

# **BUILDER**

## **By Alan Haehnel**

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## CHARACTERS

BUILDER

POMP

CYNIC

FLASH

## CASTING NOTE

The characters of Pomp, Cynic and Flash can be played by multiple actors. That is, rather than casting one actor to play Pomp, a director might opt to cast three actors as the Pompous Group. Pomp's lines would then be divided between these actors. Rather than referring to himself as "I," anyone in the Pompous Group would refer to his group as "we." Other slight changes in the script could be made to accommodate this casting decision. Thus, "Builder" may have a cast of between four and 13 characters. Builder should always be played by a single actor. All roles can be played by either gender.

## PROP LIST

Rapier  
Blue paper airplane  
Hammer  
Loaf of bread  
Pitcher of water

## BUILDER

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*At Rise: The curtain opens very slowly to the sound of wind. After the curtain is completely opened, the lights come up gradually to reveal the stage. The setting is chaotic and rugged. Boulders, boards, blocks, timbers, and other such materials are scattered and piled over the entire stage, high and low. There is not much color--just the grays and browns of natural rubble. In many places, the debris is piled into crosses of varied sizes.*

*After a moment, BUILDER appears. HE is dressed in a plain white tee shirt and dark blue jeans. From behind a block, as if rising from sleep, HE gets up slowly, surveying the scene. HE moves carefully to each corner of the stage, studying his surroundings as HE goes. Finally, HE stands slightly right of center stage on a block, makes one final appraisal of the scene, takes a deep breath, and sets to his task. BUILDER, during this play, builds. HE sets to work making a shelter out of the rubble. HE works economically, not expending unnecessary effort, but also quickly. The shelter, when finished, is actually only three walls. The fourth wall and the roof are implied so the audience can see into the hut.*

*As BUILDER goes about his business, the other three characters soon to follow constitute his main obstacle. They are constantly standing or sitting in his way, but HE works around them patiently.*

*Not all of the materials on-stage are used for the shelter, but BUILDER does dismantle all of the crosses as HE goes.*

*Appears CYNIC. HE is dressed in Elizabethan garb and carries a rapier in front of him for protection. HE checks out his surroundings quickly, notices BUILDER, and moves to him, placing his foot on the board BUILDER is about to use.*

CYNIC: (*indicating the set*) Hey, tell me something. What is all this?

BUILDER: Rubble.

CYNIC: Brilliant. I see, sir, that you have a keen grasp of the obvious.

BUILDER: Thank-you.

CYNIC: Thank-you? No, no, that's not right at all, my friend. You're supposed to come back with something really witty and callous like, "Oh, yeah?" (*BUILDER moves away, still intent on his labors. CYNIC follows.*) Look, let's try another tack, shall we? Who are you?

BUILDER: A man.

CYNIC: Oh, you are good; yes, you really are. Is that it, a man? Well, I sincerely thank you for your insight and valuable information. I mean, I really was confused. When I first came on the scene I could've sworn this was the Taj Mahal and that you were a rare white rhinoceros. But I see it now! This is rubble, and you are a man! Thank-you, oh, thank-you!

BUILDER: You're welcome.

CYNIC: Absolutely perfect. (**HE watches BUILDER for a moment.**) And just what are you doing?

BUILDER: Building.

CYNIC: (**falling down in mock worship**) Of course, of course! Oh, forgive me, great wise one, for even asking, but you know, I was so very disoriented at first. I mean, I came here and saw you and thought, "Here's a man building out of rubble." But I couldn't be sure of that, no. Who can trust their own eyes, after all? I really needed you to verify things. How did you come to be so perceptive?

**(Appears POMP in a judge's robe and wig. His gestures are expansive and self-important, his every phrase seeming--to him--to be the last word necessary.)**

POMP: (**strolling through the rubble, enjoying the sound of his own voice**)

Ah, rubble, confusion, chaos, disorder. This is life, indeed, the natural tendency of all things towards entropy. Puny individuals battle with their ineffective might all their lives, only to continue to run into the irrevocable wall of law in the universe. They thrash against it until they expire, their final breath gasping, "I must make order; I must create order." The futility of it all! No single human downfall could equal the pathos of this universal tragedy. No analogy can begin to envelope the scope of our miserable... (**HE runs into BUILDER who has placed a block in his path, which POMP knocks over clumsily.**) Oh, for crying out loud, who put that...? (**seeing BUILDER**) Ah, a fellow creature of fate. Who are you?

CYNIC: (**to BUILDER**) No, no, let me tell him, great wise one! (**to POMP**) I have just been given the inside scoop from Mr. Marvelous here. This, King Stuffed Shirt, is a man. Fancy that. And all around is rubble. And finally, the most astounding fact of all...this man is building!

POMP: (**to BUILDER**) Have you nothing to say?

BUILDER: It is as he says.

POMP: Ah, I see you are one of the agreeable ones, leading a simple existence, claiming perhaps even happiness when there is no such commodity, really. Ignorance is truly bliss for you, my halcyon friend, and admittedly I occasionally wish that I could be your companion on a cloud of non-thought. But such is the curse of knowledge, that one must leave youth behind.

CYNIC: (**poking around in the rubble**) Such is the curse of ears, that one must listen to you.

**(HE takes his rapier and lifts POMP's robe.)**

POMP: What are you doing, you filthy scoundrel?

CYNIC: Looking for food, wind-bag.

POMP: Well, I haven't any, so do desist from harassing my person.

CYNIC: "Desist from harassing my person"? You know, if you could eat your words, you'd never go hungry.

POMP: You realize, my poor boy, that you are no better than he. (**indicating BUILDER**) You also are caged and protected, hoping that your tasteless wit

can fend off pain. I truly wish you success, for no more men than is absolutely necessary should have to carry my burden--the weighty load of being destined to fathom the deepest chasms of man's atrocities to find that he is no more than an animal. **(to himself)** Fathom, chasm. That wasn't half bad.

CYNIC: One ignoramus, one jackass with verbal diarrhea and no food. How much more fun can I stand?

**(Appears FLASH with a squeal of delight, rushing around stage, beginning one little project after another.)**

FLASH: Opportunity galore!

CYNIC: Yippee, skippy.

FLASH: **(trying to build)** I'll set this on this, and this here, but no! **(HE moves on to something else.)** Here's something better! I'll put this beside this, and maybe if I break this... **(HE tries to break a board and hurts himself.)** Ow! Ooh, ow! That's not fair! I quit!

**(HE goes off in a corner and sulks.)**

CYNIC: **(to POMP)** He's with you, right?

POMP: I claim no affiliation with that individual, nor with you, beyond the fact that we are both of the same unfortunate species.

CYNIC: That's questionable.

**(FLASH has come from his corner and is admiring BUILDER's handiwork.)**

FLASH: Oh, say, that's good; that's very good! How did you do that?

BUILDER: Just as I am doing now.

FLASH: I see. I see! Sure, like that, and like that, and this to that. Yes, yes, I could do it, I could, I could! **(HE begins to build.)** This to that, and that on top of here. I'll make this just like yours, and maybe even better! This here. No, that isn't right. This over here. That's not it either! Oh, yours looks better! No fair! **(HE walks over and angrily kicks at BUILDER's work, but a block falls on him.)** Oh! Oh, I quit! I tried, but he's cheating!

CYNIC: **(still searching for food)** What a wimp.

POMP: Yes, another of the unfortunates: constantly beginning, never finishing. Of course, logical thought tells one there is no such thing as true completion, for such would be a type of perfection, which is an incomprehensible illusion. To begin with hopes of finishing, then, is only a route to failure. Failure must be justified, however, which justification brings about the appearance of spineless men: wimps.

CYNIC: I just said that.

POMP: But not with the proper introduction.

CYNIC: Look, you dirigible, I'm hungry...

FLASH: Hungry!

CYNIC: ...we're all hungry and therefore irritable so if you don't close your yap, I'm going to properly introduce you to the business end of this sword!

POMP: Threats are simply the tools of weak minds that cannot do battle on intellectual fronts. **(CYNIC pokes him.)** Cut it out, you little pig!

***(A very loud and brief trumpet fanfare sounds; a light flashes. All look up and around except BUILDER, who pays only slight attention and then continues his task. At the end of the fanfare, a blue paper airplane floats onto the set from above. FLASH scurries to catch it. HE unfolds it.)***

FLASH: A message!

CYNIC: Well, read it, if you can.

POMP: With feeling!

FLASH: "Build!"

CYNIC: Don't scream, for crying out loud.

FLASH: Well, it's just the one word, yes, just one word, the word "build" with an exclamation point after it. A shouting period. "Build!"

CYNIC: ***(poking the message with his rapier)*** Give me that, you hyena. Well, he can read at least, but I don't trust the punctuation on this thing. As far as I'm concerned, exclamation points are just question marks somebody got fanatic with.

***(HE takes out a pencil and begins to erase the punctuation.)***

POMP: ***(grabbing the paper away)*** Just a moment! Allow me to peruse that document before you begin your desecrations. Ah, yes, it does indeed say "build," and that emphatically, to our understanding. But then, one must be cognizant of the fact that words are merely symbols, subject to the whim and intentions of the writer. Now, for instance, this is written in rather bold script which might indicate that our author was deliberately overcompensating in order to cover a blatant untruth. I would interpret this as actually meaning, "Don't build!" Of course, I wouldn't impose my logic on everyone, for most are not sufficiently developed to receive it. I would merely amend this to read, "Build, if and only if you are quite certain that the idiosyncrasies of the script are of less significance than the apparent message, which is, itself, hardly reliable." In fact, out of a keen sense of duty, I think I should make that amendment legible as soon as possible.

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