

They're History

A play

by
Josh Belville

They're History - Josh Belville - 1.

Somewhere in the Bataan peninsula, late February, 1942. Lights up downstage right, displaying SAL and BARRY, both mid 20s, wearing World War II fatigues, Sal still wearing his helmet. Barry is lying unconscious and bloody on the ground, while Sal is fashioning a makeshift tourniquet around his leg. The sound of gunfire and bombs in the distance, intermingled with faint cheering and shouting. Sal has a lit cigarette dangling from his lips.

SAL

MEDIC! IS THERE A GODDAMN MEDIC ANYWHERE ON THIS PENINSULA!

(to Barry)

Hey, Barry, come on, wake up.

He hobbles over to Barry's body, shaking him lightly and slapping his face. Barry wakes up.

BARRY

Sal ... where am I?

SAL

About three miles west of the bridge. I think.

BARRY

The mortar. Did we get--

SAL

We got it. You got it.

BARRY

Thank god.

SAL

I've never seen those Nips running so scared in my life. Feels like a brand new day, Barry! A brand new day! How are you feeling?

BARRY

I ... don't feel anything.

SAL

That's just shock. You got shot but you'll be fine. Let me fix my leg and then I'll move you closer to the bridge.

BARRY

Where's Lukey?

SAL

He ... didn't make it.

BARRY

Shit.

SAL

But he shot down three snipers before he was killed. Kid's got an eye like an eagle! Gave us a wide enough hole to break through. With all the shit you two gave me in Basic, I never woulda thought that kid could do it. But he did. You both did.

BARRY

Yeah...

Beat as Sal attends to his leg.

SAL

Barry, I gotta ask you ... how did you know?

BARRY

Know what?

SAL

That the Japanese were mortaring us from this location? Nobody had intel on that except you.

BARRY

(hesitates)

Intuition.

(doubles over)

Ohhhh shit.

SAL

You okay?

BARRY

It hurts now.

SAL

(shouts)

MEDIC! MEDIC PLEASE!

(to Barry)

Let me get my leg bandaged up and we'll go.

As Sal is working, Barry pulls a thick bundle of stripped wires out of his pocket.

BARRY

Sal ... take these.

SAL

What is this?

BARRY

Wires. From the cube. You remember the cube?

SAL

Yeah, I thought we trashed it.

BARRY

We did. This is what's left. Gold and copper.

(coughs)

I want you to sell them.

SAL

Sell them? Why?

BARRY

Don't worry, just do it.

SAL

Barry, these ain't gonna be worth anything, they--

BARRY

Just ... when you get back home, sell them and--

Barry starts coughing uncontrollably.

SAL

Oh, Jesus. MEDIC! MEDIC!

(to Barry)

When we get home. When we get home.

BARRY

Sal. Put the money in ... IBM...

Barry coughs again, worse than before.

SAL

IBM? What's that? Barry? BARRY!

Barry slumps over, dead.

SAL (cont'd)

Jesus Christ...

VOICE

(distant; offstage)

Lieutenant? Is that you?

SAL

YES! I NEED A MEDIC NOW!

VOICE

(offstage)

Sir, we've been searching for you for -- GRENADE! GET DOWN!

SAL

Oh shit!

Sal falls over Barry's body as a grenade (offstage) explodes. When it does, the lights go to black on them and up on upstage left, revealing:

A tiny, dingy, sparsely furnished apartment in Brooklyn. Morning, January of the present year. LUKE, 24, bundled in warm clothes and slumped in a folding chair next to an old card table, is talking on a landline phone from the 90s. On the desk is a piping hot cup of coffee, an open laptop, and a book, open and sitting up. The front cover faces the audience and reads, in large block letters, "THE BATTLE OF BATAAN."

Luke responds to the explosion by jumping up and heading to an upstage window.

LUKE

(into phone)

Jesus, did you hear that? It was like an explosion or something. Maybe a car backfired, I -- Mickey, Mickey, Mickey, I'm not changing the subject, I heard ... Look, we have everything under control, okay?

Luke goes back to the table, resumes typing on the laptop while alternately skimming the book as he talks.

LUKE (cont'd)

I know you need that money yesterday. When I was in there with Barry, we were... yeah. Things fall through sometimes, you know? We were being *shot* at, we had to get the hell out of there. Just give us a couple of days, alright? Barry's planning something big, I can tell. It's big. No, he hasn't told me. But it's big. They're always big, right?

BARRY enters, wearing full winter gear, breathing heavily and bringing an old rusty bike in with him. In the basket of the bike is a medium sized box.

BARRY

Luke, I just got the -- Who are you talking to?

LUKE

(puts hand over receiver)

Who do you think? Mickey.

BARRY

Hang up the phone.

Barry leans the bike on the wall and takes the box out of the basket.

LUKE

(into phone)

He's here, he--

(to Barry)

Mickey wants to talk to you.

Barry sets the box on the table, knocking over the book in the process.

BARRY

Hang. Up. The. Phone.

Luke picks up the book and sets it on his lap, flipping through the pages.

LUKE

You made me lose my place!

(into phone)

Listen, Mick, Barry's not feeling so good, he, uh, he's got laryngitis or something...

Barry takes the receiver out of Luke's hand and hangs up the phone.

LUKE (cont'd)

Barry! What the hell!

BARRY

Got anymore coffee?

LUKE

Christ, he's gonna kill us, Barry, you know that?

BARRY

No he's not.

LUKE

I spent all night working on a few ideas, but they all take about a week...

BARRY

Don't worry so much.

LUKE

Don't worry?! Mickey is literally going to rip open our throats and turn us into human PEZ dispensers if we don't get him the money in 24 hours, he said 24 hours, just like in the movies!

BARRY

(nonchalant)

Lukey. Open the box.

LUKE

Does it have twelve million dollars in it?

BARRY

Sort of.

LUKE

What do you mean, "sort of"?

BARRY

The money's not in the box.

LUKE

Christ! We're screwed.

BARRY

Just open it, come on.

LUKE

No, no time. Let's go through my ideas.

BARRY

Stop, stop talking.

LUKE

Don't you wanna hear my ideas?

BARRY

No.

LUKE

You're always coming up with the plan. I have good plans too!

BARRY

No you don't.

*Luke turns the laptop to face Barry.
Barry looks at it while also taking
Luke's coffee and drinking it.*

BARRY (cont'd)

Your spelling is horrible.

LUKE

I know. Ma says I'm dyslexic. You know? Do you believe in Dog, that sort of thing.

BARRY

I know what dyslexia is, doofus.

LUKE

Do they look good? I got most of them from this book, I've been reading it for a while. It's really good. It's about World War II and--

Barry closes the laptop.

BARRY

They're shit. Open the box.

LUKE

Hey! I spent a lot of time on those!

BARRY

Why don't you ever do what I say? OPEN THE BOX!

LUKE

Why? Why should I open your stupid box?

BARRY

Because if you don't, I will personally ensure that you never have children as long as you live.

LUKE

(short beat)

You can't have children when you're dead--

BARRY

OPENTHEBOX!

LUKE

Okay, okay!

Luke opens the box. He pulls out a large, shiny, metallic cube, a machine of some kind. On the front, easily visible in LED lights, is the current date.

BARRY

This, Luke, is our way out.

LUKE

A giant alarm clock?

BARRY

It's a time machine.

Luke looks at Barry like he's unsure if he's being made fun of.

LUKE

This really isn't the time for jokes, Barry.

BARRY

I'm not joking. It's a god damn time machine.

LUKE

How do you know?

BARRY

Because: I *used* it.

LUKE

You went back in time?

BARRY

Yep. Fifteen minutes.

LUKE

Bullshit.

BARRY

I know, I thought so too, until I *did* it.

LUKE

How'd you know you were back in time?

BARRY

Set my watch, looked at a clock on the wall as I was going back. There was a flash and then the clock was fifteen minutes early.

LUKE

It's a trick clock...

BARRY

Nope.

LUKE

You were duped!

BARRY

Nope.

LUKE

Are you high?

BARRY

I wish.

LUKE

Alright, fine. Show me.

BARRY

I'm *about* to, if you'll just let me.

*Luke turns the laptop toward himself,
opens it.*

LUKE

I don't believe you.

BARRY

Luke, come on, when have I ever lied to you?

LUKE

You want a list?

(points to laptop screen)

This one, this idea, I think it's pretty great, Barry. If we can just get a gallon of molasses and a Komodo dragon--

BARRY

Lukey! Buddy! I have a *time machine*. Let's do the *time machine* thing, okay?

LUKE

Where'd you get it?

BARRY

I can't tell you.

LUKE

Oh, great, yeah, I totally believe you then.

BARRY

The guy who gave it to me, if they found out he did it, he'll get worse than fired. He'll get killed. Worse than killed.

LUKE

What's worse than killed?

BARRY

A lifetime of indentured servitude on a Scientology cruise ship.

Luke looks legitimately scared.

LUKE

(swallows)

Barry, I won't tell anyone.

BARRY

This place could be bugged.

LUKE

No way, I scrubbed everything down first thing this morning.

BARRY

You sure?

LUKE

We're clear.

BARRY

Alright, alright. It's on loan from a scientist at CERN.

LUKE

CERN?

BARRY

You know, that Hardon Supercollider place in Denmark or whatever.

LUKE

Isn't that a porn?

BARRY

What?

LUKE

Hardon Supercollider.

BARRY

I ... I don't know. Are you following me?

LUKE

Yes.

BARRY

You remember Higgs Boson?

LUKE

That guy from *Star Wars*?

BARRY

No, man, Jesus Christ. What is wrong with you? He's the guy who built the Hardon Supercollider. I guess he disappeared, they've been looking for him for years. Look, apparently they've known about time travel since the aliens in Roswell crashed--

LUKE

Hold on, let me get my tinfoil helmet.

BARRY

It's true! Some guy at CERN built this thing and my guy bought it from him.

LUKE

You know a guy who knows a guy--?

BARRY

From CERN.

LUKE

Who?

BARRY

You want me to give away my most prized contact?

LUKE

Is it Higgs Boson?

BARRY

You think I'd tell you if it was?

Beat.

LUKE

This is impossible.

BARRY

No man, it's the truth.

LUKE

You work at Kinko's.

BARRY

So?

LUKE

It's a stretch.

BARRY

I have *connections*.

LUKE

How much did it cost?

BARRY

A billion dollars. Who cares, this guy's rich. I told him I would borrow it and return it plus a fee that we'll get once we've gone through with the plan.

LUKE

A fee?! But we owe Mickey--

BARRY

It's fine. We'll pay Mickey back and then some.

LUKE

But ... this thing's tiny.

BARRY

You want it to be a DeLorean? Come on, man. It's not the 1980s anymore. But it *can* be, if we use this time machine. Just trust me here.

LUKE

(sighs)

How does it work? How do we plug it in?

BARRY

Doesn't plug in.

(taps machine)

Nuclear.

LUKE

Whoa. Like a bomb?

BARRY

No, like a submarine.

LUKE

... oh.

BARRY

Here's the plan, Lukey boy. My grandpa Sal worked at IBM in the 60s, right, and he told me before he died that the one thing he wished he'da done was invest in IBM stock back then, because now he'd be a millionaire. You with me?

LUKE

So you wanna go back in time and invest in stock?

BARRY

IBM went public in 1924. We go back, buy stock -- buy like a dollar's worth of stock, that's all we'll need! -- come back, sell stock, be *billionaires*.

LUKE

Already we have a problem.

BARRY

What?

LUKE

I don't have a dollar.

BARRY

We ... you ... I HAVE A DOLLAR.

LUKE

Do we need to split the dollar up? Do I owe you fifty cents?

BARRY

Shut up. Just, just put a muzzle on your face. Are you in or not?

LUKE

(whisper)

I'm not allowed to talk.

BARRY

You're in, okay, good.

LUKE

This is a hell of a risk, Barry.

BARRY

No it's not. If it doesn't work we just give it back to the guy and say it didn't work. And then we beat the shit out of him for being a liar. I know it sounds crazy, especially through your thick skull, me coming in here with a metal box that's a time machine, but I'm telling you, it works, and you're going to find out, right now.

Beat.

LUKE

Wait a minute. Why didn't *he* do it?

BARRY

Who?

LUKE

The guy. Your contact. Higgs.

BARRY

Why didn't he do what?

LUKE

Go back in time and get a bunch of money through the stock market.

BARRY

Luke, Luke, Luke ... who do you think I got the idea from in the first place?

LUKE

Ohhhhh...

BARRY

How else does a single guy fund an entire giant underground atom smashing compound?!

LUKE

Higgs Boson, you're a genius! Alright, what do we do?

BARRY

First you enter the date. Just put 1924 as the year, the actual day doesn't matter.

LUKE

Okay...

Luke begins fiddling with the controls on the machine. Barry paces the room, giddy with power.

BARRY

It's a miracle of modern science, Lukey. We could go anywhere, do anything. No more riding a goddamn bicycle around town -- we'll be driving in Ferrari's! And maybe when we're done collecting our cash we can travel back to the dinosaurs, see a T-Rex or something!

LUKE

Oh man that would be awesome.

BARRY

The world is our oyster--!

Sudden pounding on the door. Beat. Barry gestures for Luke to speak.

LUKE

Who is it?

VOICE

(offstage)

Jimmy. Open the door.

LUKE

Oh shit!

BARRY

Who's Jimmy?

LUKE

One of Mickey's goons.

BARRY

Mickey?! You're still worried about Mickey?

(shouting to Jimmy)

Go take a hike, Jimmy! And tell Mickey that we'll have his money before he knows it.

LUKE

Barry, no!

VOICE

Is that Barry?

BARRY
No, it's the tooth fairy!

VOICE
You got three seconds to open this door--

BARRY
ONE TWO THREE!

LUKE
Barry!

Jimmy slams into the door.

BARRY
You got that date set?

LUKE
Yeah, but--

BARRY
Then push the goddamn button!

Another slam into the door.

LUKE
This better work!

BARRY
LUKEY! PUSH THE BUTTON!

LUKE
Okay okay!

SLAM. Luke goes to push the button.

BARRY
WAIT!

LUKE
What?!

Barry runs over and puts his hand on Luke's head. Door SLAM.

BARRY
I think I have to be touching you.

LUKE
What?

BARRY
PUSH THE BUTTON!

LUKE

OKAY OKAY!

Luke presses the big green button. The lights flash and swirl around them. When it's done, they're sitting in the same spot in the same apartment, but the table with everything on it, and the bike, are gone.

They both listen carefully for another door slam, but it doesn't come.

BARRY

Did it work?

LUKE

How would I know? You said it would work!

BARRY

The table's gone. My bike's gone.

LUKE

(picks book from lap)

The book's here.

Barry goes to the door, opens it hesitantly, looks out. Then closes it and comes back in.

BARRY

Jimmy appears to be gone as well.

LUKE

So it worked.

BARRY

Apparently.

(starts checking the apartment)

Alright, now we have to find a phone book...

LUKE

Did they have those in 1924?

BARRY

I ... don't know.

LUKE

Wait a minute. Wasn't this building built in the 30s?

BARRY

What am I, an architect?

LUKE

I don't know! I just remember on the brochure, it said, "Vintage apartment, one of the few built during the Great Depression."

BARRY

When was the Great Depression?

LUKE

Are you serious? The thirties! The stock market crashed on October 29th, 1929--

BARRY

Why are we here then?

LUKE

I don't know!

BARRY

Let me see that thing.

Barry takes the cube from Luke.

BARRY (cont'd)

Luke, you moron! You put the wrong year!

LUKE

What? What? Lemme see.

Luke takes the cube. He squints really hard looking at it.

LUKE (cont'd)

Ah, you're right! I didn't even know they had these kind of buildings in 1492!

BARRY

What? No, you put 1942!

Luke squints at the cube again.

LUKE

Oh, I guess I did.

BARRY

I knew I shouldn't have given this thing to you.

LUKE

I'm dyslexic!

BARRY

Give it here, I'll change the date. I'm actually glad you didn't put 1492 as the date.

(he takes the cube)

The last thing we need is to deal with goddamn Indians or Christopher Columbus or something.

LUKE

Christopher Columbus didn't discover America in 1492. He discovered the East Indies, or what we call Cuba. In fact, he never sailed to America proper--

BARRY

Alright! Shut up! You and your goddamn book-learning.

LUKE

Sorry, it just bugs me.

BARRY

Okay. 1924! Here we come.

But before he can press the big green button, the apartment door bursts open. SAL, now just a recruitment officer, enters, pointing a gun at the two.

SAL

STOP RIGHT THERE! PUT YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM!

BARRY

Jimmy!

SAL

DON'T MOVE!

LUKE

That's not Jimmy!

BARRY

What?! What's happening?!

SAL

WHAT IS THAT IN YOUR HAND?

BARRY

Nothing!

SAL

DROP IT NOW!

BARRY

OKAY OKAY!

Barry puts the cube on the floor.

SAL

Back away from the ... whatever that is.

LUKE

It's an alarm clock.

SAL

That's no alarm clock like I've ever seen, pal.

LUKE

Let me show you--

*Luke walks toward the cube. Sal
defensively fires two shots at the
cube, destroying it.*

SAL

GET BACK I SAID!

BARRY

Did you ... did you just shoot...?

SAL

Shut up!

BARRY

You just shot the time machine.

SAL

The what?

BARRY

Luke...

LUKE

I didn't think he'd *shoot* it, Barry!

BARRY

NEVER PROVOKE A MAN WITH A *GUN*, LUKE!

SAL

SHUT UP BOTH OF YOU! GET ON THE GROUND!

*Barry and Luke scramble onto the floor.
Sal walks over to them.*

SAL (cont'd)

Who do you work for?

LUKE

Mickey.

SAL

Who's Mickey? WHO'S MICKEY?!

LUKE

He's our guy! Please don't shoot me!

SAL

Your "guy"? Is Mickey some kind of Kraut codename? Like Mickey Mouse? You're in the States and suddenly you have to use some kind of Disney nickname, throw us off track?

BARRY

Wait, you think we're Germans?

SAL

Maybe Russians!

BARRY

Whoa whoa, we're not Germans or Russians, we're Americans!

SAL

I don't believe you. I know technology, and that thing's obviously some kind of cipher or listening device, maybe even a bomb.

BARRY

No, it's not, I swear! Listen, buddy, I'm from Brooklyn, born and raised. Luke here, he's from -- where you from, Luke?

LUKE

A little suburb about a mile southeast of Boston called Hickory Falls--

BARRY

Boston! He's from *Boston*. Just a couple of Americans.

SAL

Oh yeah? You're Americans?

BARRY

Yes sir, all our lives.

SAL

(to Luke)

When's your birthday?

LUKE

July 1st, 1988.

(Barry shoots him a look)

Uh, I mean ... 1888. Is that too early?

SAL

Funny, you don't look like you're 54...

LUKE

Good genes. Great genes. And Jack LaLane, that juicer thing--

BARRY

Sir, listen to us. Do we sound like Germans? I was born at Wyckoff Heights Medical Center. You know? The place on Stockholm?

SAL

Stockholm, Sweden?!

BARRY

Stockholm *Street* in Brooklyn!

SAL

Oh. They're Allies anyway.

BARRY

And Luke here was -- hell, I don't know *what street* he was born on, but doesn't he sound like a Bostonian? Lukey, say something like a Bostonian.

LUKE

I pahk my cah in the gahrahge?

A beat. Sal lowers his gun. Barry starts to get up.

BARRY

Where are you from, sir?

SAL

Long Island.

BARRY

Oh yeah? What town?

SAL

Mineola.

BARRY

Hey! My grandpa Sal was born in Mineola!

SAL

Your grandpa's named Sal?

BARRY

Salvatore. Yeah. Hell of a guy.

SAL

My name's Salvatore too.

BARRY

Really? That's quite a--

Barry stops suddenly when he realizes who he's talking to.

LUKE
What's the matter?

BARRY
... Nothing.

SAL
So you swear you're not Germans then.

LUKE
No sir, we are red-blooded Americans, through and through.

BARRY
We hate the Germans.

LUKE
We hate the shit out of them.

SAL
How old are you?

LUKE
Twenty-four.

BARRY
Twenty-six.

SAL
(raising his gun again)
Oh, so you're draft dodgers.

LUKE
What?

JAMES
I work at the recruiting office. I track down draft dodgers.

BARRY
Okay, but--

SAL
Got a tip that there were a group of dodgers squatting in this very apartment. People seem to come and go from the fire escape. I'm guessing you are two of them?

BARRY
No no no.

LUKE
We just got here.

SAL
You two in school?

BARRY

Uh, yeah. Yeah. At NYU. Just here for the weekend.

SAL

What are you studying?

BARRY

Military Tactics.

LUKE

(overlap)

Software Engineering.

Barry glares at Luke. Beat.

SAL

What is Software Engineering?

LUKE

We're not in school.

BARRY

LUKE!

LUKE

He has a gun! You said never provoke a man with a gun!

BARRY

Lying is not provoking!

SAL

So you ARE lying!

BARRY

No Grandpa, listen, we have a logical--

SAL

What'd you call me?

BARRY

What?

SAL

What did you call me?

BARRY

I called you something?

SAL

Yeah. Grandpa.

BARRY

I ... I called you ... grandpa.

SAL
Yes.

BARRY
Oh.

SAL
The hell is wrong with you?

BARRY
It's a ... thing we call Army men back home.

SAL
Back home in *Brooklyn*?

BARRY
Yeah.

LUKE
(going with it)
We call 'em "Grandpas" too, Grandpa.

BARRY
In Boston?

LUKE
Well, in Hickory Falls.

BARRY
Small world!

SAL
Why? Why call Army men "grandpas"?

LUKE
Because war is ... old.

BARRY
Centuries old.

LUKE
Millennia, even.

BARRY
And ... so are old people.

LUKE
Old people are old too.

Beat.

SAL
I should shoot you both right here, right now. Do you realize how disrespectful that is?

There are men *dying* out there for your freedom! Also I'm only twenty-two, for Chrissakes. Both of you are coming with me.

LUKE

We're sorry, Grandpa.

BARRY

SHUT IT.

LUKE

Sorry.

BARRY

Where are we going?

SAL

If you're lucky, Algiers. If you're not lucky ... Bataan.

BARRY

Ohhh shit. Listen, you want money? We have money.

*Luke looks at the book on the table.
Barry gets out his wallet.*

LUKE

Bataan? Like the *Battle* of Bataan?

*Barry displays a very non-period twenty
dollar bill to James.*

BARRY

Look, twenty dollars and we walk out of here free.

SAL

What kind of money is this?

BARRY

Sorry, that, I, uh, I was in France, that's French money.

SAL

Andrew Jackson's on the face of a French \$20 bill?

BARRY

They ... love him, apparently.

LUKE

Barry, let's go.

BARRY

I'm *trying* to go.

LUKE

No, I mean, to Bataan.

BARRY

What?!

LUKE

Barry, I read that book cover to cover last week. I know exactly what's gonna happen. We can change it, Barry. We can change history.

BARRY

I don't wanna change history! I just want to make money!

LUKE

Barry, I know *everything*. I can change the course of the war!

Sal fires a shot into the air. A cat squeals. The three of them look up.

SAL

Enough of this. Both of you are under arrest for desertion. Come with me, NOW.

LUKE

Can I ... can I take the book?

SAL

No, get over here.

LUKE

But I really, really need that book.

SAL

Why?

LUKE

I ... love reading.

Sal walks to the table, picks up the book.

SAL

The Battle of Bataan? What the hell kinda book is this?

BARRY

It's futurism!

SAL

What?

BARRY

Jules Verne wrote it, it was one of his last books. It's about the future.

SAL

It looks like it's a thousand pages.

BARRY

Twelve-hundred and six, to be specific. It's a great read. You wanna borrow it?

SAL

Hell no, I hate reading.

Sal opens the book, flips through the pages quickly to make sure nothing's inside, then tosses it to Luke.

SAL (cont'd)

Here's your stupid book. Let's go.

LUKE

You don't like to read?

SAL

I'm dyslexic.

LUKE

So am I! I can teach you ways to overcome it--

SAL

Let's go.

BARRY

Wait. I'd like to take the cube too.

SAL

Are you kidding me? No way.

BARRY

Please. You shot it. It doesn't work anymore. But it has important equipment inside. Sal, you said you know technology, right? This stuff is state of the art. It's beyond state of the art. Let me show you. I think you'll really enjoy it.

Beat.

SAL

I'll take it. The government might want to analyze it.

BARRY

No, no government. Just you. You can make a fortune off this technology. I'll take it apart, show you the inside.

Sal hesitates, then takes the cube.

SAL

I'll take it. Let's go.

LUKE

(whispers)

What do you want the time machine for?

BARRY

Insurance.

SAL

Let's go, fellas.

As they are leaving:

BARRY

Do me one favor, Luke.

LUKE

What?

BARRY

Read that book *very carefully*.

They exit as lights fade out.

The end.