

AN EMPEROR EXPOSED

By Dean Dyer

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SYNOPSIS: New Topia is a country ahead of its time. King Joseph IV, Joe to his subjects, believes in a society without separation of classes. This way of life is working well until the arrival of Dardalus, a conman posing as a royal consultant. With the help of his beautiful accomplice, Vashti, the king's own haughty and corrupt sister, Crazella, and her idiotic twin sons, Dardalus wreaks havoc on New Topia, scaring people into giving up their freedom and driving out the king's beloved, Eleanor. Despite warnings from Theresa, "the dumb prophet of New Topia," Dardalus convinces the king that there are traitors in New Topia. He persuades the king to don "magical robes" that can only be seen by those truly loyal to New Topia in order to find these traitors. Join Joe, Dardalus, Theresa, and the rest of the kingdom for an exciting and adventurous new take on one of history's most loved fables.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(9 MEN, 12 WOMEN)

DARDALUS.....	International con man, aka Sir Robert of Hampshire. (145 lines)
IMA HAGG.....	Old spinster teacher, member of Joe's "brain trust." (46 lines)
YORA HAGG.....	Old spinster teacher, member of Joe's "brain trust." (44 lines)
HOOSA HAGG.....	Old spinster teacher, member of Joe's "brain trust." (43 lines)
TERESA S.....	The Dumb Prophet of New Topia, interacts with audience. (44 lines)
JOE.....	King Joseph IV, ruler of New Topia, romantic lead. (84 lines)
MINERVA.....	Queen Mother, voice of reason, plays bridge with Hagg. (31 lines)
GWENDOLYN.....	Joe's daughter, secretly engaged to Eric. (17 lines)

ERIC	Young lumberjack/soldier, secretly engaged to Gwendolyn. (24 lines)
GUS	Old man, palace guard, can double with Ivan. (6 lines)
MABEL	Gus' wife, another guard, can double with Berta. (3 lines)
ELEANOR.....	Joe's love interest, common woman, romantic lead. (35 lines)
ELDRED.....	One of Crazella's "twin" sons, barks like a dog at times. (41 lines)
MORDRED.....	The other twin. (33 lines)
CRAZELLA.....	Joe's sister, craves the typical benefits of royalty. (43 lines)
VASHTI.....	Dardalus' female crime partner aka Sasha and Duchess. (28 lines)
THOMAS.....	Overly enthusiastic young soldier, can double with Ivan. (5 lines)
GERTRUDE	Ill tempered, semi-competent scribe, can double with Berta. (9 lines)
BERTA	Eleanor's aunt, can double with Gertrude. (17 lines)
IVAN	Eleanor's uncle, can double with Gus or George. (12 lines)
GEORGE R. WELL.....	Reclusive, cynical farmer, can double with Ivan. (7 lines)

SETTING

Four simple sets are needed. The palace is defined by a stone wall, broken up with archways, a small table, a couple of chairs, a throne, and for the final scene, a podium or raised platform with a waist-high wall around it. The countryside scenes can be played in front of a daytime backdrop or just a curtain with a few plants and trees. One tree needs to be of sufficient size to hide a character. Crazella's cottage should be a sparse, dingy area defined by a few chairs and a couple flats or other furniture to represent a room. Finally, the kitchen of Eleanor's Aunt Berta and Uncle Ivan needs a door that opens and can be barred, a table, and three chairs. As a suggestion, a reversible flat on a rolling platform could serve as the back wall for both Crazella's cottage and Berta and Ivan's kitchen.

ACT ONE

Scene 1: The countryside of New Topia, morning.

Scene 2: The same spot in the countryside, early that same afternoon.

Scene 3: Crazella's cottage, evening of the same day

Scene 4: The palace, the following morning.

Scene 5: The countryside, early that same afternoon.

Scene 6: Crazella's cottage, that same evening.

Scene 7: The palace, early morning, a few days later.

ACT TWO

Scene 1: The palace, the next day.

Scene 2: Aunt Berta and Uncle Ivan's house in Oldenstein, the following morning

Scene 3: The palace, several days later, late morning

Scene 4: Crazella's cottage, later that same evening.

Scene 5: Aunt Berta and Uncle Ivan's house in Oldenstein, the following morning

Scene 6: The palace, the same morning and afternoon.

PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES:

ON STAGE

The most elaborate set is the palace meeting hall. It is also the most dynamic, as some subtle and not-so-subtle changes occur with the changing political climate in New Topia. In the first act, the small, simple down center table and chairs serve as the focus for much of the action, highlighting Joe's accessibility and openness. In Act Two, Scene 1, the table and chairs have been moved to up right, near the wall, no longer prominent. In Act Two, Scene 3, they are gone altogether, replaced by the throne and a plush chair next to it (taken from Gus and Mabel). Gus and Mabel's plush chairs have been replaced with the simple chairs from the table. In Act Two, Scene 6, the podium dominates the stage, and should be absurdly ornate and quite tall.

The outdoor sets in Act One, Scenes 1, 2 and 5 can be very simple. A scenic backdrop is desirable, but just some vegetation, rocks, logs, etc. can define the space. A tree large enough to hide a character is needed at stage right, and a couple of flowers that can be picked from the floor are also necessary.

The remaining sets are the interiors of Crazella's cottage and Ivan and Berta's kitchen. They can easily be built on opposite sides of the same flats and rotated as needed. Ivan and Berta's home should have a door that visibly opens and can be barred, but sound effects can be used to keep the door off stage. Simple tables and chairs are needed in both sets, and can also be exchanged by using a different tablecloth, etc.

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BROUGHT ON

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Walking stick for Ima, cane for Dardalus.

Scene 2: None

Scene 3: Toys soldiers for Mordred and Eldred, cane for Dardalus.

Scene 4: Knitting for Mabel, scroll and feather pen for Gertrude, walking stick for Ima, cane for Dardalus.

Scene 5: Dagger for Vashti, cane for Dardalus.

Scene 6: Wig/duchess costume for Vashti, cane for Dardalus, toy soldiers for Mordred, Eldred.

Scene 7: Knitting for Mabel, scroll and feather pen for Gertrude, walking stick for Ima, cane for Dardalus.

ACT TWO

Scene 1: Knitting for Mabel, scroll and feather pen for Gertrude, walking stick for Ima, swords/shields for soldiers.

Scene 2: Suitcase for Eleanor, dinnerware, club for Ivan.

Scene 3: Knitting for Mabel, scroll and feather pen for Gertrude, walking stick for Ima, swords for Mordred, Eldred.

Scene 4: Carpetbag for Vashti, cane for Dardalus, toy soldiers for Mordred.

Scene 5: Bucket and rag for Eleanor, dinnerware, mug, club for Ivan, sword for Eric.

Scene 6: Knitting for Mabel, scroll and feather pen for Gertrude, walking stick for Ima, swords for soldiers, blanket brought on by Minerva, fake soldier brought on by Eleanor.

SOUND:

Only a couple of door knocks, which can be done on stage. Some classical, medieval-sounding music before show and during intermission can add to the atmosphere.

CASTING:

Mordred and Eldred should be as different in size and appearance as possible to magnify the “twin” joke. The Hagg sisters should be at least fairly similar in appearance, made up to look very old, and should try to develop individual personalities for their characters (Hoosa is the “dominant” sister, and should probably be bigger/taller). George R. Well and Uncle Ivan can be played by the same actor or can be used as extras in palace scenes. Ivan and Thomas could also be doubled. Character descriptions listed earlier should be helpful for the rest of the cast.

COSTUMES:

Most of the costumes should have a medieval appearance, basically simple peasant wear, although some license can certainly be taken in this mythical kingdom with the Hagg sisters and others. After her revelation in Act One, Scene 3, that she can “see” the audience, Teresa S. can sport a few items from the future: a Yankees cap, brightly colored sneakers, etc. Joe should start out in simple costume, then move into more flamboyantly royal outfits in Act Two, including a crown. Vashti should look seductive, dangerous, and definitely exotic to New Topia. Tight leather thigh high boots with heels and a shorter, belted robe should work for her basic costume, with a grand dress and wig for her Duchess Willemina guise and a black, hooded robe for her “old crone” costume. As Sasha the Mystical Seamstress, a belly dancer look would be appropriate. If the heeled boots remain under the duchess and crone costumes, it will help the audience to identify her. Mordred and Eldred should wear helmets throughout, first blue and red “second-hand” appearing ones, then ones that match the other soldiers. As indicated in Act Two, Scene 3, they should get grander uniforms with medals, pins, etc., for the remainder of the show.

ACCENTS:

Dialogue was written with the intent of using British accents for the New Topians (don't miss the Monty Python ambience), but it is not necessary. Ivan and Berta should have decidedly "foreign" accents, something Slavic possibly, and Vashti should also sound more exotic, since she is said to be from Persia in her Sasha guise.

MISCELLANEOUS:

The Hags need to find a happy balance between one-upping each other quickly with synonyms and allowing the audience to hear them and respond. It should seem that they really enjoy this verbal jousting. Joe should pay attention to political speeches (Barack Obama would be a great model) for his long missives expounding the principles of New Topia. Extras can add a lot of dimension with their cheers, chants, and other reactions during the palace scenes, and it fits with the script that they would be primarily female, as the men are "off to war."

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An Emperor Exposed was first presented by the Western High School Theatre Arts Department on November 6, 7 and 8, 2008, at the Western Community Arts Center auditorium. Both an evening show and a matinee were performed on the 8th, making a total of four performances.

ORIGINAL CAST

DARDALUS	Tyler Akeo
IMA HAGG.....	Kelsey McCracken
YORA HAGG	Amanda Trudell
HOOSA HAGG.....	Maggie Lapp
TERESA S.....	Abbie Godmair
JOE.....	Benn Zerull
MINERVA	Caila Conklin
GWENDOLYN.....	Grace Patton
ERIC.....	Lucky Potter
GUS.....	John Swartz
MABEL.....	Brinn Cochrane
ELEANOR.....	Annie Yamakawa
ELDRED	John Grannan
MORDRED	Austin Lyon
CRAZELLA	Liz LeCrone
VASHTI	Jessie Metcalf
THOMAS	Clifton Chan
GERTRUDE.....	Anna Zerull
BERTA.....	Bailey Chamberlin
IVAN.....	Craig Campbell
GEORGE R. WELL	JJ Sheets

Extras:

Emma Shafer, Katelyn Morgan, Shannon Trudell, Katelin Bingner, Becca Mason, Sara Rivera, Melyssa Fitzpatrick, Bryanna Glessner, Ben Kono, Caitlin Miller, Chloe Cryderman, Lynelle Roberts

Stage Managers	Stacey Gerstung, Carra Hood
Sound	Jordan Stanaway, Sam Brown
Lights	Jacob Ellis, Jared Spice
Spots.....	Kirsten Sponsler, Allie Fransted
Director	Dean Dyer
Technical Director.....	Stan Gibbs
Publications	Amanda Trudell
Stage Crew	Emily Jones, Jessica DeWaters, Steven Andrews, Chloe Cryderman, Heather Rossner, Brittany Bice, Ellen Sponsler, Jen Kingsley, Nick Rennell, Ryan Bartell

ACT ONE, SCENE 1

AT RISE:

Curtain opens on the countryside of New Topia. Backdrop of rolling hills, sunny skies, a generally beautiful morning. A tree, big enough to hide behind, is set at right center, midway upstage. DARDALUS ENTERS running from RIGHT, looking back to see if he is being pursued. Satisfied that he's safe, he stops at CENTER, bends with hands on knees to catch his breath, and smiles with satisfaction. Before he can relax, however, IMA HAGG and her sisters are heard approaching from off SL. DARDALUS quickly dodges behind the tree.

IMA: *(Off stage, counting rhythmically.)* Six hundred and seventy-five; six hundred and seventy-six, six hundred and seventy-seven . . .

HAGG SISTERS and TERESA S. ENTER DOWN LEFT. YORA is taking long, slow paces, marking off distance, and IMA is counting them out loud. TERESA S. is carrying a butterfly net and is actively trying to catch invisible insects.

IMA: *(Continuing her count.)* . . . six hundred and seventy-eight, six hundred and seventy-nine, *(Stressing with finality.)* six hundred and eighty!

YORA stops and brings feet together, looking off right. IMA turns her like a weather vane, sighting over her shoulder. TERESA S. stops just after entering, facing audience, and appears to fall asleep standing up with head cocked to side.

HOOSA: *(Following IMA's glance.)* That's it. Six hundred and eighty paces. This is the bend. It looks like you were right, sister. The new road *will* cut through the corner of George R. Well's farm.

YORA: *(Looking in same direction.)* Yes, I feared that it would. Oh drat. George R. Well is so unsociable.

IMA: Reclusive.

HOOSA: Detached.

Sensing they are harmless, DARDALUS emerges casually from behind tree. HAGGS ignore him and continue one-upping each other with synonyms, a regular practice.

YORA: Reserved.

IMA: Aloof.

HOOSA: Misanthropic

YORA: *(Triumphantly.)* Curmudgeonly!

IMA: Oooh, good one, sister!

DARDALUS: *(Breaking in, bowing deeply, exaggerated courtesy.)*

Greetings, fair ladies. I am Sir Robert of Hampshire, Consultant to Royalty the World Over. *(Standing upright.)* May I ask whom I have the pleasure of addressing?

YORA: *(Holding her place with feet still together.)* Welcome to New Topia, Robert of Hampshire. I'm Yora Hagg, and these are my sisters, Ima and Hoosa.

DARDALUS: Yora . . . Hagg?

IMA: *(Recognizing his puzzled reaction.)* Yes, I'm afraid Father had a rather odd sense of humor. He never envisioned his daughters growing up to be spinsters. We are, indeed, the old Haggs. *(All three laugh at the familiar joke.)*

DARDALUS: I see. *(Looks around them at TERESA, who continues in her strange trance.)* And who is this . . . lovely creature?

HOOSA: *(Noticing TERESA's trance for the first time.)* Oh. Well, I'm sure you're familiar with the classical works of Homer and the great seer, Teresias, the Blind Prophet of Thebes?

DARDALUS: Yes?

TERESA S. begins to moan softly, stretching and yawning, coming out of her trance.

IMA: Well, this is Teresa S., the *dumb* prophet of New Topia.

TERESA waves at him, smiling broadly.

DARDALUS: Oh, most unfortunate. The young woman is unable to speak?

TERESA S.: (*Giggling.*) No, silly, I can talk just fine. Why are people always asking that question?

HAGGS share a look with DARDALUS

DARDALUS: Ah, I see. It's a pleasure to meet you, Teresa S.

TERESA S.: (*In deep John Wayne impersonation.*) Right back at ya, pilgrim. (*She pantomimes a tobacco spit.*)

IMA: Teresa spends a lot of time in the (*Patronizing.*) . . . future-er . . . and she sometimes has a rather unusual way of expressing herself.

TERESA S.: (*Covering her mouth as if speaking into a CB microphone, simulating static before and after she speaks.*) That's a big ten-four, good buddy! (*Drops head back on shoulder as she enters another trance.*)

DARDALUS: Hmmmm. So what was it you ladies were counting out just now?

YORA: We are laying out the new street that's to be built to give our western villages and farms better access to the trade center of the kingdom.

HOOSA: It's not really a street, sister. Streets are shorter and located in villages. This is a road.

IMA: Or a throughway.

YORA: Or a highway.

HOOSA: An avenue.

IMA: A thoroughfare.

YORA: A turnpike.

HOOSA: No, I believe you have to pay a toll on a turnpike.

DARDALUS is watching this with annoyed fascination.

IMA: How about a boulevard?

HOOSA: Hmmmm . . . I don't know. Doesn't a boulevard have to be split down the middle by a strip of vegetation or something?

YORA: Yes, I think you're right. But I do like the sound of it. Bool-avard. It's so French.

DARDALUS: *(Interrupting, before they can think of more.)* How is it that you ladies are planning a - - er, road - - for the kingdom? Isn't that a decision for the king to make?

HOOSA: Apparently you haven't been to New Topia before.

DARDALUS: No, I haven't.

Voices can be heard off left as JOE, ELEANOR, GERTRUDE, MINERVA prepare to enter. IMA and YORA turn to face sounds. DARDALUS reacts by quickly disappearing behind the tree again.

HOOSA: *(To audience.)* We're a bit of a different type of kingdom. You see . . . *(She stops, realizing DARDALUS has vanished, looks for him, puzzled.)*

JOE, ELEANOR, GERTRUDE, GWENDOLYN, MINERVA ENTER LEFT. TERESA S. comes out of her trance and waves hello, joins the crowd.

JOE: Greetings, ladies. What have you decided?

IMA: Hello, Joe. I'm afraid Yora was correct - - the new highway will have to pass through George R. Well's farm.

YORA: Now let's not get ahead of ourselves, sister - - we could turn west at the Turner farm and detour around the lake. That would keep us well off George R. Well's property.

JOE: No, that would defeat the whole purpose of the route. We want to make it easier to travel, not more cumbersome. I'll go talk to George.

HOOSA: There's not much likelihood that he'll agree, but if anyone can get through to him, it's you, Joe.

IMA: Yes, he is persuasive.

YORA: Convincing.

HOOSA: Argumentative.

YORA: Compelling.

MINERVA: Charismatic.

TERESA S.: *(Godfather impression, pantomiming as if she's drawing a handgun from a shoulder holster.)* Mebbe he can make'a him an offer he's a cann'a refuse.

JOE: *(Seizes the opportunity to interrupt as they all stare at TERESA S.)* All right, ladies. I appreciate your vote of confidence, but we'd better get on with it if we hope to have this road completed before winter.

JOE, ELEANOR, MINERVA, GERTRUDE EXIT RIGHT. GWENDOLYN hangs back, wanders past to look off left. ERIC enters UP LEFT and takes her hands - - she's obviously been waiting for him. They pantomime a conversation at LEFT. Simultaneously, DARDALUS emerges from behind the tree at right and rejoins the conversation with the ladies.

DARDALUS: So, Hoosa, you were saying that New Topia is a different kind of kingdom. How exactly is it different?

HOOSA: Well, our king is a prime example. He's quite extraordinary.

DARDALUS: Really? In what way?

IMA: Well, because he's so ordinary.

YORA: Yes, he is quite exceptional

HOOSA: Because he's so unexceptional.

IMA: Completely uncommon.

YORA: Because he's so common.

HOOSA: *(Starting to struggle for new synonyms.)* Unconventional.

IMA: Because he's entirely conventional.

YORA: *(Also struggling.)* Quite irregular.

TERESA S.: *(Breaking in.)* Because he doesn't get enough fiber!

DARDALUS: *(As they all react with puzzlement.)* All right, all right, I understand. But can you explain *how* your king is so common and ordinary?

HOOSA: Well, for example, most kings would insist on being referred to as "Your Highness . . ."

IMA: . . . or "Your Majesty . . ."

YORA: . . . or "Sire."

HOOSA: You'd probably at least expect him to be called by his full title, "King Joseph the Fourth of New Topia." But we just call him Joe.

TERESA S.: Yep, he's just your average Joe.

Lights fade on main stage as GWENDOLYN and ERIC, oblivious to the others, join hands and move into pool towards DOWN LEFT EXIT.

GWENDOLYN: You've been gone almost three weeks. I thought I'd never see you again.

ERIC: The weather stayed fine, and Father kept finding more timber to cut. We loaded up every wagon we had and still had to return twice to get all the logs home. But the good news is that we've got enough logs to keep us busy cutting lumber all through the winter. No more trips to the high country.

GWENDOLYN: And just in time for the harvest festival. *(Coyly.)* I had nearly agreed to go with Daniel Miller.

ERIC: *(Playing along.)* Oh, I didn't realize I was interrupting. How rude of me. *(Starts turning as if to leave, lets go of her hands.)* Well, I guess I'll have to ask someone else. Let's see . . . the blacksmith's daughter is quite striking. Lydia? Is that her name?

GWENDOLYN: *(Calling his bluff.)* It's *Olivia* - - and she's engaged, which I believe you know well enough, Eric Covington.

ERIC: Is that so? Well, it's good to know that some ladies take their promises seriously.

GWENDOLYN: *(Giving up the gag, leaning in to give him a quick kiss on the cheek.)* And none more seriously than this lady. Come on, we'll be late getting back for lunch at the palace.

GWENDOLYN grabs ERIC by the hand and leads him to EXIT LEFT. Lights back up on main stage.

DARDALUS: *(After contemplating HOOSA's last line.)* Wait a minute. Do you mean that man who was just here discussing the road . . . that *commoner* is your king?!!

IMA: Precisely.

YORA: That's our Joe. And the young lady who just left with the young man *(Points off LEFT.)* . . . that was Joe's daughter, Gwendolyn.

TERESA S.: You might want to keep that thing about the young man on the down low. *(Gestures accordingly.)* I don't think Joe is hip to it.

DARDALUS: But why didn't you tell me? I should have removed my hat. Bowed . . . knelt. This is terrible. I must have a proper introduction.

HOOSA: Well, if you hadn't hidden behind the tree, you would have had your chance.

YORA: Besides, Joe doesn't go for any of that kneeling and groveling. He'd just shake your hand and welcome you to New Topia.

TERESA S.: *(In a hillbilly twang.)* Sit a spell, take yer shoes off - - y'all come back now, ya hear?

DARDALUS: *(Ignoring her, wanting to understand.)* And you and the other people of New Topia - - you're all comfortable with this?

IMA: Well, virtually everyone. I suppose Crazella and her sons are an exception.

DARDALUS: Crazella?

HOOSA: Joe's sister. She's not very happy living as a commoner - - she'd prefer the pomp and circumstance that most royals enjoy.

DARDALUS: Interesting. Can I ask what role you ladies have in the kingdom that involves you plotting out roads? Are you also members of the royal family?

The HAGGS break into laughter.

YORA: Us? Royalty?

IMA: Oh, heavens no! *(The sisters laugh together again.)*

HOOSA: We serve Joe in an advisory capacity.

YORA: You might say that we're his brain trust.

IMA: We were all his teachers as he was growing up.

HOOSA: And, of course, we still play bridge every Friday with his mother, Minerva.

YORA: Besides, the road was our idea.

DARDALUS: *(Digesting this.)* Hmmm. His brain trust. Well, as I told you, I'm a consultant to royalty, sort of an unofficial ambassador of the world. Your King, er . . . Joe . . . does indeed sound like quite a different sort of ruler. In a most refreshing way, of course.

YORA: I'm sure you'll enjoy meeting him. (*Points off LEFT.*) The palace is that way. (*She brings her feet together, fixes her direction, and begins pacing again to RIGHT.*) Come along, girls, we have work to do. It's been a pleasure, Sir Robert of Hampshire.

As each of the HAGGS begins to pass DARDALUS, he bows deeply.

IMA: Yes, quite delightful.

HOOSA: Utterly titillating, I'm sure.

TERESA S.: High five! (*Attempting a high five, at which DARDALUS just stares blankly. Undaunted, she skips off after the HAGGS.*) See ya later, alligator.

TERESA S. follows the HAGGS off right, as IMA resumes her count of YORA's paces. DARDALUS is left alone, and steps DOWN CENTER.

DARDALUS: (*To himself.*) A king who fancies himself a commoner. How deliciously naïve! Dardalus, you old fox, I believe you've finally found a *palace* to call home! (*Laughs menacingly.*)

Slow fade to black over laughter.

ACT ONE, SCENE 2

AT RISE:

The same place in the countryside, early afternoon. Lights up as JOE and ELEANOR ENTER DOWN RIGHT.

ELEANOR: *(Slightly ahead of JOE, turning to face him.)* I don't see why you can't at least allow yourself to take credit for your triumphs, Joe. You are the only person I know who could have talked George R. Well into granting a right of way across his land for the new road. He doesn't trust *anyone*. It was masterful.

JOE: He's not so hard to understand, really. Sometimes George just needs to hear things explained to him directly, so he can assess the information on his own terms. I didn't tell him anything he didn't already know, Eleanor. George is a good man in his own way, but he's cautious. I just helped him to put the costs and benefits in their proper perspective.

ELEANOR: No, it's more than that. Anyone who meets you knows that you are utterly dedicated to the principles of New Topia. Freedom, responsibility, respect for the individual - - you're like a walking representation of the fundamental values of this land. *(Moving closer to him, romantically.)* Maybe that's what makes you so distressingly attractive.

JOE: *(Backing away, oblivious to her intent, then moving DOWN CENTER, speaking as a statesman.)* We're the only country on Earth with a truly free population, Eleanor, and I find myself waking up every morning in awe of that fact. It's the way God intended for people to live. Our success doesn't come because of anything I do - - on the contrary, it's because of what I *don't* do. I don't get in the people's way. *(Pacing RIGHT.)* It's been four generations since my great-grandfather, Joseph the First, established the concept of individual rights and freedoms; in his generation, people fought and *died* for that concept. I couldn't live with myself if I thought I was responsible for surrendering any of the things that they have achieved. *(Turning to audience.)* When I asked George R. Well to give up some of his land for the good of our country, he knew that I was *asking*, not ordering him or threatening him. He had a choice - - and it was because he knew

he had a choice that he made the right one. I believe that's why God gave us free will, Eleanor - - there's a remarkable beauty in watching people make the right choices.

ELEANOR has been beaming at JOE throughout this speech, slowly approaching his side. On the way, she picks a flower from a small patch of greenery. Now JOE's voice changes from the statesman to a man besieged with inner turmoil.

JOE: *(Turning to ELEANOR, grasping her hands.)* And that's why, my dearest Eleanor, it is so important that I never - - never - - abuse my power to issue a royal decree.

ELEANOR: *(Understanding where the conversation is turning.)* But it's a silly law, Joe. It was written generations ago, even before your great grandfather's revolution.

JOE: But it is still the *law*.

ELEANOR: *(Turning away from him.)* A meaningless law, that is completely contradictory to the way you have reigned as king. Royalty can only marry royalty? You've spent your entire life trying to be as equal as possible to every other citizen of this land. *(Turning back to him.)* What could possibly make the people more equal than allowing royalty and commoners to marry?

JOE: *(He breaks away from her and paces down left.)* When Joseph the First and his followers established New Topia, there was great turmoil. The concept was unique, wonderful - - but also very fragile, hated by some. The kingdom was rife with dissenters, spies, and others who wanted to snuff it out in its infancy. The elders knew that if the idea was to live, it needed to be protected, and the law against royals and commoners marrying was something they viewed as a safeguard.

ELEANOR: *(Follows him again, turns him to her - - this time she grabs his hands.)* But those days have passed, Joe. *(Turns away briefly, looking out over the audience.)* No one in New Topia wants a return to the old days of tyranny. The people have completely embraced the concepts of individual freedom and accepted the responsibilities that come with it. George R. Well is a perfect example. *(Pulling him closer.)* And no matter how humble you are, Joe, you have to know that you are at least partly responsible for our success. *(Looks into his eyes, setting up for a kiss.)* Aren't you entitled to some personal happiness?

JOE: *(Takes a long pause, nearly kisses her, but then catches himself and turns down stage toward center.)* The law of the kingdom says I can't make you my wife, Eleanor. I respect you too much to make you my mistress. *(Looking out over the audience again.)* I have enjoyed some personal happiness in New Topia. Although my marriage was arranged, Catherine was a devoted, faithful wife. And the last thing she did before she died was to give me Gwendolyn, who has brought me greater joy than I could ever imagine. I want my daughter to grow to see the principles of a free society cherished and spread throughout the world, Eleanor.

ELEANOR: *(In desperation, crossing to him once more.)* But Joe, the very best qualities in individuals are inspired by love. I love you, Joe. *(JOE turns to her, conflicted.)* And I know you love me, too.

JOE: *(Grabs her hands this time, gently.)* But what is it that you love about me, Eleanor? Would I be the man you love if I didn't follow the principles in which I believe? If I change the law for no other reason than my own happiness, Eleanor, I'll be violating everything that makes me the man I am - - everything that makes you love me.

ELEANOR: *(Playfully trailing her finger down his chest, trying to lighten the mood.)* Not everything.

JOE just looks at her sadly. Their hands drop lower, but stay connected. ELEANOR leans her head in against his chest, and JOE looks over her, off left.

JOE: We can *never* be married, Eleanor.

ELEANOR: (*Pulls her head up and away from his chest, then places her finger gently over his lips, near tears.*) No, Joe. Don't say "never." I can live with the law as long as I can still imagine us being married someday, but I can't live with "never." Leave me my hope, however silly it may be.

ELEANOR drops the flower she's been holding at her feet and drops her head. JOE bends slowly to pick it up, places it gently in her hands, and then lifts her chin to look in her eyes.

JOE: Your hope, and my love, Eleanor. Always.

JOE and ELEANOR slowly pull apart, join hands and EXIT UP RIGHT. GWENDOLYN and ERIC ENTER DOWN LEFT, obviously sneaking and having overheard the conversation between JOE and ELEANOR.

GWENDOLYN: Now do you believe me? It's pointless, Eric. My father will never let me marry you. (*Crosses down center, folding arms and looking away from him.*)

ERIC: (*Ambles toward her, stopping half way.*) He's a man of principle, Gwendolyn, and I respect him for that. But he's also reasonable. (*As she turns to face him, he walks the rest of the way to her and takes her hands.*) This may not be the right time, but the day will come. You'll see.

GWENDOLYN: You don't know how stubborn he can be. And yes, I mean *stubborn*. Everyone likes to talk about how he stands up for what he believes, but sometimes I think it's just his way of making himself feel worthy of his heritage.

ERIC: Gwendolyn, your father is a great man. Don't speak of him that way.

GWENDOLYN pushes him away and crosses a few steps down right.

GWENDOLYN: No, you don't see him as clearly as I do, Eric. He has this idea that he *must* suffer for the good of the kingdom. It seems very selfless and yet it's also *selfish*.

ERIC: How can he be selfless and selfish at the same time?

GWENDOLYN: *(Trying to find the words.)* Oh, it's as if he's offering himself up as the supreme, unblemished sacrifice for all of New Topia. He's always talking about "the people" in the collective sense, always concerned with the common good, and yet he doesn't really see the individual. *(Crossing further DOWN RIGHT.)* And just because he feels he must suffer for the good of his people, doesn't mean he should expect others to be willing to do the same. Look at poor Eleanor. She's deeply in love with him, and she's been wonderful to me, almost like a mother, ever since she came to New Topia. She shows concern for *his* happiness, but did you hear him mention anything about hers? No, just "the people," "my principles."

ERIC: But Eleanor is one of the people, and she benefits from the freedom in New Topia, just like everyone else. *(He takes a few steps toward her, but she remains turned away.)*

GWENDOLYN: *(Furious.)* Oooh. You're being just like him! *(Turning to him in anger.)* Eleanor isn't just another one of "the people." She loves him, and he needs to show her that he loves her, too. Is that how you feel about me, Eric? *(Turns her back on him again.)* Am I just one of "the people"?

ERIC: *(Approaches, spins her gently toward him, taking her hands.)* No, Gwendolyn, you know that you mean much, much more to me. And a day will come, sooner than you think, when the time will be right for me to approach your father. You'll see.

They gaze into each other's eyes as lights slowly fade to black.

ACT ONE, SCENE 3

CRAZELLA's cottage, set to SR. ELDRED and MORDRED sit at a small table, SL of the door to the cottage, and two chairs are against the flat on the SR side of the door. ELDRED and MORDRED are young men, but behave more like pre-adolescent boys. They are playing with toy soldiers, making exaggerated sounds as their "armies" attack each other. The action grows to mild violence, and MORDRED, who appears to be losing, suddenly strikes ELDRED in the head with one of his soldiers.

ELDRED: Mother! Mordred hit me!

MORDRED: He hit me first. *(Sticks his tongue out at ELDRED.)*

ELDRED: Did not, you big, fat liar. *(Slaps MORDRED on arm.)*

MORDRED and ELDRED stand and begin a slap fight, both alternately screaming for their mother to intervene, as CRAZELLA ENTERS RIGHT from inside the cottage.

CRAZELLA: Boys! Sit down right now, both of you!

ELDRED and MORDRED both SIT. MORDRED takes one more slap at ELDRED, then pulls his hand back quickly, feigning innocence.

ELDRED: Mommy!

CRAZELLA: I have had enough of you two. *(Crossing DL.)* You don't act at all like young princes. Your Uncle Joseph is turning us all into commoners. *(Thinking.)* Perhaps it's time that the two of you did something royal. I know - - you could go on a quest. *(Turns to them, feigning excitement.)*

MORDRED: I don't want to go on a stupid quest. Let Eldred go by himself.

ELDRED: Quests are boring. I'm not going on a quest. You go.

MORDRED: Oh, no. You go. *(Enticing him.)* You could slay a dragon.

ELDRED: No, you go. You could fight a troll. A big, smelly troll.

MORDRED: Or you could go find a big, smelly girl troll, and she could be your girlfriend.

MORDRED embraces himself and makes kissing sounds. They stand and engage in another slap fight. CRAZELLA, exasperated, crosses to USR chair and sits. Meanwhile, there is a knock at the door.

ELDRED: Mother!

CRAZELLA: Hush! Someone's at the door. Mordred, answer it!

ELDRED begins BARKING like a dog. He continues under the following dialogue.

MORDRED: *(Opening the door, impudently.)* Who are you?

DARDALUS enters tentatively.

DARDALUS: I'm sorry. I was looking for Her Royal Highness, Princess Crazella. I must have . . .

CRAZELLA: *(Hurrying to the door and pushing MORDRED out of the way, clearly flattered.)* I am Princess Crazella. *(She holds out her hand.)*

DARDALUS kneels and kisses her hand. ELDRED increases the volume and frequency of his barking, leaning in and growling at DARDALUS as if to bite him, wrecking the moment for CRAZELLA. DARDALUS jumps back, alarmed.

CRAZELLA: *ELDRED!* Stop it at once.

ELDRED stops barking, elicits a canine whine and hides his head between his hands, puppy-like. DARDALUS looks perplexed.

MORDRED: Mother won't let us have a real dog, so Eldred is trying to make a point.

ELDRED raises his head, curls his hands in front of him, and pants happily.

CRAZELLA: My sons, Mordred and . . . Eldred. (*Scowls at ELDRED, who finally drops the dog routine, then turns smiling back to DARDALUS.*) And you are?

DARDALUS: (*Rising to his feet.*) Sir Robert of Hampshire, Consultant to Royalty the World Over, at your service, your Majesty.

CRAZELLA: (*Loving the attention.*) The world over! How utterly exciting. (*More formally.*) You may have a seat.

As CRAZELLA moves to chair at SR end of flat, DARDALUS steps beside her, as if escorting her to the seat. He then sits in the chair to her left. MORDRED and ELDRED roll their eyes at this.

CRAZELLA: On what matters do you consult with royalty, Sir Robert of Hampshire?

DARDALUS: Oh, a variety of things: fashion, manners, etiquette, palace . . . (*Pausing as he looks at the shabby surroundings.*) er . . . décor.

CRAZELLA: Well, it certainly is refreshing to have a visitor who understands the *important* issues of royalty. I hope you'll have some success in talking with that thickheaded brother of mine, although I doubt it.

MORDRED and ELDRED resume playing with soldiers, quietly at first.

DARDALUS: I've spoken with a few of the commoners - - it seems that your brother, King Joseph, has a unique approach in ruling New Topia.

CRAZELLA: (*Rises, agitated, and steps DC.*) My brother is an idealist and a fool. Under the leadership of our family, the people of New Topia have become some of the wealthiest commoners on Earth, and yet he lives like a pauper and forces me to do the same. I can't even live in the palace, because he has it crammed full of commoners.

DARDALUS: *(Following her, stopping a few steps short.)* I have yet to meet King Joseph, your Highness, but it would be completely inappropriate for such an unworthy subject as me to speak badly of a king.

CRAZELLA: *(Turning to him.)* Yes, of course. *(Still delighted with his deference and formality.)* Living in New Topia, it's easy to forget the proper relationship between royalty and commoners. It is very refreshing, Robert of Hampshire, to meet a man who knows his place.

DARDALUS: *(Not offended at all, playing to her approval.)* The world is far more orderly and secure, your Highness, when the social classes are all well aware of their proper standing.

MORDRED and ELDRED now explode into another argument over their toy soldiers. ELDRED strikes MORDRED over the head with a soldier. Both DARDALUS and CRAZELLA turn to look at them.

MORDRED: *(As he tries to slap ELDRED.)* Mother! Eldred hit me.

ELDRED: He was cheating!

CRAZELLA: *(Screaming hysterically.)* Boys! Sit down! *(She immediately transforms to a taffy sweet demeanor, guiding DARDALUS back toward their chairs as the boys sit.)* Ever since their father was . . . *(Lying.)* lost at sea . . . I haven't been able to do a thing with them! If my brother wasn't so unreasonable, I could afford to send them away to a proper school, one that is worthy of their breeding.

DARDALUS: *(Sensing an opportunity, gesturing toward the boys.)* If I may, your Highness?

CRAZELLA: *(Following his point, comprehending.)* By all means, Sir Robert. It might do wonders for them to have some proper masculine influence. *(Returns to her seat.)*

DARDALUS: *(Crosses back to the table, but remains standing.)* Prince Mordred, Prince Eldred. May I have a word with you, please?

MORDRED and ELDRED get up, holding toy soldiers. DARDALUS looks at the soldiers and clears his throat, and they leave them, then cross DOWN CENTER ahead of him.

DARDALUS: My lords, I can certainly understand the frustration you must be feeling. Young men of your breeding and talent should be leading real armies, bringing glory and wealth to your kingdom.

MORDRED: I can make myself burp. (*Burps loudly, as ELDRED laughs.*)

DARDALUS: Yes, that's quite impressive. But the two of you are destined for much greater things. As I understand it, your uncle, the king, has no male heirs. That means one of you will be king one day.

ELDRED: Yeah, me.

MORDRED: No, me!

They push and slap at each other.

DARDALUS: (*Exasperated, but controlled.*) My lords! (*Waits for them to stop.*) This is a simple enough matter to resolve. Which of you is the eldest?

ELDRED: That's the problem . . . we don't know.

DARDALUS: I don't understand.

MORDRED: Duh . . . we're twins.

MORDRED and ELDRED remove their helmets and pose for inspection. DARDALUS looks them over carefully, circles around them, looks back to CRAZELLA for confirmation. CRAZELLA nods.

DARDALUS: Ahh, of course. Pardon me for not noticing the . . . resemblance. But still, one of you must have been born first.

ELDRED: But Mother won't tell us which one. She says she wants one of us to prove his worthiness over the other.

DARDALUS: *(Perplexed, but playing along.)* Ahh, and how very wise she is. No doubt you will both benefit by the competition. *(Hushing his voice conspiratorially, dragging them further DOWN LEFT.)* But here's the point, my lords. You both have the opportunity to improve your lives immensely, no matter which of you becomes king. If you can help me to lead your uncle to a more conventional understanding of the way royalty should behave, you will become two of the most eligible young bachelors on the continent. Lovely ladies-in-waiting from all the neighboring kingdoms will be literally throwing themselves at you. In fact, I personally know that the emperor of Siam has two beautiful young daughters, just waiting for the chance to marry.

DARDALUS has cleverly hit a nerve here. ELDRED nods agreement to MORDRED and both wring their hands and giggle excitedly.

MORDRED: *(Sober.)* All right, we'll help!

MORDRED and ELDRED rush back to the table and clear off the soldiers. They assume positions of rapt attention. DARDALUS also returns and sits down, in control. CRAZELLA watches, clearly impressed.

DARDALUS: *(To CRAZELLA.)* Now, I wouldn't be so presumptuous as to assert that I can influence a king on matters of governance, but I do have considerable experience with royalty. With the help of you and your sons, perhaps I could *nudge* your brother a bit.

CRAZELLA: *(Noting the change in the boys approvingly.)* Well, Sir Robert, you certainly possess some extraordinary skills in communicating. However, my brother is an especially difficult individual. You see, he's a man of . . . *(With obvious disgust, as if she might vomit.)* principle.

DARDALUS: *(Conspiratorially.)* Yes, well, we can't all be perfect. *(Shares a wicked laugh with CRAZELLA, then stands and crosses DOWN RIGHT.)* Unfortunately, that is one weakness which is difficult to exploit. We need something else . . . what makes your brother happy?

CRAZELLA: *(Pauses, thinking.)* There is a woman - - a commoner named Eleanor.

ELDRED breaks into his dog routine, barking and howling wolfishly at the mention of ELEANOR's name. MORDRED slaps him.

ELDRED: *(Contrite.)* Sorry.

CRAZELLA: I don't know why the poor thing stays around, since the law prohibits marriage between royalty and commoners. Heaven knows, Joseph would never violate the law.

DARDALUS: *(Pleased, crosses to CENTER.)* A woman! Ahhh, the simplest answer is always the best answer. *(Pauses a moment, thinking.)* Is it possible, your Majesty, that you might arrange a little social gathering and invite this Eleanor? I have someone I'd like for her to meet.

CRAZELLA: *(Intrigued.)* Why Sir Robert, I'm sure I can set something up. And who is it that you'd like Eleanor to meet?

DARDALUS: *(Rising to leave.)* I'll explain the details later. For now, let's just call her, "the other woman."

BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE, SCENE 4

A public meeting room in the royal palace, defined primarily by a large stone wall in the background with arched openings leading to other rooms. A table with three chairs is down center. Two comfortable chairs are posted beside the center arch, where GUS and MABEL are seated; MABEL is knitting, while GUS sleeps with his head tilted back, mouth open. Other furnishings might include more tables, a bookcase or two, antlers or head mounts of game animals on the wall, a suit of armor, etc. As lights come up, JOE and DARDALUS ENTER UP RIGHT, followed by GERTRUDE, and stop, looking down left, across the room. GERTRUDE fades over to gossip animatedly with MABEL.

DARDALUS: Am I to understand that some of these commoners we've met are actually living here in the royal palace, without expense? *(He stops, surveying the room.)*

JOE: *(Continuing DOWN a few paces to mid-center.)* Not precisely. By saying they live here without expense, you assume that they don't contribute anything. The philosophical underpinnings of the free nation of New Topia are personal freedom *and* responsibility. They are essential to one another. Things that are owned collectively by the people must also be maintained by them. *(Wanders DOWN LEFT, speaking to audience.)* This palace is a center of commerce, a base of security in times of emergency, and a general meeting place. It also serves as a haven for citizens who have suffered misfortune and are left without a home of their own. But everyone who resides here also contributes in some way. *(Looking back to DARDALUS, who follows him.)* For example, the widow Brown and her children, whom we just passed in the courtyard *(Points off right.)* - - they maintain the large gardens at the rear of the palace. Gertrude *(Points to GERTRUDE.)* is an excellent transcriber and serves as the royal scribe. And Gus and Mabel over there *(Points to them.)* are in charge of palace security.

GERTRUDE flips a careless wave at DARDALUS. MABEL nods and smiles. GUS doesn't move, but snores audibly. JOE begins moving to table at RIGHT CENTER, and DARDALUS follows.

DARDALUS: I feel very secure, your Highness.

JOE: Please refer to me as Joe. We don't use such titles in New Topia. We don't have many security problems, either. People respect each other's personal property as well as that which is owned commonly. *(Sits at RIGHT of table and motions for DARDALUS to join him.)*

DARDALUS: *(Sits at LEFT of table.)* But if this palace is owned commonly, what belongs to you?

JOE: Oh, I continue to maintain my family estate. It consists of a large farm at the northern border of the kingdom, as well as the cottage and property on which my sister, Crazella, and her sons reside. While I serve as king, other farmers contribute their time and labor to manage my farm. They have also been kind enough to provide support for Crazella since her husband has been gone, although she shows little appreciation for their efforts.

DARDALUS: *(Coyly.)* You have a sister? As a widow and a princess, isn't she entitled to live in the palace?

JOE: Entitled, yes, but willing, no. Crazella doesn't like to associate with commoners. We share very little beyond our birthright, I'm afraid.

The HAGGS and MINERVA ENTER DOWN LEFT, approaching table from behind DARDALUS. As they come into view, JOE and DARDALUS rise.

IMA: *(Approaching the table.)* Oh, Joe. Thank goodness we've found you. We've come up against a bit of an obstacle with the new addition to the school building.

YORA: A difficulty.

HOOSA: A dilemma.

IMA: A hindrance.

YORA: An enigma.

MINERVA: A conundrum. (*Pauses as the others concede victory by their silence.*) We've run out of money. We may have to postpone completion until next year.

JOE: I don't think that will be necessary. I've already spoken to Samuel Rutherford and his family. They've had a very profitable year with their livestock, and the addition will benefit them as much as anyone else. Samuel asked that you bring him a list of materials needed tomorrow and he'll have them for you by the end of the week.

HOOSA: That's wonderful!

IMA: Terrific!

YORA: Stupendous.

DARDALUS: (*Interrupting their contest.*) I don't quite understand. If you're running out of money, why don't you just raise taxes?

HOOSA: That would be impossible.

IMA: Infeasible.

YORA: Impracticable.

MINERVA: You can't raise taxes if you don't *have* taxes.

JOE: As I've told you, the people of New Topia enjoy individual freedom and *responsibility*. Everyone willingly contributes for the common good - - we don't need taxes.

DARDALUS: (*Conflicted - - JOE is starting to win him over.*) Most remarkable. I've consulted with royalty in many, many lands, your Maj . . . er, Joe . . . but I must confess, I've never met another ruler like you.

IMA: Well, we must be on our way. So much to do. It was nice to see you again, Sir Robert of Hampshire.

The HAGGS curtsy and EXIT LEFT. Minerva remains UP CENTER, behind table. GERTRUDE EXITS UP RIGHT.

JOE: Mother, I don't believe you've met Sir Robert of Hampshire, Consultant to Royalty the World Over.

DARDALUS: (*Bowing, taking her hand.*) I am your humble servant, your Majesty.

MINERVA sits at center chair, then JOE and DARDALUS sit.

MINERVA: (*Polite, but probing.*) The world over. What parts of the world have you visited, Sir Robert?

DARDALUS: It's such a long list, your Highness, that I'm afraid I would bore you.

MINERVA: I'm not easily bored. And please address me as Minerva. I'm sure Joe has told you about our disdain for such titles as "Your Highness."

DARDALUS: I beg your pardon, Minerva. Joe had indicated that such formality was unnecessary, but old habits die hard. As to my travels, I've been to France, England, Italy, Siam, Spain, Estonia ,
..

MINERVA: (*Cutting him off.*) Ahhh, Estonia. And how is my old friend, Princess Annabelle? Did she and Albert ever marry?

DARDALUS: (*Relieved, as he knows the answer.*) Yes, yes of course. Annabelle and Albert - - they have four strong sons.

MINERVA: Really? That's most interesting. I'll have to get a letter off to her. I'll make sure to mention that I've met you.

DARDALUS: (*Uncomfortable.*) Oh no, your High - - Minerva. Why I'm sure she wouldn't even remember someone as unimportant as me.

MINERVA: (*Still probing.*) Unimportant? That hardly seems a fitting term for a man whose services are sought for "the world over." And on what sort of matters do you offer consultation to royalty?

DARDALUS: By traveling frequently between countries, I'm able to keep abreast of the latest in royal fashions and trends, including clothing styles, palace décor, and etiquette.

MINERVA: (*Unimpressed.*) Really. Well, I'm sure Joe has explained to you that we're not a very typical royal family. I'm afraid we've little use for consultation on any of those matters.

JOE: Mother, I'm surprised at you. You're being quite direct with poor Robert.

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