

NUNS AND ALIENS
By Dale Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

12 Females; 5 Males

<u>MOTHER MARY FRANCIS:</u>	Abbess.
<u>SISTER BONAVENTURA:</u>	Assistant to the Abbess.
<u>SISTER AGNES:</u>	Former Abbess.
<u>SISTER PHILOMENA:</u>	Nun.
<u>SISTER KEVIN:</u>	Nun.
<u>SISTER MARY MARTHA:</u>	Nun.
<u>SISTER CLEMENCIA:</u>	Nun.
<u>SISTER MARIA CLARITA:</u>	Nun.
<u>SISTER KIMBERLY:</u>	Postulant.
<u>SISTER RALPH:</u>	Rhoda Kowalska, Lay Sister, “Sister Ralph”
<u>CHARLIE:</u>	Charlene “Charlie” Zens, reporter.
<u>GENERAL:</u>	General Senderhauf.
<u>LIEUTENANT:</u>	Lieutenant Buckingham.
<u>FR. JOSEPH:</u>	A priest.
<u>NABOTH:</u>	An outsider.
<u>HAZA:</u>	An outsider.
<u>KOGO:</u>	An outsider.

Scene Breakdown

ACT I

- Scene 1 – Chapel of The Monastery, Inside Enclosure. Matins Or Vigils.
- Scene 2 – Anteroom of Monastery, Outside the Enclosure. Early The Next Morning.
- Scene 3 – Sitting Room, Inside Enclosure, Later That Morning.
- Scene 4 – Greeting Room, Just Outside Enclosure, A Few Minutes Later.
- Scene 5 – Sitting Room, Inside Enclosure, Later That Morning.

ACT II

- Scene 1 – Sitting Room, Inside Enclosure, Immediately Following Previous Scene.
- Scene 2 – Sitting Room, Inside Enclosure, About A Half Hour Later.
- Scene 3 – Private Room, Inside Enclosure, A Few Minutes Later.
- Scene 4 – Sitting Room, Inside Enclosure, A Little Later.
- Scene 5 – Greeting Room, Just Outside Enclosure, A Few Minutes Later.
- Scene 6 – Greeting Room, Just Outside Enclosure, A Few Minutes Later.
- Scene 7 – Chapel, A Few Minutes Later.
- Scene 8 – Greeting Room, Just Outside Enclosure, About Two Hours Later.
- Scene 9 – Anteroom, Outside Enclosure, A Few Minutes Later.
- Scene 10 – Chapel. Compline That Evening.

Approximate Length

105 minutes

Time

Modern Day

Place

The Poor Clare Monastery in Roswell, New Mexico

Scene 4

Setting: Anteroom, outside enclosure.

At Rise: GENERAL and LIEUTENANT are in the anteroom.

GENERAL

You've got to be kidding, Lieutenant! That's your full report?

LIEUTENANT

I'm afraid it is, Sir.

GENERAL

None of the technology is salvageable?

LIEUTENANT

Completely destroyed in the crash, Sir.

GENERAL

And absolutely no evidence of life forms?

LIEUTENANT

None, Sir.

GENERAL

This isn't possible.

LIEUTENANT

They couldn't have gotten far, General.

GENERAL

How could anything have gotten out at all, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT

I think there has been some outside interference, Sir.

GENERAL

(As MOTHER MARY FRANCIS and SISTER BONAVENTURA enter without him noticing)

Outside interference! There better not have been any interference from these da—

(Sees the nuns before he manages to finish saying "damn nuns")

MARY FRANCIS

I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, General.

GENERAL

(To LIEUTENANT)

That will be all, Lieutenant.

LIEUTENANT

Yes sir.

(They salute each other. Exit LIEUTENANT.)

GENERAL

(Not exactly friendly)

I'm General Senderhauf.

MARY FRANCIS

And I am Mother Mary Francis, the Abbess of the Monastery.

GENERAL

(Very stiff and cold and suspicious)

Where were you?

MARY FRANCIS

I was in prayer.

GENERAL

Hel—excuse me—*heck* of a time to be sitting around praying.

MARY FRANCIS

It is always a good time to pray, General. Now how may I help you? Other than praying for you, of course.

GENERAL

Ma'am, I need to speak with you privately and confidentially.

(MOTHER MARY FRANCIS turns to SISTER BONAVENTURA, who nods and exits immediately, leaving MARY FRANCIS and the GENERAL alone)

MARY FRANCIS

If you need to speak privately and confidentially, perhaps you need to speak to a priest.

GENERAL

(Puzzles at this statement, and then continues)

I have ordered a crew to come and clean up the wreckage. They will also repair any damage to your property.

MARY FRANCIS

That is very considerate of you, General.

GENERAL

Some of my men have, in fact, already inspected the crash site.

MARY FRANCIS

You realize that is trespassing, General.

GENERAL

Well, I'm afraid we had to exercise certain liberties in the interest of National Security.

MARY FRANCIS

Liberties? Apparently in violation of *our* liberties. Whatever happened to respect for private property, General, not to mention the separation of Church and State?

GENERAL

Ma'am, this was an emergency. There may have been casualties. We were just concerned about safety.

MARY FRANCIS

You really do need to talk to a priest.

GENERAL

Why?

MARY FRANCIS

Because you are lying to me.

GENERAL

Well, if you are so interested in people telling the truth, let's hear what you have to say, ma'am.

MARY FRANCIS

You may address me as Mother, General. That is my title.

GENERAL

Oh. Well, I'm not Catholic.

MARY FRANCIS

And I'm not in the Air Force, General. But I imagine that you still prefer to be called General. Even though Generals are very private. And Privates are very general.

GENERAL

If it's all the same, ma'am, I'd rather call you, ma'am, ma'am.

MARY FRANCIS

If that makes you more comfortable, by all means. Call me ma'am.

GENERAL

Thank you...

(Remembering)

Ma'am.

MARY FRANCIS

So were there any casualties, General?

GENERAL

Well, ma'am, we didn't find any casualties.

MARY FRANCIS

You must be very happy.

GENERAL

Actually, ma'am, we're not happy at all.

MARY FRANCIS

Did you want to find any casualties?

GENERAL

The problem is, we didn't find anyone.

MARY FRANCIS

So, you can assume there are no casualties.

GENERAL

I can't assume anything.

MARY FRANCIS

Excuse me, I did not say that correctly. You can *conclude*, based on the evidence, that there are no casualties.

GENERAL

I'm not ready to conclude anything until I find who was in the aircraft. Which means I have to find either a living person or a dead body, or...

MARY FRANCIS

Or?

GENERAL

(Pauses)

Nothing.

MARY FRANCIS

Well, you found nothing. So you should be satisfied.

GENERAL

I am not satisfied, ma'am.

MARY FRANCIS

I understand.

GENERAL

You do?

MARY FRANCIS

Satisfaction is a very difficult state to attain. It is found, however, in perfect communion with God.

GENERAL

I told you I am not Catholic.

MARY FRANCIS

That can be fixed.

GENERAL

That is not a discussion I wish to have right now.

MARY FRANCIS

That is precisely the problem with so many in this world. They are not satisfied, and yet, they do not wish to have the discussion that might lead to their satisfaction.

GENERAL

(Takes a deep breath)

Normally, Ma'am, this is where I would lose my temper.

MARY FRANCIS

Then I can see that being in the monastery is having a good effect on you. Self-control is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

GENERAL

You're an interesting lady.

MARY FRANCIS

I accept the compliment, General.

GENERAL

You've got a great technique. But I can tell you're hiding something.

MARY FRANCIS

Well, I suppose I can see why you would say that. We are, after all, cloistered nuns, cut off from the world. But the corollary of that is that the world is cut off from us. Which makes us seem a bit secretive to outsiders.

GENERAL

Enough games, ma'am.

MARY FRANCIS

The life of a Poor Clare nun is not a game, General. It is quite rigorous. Something a soldier would appreciate. And yet, I sense *you* do not appreciate it.

GENERAL

Don't make me the bad guy here.

MARY FRANCIS

There is only one bad guy, General, and it is not you. But you have to choose if you are on his side.

GENERAL

War is hell, ma'am, if you'll pardon the expression. But I don't fight on the side of Hell, if that is what you are insinuating.

MARY FRANCIS

Sometimes, General, it is not so simple a matter of choosing between good and evil. Sometimes, the difficult problem is choosing between good and better.

GENERAL

Look, ma'am, this is bigger than you think it is.

MARY FRANCIS

True of most things, General. Bigger than any us of can comprehend. Except perhaps problems. They are usually smaller than we think they are.

GENERAL

Mother Mary Francis...

MARY FRANCIS

Yes, General?

GENERAL

I am going to ask you straight out: are you harboring fugitives on this property?

MARY FRANCIS

Fugitives, General? Are you pursuing fugitives? Is someone trying to get away from you?

GENERAL

Perhaps.

MARY FRANCIS

Well, if that were the case, and fugitives were seeking asylum here, then surely I do not need to explain to you the concept of sanctuary. But I'm not aware that we have any fugitives here. However, I can say to you what I would say any other day: I am fulfilling my duty of looking after a sanctuary.

GENERAL

Maybe "fugitives" was the wrong word.

MARY FRANCIS

And what is the right word?

GENERAL

(Pauses)

Aliens.

MARY FRANCIS

Aliens, General? And are you sure *that* is the right word?

GENERAL

(Rubbing his chin, sizing her up)

Look ma'am, I respect your religion and all that. I don't know what you're trying to pull with all this talk about "sanctuary." But let me be clear: if you do not release the beings you are holding, then we will take them by force.

MARY FRANCIS

Then let me be equally clear, General. I respect the United States Government, and I admire the courage and valor of the men who serve in uniform and the sacrifices they are willing to make. But as you can see, we also wear a uniform. We also follow orders. And we also are willing to lay down our lives in sacrifice. This is a sanctuary. And there is a clear line around it, and you are not allowed to cross it. If you do it by force, as you say, you will have the blood of nuns on your hands.

GENERAL

Is that what you want?

MARY FRANCIS

Is that what *you* want?

GENERAL

I'm not one to retreat, Mother Mary Francis.

MARY FRANCIS

A retreat is exactly what you need, Sir. A spiritual retreat. A time alone with God.

GENERAL

Ma'am...I'll be back. And it will be very soon. So think about what you are going to do.

MARY FRANCIS

I've already thought about it, General. And more importantly, I've prayed about it. And you are the one who needs to think about what you are going to do.

(She rises)

And now, General, if you'll excuse me. It's already time to pray again.

GENERAL

(He gives a quick nod of the head and puts his hat on to leave)

Ma'am.

MARY FRANCIS

(Joyfully)

May God be with you.

(He pauses, wants to say something, but thinks better of it, and exits gruffly. MOTHER MARY FRNACIS bows her head.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 5

Setting: Inside the enclosure.

At Rise: SISTERS are waiting in great anticipation.

(Enter SISTER BONAVENTURA)

SR. KEVIN

Sr. Bonaventura, can you tell us anything yet?

SR. BONAVENTURA

Yes, Sisters, please sit down.

(They do)

The loud crash we heard last night was in fact...a crash. You may have noticed—well, you probably did *not* notice—that when the crash occurred during our Vigil, Mother Mary Francis remained in prayer while the rest of us perhaps lost our composure. And yet, as soon as order was restored in here, and I made my way outside, Mother was already there before I was. And she was in complete control. She called the police, but instead the Air Force arrived, and Mother made the sudden decision not to cooperate with the Air Force. She took command of the situation herself. She also made the decision to keep you inside because, well, among other things, our courtyard is filled with wreckage.

SR. MARIA CLARITA

But Sister Bonaventura, that is very strange. Why wouldn't Mother cooperate with the Air Force?

SR. KEVIN

What kind of crash was it?

SR. BONAVENTURA

Sisters, listen very carefully. It appears that the crash involved something...that was...not from earth.

SISTERS

(General commotion and shock)

What?!

SR. BONAVENTURA

Sisters, please remain calm!

SR. MARY MARTHA

An alien spacecraft?

SR. BONAVENTURA
(With a deep breath)

Yes, Sisters.

SR. MARIA CLARITA

And was there an alien?

SR. BONAVENTURA
(A pause, and another deep breath)

Yes, Sisters.

SR. MARIA CLARITA

Where is he?

SR. BONAVENTURA
I...I can't tell you the details myself. In fact, I don't know all the details myself. But I—I have seen some things. Amazing things. But, as I say, Mother is in control of the situation. She will be here very shortly. As soon as she can. I think she will explain everything. Please be patient. And please pray that God gives us wisdom. The Air Force is not very happy with us right now.

(Exit SISTER BONAVENTURA. The nuns sit for a moment in stunned silence.)

SR. KIMBERLY

(In wonder)

Do you suppose he is an angel?

SR. PHYSICS

He is not an angel. Angels have no physical form.

SR. CLEMENCIA

But they can take physical form. The angel appeared to Mary.

SR. MARIA CLARITA

But they don't fly around in spaceships, do they?

SR. CLEMENCIA

We can still consider him an angelic visitor to whom we can exercise the gift of hospitality.

SR. MARIA CLARITA

Why would God send him to us?

SR. CLEMENCIA

Because God thought us most worthy of the task of hosting him.

SR. MARIA CLARITA

Sometimes you sound like Mother Mary Francis.

SR. CLEMENCIA

If only that were true.

SR. AGNES

This is all nonsense!

SR. MARY MARTHA

Well, evidently it *isn't*!

SR. CLEMENCIA

But is it even possible?

SR. MARY MARTHA

Well, obviously it *is*!

SR. CLEMENCIA

But...is it really? Sister Physics, is life on other planets possible?

SR. PHYSICS

Possible, yes. Probable? That's the real question. Of course, before we can determine if there is life on other planets, we first have to first establish if there are even other planets.

SR. KEVIN

Well of course there are!

(Pauses)

Aren't there?

SR. PHYSICS

The existence of other planets is not confirmed the same way that I can confirm the existence of a glass, which I can pick up and throw on the floor and watch smash into a thousand pieces. A distant star is only a dot of light. A planet that might be orbiting around that star is not even detectable in our most powerful telescopes as a dot, but rather as something that dims the dot we see by passing in front of it, or moves the dot slightly with what we assume to be a gravitational pull. Of course, all these dimmings, all these minute fluctuations, could also be accounted for by other explanations. We are only measuring tiny dots of light.

SR. KEVIN

Sister Physics, when you explain these things, I start to see many little dots going around my own head.

SR. PHYSICS

Now, supposing there are planets, the question becomes, "Are there planets like ours that could sustain life?"

SR. AGNES

Only God sustains life!

SR. PHYSICS

Of course, Sister Agnes, we all believe that, but there are cosmologists who insist that the universe is so very large, with billions and billions of stars, that there simply must be other solar systems with other earth-like planets, and they therefore assume that such planets are teeming with life, and that the life is intelligent, more intelligent than ours.

SR. AGNES

Hmph. Well that's actually not a stretch of the imagination, considering the lack of intelligence I've seen on *this* planet.

SR. CLEMENCIA

Intelligence does not really mean anything unless knowledge has a purpose. And an end.

SR. MARY MARTHA

(Returning to the point)

But, Sister Physics, considering the size of the universe, it *does* seem probable that intelligent life could exist on other planets.

SR. PHYSICS

Except you have to have a solar system as strategically placed in a galaxy as our solar system is placed in the Milky Way. Too close to the center and the radiation would not allow for life. Too far from the center, and that solar system would not be stable. The star would have to be similar to our sun, not too big, not too small. The life-supporting planet would have to be just the right distance from that sun. But in order for it to have a regular orbit around the sun, there would need to be a planet on the other side of it, a planet the size of Jupiter, to balance the gravitational pull of the sun, otherwise the orbit would be asymmetrical, and the variance in temperature would not allow life to survive. Also: there would have to be a moon, like our moon, which acts like a defense system against asteroids and meteors, otherwise the planet would be pummeled with objects from outer space, which would rock the atmosphere and disrupt the climate and devastate the life on that planet. And of course, the climate has to be just right. The atmosphere obviously has to contain the right mix of air and water. And then, let's just leave aside the whole question of that spark that creates life itself, and the development of that life from lower to higher forms, and the utterly baffling transition from mere animals to intelligent beings that are self-aware and reasoning.

SR. CLEMENCIA

And religious.

SR. KEVIN

(Puzzled)

We should just leave that question aside?

SR. PHYSICS

It's too gigantic of a question, and we're considering a smaller question just now about life on other planets.

SR. KEVIN

And what smaller question is that?

SR. PHYSICS

Could the intelligent life from other planets make contact with us?

SR. KEVIN

Well, could it?

SR. PHYSICS

If that could ever happen something else is necessary. You have to have precisely the right conditions for the intelligent beings to be able to develop science, to come up with an understanding of physics. So, you not only need a solar system in just the right spot in the galaxy, a sun that is just the right size, a Jupiter that is just the right size, an Earth that has an atmosphere and water, a moon orbiting around it, life, and then intelligent life—you also need the particular conditions for intelligent life to become *more* intelligent. For instance, you need something spectacularly unique like a Nile River that is long and straight and perpendicular to the equator so that someone like Aristarchus can come along and figure out the relative distances of the sun and moon. Because without just the right geographical conditions on earth, correct astronomy is not possible. And if astronomy is not possible, geometry and physics are not going to develop, much less the technology that would allow a race to reach the point where it can blast its way out of the confines of its planet and into outer space.

SR. KIMBERLY

Sister Physics, why did you choose to become a nun? It seems you should have been a scientist.

SR. PHYSICS

I *am* a scientist, Sister Kimberly. Just because I became a nun doesn't mean I stopped being a scientist. In the laboratory, I studied God's order and all of its mysteries. In the monastery, I still contemplate that same order and those same mysteries. This is simply a better setting to do what I was made to do.

SR. MARIA CLARITA

(To SISTER KIMBERLY)

And now you know why we call her Sister Physics.

SR. KIMBERLY

Yes, I do.

SR. MARY MARTHA

But, Sister Physics, what about space travel?

SR. PHYSICS

Well, what do you think, Sister? It takes years for even the light of those distant stars to reach us. So any spacecraft traveling from those places would have to travel for tens of thousands of years.

SR. MARY MARTHA

But what if it traveled faster than the speed of light?

SR. PHYSICS

Though Einstein gave us relativity, he also gave us one absolute. Or rather, one constant: the speed of light. Exceeding the speed of light is the stuff of science fiction, not of science, or at least, not of any science we know.

SR. MARY MARTHA

But science, by its very definition, is only what we *know*. It is not what we *don't* know. We don't really know what is possible and not possible.

SR. PHYSICS

I'm not sure what you mean by that, Sister. Of course, the unknown erodes for us bit by bit. But the unknown is still the unknown.

SR. MARY MARTHA

What about black holes?

SR. PHYSICS

What about them?

SR. MARY MARTHA

Couldn't they make travel through great distances of space possible? Isn't it theoretically possible to go into a black hole and come out the other side of the universe through a white hole?

SR. KEVIN

But isn't space already a hole? Isn't emptiness already empty?

SR. AGNES

Enough idle chatter, Sisters.

SR. MARY MARTHA

You can hardly call this idle chatter, Sister Agnes.

SR. AGNES

It is idle. You don't know what you're talking about.

SR. MARY MARTHA

But surely we know something! The alien is here! It is not mere idle speculation.

SR. CLEMENCIA

Isn't it ironic, Sisters, that we have chosen the cloistered life, and God has chosen to send *us* a visitor from beyond the world?

SR. AGNES

We already host a visitor from beyond this world.

SR. CLEMENCIA

Yes, of course, Sister Agnes. And this world will not understand either one.

The scientists close one eye and look through a telescope at the heavens, but the paradox is that we already have Heaven in a box. Right here in our monastery. The priest opens the door to Heaven every day at Mass. We have very little to worry about in regards to the endlessness of space. We are cloistered nuns, and yet we have the eternal God right here within our walls.

SR. MARY MARTHA

Yes, but this is different! This is not like that. This means something else. Something else entirely.

SR. KIMBERLY

(Innocently)

But, Sister, why should you be distressed about it?

SR. MARY MARTHA

I'm not distressed!

SR. MARIA CLARITA

Perhaps the purpose of all this is to test our faith.

SR. CLEMENCIA

Or to test our patience.

SR. AGNES

Or to give you an opportunity to exercise silence—the great virtue of the contemplative.

SR. CLEMENCIA

(Sweetly)

Not a virtue. A privilege. One we don't deserve.

SR. PHYSICS

Sister Mary Martha, we still don't know what we have here. The universe is filled with endless possibilities. Science calculates, but the wonderful thing about God is that he is incalculable. If God could make the conditions on this planet just right for us, he could of course do the same thing somewhere else, and if, in his wisdom, he decides to bring those two worlds together...

SR. MARY MARTHA

First you were saying it was nearly impossible, and now you're making it as simple as a walk in the park.

SR. KIMBERLY

Perhaps Sister Physics should have been a lawyer. She had us all thinking one way, and then, just like that, she had us all thinking the other way.

(Enter MOTHER MARY FRANCIS, unnoticed by the others)

SR. PHYSICS

It's all guessing at this point. But scientists enjoy guessing. They are something like gamblers. And I suppose they enjoy the same elation of gamblers when they guess right. Probably because, like gamblers, it happens so rarely that they guess right. But, like gamblers, they are lured to keep guessing even though they are wrong most of the time.

SR. KEVIN

Is that why there is a space program? Is that why scientists spend so much time and money combing the stars for signs of life, even though the odds are against them?

SR. PHYSICS

The odds are indeed...astronomical.

MARY FRANCIS

The odds always favor the house. But, as a matter of fact, I work for the house. The House of God. And I don't worry about guessing.

(They all rise to attention at the presence of MOTHER MARY FRANCIS)

SR. KIMBERLY

Mother, what do you mean by "the odds"?

MARY FRANCIS

My child, some people consider us "the odds", as it were. And yet, they make the mistake of betting against us.

(She motions to the NUNS)

Please Sisters, sit down. It sounds like you are having a very fruitful discussion. Please continue.

SR. CLEMENCIA

But as Sister Agnes says, we don't really know what we're talking about. How much of this is mere curiosity?

SR. PHYSICS

And how does curiosity hurt? Is not curiosity the germ of the sciences?

SR. AGNES

Germs cause infections.

SR. PHYSICS

Perhaps I should have said “genesis” instead of “germ.”

SR. AGNES

Curiosity is shallow. You did not come to the monastery because you were curious. Surely you wanted something more profound than a scratch for an itch.

SR. MARY MARTHA

But surely, Sister, this is profound. What does it mean for our theology that a creature from another world comes to our world?

SR. AGNES

We are not theologians.

SR. CLEMENCIA

We are not theologians, but we have a theology.

SR. MARY MARTHA

Why should we assume the laws of God are the same throughout the universe?

SR. PHYSICS

Why should we assume that the laws of physics are the same throughout the universe?

SR. MARY MARTHA

Yes, why should we?

MARY FRANCIS

Sister, be careful not to fall into the fallacy that there are no absolute truths: “Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star.”

SR. KEVIN

One of the Church Fathers, Mother?

MARY FRANCIS

No. G.K. Chesterton.

(The sisters laugh, except for MARY MARTHA, who remains serious.)

SR. MARY MARTHA

But how does our theology explain this?

MARY FRANCIS

What is the problem, Sister?

SR. MARY MARTHA

Is he a fallen creature?

MARY FRANCIS

Indeed. He has fallen from the sky.

SR. MARY MARTHA

But has he fallen from grace? Is he a sinner?

MARY FRANCIS

A very good question.

SR. MARY MARTHA

How can he be subject to the Church's authority?

MARY FRANCIS

I suppose because he is here.

SR. MARY MARTHA

Did Christ die for him?

MARY FRANCIS

Christ died for all of us.

SR. MARY MARTHA

But is he one of us?

MARY FRANCIS

I think it might be worthwhile to find that out. Perhaps we should ask him. Him...and his two comrades. Sisters, please welcome our guests.

(The nuns suppress gasps as the aliens enter. NABOTH marches in very stiffly, walking with a limp, but trying to make the best of it, putting up a good front. HAZA and KOGO are on either side of him, wanting to assist him, but at the same time, keeping their hands off him, as he apparently wishes to be unaided. SISTER BONAVENTURA enters behind them, attempting to be an escort, but unsure of what to do. What do the aliens look like? They are humanoid, but their eyes, ears and skin are different. Their costumes are appropriately other-worldly. The two groups gaze at each other.)

BLACKOUT