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The Last Noel
a 10-minute play
by Jon Herbert
with introductions written by the playwright and dramaturg

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DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

The Last Noel was workshopped and presented as a staged reading at the Mid America Theatre Conference on March 8, 2025, with the following creative team:

Marlon Ariyasinghe	Director
Kristi Good	Dramaturg
Aaron Scully	Nick Kringle
Devon Thompson	Jesus Christ

I was so excited to be paired with Jon, who had been the director of my very first dramaturgy experience for MATC 2013 in St. Louis (the year of the infamous marching band in the lobby, for those who remember). I've had the pleasure of watching Jon's pieces over the years and have always admired the deeply spiritual undertones that serve as a foundation for his work. On the surface, Jon's *The Last Noel* may present as a tried-and-true Hollywood genre of holiday films reinventing—and often poking fun at—the mythos of Santa Claus. But our team conversations about this 10-minute slice of what could be the most important night in Santa's life were much deeper than one would expect.

Our team considered not only the weighty implications of the "war on Christmas," but also our own childhood remembrances of what the holiday meant or didn't mean to us. We spoke of spirituality and religion, tradition and entertainment, and traded recommendations on our favorite retellings of the life of Santa Claus. The most exciting conversation within our team, and then later in our discussion with the audience, was how this ten-minute play could expand to a full-length piece. Jon's deep reflection on capitalism versus spirituality in an airport lounge had become a runway toward an entire world of possibilities. The most pressing rumination I was left with after only ten minutes with these characters was, "Whose side am I *really* on?"

--Kristi Good, Dramaturg

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NICK KRINGLE: Santa Claus; 40s-70s; a sharply dressed cut-throat businessman; preferably portrayed by a white male

JAX: a bartender, 20s-30s who knows what's up, an old soul; any race; any gender

JESUS CHRIST: Son of God; early 30s; dressed casually in jeans and a t-shirt; grounded, laid back; person of color; any gender

SCENE

The VIP lounge of a major international airport

TIME

Late night/early Christmas morning, soon after the last present has been delivered

STYLE NOTES:

"/" in the middle of a line means that this is the point where the next line begins and creates an overlap of dialogue.

"--" at the end of a line means that the line is cut off by the next line.

"[]" Words inside brackets are unspoken but indicate what the character doesn't speak aloud.

A Note from the Playwright...

I grew up in a Christian home where my family went to church on Sundays and celebrated religious holidays, for the most part, in the secular fashion. As I grew into adulthood, I questioned fundamentalist religious teachings and re-examined them through a broader, mythological lens. While I am no longer church-affiliated, my plays tend to re-frame, deconstruct and subvert biblical stories and characters with contemporary and anachronistic lightness.

Through these explorations, I began to consider the tension between the spiritual teachings of Christ and the secular traditions of Christmas--and to consider Jesus Christ and Santa Claus as agents of this dichotomy. Jesus, a communist, inspires people to give away their possessions and live a life in solidarity with the poor and homeless; to renounce their attachment to all things material and temporal. Santa Claus, a capitalist, inspires people to make a list of all the things they want in the hopes of increasing their material wealth. Jesus says "Don't be anxious for the things of this world." Santa is "making a list and checking it twice; gonna find out who's naughty and nice." Jesus teaches us to tame our ego, but Santa teases and stimulates it.

Personally, I do enjoy celebrating Christmas with my family and friends, and as a parent, I have enjoyed sharing the magic of Christmas with my children, Santa Claus and all. I'm not a Scrooge. I do believe Christmas can inspire goodwill and cheer, comfort and joy. That said, I have felt anxiety around the rules and expectations of gift-giving and the strange question "Are you ready for Christmas?" This question is absurd when I consider that the secular Christmas tradition is a major engine of consumerism and all the problems that come with it–labor exploitation, environmental degradation, economic privilege and entitlement, personal and national debt, and so on.

The Last Noel imagines a meeting between Jesus Christ and Nick Kringle (Santa Claus) early on Christmas morning to debate whether Christmas is to be or not to be. Working for "The Big Seven," a clandestine oligarchical council of world leaders, Santa acts as a guardian of Christmas profits and a champion of Global Capitalism. Jesus, a peacemaker on the verge of revealing himself in his second coming, plans to start a new revolution that includes

putting an end to Christmas. The Last Noel is an attempt to dramatize this ironic tension between the spiritual and secular traditions of Christmas. It is about the ideological dichotomy of these two traditions, and while the play is somewhat whimsical and light-hearted, I hope that it will challenge its audiences to consider what it means to celebrate Christmas, as well as whether and how to do so.

--Jon Herbert

Lights up on A VIP lounge in an American international airport. It's lavish, but empty.

Behind the bar is JAX, the bartender, mid-twenties who knows what's up. An old soul.

Sitting nearby is a MAN, early thirties, dressed plainly and casually in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt.

NICK, dressed in a business suit emerges from a door to a dressing suite. He talks on the phone with the use of a Bluetooth earpiece. The MAN watches him.

NICK
Who all's going to be there. All seven of the Big Seven? I'm just asking. You remember last year. If all seven aren't there, it's a waste of my time. And money. Speaking of which, I haven't seen the numbers yet, what's the hold-up.

NICK motions to JAX who has been hovering.

NICK
(to JAX)
Macallan, eighteen year.
(to phone)
What *about* Gaza? There *is* no Gaza, I didn't go to Gaza, you know that, so naturally there were no deliveries in Gaza.
(beat)
So we're going to file them as naughty. Yes, all of them. Israel and Lebanon too. Look, I don't like it either, talk to bookkeeping if you think you've got a better way to handle war zones, Tony! Alright? Now, get going on this. I want to see numbers before I board. Ten minutes. Tell him to include the division productivity report. Yes, for all the elves! I want the comprehensive report!

NICK notices the MAN staring at him and is momentarily distracted.

NICK
What? Oh... Yes, factories and warehouses. And administration. Ten minutes, get it done. Ho-ho-ho.

NICK disconnects the call. JAX brings him his scotch.

JAX
There you are, sir. And here's a glass of water and a glass of ice for you if you need it.

NICK
Many thanks.

NICK throws a hundred-dollar bill onto the bar.

NICK
Keep the change.

JAX
Thank you, sir.

NICK
Oh, and you'll find that bottle of Cristal you asked for under the tree when you get home.

JAX
You're too kind, Mr. Kringle.

NICK
Call me Nick.

NICK sips his scotch neat. JAX returns to the bar.

NICK glances at the MAN who stares at him.

NICK
Look buddy, I'm not looking for a date, so move along.

JESUS
Um... What?

NICK
Frankly, I don't know how you even got in here, but obviously this isn't that kind of establishment, and / I'm not--

JESUS
I'm not... whatever you think I am.

NICK
Well, would you kindly not stare at me?

JESUS
Okay.

The MAN relaxes his stare, and NICK turns back to his drink, but is distracted by a compulsion to engage.

NICK
Are you traveling for the holiday?

JESUS
No. Just... traveling. Are you?

NICK
You could say that.

Beat.

NICK
You don't celebrate Christmas?

JESUS
No.

NICK
Are you Muslim?

JESUS
No.

Beat.

JESUS
Today's my birthday.

NICK
Happy birthday.

JESUS
Thank you.

Beat.

NICK
Do you celebrate that?

JESUS
No. What about you? Do you celebrate Christmas?

NICK
Not exactly.

Beat. NICK stares at the MAN, intently trying to determine who he is.

NICK
I'm sorry, but... I don't know who you are.

JESUS
Why would you?

NICK
I've never met anyone I didn't know.

JESUS
That's an amazing talent.

NICK stares at the MAN.

JESUS
I'm not on your list.

NICK's eyes widen.

NICK
Who are you?

JESUS
I'm Jesus.

NICK
What?

JESUS
Jesus Christ.

NICK
Really.

JESUS
And you're Santa Claus.

NICK
Nick Kringle. I'm only Santa when I wear the other suit.

JESUS
Okay.

NICK
So you're Jesus.

JESUS
Yeah.

NICK
Jesus Christ.

JESUS
Yeah.

NICK
You don't look like Jesus.

JESUS
You don't look like Santa.

NICK
Touché.

Beat.

NICK
Wow. So how long have you ... been back?

JESUS
I sort of never left.

NICK
A lot of folks have been waiting two thousand years for the Second Coming.

JESUS
The Second Coming was meant to be a metaphor.

NICK
Well, that's... Okay. So... Did you want to tell me something, or...?

JESUS
I just wanted to meet you. Really, we should have done this years ago, but... Well, anyway, given the state of things, I thought it might be now or never.

NICK
The state of things.

JESUS
Surely you've noticed that things are looking pretty bad out there.

NICK
I don't read the news. It's too... [depressing].

JESUS
Exactly. So, you know what I mean.

NICK
Not sure I do.

JESUS
Well, you tell me, is your naughty list getting longer?

NICK
Yes, but frankly that's done wonders for my overhead. That and AI technology. I've been able to cut production costs by forty-three percent, and the coal industry is booming

JESUS stares at NICK incredulously.

JESUS
Well, it's nice to finally meet you.

NICK
Nice to meet you, Jesus. Without you, I wouldn't have a job.

JESUS
I don't... [know what you mean]

NICK
You're the "reason for the season," right? Without you, I wouldn't even exist. I owe you my life.

JESUS
I think you've got--

NICK
Can I get you a drink? Do you drink?

JESUS
No. I mean yes, I do, but... no thank you. Nick, I'm not... You have the wrong idea about me. And Christmas is-- I'm not the "reason for the season." I had nothing to do with "the season."

NICK
Well, maybe you should tell your followers that.

JESUS

See, that's it. I don't have any followers.

NICK
You're kidding right? Have you spent much time in the American Midwest? You can't throw a stone without breaking a stained glass window. Sixty-four percent of Americans worship you. That's a twenty-six percent drop from what it was in the seventies, but it's still two hundred ten million. And that's just America. That's nothing to shake a stick at. You started the biggest, most successful religion in human history.

JESUS
I didn't come here to start a religion at all.

NICK
What are you talking about?

JESUS
Religion is a curse.

NICK
What was all the--

JESUS
Cults and fanatics. I came to inspire change with a very simple teaching, and things got... out of hand. If I had known that "Christmas" would come of it, I would have never...

NICK
Wait a minute... You, of all people hate Christmas?

JESUS
Why is that so hard to believe?

NICK
Christmas is about giving and loving... being of good cheer, and... goodwill to all--

JESUS
No, it's about greed. Fear and desire.

NICK stares at JESUS.

JESUS
I say give away all your possessions / and follow my example.

NICK
Yeah, and people give gifts--

JESUS
The very idea of Christmas couldn't be further from what I was... Christmas is not about me; it's about economics. Consumer capitalism.

NICK
You sound like a communist.

JESUS
Well, what can I say?

Beat.

NICK
So... you say you never left? You've been here since the Resurrection? What have you been doing?

JESUS
Mostly watching, learning, waiting for the right time to reveal myself again.

NICK
'Cause that went so well last time?

JESUS
This kind of revolution has a life cycle.

NICK
Revolution?

JESUS
Don't you think it's time for a revolution?

NICK
I don't know, what are we talking about exactly?

JESUS
Did you know that the Tower of Babel was an advanced computer technology with artificial intelligence?

NICK
What?

JESUS
The Great Flood was the result of a man-made climate crisis.

NICK
How is that...?

JESUS
You know as well as I do how quickly things can progress once humans master industrialism. Sodom and Gomorrah was a nuclear holocaust. Man made.

NICK
The bible says God rained down fire from Heaven...

JESUS
Metaphor. The next civilization will have some such story to explain World War Three. Fire from Heaven to destroy mankind for its wickedness.

NICK
The next civilization...?

JESUS
You think yours is the first? The Earth is four and a half billion years old, Nick.

NICK slams the rest of his drink and gestures at JAX who has been watching from behind the bar. JAX pours another scotch and NICK takes a drink.

NICK
What does any of this have to do with Christmas?

JESUS sighs. He touches the rim of the glass of water in front of Nick, and it turns to wine.

NICK
Now *that's* an amazing talent.

JESUS raises his glass slightly and takes a drink.

JESUS
Christmas is a breeding ground for global corporate greed, and it's only brought out the worst in humanity--culture wars, class wars, a total breakdown of civility, not to mention a growing field of economic ruin that turns otherwise free people into mindless automatons. It's feeding the dragons that destroy us.

They each take a drink.

NICK

That's... dramatic.

JESUS
It's the truth. And it's time for revolution.

Beat.

NICK
What are you about to do?

JESUS
I'm going to do what I do. Try to save humanity from itself.

NICK
Good luck with that.

JESUS
Help me.

Beat.

NICK
Help you how?

JESUS
By finally putting an end to Christmas. If I tell them, they'll only crucify me again, but if they hear it from you--

NICK
They'll crucify me.

JESUS
And your martyrdom will inspire real change--at least for another millennium or two.

NICK
That's not very assuring.

JESUS
Look, if either one of us goes at this alone, we'll go down in flames, but together, we could turn things around. I know how this ends.

Beat.

NICK
I'm going to take a hard pass.

JESUS
If we don't do anything, the human race is facing *actual extinction*. There will be no ark, no escape.

NICK finishes his drink and stands up.

NICK
I have to catch my flight.

JESUS
You're meeting with the Big Seven.

NICK
Yes.

JESUS
This is your chance to do what's right, Nick. / Have courage.

NICK
Oh, I'm going to do what's right alright. I'm going to renegotiate my contract, just like I do every year.

NICK turns to go. JESUS stands up and catches his arm.

JESUS
Nick--

NICK
I'm not killing Christmas!

Beat.

JESUS
Then you're doomed.

NICK
We'll see.

JESUS
I have already seen.

NICK
I've never been a man of faith.

JESUS
I know.

NICK
I have faith in Christmas. I have faith in myself.

JESUS
So be it.

JESUS walks past NICK, heading for the door.

NICK
What are you going to do?

Beat. JESUS turns to NICK and smiles slightly.

JESUS
Nothing.

NICK
Stay out of my way.

JESUS starts to say something but doesn't. He exits.

NICK glances at JAX who stands attentively watching. NICK makes a call.

NICK
Jesus is back, and he's about to make a move. Assemble the task force. We need to nip this in the bud.

NICK exits.

End of play.