

The Swan and Limbo
or 'What if Purgatory was a Pub?'

By

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ACT I

Scene 1

A man, Liam, tentatively walks into what appears to be a regular bar. Once he is spotted, one of the men in the bar, John the Baptist, gets up to go over and greet him. Elsewhere in the bar is St. Peter and St. Paul sat together, and on a separate table sat alone is Buddha. On St. Peter and St. Paul's table is a toaster. Other less notable people are scattered around on various tables.

LIAM

Where am I?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Where is he, he asks? You're in 'The Swan and Limbo', mate. What's your name?

LIAM

Where?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

'The Swan and Limbo'. That's the name of the pub. Not a very good name, is it? Don't tell Him I said this, but he never did understand the concept of subtlety. Plus, for some strange reason, he just really likes swans. What's your name, son?

LIAM

Why am I in a pub? One minute I was on a plane, and now...sorry, my name's Liam.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Nice to meet you, Liam. Yeah, sorry to have to break it to you, but...you're dead, mate. My condolences. But on the upside...a totally painless death. You've got one up on me right there.

LIAM

So I'm dead?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

You're dead.

LIAM

Is this supposed to be heaven?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Well, not exactly, but--

(CONTINUED)

LIAM

Is this hell?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

No no no no no. Trust me, boy, you'd know it if you was in hell. This is purgatory.

LIAM

Purgatory? Why am I in purgatory? It's been a while since I've been to church, but isn't it supposed to be full up with, like, un-baptised babies or something?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

God, you won't let up with the questions, will you? Yeah, normally, but, you know, over 18's allowed in here only.

LIAM

Seriously? Stop with all the jokes. Who are you?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Wow, well you're no fun. I've only been stuck in here for, shall we just round it to, 2 millenia. 2000 years stuck in this crummy old pub. Excuse me if I crack a joke or two to pass the time and keep morale up. Alright, Mr. Serious. I'm John. John the Baptist to be exact. For the last couple hundred years or so we've been been ferrying everyone straight to purgatory. You see, Heavens a little...over saturated.

LIAM

You're saying Heavens full up?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Essentially, yes.

LIAM

How can Heaven be full up?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Well...Gods a pretty forgiving guy, when push comes to shove. I don't like it either, I'd rather not be neighbours with Charles Manson, but what can you do?

LIAM

Right. So I've been good all my life--

John the Baptist makes a disagreeing action, wavering his hand while holding it in a stretched out horizontal position.

LIAM

I've been mostly good all my life, and I'm supposed to just wait out eternity here?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

The alcohol helps.

Liam becomes visibly disheartened in his demeanor.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ah, come on, it's not *that* bad. I haven't even told you the best bit. Last year we put into practice a new scheme in which the inhabitants of purgatory can actually win a place in heaven. It's still in it's beta testing phase, mind, but it's getting good results.

Liam becomes intrigued, and an increase in morale is seen.

LIAM

How do I win? By being good?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

(laughing)

Ah wow, that's good. That's good. No, course not by being good. You have to take part in the pub quiz.

LIAM

The pub quiz?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Do you need me to write this down for you? Yeah, the pub quiz. I'm the quiz master. I'm pretty proud of my questions, If I may say so.

LIAM

Proud?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

It's not one of the deadly sins if I'm doing it ironically.

LIAM

Sure.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

At first he repeats everything I say to him like a child and now he thinks he's a theologian. Gah, what happened back down on Earth? What went wrong?

LIAM

So, how do I win my way into heaven?

(CONTINUED)

JOHN THE BAPTIST

You have to come fourth.

LIAM

Fourth? Why fourth? First is obvious. Third, maybe I could understand because of the trinity. Why fourth?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

That's easy. To quote the son of God, the saviour of man, Jesus said: "Come forth to recieve eternal salvation." Poor old St. Peter over there, you know, sat with St. Paul, he came fifth. See that toaster over there with him.

John the Baptist motions over towards St. Peter and St. Paul's table.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

He was pretty dissapointed. I suppose I can understand, he was supposed to be the rock the church was built upon, but I must say, it's a pretty nice toaster. It can do two sets of bread at once.

LIAM

What's the prize for first?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

(abrupt)

Nothing.

(normal)

You haven't got a hope in...in...H E L L of winning. Not with Mr. Know-it-all sitting over there.

John the Baptist motions over at Buddha.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

He's one of the reasons we made the heaven spot be the fourth prize. I couldn't bear it if he made it in. He's so spiritual and boring. Thankfully, despite his ever so clear wiseness and mystical mind, he keeps winning. Smart ass.

LIAM

Is...is that Buddha?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Yeah. He just doesn't get the hint. Every week he shows up here with his encyclopaedia brain and every week he wins.

LIAM

Can't you just disqualify him?

(CONTINUED)

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Disqualify him? *Disqualify him?* Actually, that ain't half a bad idea, you know. Thanks.

John the Baptist touches his finger to his nose.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Right. Well...it's going to start any minute now. You've got a tough decision ahead of you. Do you play it alone or do you join a team?

LIAM

Well, that's easy.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

It isn't. You see, each victor, regardless of being an individual or a collective group, only wins one place. So if you win as a team...you win just one space to be divided between that team.

LIAM

How the hell can you divide a seat in Heaven?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Think of it as a time share cloud...I don't know, one week in paradise sound good to you?

LIAM

And I'd be here the rest of the time?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Don't say it like it's a bad thing? We do this quiz every week.

LIAM

I think I'll go it alone, thank you very much.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Alright, take a seat then, one where there's a pen and paper. I'm going to go and set up.

Liam sits down at a table on his own, while John the Baptist walks over to the bar and reaches over to the other side pulling out a microphone. He then pulls some glasses from a pocket and delicately puts them on.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

(louder and more cabaret)

Right then, Ladies and Gentlemen, who's ready for Quiz Night?

Everyone mutters variations upon yes.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Now, that's just not good enough. I said...*Who's ready for the Quiz Night?*

A more louder and punctuated affirmative answer sounds out from everyone this time.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ok. Right, well, I know we have a few new comers here so I'll have a quick run through of the rules. Absolutely no cheating whatsoever, that means no phones, no psychic powers, no ESP, no paper on the desk over than the answer sheet. That one goes out to you Paul, I don't care if you're writing another letter. No *Papaer*.

St. Paul waves his hand towards John the Baptist, as if to say 'shut up'.

ST. PAUL

(muttering)

Dick.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

(talking to Liam)

Oh, by the way, I forgot to mention...if you come last...the punishment is death. Just kidding, just kidding. But yeah, really, whoever comes last gets dumped down to Hell.

(to everyone)

Right then, who's ready to start?

John the Baptist picks up some papers from the bar and holds them in front of himself.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ok, we'll begin with an easy one. Who shot J.R.?

People randomly write and those in groups talk amongst themselves.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Alright, second question. What is the name of the actor that played the character J.R. Ewing?

Again there is a flurry of activity somewhat similar to before.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

And...the third question. How many seasons did the hit show Dallas run for?

Liam slams the pen down in anger and turns to talk to John the Baptist.

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LIAM

Right, are all these questions about Dallas?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Erm, hang on...

*John the Baptist looks through his set of papers
and then turns back to Liam.*

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Looks like it, yeah.

LIAM

What? That's a bit unfair, how am I supposed to answer any of these questions? That show was way before my time.

ST. PETER

I don't know what you're moaning about, it was about 2000 years after our time. You'd think we'd get cable up here...we don't. All we get is terrestrial TV and Paramount Comedy.

LIAM

Didn't Paramount change to Comedy Central?

ST. PETER

What? You're joking? When did this happen?

LIAM

A few years back now.

ST. PETER

(looking upset)

Ah man.

ST. PAUL

Do they still have Father Ted? Do they still have Frasier?

LIAM

Look, I don't know. Who watches Frasier, anyways?

ST. PAUL

(looking offended)

I do.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Right, we're getting sidetracked. Let me just skip all the Dallas trivia. Ok, here we go, next question. What's the name of the paranoid android in Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy?

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Much like before, there is a flurry of activity between the groups and people writing answers down.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ok, and...that's it. Times up, hand your answers in to me and I'll mark them now.

LIAM

Is that it?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Yeah. Especially since *someone* wasn't happy with the questions.

LIAM

Yeah, but...three questions? I thought you said you were proud of your questions?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

I was, it took me ages to rack up enough Dallas questions to last 2 hours.

LIAM

Whatever.

One by one each group submits their answer papers to John the Baptist. He then begins marking them, while everyone sits around patiently.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ok then, the scores on the doors. Here we are then...bringing up the rear, it's 'The Purgatories' with 0. Well done guys. In fifth place with 1, it's, drumroll please, Liam. So you've won yourself a brand new toaster, come see me at the end to collect it.

Liam throws his head into his hands.

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Ok, in fourth place is... 'The Parachutes'. Terrible team name, guys. Really? Well, you've won yourselves a spot in heaven to share between yourselves, again...come see me at the end. Alright, in tied second place it's 'The All Saints' and 'The Four Quizzers of the Apocalypse'. Of course, you win...nothing.

(sounding irritated, talking fast without enthusiasm)

And first place is Buddha.

John the Baptist throws the papers down onto the bar.

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JOHN THE BAPTIST

Sorry it didn't go exactly to plan guys, but thanks for playing, I hope you've had a great time.

Liam gets up and walks over to John the Baptist.

LIAM

Alright then, where's this toaster?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Oh come on, lighten up. It's not the end of the world or anything. You've always got next week...you might want to find a video rental store.

LIAM

Why's that?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Oh, you know. Research. Next week is M*A*S*H week.

The End.