

The Last Appearance of God

by Gerry Schramm

Josh Lebel closed his notebook and glanced at Mirelle. She was studiously putting her laptop into her backpack. She fiddled with a plain blue Bic pen like it was a divining rod, then dropped it into the pack too.

The class had ended abruptly. They had gotten to the Phoenicians, which the professor dealt with in a few brisk sentences about sailing and writing. Then he announced that he was ending class early so that any students who wanted to go to the protest would have time to do so.

The protest. Another protest. Josh knew by now not to make fun of them, because that was one of the things that had first driven Mirelle away. He needed to affect sympathy. He could fake it, if the cause was realistic. But he didn't remember what it was about today.

"Hey," he said, leaning an inch toward her. "What's the protest for?"

She looked at him neutrally. "The college continues to invest in fossil fuels," she said. "It's unsustainable."

"Right," Josh said. He thought for a second that he should go with her, but he decided to stick with his plan. If the timing worked out right, by the time she got back from the protest he would be done helping Baxter and have gotten her special gift ready, and she would love it so much that she would forgive him for everything and fall back into his arms. And if she didn't love it, he would at least be able to say, "Look, I put your happiness ahead of the welfare of the whole earth. Doesn't that count for something?"

"I guess you're not going?" she said, standing up.

"I have to help a buddy move out," he said. "Baxter. He quit."

"Baxter quit?"

"He's out of money. And he says he has a girlfriend in Wyoming,

or something."

"OK," Mirelle said, and Josh noticed hopefully that her tone sounded relaxed. "Guess I'll see you around."

Right, Josh thought.

He left the classroom and cut diagonally across the lawn, back toward the Old Heckman quad, and was about to walk through the archway--the one that you weren't supposed to walk through until graduation day--when he noticed that the poster wall was almost completely bare. The wall, just across the street from the archway, usually bristled with announcements: guitar lessons, cat sitting, proofreading, film screenings, and apartments for rent all jostled for space. But evidently the staff had torn everything down, because now the wall was almost completely bare, scarred and rutted with staples but otherwise clean except for a single piece of paper, hanging dead-set center in the middle of the whole space, reading:

GOD IS PALESTINIAN

Josh stood and stared for a moment, thinking, Oh Christ, here we go. He looked around and didn't see anyone nearby, just some stick figures in the distance canting and shuffling in the direction of the protest. At first, Josh felt like tearing the paper down, making the wall entirely clean again. Pure. But then he had a new idea.

He pulled out his notebook and the black sharpie he had gotten to mark Baxter's boxes. On the last page, so it wouldn't bleed through onto the other pages, he wrote his response. GOD IS--and he was just beginning to draw a "J" when he stopped again. If he made a religious claim, the poster would surely be taken down immediately. But if he made a patriotic claim, no one could complain. Or rather, they could complain all they wanted, but by campus rules there would be no basis for tearing it down. So he finished the line in dark ink with a heavy hand:

GOD IS ISRAELI

Take that, Josh thought, and put his notebook and pen back in his backpack. He headed toward the quad and thought about Mirelle.

* * *

The plan never came together. He didn't manage to get anything for the special gift--roses, which Mirelle adored; tickets to the Blind Idiot God show; a box of kiwi fruit, their own private joke. They were all lost in the vacuum of time around Baxter's packing. By the time the van was loaded up it was almost 8:00, and Josh had to rush to the cafeteria to get the oily dregs of whatever was left to eat. At 9:00 he texted Mirelle, but didn't get a response. He went back to his place and watched TV in sad silence, thinking that he could get those things tomorrow if he moved quickly enough at lunchtime.

The next morning, he saw that Mirelle had texted him, but he also heard a great buzzing hum outside. Glancing out his window, he saw a massive crowd--by the far the largest he had ever seen at the college--standing off on the other side of the street, in front of the poster wall. Throwing on his jacket and a cap to cover his riot of hair, Josh headed down the stairs and outside.

When he reached the wall, he saw that it had burst into life, a thousand flowers in yesterday's barren soil. Now there were signs everywhere, proclaiming that God was Indian, God was Pakistani, God was Chinese, God was Peruvian, God was Kuwaiti, and on and on. All of them were roughly the same size, and mostly in blue or black ink, although a few reds stood out--God is Somali, God is Mexican--and one poster had been printed on some old inkjet, a smeary affirmation that God is Persian.

Josh scanned the crowd for Mirelle, but didn't see her. He did see Jo, her best friend, and he walked over to her.

"Jo," he said, "what's up?"

"Isn't this crazy?" she said. "God is apparently from everywhere."

"The college is just letting people put up anything?" Josh asked.

"No," she shook her head, "I saw them take down 'God Is Queer' and 'God Is Dead.'"

"Hey, do you know where Mirelle is?"

"No," she said again, but was already ignoring him. She had pulled out her own notebook and a silver marker, and was crouching down with the notebook on her knees as she wrote:

GOD IS POLISH

"I think I saw that one already," Josh said, but Jo was walking away from him, toward the wall, tearing the paper out of her book and holding it above her head as she approached the wall.

* * *

Mirelle's text said that she had been out late with friends. She didn't mention which friends. Or where.

He spent an hour alone in his room, thinking about how everything had gone wrong. Last year they had poured the foundations of a great relationship with endless sex, endless talk about philosophy, casual drug experimentation, and a road trip. But at the beginning of this year, things had cooled. And then he found out that his arch jokes about do-gooders had actually grated on her all along.

"At least the protestors care," she said. "And they're not as far left-wing as you think. In New Zealand, it's just understood that nuclear power should be banned. It's just understood that multiculturalism is a good thing. You don't have to make a big deal of it because people already know."

And that was when Josh made his first major mistake. He laughed at the idea that New Zealand mattered. "Sure, they can say all those nice things," he said, "because they're off the edge of the map and have a Hobbit-based economy."

When she reacted furiously, Josh mounted a protest of his own. She always mocked flag-waving American patriotism, so why should she stick up so militantly for New Zealand? "You only spent your first three years there," he said, but he could see from her jaw that everything he said was wrong and was getting worse.

When they made up, he emphasized that her being from New Zealand (kind of) was part of what made her interesting. It wasn't, really--what made her interesting was her sly sense of humor, her eyes, her hair, the fact that she had beaten a guy named Lozza at beer pong. But he now respected her heritage, publicly.

The make-up didn't last, though. New Zealand might have been the beginning of the end. She accused him of flirting with Jo, which was true, he had, but she still made too big a deal of it. She complained that he didn't remember their anniversary, but he wasn't even sure they really had one that had ever been counted. So it became an accordion of complaint, endlessly unfolding and wheezing, and their relationship, which had degenerated into on-again, off-again, was now mostly off-again.

Putting his laptop, notebook, pen, and phone into his backpack, Josh left his room and headed toward class. He hoped she would show up today. Mirelle had that bad habit of only showing up to around half of the classes but still getting A's. As he left the quad and crossed the street, he noticed that the poster wall continued to bloom. There was no crowd around it now, just a few scattered viewers, but Josh paused for a minute to read the new entries at the edges of the growing garden: now God was also Japanese, Korean, South African, Argentinean, and, somehow, Burundian. Who wrote that one?

He turned to go, but then decided to add one more entry himself. He pulled out his notebook and pen, and scribbled his thoughts urgently onto the page. Then, ignoring the knot of onlookers who watched him walk up and post his declaration, he smoothed out the page and borrowed a stray tack to pin it up:

GOD IS NEW ZEALANDER

(KIWI!)

I LOVE YOU, MIRELLE!

He put his materials back in his backpack, saw one of the onlookers smirking, and trudged on to class.

* * *

The professor made one of his usual opening jokes, the kind that got a polite giggle from about half of the students. Today it was that they were falling behind the syllabus, and if they didn't make up time, World History would end in the Dark Ages, but that would

probably be OK with college students because all anyone did in the Dark Ages was drink beer and act tribal.

The class meandered through history as usual, summarizing the well-known Eurasian stuff and making a brave stab at Africa and Incan America for some kind of comparison which was never entirely clear. Mirelle had noted on the first day of the class that not a single item on the syllabus pertained to New Zealand or, for that matter, Australia, or Indonesia, or anything on the antipodean side of Europe. When she had pointed this out, the professor had just sighed and said they only had thirteen weeks, after all.

Josh took notes desultorily, losing his train of thought and not following the professor's own tracks either. All he could think of was Mirelle who, thank God, had shown up today. And she looked fantastic, but Josh knew he couldn't look at her too much without things getting awkward. So he sat mostly looking straight ahead, keenly aware of her smooth contours at the edge of his peripheral vision.

When the class had about ten minutes to go, a wave of students suddenly started checking their phones, half-surreptitiously, under their desks. The professor scowled and said, "You all know the rules. No checking phones in class. We've only got ten minutes left, and we really have to finish up the lesson today."

Some of the students tentatively folded up their phones, but Lozza, always a troublemaker, raised his hand. "But professor," he said, "this is serious, this is no joke. The word is going around that God is on campus today."

The professor's scowl hardened.

"No," Lozza persisted, "there's something big going on at the poster wall. Something huge."

The other phone-checkers murmured that Lozza was right, that something was taking place right now. History was being made. Just outside. "I'm sorry, professor," Lozza said, not sounding sorry at all, "but I can't let this opportunity pass." He got up and marched out, and about ten students followed him.

Josh expected the professor to lose control, his red scowl turning

purple, but all at once his face went slack and peach and he announced, "OK, class, if something this important really is happening, I guess we'd better check it out. And if Lozza is right, what you see today may very well end up on your final exam." And he closed up his briefcase and headed for the door, joined by the rest of the students.

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Talking about the event years later, all of the observers agreed to a surprising extent on God's details. God was not an old man with a beard, nor a halo of light, nor a burning bush. God was an absence, a disruption of vision. When you looked right at God--and you could, God didn't mind--you could see that something was not quite there, but it was present in its absence. It was like a wave in the air that foamed and ebbed as soon as you noticed.

And God talked. That was the most impressive thing. The neoplasm in the air actually spoke, and spoke English, in a kind of accent that was both universal and peculiar, like London met Minnesota by way of Bangalore.

"Thank you all for noticing me," God said, and a light breeze blew the posters on the wall into a cheerful ripple. "It is truly an act of worship to come together to seek and find me."

Josh and Mirelle were standing side by side, but they weren't touching. They, along with everyone else, stood and gaped at the formless but vibrating air.

Eventually Lozza spoke. Of course. The loudmouth, Josh though, he's just trying to impress some girl.

"God, um, Lord," said Lozza. "Are the signs true? Is God really--are you really--" and he dashed a glance to his right, to see the first words he noticed on the wall, "Samoan, and German, and Canadian, and Uzbek?"

God did not reply immediately, but eventually the air breathed a quiet but firm, "Yes."

"And Indian!" said an Indian student.

"Yes."

"And Russian!"

"Yes."

"And queer!" The LGBA spokesman, still peeved that his poster had been torn down, was now appealing to a higher authority.

"Such categories do not apply to God," said God.

Now the professor stepped forward and, craning his neck, began to speak.

"But you have a nationality?" he asked. "But nations didn't exist until a few hundred years ago. At the dawn of time, there was no such thing as America," he said, and, sensing a ripple in the crowd, "Or Uzbekistan, or El Salvador, or...anything like that."

The crowd waited, breath drawn. The professor himself drew a deep breath, and then clutched his chest, and toppled violently to the pavement. A student screamed. But the professor elbowed himself up to a sitting position and, panting, said, "What was *that* about?"

Now the crowd was murmuring, astounded by the hierophany of divine presence and alarmed at the fact that God would strike people down, at least temporarily. The professor tried to speak, but his breath was mostly rasps. Several students tried to speak again, in order to ask God a more respectful question, but they only drowned each other out.

Then Mirelle shrieked. Josh jumped at her side. She had been surprisingly calm, taking in the miraculous scene with a remarkably detached air, until this moment. Now she pointed at the wall, where Josh's sign GOD IS NEW ZEALANDER flapped in the breeze. "Did you write this?" she asked Josh directly, and in a moment of panic he realized he couldn't tell whether she was enraptured or enraged.

"I..." he stammered. But then God spoke again.

Or, rather, God moved at first, a new breeze rising and detaching that one poster--that single sheet, with Josh's declaration of love at the bottom--and sending it spiraling into the air, over the poster wall and out of sight.

"I am not New Zealander," God said.

Mirelle turned away from Josh and looked at the humming air.
"You're not?" she warbled.

"No."

"But you are Swiss," someone broke in.

"Yes."

"And Tongan!"

"Yes."

"Wait a minute," Mirelle protested. "Lord, why aren't you New Zealander? It's a proper country."

Now there was a long pause. The crowd, silent again, waited. Mirelle stood stiffly. Josh desperately wanted to reach over to her and smooth out her tension, but instead he found that he was also rigid with anxiety and confusion. And then the voice spoke again.

"New Zealand," God said, "is the rounding error of the universe."

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As God's last breath evaporated in the waning sunlight, some enterprising young soul, in an attempt to curry God's favor, retrieved Josh's love note to Mirelle and marched around holding it aloft like a ring girl announcing the third round. There, for everyone to see, was Mirelle's name. The spattering of catcalls and boos grew louder as he marched to the wrought iron fence surrounding the courtyard and impaled the paper on a pointed spade. The crowd roared, and the sound was replaced with a chant: "Mirelle! Mirelle! Mirelle!"

"Death to New Zealanders!" the poster impaler cried. "Especially that whore Mirelle!"

"It doesn't take much," Mirelle said to Josh. He pushed his cap down to cover as much of his face as he could and took her hand. The two began walking away as quickly but as casually as possible. They cleared the crowd's periphery and thought they were free when a voice called out to them.

"Hey! You two!"

Josh glanced over his shoulder as he kept walking. He recognized the guy as being of the small group who laughed when he posted the New Zealander note to the wall. Mirelle dug her phone out her pocket but dropped it. "Just keep walking," Josh said.

"You're Mirelle, aren't you?" The mention of the name drew in those around him. "Look," the guy said, pointing, "that's Mirelle, and that's the douche who put up the sign about New Zealanders."

More were drawn in, and, like a school of fish that moves without a leader, the crowd gravitated toward Mirelle and Josh, practically unaware of what they were doing.

"All they need are pitchforks," Mirelle said as they turned the corner of Benson Hall, where Mirelle lived.

"What a minute," Josh said. "We can't go to your place. They'll be looking for us."

"We can't stay out here," she said. "They'll rip us to pieces."

Josh saw the panic in her eyes. He, however, was oddly calm. Perhaps it was her use of the collective plural. Us. Vs them.

"I know where we can go," Josh said as he pulled her into the gathering darkness ahead of the mob.

* * *

The door to Manchester Hall in the Old Heckman quad was propped open with a cement block. Josh hoped the open door wasn't evidence of a party in progress, the hosts not wanting to come downstairs every time someone new arrived. Josh heaved the block away as he stepped inside; he waited for the door to click shut before launching them both at the stairs, taking two at a time. Mirelle cried out for him to slow down but he ignored her. There was no time to listen to complaints in rescue mode.

At the third floor Josh dragged Mirelle to door 3D and punched it three times. Mirelle finally realized where they were.

"I thought you helped Baxter move?"

"I helped him pack his shit in his van. He's heading out tomorrow."

Josh pounded on the door again. This time Baxter opened it. He was wearing only boxers. Around his neck hung a pair of Beats headphones. "What the fuck, man?" he said, wiping an eye with a finger. "I was like half-asleep. If it wasn't between songs I never would've heard you."

Josh and Mirelle pushed past him. The room was completely empty except for the dorm furniture and Baxter's clothes hung on the back of a chair. "Close the door, Baxter. We got a problem. A situation."

"Do I need to put on my pants? I mean Jesus, I just woke up."

"I'm not going back out there," Mirelle said. "No fucking way."

"We're not going anywhere until the morning," Josh said. "Baxter, you've got to smuggle us out."

"What the fuck are you talking about, man? What is going on?"

"It's God," Mirelle said. "He appeared at the poster wall tonight."

"God? At the poster wall? What're talking about?"

"You haven't seen all the notes on the poster wall saying that God is this nationality or that nationality?" Mirelle said.

"Man, I haven't been out of this room except to eat in weeks. My roommate skipped town one week into the semester and I'm failing every class. I've been in here smoking weed and talking to my girlfriend."

Josh and Mirelle took turns describing what happened: the proliferation of notes on the poster wall, Josh posting the note about New Zealand to Mirelle, the mysterious ripple in space-time that was the manifestation of God, what God said about New Zealanders, the reaction of the crowd. The story rolled out of their mouths as if from one mind, each picking up the thread when the other dropped it, trading lines back and forth as if they workshopped the narrative for months. Josh knew their connection was back, stronger than ever. So this is what it took to become her boyfriend again, Josh thought, a jealous God, an angry mob, and one good decision.

When they finished, out of wind from not only the mad dash across campus but the frantic pace of the story itself, Baxter said nothing. He stood there, one hand inside the waistband of his

boxers, the other twirling the headphone wire around his fingers. Finally he said, "That's some heavy shit."

"You're telling me," Mirelle said.

Baxter decided it was best if he put his pants on after all. "So what do you want me to do exactly?"

"I told you," Josh said. "You have to smuggle us off campus tomorrow when you leave."

Baxter snorted. "Come on, guys. This'll all blow over. This is college. Who the fuck believes in God anyway?"

"Believes?" Mirelle asked. "They don't just *believe*, Baxter, now they *know*. Now it's really the truth."

Josh had been ignoring the insistent Twitter alerts radiating from his phone, but now he pulled it out of his pocket to show Baxter. "Twitter is going fucking nuts. Take a look."

Baxter took the phone and scrolled through screen after screen. Messages were being retweeted from across the globe. The poster wall was already being called a holy site by every religious group around the world. The news of God's appearance, and his perceived hatred of New Zealand and New Zealanders, was going viral.

Baxter handed Josh his phone and turned to Mirelle. "Looks like you chose the wrong heritage to be proud of, eh?"

* * *

The three of them listened to the ever-expanding crowd around the poster wall chanting anti —New Zealand slurs. Mirelle's name drifted across the campus several times: "Mirelle! Come out, Mirelle! God hates you and so do we!" Manchester Hall was silent; everyone, it seemed, was at the poster wall, waiting to be a part of whatever would happen next. The only light burned from Baxter's room. Around 2 am a quartet of the new fanatics stood in the rectangle of light cast from the window and fished for contact with God's most hated creation.

"Is Mirelle up there?" one of boys asked. He sounded drunk, but that could have just been angelic inspiration.

Josh and Mirelle sat stony on the floor. Baxter parted the blind slats and pushed up the window. "What was that?"

"Is Mirelle up there?"

Baxter played along. "You mean the whore of Babylon?"

"Well, she's from New Zealand."

"Believe me, she doesn't want me to find her. Not after what God said. Am I right?"

The four boys high fived each other. "You got that right!" one of them said. They slipped out of the light to call up to one of the dark dorm rooms next door.

Baxter switched off the light and sunk down beside Mirelle. "Sorry about that," he said. "I thought I'd better play along."

"It's all right," she said, and rested her head in Josh's lap, crying.

They watched the growing cacophony on all the social media networks. You Tube videos taken during God's appearance racked up millions of hits within hours. Even though not one picture showed a vision of God and no video reproduced His voice, the handbills that fluttered in response to the students' questions were proof enough for everyone. It didn't hurt that hundreds of students at a godless northeastern liberal arts college attested to the revelation. By the morning pilgrims were seen crawling on their hands and knees hundreds of miles away, determined to arrive on campus, bloodied for their God, to watch the thumb tacked papers for signs of His return. News vans descended, stretching their antennae to the sky. By sunrise the campus qualified as the third largest city in the country.

Generally, the news spread harmony around the world as people from all faiths, and even those on the fence or disbelievers, understood what God's appearance meant: that if He is every nationality, then nationality—and religion itself—should no longer act as a barrier between the people of the world. Members of every religion shrugged off labels and embraced each other. Overnight, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was over. Al Qaeda apologized and created funds to compensate its victims. Scientologists spiked

hundreds of lawsuits. And even though world peace seemed at hand, there was still the troubling problem of New Zealand.

Until now, conjecture concerning God's will had divided mankind for millennia, with each group claiming that God loved it most of all. Now the world had something even better: the name of whom God hated most of all. Some quickly pointed out that God had made so such claim against New Zealand. The majority opinion won out, namely that God had explicitly excluded New Zealand from the brotherhood of man. Called it the "rounding error of the universe." No one knew exactly what that meant, but they got the gist.

The Pope, appearing on the balcony of St Peter's in blue jeans and an Ed Hardy tee shirt, declared New Zealanders "vacuus deus." Without God. Throughout history only one thing has enabled individuals to put aside petty differences for the good of the whole: a common enemy.

And now God had reached down from the heavens and handed them one. New Zealand.

* * *

Mirelle was the first to wake up. She was stiff from sleeping on the floor. She hoped that the temperature on campus had cooled overnight. Still, not taking any chances, she crawled to the window and peeked over the sill. The quad overflowed with people. Not just students, but the very old, the very young, and every age in between, standing shoulder to shoulder, waiting for another message from God. Many carried signs that read "Bomb New Zealand" and "Kill Mirelle" and "Hunt the Kiwis!" Still others wore matching tee shirts, obviously professionally silkscreened, bearing Mirelle's high school graduation photo above the words "Have you seen me?" Where did they get that from? she wondered.

"Oh shit," she said. She dropped down and pressed her back against the wall. She kicked Josh's foot.

Josh breathed deeply and blinked at her. "Is it over?" he asked.

“Over? It's not over.” She gestured with her eyes for him to look out the window.

He did. “Oh shit,” he said as he slumped next to her. He looked at his phone. “Oh shit.”

“That's what I said.”

“No,” Josh said, handing her the phone. It was a retweet from CNN from his brother, who went to school at Berkley, time stamped only 15 seconds ago:

@joshleb it's on, bro! god hates the kiwis! RT UN declares war on New Zealand. US fires nuclear warheads at Wellington, Auckland @cnn

The crowd in the quad must have gotten the news too because they cheered as one and chanted “USA! USA! USA!”

The noise roused Baxter. He moaned and rubbed his neck. “What'd I miss?”

“We just bombed New Zealand. We gotta get Mirelle out of here.”

Baxter sat up. “The van's in the lot behind the student center. That's a lot of ground to cover.”

“She needs a disguise,” Josh said.

“A disguise?” Mirelle said. “What kind of disguise?”

“Yeah, I don't have a disguise, dude. Everything is in the van.”

Josh took his hat off and placed it on her head, pulling it down tight. Mirelle smiled and kissed his lips. “Thanks,” she said.

“Let's try one of the fire exits in the back,” Josh said. “Maybe they'll be less people back there than in the quad.”

Mirelle nodded. “And when the alarm goes off maybe it'll distract everyone and we can get to the van.”

“That's a lot of maybes,” Baxter said.

Mirelle crawled to the door and unlocked it. “We don't really have much of a choice, do we?”

Out in the hall they stood and ran. They made it unmolested to the rear fire exit. Josh stood with his hands on the red paddle that would open the door and trip the alarm. There were no windows in the door, no glimpse of what was on the other side. Josh expected either an open expanse of grass or a space clogged with worshipers,

bent on murder. He took a deep breath and said the Mirelle, "Stay with me."

She held the tail of his shirt. "I will," she said.

The alarm was louder than they thought it would be, and as soon they stepped out into the sun the throng on the lawn turned to them. Jo, Mirelle's friend, stood not two feet from them. She was wearing Mirelle's photo.

"Holy shit!" she said. "It's her! It's Mirelle!"

Josh dashed forward but was downed by a blow to the head. He landed on his stomach and instinctively covered his head with his arms. The kicks began immediately. He felt his ribs crack. He managed to roll over onto his back. There was Mirelle, limp, her face bloody, being carried aloft like a crowd-surfing corpse. The frenzied crowd tore at her as she passed overhead. He called her name but was silenced by a kick to the jaw that broke the bone. The pain lasted only moment more.

Josh and Baxter's bodies were left on the lawn behind Manchester Hall. The pieces of Mirelle that survived the trip to the poster wall were burned on a hastily constructed bonfire. The world rejoiced.

* * *

A month passed without word from God. The site had been commandeered by the US government. Fences topped with razor wire enclosed the area, and the president, representatives from the House and Senate, and governors from every state set up mobile offices on campus, awaiting God's next appearance. A continuous live feed from the poster wall was broadcast around the world. Pilgrims watched on large screens positioned around the campus and neighboring towns.

At last a small disturbance near the poster wall was detected, and word quickly spread that another appearance was likely imminent. The president, flanked by two members of the secret service in case God tried anything funny, stood at the head of the crowd of

politicians. A small pocket of air vibrated and folded in on itself. Then God spoke.

“Hello again,” God said.

“Welcome back, my Lord. I am the president of the United States,” the president said.

“I know who you are,” God said.

“It's with great pleasure that I say to you that we did it, God.”

“Did what, exactly?” God sounded wary.

“We eradicated every trace of New Zealand from the globe. Everyone who was even remotely connected with that odious country has been killed and the land itself was sunk to the bottom of the ocean. Now you *are* from everywhere.”

“New Zealand, huh? Why would you that?”

“Well,” the president said, “at your last appearance you said you were of all nations except New Zealand. You called it the ‘rounding error of the universe.’ ”

“Did I?” God remained silent for a few minutes. Those closest to the poster wall would later relate that they distinctly heard the shuffling of papers.

“Did I say New Zealand? What I meant to say was New England. That's the place with the nasty white clam chowder, right? Clams are shellfish, and you know how much I can't stand shellfish. So yeah, I meant New England, not New Zealand.”

“New England?” the president said. He nodded to the agent to his left.

The agent spoke into his sleeve. “Secure the governor of Massachusetts for questioning,” he said.

God heard the sound of gunfire off in the distance.

