Hawk? Observe how I befriend him.

*ZEBULON holds out his arm for the RED TAIL HAWK to land on.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

AWHA!.....AWHA!.....AWHA!

RED TAIL

Hawk Noise with distrust and wariness.

*RED TAIL HAWK flies away.*

ZEBULON

Well that obviously wasn't a red tail hawk. Some other kind of...hawk...I suppose.

*MAN 1 and MAN 2 hike on.*

MAN 2

As we travelled, we accepted necessity.

MAN 1

I got to use it!

MAN 2

And laughed at the constitutional struggles that accompany overland journeys.

*A BRIAR PATCH comes on. MAN ONE goes up to it while MAN TWO looks on.*

MAN TWO

That's a briar patch.

MAN ONE

This is no briar patch.

BRIAR PATCH

I'm not a briar patch.

MAN ONE

You know I require concentration for this activity.

BRIAR PATCH

I'm not a briar patch.

*MAN ONE unbuckles his pants.*

MAN ONE

You're trying to make me bust, aren't you? You're a kidder. I know that about you.

*BRIAR PATCH stabs MAN ONE with full botanical fury.*

MAN ONE

Damn boys, I think that's a briar patch.

BRIAR PATCH

Woops.

MAN ONE

Ha. Ow. Ha.

*The embers of the campfire clear the scene to reveal JAMES BRAGG watching OSAGE.*

JAMES BRAGG

Hey. HEY! Stop snoring.

OSAGE

I'm not sleeping.

JAMES BRAGG

I said that you were snoring. Hey everyone the Indians are snoring!

*In a different voice.*

JAMES BRAGG *(cont'd)*

Hey everyone the Indians are snoring.

*In a different voice.*

JAMES BRAGG *(cont'd)*

Hey everyone the Indians are snoring.

*In a different voice.*

JAMES BRAGG *(cont'd)*

Hey everyone the Indians are snoring.

OSAGE

I wasn't snoring.

*The three different voices take over JAMES BRAGG.*

JAMES BRAGG

What did he say to me? He thinks he's the prince of the prairie! Doesn't he know we brought him here?

ZEBULON

Do not harm that man!

OSAGE

Zebulon encouraged.

ZEBULON

A gregarious nature amongst my ranging rascals and the captive Osage.

JAMES BRAGG

Zebulon cited...

ZEBULON

The importance of defining these people so we may be wise about them.

OSAGE and JAMES BRAGG

Zebulon asked.

ZEBULON

How are we to define their unique existence through antagonism?

*ZEBULON places JAMES BRAGG in a position of singular camaraderie and moves him towards the OSAGE.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

We don't speak their language, and yet here we are with an opportunity to classify a new form of friendship.

*ZEBULON places the OSAGE in a position of singular camaraderie and moves him towards the JAMES BRAGG.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

Discomfort is the first hurdle to wisdom.

*ZEBULON merges them in brotherhood.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

Imagine you are cleansing yourself in a boiling hot spring. Allowing the scalding broth to scrub your skin pure. Then, you leap out and run naked as the angel Gabriel to an ice—cold pool, which happens to be nearby. For this is a land where cold and hot springs gurgle side by side. You dive in, submerging your body in water colder than frost. Feel your skin tighten around your bones, redefining your very conception existence.

*A silence of possible understanding.*

OSAGE

Hahaha.

JAMES BRAGG

We suspected the Osage understood something we didn't.

*The OSAGE village stumbles upon the traveling party.*

CHIEF

Hello. Hello. Welcome to a self-organized collection of mutually sympathetic individuals. I am the member of that collective appointed to make decisions of societal import. To which one of your self-organized collection do I direct my speech?

*An inaudible "huh" occupies the stage.*

CHIEF (*cont'd*)

I would prefer to speak with an individual in an identical or similar position to mine.

*The huh becomes and “uhhh.”*

CHIEF (*cont'd*)

I don't think I can be more specific.

ZEBULON

I have foregone the use of an interpreter.

*INTERPRETER glumly trudges home.*

ZEBULON (*cont'd*)

We will communicate in the first language of man.

*ZEBULON draws an AMERICAN FLAG in the dirt.*

AMERICAN FLAG

The flag of the United States of America will now fly over your village.

CHIEF

What are we doing?

ZEBULON

Let us speak purely and without aural dissonance.

*The CHIEF draws a BLANKET.*

BLANKET

Not in the market for blankets.

*ZEBULON draws a RABBIT.*

RABBIT

How tall do the rabbits grow in this general vicinity?

*CHIEF draws an ARROW.*

ARROW

How long do you intend to continue this?

*The sun sets. The stars illuminate. HENRY GARTH and ORGEL RIBNER enter.*

HENRY GARTH

Sometime around midnight, Zebulon began to draw the terrain ahead of us.

*A RIVER flows onto the stage.*

River?

RIVER

And then you said,

ORGEL RIBNER

River! Hey that's a river!

HENRY GARTH

Shut your garrulous mouth Henry Garth!

ZEBULON

But you continued to exclaim in whispers.

ORGEL RIBNER

River, hey, that's a river. River, hey, that's a river. River, hey, that's a river.

HENRY GARTH

*A TREE appears.*

Trees?

TREE

*(To Audience)* This is Orgel Ribner.

HENRY GARTH

Hello.

ORGEL RIBNER

You spoke in a clear and unabrasive manner.

HENRY GARTH

Trees.

ORGEL RIBNER

*The MOUNTAIN looms in the distance.*

Crap, *(Teeth Suck)*, I don't...

HENRY GARTH and ORGEL RIBNER

*The MOUNTAIN looms larger.*

Damn, I don't want to climb a mountain, damn.

HENRY GARTH and ORGEL RIBNER *(cont'd)*

*The MOUNTAIN looms like Wagner would want it to.*

HENRY GARTH and ORGEL RIBNER(*cont'd*)  
(*Teeth suck*), (*Teeth suck from a different mouth*), (*Teeth suck from a different really dramatic mouth*), (*flat tire sound*).

*CHIEF flattens The MOUNTAIN.*

CHIEF

Flat.

ZEBULON

Mountain.

CHIEF

Ahead lies pleasant. A land un-mangled by variation. A land that only seeks to provide. Do not force definition where there is no need!

ZEBULON

I'm not asking you. I'm telling you.

CHIEF

Ahead lies your ruin.

*A BEAR comes roaring on. No one notices.*

*BEAR (To Audience)*

The expedition of Clark and Lewis are in the process of shooting twenty—five bears! That might be an overestimation. Are there any bears awaiting this expedition? Where are the bears? There are no bears? There are no bears.

*BEAR sadly leaves the stage. Crickets and nighttime noises emerge. Everyone except ZEBULON speaks.*

ALL

As we tried to sleep in whatever darkness was left until morning, we heard Zebulon compose a message to the President.

ZEBULON

Mr. President, the natives here lie. They clumsily deny the existence of the natural wonders which shall serve as a testament to our glory. I am confident that the topography will vary in amazing rapidity. The mountains, natural pyramids to the reason that guides us, call to me. No sign of bears. I remain optimistic. Z.P.

NARRATOR

As we set off the next day, we waited impatiently for the ground to change below our feet.

*The earth moves gradually. GROUND and RIVER envelope ZEBULON.*

GROUND

People call me earth  
I do not change with any  
Great sense of quickness

RIVER

As the ground moves flat  
I flow slow and straight with it  
Think not this will change

GROUND and RIVER

Grassland on both sides  
Determined water in between  
What did you expect

*The three TREE barbershop quartet enters.*

TREE 1

No...

TREE 2

No...

TREE 3

No....

TREES

No more shadows  
To hide you from the sunshine  
No more limbs  
To hang off of like vines  
No more fauna  
To occupy your vision  
No more markers  
To help you pass the time.

*WILLIAM HALLER appears.*

WILLIAM HALLER

No more trees.

*The BEAR roars.*

No bears.

WILLIAM HALLER (*cont'd*)

*The BEAR roars in reverse.*

But there were fish.

WILLIAM HALLER (*cont'd*)

*A FISH starts to swim around the stage.*

WILLIAM HALLER (*cont'd*)

My name is William Haller and I tell it best. The river's reflection glanced off our flanks as we walked in a straight line for the longest single day in the annals of creation. The undeniable force that is gravity leveled the earth as far as the eye could see. So flat we still sensed the sun at twilight; and the river ever flowing at a slow speed remained our constant companion. My gaze shifted to the welcoming waters beside me. And a fish presented itself to my vision.

FISH

Hey.

WILLIAM HALLER

There was an understanding between it and I.

FISH

Catch me.

WILLIAM HALLER

Some part of Eden reestablished.

FISH

CATCH ME.

*WILLIAM HALLER catches the FISH.*

WILLIAM HALLER

It seemed to guide me.

FISH

Eat me.

WILLIAM HALLER

And so I did.

*The FISH is eaten, a willing sacrifice.*

WILLIAM HALLER

Its meat fell off its fragile skeleton with no great provocation from my teeth and tongue. I slid its bones from my mouth and threw them in the river. We ate all our fish like this in the pleasant same plain.

ZEBULON

The next man who eats a fish will eat it twice!

JAMES BRAGG

Zebulon's temper grew in contrast to the flat earth we traversed.

ZEBULON

President Jefferson...

HENRY GARTH

His missives grew terse.

ZEBULON

So damn flat I'm surprised there isn't a city here already. Z.P.

ORGEL RIBNER

He would share his letters with us and make us join his correspondence.

ZEBULON

Mr. President there is nothing to define. You have sent me on a mission devoid of necessity.

*ALL (Except ZEBULON)*

Mr. President, I agree.

*An uncountable number of days pass on the great open plains.*

ZEBULON

President, you have bought a great desert. You are a fool for purchasing it. You are a coward for sending me to define it. I'll find variation if I must create it myself. Z.P!

*ZEBULON creates The MOUNTAIN.*

*ALL (Except ZEBULON)*

It was to our amazement when we woke on some morning to find ourselves at the foundation of an enormous mountain. The river curved around the landform in violently simmering rapids.

*A silence of possible understanding.*

ZEBULON

The path is defined and it is vertical, ascend!

*The world made jagged, steep, and frozen.*

JOHN PHILIPS

My name is John Philips.

STEPHEN MCLUAN

Stephen Mcluan.

TOMMY WILTERSON

Tommy Wilterson.

HENRY MEYER

Henry Meyer.

ALL

Dead.

*ZEBULON begins to shave. The SIDEBURN  
returns wide eyed.*

SIDEBURN

Seemingly unaware of the horror enveloping his party, Zebulon shaved every day. But where once he groomed us with fanatical attention, no he allowed us to grow. We became jagged outcroppings of hair, matching the antagonistic world where we found ourselves. We pleaded with him to turn back. But he could not hear us through the cold. We watched helplessly as ten people claimed frostbite.

*LANCELYN GREEN can no longer stand it.*

LANCELYN GREEN

Now you all know me. I'm Lancelyn Green; strange name, simple man. I have never complained once this entire trip, so hear my grievances with the authority with which I speak them. We won't move.

ZEBULON

You'll move or I'll inflict you with the variety of punishments I can and will inflict. I do not list them at this moment to save warmth!

LANCELYN GREEN

Sir, we can't walk up the damn mountain. We can't walk down the damn mountain. We can't walk. You can go ahead and shoot us if you want to. That way we won't be here anymore. We got frostbite, and we are staying.

I will send for you and you will come.

ZEBULON

No we will not.

LANCELYN GREEN

Yes, you will.

ZEBULON

I am resolute!

LANCELYN GREEN

Snow whited out the sky.

SIDEBURN

*SNOW enters and pelts them with itself.*

When you try to climb  
The sky will cast me to earth  
Your feet and eyes freeze.

SNOW

For too long you look  
Up towards my dauntless peak  
Madness and failure.

MOUNTAIN

*The party experience madness and failure.*

You may send for help  
But no aid will come to you  
Save for your defeat.

SNOW and MOUNTAIN

(*To Audience*) I relayed a message down the mountain, to those who claimed frostbite. It said, "I send for you this moment. Your weakness in the face of obstacle sickens me. I stand nearly at the top of this monolith. You will aid me in completing this ascent or you will face deportation."

ZEBULON

*A sack of varying size ascends up the MOUNTAIN.*

And instead of aid I received this bag.

ZEBULON (cont'd)

*It opens. A TOE emerges.*

ZEBULON (cont'd)

What are you?

TOE

Toes.

ZEBULON

Toes?

TOE

We bring a message.

ZEBULON

Proceed.

*ALL (Except ZEBULON)*

Dear Captain, you can kiss our asses. They will be frost bitten soon enough. We'll be happy to send them along.

*This echoes through the MOUNTAIN.*

TOE

Now I offer a song.

ZEBULON

Yes, please.

TOE

The road less taken  
Is jammed with shattered plans  
That distant horizon  
Is filled with fallen stars

Failure is the ocean  
It wrecks without devotion  
Failure takes you deep  
If it doesn't take you far

My father begged me to become a wise man  
He said look within  
Your world is all you are  
Don't scour the world for glory  
Stay safe beside the river  
Stay safe under the stars

But adventure brought me to this cold land

Now look upon me  
See I have been marred  
For the price of wisdom is failure  
I cannot hide my bruises  
I cannot hide my scars

*A silence of possible understanding.*

ZEBULON

My jaw softened.

*ZEBULON softens his jaw.*

ZEBULON *(cont'd)*

I softly touched my sideburn with.

*ZEBULON pets SIDEBURN.*

ZEBULON *(cont'd)*

And I...

*ZEBULON delicately chuckles.*

ZEBULON *(cont'd)*

Let's give up.

TOE

Sir?

ZEBULON

Let's just give up.

*ZEBULON flattens the MOUNTAIN.  
INTERPRETER enters.*

INTERPRETER

The ascent was vertical and treacherous, but the path down was calm and sloping. Even our friends who still thawed out their feet were able to manage the new ground. The weather warmed. When we reached the ground, we were greeted by a group of Spanish soldiers.

*1—100 SOLDIERS enter.*

ZEBULON

Hello.

SOLDIER

Halt! You have trespassed on Spanish soil.

ZEBULON

I am so sorry. We got lost. I got us lost. It was my fault.

SOLDIER

You are to come with me.

ZEBULON

To where?

SOLDIER

A Mexican prison.

*An eruption of happiness.*

INTERPRETER

We were saved and taken to a type of luxury long since forgotten.

*A JAILER enters.*

INTERPRETER

What's this?

JAILER

Water.

INTERPRETER

What's this?

JAILER

Beans.

INTERPRETER

What's this?

JAILER

A type of soft, thin flatbread made from finely ground wheat flour or corn meal.

INTERPRETER

We rested comfortably on straw beds. They saw to our ailments, our frostbite, and our fatigue. And after not too long we were new men. One month passed.

*ZEBULON enters.*

Men!

ZEBULON

HI COLONEL!!!!

ALL

I must tell you something.

ZEBULON

Sit down colonel we have a treat for you.

HENRY GARTH

For me?! What?

ZEBULON

A song.

HENRY GARTH

Oh that is too much.

ZEBULON

And we want to sing it for you now.

HENRY GARTH

*The whole cast sings. Even if they are a TREE.*

We don't want your silver  
We don't want your gold  
We don't want your money  
By the truckload

*ALL (except ZEBULON)*

A warm bed to sleep on  
And red wine that flows  
Staying close by the fire  
And keeping your toes

By the fire that glows boys  
By the fire that glows  
Avoiding frostbite  
And keeping my toes

Let us call this water  
Let it sooth our souls  
Let us fill our bellies  
With foods we don't know

There are some who wander  
Like the wind they blow  
But that wind is freezing  
I'm keeping my toes

Keeping your toes boys  
Keeping your toes  
Avoiding frostbite  
By the fire that glows

By fire that glows boys  
By the fire that glows  
Avoiding frostbite  
And keeping your toes  
Look at that horizon  
See the world it shows  
Now look down at the warm light  
Of the fire that glows

See it dance and flicker  
See the shadows it throws  
Get lost in those shadows  
By the fire that glows

By fire that glows boys  
By the fire that glows  
Avoiding frostbite  
And keeping your toes

Men, I am leaving.

ZEBULON

*Everyone is excited about this.*

ZEBULON (cont'd)

My release has been ordered. I must bid you farewell.

ALL

Are we coming with you?

ZEBULON

No, you must stay here.

*Everyone is really excited about this.*

ZEBULON (cont'd)

You're rascals! You're all rascals! I'll miss you dearly.

*ZEBULON crosses some distance and is gone.*

*ALL (Except ZEBULON)*

The wise are rarely successful. Wisdom is gained through plans thwarted, paths impeded, and hopes dashed. It is a resolution to defeat. A resolution we all make in our own time, if we are fortunate.

End of Panel 2

## The Son of the Sun

### DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- (8) Mississippi River — Largest drainage system on the continent
- (6) Francisco Pizarro — Subjugator of the Incan Empire
- (4) Hernando De Soto — Knight of the Order of Santiago
- (1, 2) Conquistador(s), 1, Ghost — Interchangeable rank and file.
- (5) Map — Tells you where you are going
- (3) Pig — Sus domesticus
- (3) Mockingbird — Indigenous singer
- (7) Innocent Bystander — Wrong place wrong time
- (5) Cofitachequi (Coffee—Ta—Check—We) — Female Chief of her tribe
- (7) Chief Tuscaloosa — Chief of the Choctaw
- (5) Mosquito — Nature's great equalizer
- (3) Catfish — Sensitive bottom feeder

Time: 1540ish

Place: What is now the southeastern region of the United States.

NOTES: Parenthesis next to names denote phonetic pronunciation

Panel 3- The Son of the Sun

*Scene*

*Lights up on PIZZARO with coins on his eyes and water in his lungs. He is dressed like a conquistador with nowhere to go. The coins resist his efforts to remove them. When he sees, the Delta disappoints.*

PIZZARO

I should be high on a mountaintop.  
Below me roaring flames and gushing blood.  
Above me the burning heart of Jesus Christ  
Raining scalding redemption on the defeated.  
I am the lord's vanguard.  
My steel is the first steel.  
My cannon burst unjoins the virgin air.  
My beard the exception of exceptions.

*MISSISSIPPI RIVER fills the waiting space.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Don't you feel the ground rising? I'm breathless just standing here.

PIZZARO

Where I stand is but a mole on the earth.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Pick at it then.

PIZZARO

Say you?

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Pick at it. You want the ground to get bigger?

PIZZARO

Yes.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

You got to pick at it. Piss it off. Go on.

*PIZZARO enthusiastically picks at it with a period appropriate weapon.*

PIZZARO

How long will the earth take to adhere to my mighty discipline? Flesh shattered at the sound of my aggression. Steel melted at the faintest scent of my rage. My arms toppled empires into the void. Surely the ground cannot withstand my siege for long. Yield earth! Yield rocks and soil! When? When?! How soon before Pizzaro, destroyer of the Inca, builds a mountain of his own?

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Three billion years.

PIZZARO

I know not this number.

*PIZZARO enthusiastically casts aside the period appropriate weapon.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

It's not that long.

PIZZARO

Call in the slaves or allow me to barter for some. This is a spade task far beneath one who conquers worlds.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

This is why nothing gets done around here.

PIZZARO

I do not toil.

*PIZZARO slaps a bug.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

There are a lot of bugs here.

PIZZARO

I fear no insect as I fear no man.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Your heart no longer fills your veins. They can't hurt you.

*PIZZARO sniffs.*

PIZZARO

Fortuna.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

There's no gold around here.

*PIZZARO eats the ground.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

See?

*PIZZARO spits out the dirt.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER *(cont'd)*

This is the prize I offer.

*MISSISSIPPI RIVER produces a hand full of clay.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER *(cont'd)*

Take all you need.

*MISSISSIPPI RIVER bathes PIZZARO's hands in clay.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER *(cont'd)*

It yields to your desire. It exists in ample plenty. I shall give you more and more and more. Life longs to teem upon my banks; ever expanding in the sweetest of songs. I yearn to replenish that life. Pizzaro?

PIZZARO

Ask me anything.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Who is this man?

*DE SOTO enters on a sunbeam.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER *(cont'd)*

Did the sun set to mingle with the lonely?  
Has the sky set all the stars free?  
Heaven ends and begins with this vision.  
Answer me, what is this I see?

PIZZARO

He is my lieutenant, Hernando De Soto. The cruelest man God ever fashioned.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

He is the coming of grace.

PIZZARO

He is the fatal thrust of Christendom.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

I would see generations spring from that thrust.

PIZZARO

Love you this man?

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

We haven't actually met.

PIZZARO

He will not accept your affection. He forgoes temptation so that he might better bathe in the blood of his foes.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

We shall see.

PIZZARO

But I already...

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Bring this man to me so he and I may become one. What can I offer to please him? I would give anything. Speak.

PIZZARO

My throat is full of ashes.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Drink something.

*MISSISSIPPI RIVER hands PIZARRO a glass of water.*

PIZZARO

I never tasted water until this moment.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

You are too kind.

PIZZARO

If you would have him, above all others, then move him with miracles.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

All who see me tremble; I make oceans.

*MISSISSIPPI RIVER forms The Gulf of Mexico  
around DE SOTO.*

DE SOTO

Conquistador!

CONQUISTADOR

My lord, champion of heaven and leveler of jungles!

DE SOTO

What is this land I see?

*MAP soars on the wind.*

MAP

The lands of Gog, Magog, Nod, Ur, and all the unholy names of evil places lie before you. A continent of defiance insulting your blade. The night brings terror and the day displays dangers only lion hearts may face. Treasure never known to man, howls of demons, cries of saints, geysers of holy blood. Molten rivers of gilded tribute await.

*MAP catches a breeze and fades from view.*

CONQUISTADOR

We are arrived.

DE SOTO

By the nails that fastened our savior to the cross and weighted him into hell where they were made weightless by the holy spirit allowing our lord and savior to rise again first to earth to say farewell to his followers and then to heaven from which one day he will descend again.

*CONQUISTADOR is silent.*

DE SOTO

I cry anchor

CONQUISTADOR

The mud hook of the Lord!

*The shore travels to De Soto. He is unmoved.*

DE SOTO

Parchment and pen.

*Conquistador produces parchment and paper.*

DE SOTO (*cont'd*)

Now humble scribe of greatness  
Take this paper of the finest  
Make and write with truth  
What you see here and  
On this paper will  
You write of  
Glory.

CONQUISTADOR

My lord, I will compose such a fine verse for you. I will make it so good. The words will rhyme and every two lines I will make up a new word to rhyme. So really every two lines will rhyme. If you would like me to try for three lines rhyming I will. But that means the poem will be shorter. Much shorter.

DE SOTO

Oh earth that flows from the sea  
Oh sky emerging from earth  
Oh Heaven above Hell  
Oh Lord of Heaven and Hell for though hell is evil you did make it...

*DE SOTO sniffs*

DE SOTO (*cont'd*)

Conquistador.

CONQUISTADOR

Muse of might?

DE SOTO

Write a song to capture the unknown we meet.

CONQUISTADOR

The air smells of wet wool  
And the leaves on the trees are green.

DE SOTO

I would feast before our undertaking.

*A panorama of plenty appears, tempting DE SOTO.*

DE SOTO (*cont'd*)

Such wonder. Could I simply stand on this spot and never wander more? Could I know only contentment in so effortless a fashion?

*DE SOTO destroys the plenty.*

DE SOTO (*cont'd*)

Test of the Inquisition! I will not dine on fruit grown in darkness. Fetch me a swine!

*PIG comes onto the stage.*

PIG

I used to look out over cliffs into the sea below. Such a great plummet down into the colliding waves. I knew grass as sweet as sugar. I felt wind kissed with salt. I slept lying down. Then I boarded a great floating manger. The stench of enclosure and the unseen tilt of the world deprived me of such pleasure. I feared the smell of my kind, the squish of rotten hay, and the embrace of darkness were all I would know until my death. And yet, here is the sun. Here is the sea. Here is the land. It is flatter and tastes saltier, but is not without its pleasures. Father!

DE SOTO

And here we part, my child.

PIG

Am I to be first?

DE SOTO

You are. You are the first to die on this land. And you are the first to be eaten by your father.

PIG

It's me! It's me! Stuart it's me! Oh my god he's so jealous, all the other pigs are so jealous, it's embarrassing really. I was good? I stayed still when I was needed to? I was born with special purpose?

DE SOTO

Yes, you were.

PIG

Thank you father. I do hope that you grow full from me and that I fuel your action and reason. Remember me?

DE SOTO

I shall.

*CONQUISTADOR kills PIG. PIG scatters through the land and multiplies.*

DE SOTO (*cont'd*)

Hear me sinful land! These pigs are my messengers. They will tear out the roots that hold this world together. Reveal your treasure to me or suffer their frenzy!

*DE SOTO leads his men away.*

PIZZARO

He intends your subjugation.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

It is given De Soto!

PIZZARO

He will never hear you.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

I have poets to carry my song to him.

PIZZARO

Songs and sweet melodies assault his ears like catapults to a fortress.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

My songs are the dew of the morning.  
The sunrise through the trees.  
The cool breeze signaling the end of summer.

PIZZARO

Can heaven be so close?

*DE SOTO and CONQUISTADOR(s) attack the  
ground for gold. They sing.*

DE SOTO

Who brings the fire through the heathen night?

CONQUISTADOR(s)

Our lord De Soto and his lord Christ!

DE SOTO

Who shakes the earth with a fraction of his might?

CONQUISTADOR(s)

Our lord De Soto and his lord Christ!  
Who strikes with the fury  
And the blessing of the bold?  
Who knows no hunger  
Nor the aches of the old?  
Who arrives with cold steal  
And returns with hot gold?

*There is no gold. A MOCKINGBIRD lands singing.*

MOCKINGBIRD

To die for gold  
Is a sin unmatched  
When there is peace and plenty all around.  
Here in a land that loves you  
It seeks nothing more  
Than to soothe your weary bones.  
All its secrets, you will know  
To all its wonders you will go.  
Forget your desire  
And discover joy.  
I will sing the sweet blessings of the new world  
That would reinvent  
Your mighty lust for blood  
I will sing the sweet blessings of the new world  
How can a man hate when he is loved?

*INNOCENT BYSTANDER walks by..*

DE SOTO

Cease this womanly tune!

*MOCKINGBIRD flies away.*

INNOCENT BYSTANDER

I've always been unlucky.

DE SOTO

That one walks with a heavy gat.

INNOCENT BYSTANDER

My first step was a stumble. I lurch where others leap.

DE SOTO

Let us lighten his load.

INNOCENT BYSTANDER

I'm never ready. For misfortune.

*DE SOTO and CONQUISTADOR(s) surround  
INNOCENT BYSTANDER.*

CONQUISTADOR(s)

This is Texloxcictan! (*Tex—Lox—Sik—Tan*)

*DE SOTO shines.*

Even when I see it coming.	INNOCENT BYSTANDER
What's wrong with him?	DE SOTO
It astonishes me!	INNOCENT BYSTANDER
He's just in awe is all.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
Awe him further.	DE SOTO
This is Texloxcictan!	CONQUISTADOR(s)
	<i>DE SOTO shines.</i>
Misfortune is the most ruthless of masters.	INNOCENT BYSTANDER
Tell him who my father is.	DE SOTO
He is the son of the sun.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
	<i>DE SOTO shines.</i>
The brutal rays of misfortune built my shadow.	INNOCENT BYSTANDER
He lights the world with his fire. He gives libations to the thirsty.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
	<i>DE SOTO snaps his fingers, CONQUISTADOR(s) produces wine and offers it to INNOCENT BYSTANDER.</i>
Tell him it is my blood.	DE SOTO

It's his blood.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
One day the shade will swallow me whole.	INNOCENT BYSTANDER
Tell him to drink my blood.	DE SOTO
Drink his blood.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
I say, "Hello misfortune, please come inside."	INNOCENT BYSTANDER
It's just a fun thing we like to do.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
Drink my blood!	DE SOTO
It's not really his blood.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
"You're the boss."	INNOCENT BYSTANDER
	<i>INNOCENT BYSTANDER drinks.</i>
Continue.	DE SOTO
He is immortal. He will never die. He knows no pain.	CONQUISTADOR(s)
	<i>CONQUISTADOR(s) limply strikes DE SOTO with a period appropriate weapon.</i>
Yet the flick of his wrist moves mountains.	CONQUISTADOR(s) (cont'd)
	<i>DE SOTO uses his pinky finger to render CONQUISTADOR(s) useless.</i>

Lie to him not! CONQUISTADOR(s) (*cont'd*)

Where DE SOTO

Deceive him not. CONQUISTADOR(s)

Is DE SOTO

Toy with him not. CONQUISTADOR(s)

The DE SOTO

Betray him not. CONQUISTADOR(s)

Gold? DE SOTO

Where is the gold? Where is the gold? Where is the gold? CONQUISTADOR(s)

*Gold shines.*

#### INNOCENT BYSTANDER

I honestly never in my life saw a rock or a bone or a tool or a fish or a horn or a canoe or a tree or a bead shine like that. Have that color. I don't go into decorations. I like to have simple well-made things that serve a practical purpose. Once I had this bear blanket. I can't remember being cold for a thousand nights. They say when you have something that long, it's worth the upkeep. The blanket was beautiful but in that special, accidental way.

*Gold shines.*

#### INNOCENT BYSTANDER (*cont'd*)

Once I was in love with a girl. What was her name? Okitebbah. (*Okee—Te—Bay*) I wanted to get her something that matched her beauty. I walked all the way to the large village just through that forest there. That village is special because it sells these spheres made of sea froth.

*INNOCENT BYSTANDER shows a pearl of questionable size.*

INNOCENT BYSTANDER (*cont'd*)

I bought this for her. I traded the bear blanket for it, I mean. And on the way home I bartered for a leather strap from someone on the side of the path. I put the pearl on the strap and gave it to her. I said, "Wear this and feel my affection." She took it and kissed me on the cheek. The next day the strap hung from her neck. She returned the pearl to me, saying nothing, and kissed me on the lips. That was this morning.

*CONQUISTADOR(s) put INNOCENT BYSTANDER into car. CONQUISTADORS set fire to the car. DE SOTO leads them off.*

PIZZARO

Do not weep.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

He treats my gift as a nuisance.

PIZZARO

There are men who would die to protect music as holy as yours.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

And my pearls? Are they of some value to him?

PIZZARO

They have a rustic charm to them.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

He might bestow them on the necks of great people and be celebrated for it?

PIZZARO

I can see noble ladies wearing them.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Then he might be satisfied?

PIZZARO

I cannot say, my lady.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

All the pearls in the land are a small price for your presence next to mine. I give them to you, De Soto. Take them and hurry to me. I grow weak with understanding.

*CONQUISTADOR and CONQUISTADOR 1 are digging in the halls of the dead.*

CONQUISTADOR

How does every corpse have pearls in their teeth?

CONQUISTADOR 1

I've never seen so many coffins.

*A pearl is produced from a skull.*

CONQUISTADOR

And how do all the corpses still have all their teeth?

CONQUISTADOR 1

Rows upon rows upon rows. A never ending crypt.

CONQUISTADOR

I lost three teeth just today.

CONQUISTADOR 1

They bury everyone!

CONQUISTADOR

They don't bury everyone.

CONQUISTADOR 1

Look down there.

*We all look down there.*

CONQUISTADOR

A resting place for everyone.

CONQUISTADOR 1

A home for tired bones.

CONQUISTADOR

The lowest of the low.

CONQUISTADOR 1

And the highest of the high.

BOTH

Equal at last.

*DE SOTO enters with a necklace of enormous pearls.*

What is our tally?  
30,000 kilograms.  
More corpses!

DE SOTO  
CONQUISTADOR  
DE SOTO  
CONQUISTADOR 1  
There will never be an end to them. Look down there.  
*We all look down there.*  
CONQUISTADOR 1 (*cont'd*)  
This land welcomes all the dead. There is space enough for every soul. Look down there.  
*We all look down there.*  
CONQUISTADOR  
I think they bury everyone.  
No.  
CONQUISTADOR  
Everyone who ever died goes into this big lodge in their very own coffin.  
DE SOTO  
I'm sure it's like Spain, they simply dump out the old bodies and put new ones in.  
*COFITACHEQUI (Coffee—Ta—Check—We), the queen of her tribe, enters in fury and flourish.*  
COFITACHEQUI  
Fools! Hear now the command of the empress of the many bays. She who fills pools with plenty. She who drowns the disobedient in her wake!  
*She shines.*  
DE SOTO  
Is my lady angry?  
COFITACHEQUI  
Take the pearls you have pillaged and go.

DE SOTO

Did I not smite your enemies?

COFITACHEQUI

Their severed heads gather flies at the edge of our village.

DE SOTO

You're welcome.

COFITACHEQUI

Get the fuck out!

*COFITACHEQUI echoes through the land.*

DE SOTO

I am Texloxcictan. I am the son of the sun. I am immortal.

COFITACHEQUI

Liar!

DE SOTO

My men will die in droves to save my life.

CONQUISTADOR

I guess that's me.

*COFITACHEQUI murders CONQUISTADOR. A moment. CONQUISTADOR gets back up.*

COFITACHEQUI

My descendants will rip the corn out of your stomachs. You will always lust for more; never filling the smallest of voids.

DE SOTO

Let's go.

COFITACHEQUI

Your bones will boil in the fire of forever!

*They take her. Snow falls. COFITACHEQUI addresses the audience.*

COFITACHEQUI (*To Audience*)

I said, "Into the mountains. That is where the lake bubbles gold." And they believed me. The snow fell on us from the sky. And their bodies became brittle. They did not stop. Their skin froze to their armor and pulled off in bursts of powdered gore. They did not rest. I hoped to kill these

men in this wilderness. They did not die. Something forbid them. (*To CONQUISTADOR and CONQUISTADOR 1*) I have to go to the bathroom.

One CONQUISTADOR 1

Or CONQUISTADOR

*COFITACHEQUI holds up two fingers.*

CONQUISTADOR 1  
You got two minutes. And I'm counting. One minute. Two minute.

*COFITACHEQUI vanishes.*

Damn she's gone.

*The snow covers our view and reveals PIZZARO and MISSISSIPPI RIVER.*

PIZZARO  
He is not worthy of you!

MISSISSIPPI RIVER  
Oh he feels me in the ground and in the air but he is too proud to be loved. Oh De Soto, what more must I do? All is yours. Do whatever you will. Even your punishment is a balm to a longing soul. Go to the gulf that brought you, De Soto. There you will find a village to channel your fury. Mobile it is called. It is my sacrifice to you. Burn it to the ground. Expunge your rage on those innocents and come to me ready to be a lover.

*GHOST CONQUISTADOR enters and sings.*

GHOST CONQUISTADOR  
Mobile is burning  
And it's been burning for some time  
Mobile is burning  
And it's been burning for a long long time  
If you want to burn Mobile down mister you better get in line

See the fires in Mobile  
Spilling out into the sea  
See the fires in Mobile  
As they spill out into the sea  
I might have lit that fire, but it's nothing to do with me

Mobile Mobile  
I love to see you burn  
Mobile Mobile  
I love to see you burn  
I hope there's something left standing  
Hope I get another turn

I knocked very calmly on the Chief's door.

*A door. A knock.*

GHOST CONQUISTADOR (cont'd)

And how could I help it if the door just opened on its own.

*An anachronistic axe appears.*

GHOST CONQUISTADOR (cont'd)

Almost like another arm broke through it.

*The axe chops once.*

GHOST CONQUISTADOR (cont'd)

Wake up old man and tell me where you got this ring. You hide gold from us and I will rip your teeth out.

*CHIEF TUSCALOOSA takes a ring from GHOST CONQUISTADOR's finger.*

CHIEF TUSCALOOSA

I was given this ring by an old crone who claimed her grandfather took it from men with hairy faces and cold steel who came on big boats with dragon heads. She said if I wore this ring it would protect me from them. These men must not be of that line. In this land, everyone says they are a god. You can't do any business if you don't tolerate that. So you humor people as long as you can, because what harm does it do to you if someone says they are immortal? They still feel hunger. That's the price of business.

*CHIEF TUSCALOOSA and GHOST CONQUISTADOR burn.*

DE SOTO

Consult the map.

*MAP enters with a broken wing.*

MAP

A new world put to the sword. Earth doused in salt, bathed in fire. Yet no secret is revealed, no treasure excavated, no glory obtained.

*They turn in the opposite direction.*

CONQUISTADOR 1

Home is that way.

DE SOTO

We need no home but conquest.  
We crave no rest but death.  
We seek no glory but life everlasting.

*The sun alights on the MISSISSIPPI RIVER. The land opens, blooms and sings.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

I am the water that feeds the land  
I yield with unending bounty  
I am the highway of the gods  
I connect while separating  
For you son of the sun  
I give

What dreams shall I make  
To show you I love you  
For you son of the sun  
I live

What sacrifice do you demand  
To show you I love you  
For you son of the sun  
I love

DE SOTO

Impediments must be overcome.

*DE SOTO crosses the MISSISSIPPI RIVER.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

I am the key to all prosperity. What more could you crave?

DE SOTO

That which glows with its own power.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Treasure me.

DE SOTO

I scoff at your majesty.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

I love you with no conditions. Lie beside me and live a paradise unequaled.

DE SOTO

I linger here no longer.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Be warned, De Soto, I have friends all over this earth.

*MOSQUITO hatches, matures, and visits the river.*

MOSQUITO

Where is the blood that you would like me to drink? Where is the body that I must drain? Where is the light to be extinguished?

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

He is there. His wrath blinds him to my worshipping beauty.

MOSQUITO

May my life be forfeit for this great honor!

*MOSQUITO sucks the blood out of DE SOTO.*

DE SOTO

Curses to the miniature demons of this world!

*DE SOTO crushes the MOSQUITO.*

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

You will be mine, Hernando. You cannot fight that destiny.

DE SOTO

The smallest of insects...

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

I will hold you for eternity

DE SOTO

Cannot destroy me...

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

And love you longer.

DE SOTO

Please.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

What say you, conqueror?

DE SOTO

Let me not remain here. Let my body return home to Spain. Let a chapel be erected within the Church of San Miguel in the village of my birth, at a cost of 2,000 ducats, with an altarpiece displaying the Virgin Mary. Let my tomb be emblazoned with the red cross of the Order of the Knights of Santiago, and on the days marking the birth and rebirth of our savior, let a pall of black velvet with the De Soto coat of arms be placed on the altar. Let a chaplain be hired to perform five masses every week for the souls of my mother, my wife, and myself. Let thirty masses be said for me the day my body is interred, and twenty for our Lady of the Conception, ten for the Holy Ghost, and sixty for souls in purgatory. Let 150,000 pieces of gold be given annually to my wife Isabel for her needs and an equal amount used yearly to marry off three orphan damsels, the poorest that can be found. Let my name be known as one who saw more than any other man.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

You will receive no such honor.

*DE SOTO dies. CONQUISTADORS lift DE SOTO and offer him to the river.*

CONQUISTADORS

And so we cast you  
Son of the Sun  
To this great river  
Where you will sink.

*CATFISH swims from the source of the MISSISSIPPI RIVER to the present location.*

CATFISH

For a thousand years I will eat his bones and his skin. He is mine to consume and I thank you, great river, for every bite I will take.

PIZZARO

Though your dreams die with him, might I be worthy to plant new ones? I have loved you since you first graced my hands with your glory. You degrade your paradise for one not worthy of its wonder. Flawed though I am, I can see more than a fool. Let me offer you contentment if you cannot have pleasure.

MISSISSIPPI RIVER

To the mole of the earth, Pizzaro. Take up your weapon and toil for as long as De Soto has body to consume. Then you will switch.

*PIZZARO picks up the period appropriate weapon and begins to pick at the earth. The CATFISH eats DE SOTO slowly.*

End of Panel 3

## **VITA**

The playwright was raised in Covington Louisiana. He received a double B.A. in Theatre and History at Kenyon College in 2005. He enrolled in the M.F.A. Creative Writing Workshop at the University of New Orleans in 2014 where he studied under Professor Justin Maxwell.