



*The Lamentations of Julius Marantz* by Marc Estrin  
Fiction Paperback Original / 192 Pages / \$14.95  
ISBN-13: 978-1-932961-38-6

1 .

## At the Movies

*How lonely sits the city that was full of people . How like a widow has she become. She that was a princess among the cities has become a vassal.*

— L A M E N T A T I O N S 1 : 1

1 9 J U N E 2 0 0 3

The lights dimmed in Mini-Salle 7, the smallest and most hidden picture palace, deep in the warrens of Dodecaplex Two. Similarly had lights dimmed fifty years to the day before, dimmed that day at Ossining, New York, dimmed for Ethel Rosenberg as her husband was transmuted by an electric device not thirty yards away, and her own transformation beckoned.

House to half; house out. In the stepped dimming of the light, this day another Julius, a furtive Julius, a Julius on the lam, inspected the tiny chamber with its safely four, safely teenaged others. Though fifty years had passed, this other Julius, one Julius Marantz, was also scheduled for transfiguration—and for similar reasons.

W E L C O M E T O T H I S E V E N I N G ' S F E A T U R E  
P R E S E N T A T I O N

Glitzy, shoddy graphics on screen, shocking to the dark-adapted eye.

S M O K I N G O F A N Y K I N D I S P R O H I B I T E D I N  
T H I S T H E A T E R

Three French maids in scanty, leggy dresses shake fingers No No No as a smoking

*The Lamentations of Julius Marantz* by Marc Estrin

Unbridled Books, November 2007

[unbridledbooks.com/juliusmarantz.html](http://unbridledbooks.com/juliusmarantz.html)

cartoon biblical prophet pokes in from behind to baricroon, "Except, of course, for the Gold."

Maid One offers him a pack; Maid Two a light; Maid Three sidles herself up against his ashes and sackcloth. "High, but cool," she says as the others swoon in agreement.

"You can tell by the smell," Jeremiah says.

Julius Marantz settled in for an urgent interlude of safety. He had to catch his breath, gather his wits. Outside, sirens sang in trio and quartet, and Central Intelligence Corporation cars were every where, searching, no doubt, for him. His disguise was good. False white beard, filthy hippy clothes. Was it too late to consider cross-dressing? Jeremiah and his maids were floating up off screen. High, after all, was high.

BECAUSE THIS FILM IS ONLY SEVENTY  
MINUTES LONG, WE WILL HAVE OUR  
INTERMISSION RIGHT NOW. IF YOU  
HAVEN'T ALREADY, WE INVITE YOU TO  
CHECK OUT THE REFRESHMENT STAND IN  
THE LOBBY, WHERE YOU WILL FIND MANY  
DELICIOUS DRINKS AND SNACKS,  
INCLUDING THE U.S.'S OWN NATURAL  
FLAKES™. AND DON'T FORGET TO "GO FOR  
THE GOLD™®"!

House lights on. Damn! thought Julius, visible again. The four teenagers passed him, scuffing their largeness up the aisle. One picked and flicked a booger at the dirty old man while his buddies guffawed. "Santa Claus!" they taunted brilliantly.

Should I go out there? Julius wondered. Will it be suspicious to stay in here? Will the ushers be in to check refreshment receipts? Pascal's Wager. Not worth the consequences of a bad guess.

Julius limped up the aisle, practicing his crippled se nior-citizen walk. At the stand he ordered up a Tub o' Pops™, in an arcane accent, and made his way back into the

*The Lamentations of Julius Marantz* by Marc Estrin

Unbridled Books, November 2007

[unbridledbooks.com/juliusmarantz.html](http://unbridledbooks.com/juliusmarantz.html)

theater, careful not to spill the voluminous, olestrated popcorn suspended, crouton-like, in Diet-Pop™ Last to leave, first to return, he sat back down. The four teenagers marched in, laden with comestibles, just as the lights dimmed again. Though he had been only four years old at the time of Sing-Sing's dimming, he flashed, even now, on that event. Mommy and Daddy would not explain why they were crying.

House to half, house out. From the pentaphonic speakers: "Please rise and join in our national anthem." Drumroll. On the screen, Old Glory, version 52.6, flapping grandiloquently under a cross of David. The text on the staff, "YOUR LOGO HERE," Julius knew to be fraudulent. No way *his* logo—had he a logo—could make it onto Old Glory's white stripes. Those six spaces were available only to Fortune 500 companies, in the order of net income. And the image wasn't even up-to-date, for three days earlier, version 52.7 had appeared, with the top-two corporations switching places and the predicted supremacy of the Bank of Christ's logo.

A small animated hand—Michelangelo's Hand of God—pointed at the words as they scrolled along the bottom of the screen. So as not to attract attention, Julius stood and croaked along with his acned colleagues all the way to the final lines:

O'er the La-and of the Freeeeeeee

*(breathe)*

To our Home ... in the ... Skies!

Above the flag appeared the dawning sun, which, in an amazing display of computer animation, morphed from red disk through each current flag logo, streaming from one to another in proper colors, into a glorious archangel who, opening his purple robe (like a cheap stripper, Julius thought), showed blazoned upon his chest in flaming letters

A N D N O W , F O R O U R F E A T U R E  
P R E S E N T A T I O N . . .

Julius settled back for seventy minutes of he knew not what—but what did it matter? It was dark, he was unobserved and enveloped in the haze of Gold smoke from up front, he could pull down his mental ear flaps, shut his eyes....

*The Lamentations of Julius Marantz* by Marc Estrin  
Unbridled Books, November 2007  
[unbridledbooks.com/juliusmarantz.html](http://unbridledbooks.com/juliusmarantz.html)

But wait! What was that up there, seen through the slit of his vision? The title of said Feature Presentation, typing out on screen in ancient Courier, with phony typewriter clacks, such as hadn't been heard since long before Microsoft became Macrosoft:

T H E D A M N A B L E L I F E A N D D E S E R V È D  
D E A T H O F J U L I U S M A R A N T Z , S C I E N T I S T

A subway car, the IND, the very car he'd been in yesterday. He recognized the sequence of ads above the seat he'd finally obtained. "BEFORE THE END, COME BACK TO BUD," and "WHEN THE LORD CALLS, WILL YOUR LINE BE BUSY?—FIBERCELLULARS™ . USED IN THE OVAL OFFICE." A voice over the scene:

T H E M A N S H O W N H E R E I S R E A L A N D  
K N O W N T O B E D A N G E R O U S . H E M A Y E V E N  
N O W B E S E A T E D A M O N G Y O U . I F Y O U S E E  
T H I S M A N , C O N T A C T Y O U R N E A R E S T C I C  
A T T E N D A N T O R C A L L 1 - 8 8 8 - T R E A S O N .  
T H A N K Y O U .

"The man" was shown in great detail: it was yesterday's Julius, clean-shaven, skin hennaed reddish-brown, seated in yesterday's jerking subway car, in old Levis and tie-dyed Grateful Dead T-shirt, carrying the "Smart People for Central Intelligence" plastic bag he used for his costume changes, the one with the smiley face wearing glasses, just like the one now at his feet.

Feigning uncontrollable hiccups through the lobby, he was out of that theater in a flash, out onto the mean streets, the scorching sidewalks of New York. Would that this light would dim as well.

## 2 . GEKO

2 7 J A N U A R Y 2 0 0 1

Julius,” the Vice-President had said, “we want you to give us the rights to your machine.”

“Who’s we?”

“GEKO,” said the priest.

“Geheimniskoalition,” the Vice-President translated.

Julius surveyed the wrinkled faces dotting the Office of Counter terrorism Operations, xanthotic raisins in a high-tech scene.

“I’m sorry. Shall we go round the circle and do introductions?” The Vice-President was always polite.

“Daryl Plunk, Korea desk, Birthright Foundation.”

“General Plunk is part-time DOD, retired.”

“Carolyn Worthington, Earth Friends.” She looked the very model of the upright Quaker she was.

“You’re next,” the VP urged.

“Oh. Julius Marantz.”

“Organization?”

“Middlebury College, um Physics Department.”

“Edgar?”

“Edgar X. Thornbottom, Society of Jesus, World Council of Churches. Call me Thorn.”

“Thorn.” Julius nodded.

“As in crown of.”

GEKO laughed.

Julius said, “Um.”

“Morton Plumpe, Thompson Kline and Plumpe.”

“Our K Street representation.” GEKO nodded collectively at the vice-presidential savoir faire. “And this is Cosma McMoon, our court stenographer.”

“Hi.”

Julius was wary. “Is this a court?”

“A court of appeal, you might say,” the Vice-President clarified. “We’re appealing to you to consider what’s best for your country.”

“And for the world,” Ms. Worthington added.

“And for you,” said Thorn. This last was offered as spiritual direction, not threat.

“We want you to give us the rights to ... you know,” the Vice-President repeated.

“The Doodad.”

“Yes.”

“Why don’t you just take it? You have...”

“Julius, this is America. We don’t just...”

“The overriding question is one of intellectual property rights,” Advocate Plumpe advised. “Don’t you agree?”

Julius had been led through the serpentine corridors of the Executive Office Building, down, down, down, and around to the once-domain of Ollie and Fawn, following conduits from State, Defense, and Intelligence to the Situation Room beyond all situations, the external Executive brain.

As they walked past a mock-horror-film poster touting *The Return of Al Gore*, not visible, of course, to blindfolded Julius, the Vice- President, his elbow in hand, had reflected on the general condition:

“It’s not just you, Julius. We are all of us blinded—by this world. We have lost our expectancy, our sense of clairvoyance, and night advances swiftly upon us.” It was sound bites such as this that gave the country confidence in the man a heartbeat away. Beepers beeped buzzers, and locks fell away. Julius was seated in a chair and his blindfold removed. His eyes adjusted quickly to the opulent dimness of a room packed with panels, winking at him like a Hydra-headed trollop.

“Julius, all of us here realize that we’re living in tough times. Don’t you agree?” The Vice-President placed a confidential hand on his shoulder. “Don’t you?”

Julius gave a noncommittal grunt.

“And people are yearning for something different, an era of peace, love, and unity. But their world is empty, Julius. It’s a world of memorials without memory. Ours is a time of brainless arrogance in which our cosmic tragedy is repackaged as entertainment.”

“What has the Doodad got to do with all this?” its inventor asked.

“Nothing. And every thing,” the Vice-President said.

Thorn stepped up to bat.

“Julius, you are a religious man. You know we must strive to remake, by our own God-given powers, the world that our Father has made for us out of nothing and given us as our workshop.”

“You see the Doodad as remaking the world?”

“More like transforming it, Julius. Just look around. It’s survival of the sleaziest, wouldn’t you say? Hedonism ‘ ’ Us. Good God, six of the seven deadly sins are now virtues! Greed, avarice, and envy have become the keys to advancement. Gluttony, luxury, and pride are emblems of success. OK, sloth we don’t value—yet—but we’re on the way. Never has there been so little feeling of the Sacred as a genuine power.

“God blesses and serves America. But where is the demand that Americans first of all serve God, or make any real sacrifice? Look at the garbage piling up in the streets. It’s God’s metaphor. He’s trying to get our attention.”

There was a pregnant pause. The others nodded, as if the conclusion were obvious.

“And?”

“And you can help Him.”

“I can help God?”

“He needs your help.”

“I’m just a physicist, Mr. Thorn.”

*“To call heaven’s rich unfathomable mines (Mines, which support archangels in their state) Our own! To rise in science, as in bliss, Initiate in the secrets of the skies! Edward Young,”* said Edgar X. Thornbottom.

“What he means,” the Vice-President explained, “is that we no longer live in the times of Galileo and Giordano Bruno. Religions no longer suppress revolt; they have

long since become integrated into technological society.”

“What do you mean ‘revolt’?”

“*Re-voltare*. As in *teshuvah*, Hebrew for turning.” Thorn’s explication of text.

“Oh. I thought you meant *I* was revolting—um, rebelling.”

“No, no. Why would I say that?” Thornbottom continued. “I just meant in our materialist age of Kali Yuga, now drawing to a close, people want—need—the magic and security of something that’s beyond them, something greater, something more, something guided, perhaps, by advanced beings, angels maybe, or emissaries from an extraterrestrial civilization. There needs to be a mass ascension to new realms of consciousness.”

“And that’s where you come in—or rather, your Doodad does,” the Vice-President clarified.

“Is this some sort of search for ET?”

“No, Julius, for mass ascension.”

A whiff of burning sulfur. Yet from those flames no light, but rather darkness visible.

“You want to use the Doodad for mass ascension?”

“Look,” said Carolyn Worthington, “the population is exploding, and there is a huge ozone hole. Do you see how those fit together?”

“No.”

“Find a hole and fill it?”

“You mean you want to fill the ozone hole with excess population?”

A group silence of affirmation.

“Some of us do,” said Ms. Worthington.

“You want me to use the Doodad to shoot people up to fill the ozone hole? Live people?”

“Protein molecules absorb the ultraviolet,” General Plunk informed him.

“Wouldn’t the people get a little ... sunburned?”

“By the time they need SPF 40, they’ll have expired.”

“And after they are burned to a crisp?”

“The molecular cloud will do nicely,” the General informed him. “Or so I’m told.”

The whiff had grown from smell to stench. Four humans stared at Julius. Another stared at her stenographic screen. Julius’s breathing was shallow and fast.

"I see," he said.

"You'll surely agree there's a population problem." Plumpe asserted.

Julius nodded.

"Population pollution problem," Carolyn added.

His nodding continued.

"Well, then?" the Vice-President asked.

There was a long pause in the room. Julius looked around.

"Who is to choose the victims?"

"*Mortals*," said Thornbottom. "We are *all* mortal. Some must watch, while some must sleep...."

"GEKO will make the selections," General Plunk explained. "Naturally, those selections will be weighted against America's enemies. I assume you'd have no objection to that?"

Julius was silent.

"Enemies both foreign and domestic."

"I see."

"Julius," Thornbottom advised, "this cannot be an easy life. We all have a tough time keeping our minds open and deep, keeping our sense of beauty, our ability to see it in places remote and strange; we have a tough time keeping open the many intricate paths in a great open, windy world; but this, as I see it, is the human condition; and in this condition we can help, because we can love one another. We must free our souls from the every day, and open them to the *influxus mentium superiorum*."

"Let me see if I understand this," Julius said. "You want to use the Doodad to lift your enemies up into the sky."

"*Our* enemies, Julius."

"Um, *our* enemies."

"And to turn people to God," the Vice-President added, "which would make for a better world. Don't you agree?"

"Why will this turn people to God?"

His interlocutor was truly astonished. "Julius, you don't need to be a rocket scientist to understand that *this* is the Rapture. Long-awaited, long-expected great reward. Who will get the credit? God."

“But that would be a lie—a hoax!”

Plumpe shook his head. “None of the higher religions include *lying* among the mortal sins. There is no simple commandment: Thou shalt not lie.”

The Vice-President stood up from his chair and began pacing the room, his hands clasped, Beethoven-like, behind him.

“Whatever may be meant by moral landscape, Julius, at the moment, the best of our natures is drowning in the worst. Have you noticed how many people are simply nuts? This simple action will inject moral ballast to right the listing ship.”

“To stabilize the world.”

“To ease the population.”

“To harmonize with friends.”

“This is not a question of old teachings in new forms but of total reformulation in light of present experience.”

“Bird of prey to bird of prayer.”

“*Per aspera ad astra.*”

“Julius, millions of children are starving to death each month,” Carolyn Worthington said. “There are now one hundred seventeen wars being fought across the planet, and massive breakdowns of social and political structures. Can it get worse? Can it not only get better? The Rapture—real or fabricated—corresponds to our most fundamental cravings. We’ll be making a new Truth.”

Morton Plumpe gently placed paper on clipboard and handed it to Julius, along with an antique Parker ‘51, Plumpe’s personal treasure.

“Julius, this is a letter of permission. It will enable us to use the Doodad to bring order to the world. Your world. Your children’s world.”

Julius sat there, paralyzed. He had no children. Four pairs of eyes bore down upon him. The Vice-President offered his penultimate gambit, well-rehearsed.

“My friend, after the Declaration of Independence was signed, John Page wrote to Thomas Jefferson, ‘We know the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm?’”

Julius didn’t know whether he was supposed to answer the question.

“Much has changed since that fateful time, Julius. But Jefferson would still recognize the monumental themes of the day, America’s grand story of courage, and its simple

dream of dignity. We are not this story's author, yet His purpose is achieved in our duty, and our duty is fulfilled in His service. Never tiring, never yielding, we can renew that purpose today, to make our country more just and generous, to affirm the dignity of our lives. The work continues. The story goes on. And an angel still rides in the whirlwind and directs this storm. God bless you, Julius Marantz, and God bless America."

Plumpe proffered the Parker once again, and Julius took it. The room held its breath. When no signature was forthcoming, the Vice-President was forced to use the last of his resources.

"Julius, you are a scholar. Consider, then, the Lord Chancellor of the Realm, Sir Thomas More, who steadfastly rejected each petition of the King of England; who therefore was beheaded and his head lodged upon a pole on London Bridge. Would you care to reflect on this?"

The Uncertainty Principle itself was not as uncertain. But he took the Parker and engraved the paper with his own name: Julius Marantz.

*Salvator mundi? Diabolus providebitor? Or simple Homo ignavus et stupidus?*

The Thomas More bit was stricken from the record.