

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

TIM J. LORD

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Dramatis Personæ

Mark Rollins.....Agent, U.S. Department of the Interior
Mr. York.....Inspector, U.S. Department of the Interior

The Secretary.....The head of the U.S. Department of the Interior

Thalia Derrida.....Agent, President's Office for the Reconfiguration of the Interior

The Chorus of Shadows & Puppeteers:

(1 man, 1 woman)

Agent Beacons.....Agent, U.S. Department of the Interior

Agent Deacons.....Agent, U.S. Department of the Interior

Agents LaGuerre...Agent, Department of War (newly reconstituted)

Agent Sieg.....Agent, Department of War (newly reconstituted)

Audience volunteers (x2)

Audience conscripts (x???)

The Department:

A dingy basement collection of tables and chairs that seem to have been culled from whatever every other branch of government has seen fit to cast off.

The Time:

Once upon a time, not so very long ago.

PRESHOW.

As the audience enters/gets settled, AGENT BEACONS holds a sign that reads:

“I need ONE Volunteer”

When someone volunteers, he will direct that person to AGENT DEACONS. He will then pick up a new sign that reads:

“I need ANOTHER volunteer”

AGENT DEACONS will explain the roles the VOLUNTEERS will be playing and get them kitted out with whatever they need.

As this is happening, the CHORUS OF SHADOWS will be circulating among the rest of the audience handing them the following flyer:

OFFICIAL DEPT. OF THE INTERIOR MEMORANDUM

Good evening, Ladies & Gentlemen.

Welcome to the Department of the Interior. We manage the resources that belong to us all as Americans, and so, through the course of our presentation, you may be called upon to participate.

If you refuse to participate, you'll be throwing away taxpayer dollars, some of which will undoubtedly be yours. So please cooperate and help us keep government spending down. You'll feel better about yourselves.

We guarantee it.

Thank you,
The Secretary

As the audience member is reading, the chorus member should feel free occasionally to take the flyer back and highlight or circle any information that the chorus member feels is particularly relevant to that audience member.

When it's time for the play to start, the Agents and the Chorus will withdraw from the audience. Lights go out.

A PROLOGUE OF SORTS.

A desk lamp turns on, illuminating a table in the middle of the room. ROLLINS sits on one side, THE SECRETARY sits on the other. ROLLINS has a file folder in hand.

They say nothing for a painfully long time, staring at each other uncomfortably throughout. Eventually, ROLLINS sets the folder on the table...and pushes it across. The SECRETARY flirts with opening it. Before opening it for real.

Their desk lamp goes out,
and two more come on, illuminating the VOLUNTEERS.

They read from cue cards held by members of the chorus:

AUDIENCE VOLUNTEERS

It is a time of great peril and strife

The president is embattled Congress deadlocked The judiciary crippled by mistrust

And so it's down to the one branch of government that no one seems to know

or care about to save us from ourselves: (look at the other card)

The Department of the Interior

PART THE 1ST.

General lighting reveals another day at work in the Department of the Interior. Agents on phones, doing paperwork, reading reports, nothing particularly exciting. Chorus members should treat audience members as if they too are employees in the Department, asking for pens, handing them papers, &c.

One of these deskchair warriors is Mr. YORK, an unassuming young man of African-American descent. He's going over some papers, minding his own business, when ROLLINS enters, bespectacled (and preferably mustachioed). He's in a terrible mood, and goes straight to YORK.

ROLLINS

Who are these people?

YORK

...It's a public office.

ROLLINS

But who are they?

YORK

Why don't you ask them?

ROLLINS

Water in the desert? Cheap and readily available fuel? Western expansion? I did all these things, made them all possible. And then one day I come to work and find we've been relocated to the basement of—gah, the insult of it—the Department of Education.

Whatever, I make it work. The Department gets by—thrives, some would say. Until, out of the blue, there you are, from...out of the blue, day after day, sitting at my desk no less, going through my papers, and I know that for whatever reason you want me to think you're here, I know the real reason, I know that you being here means the end of me and my career and maybe the whole Department.

(silence)

Who are these people?

YORK

I'm just an inspector, Mark. Just inspecting.

YORK gets up and lets ROLLINS take his seat at the desk. ROLLINS sits down and gets to work. YORK remains, looking down at ROLLINS. He takes a coffee cup and drinks. ROLLINS reaches for his coffee cup, but it's the one in York's hand.

ROLLINS

God dammit—

YORK

Tch-tch. Separation of church and state.

ROLLINS

...Dammit then. Dammit all.

THE SECRETARY

Rollins! Where are you, Rollins?

ROLLINS

My desk, Sir.

THE SECRETARY

Stay right where you are, Rollins.

THE SECRETARY enters with
DERRIDA, an attractive young woman
sharply dressed, following close behind.

THE SECRETARY
Rollins...

ROLLINS
Yes, Mr. Secretary?

THE SECRETARY
Who are all these people?

ROLLINS
It's a...public office, sir.

THE SECRETARY
But is it this public?

ROLLINS
I guess so.

THE SECRETARY
Well, as long as they're working...
Rollins, this is Thalia Derrida, agent from the President's Office. She'll...
explain everything. She has full authority.

ROLLINS
Sir?

DERRIDA
You can call me Agent, Agent. Once we get to know each other better, maybe then
you can call, "Sir."

ROLLINS
...Okay.

THE SECRETARY
Keep up the good work, Rollins
(THE SECRETARY exits.)

ROLLINS (to YORK)
Do you mind?

YORK
Nope.
(YORK proceeds not to leave.)

ROLLINS

All right, Agent Derrida, what's all this about?

DERRIDA

Well, Agent Rollins, in short the Department of the Interior is expanding, and you've been chosen to oversee this expansion within the Department. I've been sent from the President's Office for the Reconfiguration of the Interior and I will be liaising with you to make the transition as smooth as possible.

ROLLINS

I don't understand.

DERRIDA

The Department of the Interior will be absorbing various agencies and bureaus from other departments to ease the operation of those departments.

ROLLINS

No, the Department of the Interior consists of eight bureaus—

DERRIDA

I'm aware of that, Agent, but everything's about to change.

ROLLINS

No

DERRIDA

Yes.

ROLLINS

No, I won't have it.

DERRIDA

Yes, you will.

ROLLINS

No.

DERRIDA

Yes.

ROLLINS

Will you go out on a date with me?

DERRIDA

No.

ROLLINS

Yes.

DERRIDA

Oh, all right, yes. But not until after you've absorbed the new agencies.

ROLLINS

God—

YORK

(clears his throat)

ROLLINS

Dammit, then. Just plain...dammit.

Lights.

Perhaps "Can I Kick It?" by

A Tribe Called Quest begins to play.

PART THE 2nd.

Lights up on ROLLINS alone. But YORK is circling him in the surrounding dark, handing out bureau posters to audience members which will be lit by chorus members with flashlights when Rollins names the respective bureau.

ROLLINS

I see you over there, dancing.

YORK

It's a happy day, Mark.

ROLLINS

How is it a happy day?

YORK

You heard her: "Everything's about to change."

ROLLINS

The U.S. Department of the Interior protects America's natural resources and heritage, honors our cultures and tribal communities, and supplies the energy to power our future.

YORK

Damn, Mark, you gotta relax.

ROLLINS

Created on March 3, 1849, in a bill passed by the 30th Congress on the last day of

ROLLINS (cont'd)

James K. Polk's presidency, the Department today consists of eight bureaus:

YORK

Things change.

ROLLINS

The Bureau of Indian Affairs

The Bureau of Reclamation

The Bureau of Land Management

YORK

The Interior is always adapting

ROLLINS

The National Parks Service

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The U.S. Geological Survey

YORK

Who's up for a dance party?

DERRIDA (appearing)

I am.

YORK

Excellent.

ROLLINS

The Office of Surface Mining

The Minerals Management Service

YORK

Yo, turn it up.

The music gets louder.

YORK gets a dance party going. DERRIDA tries to get

ROLLINS to dance with her, but he just fights to be heard.

ROLLINS

The Department manages 507 million acres of surface land, or about one-fifth of the land in the United States. It manages 476 dams and 348 reservoirs through the Bureau of Reclamation, 388 national parks, monuments, seashore sites, &c. through the National Park Service, and 544 national wildlife refuges through the Fish and Wildlife Service. Energy projects on federally managed lands and offshore areas supply about 28% of the nation's energy production.

Lights.

PART THE 3rd.

Lights up on ROLLINS at the lunch hall counter. He has a plastic tray. He is reaching for a spoon to serve himself, when his hand is caught by AGENT LAGUERRE. AGENT SIEG appears behind ROLLINS. Predictably, these agents look like detectives out of a Bogey film.

ROLLINS

Can I help you gentlemen?

LAGUERRE

Yeah, Rollins. You can help us.

SIEG

We're agents.

LAGUERRE

Department of War

ROLLINS

There is no Department of War. They changed it to the Department of Defense in 1949.

SIEG

Nuh-uh.

LAGUERRE

The Bigs decided there was too much defense

SIEG

Not enough war

LAGUERRE

So they brought back the Department of War

SIEG

Reconstituted it

LAGUERRE

And that's us.

(pointing to SIEG)

Sieg.

SIEG (pointing to LAGUERRE)

LaGuerre.

LAGUERRE
Department of Where.

SIEG
War.

LAGUERRE
War. Department of War.

ROLLINS
Really? Those are your names—?

SIEG
We need your help, Rollins.

LAGUERRE
You're gettin' handled a big steaming pile of shit.

SIEG
Lotsa crap you don't want.

LAGUERRE
Agencies

SIEG
Bureaus

LAGUERRE
And...affairs

SIEG
It's the affairs we're interested in

LAGUERRE
One affair in particular.

SIEG
They're gonna hand you a war, Rollins

LAGUERRE
But you can't have it

SIEG
War's our venue

LAGUERRE
Our purview even

SIEG
They're gonna give you some song and dance

LAGUERRE
Some backwards logic

SIEG
And you can argue all you want

LAGUERRE
But they're still gonna stick you with it.

ROLLINS
So what do you want me to do about it?

SIEG
Get rid of the dame

LAGUERRE
Make Thalia Derrida...disappear

SIEG
Do this for us and we'll make certain headaches of yours

LAGUERRE
Disappear.

SIEG
Read?

LAGUERRE presses a gun into Rollins' hand. And the two agents disappear.

The lamp at Rollins' desk turns on. YORK is there, playing cards with an audience conscript.

YORK
Is this really the game you want to play?

ROLLINS
Mind your own business.

YORK
I was talking to him/her. I know you want to play the game those goons are selling

ROLLINS

Please, York, I need help here.

YORK (to the Conscript)

Do you mind if we finish up later?

Thanks.

ROLLINS

I love her, York.

YORK

And you love the Department. So which do you choose?

ROLLINS

Which would you choose?

YORK

I don't have to choose. I've already got you.

ROLLINS

You've got me. I want me.

YORK

That's not up for negotiation though. Inspector's privilege.

ROLLINS

Damn you, York.

PART THE 4th.

The doors to the other room fly open. There's an avant-production of a classic, American musical — maybe *Oklahoma!* — happening onstage.

ROLLINS

What was that racket?

DERRIDA

The NEA. One of the agencies we're shifting to the Interior.

ROLLINS

The N...E...A...

Thalia, I've decided I love you.

DERRIDA

I didn't say you could call me "Thalia —"

ROLLINS

But I need to know something. I need you to be honest with me.
What's this war you're going to saddle me with?

DERRIDA

Who told you — ?

ROLLINS

That doesn't matter. Just tell me what the war is.

DERRIDA

It's a civil war. What's more interior than that?

ROLLINS

This Department was created to protect our country's resources —

DERRIDA

Yes, I know. That's why I thought—well, you couldn't possibly screw it up anymore than the Department of War boys. Maybe you could even get it settled. At long last.

ROLLINS

We don't handle conflict.

AUDIENCE CONSCRIPT

Hey, you BP asshole!

(And s/he throws a glassful of oil onto ROLLINS)

ROLLINS

Well. We don't handle conflict well.

DERRIDA

But this is your chance at redemption. You have a chance to make things right.
Make your mark, Mark.

ROLLINS

No, Thalia. The Interior doesn't do war. And we definitely don't do art.
(He reveals the gun, given him by the War Boys.)

DERRIDA

I see they got to you, the god damned Department of War.

ROLLINS

York? Did you hear that? Separation of church and—

YORK

I am not getting involved in this!

DERRIDA

Well, I'm not going down without a fight.
(She pulls a gun)

ROLLINS

I didn't expect you to.

DERRIDA

Good.

THE DUAL DUEL DUET

ROLLINS & DERRIDA face off across a microphone to sing a duel.
YORK finds some conscripts to help him light the scene.

(This song is "A Steep Climb" by The Sadies, but anything as beautifully Sergio Leone will do.)

HIM: *You always said not to break two laws at one time*

HER: *Try and do as I say, just don't ever as I do*

HIM: *Trying to find middle ground will be a steep climb*

HER: *A change in direction could be the best thing for you*

HIM: *My refuge lies where nothing can grow in total seclusion
My curse falls on me after anything comes to fruition*

HER: *Every day takes years away from me
Find a way that won't leave me so empty.*

HIM: *When you preach to the converted even the faithful might stray*

BOTH: *Try not to lose count of your blessings
They'll be all you have one day*

And the duel really begins.

A Rollins puppet and a Derrida puppet face off, à la the end of
The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, on the table in the center of the room.

Occasionally lights shift to give us views of the human Rollins & Derrida.
The last image is ROLLINS & DERRIDA drawing their guns.

At the end of the music, lights go out.

PART THE 5th.

When the lights come back up, DERRIDA is gone.

YORK is there, a large bloody stain right in his gut, but he doesn't seem to notice. He is packing up his briefcase.

ROLLINS goes to him.

ROLLINS

Where'd she go?

YORK

You shot me, asshole. I should've known —

ROLLINS

No, it wasn't me. I just — Are you okay?

YORK

You think a shot right in the gut is going to stop me?

ROLLINS

Well, I —

YORK

You won. For now at least. They'll give you what you want, make what you don't want just go away.

ROLLINS

But where'd Thalia go?

YORK

They'll give you everything but that.

ROLLINS

None of this feels right.

YORK

It isn't.

ROLLINS

I thought she'd kill me. I've never picked up a gun in my life. And now she's gone, you'll be dead soon, and I still don't know who all these people are.

YORK

No I won't. I'm not dying today either.

ROLLINS

I don't — Who are you?

YORK

Remember Lewis & Clark?

ROLLINS

I don't follow.

YORK

Clark took one of his slaves with him, all the way to the Pacific and back, trusted him, even let him vote with the rest of the Corps of Discovery about where to spend the winter of 1805. All the way to the Pacific and back and he never set him free. But he told some bullshit story about setting me free, only I wasn't happy as a free man, so I was on my way back to him when I got cholera and died.

ROLLINS

Ok.

YORK

That's me.

ROLLINS

What? like the spirit of him?

YORK

No, I'm him. I'm still alive.

ROLLINS

Are you sure Clark's not still with us? I'm pretty sure I saw him in my office a few months back —

YORK

Because I decided not to die. I decided I'd never die. And now here I am. Still living.

ROLLINS

What's this got to do with me?

YORK

Maybe everything.

Maybe nothing.

Maybe your story isn't your own.

ROLLINS

Then why are you here?

YORK

(just looks at him, then turns to leave.)

ROLLINS

Where are you going?

YORK

Word just came down.

(BEACONS hands a piece of paper to an AUDIENCE CONSCRIPT who hands the paper to YORK who hands it to ROLLINS.)

Expansion of the Interior has been permanently suspended.

My inspection is done. I've got reports to file.

ROLLINS

What does this mean for me?

Can I go back to just managing the original eight bureaus?

YORK

The Secretary will handle all that.

ROLLINS

And what about me? You're going away. Do I get me back?

YORK

What do you think?

YORK exits.

Lights go out.

A desk lamp turns on, illuminating THE SECRETARY at his desk, ROLLINS sitting opposite THE SECRETARY is reading the file ROLLINS handed him at the start of the play.

When he has finished reading, he closes the file. And stares at the closed folder for a while, shaking his head.

TWO AGENTS appear from the shadows, but it's unclear who they work for. They clap hands on Rollins' shoulders. THE SECRETARY gives a slight wave of his hand. The desk lamp turns off.

End of play.