

A STORY IN PERIL

By Alan Haehnel

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CHARACTERS

6-16 characters, all gender-flexible.

All of the characters but #27 are typical students who can range in age from 10-17. #27 could be any age. He/she is very self-important and heroic.

Extras possible--5-10 other class members

PRODUCTION NOTES

This show is designed to be extremely easy to stage. Any attempts to make it complicated should be discouraged.

PROPS LIST

Book
Deer Ears
Headband
Hat
Prop bag

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CHRIS is speaking to a group of four other kids--JORDAN, TAYLOR, SKYLER and MORGAN. HE has a book in his hands.

CHRIS: What I need you guys to help me with is my dramatic reading, okay? I've chosen a part from a really familiar story so you don't have to worry about what happens next; you can just focus on how well I deliver it, okay?

JORDAN: Like your voice, hand gestures, that kind of thing?

CHRIS: Right. That's my assignment.

SKYLER: Gotcha. What's the story?

CHRIS: "Snow White."

MORGAN: Are you going to do all the different voices for the elves?

TAYLOR: What elves?

MORGAN: You know, the seven ... Okay, I mean dwarves. Same thing.

TAYLOR: No, they are definitely not. For one thing, Elves live ...

CHRIS: Taylor. We don't have time for an Elven history lesson right at the moment.

TAYLOR: Elves and dwarves are definitely different.

MORGAN: Okay, okay.

CHRIS: Here goes. *(reading)* "So the wicked Queen said to her royal huntsman..."

JORDAN: You're not going to start at the beginning?

CHRIS: No.

JORDAN: Why not?

CHRIS: Because I don't want to and I don't need to because you already know the story. This is where I want to start.

JORDAN: Okay. I would have started at the beginning, but ... whatever.

CHRIS: Thank-you. *(reading)* "So the wicked Queen said to her royal huntsman, 'Take Snow White into the woods and kill her! Don't come back unless you can bring me her heart in this box.'"

SKYLER: Gruesome. I hope he had a scalpel with him, at least.

TAYLOR: A heart in a box. Cool.

CHRIS: Guys! You're supposed to be paying attention to my delivery, not commenting on the story.

JORDAN: So deliver then.

CHRIS: So don't interrupt then. (*reading*) "And so, with a slow step because he was very fond of Snow White, the huntsman led her to a dark, dreary part of the forest." (*CHRIS turns the page.*) Well, that's strange.

SKYLER: What's the matter?

MORGAN: Keep reading.

CHRIS: I ... I can't! Look--the rest of the pages are blank.

JORDAN: That's a cheap book.

TAYLOR: I bet it was made in China, like my little brother's toy truck collection that my mother took away because she said he would die if he ate it.

SKYLER: Your little brother eats trucks?

CHRIS: No, no--this is my book. I've had it for years. The pages weren't ever blank before.

MORGAN: Really?

(#27 enters, speaking with exaggerated authority. HE carries a bag with him for his props.)

#27: That's right; they weren't.

CHRIS: Who are you?

#27: Call me #27.

JORDAN: Your name is a number?

#27: Ever worn a new shirt and reached in the pocket to find a little tag that says "Inspected by #15?"

TAYLOR: Whoa--you're one of them?

#27: At your service.

SKYLER: We're not making shirts.

#27: I'm on a new assignment. Story Expiration.

MORGAN: That is so cool. Story Expiration. That is, like, the most amazing What does that mean?

#27: No time for details right now. Short form: You (*indicating CHRIS*) just expired "Snow White."

JORDAN: Chris!

CHRIS: Don't blame me! I didn't know.

TAYLOR: Hey, I thought stories were timeless.

#27: Think again. That story he's got in his hands just expired like that moldy yogurt you discovered in the back of your refrigerator last week.

TAYLOR: How'd you know about that?

#27: I'm a number guy. We get around.

CHRIS: Well, so, what about the story? I was right in the middle of my presentation.

#27: Disappointing, isn't it? Try multiplying that disappointment by about five billion and you'll get a sense for the scope of the trouble.

SKYLER: You mean, every book with "Snow White"...

#27: Every book, movie, play, skit, conversation, bedtime moment ... stopped cold, right where you left off.

JORDAN: Chris!

CHRIS: I didn't do it!

#27: Technically, you did, but if it hadn't been you, it would've been somebody else.

MORGAN: This is terrible.

JORDAN: This is impossible.

#27: Blank pages, ladies and gentleman. Blank pages where there once was story. Don't kid yourself; this is the real deal.

CHRIS: What can we do?

#27: You can put on this hat and think like a royal huntsman, for one thing.

(During this segment, #27 pulls various props from his bag.)

CHRIS: What?

#27: *(to TAYLOR and SKYLER)* You two need to wear these ears. Take them. Don them. Believe you are deer.

MORGAN: Chris, does it concern you that an insane number has entered your home?

#27: *(to MORGAN, handing her a headband)* Put this in your hair, Snow White.

CHRIS: Wait a minute! Wait! What is this all about? What are you doing?

#27: Don't you get it?

TAYLOR: *(referring to the ears)* Do these make my head look fat?

JORDAN: Don't we get what?

#27: You've been drafted to fight in the war on stories! (to CHRIS) Put on the hat, soldier!

CHRIS: No. No, I won't until you explain what this is all about.

I'm an intelligent, thoughtful person and, well, I don't put on funny hats and go along with number people until I know why.

JORDAN: Here, here!

SKYLER: Ditto for me!

TAYLOR: I agree. But I do kind of like these ears.

#27: All right, fine, but we've got a narrow window of time, here, so pay attention.

MORGAN: We're with you.

TAYLOR: I'm all ears.

JORDAN: Stop now.

TAYLOR: I can't help it. They're cute and quite comfortable.

#27: All right, you've heard of computer viruses, right? How they can go through the Internet and destroy your computer's memory, things like that? Well, somehow, and we're not 100% sure how, a story virus has been released. When someone tells a story and it happens to correspond to the number of tellings predetermined by the virus creators, when someone gets to that certain predetermined point in the story Well, you saw what happens.

SKYLER: Who would do that?

#27: Terrorists, we suspect. I mean, what would demoralize a country faster than to have all its most familiar and cherished stories ... poof! Wiped away.

MORGAN: So, wh ... what do we do?

#27: Put on the headband. Be Snow White. (to CHRIS) Put on the hat. Be the royal huntsman. (to SKYLER and TAYLOR) Put on the ears. Be deer.

TAYLOR: Done deal.

JORDAN: What about me?

#27: Be a tree.

JORDAN: A tree?

#27: Spread your limbs and be a tree! Represent the dark and dreary forest! Do your part to bring this story back!

CHRIS: But how will this work?

SKYLER: If it's gone, it's gone, right?

#27: The virus works by attacking and destroying only a tiny part of the story--a turning point. In this case, it's the huntsman's

decision. If the person who expired the tale can recreate that turning point, he can break the virus's back and restore the story!

(pause)

MORGAN: Viruses have backs?

#27: We only have a small time window to restore the missing part of the story, and that window is closing fast! Once it's closed ...

CHRIS: No more "Snow White."

TAYLOR: So let's do this!

#27: That's the spirit!

SKYLER: I'm a deer!

JORDAN: I'm a tree. Ooo, I'm dark and dreary, oo, oo, oo.

#27: Good, good.

MORGAN: I'm Snow White. Tra-la-la. Or whatever.

CHRIS: How do we, you know ...

#27: Just get into character. I'll tell you what to do.

CHRIS: Okay, okay, get into character, right. Put on the hat and ... now what?

#27: Think of your situation! You're a royal huntsman, sworn to do the bidding of the Queen, but given this terrible task of killing this innocent, beautiful girl you've known since she was just a child.

MORGAN: Do you really think I'm innocent and beautiful?

#27: In the context of the story, yes.

SKYLER: In other words, don't get too full of yourself.

#27: (to MORGAN) And you ...

MORGAN: I am in the woods with the royal huntsman, nothing in the world to fear, for he has always been my guide and protector.

CHRIS: Jeez, way to lay a guilt trip on me.

#27: Exactly! What excuse did you use to get her to come with you?

CHRIS: Uh, oh, uh How should I know? That wasn't in the story!

#27: Make it up! You have to, to get in the moment! What did you say to her to get her to come with you and not suspect

that you were actually going to kill her and cut her heart out and put it in a box to give to the wicked Queen?

CHRIS: I said uh, I said ...

#27: Say it right to her!

CHRIS: Uh ... Snow White!

MORGAN: Yes, my good and loyal friend, oh, Royal Huntsman?

CHRIS: Do you want to, uh ... go into the woods where I'm not going to kill you and cut out your heart?

MORGAN: What?

SKYLER: That's terrible!

JORDAN: I'm just a tree, but even I could lie better than that.

CHRIS: Hey, I've always *read* stories; I've never *been* them, okay?

TAYLOR: What are we supposed to be doing, anyway? How do the deer play into this, besides having fabulous ears?

#27: You're ... you're important.

TAYLOR: How?

MORGAN: Don't you remember?

SKYLER: Oh, now, wait a minute! I don't want to be a deer anymore. I'm taking off these ears.

TAYLOR: What's the matter? Somebody tell me what the deal is with the deer?

SKYLER: One of us is going to die! He's going to cut out our heart and put it in the box instead of Snow White's!

TAYLOR: What did I do to deserve that?

JORDAN: No trees get harmed in this story, do they?

#27: All right, look--enough! Keep in mind three things, people:

1. We're almost out of time. The window is nearly closed.
2. This is an imaginary situation. Nobody's heart is actually going to be cut out and put in a box.
3. The story is up for grabs now! That's the point--whatever he (*pointing to CHRIS*) decides is how "Snow White" will play out from now on. That is real. That will have actual consequences.

CHRIS: You mean, if I decide to kill Snow White ...

MORGAN: Chris!

CHRIS: I'm just saying!

#27: Then that is how the story will be.

CHRIS: Whoa. That's heavy.

#27: Yeah, but what's even heavier is that if we don't get moving, the story will be totally expired. The blankness of the

last pages of your book will spread until every reference to "Snow White" has been obliterated. So, deer ...

SKYLER: Yes, Sweetheart?

CHRIS: I don't think we should joke about this. We hold the future of a time-honored story in our hands.

#27: I'm glad you're grasping the gravity of the situation. So, you two playing the deer, just ... graze. Be oblivious.

(SKYLER and JORDAN do so.)

Tree ...

JORDAN: I'm swaying, doing my job, swaying.

#27: Snow White?

MORGAN: I'm just waiting to know why I'm in the woods with him (*referring to CHRIS, the Huntsman*).

#27: (*to CHRIS*) Well?

CHRIS: Come, Snow White, and let us go to the woods to, to see some squirrels.

JORDAN: Oh, now, that's clever.

CHRIS: Trees do not criticize. You do your tree thing and I'll do my huntsman thing.

JORDAN: With the squirrels.

MORGAN: There are many squirrels in the woods, Noble Huntsman. What is special about these that would take us into the dark and dreary forest?

CHRIS: Wait a minute--you can't ... (*to #27*) She can't do that, can she? I came up with a reason.

MORGAN: I'm just playing my part.

#27: Work it through, work it through!

CHRIS: Well, the thing is, Snow White, these are special squirrels. Very special. They're ... a family of ... albino squirrels! That I want you to come see. (*to JORDAN*) No comment!

JORDAN: Just swaying in the breeze.

MORGAN: Albino squirrels? A whole family of them?

CHRIS: Yes. Yes! A mommy and a daddy and a whole bunch of little critters. All white with pink eyes and stuff. You've never seen anything like it.

MORGAN: That sounds wonderful! Let's go!

#27: Okay, perfect. Now, walk to the woods, to the clearing where you have planned to do the deed.

MORGAN: Oh, look, royal huntsman--look at the lovely deer!

SKYLER: Yeah, enjoy me while you can, before there's a hole in my chest.

MORGAN: Where are these squirrels?

CHRIS: Uh, right there, at the base of that quiet, non-critical tree.

JORDAN: My limbs are getting tired.

#27: Hang in there.

MORGAN: Right down here?

(SHE kneels, looking for the "squirrels.")

#27: Good. Excellent. Now, you have to decide what to do.

CHRIS: I do?

#27: Yes! This is the crucial moment in the story the virus attacked and wiped out. You have to recreate it. You have to decide.

MORGAN: Where are the squirrels?

CHRIS: Uh, keep looking!

JORDAN: Don't untie my roots.

#27: You have a knife in your hands. The Queen has given you the command to kill Snow White. You've always been a loyal subject. But Snow White--you adore her. She is your friend. You are supposed to protect her.

TAYLOR: But look at my deer ears. They're so precious. If you don't kill her, you're going to have to kill me.

SKYLER: Or me.

TAYLOR and SKYLER: We're cute.

CHRIS: I ... I don't like conflict.

#27: Decide ... or the story expires.

MORGAN: I don't see the squirrels, Huntsman. Do you suppose they might have Oh, why do you have that knife in your hand?

JORDAN: Busted!

CHRIS: I ... I ... well, because ...

#27: Ten seconds left before the damage becomes permanent!

TAYLOR and SKYLER: So cute!

JORDAN: I would make terrible firewood. Never cut me down.

MORGAN: Huntsman, you aren't going to hurt me, are you?

CHRIS: I ... I ...

#27: Five seconds!

CHRIS: I ... I can't do it! Snow White, the Queen hates you and wants you dead! She told me I had to kill you and cut out your heart and bring it to her in a box!

MORGAN: Oh, my!

(SKYLER and TAYLOR look at one another quickly, panicked, then yell together.)

SKYLER and TAYLOR: Run!

#27: No, no--no need! It's over.

JORDAN: *(lowering her arms)* Oh, thank goodness. Tree work is hard.

MORGAN: What do you mean, it's over?

CHRIS: Was I too late?

#27: No--look at your book.

(CHRIS picks up the book and turns the pages.)

CHRIS: Hey--hey, it's coming back! It's just like it was before!

#27: You saved Snow White, in more ways than one.

(EVERYONE cheers.)

CHRIS: Wow, that was ... wow.

MORGAN: You weren't ever seriously thinking of killing me, were you?

CHRIS: No, I mean, well, it was a tougher choice than I thought. I've never disobeyed the Queen before.

SKYLER: And we were pretty dear deer.

TAYLOR: *(referring to the ears)* Can I keep these?

#27: They're yours. You've earned them. Well, I'll be off.

Unfortunately, this is an on-going battle.

CHRIS: Um, #27?

#27: Yeah?

CHRIS: I think I speak for all of us when I say, "Thanks." You're doing great work.

#27: I consider it my duty to stories everywhere. Good-bye.

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