

# INTRODUCTION

by J. Michael Straczynski

A long time ago I decided that as a writer, one of my goals was to write faster than anyone who was better than me, and better than anyone who was faster than me.

So you will understand why Neil Gaiman bugs the hell out of me.

Bad enough he is prolific, writing his own TV series, features, comics, novels . . . worse still that he does this while remaining one of the most genuinely nice guys I've ever met . . . but sheer volume aside he is also one of the finest writers working in the field of . . . well, whatever it happens to be today. Essays, TV scripts, short stories, novels, comic scripts. . . .

Did I mention he bugs the hell out of me?

I've been an admirer of Neil's work from the moment I picked up my first issue of *Sandman* under his guidance, read it, and had my brains splattered against the nearest wall. He does things with words, simple yet elegant tricks that can explain an entire character in a few carefully selected words. It's the closest thing in the writing business to close-up magic . . . you see it right there in front of you, and you can't figure out how the hell he did it.

The man is a certifiable genius . . . and being no fool, when I got my own TV series, the first thing I did (well, after having a brief lay-down to gear up for a five-year journey that has become the writing equivalent to the Bataan Death march) was to try and get a script out of Neil for BABYLON 5. Every six months to a year, I would mention it to him in person or in email. I cajoled, hounded, chivvied, circled and bugged the hell out of him (which seemed only fair in light of paragraph 2 preceding) until he finally agreed to the task.

I have allowed myself the conceit that he did it because he genuinely loves the show, and the characters, rather than simply to get me to stop sleeping on his front lawn every night. The former is what he told me, and as an act of faith, I have come to believe it.

What follows . . . is what followed. This episode was a hit not only with the fans, but the cast and crew, who were charmed by him while he was on set. Of all the freelance scripts that came into B5, this was the most effortless, the most fun, and the most insightful. When Captain Lochley recites her password, and we learn that the keyphrase is, "Zoe's dead," we learn more about her character in that two-second phrase than in the multiple hour-long episodes that preceded it.

Close-up magic.

Bugs the hell out of me.

Enjoy

J. Michael Straczynski  
Executive Producer/Creator  
Babylon 5

# DAY OF THE DEAD

BY NEIL GAIMAN

TEASER

FADE IN:

INT. MESS HALL

Lochley in the mess, eating and reading at the same time. She's reading a thick book on RELIGIOUS CUSTOMS OF THE CIVILISED PLANETS *Volume 3 Borlons to Brakiri*, and has a folder of papers beside her. She looks up and sees Sheridan grinning down at her, like a kid before Xmas.

**SHERIDAN**

Zoot zoot. Zooty zoot zoot.

Lochley says nothing. Perhaps an eyebrow raises.

**SHERIDAN (cont'd)**

They'll be clearing customs any minute now. Excited?

**LOCHLEY**

No, Mr. President. I am not excited.

**SHERIDAN**

Not even a little? I mean, this is a pretty big day for Babylon 5, Captain.

**LOCHLEY**

With respect, sir, your inauguration was a big day for Babylon 5. The day that President Clark killed himself was a big day for Babylon 5. I'm afraid today doesn't register more than the tiniest blip on my pretty big day for Babylon 5 scale.

Garibaldi has spotted Sheridan and comes over.

**GARIBALDI**

It's the big day.

**SHERIDAN AND GARIBALDI (TOGETHER)**

Zoot-zoot-zoot!

Lochley looks at them like a woman watching men do a three stooges routine, and sighs and goes back to her book.

INT. CORRIDOR. TELEVISION MONITORS.

In the corridor a certain amount of bustle, although a number of aliens and humans are standing around watching the TV screens, expectantly. Several Brakiri are marking off the corridor, under the leadership of A (nonspeaking part) PRIEST, who has a large map of Babylon 5, with crayoned markings around a thin pie-wedge area of the station. One Brakiri is up a ladder. The Brakiri have chalks, and rolls of string and decorative tinsel—whatever they could find cheaply in the market. It's almost as if they're decorating for a very ramshackle Xmas. They all have comets pinned to their robes. On the TV an INS reporter is reading the news. We come in mid-broadcast, on the news recap:

### **INS REPORTER**

. . . meaning that the 2268 Olympic Games will be the first to be held off Earth. But I think we can safely say it won't be the last.

(‘and on the lighter side’)

And finally, as all of you must be aware by now, it's a pretty big day for Babylon 5. And—yes, we can now take you live . . .

INT. CUSTOMS HALL.

STEADICAM. The words LIVE TRANSMISSION flash at the bottom of the screen, as into the customs area come REBO AND ZOOTY, both human. This is the substance of Rebo and Zooty's act, and their ‘stage’ personas: Rebo is an idiot who think he knows everything, and is thus a fool, Zooty is an idiot who knows nothing and is thus wise. Think Laurel and Hardy, Abbot and Costello, Groucho and Harpo. They bring anarchy with them. They wear hats.

### **CUSTOMS OFFICER**

Anything to declare?

### **REBO**

I have nothing to declare, my good man, except my genius.

Zooty somehow got around to the Customs officer's side of the desk. He has a goofy and endearing smile.

### **ZOOTY**

And I have nothing to declare except Rebo's genius, either.<sup>2</sup>

### **REBO**

Thank you Zooty.

They grin delightedly at each other. The customs officer looks exasperated. Zooty raises one leg, in the old Harpo Marx routine, so that the customs officer finds himself holding Zooty's leg.

### **ZOOTY**

Zoot zoot!

INT. CORRIDOR. TELEVISION MONITORS.

Lochley, Sheridan and Garibaldi walk past from off-camera, and we follow them. They pass the people we saw before. We hear the crowd laughing, human and alien. Lochley is carrying her book and folders.

**GARIBALDI**

Sounds like they're through immigration already.

**LOCHLEY**

Sir, what do you know of Brakiri Religious customs?

**SHERIDAN**

Er. They um. Nope.

**GARIBALDI**

All I know is that they hate comets. Even mentioning a comet to a Brakiri is some kind of awful taboo. Death. It's the symbol of death.<sup>3</sup>

A Brakiri is attaching a dangling comet to the tinsel.

**SHERIDAN**

Why do you ask?

**LOCHLEY**

They want me to sell them part of Babylon 5 tonight. For religious reasons.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE LONDO'S QUARTERS

A display of comets and skulls. From which we pull back to see Londo take a candy Brakiri-skull from the BRAKIRI SALESMAN, who has set up in the corridor.

**LONDO**

It reminds me of my senior ex-wife. What is it?

**SALESMAN**

Candy. Only for Carbon-based life-forms who can metabolise sugars.

Otherwise is decorative ornament.