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Playscripts, Inc.
325 W. 38th Street, Suite 305
New York, NY 10018

Phone: 1-866-NEW-PLAY (639-7529)
Email: info@playscripts.com
Web: www.playscripts.com

Cast of Characters

In order of appearance:

THREE MAGI, Three astrologers from the distant East. (MAGI A—male, MAGI B—male or female, MAGI C—female)

GUARD 1, A Roman guard who seeks more from life, but has not been able to find what he desires within the rigid borders of the Empire. (Male or female)

GUARD 2, A Roman guard who, although bored with his lot in life, is still a rigid adherent to duty. (Male or female)

MESSENGER, A messenger of the Roman army who performs his duties efficiently with no desire to know anything more than he is told. (Male or female)

Technical Requirements

One acting block

Two spears

A scroll

Production History

Twilight of the King was first performed by Twilight Productions in the Twin Cities, Minnesota on November 5th and 6th, 1999. It was directed by Grant Spickelmier with the following cast:

MAGI A Grant Spickelmier
MAGI B Jerry Barnaby
MAGI C Kathryn Wehr
GUARD 1 Randy “Caz” Miller
GUARD 2 Jim Belich
THE MESSENGER Timothy Chase

Twilight of the King has also been performed by:

Daystar University at the Kenya National Theatre in Kenya, Africa on November 24th and 25th, 2001, directed by Julisa Rowe.

Peace Tabernacle Church in Mesquite, Texas on December 15th and 16th, 2001, directed by Jason Burden.

Mount Maunganui Baptist Church in Mount Maunganui, New Zealand on December 16th, 17th and 18th, 2005, directed by Christopher Haines.

South Columbia Baptist Church, Columbia, Maryland on December 8th, 9th, and 10th, 2006, directed by Russell Wooldridge.

TWILIGHT OF THE KING

by T. James Belich

*(Three MAGI are present studying the stars. **Bold** type indicates when all three MAGI speak together. Italicized type indicates that one other MAGI, as noted in parentheses, speaks with the primary speaker. The three MAGI, although they function as a group, each have their own distinct identity that should be reflected in the vocal quality of each character. MAGI A has a deep and serious voice that carries with it despair and foreboding. He is the voice of cold, hard logic. MAGI B speaks with common sense and reason, a calm and declarative voice of practicality. He is the voice of wisdom. MAGI C is the most uplifting speaker of the three and speaks with the sense of joy and hope to come, even when her words sound dire. She is the voice of the heart.)*

MAGI A. Rejoice, all you people who sit in darkness...¹

MAGI C. ...and see a great **light!**¹

MAGI A. Upon you who dwell in the land of the shadow of death...¹

MAGI C. ...**light** shall shine.¹

MAGI B. For unto you shall a child be born, unto you shall a son be given.²

MAGI C. He shall establish his kingdom with judgment and justice...³

MAGI A. ...from henceforth and forever. **The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.**³

MAGI B. From thou, O Bethlehem, shall come forth he who is to be the ruler in all Israel.⁴

MAGI C. This man shall be the peace.⁵ The Promised One.

MAGI A. Mighty God.

MAGI B. Everlasting Father.

MAGI C. *Prince of Peace. (B)*

MAGI A. *Wonderful Counselor. (C)*

MAGI B. *Son of God. (A)*

MAGI. King of Kings.

MAGI C. Who hath declared these things from the beginning that we may know them? Before time that we may say “**He is righteous**”?⁶

MAGI B. Lift up your eyes on high and *behold (A)* he who hath created the stars that bringeth out their hosts by number.⁷

MAGI A. His **light** is come and the **glory of the Lord** has risen upon us.⁸ We kings shall come to the brightness of his rising.⁹

MAGI B. We shall see Zion redeemed with *judgment (A)* and *righteousness (C)*...¹⁰

MAGI C. ...and the Lord’s house established *in the top of the mountains (B)* **where all nations shall flow unto it.**¹¹

MAGI A. This is the word **the Lord** hath spoken.¹²

MAGI B. And it shall be said in this day:¹³

MAGI A. “**Lo, this is our God**, we have waited for him and he shall save us.”¹³

MAGI B. “**This is the Lord**, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”¹³

MAGI C. A star. This is the sign unto us that the Lord will do this thing he hath spoken.¹⁴ Let now the astrologers, *the stargazers (B)*, **stand up!**¹⁵ For the hosts of heaven are unrolled as a scroll before us.¹⁶

MAGI B. He sends us, his ambassadors, by way of the sea, saying:¹⁷

MAGI A. “Go ye swift messengers to a nation trodden down.”¹⁷

MAGI B. He hath lifted up a sign to the nations from afar, *from the ends of the earth, and behold: (A)*¹⁸

MAGI A. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take us. Morning by morning shall it *pass over (C)*.¹⁹

MAGI C. Then come, let us walk in the **light of the Lord.**²⁰

MAGI A. Our eyes shall see the king in his beauty...²¹

MAGI B. ...and behold the land that is very far off.²¹

MAGI C. Come near, ye nations, to hear: **Immanuel is born.**²²

(The focus shifts from the MAGI to a ROMAN GUARD who sits on a block, bored. He carries a spear. A SECOND GUARD enters, also with a spear, and salutes.)

GUARD 2. Hail Caesar.

GUARD 1. *(Saluting:)* Hail Caesar.

GUARD 2. Anything to report?

GUARD 1. Is there ever anything to report?

GUARD 2. I'll assume that's a negative.

GUARD 1. Good call. By the way, you're late.

GUARD 2. I was talking to the Centurion.

GUARD 1. Lucky you.

GUARD 2. Tell me about it. You'd think getting stationed here would be punishment enough.

GUARD 1. So what did you do to deserve that?

GUARD 2. Nothing. He had orders for us.

GUARD 1. Please tell me we're being reassigned.

GUARD 2. Don't I wish. No, we're just supposed to keep an eye out for some guests from out of town. Important ones, apparently. We'll receive official instructions later.

GUARD 1. Guests from where, Rome?

GUARD 2. No, from the east, somewhere beyond the Empire.

GUARD 1. Sometimes I think they'd have us believe the Empire goes on forever.

GUARD 2. If Caesar had his way, it would. But look at us, stationed here in this dinky town in some backwater province. We can't be all that far from the eastern borders.

GUARD 1. Why can't we get stationed on the frontier? It's got to be more exciting than this dump.

GUARD 2. What makes you say that?

GUARD 1. Well, they must have invasions to repel and things like that.

GUARD 2. Not very often.

GUARD 1. How would you know? You've never been there.

GUARD 2. No, but our friend the Messenger has. They sent him way off to the northwest, to an island, and stuck him on some wall.

GUARD 1. What do you need a wall for on an island? Isn't it already protected by water?

GUARD 2. The Empire doesn't rule the whole island, so they built a wall to keep out the northern barbarians.

GUARD 1. Barbarians, huh? Sounds exciting! I'll bet that wall is under constant siege.

GUARD 2. It's not considered a siege unless you're surrounded.

GUARD 1. Thank you, Mr. Literal. Under constant attack then.

GUARD 2. I don't think so. From what the Messenger said, it sounds like life there is pretty dull, just like here.

GUARD 1. I'll say it's dull. All we do is sit around. Nothing ever happens! What I wouldn't give for a little excitement around here, maybe even a small invasion. They should send me to that island. I'd show those barbarians what for!

(GUARD 1 starts jabbing at imaginary barbarians with his spear.)

GUARD 2. Nobody's going to invade here, who'd want to? Now sit down before you stab someone with that thing.

GUARD 1. Who? There's no one else around!

(The MESSENGER enters and is almost stabbed by GUARD 1.)

MESSENGER. Hold your hand! Friend of Rome!

(He salutes.)

Hail Caesar.

(The GUARDS salute.)

GUARDS. Hail Caesar.

GUARD 2. I told you to stop fooling around.

GUARD 1. Sorry!

(To MESSENGER:) So what brings you to this forgotten part of town?

MESSENGER. Message for you from the Centurion.

(The MESSENGER hands the message to GUARD 1. GUARD 2 takes it from him.)

GUARD 2. Give me that. And put down that spear, please.

GUARD 1. So what does it say?

GUARD 2. “Guests of the Empire soon to arrive.”

GUARD 1. We knew that much. Go on.

GUARD 2. “If seen, obtain details on results of search, where found in particular. Make report on such immediately. Engage in no further conversation.”

GUARD 1. That’s it?

GUARD 2. That’s it. *(To MESSENGER:)* Have they told you what exactly is going on?

MESSENGER. I’m just a Messenger. I deliver what I’m told to who I’m told when I’m told. I don’t ask questions. You can ask the Centurion for more details if you want, but I wouldn’t.

GUARD 2. I won’t. I’ve talked to him enough for one night.

MESSENGER. He’s in one of his moods, that’s for sure.

GUARD 1. When is he not? What's got him so worked up?

MESSENGER. These foreigners, what do you think? The local king sent them our way.

GUARD 1. Mr. High-and-Mighty-King-of-Nowheresville?

MESSENGER. The very same. He has too big of an ego for the king of a backwater nation, in my opinion. He pays all due homage to Caesar, but around here he acts like he's lord of the earth. The Centurion hates him.

GUARD 2. Believe me, I know. No wonder he's upset.

MESSENGER. He was furious when these orders came tonight, should have heard him rave.

GUARD 2. I did. "What am I, his butler that he sends me his guests? I'm a centurion of the mighty Roman Empire! I bow to none but Caesar!"

MESSENGER. That sums it up. Here's some advice: Be careful tonight. There's a foul wind blowing, that much I can tell you. Something serious is afoot.

GUARD 2. Maybe it means we'll finally get some excitement around here.

MESSENGER. Careful what you wish for, friend.

(The MESSENGER exits.)

GUARD 1. Well that told us exactly nothing.

GUARD 2. We know these foreigners are looking for something. It's a start.

GUARD 1. Hey, do you think the foreigners could be barbarians?

GUARD 2. What?

GUARD 1. They say they're looking for something, but they could be in disguise. You know, spying the place out, getting ready for an invasion.

GUARD 2. You have a one-track mind, you know that? They're not spies, okay? The Centurion said they're important visitors, VIPs.

GUARD 1. Then what do they look like? How are they dressed?

GUARD 2. They're astrologers, I think, something like that.

GUARD 1. Astrologers? What kind of crazy disguise is that?

GUARD 2. It's not a disguise! They're not spies!

GUARD 1. That's exactly what they want you to think.

GUARD 2. Look, good spies blend in. From what I hear, these guys stand out.

GUARD 1. That just shows how brilliant they are. Nobody would ever think they were spies!

GUARD 2. Nobody but you, that's for sure.

GUARD 1. They've got everybody fooled, from Caesar to the Centurion. But they better watch out for me. I'll see right through their shabby disguise.

GUARD 2. Look, you'd better not start poking at them with that stick of yours. You start hassling guests of the Empire and you'll get both of us hanged.

GUARD 1. Don't worry, I'll be subtle. They'll never know I'm on to them.

GUARD 2. That wasn't exactly what I meant. Listen to me, if we see the astrologers keep your mouth shut. I'll do the talking. You stand straight, hold your spear, and don't say anything. We're supposed to treat them with respect.

GUARD 1. I can't believe the Centurion is letting them wander around loose. They'll spy out the whole country!

GUARD 2. Will you give the spy thing a rest, please? How did I ever get stuck with you for guard duty anyway?

GUARD 1. Hey, I'm a great guard.

GUARD 2. Yeah, right, you're the epitome of Roman guardhood. That's why they stuck you here in a forgotten corner of the Empire.

GUARD 1. You know why no one ever invades here? Because I'm always alert. No spies have ever gotten by me.

GUARD 2. Do me a favor and shut up about the spy thing right now.

GUARD 1. Okay, no need to be so touchy about it. And when they give me a medal for thwarting an invasion, see if I share any of the credit with you.

GUARD 2. Please don't. The last thing I need is to be permanently associated with you and your delusions. And if you ever decide to run for Caesar, keep me out of it.

GUARD 1. Can you do that?

GUARD 2. What?

GUARD 1. Run for Caesar.

GUARD 2. I don't think you're qualified. Stick to guard duty. We're supposed to be keeping watch, remember?

GUARD 1. A lot of fun *that* is. We're supposed to just sit here and wait for a bunch of...

GUARD 2. Don't even say it.

GUARD 1. ...astrologers, thank you very much.

GUARD 2. Just watch the road.

GUARD 1. Fine.

(He looks one direction, then the other.)

Well, would you look at that!

(GUARD 2 quickly stands, his spear at the ready.)

GUARD 2. What?

GUARD 1. No one's coming, what a surprise!

GUARD 2. If I didn't know I'd get in trouble for it, I'd sock you.

GUARD 1. What do these astrologers think they're going to find around here? *(Mockingly, as a tour guide:)* Over here we have some run-down old buildings. And over here, a pasture full of sheep. Why look! We even have some genuine shepherds watching over

their flocks by night. And here we have the cream of the Roman Empire: Two guards standing watch, bored out of their minds.

GUARD 2. You've got that much right.

GUARD 1. What do astrologers do anyway?

GUARD 2. Predict the future by watching the stars and planets, that sort of thing.

GUARD 1. Really? How do they do that? All I see is a bunch of lights up there.

GUARD 2. That's because you don't know what to look for.

GUARD 1. Neither do you.

GUARD 2. No, but the astrologers do. That's their job. I think they look for patterns and things.

GUARD 1. You mean like constellations and conjunctions of planets?

GUARD 2. *(Slightly surprised:)* Something like that.

GUARD 1. Wow, wish I knew how to do that. I bet they know all sorts of things even Caesar doesn't know.

(Slight pause.)

Hey, that just gave me a great idea!

GUARD 2. Why does that frighten me?

GUARD 1. We could ask the astrologers where and when the next invasion will be, and then we can be there when it happens. Even better, we could set up an ambush and smash the enemy's army as they're about to attack. We'd be heroes!

(Pause as GUARD 2 stares at GUARD 1.)

GUARD 2. You... are... insane! You know that, don't you?

GUARD 1. You're just jealous that I thought of it first. And you know what? I'm going to ask the astrologers. They're sure to know something like that.

GUARD 2. You are not going to ask them anything! Do you understand me? If you do, you're sure to get us hanged, flogged, or thrown to the lions. If you say one word to them, I will personally skewer you. Got it?

GUARD 1. Okay! You can ask them! But you'd better not take all the credit.

GUARD 2. The last thing I would ever do would be to take credit for one of your ideas, believe me. When we see the astrologers we ask where they found it and make our report. "Engage in no further conversation," remember?

GUARD 1. You know what I think?

GUARD 2. I never do.

GUARD 1. I think someone up top came up with the same idea as me and wants to keep all the glory for himself. That's why we're not allowed to talk to the astrologers. It's a conspiracy against us! They do all they can to keep us peons down at the bottom. That's why they sent us here. They know we're too smart for them.

GUARD 2. Why must you always include me in these pipe dreams?

GUARD 1. But one of these days, I'll be something more. Next thing you know they'll be calling me centurion! From there, who knows? Maybe I'll even make it to the Imperial Senate!

GUARD 2. That'll be the day.

GUARD 1. You know what your problem is?

GUARD 2. Please, enlighten me.

GUARD 1. You're too content with your lot in life. You have no dreams! I might not even stay in the Empire. Maybe I could become the astrologers' apprentice and learn to predict the future. There's an idea! Now *that* would be exciting.

(He looks up at the sky.)

Who knows what I'd learn about the future every night; it would always be a surprise. Disasters, invasions, kings being born, people

dying, and a million other things that haven't happened yet. It's all written right up there in the sky. All those stars...

(Pause.)

What's that one?

GUARD 2. Some astrologer. You'd better learn your astronomy first.

GUARD 1. No, really, what's that really bright light over there?

GUARD 2. We usually call that "the moon."

GUARD 1. That can't be the moon. It's a new moon tonight.

(GUARD 2 thinks about this.)

GUARD 2. You're right.

(He looks.)

What on earth is that?

GUARD 1. That's what I was asking you, Mr. Know-It-All. Still think it's the moon?

GUARD 2. No, I've never seen that star before. Sure is bright.

GUARD 1. See! I'd make a great astrologer! Five minutes and I've already discovered a new star!

GUARD 2. I don't think you're the only one who's seen it.

GUARD 1. Do you think it could have something to do with why the astrologers are here?

GUARD 2. I don't know, maybe.

(He looks down the street.)

Look sharp, company.

(Both GUARDS stand at attention.)

GUARD 1. Is that them?

GUARD 2. Sure looks like it. Now please, don't speak.

(The MAGI enter.)

In the name of Caesar of Rome, we greet you. Are you the astrologers of the east?

(The MAGI say nothing.)

We were told to expect your arrival.

MAGI C. We are soothsayers of the east, kings of nations...

MAGI B. ...here among the children of strangers.

MAGI A. Who art thou that thou dost speak to us?

GUARD 2. We are soldiers of Rome.

MAGI A. They are nothing and their work is naught.²³

MAGI B. They have not known nor understood, for their eyes are shut. **They cannot see, they cannot understand.**²⁴

GUARD 1. What are they talking about?

GUARD 2. Why are you asking me?

GUARD 1. You told me not to ask them.

GUARD 2. Good point.

MAGI A. I see a great shadow upon them. Their battles are confused noise and their garments *shall be rolled in blood.* (B)²⁵

MAGI B. It is because there is no **light** in them.²⁶

MAGI C. Yet the **Lord of Hosts** hath purposed it to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honorable of the earth.²⁷

MAGI B. For all must be fulfilled, *great lamentations and bitter weeping* (A) because the children shall be **not**.²⁸

(Uncomfortable pause.)

GUARD 2. *(Not sure what to say:)* We have orders to ask where you have found that which you are looking for.

MAGI C. Understand ye not? Lift thine eyes to the heavens²⁹, for there it is written. At the evening time it shall be **light!**³⁰

(GUARD 1 looks up.)

GUARD 1. That star? Is that showing you where to go?

MAGI C. Perchance his eyes see and are not dim.

GUARD 1. But what does it mean?

GUARD 2. What are you looking for?

MAGI A. We have come to behold the one whose name is **the Branch**.³¹

MAGI C. For the virgin hath conceived and borne a son, and his name is called **Immanuel**.³²

MAGI B. He shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good³³, and the **spirit of the Lord** shall rest upon him.³⁴

MAGI C. He shall build the **temple of the Lord** and sit and rule upon his throne.³⁵

MAGI A. For it shall come to pass that this land shall be forsaken of both her kings...³⁶

MAGI C. ...and the **King of Kings** shall reign in righteousness.³⁷

GUARD 1. Sounds like they're looking for a new king. What did I tell you, it's an invasion!

GUARD 2. Don't start that again.

GUARD 1. I know how to find out for sure. *(To MAGI:)* So you guys can tell the future, right?

MAGI C. What wouldst thou inquire of us?

GUARD 1. This king you're looking for, what's going to happen to him?

GUARD 2. What do you think you're doing?

GUARD 1. If they can't tell us, then we'll know they aren't really astrologers.

MAGI A. Silence and hearken!

MAGI B. That you may see and know, *and understand together...* *(C)*

MAGI C. ...we shall show you the things to come.³⁸ He shall be a man more precious than fine gold.³⁹

MAGI B. His people have been as lost sheep⁴⁰, but he has come to feed his flock like a shepherd.⁴¹ When the poor and needy seek water he shall not forsake them.⁴²

MAGI C. He will give power to the faint, and to them that have no might he shall increase their strength.⁴³

MAGI A. Yet woe! A grievous vision is declared unto me!⁴⁴ They shall weigh for his price thirty pieces of silver⁴⁵ and the sun shall be turned to darkness⁴⁶ as he is fastened as a nail in a sure place.⁴⁷

MAGI C. But the nail shall be cut down and the burden that was upon it shall be cut off.⁴⁸ Then it shall come to pass that the **mountain of the Lord's house** shall be *established (B)* and *exalted (A)* **above the hills.**⁴⁹

MAGI A. We have declared these things are coming.⁵⁰

MAGI B. Before they came to pass we have shown them to thee.⁵¹

MAGI C. It is written thus in the **book of the Lord** and none of these shall fail.⁵²

(Pause.)

GUARD 2. So, what do you think, is that the future? Are they really astrologers?

GUARD 1. I have no idea.

MAGI A. They have heard but understand not.⁵³ We go, for our search awaits.

GUARD 2. When you've found this king, inform us or other servants of Rome where he may be found.

MAGI C. If you seek him, remember that the ox knoweth his owner and the donkey his master's crib.⁵⁴

GUARD 1. Hey, before you go, I was wondering, do you need an apprentice?

GUARD 2. Will you let them go before we get into trouble? You've already said enough to get both of us flogged.

MAGI B. *(To GUARD 1:)* Wouldst thou become like unto us?⁵⁵ *Seek-est thou great things for thyself? (C)*⁵⁶

(The MAGI gesture to the sky.)

MAGI A. Then look to the stars and **read this.**

GUARD 1. I can't.

MAGI A. No, for it is sealed unto thee.⁵⁷

MAGI B. For in the heavens are a people of deeper speech than thou can perceive.⁵⁸

MAGI C. But wouldst thou understand?

GUARD 1. Yes, I'd like to.

MAGI C. Then speedily with us come and know **the root of all glory.**

GUARD 2. He can't.

MAGI A. *(Thundering:)* Did we speak to thee?

GUARD 2. *(To GUARD 1:)* You can't.

GUARD 1. *(To MAGI)* I'd like to, but...

MAGI B. What holds thee here among blind souls?

MAGI C. Follow us and learn the mysteries of the heavens.

GUARD 1. See? They do need an apprentice!

GUARD 2. Don't even think about it. You have a job to do, right here.

GUARD 1. I just want to see the king. You can handle things while I'm gone.

GUARD 2. And if the Centurion comes looking for us?

GUARD 1. Just cover for me until dawn. I promise I'll be back by then.

GUARD 2. Not a chance. I'm not sticking my neck out for you on this one.

GUARD 1. The Centurion will never know.

GUARD 2. Forget it.

GUARD 1. But this is the chance of a lifetime!

GUARD 2. Then do what you want. I won't stop you. But if you go, don't come back.

GUARD 1. What do you mean?

GUARD 2. You know the punishment for deserting your post.

GUARD 1. Only if they catch me.

GUARD 2. They will. So unless you're ready to give up the Empire just to see a baby...

GUARD 1. But if he's this special, if they came all this way, then maybe it would be worth it.

GUARD 2. Worth it how? What exactly do you expect to find?

GUARD 1. I don't know. Whatever it is we've missed.

GUARD 2. And if you go with them, do you really think you will?

(Pause.)

GUARD 1. *(To MAGI:)* I'm sorry. I wish I could come, but I can't.

MAGI C. Then star-crossed wonders pass thee by.

MAGI A. Thy dreams shall be dark.

GUARD 1. Wait. What's in our future?

MAGI A. Your hands shall be defiled with blood, your fingers with iniquities.⁵⁹ **Know certainly you both shall die by the sword.**⁶⁰

(The MAGI exit.)

GUARD 2. I'm not sorry to see them leave. You know, for a moment there I really thought you might go with them.

GUARD 1. (*Not listening:*) They're following that star. I knew it was important! It does look like it's pointing at something. What's over that way?

(*He points.*)

GUARD 2. Over there? Just a bunch of pastures, I think. Not the place to find a baby king, if you ask me.

GUARD 1. But that's where the king is, under that star.

GUARD 2. Fine. *You* go tell the Centurion to follow a star to find a baby king in a pasture. I'll cheer you on in the coliseum.

GUARD 1. I wish I could see that king. He must be important for the astrologers to have come all this way. I bet there is an invasion coming.

GUARD 2. Not again.

GUARD 1. I'm serious. I'll bet that's why the local king is so scared. He's afraid this new king is going to come in with an army and take over.

GUARD 2. (*Incredulous:*) The baby king?

GUARD 1. Well, maybe that's why the astrologers are here, to help the king.

GUARD 2. With the invasion?

GUARD 1. Exactly!

GUARD 2. Look, can we talk about something else?

GUARD 1. What do you think all that stuff the astrologers said meant? Especially the part about bloody clothes and dying by the sword.

GUARD 2. We're soldiers. There's always a chance we could get killed in battle. Anyone could predict that. Why, what do you think it meant?

GUARD 1. It sounded like we're going to do something awful.

MAGI C. (*Unheard by GUARDS:*) We have spoken and given them warning, will they hear?⁶¹

GUARD 2. I think they were just trying to scare us. I doubt we're important enough to be written in the stars.

GUARD 1. Maybe we are. I mean, there are a lot of stars up there.

GUARD 2. Do you think we're going to do something terrible?

GUARD 1. Well, no, not really.

GUARD 2. Then don't worry about it.

MAGI B. We have spoken, but they shall not hearken.⁶²

GUARD 2. Look, nothing bad is going to happen tonight as long as we do our job.

GUARD 1. I suppose. Still, it gave me the creeps.

GUARD 2. Me too.

GUARD 1. It's getting cold.

(GUARD 2 looks up.)

GUARD 2. No wonder, it looks like a storm is rolling in. It's gotten cloudy all of a sudden.

GUARD 1. You're right, I can't see the star!

GUARD 2. Good. Maybe you'll stop talking about it then.

GUARD 1. Well, I have to talk about something. What else is there?

GUARD 2. Does the phrase "blissful silence" mean anything to you?

GUARD 1. Yeah, boredom.

GUARD 2. My fault for asking.

(Pause.)

All right then, what do you want to talk about?

GUARD 1. What do you think it all means?

GUARD 2. Don't get metaphysical on me.

GUARD 1. I mean everything that's happened tonight. Don't you get the feeling that something incredibly important is going on?

GUARD 2. Not really.

GUARD 1. I do! And whatever it is, we're right in the middle of it, but we have no idea what "it" is.

GUARD 2. It's not our job to know. It's our job to follow orders.

GUARD 1. But don't you want to *know*, to understand?

GUARD 2. Understand what?

GUARD 1. Well, why three astrologers would come all this way to see a baby, for a start.

GUARD 2. I don't see how their reasons concern us.

GUARD 1. But if this kid is so important, wouldn't you at least like to see him?

GUARD 2. We're Romans. We have no king but Caesar. Why should I care about this baby king?

GUARD 1. "No king but Caesar." Don't you know anything besides what the Empire teaches us?

GUARD 2. What else do I need to know?

GUARD 1. Never mind, you don't understand.

GUARD 2. Neither do you.

GUARD 1. But I want to, that's my point!

GUARD 2. Why are you so interested in this kid? Five minutes ago you were ready to desert your post, risk torture and death, and leave the Empire behind just to see one little baby. Why?

GUARD 1. Because something exciting, something important, is finally happening in this insignificant little town. Something incredible and wonderful is taking place all around us, but we're in the dark.

GUARD 2. Of course we're in the dark, it's night watch.

GUARD 1. Very funny. You know what I meant.

GUARD 2. And it's a first, let me assure you.

GUARD 1. I don't mind being kept ignorant when there's nothing to know, but this is unbearable. I want to know what's going on.

GUARD 2. We'll be told what we need to know to do our jobs. That should be enough for you.

GUARD 1. But it isn't!

GUARD 2. Then that's your problem, you expect too much.

GUARD 1. And you don't expect enough.

GUARD 2. You see? It all evens out.

GUARD 1. I don't know why I try.

GUARD 2. If you really want to know more, then go ask the Centurion.

GUARD 1. No thanks, I'm staying out of his way tonight.

GUARD 2. Good plan.

(Pause.)

MAGI B. Shall we send the lamb to the ruler of this land?⁶³

MAGI A. Or shall we give the innocent over to the **fury of the slaughter?**

MAGI C. Shall we work against the word given to us? *Quench the star revealed to us? (B)*

MAGI A. Nay, for they are dead and shall not live.⁶⁴

MAGI B. In secret we must be gone. But as the sword *reacheth unto their souls...* (A)⁶⁵

MAGI C. ...they shall have peace.⁶⁵

MAGI. **The Lord shall perform the words he hath prophesied.**⁶⁶

(GUARD 2 sees something.)

GUARD 2. There! Down the road!

GUARD 1. What?

GUARD 2. Three shadows. The astrologers.

(He shouts at them.)

In the name of Caesar, halt!

GUARD 1. I don't think they heard you. Should we go after them?

GUARD 2. No, they're too far away. Let them report to someone else.

GUARD 1. But we can still catch them.

GUARD 2. I said let them go.

GUARD 1. Why?

GUARD 2. Because I'm not giving you another chance to chase after baby kings.

(The MESSENGER enters.)

MESSENGER. Hold them here!

GUARD 1. Who, the astrologers?

MESSENGER. No, Caesar. Of course the astrologers. Don't let them pass!

GUARD 1. But they're already gone. We just saw them off in the distance, going that way. What's wrong?

GUARD 2. Did they find the baby they were looking for?

MESSENGER. Yes, but no one knows where.

GUARD 1. It's under that star.

MESSENGER. What?

GUARD 2. Don't pay any attention to him.

MESSENGER. Have you had any contact with the astrologers?

GUARD 2. Yes, but only before they found this kid. Haven't they reported to anyone else?

MESSENGER. They're avoiding all the guards. It's believed they're trying to leave the country in secret. Our orders are to prevent that. The local king is furious.

GUARD 2. Why? Why is this baby so important to everyone?

MAGI C. If only you would listen, we would say, “**Behold thy God.**” ⁶⁷

MESSENGER. He’s a king, an important one from the sound of it, and all kings are a potential threat to Caesar. You both should know that.

GUARD 1. But he’s just a baby.

MESSENGER. It doesn’t matter. All claims to sovereignty must be fully investigated. But we can’t do that unless we know where he is. If the astrologers come this way again, don’t let them pass without giving you the child’s exact location. You have permission to use force, if necessary.

GUARD 1. I thought they were guests.

MESSENGER. They were. Now they’re fugitives. I’ll be back should the Centurion have any further instructions. And I won’t mention that you let the astrologers pass.

GUARD 2. Thanks.

MESSENGER. I told you to be careful.

(The MESSENGER exits.)

GUARD 2. It would have been nice if those orders had come five minutes earlier. But as long as someone finds the astrologers, we’ll be off the hook. Stay alert.

(Slight pause.)

GUARD 1. It’s been an exciting night, hasn’t it? Strangers from a foreign land, a baby king, prophecies, and the star. A special star.

GUARD 2. Right, I almost forgot, you’re now a student of astrology. So tell me, O Wise One, what does the future hold? What have the stars told you would happen tonight?

(GUARD 1 looks at the cloudy sky and thinks.)

GUARD 1. Death.

GUARD 2. Why do you say that?

GUARD 1. I don't know. I can just feel it, in the air. Can't you? I've felt it ever since those clouds rolled in. All this darkness makes me uneasy.

GUARD 2. You're just imagining things. It is dark though, and cold.

GUARD 1. (*Seriously:*) It's the chill of death.

GUARD 2. Will you stop it!

GUARD 1. You feel it too, don't you?

(GUARD 2 says nothing but is obviously uneasy.)

I knew it! The astrologers were right. Something terrible is going to happen, I'm sure of it. I don't think I like this astrology thing anymore.

GUARD 2. You're the one who wanted to make dire predictions, remember?

GUARD 1. I changed my mind.

GUARD 2. Good. Maybe now you'll stick to guard duty.

GUARD 1. Definitely. I just wish I could shake this funny feeling.

GUARD 2. Then stop thinking about stars and prophecies. Think about something happier, like getting transferred away from here.

GUARD 1. Yeah, maybe we can get posted to that island for awhile.

GUARD 2. Why would you want to go there?

GUARD 1. It'd be a change of scenery. Hey, what do you say? If we both put in a transfer request, maybe we could get sent there together. We can't get assigned to a worse centurion than we've already got.

GUARD 2. That's certainly true. I'm sure he'd be glad to get rid of us.

GUARD 1. See? He'd approve our transfer in a minute! He'd love to send us to the other end of the Empire. All we have to do is ask.

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