

THE UNREASONING MASK

A play by D'Arcy Jones Cook and William A. Cook
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“All visible objects ... are but as pasteboard masks. But ... in the living act, the undoubted-deed ... some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask.” (Chapter 36, Moby Dick)

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THE PLAY:

The Unreasoning Mask is a contemporary tragedy based on actual events that took place in 2001-2003. Unlike classical tragedy that presents a protagonist's fall caused by human weakness, a weakness that he comes to recognize by the end of the play, *The Unreasoning Mask* presents a protagonist, equal in political stature to those depicted in classical tragedy, but a protagonist who does not come to the recognition that elicits the tragic spirit in classical drama. This protagonist remains blind to his folly even as he commits himself to the action that will cause the tragedy. The tragedy in this play happens to the common person, the innocent who are the victims of the protagonist.

The events presented focus on a single decision made in March of 2003, the decision to "pull" the second resolution presented by the United States administration requesting authority from the Security Council of the United Nations that would allow the US to attack Iraq. This resolution had been presented to the UN by the Bush administration as a means of legitimizing its desire to invade and occupy Iraq. Member states of the SC resisted this action forcing the President to pull the resolution, placing America in the role of rogue nation willing and able to invade another nation at will and without international approval.

The play opens on September 14, 2001, four days after the disastrous attacks on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the aborted attempt to attack an unknown building by the hijackers of the plane that crashed in a Pennsylvania field. The President has just returned from visiting ground zero, dazed by the emotion that poured forth from the workers at the site who called upon him to seek revenge. He commits himself to that end regardless of the consequences and without deliberation of causes and effects.

The second scene brings the action to March of 2003, 18 months after the opening scene. America has completed the destruction of the Taliban with world approval reacting in sympathy to 9/11. The UNSC has authorized inspection of WMD in Iraq at the demand of the US and continues to plead for a continuation of the inspections. The Bush administration has offered a second resolution that would terminate the first Resolution, 1441, and provide authorization for America to attack Iraq. Scenes 3-9 present an administration determined to have its way regardless of world opinion, international agreements including the UN Charter, or international law.

The protagonist of this tragedy commits himself to an action that offers sympathy for his position and the plight of the American people, but, in tracing the actions that followed that commitment, the play depicts a man oblivious to reflective thought, deliberation of consequences, world opinion, and the innocent who will be the silent victims of the atrocities he inflicts. The tragedy of the play happens to those who can do nothing to stop the drive to empire, who can do nothing but be silent witnesses to the decisions being made, who are ignorant of the forces that impel the action, and yet who suffer the horrific consequences of these decisions. The innocent are represented in the Choruses who watch the action but can do nothing more than lament what is not considered and the consequences of the decisions that destroy humankind.

We consider the play a drama for peace, a silent requiem for those who suffered the devastation wrought by leaders who gave no heed to the plight of the innocent. The play does not attempt to portray actual events as they actually happened. It is, after all, fiction, using contemporary events because they embody universal themes. We had no access to meeting transcripts nor acquaintance with psychologists who could give us professional insight into causes for behavior taken by the characters. The people portrayed in the play are characters in a fictional work. They behave the way they do because the events they were engaged in reveal leaders unconcerned about the plight of the innocent. Especially is this true of the President who must bear responsibility for the acts. He, as the leader of the most powerful nation on earth, defies world opinion, international agreements, and international law to advance his obsession to place America in control of the world's nations and to assert his declaration of American values.

His motivation is entangled in personal hatred, political intrigue, religious beliefs, corporate power, and a cabal of men who have surrounded him and propel their own agenda. The confluence of these forces comes together dramatically in the days immediately preceding the decision to pull the second resolution. That decision catapults America to the forefront of pariah nations, forcing it to act unilaterally and contrary to its foundational ideals. The most devastating consequence of this decision may be illustrated by considering the unfortunate life of Ali Abbas, the boy made armless and an orphan by the bombing of Baghdad. He was born in the year the Cabal designed the destruction of Iraq. His ill-fated, star-crossed life suffered the consequences of Rumsfeld's and Bush's obsession to destroy Iraq.

Cast of Characters:

George Bush
Laura Bush
Condoleezza Rice
Donald Rumsfeld
Colin Powell
Billy Graham
Karl Rove
Dick Cheney
George Tenet
Chorus

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SCENE 1

The scene introduces the private George and Laura Bush in a moment of physical and emotional exhaustion, at the end of a long day during the week following the events of 9/11. George has been at Ground Zero all day. He presents in this scene as vulnerable and unguarded, his thoughts and feelings coming forth raw and spontaneous in describing the many hours he has spent with victims of the World Trade Center tragedy. It is toward the end of the scene, however, when George Bush first reveals the direction in which he is headed, where we first get a glimpse of the tenor of his response to 9/11 and what role it could play in a larger political vision.

Laura is primarily a sounding board for her husband’s running commentary on the events of the day and the larger implications of the week’s events. She is herself exhausted but duty-bound to be attentive. At the end of the scene she is alert to George’s pronouncements in a way which suggests that she is intimately familiar with his fluctuating moods, even before the events of this historical and tragic event.

[No late arrivals will be seated; theater doors will be shut. Moving video footage of the World Trade Center attacks and collapse will be projected onto the curtains as Barber’s Adagio for Strings plays. First pause in music timed to collapse of buildings; projection abruptly stops with pause in music.]

[The Chorus of firemen, policemen, well-dressed civilians, men and women, representatives of the Twin Towers, enter from rear and sides of stage. They come together center stage to recite the chant, “Ground Zero.” Following the recitation, they retreat from the stage.]

CHORUS: “Ground Zero”

(The Chant)

He came to us in our hour of tribulation,
His face as ashen as the cinders on which we walked;
He heard our wail and joined our lamentation
For those who perished in this inferno.

And he heard our cry in the fire’s glow,
And he saw the steam rise from our tears,
And he felt the depth of our pain flow
And swell in the morning light.

We cried to him on behalf of all
Who lost their lives before the day began,
Who heard the thunderous roar of death
At the door, unheralded and unknown.

Who designed an act so savage?
Who willed that it be fulfilled?
What tormented heart raged
In darkness all alone?

He listened to our cries,
As we dug through the rubble of the world
Seeking the sighs of those still alive,
And he vowed revenge!

We lifted our hands in triumph to the skies,
Our vengeance red as the fire's light.
Blood raging in our veins,
As darkness shrouded the night.

“O leader hear our cries,
Your sword and ours are one,
In just cause our vengeance lies
His will and ours be done.”

[Curtain opens on living quarters of George & Laura Bush. He is in suit pants and dress shirt, sleeves rolled up, shirt opened at top with tie hanging loose, elbows resting on table. He rubs his head and eyes repeatedly, lets out a long sigh. Laura looks exhausted as well.]

GEORGE:

Laura, the faces of those people. Everyone is in such a state of shock, they don't even realize . . . they don't want to believe, I guess . . . that there's nobody gonna come out of there alive now.

LAURA:

Oh, God. It's so sad and horrible.

GEORGE:

I didn't know what to do! I mean, they were looking to *me*, and I shook their hands one after another. Seemed like it went on for *hours*. They . . . some of them even needed to hug me . . .and I was okay with that. I felt good about that. Honored, really. But I just didn't know what else to do!

LAURA

Well of course, George. What else

GEORGE:

[Cuts Laura off mid-sentence, regaining confidence]

I *did* give them autographed pictures, and I told em' that when they saw their husband or wife . . . I'd asked for the names, you know, when I signed the pictures. Anyway, I said when they saw them to tell em' I signed the picture myself . . . for both of em'.

LAURA:

[Looking away, a puzzled expression on her face]

But . . . they aren't coming back, George . . . you said so yourself . . .

[catches herself, regrets having pointed it out]

I'm sure it was fine, though. I'm sure they knew you meant wellknew what you meant, anyway.

[Changes the subject, trying to draw attention elsewhere]

The staff are afraid, but they try so hard to support me. It's like the whole country's been hit by a huge truck. It changes the way we see everything, like something could come from anywhere and we won't see it coming.

GEORGE:

This isn't like the war my Dad faced. This is evil with a capital E. Those folks today at Ground Zero understand it alright. Digging through that pile, that mountain of rubble. They wanted me to talk, to say something, you know. The noise and everything, there was no way anybody was gonna be able to hear me. Somebody handed me a megaphone, but they still couldn't hear. They just kept shouting USA! USA! Over and over again.

LAURA:

Yes, I saw it on the news.

GEORGE:

[Sits at the edge of his seat, excited and intense]

There was this one guy, Laura. The whole time . . . *the whole time* he just kept yelling ‘Don’t let me down! Don’t let me down! The emotion on his face . . . it was so, so *personal*, you know?’

LAURA:

Personal?

GEORGE:

Yeah. I mean, that’s what this is all about, isn’t it? I mean, there were hundreds and hundreds of people out there, we all were feeling the same thing . . . everybody in the country’s feeling the same thing, but . . . *this guy* . . . the passion on his face was so . . . real. My attention just kept going back to that guy. Looking at him . . . somehow . . . he made me feel like I found my purpose, you know?

LAURA:

Your purpose?

GEORGE:

You know how it’s been. We had a helluva ride getting here, but you remember during the campaign, stuff goin’ around about I wasn’t fit to be Commander in Chief, had no foreign policy experience. I just feel like I know now. I know I was meant to be here, to be President now, to deal with terrorism.

[Stands up, excited and agitated; raises his voice]

Clinton didn’t go to Vietnam either!

LAURA:

Yes, well . . . don’t you feel like you’d like to get out of that suit now and try to wind down?

GEORGE:

[Ignores her suggestion and continues]

I put in my time in the Guard. Hell! This isn’t the kind of war we’ve had to fight in the past, anyway.

[Still excited, gesturing broadly, looking out to distance]

It’s a whole new ball game; these terrorist scum, moving from country to country; they hide like rats, live in caves. All they care about is their hatred for our way of life and their crazy Islamicist beliefs!

GEORGE:

[Sits down, calms himself, takes a deep breath]

It's my *destiny* Laura, is how I feel. Otherwise, why else am I here, you know? I mean I'm not saying God made this whole thing happen or anything, but *it is happening* and *I am* the one in charge. You remember that talk I had with Reverend those years back?

LAURA:

Which talk do you mean?

GEORGE:

He told me that I had a higher calling. He told me that God had a plan for me, a mission. When he said it, I thought he just meant I should get control of myself. You know, stop drinking, get right with God. But now I'm thinking, if He had a plan, it could have been a much bigger plan than I knew back then. I mean, here I am, at this crucial point in the history of our country. *And I am in control.*

LAURA:

Relax, dear, you've got to relax. Why don't you take a break before coming to bed?. Play some video golf.

[Lights dim; Laura & George exit stage]

[Donald Rumsfeld bounds on stage left carrying a podium with the defense department seal on it and his name as secretary. He recites the following quote with great animation of facial expression and hand and arm gestures. He then leaves hurriedly stage right.]

RUMSFELD:

You're going to be told lots of things. You get told things every day that don't happen. It doesn't seem to bother people, they don't happen. It's printed in the press. The world thinks all these things happen. They never happened. Everyone's so eager to get the story before in fact the story's there that the world is constantly being fed things that haven't happened. All I can tell you is, it hasn't happened. It's going to happen.

SCENE 2

What Laura and Rice both understand on different levels but must speak around, is that George Bush is at bottom seriously inadequate to the demands of the position he occupies. Laura's understanding of this is sub-conscious; she is completely committed to support and protect her husband's image. More than anyone it is Laura Bush who understands her husband's deep-seeded sense of inferiority and insecurity, but she is conflicted by her fear and concern for George on the one hand, and on the other by her desire for his success; she is a woman deeply committed to the patriarchal ideal of marriage and family seen through the prism of her Christian faith. It is approximately 18 months after 9/11. The second resolution has been proposed to the UN Security Council to approve war against Iraq. The resolution is in trouble.

[Scene opens with Laura in personal quarters or office. Secretary announces arrival of Condoleezza Rice over speaker-phone. Condi enters]

LAURA:

Condi! Thank you for coming on such short notice, I know how busy you are.
[Walks with hand extended to greet her]

CONDI:

Don't even mention it, Laura. I'm delighted to come, anytime.

LAURA:

Please, have a seat. Can I get you some coffee, or a cup of tea?

CONDI:

No, no thanks, I'm fine.

[Sits on the end of the couch and sighs out loud]

I'd love to sit somewhere that doesn't involve major decision-making. But how are you, Laura?

LAURA:

[Tense but composed and gracious]

Oh, I'm very well. Thank you. But I think the question is, *How is George?*

CONDI:

[Chuckles, trying to make light of the question]

Well, I guess that's a question we both ask often enough, isn't it?

LAURA:

Condi, seriously, he has been so agitated.

CONDI:

[Picking up now on Laura's seriousness]

Oh, I know. I know. You know, Laura, we're at such a crucial point right now; the Security Council's split on the second resolution and it's caused an even bigger split between Rumsfeld and Powell; so much is happening – not that that in itself is unusual. But it's like being at the center of the storm - - more than one storm, really.

LAURA:

[Nervous and deeply concerned, straining to remain composed]

You know, Condi, you're the only eyes and ears I can trust around here; I mean, George talks to me every day, of course. But ... he doesn't tell me ... I mean, how is he handling ... the pressure?

CONDI:

[Becomes uncomfortable, tries to maintain professional reserve]

Well . . . George has to decide ... to pull or not to pull the resolution; it forces him to choose, and . . . The Department of Defense keeps ratcheting up the tensions. . . the international pressures . . . it's all swirling around, and George is right at the center of all these forces . . .

[Awkward and slightly embarrassed]

I don't need to tell you how George likes things to be ... clear ...

[Pauses, struggling with how to continue]

anyway, Powell's out there trying the diplomatic approach while the rest of the team can't agree on what reason is going to be used for going to war when the resolution is pulled.... it's the dissension among the team members that's getting on George's nerves.

LAURA:

[Distracted and somewhat confused]

This infighting is so negative ... during the Afghanistan operation George was steady ...

[She stops herself]

CONDI:

[Slightly condescending, wants to wrap the conversation up]

Yes, I know, I'm doing everything I can ... to make it happen the way George wants. There will be a team meeting inside of a week, with the resolution issue on fast-track. I already set that up.

LAURA:

[Agitated; holding back emotion]

These stupid political rivalries make me nauseous.

CONDI:

[Patronizing]

Yes. But we just have to do our best, all of us. I really do appreciate your concerns.

LAURA:

[Breaks loose of decorum; bolts off seat, stalks across the room and then turns to face Condi]

Sometimes I wonder if anybody really does understand. You know, Texas is the biggest state in this country, but I assure you where politics is concerned, it is *a very small pond!* And George was for so many years a big frog in that pond. It just seems like no matter how much you think you're going to be ready for this kind of pressure, it just . . . you just don't know until you're *in it*, and then . . . there's so much at stake . . .

CONDI:

[Trying to calm Laura]

Well, Laura I think the President is handling the pressure . . .

LAURA:

[Cuts Condi off mid-sentence, throws up her arms]

The man came to bed with his boots on! With his boots on!

[Both women stand in silence, stunned by Laura's admission]

LAURA:

[Embarrassed now, straining to regain composure]

Oh, Condi. I'm in a state, aren't I? My Lord.

CONDI:

[Determined now to end this meeting, she rises from her seat]

Laura, really, I think you need to take some of this pressure off yourself. Everything's going to be all right.

[Lightens her tone, trying to end on an upbeat note]

If I have anything to do with it, that is.

LAURA:

Oh, I have confidence in you, Condi. Don't you ever think I don't.

CONDI:

Laura, we'll all get through this. I know it sometimes feels like we never will. You call me *anytime you need to talk*. I mean it.

LAURA:

Thank you.

[Condi nods in response, turns and exits stage]

[The Chorus in the jury box/bleacher is made up of women and children in varying modes of dress. They respond to this scene in full understanding of the consequences of the actions that will transpire.]

CHORUS: (The Mothers' Lament)

We are women, bound in flesh
giving life to all who walk this place we share.

Still, our voices, our thoughts, they go unheard
beneath thunderous rhetoric of greed and war ;

but can we not speak, as mothers for peace?
Can we not cry out to these men?

I wait in the darkness of my home at night,
lie awake not knowing when death will strike.

Will my children die first, or be maimed,
will I survive to care for their wounds,

suffer a quick or torturous death, leaving them
homeless, scarred and alone?

We see the cruel logic as these mens' minds
deceive themselves for power's sake,

feign meaning and moral as they plot,
singing in glory the war they create.

Will you not weep for our childrens' limbs
cut down like a crop to this cause?

Will you not feel pangs of shame for lies
that veil horror and greed in our freedom's name?

Condone these crimes no more, I beg,
let them not act in our names;

Call out to the men of power: Enough. War Is Wrong!
Women of the world, cry peace in one tongue,

before fires of hell consume us, and this our earth.
Mothers all, to the higher laws of life give birth.

[ALL CHORUS MEMBERS RAISE TO THEIR FACES THE MASK OF THE
WEEPING WOMAN]

SCENE 3

George Bush meets with Colin Powell privately. Powell is concerned about Rumsfeld's approach to war with Iraq in the context of the role of the United Nations. This has been building for months, with numerable squabbles between Powell's State Dept. and Rumsfeld's Dept. of Defense. The DOD has come out in the press and made statements undermining the careful diplomatic blocks Powell has been building at the international level. Bush has initiated the meeting for an update on Powell's trip to the UK and also to reassure Powell that he shares the desire for UN support; however, this reassurance is primarily given to ease the tensions of the moment between Rumsfeld and Powell. Bush is much more closely aligned with Rumsfeld's views than with Powell's position on the need to move on Iraq with full UN support.

Powell sees this as a crucial point in the direction of the administration's foreign policy. He understands that the same world opinion and goodwill that supported America after 9/11 in its attack on the Taliban is being eroded by the threat of war on Iraq and could be decimated if carried out unilaterally. He is aware that Bush's impatience is building; he senses his time line is being shortened even as Bush reassures him and appears to support the diplomatic approach.

[Rumsfeld bounds in stage left carrying podium. He recites the following quote with the same animation as before.]

RUMSFELD:

I think what you'll find, I think what you'll find is, whatever it is we do substantively, there will be near-perfect clarity as to what it is. And it will be known, and it will be known to the Congress, and it will be known to you, probably before we decide it, but it will be known."

[Scene opens in office setting; Bush is seated at desk looking over papers as Powell enters Stage Right. Bush stands up, leans over desk and the two men shake hands, then Bush moves around desk to join Powell at a conference table. Audience views both men in profile.]

BUSH:

Let's go over . . . just briefly, your meeting with Tony; I'll hear your full report to the council tomorrow, but I'd like to know how it went.

POWELL:

[With professional demeanor]

Certainly. Well, as we all know, he's up against formidable opposition without and within his own party; public opinion is strongly opposed without further inspections and a UN resolution. Of course, that's compounded by massive demonstrations in Europe – Rome, Paris, Berlin, Madrid – millions in the streets. The Brits see themselves as part of that, as part of a united EU.

BUSH:

Right. We've had demonstrations, but nothing like they've got there. What else?

POWELL:

Evidence. Calls for evidence on both sides of Parliament, and of course in the British and European press. Tony's prepared a full report, but it's got holes. He uses the Niger papers, the ones Cheney produced but the CIA investigated and found unreliable. I think it's dangerous to use it.

BUSH:

Maybe so, but it's the closest thing we've got right now to a ... what's the word? ... oh, smoking gun, and it'll stop the critics, at least for a while. It's a goddamned shame when what should be as plain as the nose on their fuckin' faces, they want proof of anyway. If they had any amount of control at all, over there, with the press . . . I mean the press here, we've got it so they can't just ask any damn question, framed anyway they want. They know better now, especially old Thomas ... thought she ran the press corps for Chris's sake, and it didn't take long for Fleischer to change that. Anybody tries to get away with that shit here, they find themselves out of the next press conference.

POWELL:

[Showing some agitation; wants to get back to real subject]

Also, some of the statements . . . coming out of the DOD, in particular. General statements and claims being made about democratizing the region . . .

[Shifts uncomfortably, looks down at table before continuing]

Predictions of what is the will of the Iraqi people . . . things Perle says as though he's speaking for us... critics question that stuff. "The road to peace in the Middle East goes through Baghdad" statement . . . this is viewed as a veiled reference to Israeli driven policy, and without addressing the Palestinian issue, well. . .

[Powell turns both palms up, glancing directly at Bush momentarily, then rests his hands on table, but doesn't finish sentence]

BUSH:

[Attempts to present a rational argument]

I took that statement under advice, Colin. The fact of the matter is we've got to connect the dots for people, and Iraq is only the first. We've got a list of seven countries where regime change has got to happen, and it's going to happen, and that's not even the half of what we've got to do; we've got to make the case in people's minds, the case for what's gonna be a new kind of war that won't end with Iraq.

POWELL:

Yes, but you see how everybody out there reacts to Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz dismissing the UN!

BUSH:

[Getting excited]

Look, the United States doesn't have time to make nice with the UN and the fuckin' EU while they decide on a timetable when and how we should go about defending our country. Afghanistan was first because that was necessary, but you know there were many right in our team who'd of gone into Iraq before the month was out after 9/11, simple as that.

POWELL:

[Sarcastically]

Or ten years before.

BUSH:

[Calmly attempting to blunt Powell's concern]

I know, and I realize the tensions . . . the disagreements are there, and I know they run deep.

POWELL:

[Agitated]

It's difficult to move forward when people shove their private and overtly imperial agenda front and center just when I'm trying to win swing states to our side. Goddamn it, they're trying to manipulate -- NO! They're downright interfering -- in State affairs, and I resent it!

BUSH:

[Condescending]

I can understand you're feeling that way, but we need you on this team. . . you're the balance, you know, the counter balance, I depend on you a lot and I don't take that lightly, everybody knows that.

POWELL:

[More calm, but ends on sarcastic note]

I'm no longer a soldier, Mr. President. I'm not going to try to manage defense policy, but I am going to report to you how our actions are perceived and will be perceived if we go it alone, including world and domestic opinion, and I'm not going to leave out how the Brits and the Germans see our little strutting cock at the defense Department.

BUSH:

[Defusing Powell]

Colin, you're doing a fantastic job. Don Rumsfeld, he's doin' the same thing. We bring all these different perspectives together . . . and at the end of the day, then we can come to the right decision, the right strategy.

[Stands up, signaling Powell that meeting has ended, speaks quickly, appearing eager for Powell to leave]

Karl and Ari can handle the domestic situation and the polls are still lookin' good; you're our man out there at the UN and so on, and I have every confidence in you.

POWELL:

Thanks, Mr. President.

BUSH:

Look, everybody wants peace and stability in the Middle East; then we've got to create it by first cutting the balls off the worst fuckin' regime in that region, (pardon my French). It's long overdue. You know it, I know it. Blair knows it too whether his goddamn party can see it or not. That's why only a few people lead. Most people don't want to make the tough decisions ... and they become the jokes of history. Well, I'm not going to be a joke. Only a very few are prepared to do what needs to be done. There's big things to do, and I'm goin' to do them.

[Holds out his hand; the two men shake]

See you tomorrow, I'll look forward to hearing your full report then.

POWELL:

Thanks for your time this morning, Mr. President.

[Exits stage Right]

[Bush sinks back into his chair and wipes his forehead with his sleeve]

BUSH:

Jesus Christ! How long do I have to keep this going?

[He instinctively reaches for the staple gun on the desk and points it at an imaginary screen]

I need a quick fix! A good game of video golf!

[The lights dim]

[The Chorus in the jury box is made up of common people from around the world: some with Arab garments, some Afghanistan types, some Americans, some Indian, some Asian, etc.]

CHORUS: (The Soldier and the Politician)

Experience speaks with a humble voice,
For it bears witness to our arrogance and folly;
It knows what we dare not say,
“We live in fear and anxiety.”

Listen, then, my friends, to the Soldier’s words of caution,
For he seeks union with our neighbors,
Alliances with strangers,
Negotiations with our enemies,
Before we enlist the dogs of war.

He sees the soldiers strewn on the killing fields;
He hears the wailing cry of mothers watching their children die;
He touches, oh so softly, the bleeding body bent beneath the armament.
He smells the stench of burning flesh that rises where he walks;
He weeps inside, a silent witness to our primordial fear.
He knows, once war erupts, the whirlwind follows
Driving all before it without reason or purpose,
Even as it evokes myths that give it reason and purpose.

But he speaks to one who never saw war,
Never saw the fly suck the soldier’s eye;
Never heard the searing cry carve the air;
Never cradled a soldier’s head before he died;
Never listened to the rasp of fear rise in the throat
As the specter of death hovered near;

Never walked in the village square where the missile struck
To see the havoc there --
The children weeping in the street
The mothers kneeling in the dust,
Innocent victims of lies, deceit, and distrust.

Arrogance is the stepchild of privilege and stupidity,
It feeds upon itself, creating a mirage of superiority
That, like a drug, intoxicates those infected
To see themselves like gods,
All powerful, all knowing,
Determiners of human fate,
Of who to love and who to hate,
Of what is good and what is evil,
Of who will live and who will die.

Such men do not need their neighbors;
They live in myth and rule by myth
Forcing their subjects to obey through fear,
The oil that makes smooth their path
To domination of the world,
While we, obedient fools, march to their drum.

Such men find fortification in fables,
Purpose in parables,
Meaning in mayhem,
Truth in lies,
And damn as demons those who dissent.

One truth above all truths,
One god above all gods,
One power above all powers!
Such is their cry, and it carries across the seas
And the trees, and the sand,
A cry in the wilderness of time,
The cry of Alexander and Caesar,
Of Napoleon and Hitler,
And all the little men who would subjugate
The spirit of those who walk upon the earth.

[CHORUS MEMBERS HOLD TO THEIR FACES THE COMMON MASK OF THE
SOLDIER]

SCENE 4

George and Laura are in personal residence. George has gotten word from Condoleezza Rice that some top advisors have doubts and concerns about Iraq. George is very agitated and must let off steam. He launches into a tirade, revealing that he has completely lost patience with the inspection process, the UN's demands for evidence, the infighting among team members, etc.

These issues, however, only serve as convenient masks to cover up his marked inability to work at the international level, to envision the value of the UN and of world opinion, and to understand the basic premises of responsible foreign policy. This inability, for Bush, is a result of his ignorance of history, complete lack of foreign policy experience, and a narrow, supremacist view of America's role in the world. As he rants, he gains momentum and reveals his feelings of inadequacy when he was at Yale when faced with ideas and arguments he was intellectually ill equipped to grapple with.

The scene ends with Laura, concerned by George's agitated state, suggesting that he have a talk with the Reverend Billy Graham.

[Rumsfeld bounds in as before and recites the following quote.]

RUMSFELD:

You know, it's the old glass box at the – at the gas station, where you're using those little things trying to pick up the prize, and you can't find it. It's – and it's all these arms are going down in there, and so you keep dropping it and picking it up again and moving it, but – some of you are probably too young to remember those – those glass boxes, but – but they used to have them at all the gas stations when I was a kid.

[Next day, evening. Lights up on personal residence in the White House. George and Laura are seated in lounge chairs. Both wear casual clothes.]

LAURA:

So you're sure Condi was that seriously concerned, George?

GEORGE:

Sure I'm sure! She sat there in my office and warned me that people on the team were getting nervous, that they had concerns and doubts. Shit. Well, I told her to gather em' together. I'll tell them all to lay the cards on the table. There's no other way to go about it. I can meet with each one –well, I could do it that way but there's no point – it'd be better

to let em' all know at the same time that anyone not fully committed to pre-emptive action right now I want to know about it, I want to know straight, not from my National Security advisor and not from anyone else either, especially press leaks, but straight from them.

LAURA:

Do you think they'll feel free to speak openly, if they're really questioning the strategy? How will you know?

GEORGE:

Well, Laura, it's real tricky business, all these personalities and the outright hostility between the Pentagon and Rumsfeld, and him and Powell, DOD vs. State, etc., etc.

[George pauses, turns glass around in hands, thinking]

But if they're not with the program they goddamned better speak up cause I want to know now and not later. There's no room on this team to have the horse's ass draggin' behind while his head's trying to get to the finish line. This is no time to be having cold feet. I'll tell you one thing, I won't tolerate it, I will not tolerate not being 100% sure of all my people, if this team isn't on the same track then we've got a big problem. If we lose Iraq now, we lose control of the mid-east, the whole crusade goes down the tubes.

[George gets up from the couch and begins to pace nervously]

LAURA:

Have you seen Colin Powell since he returned from London?

GEORGE:

Yes, I did . . . he's between a rock and a hard place. No doubt about that. But he's doin' a terrific job.

LAURA:

Did you tell him that?

GEORGE:

Yes, and I think he believes me. Rumsfeld's another story. I can't change the personalities, people are just gonna have to either work together or not. They all know where they stand with me, dammit. Can you imagine what Blair has to face everyday?! Jesus, and within his own party. I guess it's a good thing, Laura, a good thing I was born in this great country instead of over there. If one of my people spoke to me like those guys do to Tony in Parliament I'd have his ass out of Washington so fast he wouldn't know it from his face. That kind of patience I haven't got.

LAURA:

So what was your reading of Powell after his London meeting?

GEORGE:

I didn't get the full report, he was just checkin' in. He's obviously very concerned about going into Baghdad without full UN support, or as close as we can get to it, but you and I know right now that is not going to happen. They don't have the resolve now and they haven't had it, haven't enforced their own resolution up till now. Shit, we could wait another ten years for them to get ready to move, and we aren't gonna do that. If they're with us, fine. Let Powell go out there and put a face on it, go through the motions, is all it is.

LAURA:

You don't think it's possible they will come to agree with us?

GEORGE:

We know already what the outcome is. Saddam is as good as dead cause his party's about to be over real soon and it doesn't matter what the UN does or doesn't vote to do because I've got the only resolution that counts...the one Congress gave me to take him out!

[George turns away and moves to the window, then turns back to Laura]

I'll tell you, Laura. These people out in the streets. I mean, yeah they have a right to be out there voicing their opinions. But it really gnaws at me that they are so ungrateful for the freedom to do that. And what do they think would be the state of those countries over there if oil wasn't an issue, anyway? That's the only way they have – the only resource they have to lift themselves out of the goddamned dust, and if we didn't use it, where the hell would that leave them?

LAURA:

That's true, George, and no one ever mentions it.

GEORGE:

Karl shows me clips of the demonstrators. There's one sign that really boils me, 'No blood for oil,' Shit! Reminds me of the same kind of bullshit rhetoric during Vietnam. When I was at Yale there were these intellectuals – you know, elitist snobs, I hated them and they hated me probably because I was a Bush, – they were criticizing our whole way of thinking about these things – sneering at the very history of our country, the idea that God had a hand in the formation of democracy, that the founders of this country were slave holders and hypocrites.

LAURA:

Oh, that's terrible!

GEORGE:

It's time to get over this whole ghost of Vietnam. They tried to drudge it up again when Dad was in office during the first Gulf War. Well, it's time that ghost gets buried, once and for all. With what we've got ahead of us, we can't let them define what we're doing with their pathetic slogans and tactics. I'll tell you this, this administration is going to make a difference, big time.

LAURA:

You're pretty wound up, George.

GEORGE:

Yeah, I guess I am.

LAURA:

Have you spoken with the Reverend this week?

GEORGE:

No, no I haven't. Thanks for reminding me. I must.

[Lights dim on George & Laura]

[Rumsfeld bounds in as before and recites the following quote.]

RUMSFELD:

As we know, there are known knowns. There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. That is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know.

SCENE 5

Bush consults with friend and counselor, the Reverend Billy Graham. Graham's simple, religious approach represents a kind of grounding device for George in critical moments. He lets off steam with Graham, but in a more restrained and controlled manner than he does with Laura, and Graham responds with paternal guidance in the form of quotes from the bible and spiritual advice. This appeals to George and acts as a balm when he is under extreme stress, particularly the mental stress that is resulting from the pressures of the presidency at this juncture.

Graham serves a pivotal psychological function in holding George Bush together: Graham's religious vision of the world and America's role in it breaks everything down into manageable pieces; George doesn't have to think his way through the challenges of his presidency, he need only believe that God has chosen and is supporting him, in whatever decisions he makes. When he is overwhelmed, he can dismiss the complexities attendant upon matters of State that require careful analysis and opt for the more simplistic and sweeping solutions he is capable of and more comfortable with. Graham's assertion that God has a hand in Bush's occupation of the White House allows Bush to prevail, if only temporarily, over his insecurity, doubt and frustration, by elevating him into euphoric grandiosity.

As Bush complains of others' doubts about preemptively striking Iraq, Graham assures him of his mission to defeat Evil. As Bush reveals his fear of America "letting our guard down," Graham asserts that "the devil never sleeps," unaware (or unconcerned) that Bush is speaking on another level: his psychological fear of vulnerability in revealing his own inadequacy. As Bush justifies war by way of hearing from God, as he prays, to "strike Saddam," Graham encourages him to listen.

[Next morning. Scene opens on Bush alone in office. He's standing near desk. Secretary comes on speaker phone to say she has contacted Reverend Graham and that he's waiting on the line.]

GEORGE:

Billy!

GRAHAM:

George, it's good to hear from you. How is the President?

GEORGE:

Well, Reverend, let me tell you. Sometimes I feel like I'm just gonna explode.

GRAHAM:

Oh, I don't doubt it for a minute. Sometimes the pressure, over the years for me, has gotten to me. But now I've learned to keep it at bay. It takes time. You'll get there, George. How's Laura?

GEORGE:

Laura!

[Chuckles]

Laura is a rock. She's amazing. If I had her steadiness . . . I'd be in a lot better shape. You know that.

GRAHAM:

Yes, yes. I know. God gives us the partner we need, though, isn't that right? I've seen it again and again. You are very blessed to have Laura by your side.

GEORGE:

Oh, yes, I know it, Reverend. I know it.

[Brief pause of silence in the conversation]

GRAHAM:

So, what's been happening since last we spoke?

GEORGE:

I'm just gonna cut to the chase, okay?

GRAHAM:

You go right ahead.

GEORGE:

I've got to get everyone on board, I've got to have my team on board for what's ahead, and there are days when all hell breaks loose, it seems like, and the pressures . . . the pressures, as you know, they're comin' from everywhere: DOD, the Pentagon, Intelligence, not to mention the outside players – our partners, the UN.

GRAHAM:

Oh, yes. I can imagine – or maybe I shouldn't say that -- I don't suppose I can really imagine what you're up against, but I can surely see that the pressures are enormous, George.

GEORGE:

. . . . And I . . . it's so damn important that the team has . . . the kind of energy we all had at the start of this whole thing, after the attacks, you know?

GRAHAM:

Yes, understood. It's human nature to forget, even to want to forget.

GEORGE:

. . . . And the people I most depend on, I need for them to keep this moving, keep driving hard, cause I tell you one thing, the enemy is driving hard every day, I'm sure of that.

GRAHAM:

The devil doesn't sleep.

GEORGE:

Exactly! We can't let ourselves get to be complacent, we can't let our guard down for one minute. Not only that, we've got to be on the offensive.

GRAHAM:

We must be always vigilant or the Adversary will prevail.

GEORGE:

How do I get all the players to understand that this thing is for the long haul? That we really are called now to change the world in ways our predecessors just never had to face or consider . . . I mean nobody was prepared for what's happening, it's not just me.

GRAHAM:

Yes, yes I do understand what you mean and that is absolutely correct. None of us could have been prepared for this. There is only One who knew this was coming – well, besides those who perpetrated these crimes – and only He can see the whole picture. It's in Revelation. John tells us that Satan must be destroyed by those who follow Christ. I certainly could not have foreseen the events of the last two years. But I've known you for

many, many years, George. I've seen you change and grow – we don't even need to go into that.

GEORGE:

No, no, Billy. I'm not too proud to be reminded of where I've been. Hey, if it weren't for Jesus, I don't see how, from where I came, I am here in this office, right here in the White House today!

GRAHAM:

George, I believe with all my heart that there is no accident in who is occupying the office of the President of the United States. We have discussed this before, but it bears repeating, and perhaps you need to hear it again: 'Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.' God has chosen you to lead us through this time in our history. I know you believe it, George, because I know you believe He is overseeing all his children and all things happen in His knowledge.

GEORGE:

Yes, yes I believe that, I really do.

GRAHAM:

If others in your administration don't always see the big picture, if they don't always exhibit the level of commitment to the long battle ahead, well you just have to realize that they're not in the singular position you're in. If they don't always have your vision – well, it's because theirs is a job that's only a piece of the puzzle, whereas your job requires that you see further. God needs you to see further.

GEORGE:

Yes, I accept that . . . and I know I've got to be more patient. Sometimes it hits me, there are evil people out there, and they have to be stopped.

GRAHAM:

Well, this is part of the burden. You can even call it a cross, the cross that world leaders must bear, and yours is the greatest burden because this is the greatest nation – the nation that is God's only hope for the world. 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.' It's not given by God for all to see, George. You know that. God lets only a chosen few see behind the mask of this world, to see the glory He's prepared for us. Have you and Laura been praying together?

GEORGE:

[Answers forcefully but without sincerity]

Yes, we pray on a daily basis, and I . . . I pray individually as well, and this is why I needed to talk to you, Billy. (Now with decisiveness) On Iraq, everything points to getting that Butcher out of Baghdad. I mean I know I have to sell this, to convince the American people and the world; like I was saying earlier, everybody's gotta be on board, and obviously I can't be saying 'God wants Saddam struck down' but that's just it, Reverend. (Almost jocular) You know and I know it, and that's the answer I've received to my prayers about it. I believe that God is telling me to strike Saddam.

GRAHAM:

Well, listen, George. Listen to your God. It's in John: 'the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth. Don't doubt that God speaks to you. Consider the position you hold! If this is His time, then it follows you are His means. That big picture is His. Remember, 'I will show thee things which must be hereafter.' It's in Revelation, George.

GEORGE:

Billy, I don't really need to say this, because I know you know it, but you are a great man, and I deeply appreciate your guidance. It seems like you've been there for me all along, before I even knew it, and you were there for my parents too. It means a lot to Laura that she knows I can talk to you when I need to get back on track – back on center, you know?

GRAHAM:

Yes, I know, and I am honored to do it, George.

GEORGE:

Someday, the whole world's gonna know the role you played during this crucial time, and hopefully that will be a time -- and I believe it will come – when people in this country don't have to be afraid to talk about religion, they won't have to hide the fact that they are being led by God to do His will.

GRAHAM:

That is the thought that should sustain us all, George, looking forward to that time.

GEORGE:

We'll be seeing you in a couple of weeks, but I am going to keep in close touch with you in the meantime. Thank you, Reverend.

GRAHAM:

You call me anytime. God speed.

[They hang up. George sits down behind desk and gazes off toward stage Left]

[Chorus enters stage Right]

[Chorus is the same one as in Scene III, Common of the People of the World. There is one soldier in tattered uniform and bandages.]

CHORUS (The Ministers of the Gods)

Are the ministers of the everlasting gods born with the mark

Attesting to their allegiance to the Almighty?

Are they groomed in the catacombs of His mind

To know the wisdom of His words?

Are they called by angel voices that hover in the wind

Beckoning them to speak in His stead?

Do they hear the voice of god thundering

From the dark recesses of a dream

Demanding their obeisance before His throne?

How do they know whose mark scars their brow:

The stamp of the Demon's curse,

Or the Devine's name from Zion?

Who would believe they serve the beast of blasphemy?

Who would choose the perpetual pit of denial?

Who would succumb to the serpent's wrath?

But those who succumbed to apostasy!

See how they cluster about the seats of power,

And lavish god's blessings on those who further

Their desire to fulfill the Almighty will!

So they pay homage to little minds,

Blessing them as minions of god's master plan,

To bring forth the end of time.

Hear the heralds of the Almighty proclaim His works,

The mystery of His Being, the might of His majesty!

Witness them raise paltry man to the pinnacles of power,

Where the whole world wonders at their station,

Worshipping their might, unchallenged before all the nations of the earth.

Thus do they fulfill the Devil's curse,

To make endless war on all the innocents of the earth.

One man above all men succumbs to their duplicity,
Crying to all men everywhere, "Fear God and give Him glory!
For in fear and awe will the new Babylon fall and all will plead his mercy!"

Seven plagues will he bring to those who defy his decree:
The searing sores that blister the skin carried by the sand blown wind;
The sea turned red seething with the blood of the dead;
The rivers running free in searing heat to the sea;
The living sun, a circling gyre, scorching men with its fire;
The darkness of the mind-forged chain that gnaws the tongue for pain;
The flowing blue Euphrates dried to a sand stone hue;
The voices of humiliation in the air declaring "It is done."

Which god of all the gods humans have designed since the beginning of time
Would wreak havoc upon creation?
What minister of god could believe that the purpose of life is destruction?
Who but the sinister would inspire a barren soul
To aspire to absolute control, the creation of an empire?
Are not these the acts of the leopard dragon,
The chief merchant of gold and silver,
Who will rule the world as his global kingdom?
The very one the Lamb of God will destroy through love,
The anti-Christ foretold in the prophecy of Revelation,
Who must succumb to compassion and reconciliation?

Who are we to know the wisdom of the all-wise god?
Whose words are the words of god?
Whose the scribble of an unknown man?
Whose voice can we know but the wail of the wind,
The surge of the screeching sand,
The roar of the ocean's swell,
The silence of the darkest night?
Whose mind can we fathom but our own?

Words are sounds lost in the wind as they course to another's ear,
Fleeting ghosts that appear momentarily, then disappear
As they seep silently into the recesses of the soul.
They become what we will them to become,
Or they emerge from our being,
Specters transformed by dreams and desires,
By fears and defeats, embodiments of our years.

[CHORUS MEMBERS HOLD IN FRONT OF THEIR FACES THE MASK OF COMMON
SORROW]

SCENE 6

In a chance scene outside the President's office, Carl Rove and Donald Rumsfeld meet. There is formidable hostility between them. Rove takes credit for having "created" George Bush and moreover, for Bush's election success. Rumsfeld resents Rove's influence from behind the scenes; Rove's detachment and acerbic responses to Rumsfeld's comments further Rumsfeld's animosity. The scene establishes how Bush is viewed and used by top White House officials in furthering their own careers and agendas, and how these are often at cross-purposes in an administration dominated by politics over policy.

[Karl Rove enters stage right with podium and recites the following quote.]

ROVE:

As people do better, they start voting like Republicans ... unless they have too much education and vote Democratic, which proves there can be too much of a good thing.

[Rove moves from center stage to outer area of President's office and sits down. Rumsfeld enters stage Left, hurried and distracted. He is unpleasantly surprised to find Rove there.]

RUMSFELD:

[Curtly]

Oh, Karl. Good morning.

ROVE:

[Reserved, non-chalant]

Donald.

RUMSFELD:

I'm glad I ran into you, Karl. You know, George has bought your political witch doctoring for so long, even he believes he's here as a result of it. My congratulations to you on that, but let me ask you, what good does it do to groom him to come off strong and decisive for the camera when he blows it with ad lib remarks like America's own foot-in-mouth disease?

ROVE:

[Smugly]

Oh, I think if you see the big picture, those gaffs don't count for much. The polls tell the story.

RUMSFELD:

All it takes is one slip . . . one real bad one when the heat's already turned up. I've been around long enough to have seen that first hand . . . Nixon's fast slide out of office began with his 'I'm not a crook' pronouncement to a news media already set to hang him.

ROVE:

[Condescending]

Well, Don, you obviously have little faith or even understanding of what we've been able to achieve in this administration where the press is concerned. You may have seen Nixon's fall firsthand, but you're behind the times if you think one, five or twenty slips of George's tongue really matters. He made plenty before being elected. Didn't seem to hurt, did it? Like I said, the big picture. This is the 21st Century.

RUMSFELD:

[Angered, but trying to contain it]

Oh, I see the picture, all right. He goes around talking about God protecting America! The fact of the matter is, he doesn't think anything he says can hurt him, and what you just said proves my point. (chuckles derisively) You're the wizard behind the curtains or, as the book says, the brains in the straw man. You've got him 'svengalied' into believing your numbers voodoo, and as long as you keep him believing it, you've got a job.

ROVE:

He is here because of . . . my voodoo, as you call it, Rumsfeld . . . and you serve under him, so you should be thanking me for it. Frankly, if it weren't for me, you, Cheney, and the rest of your cronies would still be waiting in the wings with your 'manifestos' gathering dust on the shelves of the American Enterprise Institute!

RUMSFELD:

[Seething]

Your position is a minor detail in this administration, regardless of what the President thinks of you, and thank God it is or we'd have you out there making more stupid comments too . . . like back in August . . . Was it really worth getting your face in the press to say we waited until September to go to war because 'it was a better sell'?

ROVE:

[Contemptuous]

That fallout had a media shelf life of 24 hours. The battle between you and Powell is what's sinking this administration.

[Bush enters surprised to find the two present. Rove hands Bush a file and exits stage. Bush nods and waves Rumsfeld into office]

SCENE 7

Bush meets with Rumsfeld to go over the decision to pull the second UN resolution and preemptively strike Iraq. In this scene George Bush is more blunt, jocular, and crude than in previous scenes. Underlying this change in demeanor is the fact that Bush has completely dispensed with any further intention to delay war on Iraq, thereby freeing him from the constraint he'd been under to pay lip service to diplomacy; Rumsfeld, emboldened and exhilarated by this realization, allows the fullness of his own arrogance to surface. While Bush is released from the pressure and pretense of supporting Powell's efforts, he also understands that it will be Rumsfeld's burden to shoulder the resulting fallout of acting unilaterally.

[Rumsfeld and Bush enter the office. Bush takes a seat at his desk. Bush is calm and self-centered. Rumsfeld agitated from his conversation with Rove and, at the same time, visibly arrogant.]

BUSH:

[Guard down with Rumsfeld]

Glad you could get over, Rummy. We've got a lot to discuss before tomorra's meeting. I've got the General next. Later this afternoon, I mean, but I want this locked up before he's in here. Get me?

RUMSFELD:

Yes, Sir. We've had a hell of a time getting Tenet to unearth good intelligence, and he's still worried about Powell's paper to the UN. He smells snoops everywhere digging up dirt.

BUSH:

[Excited, agitated]

Look, we use what we must to get the job done. I'm sick and tired of begging and cow towing to Chirac and Schroeder -- even fuckin' Putin has jumped ship, for Chris's sake! I'm not going to worry about the press. They're with us on Iraq --snapping at us really -- to get going. What are we supposed to do anyway? Leave troops stranded in the goddamn desert while that friggin Blix fusses around lookin' for stuff Saddam's stashed away? I want your take on this now, we're at the scrimmage line where we go for it or we sit.

RUMSFELD:

[Arrogantly]

You know where I stand, you've known it right along. Tenet and Powell . . . they want evidence to wave in front of the Europeans. Fuck the evidence! What's evidence anyway? Absence of evidence doesn't mean evidence is absent!

BUSH:

Hey, that's clever!

RUMSFELD:

We don't doubt the deed. We know the stuff's there. Every one of the defectors has told us the same thing: he's got 'em and he's prepared to use them. What more do we need? And if they're even near right, it'll be a cakewalk, and we can look for the weapons ourselves and prove to the world how right we were.

BUSH:

OK, but be prepared to take the heat. The world's press will be on us like flies on shit and you know it. We'll be the outlaws, not the guy on the white horse.

RUMSFELD:

[Spiritedly]

Yeah, but remember what Churchill said: 'Sheep don't need whipping.' The people will follow. We'll have the major channels with us, most of the think tanks, and they'll churn out articles supporting the war, and Israel with all its supporters, and virtually every corporation that has anything to do with defense. We're not alone, Mr. President. And, frankly, how many Americans listen to foreign news? They won't even see CNN's European version! I'm not worried about Americans, they'll rally and they'll love a good fast war especially when they see the Iraqis out there cheering on our troops.

BUSH:

But Powell wants that second resolution; he's fighting like hell to get all of 'em on board. Christ, we're stuffing their pockets with cash or twisting arms (meditatively) Those demonstrations have put a wrench in the works. Chirac and Schroeder have caved. But there's no way in hell we'll get it. I've told Powell he's gonna lose, but he keeps at it.

RUMSFELD:

[Contemptuous]

Powell's from the old school! He's a containment groupie, a goddamn freak for compromise and negotiating. He hasn't graduated to the new reality. America is all alone at the top, and it's lonely up there. If you can't lead in that rarified atmosphere, you should bail out.

BUSH:

I can't let him go now, you know that. He's pacifying a lot of people, including those who don't want you or Wolfowitz around because they can't stomach your guts!

RUMSFELD:

That's just the point, we don't have to coddle anyone anymore. The cold war is over. We're it! And the world knows it and that's why they hate us so much. We don't have to be nice, we just have to do what it takes to make us stay on top.

BUSH:

Yeah, I know what you mean. I don't need to explain anything to anyone why I say things. That's the interesting thing about being the President: I'm the commander. They've got to listen, but I don't have to . . . I don't feel like I owe anybody an explanation, especially now.

RUMSFELD:

Right. Powell doesn't buy that. He wants diplomacy, nice guy stuff that makes your position acceptable. He can toss the blame on others that way. I don't give a shit about others. That's why they don't like me over at the Pentagon, especially the generals. I've tossed all their old thinking out the door. They're angry as hell. Downsize the boots on the ground they go berserk. "Shock and awe" I tell 'em, they don't understand that you beat multiple enemies when you do in one with a big show. They're grounded in the last century.

[Proudly]

My whole crew understands its business efficiency – not millions of troops!

BUSH:

[Interrupts]

Yeah, and now little fuckers like Hersch call your crew a 'Cabal' that have hijacked the Constitution.... Powell's a good soldier. What I need to know is how we play this to the whole fuckin' world community? When I pull the resolution, Powell's out front doing it in front of all his buddies that he's promised could say 'yea' or 'nay' in front of all those cameras only days before we put the lights out in Baghdad. That's a tough sell. He's good, I'm not sure he's that good.

RUMSFELD:

[Guarded condescension]

Well, I'm not one to tell you 'I told you so.' We never should have taken it to the UN in the first place, that's what I said. But he got your ear, and now we're in this mess waiting

for the French to tell us when we can take out a threat to the US. They're just like Powell – from the last century!

BUSH:

Have your cheap shot at Powell! But you'll get yours. Wait 'til you're asked how many American soldiers are going to die, how many Iraqis, how long are we going to be in there, what's it going to cost, where's the money to come from . . . you'll be drowned. I only hope you can keep your cockiness when they swamp you with questions.

RUMSFELD:

[Strident]

Like I really care. I'll have answers for them: (sarcastically) How do I know? How does anybody know? You think I'm a savant?

[Changes gears]

Listen, we'll make it a pill they can swallow: We have the greatest precision bombs in the history of warfare, civilian casualties will be minimized, only war related targets get hit, we're after a butcher, not the Iraqi people, we're there for liberation of the Iraqis, not to conquer, there'll be reconstruction, they'll select the government, the oil revenues go to the people, not Saddam. Don't worry; we've got the answers. Besides, I can't let how many die bother me. War hurts . . .shit happens.

[Lights down on action; lights Up on Chorus]

[Chorus is made up of soldiers wearing a mixture of uniforms suggesting armies across history and national boundaries; many are bandaged and injured.]

CHORUS: (Men of War)

Are men who rise to power born to the task,
 Offspring of some primordial curse,
 Children of the first conflagration
 That raged in the recesses of the universe,
 Dividing creation into the twin Charons of Heaven and Hell?
Do they divine their dominion in the dungeon of despair,
 And glower in delight at the magnitude of their power,
 Monarchs of the souls harvested there?
Are they the demon riders of the red horses
 Let loose by the breaking of the second seal?
Have they orders from some terrible force
 To take peace from the earth, to slay their brethren

That the prophecy of ancient stories be fulfilled?
Or are they the horsemen of the fourth seal
Riding the winds of war, spreading disease and destruction
Across the sands and the seas and the cities
That dot the earth?
Or are they men devoid of heart, defective and deformed,
Whose chest is filled with cynicism and contempt
For those less fortunate, the desperate and deprived
That struggle to survive in a world unkind?

What manner of men can distance themselves from their kin?
What beast of prey have they become to devour so many
Without compassion or remorse, able to wield
Weapons of unimaginable force against unseen foes,
Who hear the screaming cry of the angel of death
Hurling from the sky,
Where life itself should be the only force:
The warmth of the sun, the gentle cooling of the rain,
The promise of spring, the hope that comes again.

Listen to those who conspire behind closed doors the destiny of men;
See how they huddle amongst themselves, laughing to scorn
The voices of those who council patience and restraint,
Who caution against gut reaction, the antidote to passion,
The enemy of due deliberation that considers consequences
That destroy those we would save.
Listen as they conspire, like Richard of old, to create their empire
On the ruins of ancient castles and tombs,
The graphic symbols of life and death,
Oblivious to the reality they portray as they plot their rise to power.

Witness the arrogance that leaves a legacy of lost memories,
Where preservation is weakness and destruction is might.
Where once the silent dreams of ancient voices scrolled their beauty
Before our eyes, moist with sympathy for their expectations,
Recognizing our dreams in theirs though centuries have passed,
Now they smolder, thoughts lost forever,
The very glory and magnificence of Mesopotamia.

These are the men who dismiss the misfortune of others,
Ignorant of causes that curse a culture
Into ruin by the ravages of time or wind or drought,
Leaving generations destitute and deprived, innocent detritus of wasted days,
Hostages of happenstance, fodder for the selfish, the savage, and the strong.

These are the men who have contempt for the poor,
 Who understand weakness as evil, might as right,
Lies, deceit, and duplicity as strength against failure,
Who believe empathy, kindness, and compassion betray success,
Allowing the weak to survive as parasites on the strong,
 And strain the juice of ambition from their loin.

Memory that gives life to identity must be destroyed
 By those who conquer, or it will destroy the myths
That gave them purpose in their slaughter.
The baubles and slogans parroted by the powerful
Become the voice of reason and the spirit of violence
 To subdue the weak and extol the strong,
And death becomes the gauge of success.

Morality lies dead beneath the sword of arrogance,
Slain by the seven angels of Revelation,
 The ministers of god's messenger,
Who unleash heaven's candles to open the bottomless pit,
Spewing spasms of smoke back to the heavens,
 Blocking the light of the sun,
 Casting darkness over the faces of men,
Even as the locusts' wings whirl their fury
Over the frightened hordes below who suffer the scorpion's blow.

This must we know of those who rule by myth:
 Their truth is imbedded in an icy heart
Frozen in time to a god of vengeance and retaliation,
Whose mission they serve by fulfilling their ambition,
And in that heartless world they find meaning.

[CHORUS MEMBERS HOLD IN FRONT OF THEIR FACES THE MASK OF
TERROR (Edward Munch's "The Scream")]

SCENE 8

Bush meets with Colin Powell to break the news privately and prepare him ahead of time for the next team meeting. The meeting begins on a conciliatory note, with Bush intending to remain calm and in control. Powell's surprise and disappointment drive him to last-ditch attempts at rational persuasion. Having already "switched gears" and having gathered momentum toward the move to war, Bush quickly loses patience with further discussion. The conversation devolves into an increasing polarization of positions, until Bush finally cuts Powell off and he realizes the hopelessness of further resistance. Bush exits, and leaves Powell sitting silently in reflection. Karl Rove walks in, expecting to find Bush. Demoralized by the preceding meeting and still reeling with the knowledge of what the United States is about to do, Powell speaks out loud, not realizing Rove's presence. The ensuing exchange reveals Powell's deep doubts as to the consequences of the action about to ensue, as well as his abhorrence of the cynical and shrewd nature of Rove's political philosophy.

[Rumsfeld bounds in as before and recites the following quote.]

RUMSFELD:

Things will not be necessarily continuous. The fact that they are something other than perfectly continuous ought not to be characterized as a pause. There will be some things that people will see. There will be some things that people won't see. And life goes on...Once in a while, I'm standing here, doing something. And I think, 'What in the world am I doing here?' It's a big surprise.

[Bush, agitated, striding back and forth in office waiting for Powell to be announced. It's late afternoon following the previous scene of the morning. The Team meeting has been scheduled by Condi for the following day.]

[The intercom announces the arrival of Powell]

BUSH:

Sorry to call you in on such short notice, Colin. But things are movin' fast and you need to know what's happening.

POWELL:

Well, it's sort of a surprise, I only had tomorrow's Team meeting on the calendar. What's happened?

BUSH:

I've decided to pull the resolution.

POWELL:

But, Sir, I don't understand. I thought . . .

BUSH:

[Quietly at first, then shows agitation]

Hear me out, Colin. You knew and I knew that Saddam had to go, we knew it a long time ago, for Chris's sake, long before the 1st resolution. (getting agitated) Now, I know it was good we got that from the UN, you were absolutely right there. But these guys won't admit it failed, that Saddam has been yankin' their chain, makin' fools of them, and he's got these weapons, and they threaten us, and the inspectors will never find them. We've got hundreds of sites to exploit. Any question about that?

POWELL:

[Becoming ever more forceful as he sees his position threatened]

I don't doubt he's got weapons, but we're not alone in the world, and the world wants evidence. That's what I told you last time when I reported on the London trip. Tony's got the same problem. The Security Council would jump on board if we gave them the evidence. But Tenet can't produce it, and Rumsfeld's rump committee can't turn what the CIA doesn't have into credible evidence even if he'd like to make silk out of the sow's ear.

BUSH:

[Exasperated]

Listen, Colin, I don't care anymore about the fuckin' UN! What the hell happened to the WMD? Did they evaporate? Can't those frogs get it through their thick heads that you can't make chemicals disappear? Can't they see that he's as much a threat to them as to us?

POWELL:

[Attempting to reason with the President]

But you just said last week at the press conference that you'd demand a vote in the Security Council! I've been using that as a prod going around to the little six and to Putin trying to pull them away from France.

BUSH:

[Continuing his tirade]

Doesn't seem to be working does it? Chirac and Schroeder are glued to their stand and that means a veto. I'm not going to be defeated by these wimps! Iraq has to be taken out, damn it ...my gut tells me that and I'm determined to do it. We can't wait around for peaceniks and appeasers at the UN to drag this out forever and change opinion in this country. We'll get the goddamn evidence when we occupy Iraq and have Saddam in chains! Then your "world" (with contempt) will know who's been right and who's been the fool.

POWELL:

[Rising to his full position with all arguments blazing. Bush mumbles indecipherable words between Powell's litany, beginning after the second one]

Look Sir, I've always followed orders, but do we simply deny the existence of international law? Do we erase our signatures from the UN Charter? Do we thumb our noses at ten million people and the vast majority of nations that condemn the very thought of invading Iraq? Do we destabilize our standing in NATO, the EU, and in the world by going alone against a nation that has not done anything to us? Do you understand how untenable our position is out there? The Charter provides nations with the means to defend themselves if attacked or if visibly provoked, and Iraq does not threaten the US.

BUSH:

[With determination]

What the hell do you mean they don't threaten us? They've got the means: the WMDs, the germ warfare, if they can hit Israel with scuds, they can send nuclear weapons there and they can give that stuff to terrorists. Come on, Powell, they are a threat and that's all we need. We decide who's a threat to America, not the fuckin' UN. I'm the President, and it's my responsibility. If it's pre-emptive, so be it!

POWELL:

[Sarcastically]

Pulling the resolution means we go to war *alone*.

[In desperation. Bush expresses agitation by body language and mutterings]

Our "coalition" will be Tony and Howard, and he'll provide a couple thousand troops. Blair will be fighting off his entire nation. He'll be alone too. Pulling it means we toss away all the negotiations and agreements the US has worked on all these years.

BUSH:

Those agreements were for a different time and you know it.

POWELL:

Pulling it makes us a rogue nation, the pariah of the world, hated by everyone. Pulling it makes us the lone cowboy, the New Age wild west, for God's sake. Pulling it gives Rumsfeld everything he wants, everything he's wanted, everything his buddies --- Wolfowitz, Scooter, Perle, Abrams, Kristol, Feith – the whole 'Cabal' have wanted for ten years and it's not good for America or its security! It turns the Defense Department into the State Department! Isn't that obvious?

BUSH:

[Quietly, with finality]

Hear me, Colin. I'm not concerned about any of that. I've got greater responsibilities than Rumsfeld or you. There's Evil out there, and it's out to destroy America. And I don't give a fuck if you think Rummy is riding on your turf. We're at war, Goddamn it! Those fuckin' terrorists hate America, hate Christians; that's what we're fightin' and if it takes a cowboy to rein them in, then it's this cowboy in this seat that will do it!

POWELL:

[Realizing all decisions have been made responds in quiet desperation]

Well, Mr. President, you've already decided. Nothing I can say will change anything. But invading Iraq will make the world less secure, the Arabs will see this as war against Islam, and, quite frankly, what we stand for -- values, justice, human rights -- will be eroded. One last thing. We haven't connected Iraq to 9/11. How do we wreak vengeance if we can't prove they're guilty?

BUSH:

Look, Colin, you can't separate 9/11 from Iraq. It's a terrorist nation; they want to destroy our freedoms, our way of life, and oil is part of that. If you want to call it vengeance, call it vengeance. We have the right to seek vengeance for the Americans who died at the hands of terrorists just like Saddam.

POWELL:

[With restrained disdain]

How many barrels of vengeance will it take, Mr. President?

BUSH:

Are you finished?
[Exasperated]

POWELL:

Yes, Sir.
[Resigned]

BUSH:

Tomorrow's meeting is the point of no return. We pull the resolution. We bomb Baghdad; we occupy Iraq. I will have no dissent on the team. Understood?

POWELL:

Understood.

[Bush walks out of room]

[Powell stands up. Powell slowly sits back down, defeated. Unexpectedly, Karl Rove enters stage right, and immediately senses Powell's mood.]

ROVE:

Mr. Secretary . . . excuse me, I didn't realize . . .
[Turns to leave the room, then pauses, glancing back at Powell, who doesn't acknowledge him]

POWELL:

[Powell speaks, though not directly to Rove]
How do you bring a nation to war with no defensible reason for it?

ROVE:

[Glib]
Everything will be measured by results. The victor is always right.

POWELL:

[Powell now looks at Rove, startled, speaks in ironic tone]

The first casualty when war comes is truth.

ROVE:

Truth is always relative. History ascribes to the victor qualities that may or may not actually have been there. And similarly to the defeated.

POWELL:

Your moral relativism has served you well, hasn't it, Mr. Rove?

ROVE:

[Boastful and condescending]

Right you are; but you'll see my point when our troops come home from Baghdad victorious, as we know they will, and all this talk about preemptive strike and unilateralism and even the memory of millions of people marching against war in the streets will be history --- and not the kind of history that's remembered, but the kind that's forgotten. Mr. Secretary, it is the end that determines the beginning, not the other way around. You'll see, we'll talk again when the war ends.

[Rove turns to leave and is nearly out of sight when Powell answers him]

POWELL:

Only the dead have seen the end of war.

[Chorus is the same as in Scene III, Common People of the World]

CHORUS: (The Designers and the Doomed)

What men design and others obey,
What they will, or to what succumb,
Determines lives and destiny.

For those innocent of designs forged
In furnaces of greed and hate,
Who they are and what they become
Unravels in the sun,
As they learn too late the scourge of war.

Ahab's cry rings 'cross the earth
"Be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal,
I will wreak my hate upon him."
What but fear of the unknown and inscrutable,
Cloaked in armor of outrageous strength-
Veins filled with the blackened blood of malice-
Can drive men to strike the sun!

The days ahead neither Ali nor we wish to see
When emotions' eyes can but scan through mist,
When time erodes sense and logics lie,
When dreams and will, hope and desire disappear,
When all is left in mystery.

The silk spins forth from the hands of fate,
A missile fired by a foreign foe,
Unseen and unknown
As it spreads above the heads of all unsuspecting souls,
A family sleeping in the final throes of fear,
Silent victims of a darkness to appall
That scatters reason in the sand,
Burying all that we presume to know,
Leaving all destitute and alone,
Until there arises in the soul,
The twin demons of despair –
That decay and fester there.

But what of those who create the design?
What fate attends their passage?
They, too, are victims of a darkness to appall,
Who live without love or human kindness,
Driven by their dark demons of gold and gall!

[CHORUS MEMBERS HOLD TO THEIR FACES A COMMON MASK OF
SORROW]

SCENE 9

The scene opens with George Bush in brief conversation with Reverend Graham, minutes before he is to meet with top level officials on pulling the UN resolution. Bush is receiving some last minute words of encouragement; he thanks Graham for providing him the assurance that “God wants peace in the world.” Bush is “on top of his game” in this scene: confident, calm and centered in his expectation of no further roadblocks to preemptive strike on Iraq as he walks into the meeting.

He presents his own case for war, which is not, in fact, a point by point analysis, but a rambling, off-the-cuff rant. He then invites each member of the team to put their “cards on the table,” though it is clear that he has made the decision already. Each member responds without pause in agreement, with the exception of Powell, who hesitates long enough for the audience to believe he might object, but then ultimately offers justification for his acquiescence by referencing his “duty.”

[Chairs for each team member are in a circle or semicircle stage Right, in shadow. Team members are already present, each sitting absolutely still and quiet. The one empty chair is Bush’s. Bush is standing in spotlight Stage Left, a phone to his ear. On a scaffold above stands Reverend Billy Graham in spotlight, also with a phone to his ear]

BUSH:

Thanks again, Reverend, especially for that reference that God wants peace in the world... I needed that reminder... I can use that. I can always count on you. I’ll talk with you soon.

[Light down on Graham as he slowly walks from the scaffold and off stage]

[Bush puts phone down and walks across stage to join the meeting and takes his seat. The mood of this meeting is nervous anticipation, with the exception of Colin Powell, who sits heavily and appears somber.]

BUSH:

[Upbeat and decisive]

Good morning everyone.

TEAM:

[Staggered responses]

Good morning Mr. President.

CONDOLEEZZA:

[Stands up to address the group]

We're all here this morning at the President's request. Our regular schedule still stands, but we'll have a new agenda by the end of this meeting. You should have all received Secretary Powell's report upon his return. I'll turn the meeting over to you, Mr. President.

BUSH:

I'd just like to begin by thanking every one of you for the fine job you've been doing. This is a good team. We've had our challenges . . . (chuckles) well, that goes without saying, what I mean is, we've had our struggles amongst ourselves. No one said any of this was going to be easy . . . and it sure hasn't been.

I want to take this moment to recognize what a huge effort the Secretary of State has made on behalf of getting this resolution passed and gaining a broad coalition. No one will ever say that Colin Powell didn't do everything possible to make that happen. That it didn't happen is not for lack of effort. The fact of the matter is, it's up to us to act now, if not with UN support, then without it. That's the bottom line. That's what makes us America. We're going to take a tough stand, we're gonna take it to the 'bottom of the ninth' when others are content to just sit it out because it's easier, or maybe because they just resent that we're taking the lead; just plain resent us for who we are.

I called you all here because I want everybody's cards on the table . . . right here and now . . . today. Because once we get this rolling, there can't be any splintering, no dissension. We can't afford it. If we're gonna do this thing, we've got to be tight. No leaks. It's got to be buttoned up and kept that way through the whole game. Now, I want to hear from each of you. I want to know what are your concerns. If you have any doubts, I want to hear them, let's put them out there right now.

I'll start. I believe it's time to pull the resolution and get the troops moving. I feel very confident . . . I feel much more comfortable in making this decision than I have for a long time. I'm a guy who likes to figure out what needs to be done and then do it; you all know that. The EU, the UN, they act like we don't know what's at stake. It's them who don't know. We're talking about world peace. That is what's at stake. That's our product. Whether they understand it or have that vision or not, that's what we're selling, and if they don't get it now, they'll get it sooner or later, at the outcome. Then they'll see that we were right, that we had the vision and the will to make it happen . . . history will tell the real story of what America did when faced with the challenge of terrorists in every

corner of the world. History will tell the truth, that America came up to the plate and stood up to whatever they threw at us. Terrorism is like a wall we have to break down and smash to dust. We don't know what's in the minds of these people. They're all wearing the same masks. It's like the guys that Saddam surrounds himself with – you know, the mustaches, they all look just like him. They think just like him. They can't afford to do anything else. They're not like us. It's all about power. There's no reason behind what they're doing. That's why I've said they're evil, and there's no understanding evil or where it comes from or what causes it. You just have to destroy it. We can't question ourselves forever. There will always be people who want to think more about it and talk more about it. But they're just afraid to act, afraid to make the tough choices. We owe it to the people who lost their lives on 9/11 to make the tough choices. Do we want the world seeing Americans running from those towers, vulnerable, helpless against what they did to us? The world was with us going into Afghanistan. They don't see that Iraq has to go. That's too bad. We've got to make sure the WMD's don't get into the hands of terrorists. Shit, we knew about Bin Ladin, knew about Al Qaeda. Look what inaction brought to our backyard! Right now, we're like the guys in the plane over Pennsylvania. We can either sit in those seats and do nothing, or we can stand up and say, 'let's roll' whatever it takes, whatever it costs. We've said that the road to peace in the Middle East runs through Baghdad. I say the road to world peace runs through the Middle East. That's my . . . that is the mission of this administration as I see it, and if I'm not mistaken, I think all of you agree with that.

Now I'm just going to go around to each of you, starting with you, Dick.

CHENEY:

I wouldn't disagree with a word you've said, Mr. President. I've said all along America will have to go it alone. That's what we're faced with now, that's what we've been faced with all along. If we're going to control events, we have to take control.

[Single drum beat, rear of theater]

BUSH:

Don?

RUMSFELD:

[Smug and triumphant]

Absolutely.

[Single drum beat, rear of theater]

BUSH:

Condi?

CONDOLEEZZA:

[Nods approval]

[Single drum beat, rear of theater]

BUSH:

Mr. Director?

GEORGE TENET:

Yes.

[Single drum beat, rear of theater]

BUSH:

Colin?

POWELL:

[Pauses momentarily before glancing up]

More than anything else, my career has been defined by my duty to my country. You can count on me.

[Drum beat LOUDER, like a war march, rear of theater]

BUSH:

Let's play ball.

[As lights begin to dim, each of the team members picks up a Death mask and places it in front of his face]

[Chorus is the same as in Scene III, Common People of the World]

CHORUS: (The Defeated)

[Chorus chant builds as Barber's Adagio rises; the lines parallel the movement of the strings. Chant ends at pause in Adagio and lights go out]

We stand before you, specters of those lost in the winds of war,
We, the forlorn refugees forced from our ancestral homes,
We, the lost children bereft of mothers and fathers,
We, the old and infirm suffering through our last days,
We, the young warriors lured by glory to our deaths,
We stand before you, mirrored images of centuries past,
 Stark depictions of what has been and what will be
 Unless you pay heed to what lust for power
 And what insatiable greed can breed as it roars across
The earth like a raging fire incinerating all in its path!

We call upon you as we, in ages past, called upon our gods
 To free us from the scourge of war, to no avail.
What gods can we call on today? What gods will destroy
 What they create? What fears can they allay?
Whose voice will they hear and whose betray?
 Or must we create our own, a god for us alone,
One whose temperament we can understand,
 Whose will is driven like the wind
Forcing all before it,
Merciless in its power,
 Vindictive in its judgment,
 Absolute in its punishment,
 Almighty as we would be Almighty
Had we not the shackles that hobble our puny beings?

What fates, then, force us to listen to these men
 Who intrigue in a silent room
The impending doom of those they do not know,
The innocent, who live in lands across the globe
 Where the sun and time and human folly
 Bury in the sweeping sands
The magnificence of their memoried past?
Who are we to those who scheme and plot
 Their path to power, who manipulate
The affairs of men and decide who will live
 And who will die?
What moments do they spend in silent meditation

On those who will suffer from their deliberation?

What mother's child will never see the sun
Lift its shimmering light above the sand?
What child, lying quietly asleep one night,
Wakes to the screeching wail of a missile's flight
And feels for fingers forever gone,
A life dead before it has begun,
An innocent victim of those deliberations.

So we come before you in supplication
That you give heed to our humiliation;
Only those who see beyond their need,
Who feel for those without a voice,
Who care for those lacking hope,
Who cry for those in deprivation,
Can bring before the leaders of the land,
The need for mercy and compassion.
And so we pray to you our countrymen.

[ALL CHORUS MEMBERS RAISE TO THEIR FACE THE COMMON MASK OF
SORROW]

*[Curtains close, Adagio resumes and the images of Baghdad being
bombed are projected in green light on scrim]*

*[Note: Alternative Arabic dirge can be used instead of remainder of
Adagio]*