

EXTRACT TWO

BULLET

So come on, tell us. What are you here for?

JOHNNY

Well, you know the library's supposed to be haunted.

ANT

Is it?

JACK

Yes, so we've decided to conduct an investigation.

JOHNNY

A proper one, all scientific.

JACK

To prove whether there's a ghost or not.

CHARLES

It's supposed to be of a monk.

COPPER

Carrying a pile of books under his arm.

JACK

Lots of people saw him before this place was a school.

JOHNNY

But since it became a school, no one's seen it, because no one's in the place late at night.

COPPER

You see? That's why we had to be locked in.

BULLET

But locked in .. I mean, if there's really a ghost ...

ANT

You're not frightened of a ghost are you?

BULLET

Of course not.

MICKO

Well, I don't believe it. It's a load of rot if you ask me.

BARNEY

No one asked you, Micko.

JACK

Of course, if there is a ghost, then we've got a camera to photograph it. Copper? [*Copper produces camera.*] And a tape-recorder. Fred? [*Fred produces portable tape recorder.*]

CHARLES

And I'll write everything we do and see down for my Dad who'll publish it in his newspaper.

COPPER

No one will be angry after that because we'll be famous...

EXTRACT THREE

CRISPIN

How old is this place supposed to be?

JACK

The library you mean? It's the oldest part of the school. Left over from when the place was a monastery,

CRISPIN

Hence the monk.

JACK

Yes.

CRISPIN

Well it all makes sense. Perhaps the monk was the librarian here, long ago.

JOHNNY

Who knows?

JACK

Hopefully we'll all know soon enough. Now down to business, guys. We'll need to turn the lights out. I suggest we try to sleep a bit. I'll take first watch with Johnny. Copper and Charles, you can be next. O.K. Everyone? Lights out.

Blackout.

THE PIRATE SCENE

There is a silence for a moment, then lights come slowly up revealing Jack and Johnny sitting at the edge of the stage. Johnny has fallen asleep. Suddenly Jack sits upright and, startled, looks out front.

JACK

Good Heavens. Do you see what I see? [*nudges Johnny awake*] Johnny? Where are we?

JOHNNY

Palm trees. Blue sky. Sand. Look at that sea. [*They are both standing now.*]

JACK

So clear you can see the fishes swimming in it like bright-coloured butterflies.

JOHNNY

Is this a dream? [*He reaches out and touches the water*] No. This water's real. Hey! Let's go for a swim.

JACK

Great idea. [*They start to remove jumpers but freeze as they hear a voice and quickly hide.*]

FOX *enters reading a map*

This is the spot.

RED

You sure? Only you thought that place the other side of the the island was the spot half an hour ago.

FOX

No, this is it. See? X marks the spot. [*Looking around the stage.*] Only I don't see no Xs here.

RED

No, stupid, they wouldn't leave a X in the sand would they? We have to pace it out. How many paces from that tree there?

FOX

Six, it says.

RED

Big paces or little ones.

FOX

Dunno, doesn't say.

RED *giving up*

Give it 'ere, dolt. Stand by that tree. Now, pace. One...two...three...four...five...six. Stop. Chopper! Yeller! Come 'ere. Bring spades. [*Chopper and Yeller enter speedily*] Start digging.

CHOPPER & YELLER

Aye, aye, cap'n.

RED

Not cap'n, duffers. I call myself 'admiral' now. Weren't you listening to that announcement I made?

CHOPPER & YELLER

No, sir.

RED

Fox, bang their heads together and see if you can get any more sense out of them. *[Fox does so.]*

CHOPPER & YELLER

Ouch! *[They sit on the ground nursing their heads.]*

RED

What are you doing down on the ground. Get digging.

CHOPPER & YELLER

Aye, aye, cap'n *[They resume digging.]*...

EXTRACT FOUR

PRUNEFACE

Ambush, sir!

BLACK BART

Up and at them! It's that rascally Red Admiral's lot. Don't let me down now! For Black Bart and the frolicking freedom of the high seas! Lay on!

They turn to attack Chopper and Yeller. All freeze frame as a strange man dressed as a monk steps in and pulls Jack and Johnny aside.

MONK

Time to leave, I think. Come with me.

The lights flicker and the pirates move off; the original boys, in sleeping positions move on and Jack and Johnny and the Monk are centre stage.

JACK

Thankyou, sir, whoever you are. Are you one of the Red Admiral's crew?

MONK

I am who I am. But for now I am your helper and your way back to the library. Look. Here are your friends. I must go now. *[He exits.]*

JACK

Wait! ... Johnny, did you see that man? Johnny?

JOHNNY

Sorry, I seem to have slept or something. I dreamed we were going to walk the plank.

JACK

We were. But we're safe now. What's the time? *[looks at watch]* Oh, goodness, it's time to wake Charles and Copper. Go and lie down, Johnny. *[shakes Charles and Copper]* Your turns.

CHARLES

Did you see the ghost?

JACK

No. But we did have a strange adventure. We'll tell you later. Keep a good watch now and wake us if you see the ghost. *[Jack and Johnny go and lie down]*

THE 007-STYLE SPY SCENE

COPPER

Goodness, I'm tired. I had my neck up against a bookcase and I've got a crick in it or something. Ouch.

CHARLES

Do be quiet. I want to watch for the ghost.

COPPER

So do I.

CHARLES

Hello, who's that?

COPPER

Where?

CHARLES

That person creeping down by the wall with his hat pulled over his eyes.

COPPER

Get down. He looks suspicious.

They hide. Meanwhile the first spy, Joe Cool, comes on stage and meets the second spy, Al Packer, coming on from the other side.

JOE

The rocks are high in Madagascar.

AL

Not as high as those in Gibraltar. What's the news?

JOE

You haven't finished the password yet.

AL

What? Oh yeser ...er...not as high as those in Gibraltar ... er ...Is the moon full tonight?

JOE

Not as full as it is tomorrow. [*They do a complicated kind of hand-slapping sequence.*]

There! O.K. I know it's you now.

AL

That's silly. You knew it was me before.

JOE

Yes. But we have to go by the rules. Passwords and secret signals, they're very important. Have you any news?

AL

I'm supposed to ask that.

JOE.

Oh. Really? I get muddled sometimes.

AL

Well? Have you any?

JOE

Yes. I'm supposed to tell you. Mad Max is out.

AL

Mad Max? You mean the man who tried to take over the world a few years ago by infiltrating the sewage system?

JOE

The same. Only now his plan is even more dastardly. He's posing as a mini-cab driver and plans to capture all M.P.s one by one as they leave the Houses of Parliament until there is no one left to run the country.

AL

How can he do that?

JOE

I don't know but that's what we have to find out, with the help of double 9, 9 [999] of course.

AL

Why not 007?

JOE

Oh, hadn't you heard, 007 and Money Penny have eloped and are now living happily married and retired on an island off the coast of Scotland.

AL

Good Heavens!

JOE

Yes, I know, dreadful isn't it? But double nine nine is a very different kettle of fish to 007. Like 007 nothing ruffles his temper but he doesn't have that fatal weakness for women..

..

EXTRACT FIVE

999

Thanks, kids. Anything I can do for you?

MONK *stepping forward again*

That's my problem. You can leave them with me.

999

Of course, sir. Cheerio, boys.

CHARLES & COPPER

Cheerio! [*to each other*] Wow!

CHARLES

Hey, they've gone!

COPPER

Look! We're back in the library. What's the time?

CHARLES

Time to wake the next two for their watch. Pity we didn't see the ghost.

COPPER

Never mind, it's still quite early. I don't expect ghosts wander about till well after midnight.

CHARLES

I'll wake Fred and Barney.

THE HARRY POTTER-STYLE SCENE

Lights fade and up after short time on Fred and Barney sitting on the front. The boys involved in the next scene are in twisted positions all over the floor behind them.

FRED

Are you asleep, Barney?

BARNEY *jerking awake*

No, of course not.

FRED

Only I'm getting bored. I haven't seen anything at all yet. No ghosts, no clanking chains, no headless horsemen, no ...

BARNEY

All right, all right. You're scaring me even talking about it. Look how soundly everyone else is sleeping. I don't know how they can, it's not exactly comfortable.

FRED

They don't look very comfortable to me. [*He gets up and moves amongst them.*] Hold on a minute. Barney?

BARNEY

What?

FRED

Ssssh! Come over here a minute. Now look down. See anything strange?

BARNEY

No ... just Hey, who is it?

FRED

Exactly. Who are these boys? They're not our friends. I don't like this.

There is a loud groan from one of the boys

TIM

Spiff? Jez? Are you all right?

BARNEY

Fred, hide. Till we know what's going on. [*They do.*]

TIM *staggering to his feet and going to shake some of the others*

Come on, everyone. Show me you're all right. That last explosion was pretty terrible

but not that bad surely? I know I'm not very good at that spell yet.

SPIFF *sits up, rubbing head*

Some spell, Tim.

JEZ *also sitting up*

Yeah. Next time I suggest you try it out on a few of your enemies instead of your friends.

TIM

Sorry. Let's wake the others up. Jamie, Oliver, Craig.

JAMIE, OLIVER, CRAIG

Here!

JAMIE

Feeling a little dazed, but here I think.

OLIVER

We're not in the spellroom any more though.

CRAIG

No, we're not. It looks as though we're in the library.

TIM

The library? Great. I've wanted to get in here for ages but it's been out of bounds ever since I've been at the school.

CRAIG *looking round*

Can't think why. It looks a perfectly ordinary library to me.

JEZ

Except the books, perhaps, look even older than I expected.

SPIFF

They smell too.

JAMIE

Fusty and dusty.

TIM

No, just magic. I bet there are spell-books here that go back to the first wizards and magicians long ago...

EXTRACT SIX

STAR-TREK STYLE SCENE

A humming sound starts, machine like. In the darkness, a desk with starship controls is brought on.

MICKO *as the lights come slowly up*

Can you hear that noise?

BULLET

What? Oh - that, yeah, now you mention it, I can.

MICKO

Well, what is it?

BULLET

Oh, who knows in a school at night? The central heating? A boiler? Something like that, I expect.

Suddenly the lights snap full up and we are on the flight deck of the Starship Dazzle. Behind the desk are Lieutenant Bright, and Mr Gin. Standing are Captain Glitter, Dr. Spark and Mr Dong. Micko and Bullet hide.

CAPTAIN G

Starship Dazzle to Mission Control. We now have the whole galaxy of Solar Three under our control. Where do you want us to go next?

LIEUT. BRIGHT

No answer from Mission Control, Captain. Just a strange swishing noise.

DR SPARK

Most peculiar. It sounds like the static that Earth radios used to suffer from. Permission to investigate further?

CAPTAIN

Permission not granted. Any investigation of Mission Control from us would be out of order.

DR. SPARK

Very well, Captain, but I think you are wrong. We have been trying to reach Mission Control for some hours now.

CAPTAIN

I know, and it makes me feel so useless, travelling through space with no particular purpose.

LIEUT. BRIGHT

We could treat it as a holiday, sir. The men could do with a break and it's many years since we had one.

DR SPARK

This human need for holidays is beyond my understanding. Now *my* people would fall apart without work. A holiday would upset their routine so much that they'd all have nervous breakdowns.

CAPTAIN

Does that mean you'd have a nervous breakdown if we took a break till Mission Control was back in touch?

DR SPARK

Of course not. I have more self-control than that.

LIEUT BRIGHT *muttering under breath*

What a shame!

MR GIN *who has a high robotic voice*

Captain, Captain! I have readings of something approaching the ship very fast on the port side.

CAPTAIN

Can you get a fix on it?

MR GIN

No, it's moving too fast.

CAPTAIN

Mr Dong?

MR DONG *who speaks in a low metallic monotone. He follows the line of his nose, as if seeing through the end of it. It is long and red.*

Three beings. Not human. Look human. Move fast.

LIEUT BRIGHT

Does he mean they're moving fast or that we should move fast?

DR SPARK

Hard to tell. You see, Uranians don't form their words in the same way as us, and because they see through their noses ...

CAPTAIN

All right, all right, thank you, Dr Spark. What's the position now, Mr Gin?

MR GIN

Creatures will make contact with Starship Dazzle in approximately 4 seconds.

LIEUT. BRIGHT

One ... two ... three....[*They all rock as if the starship is hit*] Contact made, Captain.

CAPTAIN

Clearly. Mr Dong, go and investigate...

EXTRACT SEVEN

BULLET

It's all right. We saved you.

DONG

Brave boys. Smell nice. Good boys. Stay here?

MICKO

No. I want to go home. I've had enough for one night.

BULLET

Yes, but how?

DR SPARK

You can't go yet. There's so much to ask you. Like how did you get here?

Enter the Monk

MONK

Another time. I've come to take them home.

BULLET & MICKO

Who are you?

MONK

Never mind that. You're safe with me.

CAPTAIN

Another alien. How did you enter the starship without the alarm going off?

MONK

It's easy for me. I come and go as I please.

DONG

Very strange. No smell. Nose ill? Can't tell.

CAPTAIN

We really must see to the ship's defences. We can't have any old person just coming in as they please.

DR SPARK

Quite. Mr Gin will see to it. He's Chief Engineer. Meanwhile, may I suggest all holiday is cancelled? We have a mission.

CAPTAIN

Indeed, we do. To save Mission Control from the power of the swizzlers.

MONK

Let's leave them to it. Take my hands, Bullet and Micko. Now. Beam us up. We're going back.

MICKO

Home? To my bed?

MONK

No. To the library.

Lights fade and up again. Boys asleep as before. Bullet and Micko centre stage.

MICKO

Where's that man gone?

BULLET

I don't know. [*He is looking at Micko and smiling*] You know, Micko, you're all right really. You were very brave back there.

MICKO

Not as brave as you.

BULLET

Thanks, but I didn't feel brave.

MICKO

Nor me. I'm glad we're back safe. Even if it is the horrible old library. [*Looks at watch*] It's very late. Better wake Crispin and Ant.

BULLET

O.K.

THE KING ARTHUR -STYLE STORY

Lights fade and up on Crispin and Ant on front of stage.

CRISPIN

So. It's all down to us. No one's seen the ghost yet so if he's going to appear it'll be us who see him.

ANT

I'm scared.

CRISPIN

Don't be. Ghosts can't hurt us, you know.

ANT

Are you sure? What about those poltergeist films?

CRISPIN

That's just make-believe. I don't think real ghosts are very interested in live people.

ANT

I hope you're right. [*enter Cuthbert the Cowardly*] Er ... Crispin. [*stammering*] L- L- L- Look!

CRISPIN

Oh.

ANT

Is it, you know, the ghost?

CRISPIN

I'm not sure. Doesn't look like a monk. Better go over here till we're sure.

He pulls Ant to side where they hide.

SIR CUTHBERT

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dearie me. They'll be here any minute and what am I going to tell them? I've failed again ... Who's that?

Enter Idle Jack

IDLE JACK

Hello, there, are you one of King Arthur's knights?

SIR CUTHBERT

I am.

IDLE JACK

Oh good, because I've come to learn to be a knight too. I'm quite good with the sword already, though I haven't got one of my own yet, of course. Only this stick. Look - [*He draws stick from belt and moves in to 'attack' Cuthbert, who doesn't draw but jumps back.*]

IDLE JACK

How can I prove my swordmanship if you won't fight me?

CUTHBERT

I don't like fighting.

IDLE JACK

Don't like ...? Well, honestly, call yourself a knight? Are they all like you because if so, I'm going home. Perhaps looking after my mother would be better after all.

SIR CUTHBERT

It's all right. They're not all like me. I believe I'm quite unusual. If you stick around, you'll meet the others any minute. In fact, I think I can hear them coming now.

Hubbub off and enter all six other knights squabbling. They carry an ordinary rectangular table and a couple of benches.

SIR HORACE THE HORRIBLE

This is where we agreed to have the meeting, so set it down here.

SIR MAURICE THE MAD

Says who?

SIR HORACE

Says me.

SIR BORIS THE BOLD

And if that's not enough, says me too. Want to fight both of us?

Sir Maurice looks from one to the other of them and backs down.

SIR PRANCELOT

Well, I don't see why we can't have our meeting in the hall like the other knights.

SIR BORIS

I told you. With Arthur and the Round Table Knights away on a quest, no one is allowed to use the Round Table.

SIR SWINGALOT

Why not?

SIR CRINGEALOT

I suppose it might get scratched or something.

SIR CUTHBERT

It's because it's a symbol.

SIR HORACE

A what?

SIR BORIS

I wasn't aware anyone asked you.

SIR MAURICE

But since you have spoken, explain yourself.

SIR CUTHBERT

The Round Table is a symbol of unity and harmony and we haven't earned a place at it yet.

SIR SWINGALOT

That's easily settled. One or two knights are bound to die on this quest and then it'll be our turn.

SIR CUTHBERT

I wouldn't count on it. Let's face it, we're only second string knights.

SIR HORACE

You might be because you're such a coward, but we're certainly not. Look at how many dragons I killed last year.

SIR MAURICE

And I killed that horrible Cornish giant.

SIR BORIS

And I freed the county of Kent from the Sevenoaks[*insert local county and town*] ogre.

ALL THREE

So we're certainly not second string...

EXTRACT EIGHT

At that moment, a loud knocking at the door. A loud voice through the microphone. It is the Monk.

MONK

Here am I, Cadlan, a restless spirit. Who will challenge me?

ALL KNIGHTS EXCEPT CUTHBERT *eagerly*

I will.

MONK

No, no, I seek young knights, whose hearts are innocent and whose hands have not yet shed blood.

IDLE JACK

Me?

MONK

Is your heart innocent and ready for adventure?

IDLE JACK

What do you think, Sir Cuthbert?

MONK

I seek two young souls. Find them for me, or my anger will be terrible to behold.

SIR CRINGEALOT

I don't like the sound of that.

MONK

Where are those two boys I seek? Come out, come out, wherever you are.

ALL KNIGHTS

What can he mean?

CRISPIN *emerging and pulling Ant with him*

I think he means us. [*Ant gulps*]

SIR PRANCELOT

What are they? [*He climbs up on table.*] Do they bite?

SIR SWINGALOT

A new type of dragon?

SIR BORIS

Rather small for that, aren't they?

SIR HORACE

And I don't see any flames. Shouldn't flames come from their nostrils?

SIR MAURICE

A very puny kind of dragon, I call them, if that's what they are. Perhaps they're baby giants?

SIR BORIS

Don't be absurd! How can giants be small like these?

SIR CRINGEALOT

I suppose even giants must be babies at some time.

SIR BORIS

Oh really! [*He stumps off to sit down.*]

IDLE JACK

I think I know exactly what they are. They're boys just like me.

SIR CUTHBERT

Of course they are. And frightened too, by the looks of them. Sit down, boys.

They do. All stand around and stare at them. The Monk has entered during this and suddenly stands on the table behind the boys. It would be nice if he had a throat mike so that his voice still boomed.

MONK

Aha! [*Everyone jumps*] Crispin and Antony I presume.

BOTH BOYS

Y-Y-Y-Yes.

ANT

Ant, usually.

MONK

What are you doing here?

SIR BORIS

Yes, we want to know that too. And we still haven't established what they are.

SIR HORACE

Can we fight them?

SIR MAURICE

Can we chop off their heads?

MONK

No you certainly cannot. These two boys are why I am here. Crispin, Ant, I repeat: what are you doing here?

CRISPIN

Well, you see, it's a very long story.

SIR PRANCELOT

Oooh goodie, I love stories.

SIR CRINGEALOT

Let's sit down. It's far better for listening. [*They do.*]

CRISPIN

We were in this library.....

ANT

In the middle of the night

CRISPIN

And we were looking for a ghost.

From here on the lights start to fade very gradually...

MONK

A ghost? What sort of a ghost?

ANT

Well, a monk I think.

CRISPIN

We think it was the librarian perhaps, from long ago when the school was a monastery.

By now the lights have gone to blackout. The Monk's voice comes through the darkness.

MONK

And the Monk loved books above all things. Books, and the education of boys, in which he believed passionately. He has taken an interest ever since, in books, in boys, and is pleased, very pleased to meet you. [*The last words are like an echo, again using the microphone, that dies away.*] Take care of yourselves all of you. Take care. Goodbye.

In the blackout, all the other boys are back. They are sitting up, rubbing their eyes as the lights come back up. Banging and noise out in the passage. Adult voices on the microphone: 'Ant? Are you in there?' 'Micko, I've been so worried,' etc.]...

EXTRACT from Production Notes

PRODUCTION NOTES +TECHNICAL CUES ETC.

INTRODUCTION: THEMES, THE PLAY'S INTENTIONS.

The play was written as a vehicle for a whole year group - Year 6 - in a preparatory school originally. It could equally well be done by Year 7. The brief was to give everyone of 55 boys an enjoyable speaking part and to allow individual forms to rehearse separately. Thus the format emerged of separate stories within a framework. The linking framework of the Ghosthunting boys were drawn from the best actors of the year regardless of individual forms and were rehearsed outside lesson time. The class scenes, however, could be rehearsed in lesson slots. This format, rehearsal-wise, worked very well. Boys were never hanging about getting bored and the play could be put together as a whole in the last couple of days before performance.

It was written for an extremely tiny stage with limited technical resources, so lighting and other technical cues are kept to a minimum - though if you have better technical equipment, of course, it also lends itself to some stunning special effects. In the breakdown of cues, I have given the original ones used, but also optional imaginative extras which would improve the finished product considerably.

There is nothing very deep about the play's intentions. It is largely a piece of fun. Nonetheless, certain themes creep in without being over-emphasised. Good always wins of course. The bully Micko toes the line by the end and earns the respect of the other boys. Mad Max and his henchman Brains are outwitted by 999 with the help of two boys. Mr Wagstaffe is outwitted as is the Swizzleseller and Idle Jack learns that being a knight is not really about killing dragons and suchlike, but about courtesy and caring. The Ghosthunters themselves are always rescued from their various plights by the intervention of the very ghost they are hunting - the Monk; but perhaps their punishment is ironically never to recognise him and to leave with their anxious parents at the end of their vigil convinced they never saw the ghost at all.

CHARACTERS.

JACK - a natural leader, charismatic and brave - though perhaps too impulsive and rash. The others look up to him. He has authority and certainty.

JOHNNY - his best friend. Not quite so charismatic but far more sensible. He does occasionally puncture Jack's too impulsive balloon.

FRED - likes his food. He could be - but doesn't have to be - plump.

CHARLES - very upper-crust voice and mannerisms. Father owns a newspaper. Confident character.

COPPER - very enthusiastic. The kind of boy that is carried away easily, interrupts, speaks quickly, impulsive.

BULLET - good sportsman, strong and athletic build. Very protective of Ant and against bullying. Takes such things personally and tries to sort them out himself. Brave.

ANT - must be physically small. Easily scared but quickly reassured by presence of protectors. Not a wimp - he stands up to the frightening Monk, for instance. Likeable.

CRISPIN - the boffin of the group. Very well-read and clever, with a tendency to use long words. Very much an individual, used to defending his likes and not reliant on anyone.

BARNEY - not very bright academically but a warm-hearted, thoroughly nice boy. A good sense of right and wrong. May be sporty and big in stature.

MICKO - the bully. A large chip on his shoulder, which may explain why he bullies smaller boys like Ant. He should speak with an accent that is stronger than any of the others. Perhaps he comes from a poorer family - he certainly envies the others. Care must be taken not to make him too dislikeable at the beginning, because he must develop during the course of the play.

THE MONK - is of course the ghost they are all hunting. Needs to be both mysterious and authoritative. Speech slow and commanding. Movements also slow and strong.

ALL THE ABOVE CHARACTERS ARE USED THROUGHOUT THE PLAY. THEY CANNOT BE DOUBLED.

THOSE BELOW ARE INTENTIONALLY CARICATURED AND CAN BE DOUBLED IF DESIRED. Here follow brief descriptive handles on them.

THE PIRATE SCENE:

FOX - Second-in-command to Red Admiral. Might be quite bright if given a chance by Red. Perhaps a class above him shown through better speech.

RED ADMIRAL - vain and stupid. Shouts a lot.

CHOPPER - stupid and tough. Brawn not brains. Red Admiral's man.

YELLER - stupid and cowardly. Red Admiral's Man

NASTY - as his name. Black Bart's man.

MUSCLES - very very stupid. Black Bart's man.

THICKO - ditto. Black Bart's man.

PRUNEFACE - ditto. Black Bart's man.

BLACK BART - Red Admiral's chief rival and captain of the other pirate ship. A nifty

way with alliterative language! Speaks well - upper class accent. Swaggering walk. Hand flourishes.

THE 007-STYLE SPY SCENE

JOE COOL a 'goodie' but inept spy. Much looking over the shoulder and skulking around.

AL PACKER - ditto

999 [double nine nine]- needs to be packed with as many 007 mannerisms as possible. A clone of 007, without the girl problem!! Super cool manner, stance and drawling voice.

MAD MAX [MM - double M] - strong foreign accent. As his name suggests, madness is always bubbling below the surface. Many of his speeches need to have him rising from his chair, voice hysterical, eyes rolling and perhaps with some other tic to show his imminent loss of control. Brains is able to soothe him, as is stroking his pet guinea-pig.

THUG - supposedly a bad guy, working for Mad Max, but surprisingly soft-hearted. Practical no-nonsense type.

AMMO - physically a little weaker than Thug, but also sensible and courageous. Also supposedly a bad guy - with a soft streak.

BRAINS - as his name suggests, the real power behind Mad Max, who he keeps under control - just. Should be played very exaggeratedly upper-crust, with careful pronunciation of all his words. Precise and dangerous. Voice, as well as posh, should be silky and sinister. Actions and stance based on those of a butler. Could be a little camp.

THE HARRY POTTER-STYLE SCENE

TIM - the Harry Potter parody, still practising his spells - he doesn't always get it right. However, liked and respected by most of those with him.

SPIFF - just another typical boy

JEZ - ditto

JAMIE - ditto

OLIVER - becomes invisible with Kevin. Rather childish and selfish

CRAIG - another boy, quick-thinking.

GREMLIN 1 - nasty little creature, stooped and scuttling. It is short-sighted and uses smell instead, so actor should sniff exaggeratedly and look as though he is following his nose not his eyes. Speaks in a high 'witchy' sort of voice. Squabbles with his friend a lot, which involves leaping at him and rolling around on the floor, scrabbling with the hands and feet.

GREMLIN 2 - as above.

MR WAGSTAFFE - the baddie. The Dream teacher at Grindlescoop Hall. Wants to become Headmaster and use the talented boys who would then be at his disposal for his own power-seeking ends. Needs to be authoritative and come over as 'adult' in contrast to the boys. Speaks with some passion about his dreams - and we can see that this passion is beginning to turn his brain.

KEVIN - throughout most of the scene he is invisible. Needs to be acted well to be convincing. He is a plucky individual, likeable and feisty.

THE STAR-TREK STYLE SCENE

CAPTAIN GLITTER - based on Captain Kirk rather than Patrick Stewart, but either model will do. Speaks with great certainty and authority. Stands braced and firm. Irritated by Doctor Spark.

LIEUTENANT BRIGHT - eager sidekick. Often confused by the aliens around him. Keen 'bright' voice and mannerisms.

DOCTOR SPARK - based on Doctor Spock, but more ponderous. A know-it-all who has to have his say, whatever. Drives everyone mad.

MR DONG - an alien with a long red nose. speaks in a low metallic monotone. Cannot string sentences together so his words are very cryptic and often open to misinterpretation. Needs an alien way of moving, perhaps slow and ponderous to match his slow gruff voice.

MR GIN - a green alien with a high robotic voice. Speaks fast and excitably. Movements should also be fast and jerky.

THE SWIZZLESELLER - a con-man, who must come over very much as the charming showman. Tends to speak like a salesman - very emphatic and enthusiastic about his product. Movements showman-like too - flourishes and poses.

HURLY - the Swizzleseller's sidekicks. Also given to circus-like flourishes. When not performing, behaves like a sulky bad-tempered kid.

BURLY - ditto

PRIVATE FIZZ - rather naive and not very bright, but awfully enthusiastic

PRIVATE RAY - vain and also not very bright. Thinks he's clever, but he's not.

THE KING ARTHUR -STYLE SCENE

SIR SWINGALOT - all the knights except Cuthbert are pretty well interchangeable. They are not really bad, just a little over-enthusiastic and full of bluster. A lot of shouting and grimacing and strong gestures like shaking fists, banging fists on tables, and so on.

SIR CRINGEALOT as above

SIR PRANCEALOT - a favourite with the ladies! Could be a little more effeminate than the others.

SIR BORIS THE BOLD - as Sir Swingalot

SIR MAURICE THE MAD - ditto

SIR HORACE THE HORRIBLE - ditto

SIR CUTHBERT THE COWARDLY - clearly a cut above the others. His power is with words and ideas, not brawn like the others - who don't respect him because their whole ethos is the power of the sword. His manner is polite and pleasant. He can be firm when he knows he's right.

IDLE JACK - a bumptious boy - should be physically smaller than the others if possible. Wants to be a hero but lacks the 'courtesy' that Cuthbert says he needs. Is put down a peg or two during the scene, but still remains enthusiastic and bright-voiced. Agile movements.

Though written for all boys, there are many characters here that could equally well be girls - or it could even all be done by girls. Why not?