

CANNED PEACHES IN SYRUP

(An environmental tragi-comedy)

By

ALEX JONES

Produced by the Pasadena Playhouse (the state theatre of California), Los Angeles, October 2007. Eight weeks after, the run was extended - sold out. Another production in an Italian translation in Rome.

There is an American version of the play available too. It has been published in America by 'Original Works.'

A hundred years of global warming has reduced the planet to a desert wasteland, peopled by dwindling tribes of vegetarians and cannibals. Ma, Pa and Julie wander the blighted landscapes of what was once a thriving metropolis in search of vegetable sustenance, but when the malicious prophet Blind Bastard shows up and discovers they are the guardians of the very last can of fruit known to mankind, and as sure as apples are apples somebody's going to die. After informing the cannibals in a nearby canyon that there is fresh meat nearby, it is decided that one of them should check them out. Roger bravely wanders into their camp and before Pa can blow out his guts, his daughter falls instantly in love, triggering a Romeo and Juliet journey that spirals dangerously into passion, mayhem and destruction beneath the background of a doomed world.

**SYNOPSIS & SAMPLE SCENES
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Characters

Ma

Pa

Julie

Blind Bastard

Scab

Bill

Heather

Rog (short for *Roger*)

The set

The stage is an ancient tarmaced road, which has almost been entirely engulfed by the desert, which the world is reverting to following a hundred years of drought. The whole space is covered with sand. There are a few rocks, which are broken pieces of concrete with the rusty reinforcing-steel sticking out. There is one broken concrete lamppost. There is a huge sky backdrop, which glows sourly through the veil of a stricken sky. The place is somewhere in England. The time is the future...

ACT 1

SCENE 1

The Family arrive on stage pulling an old caravan that has been somewhat modified, and is pulled by a harness attached to a wooden chassis.

- MA How much further, Pa? I don't think I can manage much more.
- PA Thought I saw some green when we were on top of that last ridge - bit of grass or shrub or summat.
- MA Can't say I saw anything, Pa.
- PA Could've been mistaken. (*Stops*) Wanna stop then?
- MA The girl's knackered, Pa.
- PA You knackered, girl?
- JULIE I am a bit.
- PA We'll camp up then. It's as good a spot as any; clear view all around, see anyone coming way off.
- JULIE I'll boil some water, shall I Pa?
- PA No, best not, girl; save our resources. We'll chew on them roots we dug up yesterday - plenty of moisture in them.
- THEY BEGIN TO MAKE CAMP.
- MA What say we put up for a few days, Pa? My legs are like jelly and my shit's ever such a funny colour.
- PA What colour is it?
- MA Pink.
- PA What colour's your shit, girl?
- JULIE Green, Pa.
- PA What you been eating, Ma?
- MA That's a daft question; the same as you of course - grass an' boiled root.
- PA Pink shit don't sound right. You could perhaps use a rest. I just hope there's no cannibals around these parts.
- MA Don't be silly, Pa. There's no one for miles.
- JULIE has set up the deck chairs and picnic table. They sit down to eat their roots.*
- PA Pink shit, eh?
- MA Bit peculiar, isn't it?

PA Could've been that bark we had last week; that was a bit pinky underneath.

MA But the girl's shit is fine. What about you? What colour's your shit?

PA Green.

Pause. They carry on eating.

JULIE I'm gonna have to be sick.

JULIE gets up and throws up a few paces off. The others carry on eating, regardless. Eventually she returns to the table.

 I don't think I can manage much more.

MA You eat up, girl. There's goodness in that root.

PA None of us feel like eating that often, but we have to force ourselves. Don't let a bit of vomit put you off. You need your sustenance.

JULIE carries on eating. Pause.

 We'll stay here a few days then. We've got enough provisions just now.

MA Oh that would be nice, Pa! It's been a good while since we've had a decent break. Since the tribe broke up it seems like we haven't stopped walking.

PA We have to find new pastures, Ma. We stay put too long, we'll starve. 'Less you fancy cannibalism?

MA Ooh don't talk so vile! I couldn't bear the thought - meat is murder, Pa; you know that. We took the pledge with the rest of the tribe. You shouldn't even joke about it.

PA Sorry Ma.

MA The vegetarians are the chosen people. We'll survive because of our purity and our links with the earth,

PA Then how come our tribe are wiped out?

MA Oh Pa, we're still here and there are other vegetarian tribes around. It was a test of our faith.

PA Yeah, maybe.

MA *"Flesh is weak and the grass is always greener on the other side."*

PA When we can find some.

MA *Resolve* - that's what you're always telling me.

PA Yeah, you're right Ma - *Resolve*. We'll survive.

MA That's more like it!

An old man with bandaged eyes, holding a wooden staff slowly gets up from behind a boulder. JULIE spots him.

JULIE *Pa!*

PA *(Clocking him)* Fetch my gun, girl!

JULIE quickly gets PA's rifle from the caravan.
PA points it at the blind man.

 Who are you?

B.B They call me *Blind Bastard*.

PA Why?

B.B Because I'm blind.

PA I see. And what can we do for you, Blind Bastard?

B.B No - what can I do for you?

PA Well you could start by fucking off.

B.B A natural reaction to a stranger in a strange land.

PA Then naturally fuck off.

B.B I am an old man, blind and scabby. What possible harm can I do you?
(Walking towards PA).

PA Hold it right there, Mr Blind Bastard; whether you can see or not
you need to know I've got a gun in my hand.

B.B *A gun!* Do you have bullets?

PA What use is a gun without a fuckin' bullet?

B.B God's leaden deliverers were all spent many years ago.

PA You can take it from me, they're not all spent; one more step
you can have one of your very own.

B.B You speak through fear. But your threats are empty - you
have no bullets.

PA What's your game, stranger? We have no food to share.

B.B Do not fear me - I am a Holy Man, I mean no harm.

MA You're a Holy Man?

B.B *I am the eyes of the world!*

PA I can't see it myself.

MA *Respect Pa.* He's a Holy Man - he has an affliction.

PA There are plenty of blind people since the sun went crazy. It doesn't
mean a thing. And what was he doing hiding behind a rock?

B.B I sought shelter from the mid-day burn. I fell asleep... I believe
you have some root. I haven't eaten for three days.

MA Oh let him have some root, Pa - he's safe.

PA Thank you Madam, my blessing upon you.

MA He blessed us Pa. We ain't been blessed for a long time now.

Pause.

PA All right, Blind Bastard; you can join us for a while.

B.B Accept my scabby thanks. Please... guide me to your feast -

MA sits him down and hands him some root. He begins to chew.

Very nice, very woody.

MA It's a bit dry.

B.B Sustenance from the soil. We must be grateful for whatever this poor maligned rock deems to give up to us. (*Chews for a while*)
What tribe are you?

PA Vegetarian: the last of the Milton Keynes Salad Men. We were nomadic; our tribe have always been grazers, moving from pasture to pasture.

B.B Vegetarian, eh?

MA Are there any vegetarians around here?

B.B Some.

PA What tribes?

B.B The last I saw were the Mid Lothian Thistlejaws and Pineconers.

PA What were they doing down here? I hear there's still trees in Scotland.

B.B The trees are sick.

PA We're all bleedin' sick, mate. The whole soddin' world's sick, but trees are trees! A tree is a great source of protein.

MA Would you like to try this other kind of root, Blind Bastard? It's a bit more sappy.

B.B You are kind, Madam. Blessings on you and your family.

MA Oh thank you, a blessing never goes amiss.

PA What other tribes have been here?

B.B There was a group of people from the Welsh borders seen a few weeks ago.

PA Veggies?

B.B Meat eaters.

PA (*Concerned*) What kind of meat?

B.B Animal.

PA *(Relieved)* Thank God!

B.B There *are* cannibals around these parts,

PA I knew it!

MA Oh Pa, we haven't got to move on again have we?

PA What's their strength?

B.B Remnants like you. Just a handful, sick and stained by the corruption of their foul misdeeds. You needn't be worried by them.

MA Are you vegetarian then, Blind Bastard?

B.B Of course - the only true way, Madam: redemption through earthly ties - the soil will give up its fruit once more when the canker is cut from the branch of life. The cannibals are diseased by the diseased flesh they devour. The earth will claim their bones and surrender a flower for each disgusting corpse interred within its loamy tomb.

MA Ooh, that's beautiful! You really are a Holy Man.

B.B My affliction is Christ's gift; a burden and a blessing - I can see, but can't see; the world is dark, but the way forward is bathed in light and visions. I am chosen: *Meat is murder!*

ALL *Meat is murder!*

PA You're welcome, Blind Bastard. I didn't know you were of our creed. Can't be sure in times like these. It's hard to trust anyone.

B.B Think nothing of it.

PA These cannibals, where are they?

B.B Some miles off. I have observed them, unseen: a crass bunch of worm-ridden carcasses, brown-knickered and runny-arsed in the face of danger. Your gun will keep them at bay... even though you have no bullets.

PA I have bullets.

Pause.

JULIE We've got a tin.

MA *Shush girl!*

B.B A tin?

PA Nothing to speak of, just a tin.

B.B What kind of tin?

JULIE Fruit.

B.B *A tin of fruit?* I haven't seen a food tin for many years.

PA You shouldn't speak of it girl, you know that.

JULIE But he's a Holy Man, Pa.

- MA It's an heirloom; belonged to your grandpa that did.
- B.B A great treasure, no doubt. You can trust me. Let me examine it, please? I would consider it a great honour.
- PA I don't know...
- MA Oh go on. Pa. It can't do no harm.
- PA Fetch it then, girl -
- JULIE enters the caravan and comes back with the tin. BLIND BASTARD holds out his hands, expectedly. JULIE passes the tin to PA, who places it in BLIND BASTARD's waiting hands - it is almost a religious experience. BLIND BASTARD begins to stroke the tin. He shakes it by his ear.*
- Careful!*
- B.B Of course... The fruit is suspended in liquid of some kind. I can feel it heavy and ripe, bumping against the sides of the tin... What is it?
- JULIE Tinned peaches in syrup.
- B.B (*Soft moan*) I know the fruit from old.
- JULIE What's it like?
- B.B You've never tasted it?
- JULIE No, it's the only tin we have. I ate an apple once though; that was lovely - all crispy and wet.
- B.B Apples were fine fruit: apples and pears were prolific at one time, but a peach is something much rarer.
- MA Tell us what it's like, Blind Bastard.
- B.B A peach is a soft, heavy fruit, the colour of the sun; its flesh is firm and sweet to the tongue, like a small breast in the mouth.
- MA Ooh, it sounds lovely; apart from the *small breast* bit.
- B.B Why haven't you eaten them?
- PA We're saving it for a special time when the last cannibal is dead and the land is spouting green again. When we know the world's on the mend, then we'll eat them; in celebration, like.
- B.B A worthy thought.
- PA (*Concerned for the tin*) Yeah, er can I relieve you of it, Blind Bastard? It is very valuable.
- B.B Of course... (*Goes to hand it over, but holds back*) But first I will bless it; it is the only tin I know of. There is to my mind no other fruit upon this earth. I will pray for all of you, entrusted with this sacred object of the earth's finer time.
- MA A prayer - for us?

B.B What are your names?

MA I'm Ma, he's Pa, an' she's our girl, Julie.

B.B Oh Lord God creator and destroyer, whose mighty hand once gave succour to this blighted stone! Bless Ma, Pa and Julie. Sustain them and guide them, guardians of this tin of peaches in syrup. Bless this fruit oh Christ our Lord and protector. Keep it safe and free from harm, so that when the world is once again a fine and wondrous place to behold, Ma, Pa and Julie can feast in your honour upon the peach and drink the heavy sticky syrup of your love.

MA Ooh Pa, I could cry! That was so moving.

B.B It is reassuring to meet such fine people. Believe me, you will live to see this world clothed in green again.

PA I hope you're right, mate. Sometimes I just can't see it though - it looks pretty fucked up to me.

MA Oh Pa, it'll happen - have faith! God fucked it up to test us.

PA No Ma, it was all the cars and chemicals that did it.

B.B Not cars - *whales*.

PA What the fuck's a whale?!

B.B Great monster fish of the oceans that once swam in their millions, teeming and spawning like a foul disease. Their faeces contained deadly radioactive toxins, poisonous to all but them.

MA Who would have though it - *whales*?

B.B The whales were prodigious shitters. One turd could weigh as much as 300 tons.

PA That's a big turd!

B.B The seas began to clog with their shit - all manner of sea animal died.

PA Why didn't people kill them?

B.B They tried. Whole Cities took to sea in all manner of craft, but to no avail - all were devoured by the whales.

PA *Crikey!*

B.B Finally the radioactive gas from their shit filled the sky, forming great noxious clouds that rained their filth to the ground, poisoning the earth.

MA What happened to the whales?

B.B Choked by their own shit.

MA What... colour was their shit?

B.B What?

MA What colour was their shit?

B.B Erm... yellow, bright yellow. Why?

MA Nothing.

PA Well that is a remarkable story, Blind Bastard. I always knew it was nothing to do with God.

B.B God's great design can take many forms.

MA Of course it can. God probably sent the whales, didn't he, Blind Bastard?

B.B His punishment for all of the wickedness he saw.

PA Well I reckon we've been punished enough.

MA Excuse Pa, Blind Bastard. He's not really a backslider; just a bit cynical at the moment.

B.B You must keep the faith: *Believe and the Lord will provide.*

PA How come you haven't eaten for three days, then?

Pause.

B.B *(Stands) Christ Almighty, Lord of the apple, peach and pear..!*

PA No more blessings, please.

B.B I have overstayed my welcome - my apologies.

MA *Oh Pa!*

PA I don't mean no disrespect, but we've had a hard time of it lately and prayers aren't what we need just now.

B.B Of course, I understand. I will take my leave.

BLIND BASTARD stands and begins to tap his way out into the desert beyond.

PA Hold it right there, prophet.

BLIND BASTARD freezes instantly, wincing that he has been caught. He feigns surprised innocence.

B.B There is disdain in your voice. What have I done to offend you?

PA I think you've forgotten something, Holy Man.

PA walks up to BLIND BASTARD and takes the tin from his hand. BLIND BASTARD becomes embarrassingly apologetic.

B.B Oh... I apologise most profusely; an aberration, a clumsy forgetful moment exacerbated by my senility and rancid old age...

MA *(Understanding)* Anyone could have done it.

B.B Then I will call again and share your company... if I am welcome?

MA You're more than welcome... isn't he, Pa?

She turns and hard stares her husband.

You're more than welcome, Blind Bastard.

BLIND BASTARD smiles his thanks, his brain already planning a stratagem to get the peaches.

B.B If you could just point me towards the ridge to the East..?

JULIE does so. BLIND BASTARD begins to tap his way off stage.

MA Will you be all right? How do you manage to find your way when you can't see?

B.B I can see perfectly - The Lord is my guide.

He trips over a rock. The others help him up.

The ridge to the East..?

Once again JULIE points him in the right direction. As he exits...

Bless you, benevolent strangers bound to the earth by your vegetable roots... bless you and bless your fruit; a bright glowing grail in a world fucked by flesh eating monsters - their sins will reap the whirlwind of God's terrible wrath - *they will be punished!*

He taps his way off with his stick.

PA *(Watching)* He's fallen over again.

MA It's marvellous how he manages though.

PA You shouldn't have mentioned the tin, girl.

JULIE But he's a Holy Man, Pa.

PA No matter who he is - people'd kill for that tin; I've told you before.

JULIE Sorry.

MA Oh no harm done - he's harmless enough.

PA I hope so.

MA Don't be so cynical, Pa. He's a nice blind old man; totally trustworthy. When he said that prayer, it was like standing in the rain - I felt all refreshed!

PA *(Smiles)* Did you Ma?

MA Yes I did - all holy and chosen.

Pa reverently replaces the tin a shrine on the inside door of the caravan. Ma and Julie watch.

JULIE *Meat is murder.*

ALL *(Smiling) Meat is murder!*

They all hug. Music as lights cross fade to and take us to...

SCENE 2

The cannibal's camp. The same day. The camp is set around the rusted carcass of a burnt out lorry, in which they sometimes shelter. The place is littered and untidy. SCAB is sitting, propped against the tyreless wheel of the lorry. BILL is nearby, stirring the contents of a pot over a meagre fire.

SCAB I feel like a pile of crap.

BILL Pretty much what you look like, Scab.

SCAB Is it?

BILL Yeah - all brown an' runny.

SCAB I keep throwin' up, but I don't know where it's comin' from.

BILL Well just stop when you see a little circle come up, 'cause that'll be your arse-ring.

SCAB S' a joke, innit?

BILL I think so.

SCAB I thought it was.

Pause as SCAB looks up at the sky.

Look at the sun, Bill - it's like a great big red-hot ball of fire.

Pause.

BILL The sun *is* a big red-hot ball of fire.

Pause.

SCAB I mean it looks different.

BILL You say that every day, Scab.

SCAB I think it's changin' colour.

BILL Probably.

SCAB What does it mean?

BILL Means we're all fucked, probably.

SCAB Thought so.

Pause.

My skin's ever so sore, Bill.

BILL I know, mate.

SCAB I could cry sometimes.

BILL I know.

SCAB I can't sleep for the pain.

BILL Just keep wrapped up, Scab. Keep out of the sun; it's all you can do.

SCAB Yeah... Think it'll clear up?

BILL Might.

SCAB Yeah it might, mightn't it?

BILL Yeah, never know.

SCAB I've seen people recover; whole body covered in crusty scabs; couldn't see their face, even.

BILL S' possible.

SCAB I just wish it'd rain; could do with a wash. I think if I could just wash the poison out of me body, like, it'd heal up.

BILL Never know.

SCAB It ain't half sore.

BILL I know.

SCAB It never stops.

BILL Yeah.

Pause.

SCAB How's *your* skin, Bill?

BILL Same as always, mate; bit patchy, y' know, few sun-sores here an' there. Same as everyone really, just normal.

SCAB Hope you don't get this, Bill.

BILL Yeah, me too.

SCAB It ain't half sore.

BILL I know.

SCAB It makes me cry sometimes... the pain is terrible; like me whole body's burnin'.

BILL These things are sent to try us, Scab... (*Spots HEATHER and ROG approaching*) Hey, the lads are back from hunting!

HEATHER and ROG enter, tired and pissed off.

How'd it go, lads?

HEATHER Don't ask!

BILL But you've been gone two days. No game about?

ROG Some.

BILL What you got?

HEATHER throws her rucksack on the ground and begins to unpack it.

HEATHER Well let's see what goodies we got in here...

She pulls out a load of what looks like straw.

Well we got us some... dry grass - yum, yum! An' we got us a...

She pulls out something that looks like an old dry stick.

What is that again exactly, Rog?

ROG S' a... old dead snake.

HEATHER bangs it against the lorry door - it retains its frozen shape.

HEATHER Old dead snake!

She carries on pulling out more clumps of straw.

More dry grass... and oh, you're gonna love this -

HEATHER takes out a grubby Tupperware container and empties out a pile of insects onto a dirty old plate by the cooking stuff.

Insects!

BILL What kind?

ROG A few cockroaches, but ants mostly - I found an old ants nest.

BILL *(A little perplexed)* Can't go far on an ant.

ROG What's in the pot?

BILL Scab's vomit, boiled.

ROG What's it taste like?

BILL *(Tastes it)* Scab's vomit, boiled.

ROG Any fox left?

BILL It's head.

ROG Let's have that then - I'm starving!

BILL I was gonna save it for the weekend. I was gonna collect some of that shrubby stuff from by the brook an' boil it into a broth.

HEATHER Never mind the gourmet stuff, Bill. We've been huntin' for two fuckin' days! We need some grub!

ROG How's it going, Scab?

SCAB The pain's terrible, Rog. Feels like me body's on fire.

ROG You been keeping covered up?

SCAB Yeah. I think it would help if it rained; wash the poison out, like.

ROG Yeah.

SCAB Think it'll rain soon, Rog?

ROG Piss down, mate. We're in for a good storm.

SCAB Think so?

ROG For certain.

HEATHER Long as it ain't like that bleedin' monsoon we had two years ago; never stopped rainin' for six fuckin' months!

SCAB I wouldn't mind six months of it; wash the poison out of me system, that would. S' good for the complexion, Heather.

HEATHER You do talk crap, Scab!

BILL He *is* crap - our very own talking turd!

SCAB I *feel* like crap.

BILL is fingering the ants on the plate, mixed with a couple of beetles and a cockroach or two.

BILL Y' know, I reckon these might cook up into a soup; maybe mix in some of that dry grass an' chop in the snake too.

HEATHER Ant-fuckin'-soup - I can't wait! An' you know what, Bill; you know fuckin' what? While you're boilin' up the regurgitated remnants of Scab's stomach lining an' fricasseeing cockroaches - there are livin' people in the valley - with meat on their bones, an' livers an' kidneys an' brains an' all that lovely eatable shit that human beings are made of.

BILL *What?!*

HEATHER A family - three of 'em.

BILL *Great; let's get 'em!*

BILL gets to his feet and grabs his weapon - a samurai sword with a broken blade.

ROG Dunno Bill...

BILL Come off it, Rog - pickin's is pickin's.

HEATHER He's goin' soft!

ROG No I'm not. Just bein' realistic.

HEATHER We'd take 'em easy!

ROG I'm not sure anymore. There's only the three of us now. Can't count on Scab no more.

SCAB Sorry Rog.

ROG S' okay Scab, not your fault.

SCAB If it rains an' the poison washed away, I think I'd be up to it.

ROG Yeah, 'course you would.

BILL We can't just let them wander off, Rog; we've got to try. There's no food left for miles. All you've brought back is some fuckin' insects!

HEATHER He's right, Rog. When are we gonna see a decent meal again?

ROG We need more information, Heather. Can't just go chargin' in. We'll ask Blind Bastard.

HEATHER We saw the spasticated cunt-dick down there talkin' to them.

BILL *Shit!* He's bound to have told them we're around here.

HEATHER Why don't we just kill the blind fucker?

BILL No, we can't do that, Heather.

HEATHER Why not?

BILL He's a Holy Man.

HEATHER *So?*

BILL It's unlucky to kill a Holy Man. Remember what happened when we killed *No Legs Cunt Face?* We lost seven of the tribe to skin cancer. Dead in less than a week; couldn't even eat them.

ROG Yeah I remember; a mass of puss and running sores.

HEATHER They weren't cloaked up at mid-day, it was a bad summer; the sun turned a funny colour.

BILL Yeah, but *why* was the sun a funny colour?

HEATHER It's superstition, that's all. I ain't ever gonna be suckered by those scrougin' religious pussy-rags. Listen up an' I'll give you *my* lesson for the day: eat the weak an' slaughter the crippled an' weary of the world for your own sake a-fuckin'-men!

BILL We kill no Holy Man.

HEATHER Bunch of fuckin' girly vaginas!

Pause.

SCAB The sun's changin' colour. Something funny's happening to it.

HEATHER Scab -

SCAB What?

HEATHER Shut the fuck up!

SCAB Sorry.

At that moment, BLIND BASTARD stumbles on stage and throws his hands into the air like Moses on acid, proclaiming his presence, making them jump.

B.B In the name of Saint Bob of Geldof, the patron saint of terrorists an' fucked up causes, I bless this bone yard refuge and its savage tribe of Christ's dark angels - flesh for flesh!

ALL BUT HEATHER Flesh for flesh!

HEATHER Why do you always have to creep up on us like that, *blind twat!*

B.B I tread with the Lord's nimble step.

He falls over.

HEATHER S' funny you should turn up, you old wanker. I was just suggestin' we kill you.

B.B (*Ranting, desperate*) I am a Holy Man! I am chosen! My affliction is my burden and my blessing! It is a most pernicious sin to kill the chosen - death will most surely follow. If you recall the prophet, No Legs Cunt Face..?

ROG Calm down, Blind Bastard. You're safe; we're not going to kill you.

B.B (*Still ranting*) Seven of your tribe dead within a week..!

HEATHER Oh shut up you ranting old prick!

B.B God have mercy upon her frailty. Forgive this profanity..!

ROG We saw you in the valley, Blind Bastard.

HEATHER With the caravan people.

Pause.

B.B I have information.

ROG That's what we want.

B.B I must beg a favour in return.

ROG You can have some of their meat, don't worry.

HEATHER Yeah we'll save the prick for you - you can shove it up your skinny arse; might make you shut up for a while!

B.B I deaf my ear to your verbal filth. But Christ will record every word that pours like a torrent of piss from your scummy mouth.

HEATHER I'm gonna chew your buttocks one day, you scroungin' old tosspot!

ROG Give it a rest, Heather! If we want their meat, let's get this shit sorted before they all fuck off... (*To BLIND BASTARD*) You can have a share in their flesh. Now tell us what you know?

B.B There is something more I want.

HEATHER He's not havin' the fuckin' caravan - that's a bloody good shelter!

B.B Not the caravan... a tin.

Pause.

BILL A tin?

ROG What of - meat?

B.B Fruit.

BILL What kind of fruit?

B.B Peaches.

BILL Never heard of 'em. What they like?

B.B They are like... fruit.

SCAB I tasted fruit, once.

BILL What's it like, Scab?

SCAB Nice.

ROG I didn't know there was anything like that left.

HEATHER What's so special about this tin, then? Why do *you* want it so much?

B.B It is meant for the prophet's lips alone: the Christ child, Jesus himself led me to it.

HEATHER Well maybe we want the fuckin' tin, you bullshitin' scroungin' old cum-bucket.

BILL Let him have it - it's only a fuckin' tin.

ROG I've never seen a tin.

BILL S' only a bit of metal, Rog; nothing special.

ROG Okay, the tin's yours when we take them. So give us the low-down -

B.B They are a family of vegetarians.

BILL *Brilliant!*

HEATHER They're dead meat!

B.B They have a gun.

BILL *Shit!*

ROG Have they got bullets?

B.B They say so.

HEATHER They haven't got bullets. Nobody's got bullets anymore.

ROG Did you see any?

B.B I'm blind.

ROG Oh yeah.

HEATHER I thought you were the eyes of the fuckin' world!
I thought you saw everything?

B.B Only what The Lord chooses to reveal to me.

HEATHER Bullshitter!

B.B Your words are recorded.

HEATHER I'm gonna bake your bollocks some day, you blind wanker!

B.B Your soul will writhe in hell's fires - repent now, or my curse will blight your fortunes.

HEATHER *(Grabs BLIND BASTARD) I've had enough of this shit!*
BILL and ROG pull her off.

BILL Cut it out, Heather! We can't fuck up - he *is* a Holy Man!

HEATHER It's all bullshit, Bill! He wandered in here from nowhere, scrounges our food, an' we're stupid enough to fall for it!

BILL You can't offend God, Heather. We can't take the risk.

HEATHER For fuck sake, Bill - *we eat people!* Think God'd give a flying fuck for a cannibal?

B.B Cannibals are the chosen people: "*The strong will inherit the earth!*" sayeth The Lord.

HEATHER Shut him up somebody; before I slice the fucker!

ROG All right, Blind Bastard; that's enough religion for now. Anything else we should know about these veggies?

B.B The tin of peaches is an offering from God; it is meant for my lips...

HEATHER *He doesn't fucking stop!!*

ROG *(Shouts)* Calm down everybody!
Pause.
Right... We saw three - a man and two women. Any more?

B.B They are all there is: Ma, Pa and their daughter.

ROG Any other weapons?

B.B I know only of the gun. When will you kill them?

HEATHER Think we'd tell you, you withered old prick!

ROG When we're ready. When we've reccied and got the situation sussed.

BILL You can fuck off now, Blind Bastard.

B.B My gut is empty and aching. I haven't eaten for three days.

HEATHER Lyin' prick! We saw you eatin' with the veggies.

B.B Dry and withered root - hardly sustenance. It is right an' proper to offer a morsel to your wanderin' priest.

ROG Oh give him something, for fuck sake!

BILL Give us your mug, Blind Bastard -

BLIND BASTARD unhooks a plastic mug from his belt and holds it out. BILL takes it, fills it from the pot and hands it back to him.

B.B What is it?

BILL Stew.

BLIND BASTARD now has to run through his well-worn priest routine before moving on - he strikes an actor's pose.

B.B May the hail of Mary's blessing fall like frozen rain on your coming enterprise, in the sure hope that the vegetarians die a righteous death to preserve God's hallowed race - flesh for flesh!

ALL BUT HEATHER *Flesh for flesh!*

BLIND BASTARD exits.

HEATHER *Cocksucker!*

BILL What they look like then, these veggies?

ROG We saw them from way off. But the girl looks tasty.

HEATHER Yeah - nice arse.

ROG Plenty of meat on it.

BILL What about the gun then?

HEATHER It's just a gun, that's all. They can't have any bullets; bullets ran out years ago.

SCAB Yeah, but they're vegetarians remember? Nothing to kill - they might not have used them up.

BILL Vegetarians still kill *people* though, Scab; vegetarians kill cannibals.

SCAB You can't blame them.

ROG No, you can't blame them... and *we're* cannibals, aren't we? If they do have some bullets, we could cop for it.

Pause.

One of us'll have to check it out.

HEATHER Oh yeah, that's good - *"Excuse me, we're cannibals - we'd just like to know if you have any bullets for your gun?" "No, we just keep the gun to scare off cannibals with." "Great, we'll be over tonight to eat you all then." "All right, look forward to it - bye for now!" Prick!*

ROG When I say one of us should check them out; I mean that one of us should make friends with them; win their confidence.

BILL Be difficult, Rog.

HEATHER Nobody trusts strangers anymore.

ROG They spoke to Blind Bastard.

BILL That's different, he's a Holy Man. Besides they didn't tell him much.

ROG But they didn't kill him. Look lads, I agree it's desperate. I can't see us killing any more game for a while. I ain't seen a dog for months.

BILL I saw a rabbit last week.

HEATHER I'd love a rabbit!

BILL I like 'em boiled.

HEATHER I'd eat one fuckin' raw!

ROG But we ain't got no rabbit, nor no dog and there's fresh prime meat out there.

HEATHER Too right! I'm fucked if I'm gonna watch them wander off.

BILL Who's to go then?

HEATHER I'll go.

ROG Fuck off, Heather. You're hardly the diplomatic type.

HEATHER What the fuck's that supposed to fuckin' mean, you cock suckin' girly-vagina, turd-pusher!

BILL No Heather, he's right. If they have got bullets, you'd cop it straight off.

HEATHER Well - *fuck you!*

BILL I'll go.

SCAB *No Bill..!* I mean, who's gonna look after me?

HEATHER You hear that? You fuckin' hear that?

SCAB I only meant...

HEATHER We're fucked to the point of starvation an' that miserable mess of diseased flesh is whining about who's gonna take care of him? Know what? It's time he was taken care of.

HEATHER takes out her knife and goes for SCAB.

SCAB *No!!*

BILL grabs HEATHER.

BILL Leave him, you fuckin' bitch! He's one of us!

HEATHER He's dyin'. What does it matter?!

SCAB I'm not dyin'. I just need a wash, tha's all!

HEATHER *(Lunges again) Kill the fucker!*

ROG and BILL scramble her to the ground. The three of them wrestle for a while. HEATHER is desperately trying to kill SCAB.

BILL You're not killing him!!

HEATHER I fuckin' am!!

SCAB I'm not dyin', Heather, honestly!

ROG Grab her arm - get her knife!

HEATHER You're all weak, piss-fuckin'-weak!

BILL *(Now has HEATHER'S knife)* Right - let's see who's fuckin' weak, then!
BILL now lunges at HEATHER.

ROG *Oh fuck!*
ROG dives on BILL, HEATHER dives on ROG, trying to get to BILL.

BILL I'll kill her! I'll fuckin' kill her! Scab is one of us!

ROG *(Shouts)* Stop it! Stop it before someone fucks up!
We've got food out there remember!!
They all begin to calm down.
Fucking hell, I don't believe you lot! You're like fucking animals!
They all give up, breathless and wearied.
I'll go, okay? You'd better stay and look after Scab, Bill.

SCAB Thanks Rog. I think if it'd rain...

HEATHER If it doesn't rain soon, Scab - how about if I piss on you?!

SCAB If you think it might help, Heather...

HEATHER Scabby hunk of cancer-ridden shit!

BILL Leave him alone now - I'm warning yer!

ROG Please everyone! We're the last of our tribe; we've been through
a lot together, let's not forget that - *Flesh for flesh*, eh?
Pause.

ALL *(Quiet) Flesh for flesh.*

ROG That's better! Now let's finish the rest of that fox, and
I'll slip over there first thing tomorrow.

SCAB I'm gonna be sick!

BILL *(Passing the pot)* In there, Scab -
Music. Cross fade lights to...

CANNED PEACHES IN SYRUP

AMERICAN REVIEWS

*Pasadena Playhouse (The State Theatre of California), Los Angeles, October 2007.
Eight weeks after run was extended - sold out.*

LA StageScene.com - Seeing a show at the Furious Theatre in Pasadena is a virtual guarantee of a brilliantly acted and staged production. Dámaso Rodriguez and his furiously fearless band of thespians invariably pick edgy and topical pieces of writing, which they bring to vivid life upstairs at the Pasadena Playhouse, and Canned Peaches in Syrup is no exception. Set in the not so distant future, in a world where food and water are so scarce that half the remaining inhabitants of our planet have turned to cannibalism to survive, Canned Peaches is, as they say, as topical as today's headlines. It's also an outrageously funny comedy, and a love story a la Romeo and Juliet to boot. As the play opens we meet (in starkly beautiful silhouette against an orange sky) Pa, Ma, and Julie, a family of vegetarians (the other half of those still alive), looking for fresh pastures. Vegetarians are "the chosen people," they proclaim in their Oklahoma dust bowl accents and ragged garb. A tall and imposing figure arrives, striking fear in their hearts. "They call me Blind Bastard," he tells them portentously. "Why is that?" they ask. "Because I'm blind!" (As you can see, this *is* a comedy.) Ma, whose faith remains intact despite the bleakness of her life and surroundings, declares him a holy man. Life may be fucked up, she says, but "God fucked it up to test us." One way her life is fucked up now is that her "shit is blue" instead of the usual vegetarian green, and what could that portend? "God's trying to tell me something," she tells Pa, who replies wryly, "There's easier ways than turning your shit blue." This vegetarian family's cannibal counterparts are Bill, Heather, Rog, and Scab, looking like something out of Mad Max. Their motto is "flesh for flesh," and their language makes the vegetarians sound like a Disney family by comparison, and next to the cannibals, the veggies look just about ready for dinner with the president. That is to say, these man-eaters are the filthiest looking and sounding folk you're likely to see on an L.A. stage this year, or any other. "For fuck's sake, we eat people!" one of them exclaims, defensively...or proudly. Upon learning that there are vegetarians (i.e. food for hungry cannibals) nearby, their interest is piqued, but when Blind Bastard warns the cannibals that the veggies have a shotgun (and quite possibly bullets), they decide to send Rog to reconnoitre. Though Rog swears to Pa, Ma, and Julie that he's a veggie, a disbelieving Pa threatens to shoot him dead. Julie, however, looks into his "weird" eyes and sees not only someone she can trust but someone any love/sex-starved veggie teen girl could love. Rog feels the same, though in his own case, the stakes are higher. Struck by a thunderbolt of love at first sight, he twangs, "I can't eat her! She's beautiful!" and yet another R&J fall head over heels for each other. Don't expect the course of true love to run smoothly, though. The cannibals are not about to give up their quest for meat so easily. Playwright Alex Jones has written a seriocomic warning of the dangers of global warming, pollution, war, and all the other threats to our planet, to which director Rodriguez has applied his usual magic, abetted by a cast that couldn't be better. The Furious Theatre's company of actors is small (just 13 in all) which means that every Furious production benefits from the best of the company's ensemble as well as guest artists who bring their unique gifts to each show. Furious members appearing in Canned Peaches are Nick Cernoch, Katie Davies, Shawn Lee, and Eric Pargac. They are joined by Dana Kelly, Jr., Robert Pescovitz (a Furious regular), Laura Raynor, and Libby West. Cernoch (who's served nobly backstage and in the booth for the past few productions) returns to the Furious stage in an absolutely superb performance as Scab, a Cannibal so weakened by disease (he is called Scab with good reason) that he never moves from his earthen bed. Cernoch brings out every layer of beauty and poignancy in the horribly infected Scab, who protests that, "I'm not dying. I just need a good wash." No matter how terribly he suffers, Scab will not give up. "It's still life," he tells Bill, played by the wonderful Pargac (on a roll this year with three formidable Furious performances in a row). The scene in which Scab entreats Bill to just "hold me" is the kind of scene that gets shown at the Oscars as the nominees' names are read. Exquisite work by both actors. Raynor, as Ma, matches Cernoch and Pargac every step of the way. In a world of violence and starvation, hope shines from her eloquent eyes in a gentle and powerful performance. As Pa, Pescovitz downplays his leading man good looks, becoming a Henry Fonda as Tom Joad for our time. And Katie Davies is adorable wide-eyed innocence in a world gone mad. She tells Rog (without irony), "You make me feel great! I've only thrown up twice today!" Ma and Pa are equally delighted that their daughter has found love with a wandering veggie. "I never thought I'd see her fuck!" exclaims an overjoyed Ma. "She's growin' up," explains a philosophic Pa. Since Raynor, Pescovitz, and Davies clearly love the characters whom they are bringing to life, the humor never sounds forced or crass, and the vulgarity of their language is

softened by the genuineness of their work. Kelly makes the enigmatic giant Blind Bastard alternately sympathetic, scary, and dangerous, and Lee (memorable in *Impending Rupture of the Belly*) does fine work once again as the most improbable of romantic suitors. Finally, West (one of our busiest and most versatile actresses) is the scruffiest, raunchiest, filthiest Heather (of all names!) you're likely to see on stage...ever! That the same actress who embodied the small town beauty of Madge in *Picnic* and the Hollywood glamour of Lily Garland in *Twentieth Century* could play a character who makes Sigourney Weaver's in *Alien* seem like a girl from finishing school is nothing short of miraculous. (One of my favorite exchanges is between Rog and Heather. Rog: "They're good people!" Heather: "They're supposed to be a good meal!") A Furious production is destined to benefit from the finest design team around, and *Canned Peaches in Syrup* is no exception. From Melissa Teoh's striking scenic design, which makes every image a gorgeous tableau, to Dan Jenkins' mood-enhancing lighting which scorches the stage in a blaze of orange, to Christy M. Hauptman's costumes, a "distressed" bunch of hugely imaginative rags, to Doug Newell's apocalyptic original music and sound design, this is a Furious band of artists at the top of their crafts. Add to them Brian Danner's fight choreography (there's a three-way free-for-all in Act 1 that exhausts the audience just to watch) and Christa McCarthy's hair design ("I washed my hair last year!" brags Julie, and you believe her) and makeup (like Scab's which takes Cernoch two hours to apply) and you have one hell (deliberate choice of words) of a striking production. Dámaso Rodríguez told a Q&A audience after last night's performance that the Furious chooses its scripts based on two primary criteria: the story must ask questions, and it must have high stakes. In Alex Jones' frighteningly real (yet outrageously funny) script, there are both. *Canned Peaches in Syrup* makes its audiences think and ask questions (about pollution, global warming, war, and other plagues that threaten our earth) and the stakes for its eight characters couldn't be higher. At the final fade out, we are forced to ask ourselves, is there still hope, or is this the end of everything, as we know it, questions which couldn't be more topical or relevant in today's world. Funny, filthy, touching, action-filled, romantic, tragic...*Canned Peaches in Syrup* is all of this, and more. *Steven Stanley*. Carrie Hamilton Theatre (formerly the Pasadena Playhouse Balcony Theatre), 39 S. El Molino Ave., Pasadena.

Variety - *Reccomended. Legit: With "Canned Peaches in Syrup," a relentlessly macabre glimpse into a post-apocalyptic future of worldwide environmental devastation, Brit scripter Alex Jones has impressively intermingled an everyday struggle to survive with the often-hilarious absurdity of the human spirit that innately strives to create normalcy out of chaos. Under the inventive staging of helmer Dámaso Rodríguez, a talented and dedicated eight-member Furious Theater Company ensemble turns Jones' creative vision into a compelling and noteworthy legiter* - The planet's civilizations have been distilled down to two tribes of nomadic humans: Vegetarians and Cannibals. Pragmatic veggie-muncher Pa (Robert Pescovitz) strives to instill the will to live into the spirits of his sickly wife Ma (Laura Raynor) and listless daughter Julie (Katie Davies). Pa's one tangible symbol of hope is an unopened can of peaches, which he is saving to celebrate the world's rebirth, when the Earth can finally replenish itself.

The sorry condition of the planet is a result of the environmental concerns of today, principally the broad strokes of industrial pollution and global warming. The concept of a divinity, however, is still strongly embedded within the psyches of these motley human stragglers, enabling smooth-talking religious huckster Blind Bastard (Dana Kelly Jr.) to play off the fears of both clans. Mellifluously gifted Kelly projects a perfect balance of pomposity and grasping need as Blind Bastard relentlessly pursues the one remaining symbol of Earth's former glory: Pa's can of peaches. Jones contrasts the tentative optimism of the Pa clan with the voracious immediacy of the nearby cannibal quartet of Rog (Shawn Lee), Bill (Eric Pargac), Heather (Libby West) and near-dead but still lighthearted Scab (Nick Cernoch). The essence of Jones' thematic throughline, the burgeoning Romeo and Juliet romance between Rog and Julie, is set in motion by the absurdly hyperphysical antics of the cannibals as they send Rog surreptitiously into Pa's camp to scout out their next meal -- Pa and kin. Lee and Davies are perfectly matched, as Rog and Julie utter endearing profanities at one another that are in perfect accord with the wretched, environment-ravaged conditions of their youthful bodies. In Jones' painfully brutal world, the couple reaches their romantic pinnacle when Rog tentatively suggests they engage in a near-extinct level of human interaction: copulation. The action is played out on Melissa Tech's stark, impressionistic sets, which give credence to the scripter's concept of a sun-seared American landscape devoid of adequate natural resources to sustain healthy life. The ensemble's character-perfect perfs are enhanced by the inventive, evocative designs of Christy M. Hauptman (costumes/props), Dan Jenkins (lighting) and Doug Newell (sound/music).

L.A. Times - '*Canned Peaches*' a wicked farce. *Times* rating: recommended. *Readers' rating:* recommended. '*Alex Jones*' smart and wicked farce imagines a world divided into cannibals and vegetarians. The play manages to make the audience laugh as mankind literally devours itself limb by limb' - In a drought-stricken dystopia where humans are divided into cannibals and vegetarians, life tastes pretty much like a mouthful of dirt no matter what diet you follow. Alex Jones' new play, "Canned Peaches in Syrup," is a nasty, cynical farce about human desperation in bleak times, but as the title indicates, there's more than a hint of sweetness to balance out the bitter world view. The Furious Theatre Company's production is smart, wicked and acted with animal intensity by a stellar cast. The story follows two itinerant groups -- a nuclear family of vegetarians ("Meat is murder!" serves as their mantra) and a mercenary gang of cannibals. Everyone is hungry, tired and covered in a permanent layer of dust. In an attempt to procure human flesh, one of the cannibals (Shawn Lee) secretly infiltrates the vegetarian camp, only to fall in love with the family's young daughter (Katie Davies). "I like your hair," the boy says. "Thanks. I washed it last year," she shyly replies. The plot line suggests "Romeo and Juliet" crossed with "Mad Max," but the overall tone is more like a raunchy satire in the Alfred Jarry vein. The dialogue features wall-to-wall profanity, and the scatological conversations possess a deadpan comic quality. In the end, the vegetarians' prized can of peaches goes missing and bloody mayhem breaks loose. This play's biggest achievement is making the audience roar with laughter as mankind literally devours itself limb by limb. *David Ng*

Los Angeles city Beat - Maybe it's because Halloween and the Day of the Dead are imminent? Whatever the reason, death hovers over most of the plays that I saw last week. Jeannette describes the devastation caused by their wildfire as "very end of the world." But it's nothing compared to the actual end-of-the-world scenario in Alex Jones's *Canned Peaches in Syrup*, a Furious Theatre production in which nomadic cannibals and vegetarians are the only people left in the wake of an apocalypse. This play has a higher death toll (three) than any of the others I saw last week, but it's actually more about the death of the planet – and the touching attempts of its creatures to maintain some shred of human feeling, particularly through a Romeo and Juliet-style romance. The titular can of fruit, which we might dismiss today as blah compared to fresh peaches, has become a rare and precious relic in the playwright's post-apocalyptic world. Jones is saying, amid a torrent of graphic language and violence: Count your blessings. Dámaso Rodríguez's cast is dynamite, and this grimly funny work ultimately serves as a chilling siren, warning us of what might be. *Don Shirley*.

Backstage.com - Critics Pick: An unkempt patriarch leads his family through a desolate landscape, dragging a large wagon that contains the family belongings, à la *Mother Courage*. This opening imagery in Alex Jones' futuristic dark comedy brims with contemporary resonance, evoking reflections on society's homeless population. Setting his play in an unspecified region in America after environmental damage has led to an apocalypse, Jones combines audaciously subversive humor with subtle poignancy to profound effect. Director Dámaso Rodríguez's incisive world-premiere rendition is a bold and thrillingly theatrical exploration of Jones' intriguing themes. With the world's food supply limited to unappetizing options such as plant roots, humanity has evolved into nomadic tribes of predators (cannibals) and prey (vegetarians). The most valuable possession of a vegetarian clan - Pa (Robert Pescovitz), Ma (Laura Raynor), and daughter Julie (Katie Davies) - is a can of peaches. When a bizarre derelict, Blind Bastard (Dana Kelly Jr.), wanders onto the family's camp spot, presenting himself as a religious disciple, Pa foolishly shows this seemingly harmless visitor the stashed can. Bastard will do anything to get this rare delicacy for himself, including alerting a nearby cannibal tribe to the vegetarian family's whereabouts. Though Jones uses broadly comic situations to drive his story, his themes are sobering. He ponders our instinctive need for human connection, even among opponents in a desperate struggle for survival. Though bawdy dialogue and gross-out gags occasionally lapse into overkill, these devices are effective in delineating the crudity of this emotionally damaged society. The ensemble work is impeccable. Kelly is splendid as the mad wanderer -- a hilarious amalgam of Don Quixote and one of those bombastic television evangelists. As mismatched lovers, Davies evokes raucous hilarity with her sex-starved virgin, and Shawn Lee is equally fine as her suitor from the wrong side of the tracks -- a cannibal tribe. Guess who's coming to dinner? Or who will be dinner? Libby West's boisterous take on the hell-raising Heather, an insatiable carnivore, is at once funny and fearsome. Excelling in other roles are Pescovitz, Raynor, Nick Cernoch, and Eric Pargac. Stunningly surrealistic design elements and Brian Danner's masterful fight choreography add to the realization of Jones' thought-provoking vision. *Les Spindle*.

The 2008 nominations for the Garland, LA Weekly and Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle Awards have been announced!

Garland Award Honorable Mentions:

PRODUCTION

Canned Peaches in Syrup

An Impending Rupture of the Belly

PLAYWRITING

Alex Jones, *Canned Peaches in Syrup*

DIRECTION

Damaso Rodriguez, *Canned Peaches in Syrup*

PERFORMANCE IN A (PRIMARILY) STRAIGHT PLAY

Nick Cernoch, *Canned Peaches in Syrup*

Shawn Lee, *An Impending Rupture of the Belly*

Troy Metcalf, *An Impending Rupture of the Belly*

SCENIC DESIGN

Melissa Teoh, *Canned Peaches in Syrup*

LIGHTING DESIGN

Dan Jenkins, *Canned Peaches in Syrup*

SOUND DESIGN

Cricket S. Myers, *An Impending Rupture of the Belly*

MAKEUP DESIGN

Christa McCarthy, *An Impending Rupture of the Belly*

Christa McCarthy, *Canned Peaches in Syrup*

REVIEW ON 'GOOGLE BOOKS'

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Hellz yeah!!!!!!! Like Romeo & Juliet in the apocalypse and on drugs. Amazing! Read this people! I wasn't familiar with Alex Jones because he is a UK writer and I haven't seen his work. Kudos to Original Works Publishing for giving us Americans a chance to discover him.

[Write review](#)