

THE INVISIBLE FORCE

Written And Adapted By Chase Brantley

Inspired by Fred Merrick White's Short Story "THE INVISIBLE FORCE"

CAST LIST

In order of appearance

DETECTIVE APPLETON

ENGINEER'S APPRENTICE

FOREMAN

SIR BARCOMBE

LADY MARTHA

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

MAX THE FOOTMAN

CONSTABLE

CABBIE

ALTON ROSSITER

TIM GERGUSSON

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

SECRETARY OF STATE OF WAR JOHN BRODRICK

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER CHARLES RITCHIE

WORKMAN WILLIAMS

SOLIDER

FOR THE DIRECTOR, DESIGNERS, AND PERFORMERS

The Invisible Force is 1903 slap-stick techno-fear apocalyptic thriller. At the beginning of the 20th century, public utilities such as natural gas, water, electricity, and sewers were just being implemented in major cities. The new age of civilization and modernization had begun. But, evolution isn't without struggle or mishap. Isolated forces of nature contain great power – power for progress and power for destruction – beyond our imagination...

This script is best enjoyed with outrageous characters, whose personalities verge on the cartoonish. The Invisible Force is a soap opera of devastation. Be outrageous. This play is not historically accurate and if cast and performed as such would greatly diminish the fun. Therefore, a character's race, gender, sexual orientation, accent, language, and attitude are open to all interpretations. I encourage performers to think outside the expectations and limits of England. If you are having fun, you're going in the right direction.

As for set design and general mood, I encourage poor theater and puppetry. The gruesome violence should be stylized with red ribbons instead of fake blood (until the Soldier appears). The distance and playfulness will give the audience permission to laugh. The puppetry and stylization will also allow each show to find countless games that are not written into the script. If you find something beautiful that is not the script, keep it. The script is just a guideline for play.

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AND THE FOLLOWING ARTISTS FOR THEIR TIME, PLAYFULNESS, AND FEEDBACK:

Charlotte La Nasa, Audrey Nana, Cameron Jefts, Paige Wilson, Sarah High, Jayson Smith, Megan Quick, Jake Krakovsky, Jeremy Colwell, Claudio Del Toro, Hazel Townsend, David McIver, David Christie-Miller, Gemma Soldati, Tom Curzon, Armando Gonzalez Medina, Jade Fern, Shoshana Mann, Nicholas Hemerling, Julia Wilson, Belinda, Anderson-Hunt, John Patrick Bray, Laura Slade Weishaar, Emily Rich, Peter Andersen, Chris Silcox, and Francesco Basile

SCENE ONE

The mood here is campfire ghost story. Through the play the switches to Detective Appleton can be quick and jarring, creating an over-the-top spooky atmosphere. This can work especially strong if it seems out of place with the scene before.

Lights up on a bleak oak table with a single light. DETECTIVE APPLETON retells an American Transportation Committee from New York City (the audience) about the events that happened last year on January 20, 1903. APPLETON takes their time speaking slow, puffing on their pipe, and instilling fear with every breath.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Smokes

Mother Nature is a tigress.
It cost us a lot of lives to container her.
We laid thousands of kilometers of pipes to
cage her, isolate her. She's a sneaky
succubus, an almighty Athena. And as much
as we are gods, remember that our bodies are
weak, frail membranes against lady terra.
You can't contain a woman without
consequence.

It was perfectly quiet that night, January
20, 1903 along the gleaming core that lay
buried under Bond Street and St. James's
Street. The ceiling had cracked. The river
dripped slowly through it. Thousands of
kilograms cracking and crying through the
Piccadilly line, a modern marvel of
architectural wonder.

Something had gone wrong with a water-main
overhead, the concrete beyond the steel belt
had cracked. The metal skin had been peeled
away, and the friable concrete had fallen on
the rails. It had brought part of the crown
with it, so that a maze of large and small
pipes was exposed to view.

Blackout

The stage is lit by lamps carried by the two actors creating a spooky coal-mine-like atmosphere.

The pipes can be visibly hanging and lit with a single light that reveals them once and then disappears as if they were a dream. The ENGINEER'S APPRENTICE sings a Scottish ditty while carrying a huge saw. First day on the job.

ENGINEER'S APPRENTICE
Hey! What's with these pipes?

Pipes light up and disappear as is lamp passes over them

ENGINEER'S APPRENTICE
They look like the reeds of an organ...What are they?

FOREMAN
Gas mains, water, electric light, telephone, goodness knows. They branch off here, you see. The moisture had corroded the steel plates. Been a bloody mess fixin' those leaks from the river.

ENGINEER'S APPRENTICE
Oooooo...sounds fun

Grinning with a malicious innocence

FOREMAN nods absently

FOREMAN
Listen we need this done fast. You know what you're doing?

ENGINEER'S APPRENTICE nods lying.

Alright, I'll leave ya to it.

ENGINEER'S APPRENTICE
Bloody dark down here...always have us workin' at night...

Sings a Scottish ditty. The sound of saw metal fills the stage. Blackout.

SCENE TWO

Spooky Lights up

DETECTIVE APPLETON

That night, around one in the morning, some lights two grids down from Buckingham Palace went out. But it was now near four o'clock in the morning, and the thing mattered little. These accidents occurred sometimes in the best regulated districts, and the defect would be made good in the morning. I was stationed in the Palace at the time, for one of the great State Balls, honoring the Prime Minister. Supper was over, the magnificent apartments were brilliant with light dresses and gay uniforms...

Enter Ballroom scene. Actors appear in a humorously posh waltz. The dance is in unison and dirty with plenty of hand flourishes, pelvic thrusts, and pauses. People are clearly drunk and past formalities. Dancers can dance with an invisible partner or costumed broomstick. LADY MARTHA and SIR BARCOMBE dance around each others shouting over their partners.

LADY MARTHA

It is without a doubt, Bar, the most exciting science!

SIR BARCOMBE

Aero-planes! Kill me now!

LADY MARTHA

But, automobile engines are so heavy so –

SIR BARCOMBE

Automobiles are dangerous and totally unnecessary.

LADY MARTHA

Our newest design is a Cycle –

SIR BARCOMBE

Bicycles! CHRIST MARTHA! DO – YOU – KNOW – how many people died from bicycles?!

LADY MARTHA

And twin propellers –

SIR BARCOMBE
DEATH...It's literal DEATH

LADY MARTHA
We'll test it this weekend at George's
Estate

SIR GEORGE EGERTON to his invisible or broomstick with a horse head

SIR GEORGE EGERTON
I simply love horses

SIR GEORGE EGERTON laughs for way too long

SIR BARCOMBE and LADY MARTHA finally meet as partners and the lights
burst off. Everyone screams. The broom stick partners are thrown off
stage. Lots of stylized loud noises.

SIR BARCOMBE
Blimey Martha! We've lost the plot.

LADY MARTHA
Bar, shhhhhh. don't be such a Nutter. The
lamps have just popped

RANDOM PARTY GOER
Someone light a candle

SIR BARCOMBE pulls out a candle

SIR BARCOMBE
Christ! Electricity is man's greatest sin.

Lights his candle

That's why I fought against the change in
1895. Mother Nature is a wildebeest; you
can't cage her. She's too dangerous!

LADY MARTHA lights her candle

LADY MARTHA
I married a fearful pillock with a tiny
tinker

SIR BARCOMBE
I married a ninny minge-bag

BOTH laugh gayly

SIR GEORGE EGERTON enters suddenly with his candle. He laughs quite
loud.

SIR BARCOMBE and LADY MARTHA gasp with fright.

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

Friends, fear not! It is I, Sir Egerton. Bloody shocking; someone is not batting on a full wicket tonight. It's patchwork. So far as I can judge. I expect there is a pretty bad breakdown.

All nod in agreement

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

My dear chaps, do you mean to say that clock is right? It's nearly four, sure enough

SIR GEORGE EGERTON starts to shake

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

Christ Almighty! do you feel...? Merciful Heavens! what is that?

Everyone moves in slow motion shaking and stumbling

SIR BARCOMBE

AHHHHHHHHHHH! CHRIST ALMIGHTY, THE CHANDELIER IS FALLING!

Mad rush of escape as the chandelier crashes to the floor

SIR BARCOMBE

Martha! I'm a sinner, I've sinned!

LADY MARTHA

O shut-up Bar. It's just an earthquake and a mighty nasty one at that. That accounts for the failure of the electric light. There will be some bad accidents tonight. Eger come out from underneath that table, the worst is over.

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

It is without a doubt too dangerous. Off to the carriages; see you after the apocalypse Martha dearest.

LADY MARTHA

O we're coming with you. Come Barcombe, let us home. Stranger things have never happened.

SCENE THREE

Spooky Lights up

DETECTIVE APPLETON

Never, perhaps, in the history of royalty had there been so informal a breaking up of a great function. The King and Queen had retired some little time before—a kindly and thoughtful act under the circumstances. The women were cloaking and shawling hurriedly; they crowded out in search of their carriages with no more order than would have been obtained outside a theatre.

Outside Buckingham Palace the carriage lines are chaos.

MAX THE FOOTMAN is crying

MAX THE FOOTMAN

Lady Martha, I am not sure I can take you home. Oxford Street and Bond Street are impassable. I'm so dreadfully sorry. The world has gone mad!

LADY MARTHA

It's like a shuddering romance that I read a little time since. But I must know something about it before I go to bed. Let's try St. James's Street, Max—if there's any St. James's Street left.

MAX THE FOOTMAN is still crying

MAX THE FOOTMAN

Madam, I thought I told you

LADY MARTHA

Bar get in the back. We're off to St. James's Street.

SIR BARCOMBE

My wife is mad. I hope the clubs are safe. Eger! Is it safe to strike a match with all this gas reeking in the air?

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

Anything's better than the smell of gas.

LADY MARTHA

True that! May I take your fag Eger?

BOTH MEN give a playful shock

SIR GEORGE EGERTON
Excuse me!

SIR BARCOMBE
MARTHA!

LADY MARTHA
Your cigarette.

SIR GEORGE EGERTON
Of course

SIR BARCOMBE
Reminds me of a fishmonger bum

LADY MARTHA
Bar!

SIR GEORGE EGERTON
It was only once

LADY MARTHA tries to contain her Laughter

LADY MARTHA
Eger!

SIR GEORGE EGERTON
Or thrice

SIR BARCOMBE
You naughty Nilly.

SIR EGERTON and SIR BARCOMBE exchange a loving wink. ALL THREE laugh.
MAX THE FOOTMAN is still crying. Blackout

SCENE FOUR

Spooky Lights up

DETECTIVE APPLETON

It was a thrilling sight focused in that blue glare. It looked as if London had been utterly destroyed by a siege—as if thousands of well-aimed shells had exploded. Houses looked like tattered banners of brick and mortar. Heavy articles of furniture had been hurled onto the street; on the other hand, little gimcrack ornaments still stood on tiny brackets.

The Carriage stops a block from the blast on the streets of London

LADY MARTHA

Max slow the carriage.

MAX THE FOOTMAN is still crying

MAX THE FOOTMAN

Madam, I really think we should turn around

SIR BARCOMBE gasps seeing his beloved club destroyed

SIR BARCOMBE

NO! Martha, my club! It's rubble.

LADY MARTHA

Constable! Sir Constable? Can any of you say what's happened?

CONSTABLE enters. They struggle to speak through the trauma of the explosion.

CONSTABLE

The world's come to an end,

LADY MARTHA

Did you investigate?

THE CONSTABLE's replies are broken, clearly shell shocked

CONSTABLE

I — it's a —

SIR BARCOMBE cries

SIR BARCOMBE

my club...

MAX THE FOOTMAN is still crying

MAX THE FOOTMAN

Madam –

LADY MARTHA

What happened?

CONSTABLE pulls themselves together touching their helmet

CONSTABLE

Madam, It's dreadful. There has been an accident in the tubes; and they have been blown all to pieces.

LADY MARTHA

Can you tell us anything about it?

CONSTABLE

I was in Piccadilly...Everything was perfectly quiet. And so far as I could see not a soul was in sight. Then I heard a funny rushing sound, just like the tear of an express train through a big, empty station. Yes, it was for all the world like a ghostly express train that you could hear and not see. It came nearer and nearer; the whole earth trembled just as if the train had gone mad in Piccadilly. It rushed past me down St. James's Street, and after that there was an awful smash and a bang, and I was lying on my back in the middle of the road.

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

Some ghastly electric catastrophe!

SIR BARCOMBE

I knew it! Damn 1895 electric committee, They've put us all in danger.

CONSTABLE

I can't tell you any more, except that the tube has blown up.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

Of that fact there was no question. There were piles of debris thrown high in one

part and a long deep depression in another like a ruined dyke. A little further on the steel core of the tube lay bare with rugged holes ripped in it. And still the gas main roared on until the flame grew from purple to violet and to straw colour before the coming dawn. If this same thing had happened all along the network of tubes, London would be more or less a hideous ruin.

SIR BARCOMBE

Martha! My watch is MAD!

SIR BARCOMBE glances in awe at his watch while it raced furiously

LADY MARTHA

By Jove! we're in danger here. The air is full of electricity. I went over some works once and neglected to leave my watch behind me, and it played me the same prank. It affects the mainspring!

SIR BARCOMBE

Bloody Electricity!

LADY MARTHA

Look at those great ropes and coils! Bloody hell, they are coming out of the ground here and there.

A dog crosses the street and trods past on open wire and explodes. All that remained of the dog was what looked like a twisted bit of burnt skin and bone. It appeals to Sir George Egerton's imagination strongly.

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

Bloody heck! Poor little brute...It might have happened to you or me.

MAX THE FOOTMAN is still crying

LADY MARTHA

I wonder if we can get some indiarubber gloves and galoshes hereabouts. After that gruesome sight, I shall be afraid to put one foot before the other.

A horse attached to a cab comes creeping over the blocked streets; the animal slips on a grating connected with the ventilation of the

drains, and a fraction of a second later there was no horse in existence. The driver sits on their perch, white and scared.

SIR BARCOMBE cries out

SIR BARCOMBE
Fliberty Jibbet!

LADY MARTHA
SIR! DON'T YOU MOVE! And everybody keep out of the roadway. Max, I need galoshes!!!!

MAX THE FOOTMAN is still crying

MAX THE FOOTMAN
Madam, I believe... there is a rubber... warehouse somewhere near...I remember one loc -

LADY MARTHA
Very good! I'll back shortly

LADY MARTHA exits

SIR BARCOMBE starts to cry again

SIR BARCOMBE
Bloody Electricity!

SIR GEORGE EGERTON
There there my ole butternut.

SIR EGERTON kisses SIR BARCOMBE'S check

It rattles the mind that a force that only gives a man a bad shock when he is standing on dry ground often kills him when the surface is wet. And we can't even see it!

SIR BARCOMBE
[full of fear] It's invisible...

LADY MARTHA enters with comically large rubber boots and gloves and runs confidently to the cabbie

LADY MARTHA
Careful now. Nice and easy

LADY MARTHA helps the CABBIE off the carriage. The left side of their face is all drawn up and puckered. Their left arm is useless. If discovered with the cast, this moment could be a 5 minute bit of LADY MARTHA, SIR GEORGE EGERTON, and SIR BARCOMBE cartoonishly struggling to help the CABBIE to the ground.

Once the body is on the ground and everyone steps back, SIR GEORGE EGERTON speaks with the confidence of a doctor.

SIR GEORGE EGERTON
Apoplexy from the fright.

LADY MARTHA
Not a bit Eger. It's a severe electric shock. Hold up. It will relax as we lay him on the earth. See...

Gradually the CABBIE'S body relaxes and they sits up

CABBIE
If that's being struck by lightning, I don't want another dose. It was as if something had caught hold of me and frozen my heart in my body. I couldn't do a thing. And look at my coat!

Their coat falls apart right before their eyes!

MAX THE FOOTMAN cries

MAX THE FOOTMAN
Lady Martha! Please, we need to go home!

LADY MARTHA
Max, you're right. It's dreadful when all the terror is left to the imagination. Let's home.

ALL exit. Blackout.

SCENE FIVE

Spooky Lights up

DETECTIVE APPLETON

The danger could not be averted by switching off the power altogether at the various electrical stations of the metropolis. At intervals along the tubes were immense accumulators which for the present could not be touched. It was these accumulators that rendered the streets such a ghastly peril.

It was the electrical expert to the County Council—Alton Rossiter— who first got on track of the disaster.

Scene shifts to another street of London. Enters ALTON ROSSITER and the tube manager TIM GERGUSSON.

ALTON ROSSITER

Mr. Gergusson! Mr. Gergusson!

TIM GERGUSSON

Mr. Rossiter, follow me quickly.

ALTON ROSSITER

What information — AWWW

TIM GERGUSSON

Watch the head sir!

ALTON ROSSITER

do you have on the Piccadilly Line?

TIM GERGUSSON

The core is corroded —

ALTON ROSSITER

My god the gas is brutal!

TIM GERGUSSON

caused by — Careful Sir — caused by a leaky water-main.

ALTON ROSSITER

I need to contact for Mr. Walters on city — Zounds, look at those exposed conduits! This whole area is a death trap.

TIM GERGUSSON

I've seen 15 deaths.

ALTON ROSSITER
Do you have any information –AWW

TIM GERGUSSON
Careful sir!

ALTON ROSSITER
what caused the damage? What happened here
last night?

TIM GERGUSSON
The night before, this had been the area
– Watch your step sir! – The area had
been located for repairs – Careful Sir –

ALTON ROSSITER
Let's enter here at Bond Street, Mr.
Gergusson. We may be able – Jabberwock! This
gas is killer!

TIM GERGUSSON
We shall have to manage as best we can. For
a little time – Careful your back sir! – the
gas of London must be cut entirely. With
broken mains all over the place the supply
is positively dangerous. Look here..

He points to a spot that remains mysterious. This spot is lit by a
glowing light similar to the briefcase from Pulp Fiction.

ALTON ROSSITER
MY GOD. LOOK AT THIS!

TIM GERGUSSON
YES! – Watch your foot sir – THIS COULD
EXPLAIN EVERYTHING!

ALTON ROSSITER
IT WOULD HAVE CREATED –

TIM GERGUSSON
Sir, careful your bum

ALTON ROSSITER
an explosion unimaginable...

Silence. As the game continues ALTON ROSSITER slowly becomes a dog.

TIM GERGUSSON
Yes. Of course. I see exactly what you are
driving at.

ALTON ROSSITER
What time –

TIM GERGUSSON

Duck

ALTON ROSSITER

Do the trains start

TIM GERGUSSON

4 am – little jump here

ALTON ROSSITER

And, any out this morning

TIM GERGUSSON

Thankfully none – through the legs

ALTON ROSSITER

Notice London Gas immediately!

TIM GERGUSSON

Right away – sit

ALTON ROSSITER

I'll head to Westminster.

TIM GERGUSSON

– SHAKE

ALTON ROSSITER

We need to relay all this information to
the Prime Minister

TIM GERGUSSON

Good boy

Tosses ALTON ROSSITER a treat. Blackout.

SCENE SIX

These side scenes with DETECTIVE APPLETON are gradationally less spooky. And increasingly full of lights, especially as they join the scenes.

Lights Up

DETECTIVE APPLETON

The operator in charge of the switches was actually close by. Fortunately for him the play of the current in the tube had carried the gases towards St. James Street. The explosion had lifted him out of his box. He later recalled to us that there had been an explosion directly as he pulled down the first of the switches, and his memory was a blank after that.

The cause of the disaster was found by Alton. To prevent further catastrophe notice was immediately given by Tim Gergusson to the various gas companies to cut off the supplies at once. Alton ran to tell the Prime Minister. In a little time the whole disastrous length of the tube was free from danger. Or so we thought...

Scene at 10 Downing Street at 7:00 AM. Everyone went straight here from THE PRIME MINISTER'S party at Buckingham Palace. Everything is fully lit with the sunrise, even APPLETON'S desk, which is now part of the scene. THE PRIME MINISTER is still drunk. And he's furiously trying to understand what the hell is happening.

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

GOD DAMN IT! What the hell is happening to our city? Why the fuck was our party blown to shit and half our city destroyed?!

EVERYONE sits silent

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Brodrick?

SECRETARY OF STATE OF WAR JOHN BRODRICK
We could be under invasion.

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

What the hell are you saying Brodrick?

JOHN BRODRICK

It would have had to have been a coordinated attack. But, we're talking thousands of bombs planted throughout the city over a series of months.

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Bloody fucking christ is that even possible?

JOHN BRODRICK

Slim, but this is the 20th century sir. Who knows what a government is capable of?

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Bloody Hell! The might of the British empire will not be humiliated by some back-alley back stabbing bullshit. Telegraph German Chancellor Bülow of a possible attack on British soil, and inquire with President Loubet about a state of fucking WAR! Fiddle Fuckin' Shits! Those French arseholes want me to sign a peace treaty with the Russians all the while setting us up with this bloody nightmare! How soon can we ready our forces?

JOHN BRODRICK

Three days we can have 10,000 loaded on ships.

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Do it!

JOHN BRODRICK

YES SIR.

BRODRICK Exits

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Now, what's the damage on London?

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER CHARLES RITCHIE

The blast seems to cover a kilometer radius from Piccadilly to the edge of Bond Street. Staton. But it's impossible to yet estimate the full extent of the damage. In St. James's Street alone the loss was pretty certain to run into millions. Down in Whitehall and Parliament Street, and by Westminster Bridge, the damage was terrible. Huge holes and ruts had been made in the earth, and houses had come down bodily.

PRIME MINISTER sits quietly fuming. 5 seconds minimum of silence.

CHARLES RITCHIE

That's not the worst news. There was an early special train set out this morning right at 3:30am for an annual excursion of five hundred men and their wives to Paddington. They were going to Windsor...we haven't...found them.

PRIME MINISTER is still quietly fuming. Another 5 seconds minimum of silence.

The doors burst open revealing ALTON ROSSITER rushing into the room.

ALTON ROSSITER

WOOF WOOF!

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Alton Boy! What is it?

ALTON ROSSITER

WOOF WOOF

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

ALTY!..STOP LICKING ME. Now is not the time. Fucking me, we're at war and I can't even keep a secure room. Appleton get Alty out of here.

DETECTIVE APPLETON grabs ALTON ROSSITER and BOTH struggle to leave.

ALTON ROSSITER

WOOF WOOF! WOOF!

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

APPLETON!

ALTON ROSSITER

HOOOOOOOOWWWWWWWWLLLLLLLLLL

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Wait! Let him speak...

ALTON ROSSITER

[Growls at Appleton]

ALTON ROSSITER trots to the table and sits

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

UP

ALTON ROSSITER stands tall

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
Good boy!

PRIME MINISTER tosses ALTON ROSSITER a treat

Alton Rossiter
[Dog Sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
Hummm

ALTON ROSSITER
[Dog sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
My god

ALTON ROSSITER
[Dog sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
Of Course

ALTON ROSSITER
[Dog sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
Ooooooooo

ALTON ROSSITER
[Dog sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
Of course!

ALTON ROSSITER
[Coughs]... Excuse me...

Glances at the PRIME MINISTER

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
Yes

ALTON ROSSITER
[Dog sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR
BOOM!

ALTON ROSSITER

[Dog sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Jesus, we're not at war!

ALTON ROSSITER

[Dog sounds]

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Fuck me...the gas from the pipes filled the tunnels, and then when we turned on the power...

ALTON ROSSITER

HOOOOOOOOWWWWEEEEELLLLLL

EVERYONE sits silent

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

It's a nightmare.

EVERYONE suddenly understands Alton

ALTON ROSSITER

The only positive note is that we didn't have any trains running before the generators turned on.

EVERYONE sits silent

CHARLES RITCHIE

Actually, we did, there was -

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

O yes, we did. Special training running that early. It was carrying five hundred soldiers, women, and children.

EVERYONE sits silent

ALTON ROSSITER

Where did they board?

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

At...

CHARLES RITCHIE

Deptford -

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Deptford...

CHARLES RITCHIE

Heading to Paddington.

EVERYONE sits silent

ALTON ROSSITER

They could be alive...

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

What do you mean?

ALTON ROSSITER

The explosion hit Embankment, but those lines run parallel. The Piccadilly explosion went towards Bond Street. I would bet they are alive

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Jesus Bloody Christ!

ALTON ROSSITER

We must first ascertain the exact time that the train left Deptford, and the precise moment when the first explosion took place. Mind you, I believe there was a series of explosions. You must agree with me that my theory is a correct one.

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Of course I do. But what are you driving at?

ALTON ROSSITER

It's just possible, faintly possible, that those trains ran into a portion of the tube where there was no explosion at all. There were explosions behind them and in front of them, so that the trains may be trapped with no ingress or outlet. our duty is pretty plainly before us – we must go to Deptford!
WOOF

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

Appleton, get this man what he needs.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

Yes sir

PRIME MINISTER BALFOUR

God help us in this hour of darkness.

ALTON ROSSITER

H00000WWWL LLLLLL

SCENE SEVEN

APPLETON'S desk is now part of the scene. APPLETON speaks directly to the audience without a dramatic transition. They are now part of the scene.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

I joined that search party at the around 7am the morning after the explosion. We left 10 Downing Street at 7:30am. The journey to Deptford was no easy one. It was possible to use cycles, seeing that the rubber tires formed non-conductors, and indiarubber gloves and shoes allowed extra protection. But the mere suggestion of a spill was thrilling. It might mean the tearing of a glove or the loss of a shoe, and then—well, that did not bear thinking about.

The stage slowly has less light during these scenes. The closer they get to the train, the darker it becomes.

ALTON ROSSITER

Alright Gentlemen. We've located the main generating Station. BARK BARK BARK —

ALTON ROSSITER barks at some unseen stranger until they disappear

ALTON ROSSITER

That's the excellent news. The unfavorable news: it's under a heap of refuse...a massive tangle of exposed live wires.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

Is it possible?

ALTON ROSSITER

For a kid, yes. For a man, I can't make any promises.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

I'll go

Silence 5 seconds minimum

WORKMAN WILLIAMS

Me too

ALTON ROSSIER

You'll need someone who knows how to operate
the switch board.

TIM GERGUSSON

I'll go

ALTON ROSSIER

Alright Gergusson. You'll need a fourth who
is small enough for the tunnels.

Turns to the AUDIENCE.

ALTON ROSSIER

Anyone able to help?

Get an AUDIENCE MEMBER to join your crew. Keep asking until someone
answers. Bring them up on stage to get dress.

ALTON ROSSIER

You'll need to work as a team to turn off
this accumulator so that we can start
blasting through this pile of debris.

DETECTIVE APPLETON
Got it

TIM GERGUSSON
Got it

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
GOT IT!

ALTON ROSSIER

Let's cover these men from head to toe with
indiarubber!

THE CREW is dressed slowly in comically large rubber boots and suits
eventually looking like outrageous hazmat suits.

SCENE EGIHT

APPLETON speaks from the scene as everyone is being dressed. There is no transition.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

We toiled on willingly, and yet with the utmost caution; for the knots of cable wire under our feet and over our heads were like brambles in the forest. If one of these had given way, all of us might be destroyed. It was the kind of work that causes the scalp to rise and the heart to beat and the body to perspire even on the coldest day. Now and then a cable upheld by some debris would slip; there would be a sudden cry, and the workmen would skip back, breathing heavily. It was like working a mine filled with rattlesnakes asleep.

ALTON ROSSITER stays on stage. The crew makes its way down the stage to one side of the audience. With the AUDIENCE MEMBER in front, DETECTIVE APPLETON and WORKMAN WILLIAMS start climbing through the audience following the guide of the audience member. Actors are encouraged to adlib with the audience. The text below is a guideline. But, have as much fun as you want. As TIM GERGUSSON begins to climb through, a gentle cartoonish netting of wires falls from the ceiling onto Tim and several audience members.

TIM GERGUSSON

FIDDLE STICKS! Blimey cable fell before me.
I can't get through.

WORKMAN WILLIAMS

We're at the switch board

DIFFERENT AUDIENCE MEMBERS are given cartoonish props throughout the scene that turn them into different parts of the generating station. Or the props gently fall from the ceiling.

TIM GERGUSSON

I'll have to talk you through it. Jiminy
Crickets, the tube is falling.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

Hurry! Tell us what to do!

TIM GERGUSSON

Do you see a red leaver?!

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
[Looks at AUDIENCE MEMBER for help. Adlibs]

AUDIENCE MEMBER
[eventually finds it]

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
Found it

TIM GERGUSSON
Pull it down

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
[Looks at AUDIENCE MEMBER to do this]

DETECTIVE APPLETON
Done

TIM GERGUSSON
Buckets of SNAKES! A wire fell on my boots.
I can't move.

DETECTIVE APPLETON
Mr. Gergusson! Focus. What next?

TIM GERGUSSON
There is a fuse box behind the main chair.

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
[Looks at AUDIENCE MEMBER for help. Adlibs]

AUDIENCE MEMBER
[eventually finds it]

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
Found it

TIM GERGUSSON
Flip the switches to the left

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
[Looks at AUDIENCE MEMBER to do this]

DETECTIVE APPLETON
Done!

THEY sit silent in the audience. GERGUSSON holds his breath. And reaches for the wire on his chest. If alive, he could instantly be fried. His hand clasps the exposed wire. Nothing.

TIM GERGUSSON
[Whispers]It's done.

EVERYONE shouts. Few smiles fill their faces. GERGUSSON crawls to the other actors.

They are still in the audience. They pretend to have a serious atmosphere of silence. If the audience laughs, remind them it's not appropriate to laugh in a serious moment, which if done well can be a very funny game. WORKMAN WILLIAMS produces a large flask of brandy. He takes a swig and passes it around. This is another game. Offer the flask to the audience.

WORKMAN WILLIAMS
[sings a beautiful song softly]

TIM GERGUSSON
How many years since yesterday morning?

ALTON ROSSITER
[Shouts from on stage] Any progress??

TIM GERGUSSON
It's done!

ALTON ROSSITER
[Shouts from off stage] Thank god! I thought we'd lost you. Get out of there. We've got kilometers to go mates. Hurry quick!

Actors get out of the audience. Don't rush, but don't be annoyingly long. It's time to get moving.

SCENE NINE

APPLETON speaks as they are making their way to the stage

DETECTIVE APPLETON

Rossiter calculated that the trains must have been near to Park Road Station when the explosion occurred. When we arrived at the scene we found that a big crowd had gathered.

We worked endlessly for the next 48 hours taking shifts. The wall of rock, steel, and pipes was thick. And the terrain so rough we couldn't bring machines down to help. So we toiled by human hand.

TIM GERGUSSON

Let's fire those charges.

Explosions erupt from off stage, sending dust and rocks onto the stage.

TIM GERGUSSON

Again

Explosions erupt from off stage, sending dust and rocks onto the stage.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

A rumour had spread that feeble voices had been heard down one of the ventilation gratings, calling for help. Gergusson and Rossiter reached the spot with difficulty.

TIM GERGUSSON

Again

Explosions erupt from off stage, sending dust and rocks onto the stage.

ALTON ROSSIER

LOOK!

A SOLDIER staggers onto the stage. He appears to be past all emotions. His eyes show no gratitude, no delight. The slap-stick of the show gently disappears. I discourage emotional or over-acting at this

point. THE SOLIDER'S blood and horror can be as realistic as possible. And his tale told with a detached stillness and silence.

SOLIDER

You found us...

ALTON ROSSIER

Is—how is it? How is everyone?

SOLIDER

Many were killed, but the others are sitting in the carriages waiting for the end to come. The lights in the carriages helped us a bit, but after the first hour they went out. Then one or two of us went up the line till it seemed to rise and twist as if it was going to climb into the sky, and by that we guessed that there had been a big explosion of some kind. So we tried the other way, and that was all blocked up with timber; and we knew then. The electricity was about, and —, it wasn't a pretty sight, so we went back to the trains. When the lights went out we were all mad for a time, and—and—

THE SOLDIER bursts silently into tears

Fade to black. Slow classical music plays. Maybe Debussy.

SCENE TEN

Lights slowly fade up. APPLETON doesn't move. Give the audience silence to absorb the Solider. Speaking gently and slowly, APPLETON takes their time.

DETECTIVE APPLETON

The trains began to pour out their freight of half-dead people. There were some with children, who huddled back fearfully in their corners and refused to face the destruction which they were sure lay before them. They were all pale and trembling, with quivering lips and eyes that twitched strangely. Heaven only knows how long an eternity those days of darkness had seemed.

The rebuilding was painful. Some say we benefited. London appears stronger and we have more safety regulations to prevent such a disaster. But, the damage was more than physical. It was elemental – shocked a core understanding of our limits. It would have seemed impossible, absolutely impossible. So, people just try to work and forget the consequence of “progress”.

We sold half our soul to get here and the other half trying to forget.

Lights Fade. Lights fade up gently on LADY MARTHA, SIR BARCOMBE, and SIR GEORGE EGERTON sitting around a table for tea.

LADY MARTHA

It's been just dreadful George. I awake every night afraid and in fear.

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

It's terrible Martha.

SIR BARCOMBE

It's unimaginable what we went through. I'll never be the same.

They sit in silence sipping tea as the music plays. SIR BARCOMBE holds up a deck of cards.

LADY MARTHA

Naughty Barcombe

SIR GEORGE EGERTON

You rascal.

ALL laugh.

As SIR BARCOMBE deals a full deck for a game of hearts, he says:

SIR BARCOMBE

Club should be reopened next week

ALL "ooo" and "ahhh". They pick up their hands. Take time to organize them. As they play, the lights slowly fade and the slow music fills the space.

THE END