### Exeunt Omnes

Roger Zelazny

Houselights low. The Reapers and Nymphs danced as the bombs began to fall. Prospero faced Ferdinand.

“ ‘You do look, my son, in a mov’d sort, as if you were dismay’d. Be cheerful, sir, our revels now are ended. These our actors, as I foretold you, were all spirits, and are melted into air, into thin air...’ ”

He gestured simply. The Reapers and Nymphs vanished, to a strange, hollow and confused noise.

“ ‘.. And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples,” he continued, “ ‘the great globe itself, yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve and, like this insubstantial pageant faded, leave not a rack behind... ’

The audience vanished. The stage vanished. The theater vanished. The city about them faded, with a strange, hollow and confused noise. The great globe itself became transparent beneath their feet. All of the actors vanished, save for the spirits of Ariel, Caliban and Prospero.

“Uh, Prossy.. .” said Ariel.

“ ‘We are such stuff as dreams are made on—’ ”

“Prospero!” bellowed Caliban.

“.. And our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

Caliban tackled him. Ariel seized him by the sleeve.

“You’re doing it again, boss!”

“ ‘Sir, I am vexed—’ ”

“Stop it! The melt is on! You undid the wrong spell!”

“ ‘Bear with my weakness—my old brain is troubled... ”

Caliban sat on him. Ariel waved his slight fingers before his eyes. They drifted now in a vast and star-filled void. The nearest sizable body was the moon. Satellites—communication, astronomical, weather and spy—fled in all directions.

“Come around, damn it!” Ariel snapped. “We’re all that’s left again!”

“ ‘Be not disturbed with my infirmity... ”

“It’s no use,” growled Caliban. “He’s gone off the deep end this time. What say we give up and fade away?”

“No!” Ariel cried. “I was just beginning to enjoy it.”

“We *are* disturbed by your infirmity, Prossy! Cut the Stanislavsky bit and put things back together!”

“ ‘If you be pleas’d, retire into my cell and there repose... ”

“He’s coming to the end of his lines,” said Ariel. “We’ll get him then.”

“ ‘A turn or two I’ll walk, to still my beating mind.”

“Where are you going to walk, boss?” Caliban asked. “You took it all away.”

“Eh? What’s that?”

“You did it again. It’s a terrific scene that way, but it tends to be kind of final.”

“Oh dear! And things are pretty far along, too.”

“The furthest, I’d say, to date. What do you do for an encore?”

“Where’s my Book?”

Caliban flipped his flipper.

“It went, too.”

Prospero massaged his eyeballs.

“Then I’ll have to work from memory. Bear with me. Where was it?”

“A desert isle.”

“Yes.”

He gestured magnificently and the faint outlines of palm trees appeared nearby. A slight salt scent came to them, along with the distant sounds of surf The outlines grew more substantial and a shining sand was spread beneath their feet. There came the cry of a gull. The stars faded, the sky grew blue and clouds drifted across it.

“That’s better.”

“But—this is a *real* desert isle!”

“Don’t argue with him. You know how he gets.”

“Now, where were we?”

“The entertainment, sir.”

“Ah, yes. Come to my cave. Ferdinand and Miranda will be waiting.”

He led them along the shore and up to a rocky place. They entered a great grotto where a large playing area was illuminated by torchlight. Prospero nodded to Ferdinand and Miranda and gestured toward the stage.

“Boss, something’s wrong.”

“No tongue! All eyes! Be silent!”

Ariel lost his power of speech for the moment and regarded the scene that appeared before him.

The great globe of the Earth, sun dappled, cloud streaked, green, gray and blue, turned slowly above the playing area. Tiny sparks, missiles, streaked above it, vanishing to be replaced by minute puffs of smoke over the major cities of North America, Europe and Asia. The globe rushed toward them then, one puff growing larger than the others, replacing all else. Up through dust, fire and smoke the vision swam, of a city twisted, melted, charred, its people dead, dying, fleeing.

“Boss! This is the wrong bit!” Caliban cried.

“My God!” said Ferdinand.

“ ‘You do look, my son, in a mov’d sort, as if you were dismay’d,’ ” Prospero stated.

“Here we go again,” said Ariel, as the world rotated and entire land masses began to burn.

“ ‘... the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, the great globe itself.. .’ ”

More missiles crisscrossed frantically as the icecaps melted and the oceans began to seethe.

“ ‘ shall dissolve.. ’ ”

Large portions of the land were now inundated by the boiling seas. “ ‘... leave not a rack behind.. ’ ”

“We’re still substantial,” Ariel gasped.

“But *it’s* going,” Caliban observed.

The globe grew less tangible, the fires faded, the water lost its colors. The entire prospect paled and dwindled.

“ ‘... is rounded with a sleep. ’ ” Prospero yawned.

... Was gone.

“Boss! What happened to—”

“Sh!” Ariel cautioned. “Don’t stir him up.—Prossy, where’s the theater?”

“ ‘... to still my beating mind. ’ ”

“ ‘We wish you peace,’ ” Ferdinand and Miranda said in unison as they exited.

“Where are we, sir?”

“Why, you told me 'twas a desert isle.”

“And such it is.”

“Then what else would you? Find us food and drink. The other’s but a dream.”

“But, sir! Your Book—”

“Book me no books! I’d eat and sleep, I’d let these lovers woo, then off to Naples. All magics I eschew!”

Caliban and Ariel retreated.

“We’d best his will observe and then away.”

“Aye, sprite. Methinks the living lies this way.”

*[Exeunt omnes.]*