WHEN BOOKS GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

By Bryan Cutler
When Books Go Bump In The Night was first performed at Smith’s Hill High School on Friday, June 24, 2011, with the following cast:

Apple Delicious   Jenna Owen
Mack Mastiff   Ben Brooker
Constance Reader   Aleida Moulton
Mr K   Nick Orr
Mayor Swindler   Claire Crighton
Sergeant Bully   Dimi Havadjia
Buddhacup   Hannah Paduch
Penelope Forthright   Thea Stephenson
Mrs Chitchat   Maneesha Todd
Miss Forget-Me-Not   Katie Newfield
Jimmy   Otis Wishart
Pete   Nic Bertolla
Kid A   Anna Tomlin
Kid B   Rhianna Schwenke
Angus   Georgia Brown
Robertson   Charisse Adair
Dinny   Rachel Jones
Donny   Alice O’Toole
Dog Ears   Ryan Fairweather
           Michaela Padayachee
           Anna Stanton

Chorus
(in a multitude of roles!)   Jarrod Bridges
           Mary Dijkmans-Hadley
           Rianna Ledwos
A library. Actors line up as book shelves. It’s a stormy night. Thunder and lightning can be heard, along with the smashing of glass. Enter two kids.

KID A You shouldn’t have smashed that window.

KID B What were we gonna do, stay outside and get drenched? It’s raining bats and frogs out there.

KID A I’ve got glass all over me. I look like a lamington.

KID B Or a mongoose with dandruff.

KID A Oi!

KID B Take a breath, it’s not the end of the world.

KID A Try telling that to the weather, it’s like the apocalypse or something.

KID B It’s biblical, like the revelation.

KID A What is this place, anyway? The morgue?

KID B Close, it’s the library. Where all books go to die.

The book shelves heave and change direction ninety degrees.

KID A Um, is it my eyes or did those shelves just move?

KID B It’s just the shadows of the headlights from cars outside.

KID A Who’s driving the streets at this hour?

KID B Probably the cops, looking for us. I might have accidentally spray painted the word ‘bully’ on a police car.

KID A You did what?

KID B Accidentally, my finger slipped.

KID A Nothing’s an accident with you except being born.

KID B Uh, that was my parents’ accident. Not mine.

KID A Why did you have to go and graffiti the car?

KID B What else are you gonna do in this loser town, play Bingo? Sixty-six, clickety click, seventeen, dancing queen, thirty-one, get up and run!
KID A  Quit spooking me! Okay, so I know, like, there’s, nothing to do. But still…

KID B  Look, just shut it, would you? This storm can’t last forever, so what’s say we just act cool and ride it out?

KID A  I s’pose.

KID B  I thought I told you to act cool.

KID A  I am acting cool!

KID B  You look like a ballerina with piles.

KID A  But I like to smile.

KID B  Piles, zombie, bum bugs.

KID A  Oh.

KID B  So just act cool, and before you know it you’ll be back in bed at mummy’s and daddy’s in no time.

KID A  This place is spooky. I’m gonna find some lights.

KID B  And let everybody know we’re in here? Get a grip.

KID A  You get a grip, you stink, all musty and stuff. You been visiting an old folk’s home?

KID B  No. An old books’ home.

KID A  Huh?

KID B  It’s this place, all the books are mouldy and mildewy. Comes from years of neglect and insignificance.

*The book shelves heave and change direction ninety degrees.*

KID A  Now you can’t tell me that was the shadows.

KID B  What?

KID A  Those shelves, like, they just moved.

KID B  It’s the library bogeyman. The ghosts of Austen, Bronte and Shakespeare. Out of date and out of place.
The book shelves heave and change direction ninety degrees. Sounds of dogs barking can be heard.

KID A Alright, what is that? I’m getting a little freaked! Hold me!

KID B moves between the book shelves, dragging KID A with them.

KID B Hold this. (Taking books from the shelves) Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice. Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre. I spit on your memories!

The book shelves heave and change direction ninety degrees. The sounds of dogs barking become louder.

And here he is, William Shakespeare. Man, the amount of torture you’ve put me through. (Picking up a copy of Romeo and Juliet) ‘Oh Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?’ Open your eyes, Juliet, he’s right down there in front of you.

KID A It means why.

KID B What?

KID A Wherefore.

KID B What for?

KID A Wherefore. It means, why. Why are you Romeo?

KID B See that’s what I’m talking about; if it means why, then why not just say why?

KID A What?

KID B Wherefore do we have to learn Shakespeare?

KID A Because-

KID B On the pyre, burn Shakespeare!

KID B produces a lighter and moves to burn the book. The shelves begin rotating.

SHELVES (Chanting continuously) Feel the need, the need to read!

KID A What did you say?

KID B I didn’t say anything.

KID A Then if you’re not chanting that, and I’m not chanting that, then it must be...time to get out of here!
KID B  Quit over-reacting.

KID A  Over-reacting? The library’s coming alive and I don’t think it’s too happy.

KID B  Would you listen to yourself?

The shelves start to form a maze, entrapping the kids.

But, on the other hand, maybe an exit is in order.

A thunder crack is heard.

Let’s scram!

Escape is impossible. The kids run through the maze, but the shelves prevent their exit at every turn.

KID A  Wait a second, I’ve got an idea. Just repeat these four letters, TLDR, with me.

KID B  TLDR? What does it mean?

KID A  Never mind, just do it!

KIDS  (Chanting) TLDR!

The shelves react like vampires having seen crosses and begin moving away from the kids, who seem safe.

KID B  I’m impressed, that’s amazing.

KID A  TLDR.

KID B  What does it stand for?

Enter CONSTANCE, accompanied by Dog Ears.

CONST.  It means, ‘Too long, didn’t read’. That’s the youth of today for you, tiddly-pom. When what it should be is, too lazy didn’t read.

KID B  Who’s this crazy lady?

CONST.  I am Constance Reader. And your sarcastic quips on the canonical works of literature shall turn you into fresh reads.

KID A  Fresh reads?
CONST. My dog ears here are always looking for something new to feast their fangs upon; they love a good book. Dog Ears? Hunt them down and pulp them!

The dog ears chase the kids through the shelves, eventually cornering them. The shelves entrap the kids in a systematic melee. Suddenly, the shelves spring back to order; the kids have now become part of the shelves. Stop thunder and lightning f/x.

My dear people, some of you look a little shocked that I would rain vengeance down on such lovable imps. But have no fear, at last they're serving some worthwhile purpose. We haven't really harmed them, they're just better read than dead. Anyway, tiddly diddly piddly pom, and all that jazz, let's change the set. These actors are dying to get out of those cumbersome cloaks and I'm dying to settle down to a good story. Dog ears? Fix that broken window.

The other actors move into the new setting.

Tonight we shall tell you a tale of two towns from the district of Milton. The first town is called Bull and the other is called Cock. That's right, 'Cock'. Now I didn't come down in the last shower wet behind my ears, oh no. Some of the less educated will titter or twitter when they hear the name 'cock'. So, henceforth we shall name the town, Cockle-do. Bull and Cockle-do seem to have been at war since Adam was a boy and part of the reason for that is that this library stands just across the border in Cockle-do Town. This has caused resentment amongst the Bulls and, as a result, they have shunned this place of socialising and learning and become somewhat Beat. backwards. But that's enough compound sentences for now; see for yourself as we now take you to the Bull Hotel, tiddly pom.

The Bull Hotel. MACK, the hotel publican is serving some customers as SERGEANT BULLY enters.

MACK Evening, Sergeant Bully, what'll ya have?

BULLY I'll have some answers if you don't mind, Big Mack. Like who graffitied my squad car while I was investigating a disturbance at Hungry Jacks.

MACK A disturbance at Hungry Jacks?

BULLY A disturbance at Hungry Jacks.

JIMMY What, they run out of vegeburgers?

BULLY That's enough out of you, Jimmy No-Nose.

MACK You like vegeburgers?
PETE Sergeant Bully’s gone all vego since he met that new age, flower power, vegan girlfriend of his.

BULLY You leave Buddhacup out of this, Pickpocket Pete.

JIMMY Must have been like a bully in a china shop.

BULLY You don’t know what Buddhacup’s like when she’s hungry; she gets all harpoonal.

PETE A red rag to a red bull.

BULLY Give us a glass of your best, would you, Mack?

MACK Sure, full cream or skim?

BULLY Load me up with the full cream, I’m no skimmer.

MACK One full cream, straight from the udder.

PETE I thought that was chai tea.

BULLY Anyway, it still don’t solve my problem. Who spray painted my car?

JIMMY What did it say?

BULLY ‘Bully’.

MACK What’s wrong with that?

PETE Coulda said ‘pig’.

JIMMY Or ‘fat pig’.

PETE Or ‘fat and filthy pig’.

JIMMY Or ‘fat and filthy and fecund pig’.

PETE What’s fecund?

JIMMY It’s Irish, past tense of feck.

BULLY Would you guys just pipe down? Can’t you see I’m on my imaginary walkie-talkie?

OTHERS The imaginary walkie-talkie!

BULLY Yes, the imaginary walkie-talkie. Police issue as standard.
MACK What’s it say?

BULLY It doesn’t say anything, it’s imaginary.

BULLY *whips out a real walkie-talkie.*

This on the other hand says plenty. Who’s up for pizza? Whaddya want, Mack?

MACK Oh to escape all of this, read some Dostoevsky-

PETE Make mine Meat Lovers!

MACK To traipse across the moors in search of my Cathy-

JIMMY Nah, Chicken Supreme!

MACK To still fit in my ballet pumps that Mumsie bought me when I was five.

OTHERS Eh?

MACK I mean, to find true love, hear the pitter-patter of tiny feet.

BULLY That ain’t no pitter-patter of tiny feet, that’s Buddhacup!

*Enter BUDDHACUP.*

BUDDHA Chicken Supreme! Meat Lovers! And what’s that your drinking, Bully boy?

BULLY Ah, milk?

BUDDHA Milk? That’s an animal product. I thought I told you to stick to chai tea?

PETE That’s what I said!

BUDDHA Shuddup, Pete! *(To BULLY)* You’ve made me unhappy. I should put you over me knee and give you a good smack on your bot-bot right now. You’d like that, wouldn’t you?

BULLY Well, yes.

BUDDHACUP places BULLY over her knee.

MACK Hold it, Buddhacup, the phone’s ringing.

BUDDHA I can’t hear any phone.

MACK That’s because it’s imaginary.
BUDDHA. Why you-

BUDDHACUP drops BULLY and heads for MACK.

BULLY But, Sweet Potato, Kumara, we were going to play hanky-spanky.

BUDDHA Imaginary phone, my tushy-woosh!

A phone starts ringing.

MACK That, on the other hand, is a real phone. Mind if I take it?

MACK answers the phone.


MACK hangs up the phone.

BULLY Who was it, Mack?

MACK I don’t know, he just called himself ‘Mr K’.

BULLY Mr K? I don’t know any Mr K.

BUDDHA Quite a mystery man, then.

PETE Mr K? Tell us what he said, Mack.

JIMMY Yeah, what did Mr K say?

MACK Those two kids in town, you know, the graffiti artistes-

BULLY Possibly the ones who spray-painted my car.

PETE & JIMMY You think?

MACK They’ve gone missing. And he gave me a hot tip.

PETE Black Caviar in the seventh at Sandown?

JIMMY Or the fifth at Flemington?

MACK No, to show off my confidence with the Special K challenge. But Mr K also said that the last place those kids were seen was Beat at the library.
Thunder and horror stabs are heard.

PETE Not the library?

Thunder and horror stabs are heard.

BULLY The library!

No sound effects are heard.

Oh, why didn’t they work for me?

MACK They did, they were just imaginary.

JIMMY But the library’s on Cock turf.

Sound of a throat clearing can be heard.

Sorry, Cockle-do turf.

MACK Sergeant Bully, you have to investigate.

BULLY But I can’t go back there. Not after what happened last time.

PETE & JIMMY What the?

BULLY (Sobbing) They…insulted my intelligence. Called me stupid, called me dumb. And they called me names. I can’t go back I tells ya!

BUDDHA There, there, my little tofu square, let Buddhacup take you home and make you a nice cup of orange pekoe.

Exit BUDDHACUP & BULLY.

MACK Someone’s gotta check out that library, boys.

PETE Yeah, but not tonight.

JIMMY It’s dark out there.

PETE Tomorrow, whaddya say, Mack?

MACK Alright, tomorrow it is. You got my back?

PETE & JIMMY (Crossing fingers) Sure.

Lights down.
The library by day. PENEOLOPE FORTHRIGHT, the librarian is at the counter. MRS CHITCHAT enters.

CHITCHAT Miss Forthright, I hear there was some commotion here last night.

PENNY Some commotion? Not in my library and not on my watch, surely, Mrs Chitchat.

CHITCHAT But I’ve heard those ne’er-do-wells, those artistes graffiti were spotted in the vicinity and up to no good.

PENNY And where might you have heard this?

CHITCHAT Let’s just say there is a whisper of it on la vine de grape. An agent provocateur can not reveal her sources.

PENNY An agent provocateur? More like the town gossip if you want my opinion.

CHITCHAT Moi, a gossip? (Picking up a book) Miss Forthright, I take umbrage at such a claim!

PENNY (Taking back the book) You just leave Umbrage out of this, he’s a very fine author. Now, I’ve been librarian here for twenty two years and I’m not about to start believing your hubbub about some hullabaloo.

Enter MISS FORGET-ME-NOT.

Good morning, Miss Forget-Me-Not.

MISS F Ooh, I hope I’m not interrupting.

PENNY Not at all, Mrs Chitchat here was just suffering from foot-in-mouth disease.

MISS F I once had a cat that had fleas. Had to be put down.

PENNY So, Miss Forget-me-not, here to return your book?

MISS F Yes, Dracula. I think I’ve finished it, though one can never be sure with all those letters and diary entries.

CHITCHAT All that sucking and biting.

PENNY It’s a gothic classic, Miss Forget-Me-Not!

MISS F What is?
PENNY  Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

MISS F  Have I checked my macula?

CHITCHAT  No, *Dracula*.

MISS F  Did Dracula have macula? That would account for his red eyes.

PENNY  So you *have* read it.

MISS F  By Steven King?

PENNY  No, by Bram Stoker.

MISS F  Bram Stoker didn’t write *It*, Steven King did. It’s a horror classic.

PENNY  Just like *Dracula*.

MISS F  Oh, I would like to read that, I’ve heard such great things about it. It’s a Gothic classic.

PENNY  Yes, I know, but you’ve just-

MISS F  Speak of the devil, there it is. What a stroke of uncommon luck, somebody must have just returned it.

PENNY  Yes.

MISS F  Must be extremely popular. Do you mind if I borrow it?

PENNY  Not at all, let me just swipe it for you.

MISS F  But it looks clean enough as it is. Toodle-loo, must rush. See you same time tomorrow.

*Exit MISS FORGET-ME-NOT.*

CHITCHAT  Why did you tell that woman I had fleas?

PENNY  Mrs Chitchat, I simply said that-

CHITCHAT  So what if I feel some minor irritation every now and then? The odd itch, the need to scratch?

PENNY  Mrs Chitchat-

CHITCHAT  I’ve tried Epsom salts, lime rubbings and bicarbonate of soda, though all that appears to do is make me belch.
PENNY  Mrs Chitchat-

CHITCHAT  And the other. There’s nothing quite so un-ladylike as a lady who suffers from les burps du bottom.

PENNY  You were saying about the commotion last night?

CHITCHAT  Yes, have you called the police?

PENNY  You know very well that Sergeant Bully won’t come to Cockle-do.

CHITCHAT  Well then, dear, do you mind if I take a look around?

PENNY  Not at all.

CHITCHAT  I might just go deeper in to the library where the stench of old books might mask my odour. *Beat.* You can’t smell me, can you?

PENNY  Of course not.

CHITCHAT  Phew.

PENNY  Indeed, phew.

MRS CHITCHAT  moves amongst the shelves. Enter MAYOR SWINDLER with two workers.

    Ah, Mayor Swindler. What brings you to Cockle-do Library today?

MAYOR  Miss Forthright, does one need a reason to enter this paragon of philosophy, this edifice of education, this citadel of study?

PENNY  Most people, no. But you, on the other hand, rarely bring tidings other than from the bastion of bad news.

MAYOR  Strictly a friendly visit, I assure you.

WORK 1  Where do you want us to start, boss? Clock’s ticking.

WORK 2  Clock’s ticking, Mayor Swindler.

PENNY  Start what, may I ask?

MAYOR  The developments, the restructuring.

PENNY  Restructuring?
MAYOR   We at council have got some great plans for this building, this library. Plans you wouldn't believe even if I told you.

PENNY   And why haven’t you told me?

MAYOR   ‘Cause you wouldn’t believe me if I did. Suffice to say, very hush-hush.

WORK 1   Oi, Errol, grab this end of the tape measure and walk to the other end of the library. There’s a good boy.

WORK 2   Why can’t you walk to the other end?

WORK 1   Union regulations, buddy, and ya wouldn’t want to go against the union now, would ya? Solidarity forever.

WORK 2   Solidarity forever.

The workers begin measuring the library.

PENNY   I’m not happy about this, Mayor Swindler.

MAYOR   Then you should have come down to the Town Hall when we took the vote.

PENNY   I never heard of such a meeting.

MAYOR   It’s always me me me with you, isn’t it? Have you ever thought that this redevelopment might be in the public’s interest?

PENNY   But the public’s never interested in what the council does!

MAYOR   Nor the library.

MAYOR & PENNY   A-ha, that’s where you’re wrong!

MAYOR   We put this restructuring to a public vote.

PENNY   A public vote?

MAYOR   Yes, unfortunately, no-one from the public turned up.

PENNY   And why was that?

MAYOR   Printer’s strike, invitations and public notices never got done.

PENNY   A printer’s strike?

MAYOR   Why do you have to keep repeating everything I say?
PENNY  Because what you’re saying doesn’t make any sense!
MAYOR   That’s hardly a valid reason for repeating it.
PENNY   But a printer’s strike, on a matter as important as the future of the library?
MAYOR   It was a union issue, I’m sure you’ll understand.

*The workers return.*

WORK 1  Thirty four by twenty six by thirty four, Mayor.
WORK 2   By thirty four, Mayor.
MAYOR   Strange measurement for a building.

*Enter CHITCHAT with tape measures binding her.*

WORK 2   But good measurements for a lady.
PENNY    Mrs Chitchat!
CHITCHAT I just wanted to help.
PENNY    Take those tape measures off at once.
CHITCHAT Yes, I shall lose a few inches around the waist.

*Exit CHITCHAT.*

MAYOR   And you two measure the building!
WORK 1   We did measure the building, guv, same as on the plans.
WORK 2   Oi. You said you were going to let me tell him.
WORK 1   I’ll let you tell him next time.
MAYOR   There won’t be a next time.
PENNY & WORK 2  Won’t be a next time!
MAYOR & WORK 1   Would you stop repeating everything I say!
MAYOR   *(To Workers)* Start the stock-take.
PENNY What stock-take?

MAYOR Don’t get your britches in a bunch.

MRS CHITCHAT returns.

CHITCHAT No britches, no itches; and I’ve lost half a foot!

Enter MACK, who begins browsing the shelves.

Hold on, what do we have here? An interloper?

PENNY It’s one of the Bulls, Mack Mastiff, he pours beer for a living.

CHITCHAT You must call security immediately.

PENNY Don’t be silly, he’s probably lost.

MAYOR He’s a long way from home.

PENNY One would think he had a street directory.

CHITCHAT A street directory, whatever for? Everybody knows that Bulls can’t read. He just looks so un-evolved.

PENNY That’s because people who read books look more intelligent than people who don’t.

MAYOR I’m losing IQ points just looking at him. I shall check on the stock-take.

MAYOR does so.

CHITCHAT What the Charles Dickens is he doing here? Miss Forthright, it’s up to you to find out.

PENNY And find out I shall. (Clearing her throat) Excuse me, young man, can I be of assistance?

MACK I certainly hope so, Mrs…?

PENNY It’s Miss, Miss Forthright.

MACK Pleased to meet you, Miss Forthright. Name’s Mack, Mack Mastiff.

They shake hands.

PENNY My, that is a firm grip you’ve got there.
CHITCHAT  No doubt from years of manual labour.

PENNY  I feel like a keg being popped.

CHITCHAT  Well I know a thing or two about popping. *(Shaking hands with MACK)*
Elizabeth, Lizzy, Beth, call me whatever you like. I'm married, you know.

MACK  That's a pity.

PENNY  Yes, her husband's a very unlucky man. So what brings you to Cockle-do?

MACK  Just wanted to borrow a book.


CHITCHAT  You could blow me down with a feather.

PENNY  Ah, I understand, you want an audio book; the ones they make for people who can't read.

MACK  No, I want a real book.

CHITCHAT  Dr Seuss?

MACK  I'm not five years old. I was looking for a copy of *Beat. The Lost Boys*. *The shelves shudder and moan.*

PENNY  Don't be silly. Why would you want *The Lost Boys*, they made it into a teen vampire movie.

CHITCHAT  With lots of nibbles.

MACK  My father told me to never judge a book by its movie and I reckon if I found *The Lost Boys* then I'd know exactly what's going on around here.

PENNY  It's out on loan at the present.

MACK  Aren't you going to check on that fancy computer of yours?

PENNY  Mr Mastiff-

MACK  Mack.

PENNY  Mr Mastiff. I'll have you know that I am a professional, I am aware of the comings and goings of each and every book in this library. They are like my children.
MACK So the lost boys are like your children, are they?

PENNY *The Lost Boys* is like your child; please adopt correct verb-noun agreement if you wish for this conversation to advance any further.

MACK Fair enough, but take it easy on the tautology; ‘advance any further’; I got the idea on ‘advance’.

PENNY I don’t fluster easily, Mr Mastiff.

CHITCHAT That’s right, she hasn’t even kissed a man for ten years.

MACK Look, all I want is a book.

PENNY We don’t have any.

CHITCHAT For the likes of you.

MACK What about all those books?

CHITCHAT All of those books.

MACK Whatever. How about *Banksy*, the biography of the world’s most famous graffiti artist?

*The shelves shudder and moan.*

PENNY *(To the workers)* Do be careful with those books! Look, Mr Mastiff-

MACK Mack.

PENNY Mr Mastiff. Can’t you see we have a stock-take going on? Isn’t that correct, Mayor Swindler? We’re conducting a cataloguing stock-take?

MAYOR Cataloguing? I guess you could call it that. Hurry up, boys, or the old bird will be onto us.

MAYOR returns to the shelves.

PENNY And we are effectively closed for the purposes of lending stock.

*Enter MISS FORGET-ME-NOT.*

Miss Forget-Me-Not!

MISS F Have I caught you on the hop?

PENNY Not at all, but surely you’re a day early, you said you’d be visiting us tomorrow.
MISS F    Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.

PENNY    Yes, tomorrow!

MISS F    Yes it is now, it’s not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; the readiness is all.

CHITCHAT  Still more gookle-de-gobble.

MISS F    Hello, young man. They think I have dementia, but I still know a hawk from a handsaw.

MACK     So do I, ma’am.

_They shake hands._

MISS F    That is a firm grip you’ve got. Reminds me of a python eating a porcupine. Prickly business.

PENNY    Are you here to return your book?

MISS F    Yes, _Dracula_. Is that the one with all those journals and diary entries for readers with a short attention span?

PENNY    It’s a gothic classic, Miss Forget-Me-Not! With bats, fangs and the undead.

MACK     The undead!

_The shelves shudder and moan._

MISS F    Yes, here it is.

MACK     I’ll borrow that book.

PENNY    You will not!

MISS F    And which book is that?

MACK     _Dracula._

MISS F    Oh, I would like to read that, I’ve heard it’s a Gothic classic.

PENNY &  Yes, I know-

MISS F    But you must read it, young man. Reading is food for the brain.

MACK     (To PENNY) So stick that in your computer!
PENNY But you don’t have an account with this library.

MACK Oh, yes I do. Here’s my library card that my parents gave me when I was a little kiddie.

CHITCHAT You have a Library card

MACK Mustn’t have used it in twenty years. Swipe me.

PENNY Very well. *(Swiping) Dracula* for Master Mack Mastiff- wait on.

MACK What?

PENNY It says here that you have a book overdue, twenty years overdue.

MACK You can’t be serious.

PENNY Dr Seuss’ *Fish Out of Water*.

CHITCHAT As you are now.

MACK So what?

PENNY Well, you see, before I can loan this book to you, you will need to pay the overdue fine which comes to, yes here it is, eleven thousand six hundred and eighty-two dollars.

MACK Eleven thousand six hundred and eighty-two dollars!

PENNY And fifty-seven cents.

CHITCHAT No book for you!

MACK *(To MISS F)* Here, you have it.

MISS F *Dracula!* What a stroke of uncommon luck, somebody must have just returned it. Toodle-loo, must rush.

CHITCHAT Hold on, Miss Forget-Me-Not, I’ll walk you to the bus stop.

*Exit MISS FORGET-ME-NOT & MRS CHITCHAT.*

MACK This is ridiculous! A man wants to read a book and first you tell me that the place is closed and then that I have some unbelievable fine.

PENNY Indeed.

MACK All I want is to find out about lost boys-
The shelves shudder and moan. MAYOR returns.

MAYOR What the hell is going on?

MACK -and graffiti artists.

The shelves shudder and moan louder. Worker 1 returns.

WORK 1 We’ve gotta get out of here! This place is collapsing!

MAYOR The only thing that’s going to collapse will be your super fund.

WORK 1 I’m sorry, Mayor Swindler, but this is Occupational Health and Safety!

MAYOR OH&S be buggered. The bulldozers are booked for next week! Now get back to work!

Worker 1 returns to the shelves, which begin to move.

PENNY What bulldozers?

MAYOR Oh, you dopey, old cow, we’re knocking the library down.

PENNY I beg your pardon?

MACK Yeah, she may be old and dopey, but she’s not a cow!

MAYOR Stick some straw in her mouth and watch her go ‘moo’.

PENNY You’re knocking the library down?

MAYOR Of course we are. This library is like a fat relative at Christmas; old and in the way.

The shelves begin yelling, encircling the workers and consuming them.

PENNY But this is my life!

MAYOR Then you’d better get a new one.

MACK And we’d better get out of here, whaddya say? Mayor?

MAYOR Just let me call my workers. (Calling) Boys! Boys?

The shelves start to move closer. The sound of dogs barking can be heard.

Ah, they’ll come when they’re hungry.
Exit MAYOR SWINDLER.

MACK Coming, Miss Forthright?

PENNY I will not abandon my post; if this library's going down, the rats will leave first!

MACK Last chance!

PENNY Goodbye, Mr Mastiff-

MACK It's Mack!

MACK exits.

PENNY Goodbye, Mack.

The shelves encircle her and consume her. From the ruins appears CONSTANCE. The shelves spring back into place.

CONST. What a bitch. I'm not referring to poor Miss Forthright, though she was a dopey old cow. Rather, I mean these plans to close my library. Something will have to be done about Mayor Swindler, tiddly-pom. (Calling) Snarl, Growl and Woof!

The Dog Ears enter.

Ah, my Dog Ears. What do you think we should do with Mayor Swindler?

SNARL To eat or not to eat-

GROWL That is the question.

CONST. Cat got your tongue, Woof?

WOOF Woof's too sexy for his cat.

CONST. It's a figure of speech, Woof.

WOOF Poor pussy, poor pussycat.

CONST. Enough, Woof. What Mayor Swindler doesn't understand is that people are born to read and whilst there are readers, there will be my library. And should anyone try to stand in my way, I shall cry 'havoc', and let slip the dogs of war!

GROWL Growl!

SNARL Snarl!
WOOF    Woof...

Lights down.

The Bull Hotel. MACK, JIMMY, PETE, BULLY & BUDDHACUP are present. A television is on in the background. They're all waiting for something.

MACK    I thought the phone would ring about now.

JIMMY   Why's that, Mack?

MACK    I dunno, just a hunch. Must be on silent.

MACK picks up the phone.

MACK    Bull Hotel, best beer in Bull and that's no Bull.

The phone rings. MACK replaces the receiver and picks it up again.

Bull Hotel, best beer in Bull- Oh, it’s you Mr K. What’s that, Mr K? Look, you’ll have to slow down or the audience will realise there’s not really anybody on the end of this phone. What’s that, Mr K? Beware the worm in the apple? Can’t you speak literally, Mr K? No, I get it. Worm. Apple. Beware. Okay. Yes, nice talking to you too, Mr K.

PETE    Who was that, Mack?

MACK    Mr K.

JIMMY   Mr K?

MACK    Who would have thunk it?

BULLY   Let me get this right, Mack, you expect us to believe that the library came alive and ate Penny Forthright?

PETE    Sounds like a cock and bull story to me.

JIMMY   Libraries don’t just do that sort of thing.

PETE    You wouldn’t be having a lend of us, would you?

MACK    The only lending I was trying to do was lend a book.

BUDDHA  Borrow a book. You lend a book to someone who borrows it.

MACK    Thanks for the lesson, Buddhacup. You got a mobile phone?
BUDDHA Of course.
MACK Then SMS.
BUDDHA Beg yours?
BULLY What Mack means, Carrot Cake, I don’t think that grammar lessons are entirely helpful right now, but.
BUDDHA Nor is finishing a sentence with a conjunction, Sergeant.
BULLY Sergeant? What happened to tofu square, Sweet Meat?
BUDDHA Sweet Meat, why you carnivorous cretin! Do you want me to take off my slipper?
JIMMY Why, will you turn into Cinderella?
PETE No-one’s queuing up to play Prince Charming.
MACK Hey, Buddacup, when did you turn into such a language expert?
BUDDHA I read, therefore, I am.
JIMMY Sounds twisted.
PETE Sounds French.
BUDDHA It’s a French twist on Cartesian philosophy.
MACK You actually read books?
PETE Not just the Mercury?
BUDDHA Ever heard of the I Ching?
BULLY Is that a new gizmo by Apple?
BUDDHA Enough, Sergeant Bully. Tonight you sleep in the dog-house.
BULLY Again?
BUDDHA And no Shmackos for you! There’ll be no lip-shmacking tonight. I’m going to watch the TV.
She does so.
MACK We really should go a bit easy on Buddacup, people.
JIMMY Oh come on, she prances around like she owns the place.

PETE Just because she went to university.

BULLY She did an Arts degree.

JIMMY There you go, doing an Arts degree’s not really going to university, is it? Just some way to pass the time and avoid growing up.

MACK It’s easy to knock things you don’t understand, Jimmy. Take the library, I bet there’s a wide world of knowledge in there just waiting to be read.

PETE What’s got into you, Mack?

JIMMY You’re starting to sound like a Cock-

Sound of a throat clearing can be heard.

JIMMY L-Do.

BULLY Besides which, mate, there’s the internet these days, you can get it on any computer.

PETE Just don’t leave any potentially embarrassing information on Facebook that could be seen by a prospective employer in ten to fifteen years time.

BULLY & PETE & JIMMY (To audience) That message brought to you by the Department of Education and Training.

MACK See that’s the point, you can’t really trust the internet, can you? I mean, who really runs it?

BULLY Sounds like an interesting road of conversation to travel down-

PETE But we’ve already covered it in a previous school play.

MACK Laugh all you want, but I’ve already got the best computer in the world, it’s called my brain.

BULLY We’ve all got a brain.

MACK That’s right, so don’t you think we should feed it? Books, people, they’re like food for the brain. An old woman told me that.

BULLY What a touching metaphor.
BUDDHA  It’s a simile, birdbrain. A metaphor’s when you’re saying that one thing is another, a heart of stone, for example. A simile’s when you compare two-

PETE & JIMMY  Oh, shut up!

BUDDHA  Alright, why should I bother; it’s like throwing pearls of wisdom before swine. And the first person who tells me that I just mixed my metaphor will get the slipper!

PETE  Mixing metaphors? This isn’t concrete, honey.

JIMMY  Concrete honey. Sweet.

BULLY  Anyway, Mack, finish that story about what happened at the library.

MACK  Ah, what’s the point? *(Indicating audience)* They’ve seen it all already. But maybe that library’s not such a bad place after all.

BULLY  Apart from coming alive?

MACK  Apart from coming alive.

PETE  And eating Penny Forthright?

MACK  Okay, so it’s got issues. Yet I’m not afraid to say it, I want to become a reader!

BUDDHA  Guys, would you just pipe down for a second? The mayor’s making an announcement.

*Enter MAYOR, as if on television. The others crowd around, now reporters, except BUDDHACUP, who’s a protester.*

MAYOR  And thus, it is with sincere and great regret that I have to inform you that the Cockle-do Library will be closing its doors for good one week from today.

MACK  But why, Mayor, why?

MAYOR  Because half the population of the district of Milton never use it. And if you don’t use it, you lose it.

PETE  Oh, bull!

MAYOR  That’s right, the Bulls. Ignorance may lead to strength, but that’s just Orwellian propaganda. In this case it’s leading to a proposed twelve storey residential development.
JIMMY A proposed twelve storey residential development?

MAYOR In which I have no personal financial interest, just a love of large, brown paper bags that appear on my desk every time I seem to leave my chambers.

MACK Sergeant Bully, have you investigated these so-called brown paper bags?

BULLY (Receiving a brown paper bag from MAYOR) Yes, indeed, nothing in there except Mummy’s lunch; most rewarding.

PETE A proposed twelve storey residential development’s alright for the rich and snooty, but what’s in it for the workers?

MAYOR A new shopping arcade. I’ll call it Swindler’s Mall. Retail therapy for the masses to wash that envy clean away. And for all of those busy blue collar workers on the go, I can announce the impending opening of a world famous American family hamburger restaurant as well.

BUDDHA You’re opening a McDonald’s?

JIMMY Don’t be stupid, they’re Scottish, it’s pronounced Muckdoonalds.

BUDDHA I can’t believe this, you’re trading books for burgers!

MAYOR Books use paper, which comes from chopping down trees. Stick that in your global warming peace pipe, you mung bean, hippy, waste of space. (To BULLY) That shut her up.

BULLY I don’t know…

MAYOR You seem worried about your girlfriend, Sergeant Bully.

BULLY She knows how to use a slipper.

MAYOR Ooh, painful. But perhaps I can give you this (Produces brown paper bag) to relieve the pain when you dump her. Look inside.

BULLY Mmm, lunch Beat. money. Buddacup, we’re through!

BUDDHA As if I care about you, pinky-boy! Mayor, haven’t you read the statistics that so-called family restaurants are responsible for the most rainforest land clearing just so they can graze cows?

MAYOR Yes, in fact we dealt with that issue in another school play. Now, if there are no more questions I have a charity ball to attend, organised by a well-known property developer, at which I am the guest of honour. Come, Bully, I want you by my side.
Exit MAYOR & BULLY. Back to the Bull Hotel.

BUDDHA  I can’t believe he left me.

MACK    I can’t believe the library’s closing. Where else am I going to get access to such a treasure trove of books?

BUDDHA  Another metaphor.

Enter APPLE.

JIMMY I wonder what I could meet her for!

APPLE  Hello, boys, I was wondering if I could interest you in something to read?

MACK   (Smitten) Something to read! What are you, an angel?

APPLE  Not an angel, an apple, Apple Delicious. Would you like to see my device?

ALL    Yes, please!

A phone rings.

APPLE  Aren’t you going to get that? No? (To audience) See how the worm turns.

Lights down.

A public meeting place in Cockle-do Town. Many protesters are gathered.

ALL    What do we want, books! When do we want them, now!
       What do we want, books! When do we want them, now!

Enter MAYOR with BULLY & some cronies.

MAYOR   People, people, people, some decorum and dignity, please.

CHITCHAT What’s all this about your proposal to close the library down?

MAYOR I said everything I’m going to say at my press conference this afternoon. Do you really want me to repeat it all?

ALL     No!

MISS F I do.
CHITCHAT  All we want to know is why you’re shutting the library.

ALL  Yes.

MAYOR  Look, it’s not making any money. You can’t expect council to keep propping up the place. When are you going to learn, nothing in this life comes for free?

SPEC 1  But it doesn’t come for free.

MAYOR  What’s that?

SPEC 1  My library card cost me a whole dollar!

SPEC 2  So did mine!

MAYOR  Oh, my heart bleeds. Would you listen to yourselves; doctors, lawyers, white collar workers and fat bastards sitting on large inheritances.

SPEC 3  A dollar is a dollar!

MAYOR  At least there’s no teachers. Boy, can they whinge.

SPEC 4  I’m a teacher and I don’t think I was whinging.

MAYOR  Nor would I be if they gave me eleven weeks holiday a year.

SPEC 5  Whose side are you on?

MAYOR  Was that a question to me or the teacher who wrote this trash? But my point is, my point is…Ah, seem to have forgotten what I was going to say.

SPEC 6  Well, it must not have been very important otherwise you wouldn’t have forgotten it.

MAYOR  You know, it wasn’t that important, speaking to people like you never is. Let’s face facts, the library is right in the middle of a large residential area and that’s what it’s going to become, a large residential area.

BULLY  With a Muckdoonald’s.

BUDDHA  Cows have feelings too!

BULLY  Buddhacup?

BUDDHA  Meat is murder!
BULLY Oh, Buddhacup, it’s been murder being without you for this five minutes of stage time.

MAYOR Man up, Bully. I don’t think that quite came out the way I intended, but still, have a sandwich.

MAYOR passes BULLY a brown paper bag.

BULLY But I’m only hungry for love.

MAYOR Take a look inside. I think you’ll find it’s your favourite.

BUDDHA My little tofu?

BULLY Somebody remove that woman.

The cronies remove BUDDHACUP and exit.

CHITCHAT We will not let you get away with this, Mayor Swindler.

MAYOR You’ll get over it, same way your husband got over you when that nubile engineering undergraduate came to town picking grapes.

CHITCHAT Well, I never!

MAYOR And we don’t need une vine de grapes to tell us that. Anywho, it’s been a blast, or it will be when the dynamite comes-

CHITCHAT What if we staged a read-in at the library?

MAYOR You’re going to the library? Surely you’ve heard the rumours about the place.

CHITCHAT I don’t hear rumours, I start them.

MAYOR But what about Penny Forthright, those workers, the kids who spray-painted Sergeant Bully’s car?

BULLY So that’s who it was!

MAYOR Mrs Chitchat, that library is a white elephant, but it’s also the elephant in the room, the thing that none of us want to talk about.

CHITCHAT How so?

MAYOR Something’s been happening there, something evil. And when evil feeds, evil grows. Beat. That’s why I’m off to sign some papers to receive my free time share apartment in Ibiza.
BULLY        Ibiza!

MAYOR        It’s pronounced ‘Ibi-tha’, with a lisp, like Barcelona, hacienda, tapas
and stupid. Been nice doing business with you, easy as taking candy off a
constituency.

Exit MAYOR & BULLY.

CHITCHAT    Miss Forget-Me-Not, they can’t take away our library.

MISS F      I agree. What library?

SPEC 1      I learnt to read in that library!

SPEC 2      I learnt the Dewey Decimal System in that library!

SPEC 3      My daughter goes to crèche in that library!

SPEC 4      I had my first kiss in that library!

SPEC 5      I got married in that library!

SPEC 6      My son was born in that library!

MISS F      I scrape my warts in that library!

ALL         Your warts!

MISS F      At least it’s not my piles.

*They all laugh.*

Yes, I was joking, I use my pile-scraper there too.

CHITCHAT    It’s time to take action, people. Who’s for a read-in?

ALL         Yes!

CHITCHAT    We’ll outlast them, we’ll stay for a month!

SPEC 2      Um, I’ve got a tae-kwon-do lesson this afternoon, a month might be a
bit tricky.

SPEC 4      And there’s boot-scootin’ tonight at the RSL.

SPEC 6      My son’s learning the ukulele and Uke City don’t give refunds.

CHITCHAT    The ukulele? Why doesn’t he learn guitar?
SPEC 6  ‘Cause that’s takes time, commitment and skill.

CHITCHAT  Oh.

SPEC 1  My Feng-Shui class is at three, and missing a Feng-Shui class is, like, totally not Feng-Shui.

SPEC 3  I’ve gotta take my daughter to kickboxing.

SPEC 5  My husband won’t let me go to the library. He says its egalitarianism and class consciousness undermines the very foundations of capitalism!

CHITCHAT  Well if we can’t stage a read-in, what do we do?

MISS F  How about we borrow all the books?

CHITCHAT  But won’t that just make it easier to knock the library down?

MISS F  They won’t demolish the library.

ALL  Huh?

MISS F  Far from it. We’ll make worldwide news. A community making a stand against corporate fascism. We’ll put Milton on the map. We’ll call it the ‘Wot, No Books’ campaign. No publically elected Mayor could stand such bad publicity; Swindler will have to leave the library open.

ALL  She’s right!

CHITCHAT  You’re so wise. We’ll be underdogs, Miss Forget-Me-Not!

MISS F  Why would I want to get under a dog?

CHITCHAT  Everybody, library cards present!

*Everybody whips out their library cards.*

lock and load!

*They lock and load their cards as they would a pistol.*

A-borrowing we shall go. Ready, steady, read!

*Hoots and hollers as they rush off towards the library.*

*The Bull Hotel. MACK, JIMMY, PETE & BUDDHACUP are present. They are all crowded around APPLE.*
APPLE Boys, ever wanted to read?

JIMMY Hey, I can read.

PETE We get the Milton Mercury home delivered.

JIMMY Only on Sundays.

APPLE Do you two live together?

JIMMY No way.

PETE I’m married with two kids.

JIMMY And I’ve got a budgie.

APPLE Then why only on Sundays?

JIMMY That’s when the car ads are in it.

APPLE And the best sports coverage in all of Milton.

PETE You’re not knocking the Mercury, are you?

APPLE Far from it, it’s been your local rag for over one hundred and fifty years.

MACK How come you know so much about the Mercury?

APPLE Your name?

MACK Mack.

APPLE Mack, nice to meet you, Mack.

They shake hands.

MACK That’s a strong grip you’ve got there, Apple, like a female praying mantis about to rip off its partner’s head.

APPLE I like to keep in shape, Mack.

MACK I can see that, Ms Delicious.

APPLE Call me Apple, and it’s Miss.

MACK But the Mercury?
APPLE Research, Mack. I'm in the business of knowing things. For example, I know that you want to put on some pumps and read Dostoyevsky.

MACK How did you know that?

APPLE I pay attention.

BUDDHA You've been snooping!

APPLE And you've read the I-Ching, but have you delved into the world of Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance?

JIMMY Buddha on bikes? Rev me up!

PETE I just like the Mercury.

APPLE What if I was to say that you could read the Milton Mercury each and every day without even having to leave your house?

PETE But I get it home delivered.

APPLE Alright, without even having to open your front door.

MACK Sounds like something to do with the internet to me.

BUDDHA And it's taking over the world.

APPLE Your name?

BUDDHA Buddhacup.

APPLE Buddhacup, what a sweet new age name, Buddhacup.

BUDDHA Don’t think you can flatter me.

JIMMY Or she'll flatten you.

BUDDHA That internet's going to destroy everything.

APPLE There’s no threat from the net, Bubble Butt.

BUDDHA Buddhacup.

APPLE Like I said, Buddhacup. But how would you like it if I showed you a way that you could get the Mercury, plus any other magazine or book, all in your own home.

PETE I don’t have the space.
JIMMY He’s right, he’s a hoarder, his place is chockfull of form guides and old Reader’s Digests.

APPLE And all that can be a thing of the past. Fellas, and Chupa Chup, (She presents an iRead) this is the new iRead, the portable reader that you need.

JIMMY Hey, that rhymes.

BUDDHA Sound like copy from some advertising guru’s sales campaign.

APPLE Check it out; every magazine, every book, all safely stowed on the iRead, for you to read when you want to read.

MACK How do they all fit in there?

APPLE They’re tiny electronic files now. Think of it, no more cumbersome books and no more of that stale and musty stink that books bring to a home, drastically reducing its sale price on auction day.

BUDDHA But I like that stale and musty stink.

APPLE I had noticed. But you also love rainforests, you know that. No more books and the lungs of the Earth will breathe deeply for millennia to come. Mack, you want to iRead, don’t you?

MACK Sure do, Apple.

APPLE Then give me the name of a book you’d like to read, any book. Try me.

JIMMY I’ll try you!

MACK Have you got The Lost Boys?

APPLE Not on this iRead-

BUDDHA A-ha!

APPLE But give me twenty seconds and The Lost Boys will be delivered to the iRead. You do have, Wi-Fi, yes?

PETE Wi-Fi?

MACK Wherefore?

APPLE Why? Because that’s how the book is delivered.

MACK (To audience) A woman who knows what ‘wherefore’ means. If only I could impress her with more Shakespeare. Thy beauty's form in table of my heart. (To APPLE) We have Wi-Fi.
BUDDHA  What does Wi-Fi mean?

APPLE  Nobody knows, Chumbawumba-dumby-do, at least not without a rudimentary web search. But it means that *The Lost Boys* will be delivered wirelessly.

JIMMY  What, not at a hospital?

BUDDHA  No, stupid-

JIMMY  No wonder they’re lost.

APPLE  And, ta-da, here is your book, right where I said it’d be, on the iRead.

MACK  Let me have a look!

*Enter MR K, wearing large spectacles. He’s always looking in the wrong direction.*

MR K  Don’t read that book!

MACK  Who are you?

APPLE  The sworn enemy of the iRead, an optometrist!

MR K  That’s right, Miss Delicious. Your iRead holds no truck with me!

JIMMY  It can hold a truck too? Let me at it!

MR K  Only look at the iRead if you want to go blind, boy.

APPLE  Don’t listen to him; have a go, you know you want to.

PETE  Give it me!

JIMMY  I had it first!

MACK  Hey, they’re my lost boys.

*The boys fight over the iRead; eventually MACK takes possession and starts reading. They’re all engrossed.*

APPLE  *(To Mr K)* So, you found me again.

MR K  It wasn’t easy, now that they’ve taken away my driver’s license.

APPLE  Then how did you get here?
MR K  Wirelessly. And what you’re doing to people’s eyesight is unconscionable.

MACK  It’s like a real book!

APPLE  That’s a myth, our back lighting system is new and improved.

BUDDHA  Let me turn a page!

APPLE  Independent tests have shown the link between the back-lighting and blindness is an optical illusion.

PETE  Let your fingers do the sorting!

MR K  You know what you can do with your independent tests.

JIMMY  The iRead makes me wanna read!

APPLE  See-

MR K  Where-

APPLE  There, more happy customers.

MR K  Until they go blind!

APPLE  Don’t be so short-sighted. This is the big picture I’m talking about.

MR K  Where-

MACK & PETE & JIMMY & BUDDHA  Here!

APPLE  There!

MR K  People, look at me! Beat. Are you looking at me?

ALL  Yes!

MR K  Oh, there you are.

APPLE  Stop making such a spectacle of yourself.

MR K  Very funny, Miss Delicious. People, I used to be just like you, ignorant scum that had never read a book in my life. I felt worthless, cheap, hooked on Snickers Bars and two minute noodles. The only reason I got up in the morning was so I could go back to bed. Then one day, one day, people, I got
myself an iRead. All at once I felt I was born to read, flying into different worlds, meeting new friends and escaping my own pathetic non-existence.

BUDDHA So what happened?

MR K I became obsessed I tell ya, more obsessed than a gamer in the final stages of *Call of Duty: Black Ops*. And then I noticed, I was having to hold the iRead closer to my eyes and its back-light bored into my retina like a child’s finger into a funnel web’s hole. I don’t know if that came out exactly how I meant, but you see my point, those of you lucky enough to still have twenty-twenty vision, the iRead damaged my sight!

*He stops for a response.*

MACK You think we’re ignorant scum?

BUDDHA Worthless and cheap?

JIMMY We don’t even like Snickers and two minute noodles.

PETE *(Sheepish)* I do.

MACK & PETE & JIMMY & BUDDHA

PETE I like two minute noodles. I’ve even got a two minute noodle diet. Two weeks on the noods and my love handles are a thing of the past. You even get used to the chronic constipation after a while.

APPLE TMI!

MR K Look, I don’t think you’re ignorant scum, just ignorant, like I was.

MACK So, you became an optometrist?

MR K Not really, I couldn’t find the university.

BUDDHA Not an optometrist?

APPLE I told you, boys, and Blubber Butt, he’s an imposter, the enemy of the iRead. Now, you’re either with me, Apple Delicious and the iRead, or you’re with him, where the glasses certainly aren’t half full. Make your decision before I walk out of your lives forever. What’s it to be?

MACK & PETE & JIMMY &
BUDDHA

APPLE  There you have it, Mr Floptometrist. Time to leave.

MR K  Alright, I'm going. I've said my piece, I've given you my warnings. There's just one more thing.

APPLE  What?

MR K  Could someone show me where the door is?

JIMMY  What a freak.

PETE  What a fruit loop.

APPLE  What a phoney.

MACK  Now, getting back to the plot. If we all have an iRead, then we don't really need a library, do we?

APPLE  passes an iRead to each of them, except MACK, who still has the original one.

APPLE  No, Mack, with an iRead, you can throw away all of your books for good.

PETE  Thanks, Apple.

JIMMY  You're choice.

BUDDHA  What do they cost?

APPLE  Ah, Buddhacup, we can work that out later, don't you want to read?

BUDDHA  You remembered my name!

APPLE  Such a pretty name, Buddhacup, you know that.

MACK  Something's wrong with mine, I'm back at the menu.

APPLE  Come over here, Mack, I can help you find your lost boys.

Lights down.

The Library. MRS CHITCHAT, MISS FORGET-ME-NOT and other borrowers are amongst the shelves taking out books. The two new librarians, ANGUS & ROBERTSON seem very pleased.
CHITCHAT  Look at those two new librarians, happier than pigs in mud.

ROBERT.  Busy today, Miss Angus.

ANGUS   I’ll say, Miss Robertson.

BORROWER 1 approaches the counter, laden with books.

ROBERT.  And will that be all?

BORR. 1  Yes, thanks.

ANGUS  Fifteen books. Have a nice day.

BORROWER 1 leaves.

ROBERT.  My god, what an unattractive woman. Revolting.

ANGUS  Somebody's given her a thrashing with the ugly stick.

BORROWER 2 approaches the counter, laden with books.

And how are you on this delightful day, madam?

ROBERT.  Fifteen books for you?

BRR. 2   I must say it's nice having new librarians.

ANGUS  And it's nice having lovely customers like yourself.

ROBERT.  Have a nice day.

BORROWER 2 leaves.

Pee-yew! Did you catch that breath, Angus?

ANGUS  Emitted from the very bowels of hell, Robertson.

ROBERT.  Still, books are just flying out the door, Angus.

ANGUS  Not like the old days, Robertson.

ROBERT.  We tried, Angus.

ANGUS  But you just can't please everybody.

BORROWER 3 approaches the counter, laden with books.

BRR 3  Excuse me, could you recommend a book on playwrighting?
ROBERT. Can’t you see we’re in the middle of a conversation here?

BORR 3 I just wanted some advice.

ANGUS So we’re supposed to just drop everything and pander to your piffling demands?

ROBERT. Haven’t you already got fifteen books?

BORR 3 Yes.

ANGUS Then that’s your maximum, any more would be greedy.

ANGUS The exit is over there.

ROBERT. Just follow the signs.

ANGUS Signs with big pictures for those with an intellectual deficiency.

BORR 3 (Sarcastic) Sorry for bothering you.

ROBERT. That’s quite alright. Any time.

ANGUS I don’t know why our shop closed, Robertson.

ROBERT. Me neither, Angus. We’re likable people.

ANGUS Charming even.

BORROWER 4 approaches the counter, laden with books.

BORR 4 Pardon me, I have my fifteen books, but I was thinking of swapping this one for *Dracula*.

ANGUS A whacking with a spatula, more likely!

ROBERT. Why would you want to read such old trash?

ANGUS We only stock books by popular authors, like J.K. Rowling, Stieg Larsson and those obese hosts of *Masterchef*.

ROBERT. Now, shoo!

BORR 4 leaves.

As I said, Angus, we’re friendly, courteous and quite charismatic.

ANGUS You’re charismatic, Robertson.
ROBERT. You too, Angus.

ANGUS Pats on the back.

*They pat each other’s backs.* CHITCHAT approaches carrying a mound of books.

My lordy, deedy-do, that’s a lot of books.

CHITCHAT I’ve got a special voucher that allows me to borrow thirty books at a time.

ROBERT. A voucher? Don’t you mean a gift card?

ANGUS Gift cards are for losers.

ROBERT. People with no imagination, and once we’ve been given the money, we certainly don’t expect the recipient to cash it in.

CHITCHAT But it’s only a voucher.

ANGUS You want to use that voucher, you’ll have to take out twice as many books.

CHITCHAT *(Happy)* Okay.

ROBERT. Looks like you could use a hand.

CHITCHAT Yes, please.

ANGUS Then ask one of your friends, we’re busy.

CHITCHAT *goes and gets* MISS FORGET-ME-NOT to help her.

ROBERT. Gosh darn it, people give me a headache, Angus.

ANGUS Migraine?

ROBERT. My grain, your grain.

ANGUS Never go against the grain.

ROBERT. You’re so wise, Angus, and a little bit witty.

ANGUS You’re witty, Robertson, and a little bit pretty.

ROBERT. Fancy a double decaf latte with skim milk, Angus?

ANGUS Just a mo, we have another customer.
CHITCHAT & MISS FORGET-ME-NOT approach the counter with the remaining books.

ANGUS Alright, make it snappy.

ROBERT. Quick sticks, we haven't got all day.

MISS F Well you do now.

ANGUS What do you mean, hmm?

CHITCHAT This is the last of the books; we've borrowed every book in the place.

ROBERT. Every book in the place, but there were only six of you!

MISS F Were only six of you; verb-noun agreement.

ROBERT. How are we expected to know that?

ANGUS We don't read.

ROBERT. But there were only six of you.

ANGUS And at fifteen books each, that makes it just over one hundred.

ROBERT. There must be more.

CHITCHAT Ah, you're forgetting all those customers who came and borrowed before this scene began.

ANGUS Something happened before this scene?

ROBERT. You mean life exists without us?

MISS F Yes, and it would have been pretty boring if we showed all fifty thousand being taken out.

ROBERT. What a long night that would have made it.

CHITCHAT Anyway, thank you so much.

ROBERT. Our pleasure, dear lady.

CHITCHAT Would you look at that, an empty library.

MISS F There's something quite symbolic about it, don't you think.

CHITCHAT What, victory for the little people, book power prevails?
MISS F  No, look, Angus and Robertson…and no books!

MISS FORGET-ME-NOT and CHITCHAT leave, laughing.

ROBERT.  Now, how about that double decaf latte with skim?

Some dogs are heard howling.

ANGUS  What was that, Robertson?

ROBERT.  Just some neighbourhood dogs most likely.

ANGUS  I don’t like it, they’re quite chilling, Robertson.

The shelves move ninety degrees.

ROBERT.  I agree, Angus. And this place without any books? It’s like a ghost library.

The shelves move ninety degrees.

ANGUS  What’s happening to those shelves?

ROBERT.  Libraries don’t move.

ANGUS  Let’s make a run for it!

ROBERT.  But what about my osteitis pubis?

ANGUS  Stuff your osteitis pubis!

ROBERT.  Or my gammy leg? You know, the one I inherited from my father’s war wound.

The shelves start moving towards them. Dogs are howling louder.

Alright, I hear you. Let’s leave at once with decorum.

They make a rush for the door, but…enter CONSTANCE with the dog ears.

CONST.  You put my library out of business and now I’m going to do the same to you. Angus & Robertson out of business. Sic ‘em, dog ears.

The Dog Ears chase ANGUS & ROBERTSON into the shelves and dispose of them thoughtfully. CONSTANCE is spotlit.

I don’t really have anything against Angus & Robertson, well not the franchise shops that still exist. No, it was just the opportunity for a cheap joke, though
nothing was ever cheap at Angus & Robertson. But if those two thought that they could run my library into the ground then they had better think again...if they could. And what of this puerile ‘Wot No Books’ campaign? They can take all the books out of me, I mean my library, but they’re going to have to return them at some stage or they’ll incur late fees. And with late fees comes money and with money comes power and with power comes expansion and with expansion comes world domination and with world domination comes...I think I’ve made my point. But there’s somebody else who’s none too happy about this outbreak of book borrowing. Cut to the Mayor’s office.

Nothing happens.

Lights down on me and up over there.

Lights down.

Thank you.

Lights up on CONSTANCE, who’s doing something embarrassing, like picking her nose...Lights down.

The Mayor’s Office. MAYOR & BULLY are in a meeting.

MAYOR Let me hear it again, Sergeant Bully, you mean that you knew that those constituents were taking every book out of the library and you did nothing about it?

BULLY What could I do, they have the right to borrow.

MAYOR But not every book!

BULLY Besides which, you’re not catching me anywhere near that library, not after what happened last time.

MAYOR I thought your motto was protect and serve?

BULLY That’s the American motto, I run a strictly self-service patrol. Anyway, I thought you’d be pleased, somebody was going to have to get rid of the books. Saved you a bit of money, I reckon.

MAYOR It’s not going to save my political career. Have you seen today’s Milton Mercury? Headline – ‘People Power Empties Threatened Library’.

BULLY That’s a bit strong.

MAYOR And it’s gone viral on Facebook, the friends of the Cockle-do Library, the Fockles, has passed one million.
BULLY  I never use Facebook, you said yourself that any potentially embarrassing information on Facebook could be seen by a prospective employer in ten to fifteen years time.

BULLY & MAYOR  (To audience) That message brought to you by the Department of Education and Training.

MAYOR  Who’s going to want to employ you? More importantly, what’s this going to do to my reputation? There won’t be any property developers offering me a champagne and caviar quango to see out my dotage.

BULLY  A quango? Isn’t that something that birds poop?

MAYOR  That’s guano, you Ostrogoth! A quango’s a free ride, a sinecure, like being head of a government-financed consultancy, but independent of it, where my only duties would be to schmooze investors at sporting events and see my picture in the Mercury’s society pages.

BULLY  Okay, I’ll deal with it, somehow I’ll get the books back in the library.

MAYOR  You’ll do nothing of the sort, (Calling off) Dinny! Donny! Get in here this instant!

Enter DINNY & DONNY.

DINNY  You called, boss?

DONNY  Who do you want us to kill?

MAYOR  I don’t want you to kill anyone.

DINNY & DONNY  Oh…

MAYOR  Well, not yet.

DINNY & DONNY  Cool.

MAYOR  No boys, I want you to get some illegal emigrants for me.

DINNY  Don’t you mean immigrants?

DONNY  Cool, border patrol.

MAYOR  Not border patrol, boys.

DINNY  Huh?
MAYOR Borders Patrol. It’s a pun, get it?

DONNY Get what?

MAYOR Oh, why do I waste my best material on buffoons? Listen up, some books have emigrated from the library and it’s up to you to arrest them.

DONNY Books?

DINNY How do you arrest a book?

MAYOR You do a bit of leg work. Door knocking, house to house. You knock on a door, you get their books.

DONNY But what if they don’t wanna give ‘em to us?

MAYOR Then you beat the crap out of them until they do.

DINNY & DONNY Cool.

BULLY Wait a second, what are you going to do with fifty thousand books? Sell them?

MAYOR And take the chance that they’ll just be donated back to the library? Oh no, we’re not going to sell them, I’ve got something much more incendiary in mind, if you catch my spark.

MAYOR & DINNY & DONNY Cool.

Lights down.

Mrs Chitchat’s House. A Book Club is meeting. CHITCHAT and others are discussing books.

CHITCHAT Welcome, ladies, to the first meeting of the bi-weekly Mrs Chitchat’s Book Club. I’m positive we have plenty of good books to discuss. Around a hundred and five of them. What’s everybody been reading this week? Who’d like to start? Mrs Cheryl?

CHERYL Yes, Mrs Chitchat. This week I’ve been exploring the wonderful worlds of The Female Eunuch, Foetal Attraction, Fear of Flying, The Bride Stripped Bare and The Edible Woman.

CHITCHAT Quite the little feminist, aren’t you? Mrs Sybil?
SYBIL    I’ve been delving into *Great Expectation*, *The Great Escape*, *Great House*, *The Great Gatsby* and *I am the Cheese*.

CHITCHAT    Great.

SYBIL    Yes, on pasta.

CHITCHAT    Indeed. Mrs Beryl?

BERYL    I’ve had a fun week with *The Handmaid’s Tale*, 1984, *Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brave New World*.

CHITCHAT    Ah, the pleasures of dystopia. .

BERYL    The dangers of the modern world, Mrs Chitchat.

CHITCHAT    Absolutely. Mrs Feral?

FERAL    I’ve been getting my sexy thing on, reading D.H.Lawrence’s *Sons & Lovers*.

CHITCHAT    But there’s no sex in that book, Mrs Feral.

FERAL    There is if you use your imagination, they go at it like wildcats-

CHITCHAT    Mrs Feral!

FERAL    -On heat! Under the mulberry bushes.

CHITCHAT    Mrs Feral, I’ll have to insist that you refrain from-

* A door bell is heard.

      Ah, that must be the cucumber sandwiches and mince pies that I had especially catered for this occasion.

* A different door bell sound is heard.

      Yes, yes, I’m coming, hold your horses.

* A different door bell sound is heard.

BERYL    How many door bells have you got?

CHITCHAT    Oh, let’s see, there’s one for the neighbour, one for the maid and one for the little boy who lives down the lane. Though the least said about Boutros Boutros the better.

FERAL    Mrs Chitchat’s bringing sexy back!
A different door bell sound is heard.

CHITCHAT  And one for the caterers. That'll be them now.

CHITCHAT  opens the door. DINNY & DONNY enter.

Hmm, you don’t look like caterers.

DONNY  Nah, we’s more like cleaners.

CHITCHAT  Cleaners? But my house is spotless; I’m an Easy-Off Bam girl.

DINNY  Look, love, we were just in the neighbourhood and we’s was wondering if you had any books?

CHITCHAT  Mais oui-

DONNY  I don’t care what you do, love, we’s just in’erested in books.

DINNY  Mind if we take a sniff around?

CHITCHAT  You can smell me?

DONNY  Now why would we want to do that?

DINNY  We’re sniffing for books.

CHITCHAT  Then you’ve come to the right place, this is the first meeting of the bi-weekly Mrs Chitchat’s Book Club.

DINNY  Would you look at all them books!

DONNY  Must be ‘undreds.

CHITCHAT  One hundred and five to be precise.

DONNY  Book ‘em, Dinny!

SYBIL  What do you want with our books?

DINNY  They’s under arrest, they’s is.

CHITCHAT  I beg your pardon, but you can’t simply walk in here with your filthy work boots on and expect to take our books.

DINNY  I think you’ll find we can.

CHITCHAT  Over my dead body.
CHITCHAT Alright, ladies, be calm, deep breaths. These Neanderthals are going to relieve us of our written treasures.

DINNY & DONNY start taking the books.

DONNY I glad you saw things our way, Miss. Things could have gotten ugly-er.

DINNY I think that’s it, Donny, all except that last one.

DONNY (To FERAL) Here, hand over the book, Miss.

FERAL Oh, take me with you!

DINNY Must really love your books.

FERAL It’s not that, I’m sick of these prissy, pompous, pretentious snobs who can never get their noses out of a musty book to smell what’s really happening in life.

DONNY You don’t have a dictionary here, do ya?

FERAL Please, let me go with you.

DINNY Look, love, we’s don’t have any room in the van.

FERAL I’ll do anything!

DONNY Well, I s’pose we could squeeze just one more in.

FERAL Thank you!

FERAL wraps herself around DONNY.

DINNY Donny, what are you doing, Donny?

DONNY Hostage. A bit of security. Just in case they’s come after us.

DINNY Come after us? Yeah, good one.

DINNY & DONNY Cool.

CHITCHAT Where are you taking our beloved books?

DINNY That’s for you to know-
DONNY And us to find out.

DINNY & DONNY Let’s burn, baby, burn!

FERAL Disco inferno!

DINNY, DONNY & FERAL exit, laughing.

ALL (Sadly) Our books.

Lights down.

Miss Forget-Me-Not’s House. MISS FORGET-ME-NOT is sitting alone, surrounded by books.

MISS F (To audience) Now I’m sure I don’t need to tell you why we are all gathered here today. But would somebody mind telling me? You see I’m rather at a loss. I’ve got a stack of invitations here to a book club meeting, but none of them are addressed to me. This ‘Wot No Books’ campaign has changed my life into hurly-burly, a higgledy-piggledy, and I miss my old routine of pretending to forget that I had borrowed Dracula everyday from the library. But sometimes you have a routine for a reason.

Every day, twelve hours apart, at seven in the morning and at seven at dusk, I’m alerted to the sudden invasion of a flock of sulphur-crested cockatoos. They appear stealthily, swooping through gums and flame trees, depositing themselves on branches that sway like television antennae in the midst of a storm.

Shocking white plumage
White as the purest man’s soul
Be my friend forevs.

My haiku for a cockatoo. And they are my friends. Yes, I know they screech. And squawk. Yet as the flock air-bombs and chews their way through my timber decking for no other reason than to sharpen their beaks, one cockatoo remains, perched on that same branch. It is the scout, on the look-out for potential danger, guarding its family from predators.

Some people there are who don’t like a cocky, they use scarecrows and netting and even sound waves to shoo them, but as the cockies squeal and shriek, they tell me to wake up, they challenge me to keep thinking and exercising my brain. And isn’t that what a good friend should do? Sometimes I see myself as that one scout, perched in the middle of my friends, protecting my flock from surprise attack. And while they pester and provoke people, I sit contently, happily until we all fly away again.
A knock on the door is heard.

Some people there are who don't like a cocky.

Another knock on the door is heard.

They bring guns and fire to the fight. And no matter what the scout does, each and every bird will be blown away like ashes in the wind.

Another knock on the door is heard. The lights start to fade.

(To the books) Maybe if we’re really quiet they won’t know we’re here.

Lights down.

‘Money’ by the Flying Lizards begins playing. Enter APPLE, showing off her money, jewels and finery to the audience. Cut music. BULLY, BUDDHACUP, JIMMY & PETE can be heard calling out lines such as, ‘Where are you, Apple?’, ‘We can’t see, Apple!’ and ‘The iRead has made us blind, Apple!’ They enter, wearing large spectacles (virtually blind), and begin to stalk APPLE who, terrified, collapses to the ground. They exit. Spotlight on APPLE, who sits up, as if waking from a nightmare.

APPLE What have I done?

Lights down.

The Town Square. Doves’ ‘Firesuite’ is playing as Borders Patrol light a fire and it comes to life. The flames are actors. In a syncopated, stylised manner, Borders Patrol forces the Cockle-Do citizens, minus MISS FORGET-ME-NOT, to throw their books onto the bonfire which devours them. The Bulls, now all wearing glasses, are happily giving magazines and books to the flames as if feeding young children. When the last book is burned, the fire turns on the citizens and spreads. They reach the Mayor and burn all of the money. It flies everywhere. Everybody flees in panic.

The Library. It appears to be empty. MACK, APPLE, JIMMY, PETE, CHITCHAT, MAYOR, BULLY, BUDDHACUP, DINNY & DONNY enter in a hurry.

APPLE What are we doing here, Mack?

MACK Making a stand, the library’s the only building in the whole town that the flames haven’t got to yet.

APPLE Where are the shelves?

MAYOR No books, no shelves.
JIMMY What do you want us to do?

MACK Go out to the kitchen, get some towels, blankets, whatever you can find, wet ‘em down and place ‘em under the doors, so the smoke doesn’t get in.

PETE Right on it. Where’s the kitchen?

MAYOR Hold it, boys, it won’t work.

MACK Why won’t it work?

MAYOR I was worried about those protesters staging a read-in, so I had the council cut all the power and water to the building.

BULLY Well that’s just bloody fantastic, isn’t it!

MAYOR Steady on, Bully.

BULLY No you steady on. You’ve led me up the garden path, made me break up with my one true love, all for the sake of a lousy buck.

BUDDHA Your one true love?

BULLY Yes, Buddhacup, and if we make it through all this, I want you to know that I’ll never lend you out again.

BUDDHA (Loving) Oh, Bully, you’ve made me into a metaphor!

CHITCHAT Oh, please. People, we need to do something and fast!

MACK You two, Borders Patrol, think you can do something useful?

DINNY What do you want done?

MACK See those two side doors, there and there?

DONNY Yeah?

MACK Guard ‘em with your lives. I don’t know what’s out there, but when they find out we’re here, this library’s gonna want some payback.

DONNY & DINNY go to guard the doors.

APPLE Everybody else, just stick together.

MAYOR So that’s the plan, wait for the either the fire or the library to get us? We’ve got to make a run for it!
APPLE You’re crazy, the whole town’s a bonfire, we won’t make it five metres out there.

MAYOR Somebody’s got to do something and I don’t like this plan of your boyfriend’s just to stand around at wait for death!

APPLE He’s not my boyfriend! MACK I’m not her boyfriend!

MAYOR And I’m nobody’s friend. I’m a winner, did you hear me, and I’m not going to get stuck in this fiery tomb with a pack of losers.

CHITCHAT What are you thinking?

MAYOR I told you, I’m getting out of here!

MACK Jimmy, Pete, stop him!

JIMMY & PETE move to stop MAYOR, who takes BULLY’s gun.

BULLY That’s my gun!

BUDDHA What are you doing?

MAYOR It’s my insurance policy, just like the one I took out on this building in the event of flood, acts of God and fire.

APPLE You’re insane! Mad as a goldfish with rickets!

MAYOR Maybe, but I’ll live to tell the tale. Now, back off! See ya, suckers!

MAYOR runs to the door, but it opens before he gets there. A bloody, zombie-like MISS FORGET-ME-NOT appears, screams, and drags the MAYOR, killing him in the process.

MACK Boys, help me with the door!

MACK, JIMMY & PETE force the door closed, leaving MAYOR & MISS FORGET-ME-NOT outside.

APPLE Oh, the poor man.

PETE He got what he deserved.

CHITCHAT But what about Miss Forget-Me-Not?

MACK You can’t think of her that way, any more, Mrs Chitchat, she’s long gone. Whatever’s possessed this library has possessed her too.

BULLY We’re all gonna die!
BUDDHA Snap out of it, Bully.

BULLY We’re all gonna die!

BUDDHA *smacks* BULLY across the face.

I needed that.

BUDDHA And I need you, but the real Sergeant Bully, not some weak, weedy wimp!

DINNY Hey, Donny?

DONNY What, Dinny?

DINNY Can you hear anything on your side?

DONNY Not a thing.

DINNY I reckon these side exits might be the go.

DONNY On three?

DINNY & DONNY One, two-

*The side doors open in each doorway is a very bloody and ghost-like ANGUS & ROBERTSON-

DINNY & DONNY Three! -who kill DINNY & DONNY and throw them inside. They close the doors and stand on the outside, guarding them.

CHITCHAT Oh, Miss Forget-Me-Not, my dearest friend, where are you?

CHITCHAT begins to move towards one of the side doors. ANGUS senses her approach immediately and stands waiting.

APPLE Mrs Chitchat, where are you going?

CHITCHAT I just want to, I just need to, I've just got to find Miss-

ANGUS is about to ‘pounce’ when.

APPLE Mrs Chitchat, we must stay together. Now come back to the group.
CHITCHAT Of course, you’re right, my dear. It’s just my nerves.

APPLE We’re all nervous, Mrs Chitchat, but those zombies out there wants us to separate, to pick us off one by one.

_A chant begins from outside: ‘Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, if the fire won’t get you, the library must!’_

What’s that noise, Mack?

MACK Dunno.

PETE It’s the library!

JIMMY It’s coming to get us!

BUDDHA We’re all gonna die!

BULLY _smacks_ BUDDHA _across the face._

That’s my bully!

_The chant intensifies as PENNY _leads_ MISS FORGET-ME-NOT, ANGUS & ROBERTSON, MAYOR, DINNY, DONNY, the workers and kids into the library. They are all bloody and zombie-like. They immediately seize JIMMY & PETE, turning them into zombies, a part of this ‘parade’, which slowly forms into the library shelves, trapping the others. Then silence until…the sound of dogs barking can heard._

CHITCHAT Why are those dogs barking?

MACK I’ve heard that sound before. On the day that Penny Forthright disappeared, there was barking within the library.

_The chant begins again. Enter the Dogs Ears, who rush into the shelves and chase the survivors. They are just about to be caught when a whistle is blown. The dogs heel and pant. Enter CONSTANCE._

CONST. Good Dog Ears, good doggies. Heel now, pets, heal. Now, whilst mathematics is not my strong suit, it appears that you are the final five survivors. Unfortunately, you’re not playing for a million dollars and fire does not represent life. But since this is a library and a place of learning, I find it only fitting that I teach you one last lesson, what happens to people who stand in the way of my library!

APPLE But we don’t want the library to close!

CONST. That’s a bit rich coming from Miss iRead herself.

MACK The iRead’s are damaging our sight.
CHITCHAT We want books, so why would you want to harm us?

CONST. Because if you read more, you would understand that it will have blood, blood will have blood.

BUDDHA But that’s like two wrongs making a right, and two plus two does not equal five!

CONST. I told you I wasn’t any good with maths! But I do know that you are the lowest common denominator. You have no integrity, you can’t be trusted. You, Mrs Chitchat, are a harmful gossip. Sergeant Bully takes bribes in brown paper bags and then reneges on a deal to be with Miss Buddhacup, who sat back and laughed whilst all my books got burnt. And you, Mack, I thought there was hope for you until you got sucked into an iRead because of a twinkle in the eye, the worm in the apple, now your girlfriend.

APPLE I’m not his girlfriend! MACK She’s not my girlfriend!
You’re not? You’re not?

CONST. But who loves me? Who loves a library? With the speed that technology’s taking over the world, what happens to me? Am I to be discarded, forgotten like a goldfish with rickets? I won’t have it! You are trying to kill me; you are bleeding me to death. So it will have blood, I say, blood will have blood.

BULLY Alright, get it over and done with, call on the dogs.

CONST. Oh no, that’s a bit simple, don’t you think? Like any fundamentalist thinker with a belief, I’m not happy unless you agree with me. For that reason, I’m going to make you part of me. Library, form the Bookworm!

The shelves and Dog Ears now link up to form a giant seething worm that chases the five survivors. CHITCHAT, BULLY & BUDDHA are consumed and become part of the worm. The worm is just about to get MACK & APPLE, when ‘Lady’ can be heard. All stop.

Who is this intruder? Who dares sing love songs at my time of ultimate victory?

Enter MR K(INDLE) wearing a flashy suit, looking a million dollars, crooning ‘Lady’, Las Vegas-style.

MR K Hello, Constance.

CONST. Mr Kindle.

MR K I said I’d come back for you.
CONST. But when you left last time I never thought you would.

BUDDHA The optometrist?

MACK I’ve got it, you’re Mr K, I thought I recognised your voice.

APPLE You two know each other?

CONST. Oh yes, Mr Kindle and I go back a long way.

MR K I tried to woo Constance with my portable reading device years ago, but she wouldn’t have me.

CONST. A Kindle can never replace a book.

MR K I swore one day I would return, updated, upgraded and improved.

CONST. But, Mr Kindle, as charming as you are, and even though my knees are buckling at the sight of your rippling pecs and quads, underneath it all, you’re just the same reading device.

MR K That’s where you’re wrong, Constance. I knew that I’d have to give you something special to make you give up all Beat. this, to leave your library behind forever. I’ve made some improvements, Constance, my shape is slim-lined and visibility is thirty percent better so you won’t hurt your eyes. And now you can download e-books into your very own library using my Wi-Fi Whispernet technology. Can I tempt you into trying it?

CONST. (Husky) Show me.

MR K whips out the all-new Kindle.

Oh, my god.

CONSTANCE flips through the Kindle.

It looks just like a book!

MACK It’s even got pages!

MR K E-pages!

CONST. I think I’ll see how snugly it fits.

CONSTANCE puts the Kindle into her pocket.

It’s perfect!
MR K  Tell me, Constance, is that a Kindle in your pocket or are you just happy to read me?

CONST.  *(Smitten)* Mr Kindle!

MR K  With my new Kindle it's like having a library in your pocket. That way, all you have to do is whisper and we'll be together. You do know how to whisper, don't you?

CONST.  No, but I know how to whistle.

CONSTANCE blows her whistle. The Dog Ears immediately rush to her.

CONST.  Not you this time, Dog Ears. I want him!

GROWL  Growl.

SNARL  Snarl.

WOOF  Woof.

MR K  Don't be disappointed, I have plenty of stock for everyone.

*Cheers from all.* MR K passes out Kindles to everybody.

CONST.  I never believed you'd do it, create something that would make me leave my library forever. Oh, Mr Kindle, I love you!

MR K  And I love you, after all, a library is but bricks and mortar, an empty building without those who love and love to read. My library-in-a-pocket gets hearts beating as one, pumps blood into the brain and removes the need for a carbon tax.

ALL  Removes the need for a carbon tax?

MR K  Maybe not yet, but I'm trying, Constance, I'm trying. So, what say you? What say all of you? Shall we leave and surf off into cyberspace and Kindle together?

ALL  (except APPLE)  Hell, yeah!

MR K  In the immortal words of Mrs Chitchat, ready, steady, read!

*All, except APPLE, begin to move off.*

APPLE  Wait!

MACK  Apple?
APPLE  Don’t you see this isn’t right, Mack? That he’s just another marketing vampire designed to suck you into e-books like I sucked you into the iRead?

MACK  But this is different.

CHITCHAT  We like the library-in-a-pocket.

APPLE  I don’t. I like the library. You’re wrong if you think this building is just about bricks and mortar. It’s about people, the neighbourhood, the love of sharing and so much more. It’s about making the written word available to the poor, the pensioners and the disadvantaged for a pittance. How much does that library-in-a-pocket cost, Kindle?

MR K  Ah, Apple, we can work that out later, don’t you want to read?

APPLE  You won’t tell me, will you? And I know the advertising spin because I used that exact same line myself.

MACK  So, what’s changed?

APPLE  I have, Mack. And what you people have here in this library is worth far more than selling your souls to for the sake of some lousy gadget. When I was a little girl, my mother brought me to a library just like this one and taught me how to read, how to love the smell of a book.

MR K  I’m working on that!

APPLE  But the library also taught me more. It taught me about community and values of brotherhood, family and being there for one another when times get bad. It taught me how to look at myself and realise when I’m doing the wrong thing. That’s a lesson I forgot, but the library, and this real, human connection, also taught me that you learn from your mistakes. So that’s why I’m staying. That’s why I’m going to go on fighting for this humble temple of wisdom. I’ll stay alone if I have to; it’s up to you to choose. You can stay here and fight for the library or you can flee never to connect again. What’s it to be?

‘Books are Burning’ by XTC plays. The others look at their Kindles, then at APPLE. They look at their Kindles, then give their Kindles to the audience. They crawl towards APPLE and surround her. APPLE raises a book above her head and slowly rotates. The final image could be reminiscent of Joan of Arc, the Statue of Liberty or the Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics. Slow fade of music and lights.

THE END
Email to Stony Stratford Library

Hi there!

My name is Bryan Cutler and I'm a Drama teacher from Wollongong, Australia currently travelling through the UK. I visited the Stony Stratford Library today, let me tell you why...

I run a Drama class in high school in which the students and I write and perform a play each year. We're always scratching our heads for new ideas, so when we heard of the 'Wot No Books' campaign (and the genius strategy of borrowing all the books from the library), we found the inspiration we needed.

In our 'adaptation', members of a local community (the Cockle-dos) fight against the closure of the local library by Mayor Swindler. Their sworn enemies, the Bulls, have scorned reading for decades, but are charmed into taking it up by a travelling salesperson, Apple Delicious, who's selling the new 'iRead'. Meanwhile, in opposition to the mayor, the Cockle-do residents borrow every book in the library, a move that is swiftly countered when Swindler calls on his henchman, Borders Patrol, to hunt down and seize anything that even smells like a book. All the while, there is another player in the story, Constance Reader, the librarian of decades past (a ghost-type figure), who summons the library itself to come alive and destroy all who seek to close it. A giant bonfire to burn the books is organised by Swindler, but swiftly gets out of control, causing both Bulls and Cockle-dos to flee to the only safe place, the library, where Constance Reader is waiting with a bevy of ghosts and 'Dog Ears' to make a sacrificial pyre to teach all and sundry that the written word is sacred. Thus, a small town comedy turns into a Gothic horror story (well, at least as scary as we can make it for a school audience!). Much else ensues, but Apple Delicious turns out to be the saviour of the day realising, at last, that the threat from the net (her own 'iRead' and the mysterious Mr Kindle's electronic 'library-in-a-pocket') will only cause people to disconnect from each other, that the library is about more than bricks and mortar, it's about community, neighbourhood and the human experience. After a stirring speech, the play ends with her asking the other characters, and the audience, what they will choose to do.

I spoke to the lovely man in the RSPCA shop who he informed me that the library has received a one year extension. Congratulations! So sorry I couldn't have spoken to you guys personally, but he encouraged me to email you about the effect that you have had on us in a school in Australia.

The play doesn't have a name as yet, (any ideas? You guys come up with the good ones!) but the kids are all extremely excited about performing it.

Your actions are an inspiration to us. They offer compelling reasons why we must stop and consider the impact of what we do. We can all take up the wonderful opportunities that technology offers us, but we must be sure that we don't lose something more important along the way, our conscience.

Thanks for your story and good luck in the future!