

No, It's We Who Bug the Landlord



—Arthur Hoppe

"The Lord is listening all the time. The Lord has got his tape recorder going from the time you're born until you die"—The Rev. Billy Graham, commenting on the expletives in the presidential tapes.

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Scene: The Heavenly Real Estate Office. The Landlord is humming happily to himself as he puts the finishing touches on a new galaxy. His business agent, Mr. Gabriel, enters, papers in one hand, Golden Trumpet in the other.

The Landlord: A phantasmagoria of comets, one Milky Way, a sprinkling of novae . . . Ah, quite lovely, if I do say so myself.

Gabriel: Excuse me, sir. But we've received another statement from Billy Graham.

The Landlord: Billy who? Oh, yes, the one who thinks I'm a middle-class Republican. What does he want now?

Gabriel: Oh, nothing, sir. He merely told reporters that you've put a wiretap on every tenant of that little planet you love so much, Earth.

The Landlord: I have?

Gabriel: If you haven't, sir, you certainly should. The principles of sound, modern business management demand it.

The Landlord: They do?

Gabriel: It's a question of planetary security, sir. You know very well how those irresponsible tenants commit rampant acts of vandalism — gouging up your carpets of wildflowers, dumping their garbage in your air and waters. Really, sir, they're destroying property values right and left.

The Landlord (sighing): I know, Gabriel. I know.

Gabriel: With an efficient and comprehensive system of wiretaps, we could probe into every nook and cranny of their daily lives — their intimate conver-

sations, their secret boasting, their love-making, their . . .

The Landlord (frowning): Really, Gabriel!

Gabriel (carried away): It's the only way to determine who is being disloyal! Who is breaking the rules!

The Landlord: I'm sure all of them have broken a rule or two in their time.

Gabriel (triumphantly): Exactly, sir! And once we have the proof on tapes, (he raises his trumpet eagerly) I can sound The Eviction Notice.

The Landlord: No, no, Gabriel. That's going too far.

Gabriel (shaking his head): You keep saying that, sir, despite every sound practice of property management. Well, at least you could listen to the tapes and compile an Enemies' List.

The Landlord: A what?

Gabriel: An Enemies' List, sir. You could draw up a roster of those who refused to contribute to your good works, those who are secretly disloyal, those who . . .

The Landlord: And what would I do with such a list?

Gabriel (enthusiastically): Why, you would visit those on it with plagues of boils and locusts and Internal Revenue Service auditors. You would take away their television stations, destroy their newspapers, hound their attorneys . . .

The Landlord: But why, Gabriel?

Gabriel (surprised): Why, to put the fear of you in them, sir. To make them respect you.

The Landlord: Do you really think they'd respect an eavesdropping, petty, vengeful, power-mad voyeur?

Gabriel: But sir, Billy Graham says . . .

The Landlord (in a voice of thunder): By me! Who does Billy Graham think I am? A President?