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Carole Dhu

- *A Characteristic Quest*

Two Acts – A Comedy Play

with optional original music by Geri Jones

Running Time: approx. 100 minutes, excluding interval

Period: Medieval – Dark Ages, approx 1000AD, England

Mx12 : Fx9

Warnings: Adult Content, 15years plus

Synopsis:

One wild and stormy night, back in medieval times, Farsight the Blind Lookout of Camelittle is approached by a well-spoken stranger, wishing to seek shelter from the storm. Camelittle's knights of the Coffee Table, led by Sir Frederick the Fearless are planning to go on a quest.

With every knight having their own characteristic, they wander the countryside and meet a family of unusual brothers and stumble upon the Sisters of Celibacy. The knights defend the ladies against a band of marauding Welsh invaders.

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About the Playwright: Carole Dhu



Carole Dhu has been active in the theatre arena for the last thirty years, both as a performer, a producer, director, vocal coach, compere, teacher and adjudicator, as well as a couple of stints providing character voices for radio commercials.

Since 2003 Carole has run a production company, Primadonna Productions – which incorporates a children’s Drama Troupe with pupils aged from four to sixteen years of age and has made the recent move into independent productions of shows for adult performers also. This has given her the benefit of some ‘on the ground’ events management experience as well.

About the Play:

A Characteristic Quest was first performed by Murray Music and Drama in Pinjarra, Western Australia in July-August 2006. The original cast list can be viewed on page 3.

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Original Cast - Murray Music & Drama Club July/Aug 2006

Farsight the Blind Lookout	JAMES COLEMAN
Sir	SEAN READ
Chuckles the Executioner (who also plays his three brothers Cartman, Jack the Eunuch, and Will)	RUSSELL BAXTER
Sir Peter the Pious	STEPHEN SUN
Sir Nigel the Not-So-Bright	GERI JONES
Sir Frederick the Fearless	MICHAEL ROGERS
Maurice the Mute Minstrel	CHRIS CALLISTER
Sir Hamish the Hypochondriac	JOY BOYCE
Sir Leopold the Ladies Man	ANDREW PECKOVER
Sir Charles the Chaste	ROB PERCY
Alice Appletree (to be doubled by one of the Sisters)	CAROLE DHU
Sir Norman the Narcoleptic	PADDY LARKIN/ DANIEL KERSHAW
Sir Desmond the Depressed	COLIN HOWE
Two corpses (to be doubled by two of the Sisters)	TAMMY DELAPORTE/ SIAN DHU
Catherine – Mother Inferior	JANIS CROXTON
Elizabeth– Sister Compost	TAMMY DELAPORTE
Charmaine – Sister Quill	PAM PECKOVER
Mary – Sister Cholera	SIAN DHU
Edwina – Sister Gastro	ADRIA GREEN
Anne – Sister Foghorn	ALISON GOSS
Isabella – Sister Tinnitus	ANGELA EDWARDS
Gwendoline – Sister G – String	SARAH CHRISTINER

The original show also incorporated three extra roles not in this version of the script:

Wartina the Witch	PAT BENTLEY
Vagabond the Elder	HUW JONES
Vagabond the Taller	IAN BIRCH

Cast List (in order of appearance)

Farsight the Blind Lookout

Sir

Chuckles the Executioner (who also plays his three brothers Cartman, Jack the Eunuch, and Will
– so four parts in all)

Sir Peter the Pious

Sir Nigel the Not-So-Bright

Sir Frederick the Fearless

Maurice the Mute Minstrel

Sir Hamish the Hypochondriac

Sir Leopold the Ladies Man

Sir Charles the Chaste

Alice Appletree (to be doubled by one of the Sisters)

Sir Norman the Narcoleptic

Sir Desmond the Depressed

Two corpses (to be doubled by two of the Sisters)

Catherine – Mother Inferior

Elizabeth – Sister Compost

Charmaine – Sister Quill

Mary – Sister Cholera

Edwina – Sister Gastro

Anne – Sister Foghorn

Isabella – Sister Tinnitus

Gwendoline – Sister G – String

A Characteristic Quest - Cast List

Farsight the Blind Lookout: name says it all really! Farsight is totally, legally and hopelessly blind.....he has zero zero vision in both eyes, but is eternally grateful to have the job as town lookout for the city of Camelittle. (Mind you – he got the job on the recommendation of Sir Nigel the Not So Bright). With a broad 'commoners' accent, this is a great comedy role, with a short song to open the show.

Sir: Mysterious and very well spoken knight of the realm who arrives in Camelittle, and unwittingly provides the knights of the town with a purpose for their quest. (They are perturbed that he has no characteristic tagged onto his name like they do, so they set off to find him a characteristic of his own!) Almost having the name "Sir Dick" bestowed on him by the grateful Sisters of Celibacy who are very impressed with a certain characteristic of his in the bedroom, it turns out that he is really the King in disguise, investigating the loyalty of his knights around the country. Sings the anthem of the show "Knight of Our Lives" with the sisters.

Chuckles the Executioner: (who also plays his three brothers) – needs to be able to carry a comedy song "Bring Out Your Dead" as well as a variety of accents, including a Welsh one. He is always in subservient roles: his other personas being a corpse collector, a Eunuch in the service of the Sisters of Celibacy and Will the Welsh messenger lad.

Sir Peter the Pious: a serious, sincere and pious knight, who strives to keep his fellow knights on the path of holiness. Yet, we discover he doubts his celibate lifestyle, in the catchy comical duet he sings with Charles the Chaste.

Sir Frederick the Fearless: Leader of the group of knights that have attached themselves to his household, amazingly brave and fiercely loyal to the King. Sings "We'll Fall on Our Swords", during the show. He leads the knights off on the quest, and generally keeps order and 'runs the show'.

Sir Nigel the Not-So-Bright: Again his name says it all, he is a calamity on legs. For example, the family zebra is named Spot, and he is the knight who employed a blind man for the town look out and a mute to be the local minstrel!

Sir Leopold the Ladies Man: This handsome and dashing knight is the scourge of bedchambers around the region, parading around showing his lance off. It is his deflowering of maidens and his knack of leading married ladies astray that causes the local women to lock themselves away as the Sisters of Celibacy, in shame of their enjoyment of carnal delights. With a sense of "Fabio" style about him, he is irresistible.

Sir Norman the Narcoleptic: Norman means well.....he just has trouble staying awake long enough to complete anything – including a lot of his lines! Frequently asleep – this is a fun role to play!

Sir Charles the Chaste: A knight who is immensely proud of his chastity, and strength of will power when it comes to resisting the delights of the flesh. Sings the duet "Celibacy" with Peter the Pious.

Sir Hamish the Hypochondriac: Poor Hamish suffers from every affliction known to mankind, pustules, boils, sore throats, and when he gets a stomach ailment midway through the show, then he passes wind in a truly spectacular fashion! (Sound effect included, just for the one scene only, we don't want to overplay that particular joke!)

Sir Desmond the Depressed: Has a gloomy disposition, and it is a little known historical fact that his miserable outlook on life inspires one of the Sisters of Celibacy to invent a concoction of plants whose initials spell PROZAC. Desmond ALWAYS expects the worst to happen.

Maurice the Mute Minstrel: Another of Sir Nigel the Not So Bright's 'finds' – Maurice cannot utter a sound, he mimes the music at Sir Frederick's banquets, and at the meetings conducted by the knights of the coffee table. A knight of passion with Sister G String leads him to have some success in uttering happy moans towards the end of the show, but by and large this is an excellent role for someone who has great stage presence but not a lot of time for learning lines!

The Horses: a special note! In the original stage production we made a set of medieval looking horses, which the knights stepped inside, so their legs walked the horses around, but it looked like they were riding. We then had the horses dancing in one of the songs. THE HORSES AT THIS POINT ARE STILL INTACT, contact TAZ Entertainment if you would like to use these, a minimal hire fee will apply. They were a HUGE hit with our patrons. See photos at the end of this script.

Alice Appletree: Small cameo role, country accent. Alice is the victim of one of Sir Nigel's mistakes.....her husband Will was shot by Sir Nigel in an archery training exercise. (Well.....they DID say Fire at Will!) She comes to the castle for some financial compensation, and exits with a new husband.

Mother Inferior: Leader of the band of women who have shut themselves away from the world, resolving never to weaken again in regards to the temptations of the male body. (Most of them are here due to past dalliances with Leopold - she still lusts after him.)

Sister Tinnitus: Deaf - totally. Delightful role, ludicrous lines, as she never answers any question correctly.

Sister Compost: Tends the garden.

Sister Quill: Clerical sister.

Sister Cholera: Runs the sick bay. Sings "Knight of Our Life".

Sister Gastro: In charge of the kitchens.

Sister Foghorn: General housekeeper. Sings "Knight of Our Life"

Sister G String: Plays the harp (not that we ever see that happen, we are just told it is her job!)

SCENES & SONGS

Act One

Scene One: **One stormy night, on the 'watch' outside the walls of Camelittle**
(Song - Farsight: *Welcome Along*)

Scene Two: **Council meeting of the Knights of the Coffee Table – the next morning.**

Scene Change Music "Questing" goes here

Scene Three: **A lonely patch of countryside – a few hours later**
(Song - Cartman/Knights/Corpses: *Bring Out Your Dead*)

Scene Four: **Evening camp under the pine trees – a fortnight into their quest.**

Scene Five: **Outside the castle of the Sisters of Celibacy- about fifteen minutes later.**
(Song - Mother Inferior/Frederick/Nigel & the Knights: *You're Not Getting Nun Tonight*)

Act Two

Scene One: **Inside the castle of the Sisters of Celibacy – late the next afternoon**
(Song - Frederick/Desmond/Nigel, all knights & sisters *"We'll Fall on Our Sword"*)

Scene change music "Let Us Pray" goes here

Scene Two: **On the battlements - just after nightfall on the same day**
(Song - Peter Charles & Norman: *Celibacy*)

Scene Three: **The ladies' bedchamber – immediately following**
(Song - Foghorn/ Cholera/ Sir & the Sisters : *"The Knight of My Life"*)

Scene Four: **Back to the battlements – the following dawn**

Scene Five: **The dining hall. – later that morning.**

Finale – All – Medley Reprise of Knight of my Life/Fall on our Sword

(Note Scene change music can be used as seen fit – above is a guide only)

Introductory notes on music, costumes and sets

I have written this play with community theatre in mind – simple and inexpensive to stage - unless you have the funds at your disposal of course to make it a magnificent and visual spectacle!

For ease of production, you can will find along with your scripts two CD's, one with just the backing (for performances) and one with myself and the composer singing the songs so you know how they should sound – although we are sure that they can be improved on!

Please remember that the play and songs ARE copyrighted – and are only to be performed within the agreement of your license.

Although nowhere near as witty, much of what I saw in my head whilst creating this plot line is of a similar type humour to the *Monty Python/Black Adder* genre, and for a play such as this to succeed I would suggest that aside from obviously using actors with as much comic talent/experience/ timing as possible – should they be available – it would be best to have a cast who can master the appropriate range of accents. For example “Sir” needs to have that John Cleese type of pompous British accent, Farsight needs to have a *Baldric (Tony Robinson) type accent* - and maybe Hamish a Scottish one, and Alice Appletree a real country one. However all of this is only a suggestion – if there are only actors available who can't do accents – you can either do it without – or better yet use this script as an opportunity to develop that skill in your players.

A brief note on costuming so that the thought of *all the knights' 'armour'* doesn't discourage you. I have been involved with several shows using knights over the last thirty years and three methods of dressing them seem to be most popular.

For the footwear boots always look dashing – even if they are only shoes with leg pieces attached, and thick tights. Supermarkets seem to stock very cheaply those hideous thick ribbed tights which will do the trick – they seem to be around in grey, navy, green in most shops – and if you get the largest sizes available they should fit smallish men – for the sake of decency wearing two pairs one on top of the other may be a good way to go! Large men may need to get their tights from a dance shop or beg an old pair of plain leggings off a lady you know! Helmets I don't feel are a must – they hide faces – but if you are *creative and wish to do something* along the helmet line, go for it!

The top half of the knights - this first idea is the most costly – and obviously is the best looking alternative - get old leather jackets from the op shops and spray them with silver paint after cutting them into tunic style tops. Second idea - get lots of large knitting needles and grey wool and set your family members to work – two large rectangle of grey loopy knitting can be stitched up to leave armholes (tabard style), and with a grey t-shirt or black skivvy underneath will do the trick. Finally – grey shiny (or even dull) fabric cut into rectangles and sewn tabard style will again do the job. Of course if you have smithies living locally who are happy to hammer you out authentic suits of armour at a discount price – you can disregard all of the above!

Sets - I am not going to give any notes on this – each production can take the brief descriptions in the script and do with it as they will. If you have the artistic talent and the funds to make

things truly spectacular – do so! If you are limited budget wise or by a lack of builders/painters then you can be as minimal as you wish. Hopefully the script will be amusing enough to carry your audience along for the night without them needing West End type scenery!

So.....read away! I hope you find yourself chuckling in spots. This script would probably go down well as a theatre restaurant type show – the imbibing of a few pre-show drinks always tends to fuel an audience’s appetite for humour – but should you wish to do a traditional straight seating show I am sure it would still go down well. (You will see from the script that I wrote it with the latter in mind – using the centre aisle a fair amount.)

Enjoy the story!

Carole Dhu

Act One Scene One

Storm noises fifteen seconds or so.....

[At the sound of the first loud thunder crash we see a cloaked and hooded figure {Farsight} come onto the stage – in front of the main curtain which is not yet opened – he is huddled against the elements and his whole body language bespeaks of the cold and driving rain. He stops front centre and gazes unseeingly (literally as we will discover) down the aisle off to the back of the hall – the area in front of the main curtain need only be lit dimly.]

..... leads into "OVERTURE" which also includes this song in the middle of it.

FARSIGHT: Welcome Along

Welcome along I hope you like our story
Welcome along, the guts and all the glory
It doesn't really matter if you've had a bad day
Pull up a chair, we'll chase your troubles away

Welcome along, we'll tell you all a fable
Welcome along come join us at the table
Grab yourselves a drink because tonight you're our guest
We'll saddle up our horses and set off on our quest.....

Music fades.....into storm noises.....

SFX: As the music fades out fade in a few loud thunder crashes and if your lighting dept runs to it – a couple of lightning flashes at this point would not go astray. I would suggest no more than about twenty seconds of this at full volume, it can then be faded down to run quietly through the entire scene as background noise if you so desire – it'd add atmosphere.

[After the third loud thunder crash – from the back of the hall and down the aisle enters a second cloaked and hooded figure {Sir}. He has a lighted lantern in one hand, and over the other shoulder is slung a bedroll and a dented and dull cooking pot. He is peering ahead as if groping his way through a dark and stormy evening – commences speaking once he is halfway down the aisle and he is well spoken.]

Note: The dialogue in this scene needs to be brisk – opening scenes in front of curtains can be a bit boring to look at if they are slow. Three actors who are slick with dialogue delivery are essential for the success of this scene.

Sir: Good evening to you my man! Is there anywhere around this lonely stretch of countryside where I could find some food, a warm bed and shelter from this inclement weather?

[By this point he is standing in front of centre stage speaking up to Farsight.]

Farsight: *(who jumped visibly as Sir began to speak and is now peering anxiously slightly off centre) 'Ark! 'Ooo goes there?*

Sir: *(somewhat taken aback) I do!*

Farsight: You oughtn't to be sneaking up on people in the dark and then go shoutin' down their ruddy ear 'oles. I nearly died 'o fright!

Sir: My good fellow! I was hardly sneaking! I'm swinging a lantern in front of me for Heaven's sake!

Farsight: Are you? Are you indeed? *(He switches his gaze slightly so that he is now focused on the top of Sir's left ear.)*

Sir: *(totally bewildered) Yes! Look, can you just tell me where I can find some shelter and a meal?*

Farsight: No, not yet. I 'ave to make sure you're not a vagabond or the like. I 'ave a responsible position to fulfil – duties to perform.

Sir: What position?

Farsight: I'm the town lookout.

Sir: *(absolutely flabbergasted) But that's ridiculous! You couldn't see me from twenty paces away. Go on – admit it! You couldn't could you?*

Farsight: No Sir I couldn't. And I can't see you now neither – but that won't stop me from doing my job.

Sir: Can't see me now? Why this is ludicrous. You must be blind. *(He begins to mount the stairs up on to the stage – which in my mental picture – using my home theatre club in my mind's eye – are set on the stage left side of the stage – a simple set of three or four steps leading up on to the apron.)*

Farsight: That I am Sir. *(He balls his fists and stares ferociously off into the wrong direction.)* And I must respectfully insist that you declare yourself before I will let you pass! You are.....?

Sir: *(who during Farsight's last line has reached the stage and is now standing right next to Farsight's left ear)here!*

[Farsight jumps with fright, grabs Sir's arm to prevent himself from falling – then pats Sir's face, body, up his legs etc policeman style – a frisking – at a fairly quick pace.]

Farsight: *(as he's frisking)* Well you feel a safe enough sort of fellow to have around. What's yer name?

Sir: Er.....er..... *(obvious he's a bit uncomfortable)* I haven't actually got one.

[Farsight's face needs to register surprise at this but just as he opens his mouth to comment Sir will barrel on – he's not in the mood to discuss it just now.]

Sir: Look is all this really necessary? I only want a place to bed down for the night – I've not come to invade for Heaven's sake!

Farsight: Not so hasty me lad – at least I'm assuming you're a lad – you certainly felt like one!

[Sir glances at his crotch as Farsight says this, and Farsight himself glances in the general direction – remembering of course he is blind – so he would not beeline in super-accurately.]

Farsight: You can at least tell me where you are from and where you are bound.

Sir: I am from the small hamlet of er....Rhubarb – on – Crumble, *(it is obvious to the audience that he is making this bit up)* and sometime hence I decided to leave the home of my forbears and set forth on a great adventure.

Farsight: What? Four bears you say? Blimey - they must've been expensive to feed!

Sir: Well not really – they're all dead!

Farsight: Oh shame! Still I s'pose you skinned 'em – nothing like the feel of a nice fur rug on the floor ey?

Sir: What are you on about?

Farsight: Your four bears. Grizzlies were they?

Sir: Not four bears! Forbears – as in ancestors! I left the home of my ancestors in search of adventure!

Farsight: Oh right – gotcha! 'Ow's it been so far then – this adventure of yours?

Sir: Dead boring! And I'm wet and cold, so can we please finish with the introductions? Where am I?

Farsight: *(grandly)* You sir, 'ave just arrived in Camelittle!

Sir: Where?

Farsight: Camelittle! *(This next paragraph is one of the main expositions in the plot and it is vital that the actor in this role is able to deliver this in an interesting fashion, not just rattle it off – so the audience get the whole concept of the show in a concise and interesting nutshell!)* It's the stronghold of Sir Frederick the Fearless and several other fine gentleman knights, who all for some reason or other didn't make the final cut for King Arthur's round table in Camelot. Sad sort 'o place truth to tell Sir – these fellas were desperate to sit at the Round Table, but they were all disqualified as they had a family member or recent ancestor who'd been dishonourable at some time or other – and King Arthur – well God Save him I say Sir, - I mean 'e 'as a job to do 'asn't e? – well anyway, King Arthur was very strict with the criteria for 'is knights. They all 'ad to 'ave unblemished family backgrounds – and this lot in 'ere *(he gestures behind himself)* well, they ain't and that's the truth of it. Fine fellas they are indeed - but payin' the price they are for the failin's of others.

Sir: And yet they are still loyal to the King? No plans of rebellion?

Farsight: Not likely sir, they love the King dearly. They lives 'ere, righting wrongs, guarding the local villagers from 'arm, and protecting virgins from ravishment – er.....well that is they used to protect virgins. Unfortunately Sir Leopold got a bit carried away when he first arrived 'ere and he er.....ravished them all, so there's not any left to protect.....er.....virgins that is!

(Hastily – to re-inforce the general decent calibre of the knights) 'Owever Sir – excepting that one mis 'ap, they're a flawless bunch, findin' poor misfortunates like myself a job – I mean I'd always wanted to be a lookout, and in most places me bein' blind would've been a real problem – I'd never 'ave 'ad a look in! Ha Ha! Get it – a look in? *(Goes to elbow Sir in glee but misses.)* Thank goodness that Old Sir Nigel put in a good word for me that's all I can say.

Sir: Sir Nigel?

Farsight: Sir Nigel the Not So Bright. "E's a regular champion in my book!

Sir: Indeed. Now perhaps you could find Sir Nigel or another of these knights, inform them I'm here, and one of them may locate me a bed.

Farsight: Beggin' your pardon sir – I can't leave my post. Just wait a tick – Chuckles'll be along any minute to relieve me, and then we'll be able to go. *(Farsight puts his hand to his eyes as if he could see and peers off stage left)*

Chuckles: *(enters from stage right, dressed in traditional executioner garb)* I'm over 'ere Eagle eyes! Ah! We 'ave company I see.

[Sir is looking visibly shaken at this frightening spectacle]

Chuckles: *(strides over and pumps Sir's hand enthusiastically)* Pleased to meet ya! Couldn't 'elp over'earing most of your conversation – I was sitting in the shelter of the wall over there out of the wind, 'avin' a smoke before I commenced duty – we're not allowed to smoke on the watch. Chuckles the executioner – that's me. *(Sir cringes)* Oh..... unemployed don't worry! I'm another of Sir Nigel the Not So Bright's charity cases. Bless 'im – I've got a fancy title – but I'm really just another lookout – to give Farsight a chance to rest 'is eyes!

Farsight: I tell ya – 'e's got an 'eart of gold that Sir Nigel – if it wasn't fer 'im we'd both be wandrin' around the place – out of work and all alone in the world, what wiv us both bein' orphans 'n all.

Chuckles: Well, in all honesty I wouldn't 'ave been totally alone, not me. I come from a great big family meself. I mean my muvver and favver 'ave both passed on – God Bless 'em, but I do have several brothers scattered about the countryside – all grown up like me now of course. But by golly, ours was a full 'ouse when I was growin' up, and every ten months or so along came another brother – never a sister. I reckon my muvver and favver must have been at it like rabbits.....

Farsight: *(hastily interrupts)* I'm sure our visitor doesn't need to 'ear any more Chuckles – e's cold and tired.

Chuckles: Oh, right you are then. Off you go then Farsight, find this nice gent a warm bed. *(Remembering)* Oh yeah – Sir Frederick says to tell you you're welcome to attend the Council meeting tomorrow – 'ave a break from standing in the rain. *(Turns to Sir)* You'll no doubt be welcome 'n all. I never miss a council meeting if I can 'elp it – not since they got the new table.

Sir: New table?

Farsight: For their meetin's. They could 'ardly 'ave a round one now, could they? It's been done. So they tried to think outside the square – and came up with a triangular one.

Chuckles: An absolute disaster! Ev'ryone kept dentin' their armour on the corners – so they had to get another one. By popular vote they decided on a coffee table! Not that impressive to look at, but we do get a lovely spread to eat at the meetings now! I've not missed goin' to one since the coffee table turned up. Seeya later then!

Farsight: Not if I see you first *(Laughs delightedly and slaps his thigh)* I tell ya! I'm a laugh a minute. "Ang on Sir, just before we go I need to relieve meself – where's a good spot now.....? *(He wanders over to the edge of the stage and peers blindly into the front row)* This'll do!

[Just as he starts to undo the front of his trousers both Chuckles and Sir make noises of dismay and each grab one of his arms as the lights go to BLACKOUT.]

Act One Scene Two

The actors from previous scene leave the stage immediately in the dark, there is a five second surge in the storm noises and then we hear (after the applause if there is any!) posh male voices saying things along the lines of "Pass the sugar old boy", and "Where's the milk jug" and "I think I'll try Earl Grey today" "Black with two for me please" as the main curtains open to reveal.....

Meeting Hall of Sir Fredrick the Fearless – blacks will do fine for staging here, as long as the colour is alleviated with a couple of standards (i.e. flags) hanging lengthwise from the back curtain in say yellow and orange – Frederick's family colours/crest. Just behind the curtain is a long coffee table, and there are benches behind that. Crowded on to these benches – ridiculously close to each other are the knights.

Sir Peter the Pious is standing to the right of the table, he is holding a basket of apples. Sir Nigel the Not-So-Bright is standing at the left end of the table – holding a basket of sticky buns. Seated at the table from stage R to L are Sir Leopold the Ladies Man, Sir Hamish the Hypochondriac, Sir Charles the Chaste, Sir Frederick the Fearless, Sir Norman the Narcoleptic, and Sir Desmond the Depressed. All have an apple and a bun.

(So Leopold is seated nearest the knight holding the apples, and Desmond is seated nearest the knight holding the buns.)

Important Note: *Each knight needs to have a strongly different character from each other – visible to the audience from the start – eg. Sir Hamish would always be wincing, holding his back, mopping his brow, feeling his pulse etc. Peter the Pious would often be reading a prayer book or praying in the corner, Sir Leopold forever preening and posturing, Sir Norman regularly dropping off to sleep wherever he is, Sir Charles with eyes downcast and shielded whenever a woman appeared, Sir Frederick chest out and strident, Sir Desmond slumped shoulders, miserable countenance, and Sir Nigel the vacant eyed male equivalent of the enthusiastic ditsy girl type character that is often referred to as bimbo – but he SINCERELY BELIEVES he is always trying to help. This storyline will only be funny throughout if these eight actors are capable of distinguishing their characters from the others.*

At the back of the stage is a raised platform, so that the people who will eventually stand on it are visible from the chest up to the audience. Currently it is empty except for Maurice the Mute Minstrel who is standing at the far R of it.

Up to and after the entrance of Farsight and company we need to see tea cups being filled, passed along, sugar milk etc likewise, but in mime once the action commences.

Chuckles and Farsight enter from Stage left – Chuckles is guiding Farsight who is in the lead. As they reach the left of Sir Peter.....

Sir Peter: *(almost chanting) One apple each my friends, God is watching.*

[Chuckles takes one, Peter places one in Farsight's hand, and then the two of them cross the stage in front of table, go around behind Sir Desmond and stand on the platform near Maurice.]

[Enter Sir SL, who stops and smiles at Sir Peter.]

Sir: Good morrow friend! I have just arrived in Camelittle, and have been told it is permissible to watch the Council meeting.

Sir Peter: Certainly, you are most welcome. I am Sir Peter the Pious, and will look forward to further discourse with you at a later time. For now – please - make haste to the spectators' gallery. We are ready to commence. Please – take some refreshment.

[He holds the basket out in front of him and as Sir is about to pass by Leopold leans up and tries to take another apple.]

Sir Peter: *(without even needing to look)* One apple each my friend. God is watching.

(Leopold hastily drops his arm and sits back down. Sir crosses in front and takes an apple in passing. He reaches Sir Nigel at the far end and as he gets to the R of him, about to go around to the back)

Sir Nigel: How do you fare stranger? My name is Sir Nigel The-Not-So-Bright. Fancy a sticky bun old chap? *(Sir takes one nodding his thanks as.....)* Take two in fact – they're delicious!

Sir: *(hesitates – indicates Sir Peter with a nod of his head)* I wouldn't like to be greedy Sir Knight. After all – God is watching.

Sir Nigel: Not these buns he isn't! He's got his eye on the apples!

[Sir takes a second bun and joins the other three spectators on the platform at the rear of stage. Sir Frederick rises and all fall silent.]

Sir Fred: Sir Knights – I call the Council to order. Before we commence our weekly business let us proclaim our devotion to our beloved King Arthur

All Knights, Maurice, Farsight and Chuckles: *(those who have them raising coffee cups etc)*
Long live King Arthur!

Sire Fred: ...expressed in song by our trusty squire Maurice the Minstrel.

[Maurice steps down from the platform and comes down next to Sir Peter. All knights stand and place their hands on their hearts (as do Farsight Chuckles and Maurice) as Maurice begins.]

Maurice: *(miming – not a sound to escape)* God Save King Arthur Our Most Noble Leige Whose standards of Valour We strive to achieve. (Maurice repeats this until the dialogue required is completed)

Sir: *(To Chuckles & Farsight as Maurice begins his second time through)* Why is he miming?

Farsight: E's mute.

Chuckles: Since birth.

Sir: Then why is he a minstrel?

Farsight: E's always wanted to be one.

Chuckles: Since birth.

Sir: How do you know that if he can't speak?

Sir Hamish: *(Angrily turns to them)* SSSShhhhhh!!! It's rude to make conversation while Maurice is singing.

[Sir shrugs as if it's all too hard to understand. Maurice turns and bows to knights. They all sit as he returns to his spot on platform. Sir Frederick remains standing. Peter and Nigel sit as well, Norman immediately falls asleep]

Frederick: We have two petitioners today. One in person, but first we have an absentee request which has been sent to us through Sir Leopold. If you wouldn't mind filling us in Leopold.....

Leopold: *(standing)* Yes – we've had a request for there to be an increase in the amount of honey we add to the cider that we sell from the gatehouse to the local workers. It's not quite sweet enough apparently.

Charles: *(jotting notes)* Which of the townsmen requested this? I need to note it in the minutes.

Leopold: Lewis the Fat Arsed Git.

Charles: I beg your pardon?

Leopold: Lewis the Fat Arsed Git.

Charles: Since when have we allowed our townspeople to have names as crude as that?

Leopold: What are you talking about?

Charles: Lewis the Fat Arsed Git of course!

Leopold: Well he did. I was there!

Frederick: Did what Leopold? You've rather lost us I'm afraid.

Leopold: Asked about it. The honey in the cider. Lewis the Fat Arsed Git.

Frederick: *(the light dawns)* Ah! I see. Lewis the Fat. Asked IT. Good Lord man, speak clearly, we very nearly put a rude word in the minutes.

Hamish: I vote we do it. More honey I mean – not the rude word in the minutes. Honey is very good for a sore throat. I know of course, suffering like I do from minewhy only the other day I had enormous weeping yellow pustules on my vocal chords –

Frederick: *(interrupting hastily – they have heard all this a million times)* Quite Hamish – all in favour? *(All say aye)* Now our next petitioner is here in person - Alice Appletree, recently widowed whose family tends the apple orchard adjoining our archery practise fields.

[Enter Alice from stage right – stand at the end of the table closest to Sir Nigel]

Frederick: Good morrow Mistress – how can we assist you?

Alice: *(strong country accent)* Well my Lord, I'd like a bit 'o compensation for my Will, now 'e's dead 'n all, and with you lot bein' responsible for 'is murder as it were. I'm left with no man to do the labourin' – I'll need some sort 'o funds to pay a labourer.

Frederick: My good Alice – I fail to understand you. How are we responsible for his.....murder did you say? Will Appletree was a friend to us all – indeed – the fruits of his labours enjoyed by us all. *(Indicates apples)*

Alice: *(bluntly)* "E was shot my Lord – with an arrow –from your archery field!

Leopold: *(rises to his feet, gives a dashing bow, sweeps his hair back and favours Alice with a Fabio type smile)* My dear Alice, I am sure that a woman of your innate wisdom can deduce that this unfortunate accident is just that, an accident. A woman of your charms will soon find another lusty partner to warm your nights – and tend your – er..... apples! *(He bows and sits)*

Alice: *(not to be swayed)* It weren't an accident! I 'eard the order – when you were out there practising with your bows and arrows - and I even saw 'oo did it! It were 'im *(she points at Sir Norman who has woken up about the time Alice entered)* ' oo gave the order, and 'im *(points at Nigel)* 'oo carried it out. And my Will fell out of the tree – shot through the 'eart.

Nigel: Sorry Alice – I had no choice – I have to obey orders.

Norman: What order? I never told you to kill anyone!

Nigel: Yes you did! You did 'ready - aim – fire' exercises with me for a while – and then you told me to "Fire at Will". So I did. *(Proudly)* I got him as well!

[Alice looks at Frederick with an "I told you so" look. The knights look sheepish]

Norman: *(stands up aghast)* But I didn't mean for you to aim at.....oh! For Heaven's sake.....*(a glazed look comes over Norman's face and his chin drops to his chest as with a solitary snore he falls asleep once more)*

Frederick: Ah Goodwife Alice, please accept our apologies – a slight misunderstanding obviously.

Alice: Yes – well an apology isn't going to keep the orchard goin' – is it? I need some money to pay a labourer – unless you can find me another 'usband!

Frederick: Chuckles! Come 'ere lad! How do you fancy a career change? How do you fancy apple farming?

[Chuckles and Alice eye each other off, she looking appraisingly at him and him grinning widely.]

Chuckles: I fancy 'er – I mean it quite nicely thanks!

Frederick: What say you Alice? Could Chuckles here become the apple of your eye?

Alice: E's as right as ninepence! *(She takes his arm and they start to exit from where she entered, but just before they reach the wings, she stops, fishes in her skirts and pulls out an arrow which she takes back and gives to Sir Nigel. Stuck on the end of it is a nice juicy lamb's heart from the butchers – giving a nice opportunity for a reaction when he takes it and is left with it.)* You might as well 'ave this back, I had to rip it out of 'im so I could close the lid of 'is coffin. No sense in wastin' it. Jus' be a bit more careful in future! *(They exit)*

Chuckles: *(as they leave - nervously)* Alice – do you think that's wise?

[Nigel looks with distaste at the arrow with a heart on it and quickly passes it along to the knight next to him, who does the same until it reaches Sir Frederick who impatiently places it on the table in front of him.]

Frederick: Indeed! Well, an unfortunate occurrence but one I am sure you will learn from Sir Nigel. In the heat of battle "Fire At Will" means that you no longer wait for the instruction to fire for every shot – but you can choose when and where to fire – hence "Fire At Will".

Nigel: Yes – but what if no-one is called Will? Will the knight leading the charge yell out "Fire at Henry" for example – or "Fire at George". *(Big sigh from Nigel – other knights are in despair at his dense-ness, except for Norman who is still asleep)* It just seems such a slow way to kill off the enemy Sir Frederick – I mean why can't we have an order "Fire at all of those men who aren't on our side?"

Frederick: Perhaps Sir Nigel we can discuss this later – I wish to hear news of other parts of the country from our travelling visitor – please step forward Sir Knight. *(As Sir comes forward)* This new friend may be able to inspire us with fresh ideas to prove our valour. *(Frederick steps back so he and Sir are standing behind the table – all others at table sitting)*

[Sir reaches him and bows low]

Frederick: Please good knight – declare yourself? You are.....?

Sir: Sir

Frederick: Yes well we're all Sirs aren't we? Sir who?

Sir: Just sir, sir.

Frederick: Sir Sir?

Sir: Exactly. That's me – and I'd like to join your order if I may. I have rather had enough of traipsing around the countryside – it's time to settle down and do some good deeds, knightly business – all that sort of stuff.

Frederick: Well... I'm sure we'd be pleased to have another able-bodied member on the team....but it's just a bit difficult if you haven't got a name. Something of a drawback really. I mean – what will we call you?

Sir: Sir Knight or something – won't that do? I'm sure it'd do the job.

[The knights all mutter briefly between themselves then Sir Hamish stands up]

Hamish: We're just wondering good sir knight – if it might be possible to give you a name. We are all known in a general fashion as Sir Knight and if that was actually what we called you then it could become confusing from time to time. Have you no personality trait or characteristic that you could use? For example.....I am Sir Hamish the hypochondriac, due to my incessant worrying about my health. Indeed, one look at me and I'm sure you can see why.....my pasty skin pallour is a good indication of just how sickly and frail I really am.....

Charles: *(hastily interrupting)* Quite Hamish.....I'm sure the gentleman gets your point. I am Sir Charles the Chaste.....due to my immense strength of willpower when it comes to matters of the flesh – and our esteemed leader here is called Frederick the Fearless due to his amazing bravery. Sir Leopold the Ladies Man is named after his many successes in the carnal field *(Leopold bows with a flourish whilst Sir Charles's face displays his distaste)* and Sir Peter the Pious is named for his sincere and admirable piety and devotion to good works.

Sir: I'm afraid I don't have any outstanding virtues – I'm a bit ordinary really.

Desmond: *(Gloomily)* Doesn't need to be a virtue old chap – I am named after my disposition – Sir Desmond the Depressedold Nigel here is Sir Nigel the Not-So-Bright due to his.....*(at this point it is discovered that Sir Nigel is quite happily balancing a biscuit on his nose or some similar childish game).....er ... (glances at Nigel)* well – it's quite obvious really isn't it, and then of course we have Sir Norman the Narcoleptic *(loud snore from the sleeping Norman)* who of course is named after his medical condition of Narcolepsy.

Sir: What's Narcolepsy?

Desmond: You mean you really don't know?

Sir: Well I do actually – but I figure there'll be a few in the audience who don't – so this is a good chance to slip it in.

Desmond: Narcolepsy – a rare medical condition characterised by sudden and uncontrollable episodes of deep sleep. *(Huge snore from Norman- Frederick next to him gives him an elbow and Norman struggles into wakefulness)*

Sir: Well – I'm pleased to make the acquaintance of all of you. I do hope that my lack of a name won't be a barrier to my joining your band of knights.

Frederick: No, no not at all – it just doesn't sound very flash does it – plain old Sir?.....is there anything in your family background that could assist us in finding a name. For example.....your father...?

Sir: A parsnip farmer Sir Frederick.

Frederick: Hmmmmm.....Sir Parsnip.....no.....not a lot of help there then. Your grandmother perhaps?

Sir: A witch.

[Peter the Pious gasps audibly - Sir Fred hurries on]

Fred: Your mother perhaps?

Sir: *(hangs his head)* A night-worker Sir Frederick.

Charles: Don't look so ashamed old boy – after all – we're all knight workers aren't we?

Norman: I don't think he means a knight worker Charles – he means a night worker.

Leopold: *(lustily)* Oh- hoh! *(accompanied by an enthusiastic face and suggestive arm movement)*

Charles: *(hastily)* Oh quite! No names there then!

Frederick: Look – I think we've wasted quite enough time on this name business – if you are just plain old Sir – then plain old sir it is. I can't see that you will have any less valour or honour through not having a name.

However – just to formalise the thing properly – I have to ask you, what attributes can you bring to our council – the Council of the Coffee Table?

Sir: Bravery, devotion, good humour, intelligence, andjust let me pull this out.....

[He fumbles with the front of his belt and all gasp in horror. Then he realises that what he's after is at the back, so he turns his belt around and we see a small silver coffee pot tied to it by a piece of string.]

Sir:and a nice silver coffee pot left to me by my dear Aunt Sybilla!

[All knights "Oooh" and "Aah" in relief and delightedly burst into a small applause as Sir breaks the string and deposits the pot on the table with a flourish.]

Frederick: *(impressed by the gift)* Well, I can't see any reason why you shouldn't join our table....all in favour?

All: Aye!

[At this point Norman falls asleep and falls off his chair]

Frederick: Ah! Most obliging of you Norman – please Sir – take a seat. Right now – to business - we need to find a project - a plan – to occupy ourselves with.

Leopold: A quest!

Frederick: Exactly! Now – don't be shy – feel free to throw any ideas into the ring.

Peter: Why not search for the Holy Grail?

Leopold: It's been done!

[At this point Norman wakes and stands up behind Sir rubbing his head where he hit it on the floor]

Hamish: Has any one got a ring that needs destroying? We could take it to the fires of Mount Doom and throw it in.

Charles: No that's been done too!

Frederick: Besides – that'll take too long, we haven't got the luxury of three instalments – whatever we do has to be able to be completed in one show – tonight!

[Maurice the Mute begins to leap up and down enthusiastically at the back]

Farsight: Beggin' your pardon my Lords – Maurice has an idea to put forth by the sounds of this jumpin' next to me.

Frederick: Certainly Maurice – come down the front here where we can hear.....er..... I mean see you.

[Maurice comes front of table, and pantomimes –as in charades – the action to portray movie and book.]

Desmond A movie!

Norman: And a book!

[Maurice nods agreement. He holds up three fingers to symbolise three words]

Nigel: Fingers!

[Everyone stares at him in exasperation]

Peter: Three words! Good – go on Maurice. First word – yes.....

[Maurice mimes stabbing something]

Charles: Jousting.....stabbing.....

[Maurice switches to being the victim – clutches his chest and falls down]

Hamish: Heart attack.....dying.....

[Maurice leaps to his feet – giving them encouraging signals.]

Leopold: Killing.....

[Maurice is ecstatic – gives a chopping motion to indicate to cut word short.]

Leopold: Kill!

[Maurice is nodding yes]

Frederick: Well done Leopold! *(Maurice holds up three fingers)* Third word.....

[Maurice begins miming being a dragon and breathing fire]

Norman: Oh I know! It's a dr..... *(he falls asleep on his feet – all stare at him – count to three then.....)*

Sir: A dragon!

[All the knights are appalled.]

Frederick: Oh I say Sir. Terribly bad form indeed! It's Norman's go!

Sir: But he's asleep again! We could have been here for hours.

Frederick: Not the point old bean! Common courtesy don't you know!

[Murmurs of agreement all around.]

Sir: I'm sorry! Really!

Desmond: *(sadly)* Well – you've ruined the game now – no point in waiting til Norman wakes up – we may as well carry on. First word kill – third word dragon. Kill something dragon.

Farsight: The! Kill the dragon!

[Maurice nods excitedly.]

Peter: None left Maurice – all the dragons were slain years ago. We're too late. *(Maurice returns sadly to the platform)*

Frederick: There just doesn't seem to be anything for us to tackle – no opportunity for us to show our quality to the world – Frederick the Fearless – with nothing to fear! What's the use of having a name like that if I can't live up to it?

Sir: Cheer up Sir Frederick. At least you have a name to live up to. Something that identifies you apart from the rest of us. Something more than just plain 'Sir'. I really think that I need to find a name – a characteristic – to identify the real me.

Leopold: Seems like you've got your own plan of action sorted out then. Good luck with it! Where will you start?

Sir: I have no idea. It's quite a challenge really. Where do you go to look for a characteristic I wonder? How do you find out what really makes you you?

Frederick: *(sadly)* Well – in my day, you'd go off on a quest and see what... *(idea dawns)*of course! That can be our quest!

Sir: What can?

Frederick: To find you a characteristic! Something we can use to name you properly. *(As he goes into this speech he comes around to the front of the table and steps out onto the apron of the stage. He picks up the arrow with the heart on it, which gives him something to wave around as he talks. Sir follows him.)* We will venture out across the land until we uncover some characteristic for you to use in your name. Take heart man! *(Just as he reaches this point the arrow will have been waved in such a fashion that it ends up with the heart between them, their gaze lands on it and there is a brief pause as they look at the heart. Frederick hastily puts the arrow behind his back)* We will meet whatever adventures cross our path – and in the process we will uncover some hidden characteristic or skill that will give you your name. *(Shouts dramatically with his hand clapped to Sir's shoulder)* Who will join us in this quest?

[All the knights rise to their feet crying "I will" "I shall" "Take me" etc and step forward onto the apron. Maurice and Farsight also come forward but whereas the knights and Maurice are all facing the front Farsight will be facing in the direction half to the side of and half to the back of the stage.]

Frederick: We nine knights of the coffee table shall ride forth at once!

Farsight: *(coming front of stage and facing off in the totally wrong direction)* I'll come too my Lord, you'll be needing my sharp eyes! And Maurice the mute minstrel will accompany us also.

Frederick: Very brave indeed when we could be facing danger at every turn. Who knows what trials await us? I appreciate your devotion! To the stables men! Hamish, Farsight, bring some food!

[All exit except Farsight, and Hamish who rapidly stuff apples and biscuits into 2 small sacks, conveniently folded on the table.]

Hamish: It is decent of you and Maurice to come you know – this quest could be a risk to the health of all of us.

Farsight: Not decent Sir Hamish, not really. It's just our parts would have been very small indeed if we'd been written out after two scenes ey?

Hamish: Good thinking Farsight! *(Claps him on the shoulder and they start to walk offstage.)* Now, come and help me find the first aid kit before we leave, horse riding always irritates my piles. You will be able to help me apply my soothing ointment each evening.....

Curtain shuts.

The scene change music entitled "Questing" will be played at this point and will fade out as the knights come galloping down to the stage. Cartman and cart are set on the apron in the blackout. This next scene will be played in front of the main curtain, but allow enough time for your knights to sprint around to the front of house so they can enter on their horses and ride through the audience. It will be Farsight and Hamish you'll be waiting for so there needs to be a bit of this music played before you bring the lights up on Cartman.

Act One Scene Three

In this scene, you will need to call on your actors ability to ACT – to take this ridiculous hobby horse riding action and make it believable.....if they carry on as though it is serious stuff then it will be funny. If they look embarrassed and start laughing themselves then it won't have the desired effect.

In front of the curtain when the lights come up we see a man standing with a push cart. He is the spitting image of Chuckles the executioner, which won't be hard to do as it's the same actor! The cart will hopefully be of a size to have two dead bodies draped over/in it - - pick your two smallest women actors, dress them in rags and tatters for this.

Cart Man: *(yells over the music which is fading)* Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead! *(He rings a handbell)* Come on...don't be shy. Bring 'em on out!

[Our eleven questing gents come galloping down the aisle, on wooden hobby horses. They pull up as they near the front. Ad libs of "Whoa, steady there etc to horses"]

Frederick: *(from the auditorium floor)* Good morrow peasant!

Cart Man: Good morrow fine sirs. Appalling weather isn't it?

Leopold: Well at least the rain has stopped temporarily. The roads really need to dry out. Our horses keep getting their wheels bogged in the mud!

Cart Man: Wind's still cutting like a knife though isn't it? Cold enough to freeze the balls off a brass monkey.

Peter: Peasant, that crude language becomes you not. Do you not want to be eligible for Heaven when your time comes to pass over?

Cart Man: Beg pardon Sir, I try not to think about passing over. It's a bit too close to the bone when you're in this line of work. *(Bellows off to his right)* Bring out your dead! *(Rings his bell)*

Charles: I've often wondered how a man finds himself in your line of work. *(He mounts the stairs with his horse, followed by the other knights, who join him one by one on stage during the slow beginning to.....)*

CART MAN'S "BRING OUT YOUR DEAD SONG."

Cartman:

My daddy always said "Get a job and make some bread"
Don't let an opportunity pass by
But little did I know once I gave this job a go

A bloke could make a killin' every time a person died.....

When I was a little boy Dad sent me off to school
I failed Home Economics and I didn't know what to do
But on my 13th birthday an idea came to my head
I'd make my fortune pickin' up the dead

Bring out yer dead
(Corpses sit up and echo) Bring out yer dead
Bring out yer dead
(Corpses echo) Bring out yer dead
Just throw those bodies in the cart that's what my Daddy said
They might have died of leprosy or choked on a crust of bread
Everybody bring out yer dead.

8 BAR DANCE BREAK FOR THE CORPSES
(He knocks them on the head to get them back on the cart)

Suddenly the times got tough I was running out of dough
I tried my hand at acting
And gave modelling a go
But suddenly prosperity it came again my way
'Cos people started dying from the plague

Bring out yer dead
(Knights echo) Bring out yer dead
Bring out yer dead
(Knights echo) Bring out yer dead
If my cart is overfull – I'll dig a hole instead
It doesn't matter if your name is Guinevere or Fred
Everybody bring out yer dead.

Bring out yer dead
(Knights echo) Bring out yer dead
Bring out yer dead
(Knights echo) Bring out yer dead
If my cart is overfull – I'll dig a hole instead
And if they're showing signs of life just knock 'em on the head
Everybody bring out your dead.....I mean to tell ya.....
Everybody bring out yer dead! Oh yeah!

Ad lib big ending (as per vocal recording or vocalist is free to make up their own particular version of what is on recording.)

Norman: I have to say my man, you bear a striking resemblance to our own Chuckles the Executioner back at Camelittle. It's uncanny.

Cart Man: *(Almost crying with glee)* Chuckles! Chuckles the executionerwith the handsome face.....Chuckles with the manly physique? Good 'eavens Sir, that would be my bruvver. Well – one of 'em I mean. We're a huge family, our 'ouse was crammed full when I was a young 'un.....my parents 'ad a new kid every ten months or so, always boys 'n 'all. I reckon my muvver spent every available minute lyin' on 'er.....

Charles *(hastily)* Quite!
and Peter: *(hastily)* Yes!

Cart Man: Anyway I 'eard 'e 'ad fallen into a great job. Beats this one at any rate. *(Bellows off to his left)* Bring out your dead! *(Then to centre)*
Bring out your dead! *(Bell)*

Nigel: We don't have any dead!

Cart Man: What about 'im? *(Nudges Norman - who has sat down and nodded off since the song finished - with his foot.)*

Norman: *(wakes up)* Morning all!

Cart Man: Oh bugger! I'm so close to being the top body collector this week. I only need one more to win a nice set of onion peelers.

Hamish: Take me if you like, I'm dying.

Cart Man: No you're not!

Hamish: I think you'll actually find I am. I'm feeling weaker by the hour. *(hopefully)* I've got leprosy.

Norman: No you haven't.

Hamish: Cholera then.

Nigel: No you haven't.

Hamish: The plague. I've got the plague. *(He looks earnestly at Cart Man who is not to be swayed.)*

Cart Man: Look Sir, there are huge penalties for carting off bodies that ain't dead. You 'ave not got the plague.

Hamish: Truly I have, I got it this morning after breakfast.

Cart Man: Look mate – you have not got the plague alright? I've seen what it does to people – and you ain't got it! It's bad around these parts at the moment though, so you lot watch out for yourselves.

Frederick: Thank you for the warning, good citizen. How shall we know if we've caught it?

Cart Man: Easy! First you'll get big spots all over your stomachlike these 'ere..... *(he pulls up his tunic to reveal a stomach covered in large circular purplish spots)* and then about six hours later you'll just keel over.

[The knights all look at each other in concern]

Cart Man: Bring out your.....*(He keels over and dies)*

[The knights all look at him on the floor and then each other. Faces quite clam and deadpan. Without a word they jump their horses over him and off through the side of the curtain.]

Blackout Questing Music as required.

ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

Curtains open to reveal all the knights (except Charles and Nigel who are offstage) sleeping around a campfire, huddled against the cold. Maurice and Farsight are also asleep – but separate from the group – it is obvious Farsight has fallen asleep on the watch.

Only half the depth of stage is revealed – the mid stage tabs are covering the back half of the stage, in front of these black curtains are standing a few Christmas trees (undecorated), and if you wish to make a few log bases to extend the height of one or two that will give you a variety of heights.

The only two knights awake are Norman and Sir and they are sitting up at the forefront of the group.

Sir: Can't sleep ey Norman?

Norman: Not right now – but believe me I'll nod off in a minute. That's why I never wander too far from the fire – in case I fall asleep somewhere and freeze to death before I wake. It's jolly cold – and from the way the stars are covered by those thick heavy clouds we are in for a real blizzard shortly.

Sir: Norman, we've been on the road for days now. I know that these quests can be long and laborious, but I do hope something exciting happens soon. A fellow can get dashed bored with just the same few faces for company. And why is it that all the land hereabouts seems to be bereft of womenfolk? I declare except for Alice Appletree back in Camelittle I have not sighted one woman since we began our travels.

Norman: Blame Sir Leopold the Ladies Man for that. When he first arrived he gallivanted all over the district, showing off his lance apparently. Impressing all the maidens hereabouts. And the ladies certainly seemed to be enjoying ithe had it out morning noon and night. Ladies young and old were queuing up for a look at it, being that it was longer than everyone else's. Apparently some of his favourite maidens even got a chance to lift it up.

Sir: (wistfully) Lucky blighter. I've never had much success with the lance myself. Jousting's just not my thing. Give me a sword any day.

Norman: Anyway eventually the local menfolk were furious and threatening to murder him. Fathers, husbands, brothers, suitors, all very very jealous you understand. So they banned all the womenfolk from talking to him. Initially all the women began to pine for him – after all he was such a great f.....(he falls asleep mid-sentence)

[Charles and Nigel enter.]

Sir: Sir Norman was just filling me in on Sir Leopold's colourful past. I hear he was a great f.....

Charles: (hastily) Favourite with the ladies yes! But of course once he was banned from mixing with them and they were distanced from his overwhelming charm, they began to realise that they had sinned. They began to feel shame. After all, once you are deflowered.....I mean if you are no longer a maiden – then what are you?

Nigel: (having to think) A boy?

[Charles and Sir look at him and then ignore him.]

Charles: Many **married** ladies had also sinned on his account, and eventually the shame and disgrace became too great for them to bear. So they locked themselves away in an impenetrable castle, and took the name The Sisters of Celibacy. Indeed no-one knows where the castle is situated, only that it is somewhere in this general vicinity.

They took a vow to abstain from associating with men for the rest of their lives – and live in repentance of their carnal lusting after Sir Leopold.

Sir: Gracious! Sir Leopold is certainly quite a fellow isn't he?

[Loud thunder crashes - the knights begin to stir.]

Charles: Fellow travellers! Sir Nigel and I have fed the horses, and they are ready to travel onwards. I feel we should seek out a cave or an old dwelling to wait out the storm. It's not safe to shelter under these trees incase the lightening returns.

Nigel: A good point Sir Charles. Wake up Sir Knights! We set forth once again! Farsight (he shakes him awake) – lead on oh trusty squire. You shall be our eyes for the road ahead. Go and seek out some shelter.

Frederick: Er.....Sir Nigel.....is that wise? Perhaps someone with better eyesight?.....

[Farsight stumbles off in the direction of the horses.]

Nigel: (earnestly) Farsight is our lookout Sir Frederick. It would hurt his feelings if we sent someone else.

[Knights all begin to move off stage.]

Frederick: (*pained acceptance*) Of course Sir Nigel – you are quite right. We shall trust our fate to the sharp eyes and dim wits of our lookout!

Quick blackout (Questing Music as required) during which time the crew will remove the trees and fire and open the midstage tabs to reveal a painted grey stone wall which is quite high, with a

single door in its centre which opens outwards, onto the stage. Frederick and Farsight leave the stage in the blackout.

ACT ONE SCENE FIVE

Enter Farsight, alone and carrying his lantern. (*Lighting quite dim here*) Wind SFX are heard, he is shivering and clutching his cloak. He sits down leaning his back against the wall.

Farsight: Blimey! Not a building in sight. Luckily this hedge seems to be a good wind break. I'll wait here for the others to catch up.

Frederick: (*entering*) Farsight! Well done! I could see you hurrying up the hill in front of us, and I thought I'd put a spurt on and catch you. The others aren't far behind. (*He has a good look at the wall.*)

I say old chap – you've excelled yourself!

Farsight: I thought you'd be pleased my Lord – it's a good sturdy hedge, and will make a good barrier against this awful wind.

Frederick: A hedge Farsight? Feel it man, it's made of stone!

Farsight: (*Standing and patting the wall*) So it is my Lord. A stone hedge! Blimey it's a miracle! Still it's nice if the odd miracle or two occurs on a quest isn't it?

[Frederick looks exasperated but is saved the trouble of answering as all the knights enter. They all look up at the wall mumbling conjectures as to what it could be amongst themselves.]

Peter: I say Sir Frederick! What a bit of luck finding such strong shelter in such foul weather. I estimate the snow will be falling fast in a matter of minutes – but now we shan't have to worry. What a stroke of good fortune.

Farsight: I know Sir Peter – a stone hedge. "Oo would've thought? Our quest's first miracle. "Oo knows what we can expect next?

[A piercing & strident woman's voice is heard from behind the wall.]

Mother: Who is lurking there? Answer at once!

Farsight: A talking stone hedge!! Another miracle! (He turns his blind eyes rapturously to heaven)

Frederick: (*quite calmly*) Farsight?

Farsight: Yes Sir Frederick?

Frederick: Shut up!

Farsight: Er....yes Sir Frederick.

Mother: I am waiting.....who is skulking out there?

Frederick: Just a group of nine valiant knights on a quest, seeking shelter from the weather.
(Silence for a second) And our two servants.

(More silence) Er.....could we possibly be granted entrance to wait out the coming storm. The moon and stars are totally blocked out by the clouds – we could perish once the snow begins to fall.

Mother: I am sorry. We cannot let you enter. We are the Sisters of Celibacy. We have taken a vow that no man's eye is to look upon us, and no man's voice is to fall upon our ears.

Hamish: Good woman– this weather is exacerbating my chillblains. And you're listening to mens' voices now aren't you?

Leopold: Fair Lady. We have a blind man we could send in first, so he would not be able look on you, and a mute who would not speak to you. Perhaps you could show them to a spare room where we could spend the night, and then they could come and bring the rest of us in, so you need not see us? Or speak to us if that is truly your wish. Although we would be sad indeed to miss out on the company of such a wise and virtuous lady.

Mother: *(suddenly girlish)* Leopold is that you?

Leopold: Indeed it is!

Mother: *(positively purring now)* Leopold it is I.....Catherine. You may remember I oiled your lance when you visited our town some years ago.

[A large hubbub of women's voices is heard ...Leopold's name being spread excitedly amongst the group.]

Leopold: Indeed I remember Catherine. Why are you locked behind these walls? And do I hear other familiar voices within also?

Gwendoline: Oh Leopold it's Gwendolineyour voice is heaven to my ears.

Charmaine: Leopold, I have never forgotten our night together. It is I - Charmaine!

Elizabeth: Leopold, do you remember your Elizabeth? I used to kiss your lance for luck at all the tournaments.

All females: Leopold, Leopold, etc

[Mother steps out of the doorway. She is hooded and draped in a grey cloak. She stares lovingly at Leopold, the other knights grouped off to the side unbelieving at the passion he has aroused in these ladies]

Mother: Leopold- you must leave this place at once! We are all here to protect ourselves from the sins of the flesh. You have dangled temptation in our way too often – in fact all of the ladies within these walls are those who succumbed to your charms. We have resolved never ever to weaken again!

Women inside: *(Despondently)* Oh!

Farsight: *(in a general aside to the other men)* I don't think they need to worry – it's a bit cold for anyone to be doin' any dangling in this weather!

Frederick: Farsight, I think you'll find it was just a turn of phrase, I can hardly envisage Sir Leopold dangling his.....er.....dangling.....oh never mind!

Mother: I myself, as senior amongst them, have promised to guard their well-being and chastity. Indeed I have become their mother..... not Mother Superior, as I was too weak in matters of the flesh to deserve that title, but Mother Inferior as is befitting a fallen woman like myself.

Leopold: *(kissing her hand)* Catherine – as I remember you were certainly NOT inferior. *(he lifts her arm and kisses inside her elbow)* In fact I would go so far as to say you were, my dear... *(he kisses her shoulder)* superior in EVERY way.

Mother: *(quite weak at the knees)* Leopold.....desist! I must be strong. I must refuse you admission.....to protect our virtue.

Voices within: *(a wail)* Oh!

Leopold: *(heaving a big theatrical sigh)* If you truly must Catherine.....I cannot gainsay you. I shall sacrifice myself.....and my friends.....to protect your virtue from temptation. I shall take myself from this place, and die in the snow. *(Melodrama galore)* But.....my fair one.....as I lie in an icy drift, with the corpses of my gallant companions icing up around me *(the rest of the company are looking positively horror stricken at this description of their coming doom)* I shall cling for a few moments more to life, and savour the vision of your face.....safe, and warm.....virtue intact, within your stone

dwelling. Ah! Who would have thought that one with such a capacity for love could have turned her heart into stone to match the walls of her voluntary prison?

[The others can't take their eyes of this display, but as he finishes speaking they look curiously at Mother. She is looking anguished.]

Mother: See Leopold.....you are doing it once again, using the silver speech that woos us into moral danger. Go at once.....before I weaken!

Voices inside: *(tragic)* Oh!

Leopold: *(wringing the moment for all it is worth)* Then my beloved – at least keep my horse – and save it from the bitter fate that awaits us! *(He thrusts his hobby horse into her arms, and makes a dramatic exit)*

[The other knights burst into applause, wiping eyes etc.....then slowly realise that they are all supposed to go as well. As they all begin to hand her their horses she weakens.]

Mother: Oh very well! Someone go and get Leopold.

Farsight: I'll go my Lady! *(He goes to head off in the wrong direction and Charles grabs him, swings him around and then holds him on the spot)*

Charles: I'll go Farsight. It'll be quicker. *(He leaves)*

Mother: Come into the warmth! Lead your horses through to the sheltered courtyard out the back. Do NOT look or speak to any of the sisters. There is a large vacant chamber to the left of the passage, that is where you must stay to wait out the storm. I would not have your deaths on my conscience.

But.....be warned.....the only fires that will be lit tonight are in the stone fire-places. I will permit NO igniting of our physical passions.....those flames are permanently quenched! Our order is determined to adhere to our vows of celibacy.....*(she stares them down fiercely as she concludes)*.....You sirs, will be getting nun tonight! *(Yes – the nun instead of none IS deliberate!)*

YOU'RE GETTING NUN TONIGHT

You rode up to our castle and you thought you had it made
We're not a bunch of women who all wanna get laid
Ours is now a sheltered life, we guard our chastity
You're welcome just to come inside and have a cup of tea

Oh let me warn you
We're not running a knight club

DRUM ROLL/DISCO BALL LIGHTS ON
8 BAR DISCO DANCE BREAK
(During which Leopold and Charles return and watch)

We've hidden in this castle as we're suffering from guilt
Leopold the Ladies man he had us to the hilt
We guard against temptation and there'll be no going back
And none of you fine gentleman will get us in the sack
Oh let me warn you
There's a chorus coming up...

Mother: Oh you're not getting nun tonight
Knights: Oh we're not getting nun tonight
Frederick: I would like a cup of tea if that would be alright
Mother: Keep your armour on 'cos you're not getting nun tonight

Dance Break

Leopold the Ladies Man looked great in the buff
Got us in a habit and we couldn't get enough
He gave us all knight fever but we still felt alright
We never got to sleep because he stayed up all night
Oh let me tell you
He gives a lovely back rub

Mother: Oh you're not getting nun tonight
Knights: Oh we're not getting nun tonight
Nigel: Hi my name is Nigel and I'm really not so bright
Mother: I don't give a stuff 'cos you're not getting nun tonight

Mother: Oh you're not getting nun tonight
Knights: Oh we're not getting nun tonight
Mother: So buckle up your trousers then and make sure they're on tight
EVERYONE: Oh, we're not getting nun tonight

2 *riffs*

EVERYONE: OHHHHHHHHHHH we're not getting nun tonight!

[She disappears into the doorway, and as the curtains shut we see the knights beginning to file through into the door.]

INTERVAL.

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Original Cast of A Characteristic Quest

