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Cast of Characters

LEMUEL

ZONDALINA

MELCHIOR

CASPAR

BALTHASAR

KING HEROD

EBULCHANEZER

SPIES

BEGGAR

BANDIT #1

BANDIT #2

BANDIT #3

BONOCOPPIUS

MALECOPPIUM

GRYPHON

SHAB

FENNEL

ZIFFY

ALCHEMIST

JANITOR

INNKEEPER

MARY

JOSEPH

Production Notes

Casting

Though originally performed with a cast of eight, the roles in *Bethlehem or Bust* can be distributed in many different ways, depending on the needs of the company. If every character is played by a different actor (including Zondalina the sheep, who appeared as a puppet in the Piper McKenzie production), 22 actors can be used in the show.

Additionally, the show is highly open to gender switching—though the roles skew male, any number of them can be played by female performers. In the Piper McKenzie production, one of the Kings (Caspar) was played by a woman, and it's probably not a bad idea for any other production to have one female king. The gender pronouns used to describe the characters should stay the way they're currently written in the script.

Combat

This play was originally developed for Fight Fest, a festival devoted to stage combat at The Brick. Though an integral part of the story, the duration and intensity of the combat can reflect the skills of the performers to the best degree possible. The battles should be fast and fun and cartoony—since the play is geared towards young audiences, a breezy, swashbuckling, non-realistic style is probably the best way to go. (That's not a bad approach to take with the entire show, frankly.)

Acknowledgments

Bethlehem or Bust was originally produced by The Brick Theater, Inc., at The Brick Theater in Brooklyn, New York, in December 2010 and January 2011 as part of Fight Fest with the following cast and crew:

LEMUEL	Doug MacKrell
ZONDALINA (Voice)	Roger Nasser
MELCHIOR	Jon Hoche
CASPAR	Rocio Mendez
BALTHASAR	Timothy McCown Reynolds
KING HEROD	Jeff Lewonczyk
EBULCHANEZER	Samantha Mason
SPIES	Rebecca Comtois, Christopher Yustin
BEGGAR / BANDIT #1	Christopher Yustin
BANDIT #2	Rebecca Comtois
BANDIT #3	Samantha Mason
BONOCOPPIUS	Samantha Mason
MALECOPPIUM	Christopher Yustin
GRYPHON	Rebecca Comtois
SHAB	Christopher Yustin
FENNEL	Samantha Mason
ZIFFY	Rebecca Comtois
ALCHEMIST	Christopher Yustin
JANITOR	Rebecca Comtois
INNKEEPER	Rebecca Comtois
MARY	Samantha Mason
JOSEPH	Christopher Yustin
Producer	Piper McKenzie
Director	Hope Cartelli
Assistant Director	Roger Nasser
Fight Directors	Adam Swiderski and Alexis Black
Costume Design	Julianne Kroboth
Production Design	Katrina Frances Lewonczyk, Abernathy Bland
Lighting Design	Ian W. Hill

BETHLEHEM OR BUST
HOW THE THREE KINGS TEAMED UP TO DELIVER
THE WORLD'S VERY FIRST CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

by Jeff Lewonczyk

Introduction

(LEMUEL enters through the audience with his sheep, ZONDALINA.)

LEMUEL. Hello! Hi there! Thanks for coming... *(etc.)*

(When LEMUEL reaches the stage, he looks out at the crowd.)

Hi! Wow. Well, you'll never believe what happened. What an adventure! It was amazing! Not only was it amazing, it was incredible. Not only was it incredible, it was great. Not only was it great, it was exciting! Not only was it exciting, it was—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. What's that, Zondalina? Oh, hey, this is my sheep, Zondalina. Say hello, Zondalina.

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. And I'm a shepherd—my name is Lemuel. Hi! So, what did you say, Zondalina?

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. What's that? I should get on with the story? Because that's what everyone came to hear? I don't know—it's kind of crazy, I'm not sure they'll believe me. But I can give it a try. Do you all want to hear the amazing, incredible, great and exciting story I was just talking about? Well okay then. It's a story about some really interesting people I met. They were smart, they could do amazing things, they were nice—well, most of the time—but the big thing that made them interesting is that they were kings! Up until then I'd never even *seen* a king before, but then, on a single day, I made friends with not one, not two, but three of them! Three whole kings! I also met a fourth king, but he was a baby. And a fifth king too, but I didn't like him so much. But oh man, where should I start?

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. I should start when the three kings all met each other? I wasn't there for that part! But they did tell me all about it later, so I

guess I can give it a try. I'm sorry if I don't get all the details right—I'm a shepherd, after all, I look after sheep and I'm not used to—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. Okay, Zondalina, I'll get started! Jeez...

Scene One

LEMUEL. Okay, so, it all began on the top of a hill outside the city of Jerusalem, which is in the country of Judea, which is where I'm from. It was the middle of the night, and the sky was just crowded with stars. But even though there were like a hundred of them, there was one star in particular that was bigger and shinier than the others.

(Lights up on the star.)

Wow, it sure is pretty... But don't get distracted! If you do, you'll miss the shadow that just appeared from the darkness to get a closer look at the star...

(During this last bit, BALTHASAR appears, as if climbing a hill.)

BALTHASAR. There it is...and it's even bigger now!

(BALTHASAR reaches into his cloak and pulls out a telescope, which he uses to look at the star.)

Incredible...unlike all the other stars in the night sky, it just keeps growing. I've never seen anything like it.

LEMUEL. But look—he's so distracted by looking at the star that he doesn't see that there's another shadowy figure coming towards him...

(Another shadowy figure [MELCHIOR] appears, having just climbed the hill.)

MELCHIOR. Who goes there?

(BALTHASAR swings around, still holding the telescope to his eye.)

BALTHASAR. *(Jumps back and lowers the telescope in shock.)* Aaah! Who is that?

MELCHIOR. I asked you first.

BALTHASAR. Yes, but I was here first.

MELCHIOR. Put away your weapon!

BALTHASAR. What weapon?

MELCHIOR. The one in your hand.

BALTHASAR. Do you mean my extendoglass?

MELCHIOR. Whatever it is—drop it!

BALTHASAR. (*Walking to MELCHIOR:*) No no, this isn't a weapon, you see...

(*MELCHIOR pulls out his sword and attacks with it.*)

MELCHIOR. Aha! Try to attack me, will you?

BALTHASAR. (*Fending off MELCHIOR's attack using the telescope:*) I didn't attack you! You attacked me!

MELCHIOR. But you're fighting back, aren't you? That means there's a 99.9999 percent chance that you're a foe!

BALTHASAR. I'm not a foe, you're a foe!

MELCHIOR. If you're no foe then lay down your weapon!

BALTHASAR. I told you, it's not a weapon—it's an extendoglass!

MELCHIOR. I have no idea what you're talking about.

BALTHASAR. It's my own invention—using specially crafted glass lenses, it makes distant objects appear much closer.

MELCHIOR. If it's not a weapon then why are you fighting me with it?

BALTHASAR. You didn't give me time to pull out my sword.

MELCHIOR. Then do so, and we'll fight like men.

BALTHASAR. Sure, hold this.

(*BALTHASAR throws the telescope to MELCHIOR, who looks into it as BALTHASAR pulls out his sword. They begin to fight as MELCHIOR continues to look through the telescope.*)

MELCHIOR. Woah—your invention totally works! I can see at least 12 and a half times farther than usual!

BALTHASAR. Twelve and three-fifths, actually. You sure know your numbers.

MELCHIOR. Of course—I'm a brilliant navigator. Check out this incredible map of Judea I made.

(*MELCHIOR pulls a map out from his belt and tosses it to BALTHASAR who catches and unrolls it—all while fighting.*)

BALTHASAR. Impressive!

LEMUEL. And so the two strangers continued to fight. They were so excited in the heat of battle that they didn't see the third shadowy figure...

(CASPAR *enters behind them.*)

CASPAR. Excuse me, what is transpiring here?

(MELCHIOR *and* BALTHASAR *stop fighting in order to see who it is.*)

BALTHASAR. Not again...

MELCHIOR. I'm sorry, sir, but this is a private swordfight. Please move on.

CASPAR. I am grateful to you for extending the suggestion, but I'm afraid that departing now would be unnecessarily rude.

MELCHIOR. I beg your pardon?

CASPAR. You see, it has been requested that I rendezvous here with a certain party, and for me to be absent upon the designated occasion would be highly inconsiderate.

MELCHIOR. Aha—so you're here to see *this* villain, are you?

BALTHASAR. I already said, I'm not a villain!

CASPAR. Alas, I have never encountered this individual in my life.

MELCHIOR. You expect me to believe you both climbed 1,782 feet to the top of a hill in the middle of nowhere just for your health?

BALTHASAR. I didn't actually climb—I used this unique hook and pulley device of my own invention. I call it a "grapparatus." You see—

MELCHIOR. Be quiet!

CASPAR. I urge you, sir, to sheathe your weapon, along with the fervid temper that accompanies it. It would behoove you to comply with my imperative posthaste!

MELCHIOR. Do you have any idea what he just said?

BALTHASAR. No.

MELCHIOR. Me neither.

(MELCHIOR *and* BALTHASAR *resume their fight.*)

CASPAR. Very well then—if neither of you are predisposed to an amicable reconciliation, I am forced to join this altercation and subdue you both!

(CASPAR *pulls out his sword and joins them. They fight silently for a bit.*)

BALTHASAR. Hey, you guys aren't too bad.

CASPAR. Our skills appear to be reciprocal in their potency. If only one of us could vanquish or be vanquished, we could solve this conundrum!

MELCHIOR. If you'd like to surrender, be my guest.

BALTHASAR. Never!

MELCHIOR. Well, I'm only working at fourteen seventeenths of my full strength. Let's see what happens when I bump it up a notch.

(The trio fights harder and brings it to a big finish, coming right into each other and then all pushing away at once so they fly in three different directions and land sprawling on the ground. Sound of slow clapping. The Kings look around as HEROD appears.)

HEROD. Bravo! That was almost as fun as watching a trained elephant juggle a dozen cats while crossing the Dead Sea on a tightrope!

(The Kings stand and bring up their swords.)

HEROD. Oh, put those silly things away—they make me want to sneeze! Besides, I do think we have you surrounded.

(Three SPIES with swords enter from the shadows to surround the Kings. The lead spy, EBULCHANEZER, wears a slightly flashier costume than the other two.)

Ebulchanezer?

EBULCHANEZER. Yes, Your Royal Incredibleness?

HEROD. Are these the gentlemen I've been so excited about meeting?

(EBULCHANEZER walks and gives each of them a close, tense up-and-down.)

EBULCHANEZER. Yes, they are the three kings you've called from across the earth to meet you in Judea, Your Most Gracious Magnificence.

MELCHIOR. *(To BALTHASAR:)* Wait, you're a king?

BALTHASAR. *(To CASPAR:)* You're a king too?

CASPAR. *(To MELCHIOR:)* You're also a royal personage?

(They all bow down to each other.)

THREE KINGS. *(To each other:)* My apologies.

HEROD. *(Laughs hysterically.)* Oh, goodie! It's just like the time I bowed in front of a mirror all afternoon because I forgot what I looked like!

BALTHASAR. So does this mean that you're Herod, King of Judea?

HEROD. (*Trying to remember:*) Herod... Herod...yes!

EBULCHANEZER. And since he's the king in these parts, you should bow to him too.

(The Kings bow to HEROD.)

HEROD. You all have weird heads.

LEMUEL. Yup, that's King Herod—the fifth king I mentioned. He's...a little strange.

CASPAR. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, fellow king. But would it not have been simpler to entertain us in your royal chambers instead of this desolate summit?

HEROD. Yes, I do feel terrible for making you trek all this way in the middle of the night. But what I have to tell you is a secret—ssssh! *We don't want the Romans finding out!*

(HEROD gathers the Kings close to him as LEMUEL speaks.)

LEMUEL. The people who really run Judea are the Romans. They're these big, annoying people from the West who wear brushes on their heads and walk around like they own the place even though most of them don't even live here. Everyone hates the Romans.

MELCHIOR. What kind of secret?

HEROD. Have you noticed the star that's been hanging around in the sky over my kingdom?

BALTHASAR. Of course!

HEROD. Well, it says in some of our ancient books that a new leader—a king!—is going to be born in Judea one day—someone who can probably get rid of the Romans and make everybody happy and maybe invent ice cream or something. And how are we supposed to know when this baby king will be born? Because a new star will suddenly appear in the night sky. A star just like—oh look! There it is.

BALTHASAR. If everyone can see it, then what's the secret?

HEROD. The annoying thing about these ancient books is that they didn't come with any names or addresses. I need to find out where this new king is, but all of my royal astronomers have run away—that is to say, they're busy looking at other stars. However, my royal spies—I mean, advisors, tell me that you are three of the most wise and learned men in the entire world, with all the right skills to find the baby king. Ebulchanezer, can you take it from here? I can't really tell them apart.

EBULCHANEZER. Of course, your Golden-Laureled Splendiferousness. Ahem. Melchior the Navigator, King of the East—your skill with numbers and measurement will allow you to find the right location of the star. Balthasar the Builder, King of the North—your inventions and ingenuity will help overcome the obstacles along the way. Caspar the Elocutionist, King of the South—your dedication to diplomacy will allow you to speak and learn from the many people you will meet during your travels.

MELCHIOR. So let me get this straight—you want us to go on a secret undercover mission and find this baby before the Romans can get to him first.

HEROD. Uh-huh.

CASPAR. Because if word got out about the new king, the ruffians, roustabouts and rapscallions rampant upon these roads would run riot.

HEROD. Right!

BALTHASAR. Just one question: What are you going to do with the baby once we find him?

HEROD. Why, I'm going to protect him, of course! He can't very well become king until he's had a chance to grow up a bit, and my court is the best place for him to do that! We can play hopscotch together and pretend we're giraffes, and I can eat some of that ice cream he's going to invent! He'll be my own very special prisoner—I mean, royal guest. (*Evil laugh, followed by hiccup.*) Excuse me!

BALTHASAR. Well, it's true that I'm curious to solve the mystery of the star.

MELCHIOR. I can use it as an opportunity to finish my map of Judea.

CASPAR. And I can consider it a tour of the words and customs of a new people.

HEROD. Hooray! I'm as pleased as a puppy in a pickle patch! Ebulchanezer here will keep track of your journey through my network of spies—I mean, advisors. When you find the source of the star, I'll come and meet this bouncing baby boy for myself.

EBULCHANEZER. And whatever you do, don't get tangled up with the Romans! If they find out what you're up to, they won't be very happy about it.

HEROD. Oh, and one last thing—don't try to leave the kingdom without telling me about the baby. It would be terribly rude, and I'd be forced to throw you in prison and make you wash the floors and eat gruel and all sorts of nastiness. Alright then? I'd love to stick

around and jump rope, but my sumptuous royal feasts aren't about to eat themselves. Toodle-oo!

(HEROD exits, followed by the SPIES.)

MELCHIOR. Did he just say what I think he said?

CASPAR. Do you mean "Toodle-oo?"

MELCHIOR. No, the part about taking us prisoner.

BALTHASAR. He definitely said that.

MELCHIOR. That's what I was afraid of.

LEMUEL. And with that, the Kings all went down the other side of the mountain and prepared for the long journey ahead.

(The Kings exit.)

Scene Two

LEMUEL. Now, the tricky part is that they had no idea where they were going. It wasn't like, oh, I need to go to *Bethlehem*, so I'll just follow the signs to *Bethlehem*! No, these guys hadn't even *heard of Bethlehem*, and so they had no idea that *Bethle*—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. Oh man! I just gave away the ending! The baby is in Bethlehem. Jeez. I'm so sorry. But uh, look, it's like some guy once said, "Getting there is half the fun." Even if you know what's going to happen, you don't know *how* it's going to happen, right? So there they were on the road, riding their faithful camels through the desert towards the star.

(The Kings appear, on camels, and spend the following dialogue "moving" across the landscape.)

BALTHASAR. So do you really think we should worry about Herod?

MELCHIOR. I'm not sure. He's kind of... (Twirling finger around ear, whistles a coo-coo noise.)

CASPAR. Well, regal figures are entitled to their eccentricity. I've spent so many late nights compiling my royal thesaurus that some of my subjects gossip that I'm a vampire.

BALTHASAR. It's a lot of pressure to be king, and you've got to unwind somehow. My people don't know what to do with my inventions. Fire-umbrellas, underwater bathtubs...or this thing. (Pulls

out a spray gun.) I call it a hydroflit. It squirts water. I have no idea why. Yeah, kings are weird.

MELCHIOR. I disagree. I think you two are 3.27 times stranger than I am.

CASPAR. Your fixation on numerical values constitutes a definite idiosyncrasy.

MELCHIOR. Who are you calling an idiot?

CASPAR. No, *idiosyncrasy*—a personal peculiarity.

BALTHASAR. A special weirdness of your own.

MELCHIOR. Numbers? Weird? No way! They're the best things in the world! They don't lie or cheat or try to fool you. They're always right where you left them. Numbers are my best friends. (*Beat.*) Okay, maybe that is a little weird.

LEMUEL. And so they went on like this, talking about their countries back home and getting to know each other. They took the back roads, keeping out of sight of the Romans and barely seeing another soul the entire time. Until one day...

(A BEGGAR *pops up out of nowhere. The Kings stop their camels.*)

BEGGAR. Penny for the poor?

CASPAR. Hark, a vagrant!

BEGGAR. Penny for the poor?

BALTHASAR. We should stop and show him some charity.

BEGGAR. Penny for the poor?

MELCHIOR. Stop it already, we get it. (*Reaches into his saddlebags.*) Here, sir, is a piece of gold.

BEGGAR. Gold—oh my goodness! Are you sure you can spare it for a poor beggar like me?

MELCHIOR. Of course I can—I always carry gold in my saddlebags when I go on a journey.

CASPAR. (*Pulling out a container and opening it for the others to smell:*) The substance I convey upon all exotic sojourns is frankincense. Let me give you a pinch of it to use or sell.

BEGGAR. Frankincense—what's that?

CASPAR. It is an aromatic substance that awakens lofty thoughts within anyone who inhales its divine scent. See for yourself.

(CASPAR *hands the BEGGAR a pinch of frankincense in a small pouch.*)

BEGGAR. (*Sniffing:*) Mmm, that is nice!

BALTHASAR. Now me, I always make sure to have myrrh.

BEGGAR. Myrrh?

BALTHASAR. It's a rare, valuable resin that's only found in my country. It has the power to cure sick bodies and to reduce pain. Here's a bit for you.

(*BALTHASAR hands him a small vial of myrrh.*)

BEGGAR. Wow...you all must be very rich.

BALTHASAR. It's true—we have plenty to spare and so we share.

MELCHIOR. No no, no need to thank us—it's just the way we are.

CASPAR. Charity towards mendicants is always well-advised.

BEGGAR. Well I can't tell you how grateful I am to hear that because—we're gonna rob ya!

(*BEGGAR claps his hands twice, and two other bandits jump on-stage.*)

BANDITS. Boogaboogabooga!

(*Unprepared, the Kings are knocked on the head with clubs by the three bandits, who steal the saddlebags and run to the opposite side of the stage.*)

BEGGAR. Wait! (*The others stop and they all turn to face the Kings.*) I just wanted to thank you for this wonderful opportunity. You're the biggest group of morons I've had the pleasure of robbing in a long time. See ya!

OTHER BANDITS. Nyaah!

(*They exit. The Kings get up.*)

BALTHASAR. We should never have told him we were carrying all that stuff.

CASPAR. Our magnanimousness was our downfall.

MELCHIOR. Well are we just going to stand here crying? Let's go get them!

CASPAR. But we'll exhaust ourselves pursuing them.

BALTHASAR. And then we'll have to fight them!

MELCHIOR. Don't worry—I have a plan. They'll have to stop for rest some time, and so...

LEMUEL. And so they listened to Melchior's plan. What was it exactly? Well, in order to find out, we'll have to jump ahead to later that night, and travel to the cave that the bandits were using as a hideout...

Scene Three

BANDIT #1. (*Aka BEGGAR.*) So what are we gonna buy with all this treasure, guys?

BANDIT #2. Well I'm tired of this ugly cave we always hide out in. Maybe we can give it a paint job, or some nice wallpaper!

BANDIT #3. (*Smacks BANDIT #2 slapstick-wise.*) You idiot! With all this treasure, we could buy a whole new hideout! Or maybe new camels for our getaways. *Solid gold* camels.

BANDIT #1. (*Bangs their heads together.*) Cool it the both of you! Nobody's buying anything until we divide up the loot.

BANDIT #2. And how are we supposed to do that?

BANDIT #1. Well, there's three of us, right?

BANDIT #3. (*Counts them:*) One, two...wait, I lost track. Let me try again. One, three, two...

BANDIT #1. There's three of us, okay! And there's three pieces of treasure. So we take each piece of treasure and divide it three ways so we all have a part of each piece.

BANDIT #2. Ow, you're making my head hurt!

BANDIT #3. Wait, are you sure there's *three* of us?

BANDIT #1. (*Doing another slapstick thing with them:*) Be quiet, you blockheads! This isn't brain science. You need brains for brain science.

BANDIT #2. Well, I may not have a brain, but I have an idea. There are three of us, right?

BANDIT #1. Right.

BANDIT #3. Right?

BANDIT #2. And there are three pieces of treasure, right?

BANDIT #3. Let me count... (*BANDIT #1 smacks him to shut him up.*)

BANDIT #2. If we each take one piece of treasure, then problem solved!

BANDIT #1. Alright, that's a great idea. (*Picking up the treasures and handing them out:*) I'll take the gold, you take the frankincense, and you take the myrrh.

BANDIT #3. Why do I have to have the myrrh?

BANDIT #1. (*Switches them:*) Fine, you can have the frankincense, and you take the myrrh.

BANDIT #2. Wait just a highway-robbin' minute! It was my idea, I think I should have the gold. (*Takes the gold and gives BANDIT #1 the myrrh.*)

BANDIT #1. But I'm the one who started the robbery, so I should get the gold. (*Switches it back.*)

BANDIT #3. Well I think *I* should have the gold. (*Switches with BANDIT #1.*)

BANDIT #2. Why should *you* have it?

BANDIT #3. Because I'm greedy!

(Some comic business in which the bandits all argue with each other while passing the three treasures back and forth between them. During this time, MELCHIOR appears, dressed as a beggar. He clears his throat, but the bandits don't notice him. He clears his throat a few more times, every more loudly, until finally he basically shouts it. The three bandits turn around and spot him. Uncomfortable pause.)

MELCHIOR. ...penny for the poor?

BANDIT #1. You have got to be kidding me.

MELCHIOR. Penny for the poor?

BANDIT #2. Is this guy serious?

MELCHIOR. Penny for the poor?

BANDIT #3. I'm a complete imbecile, and even *I* can see right through this.

MELCHIOR. Surely you must have some frankincense or myrrh or, I don't know, *gold* you can spare for a poor beggar like me?

BANDIT #1. How did you find this secret cave?

MELCHIOR. Oh, is it secret? Sorry, I didn't realize. But so long as I'm here...penny for the poor?

BANDIT #2. Where are your friends?

MELCHIOR. What friends?

BANDIT #3. Come on, we all know they're waiting outside so they can steal your stuff back while you try to distract us.

MELCHIOR. What stuff? I just want a penny. A *gold* penny.

BANDIT #1. (*Putting down his treasure and grabbing his club:*) That's enough! I guess you want to be clobbered a second time! Get him!

(The other bandits put down their treasures and grab their clubs. MELCHIOR throws off his cloak and pulls out his sword.)

MELCHIOR. It's true—that was just a brilliant disguise! But now I'm ready to fight you all!

(One of the bandits knocks the sword out of MELCHIOR's hand.)

Oh.

(The bandits all attack MELCHIOR at once, and he needs to dodge the swings of their various clubs. BALTHASAR and CASPAR appear outside the cave on the edge of the stage. As they speak, the action continues "inside.")

BALTHASAR. Uh-oh—sounds like they figured it out. Melchior needs our help!

(BALTHASAR starts to run in but is restrained by CASPAR.)

CASPAR. No! Our intervention is premature!

BALTHASAR. What do you mean—he's fighting them.

CASPAR. He deliberately instructed us not to intercede until he uttered the confidential authorization.

BALTHASAR. The what?

CASPAR. The secret word! Melchior counseled us not to infiltrate the cavern until he uttered the phrase "explosive garbanzo."

BALTHASAR. That's a very impractical secret word.

CASPAR. If we meddle now it could thwart the entire stratagem.

MELCHIOR. I could use a little help in here, guys!

BALTHASAR. I don't care, I'm going in!

(BALTHASAR runs in.)

BALTHASAR. Stop, thieves! I'm here to—

(BALTHASAR trips over the treasure that the bandits had put down in order to grab their clubs and falls to the floor. Everyone stops fighting to laugh.)

BALTHASAR. Oh, for Pete's sake— Explosive garbanzo!

(CASPAR follows in.)

CASPAR. Lay down your weaponry, rogues, or face the wrath of—

(CASPAR trips over BALTHASAR and falls down too. More uproarious laughter.)

MELCHIOR. *(As the laughter dies down:)* Oh, that's rich.

BANDIT #2. Now where were we?

BANDIT #3. Oh, right!

(BANDIT #1 goes for MELCHIOR, while the other bandits go for CASPAR and BALTHASAR, who have stood up. They immediately knock the swords out of their hands with their clubs.)

BALTHASAR. Hey, no fair!

BANDIT #2. Stealing's not fair either!

BANDIT #3. But we do it anyway!

(Now BALTHASAR and CASPAR are dodging bandit clubs like MELCHIOR.)

CASPAR. How do we escape this predicament?

BALTHASAR. I have no idea!

(As BALTHASAR jumps out of the way of a club swing, BANDIT #1 steps in and gets hit by Bandit #2's club.)

BANDIT #1. Hey, what'd you do that for?

BANDIT #2. You got in my way!

BANDIT #1. Well, now you're in my way!

(BANDIT #1 hits BANDIT #2 with a club.)

BANDIT #2. Ow, that smarts!

BANDIT #1. Then it's the only smart thing about you!

(BANDIT #2 swings back at BANDIT #1, who jumps out of the way right in time for BANDIT #3 to step into the same place while swinging at CASPAR.)

BANDIT #3. *(Getting hit:)* Yowza! What the heck?

(BANDIT #3 swings for BANDIT #2 but accidentally hits BANDIT #1.)

BANDIT #1. Oh, that's the last straw!

(The three bandits start swinging at each other, completely ignoring the Kings. The Kings gather downstage of the noisy, comical fight.)

BALTHASAR. Let's grab our things and get out of here!

MELCHIOR. But we still need to kick their butts!

CASPAR. They're doing an admirable job of that on their own. Let us withdraw, forthwith!

(The Kings gather up their swords and the treasures and run out. After a moment, the bandits stop fighting briefly.)

BANDIT #1. Hey, where'd they go?

BANDIT #3. Where'd who go?

(BANDIT #3 hits BANDIT #1 again, and the fight continues as if nothing happened. They fight their way off stage.)

Scene Four

LEMUEL. So the kings got away from the bandits. But that doesn't mean their trouble was over—no way, Jose. Now they had an even bigger problem—and it was each other.

(The Kings re-enter on their camels, traveling.)

BALTHASAR. I can't believe you picked "explosive garbanzo" as the secret word.

MELCHIOR. If I picked a regular word like "hello" or "please" you might have come in too soon.

BALTHASAR. But that doesn't matter because you never even said it!

MELCHIOR. I was being attacked by three guys with clubs—I got a little confused.

CASPAR. The entire machination left much to be desired.

BALTHASAR. Well you sure didn't help when you tried to keep me from going in to save him.

CASPAR. I'm duly aware of Melchior's tendency toward surliness. It was no stretch to conjecture that his incompetence was an integral component of the scheme.

MELCHIOR. I'm not sure what you just said, but I think it was an insult!

CASPAR. Assuage your temper, sir.

MELCHIOR. What did you just call me?

BALTHASAR. Now just calm down, Melchior.

MELCHIOR. Who told you to butt in?

BALTHASAR. Because sometimes I don't think the two of you are very practical thinkers.

MELCHIOR. Practical? This from a guy who carries around a pot full of *myrrh*?

BALTHASAR. Don't make fun of my *myrrh*!

MELCHIOR. I'm 1.37 times bigger than you and I can make fun of whatever I want!

CASPAR. Your incessant quantification is becoming tiresome.

MELCHIOR. Well your incessant *face* is becoming tiresome.

BALTHASAR. STOP!

(They all stop their camels.)

BALTHASAR. Listen to us. All we can do is argue and complain. We're no better than those half-witted thieves back there. Aren't we kings? Shouldn't we be nobler than them?

CASPAR. Loathe as I am to concur, I'm afraid Balthasar's thesis is legitimate. Our adventure thus far has been characterized by a failure to collaborate.

MELCHIOR. No wonder we can't get along—I can barely understand three-tenths of what you say!

BALTHASAR. Then why continue this way? Maybe we need to finish this journey the way we began it: alone.

CASPAR. That's a capital idea!

MELCHIOR. After all, the star is in the sky for all to see.

BALTHASAR. Maybe we'll all meet again once we get there, but Herod doesn't care which of us finds the way.

MELCHIOR. Why do we have to do what Herod says anyway? We're kings too, darn it all!

CASPAR. So we're all in accord— we will traverse Judea independently?

MELCHIOR. I don't care what you say—I'm heading out alone. See you both underneath the star—if you ever make it.

(MELCHIOR leaves.)

CASPAR. Understand me, Balthasar, I harbor no animosity towards you as an individual.

BALTHASAR. Me neither. I just wish it didn't have to be this way.

CASPAR. One mustn't dispute with destiny, Balthasar. Farewell.

BALTHASAR. Goodbye.

(CASPAR leaves in one direction, and, after a moment, BALTHASAR heads off in another. After a moment, EBULCHANEZER sneaks out of the shadows.)

EBULCHANEZER. Wait'll King Herod hears about this...

Scene Five

LEMUEL. Wow, that was creepy! I'm beginning to get worried. What happens if they don't get back together again? What if they never meet me, and I don't get to be a part of the story, and Herod gets ahold of the baby king and—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. I know, this story has already happened. But what if it changed while I wasn't looking? What if they got locked in prison or eaten by monsters or—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. Okay, okay! You're right. Just keep telling the story. But it's kind of hard to stay cool, considering what sort of crazy stuff is still coming up. Take Balthasar, for instance.

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. After the Kings split up, each of them took a different road. Balthasar decided to take the main road, but he was already warned what would happen if he traveled in the open like that...

(BALTHASAR stares through the extendoglass, and is completely distracted as two Roman soldiers, MALECOPPIUM and BONOCOPPIUS, enter behind him. They march military style until they are directly behind BALTHASAR.)

MALECOPPIUM. Company—halt!

(BONOCOPPIUS and MALECOPPIUM stop. BALTHASAR turns around.)

BALTHASAR. I'm sorry—am I in your way?

MALECOPPIUM. You! On the camel! Yes, you! Your papers!

BALTHASAR. My papers?

BONOCOPPIUS. Yeah, you know—your identity papers? The ones that give you permission to be out on the road? Be a sport and let us take a look, why don't you?

BALTHASAR. I'm afraid I don't have any papers. Are you Romans?

MALECOPPIUM. A foreigner! Seize him!

BONOCOPPIUS. Woah woah, I don't think we need to run around seizing everybody *just* yet. What's your name, guy?

BALTHASAR. My name is Balthasar. Balthasar the Builder, king of the lands to the north.

MALECOPPIUM. Treason! There is only one king, and that is Caesar! Lock him up!

BONOCOPPIUS. I apologize for my partner, he's a little hot around the hairline. Caesar's the head guy of the Roman Empire, if you didn't know. Between you and me, it's not the best idea to go telling people you're a king in these parts. Listen, uh—Balsawood, is it?

BALTHASAR. It's Balthasar.

BONOCOPPIUS. Balthasar, right. Listen, my name's Bonocoppus, and this is my partner, Malecoppium.

MALECOPPIUM. Why are we just standing here talking to this filthy foreigner? Let's take him to the coliseum and feed him to the lions!

BALTHASAR. But what have I done? Have I broken any laws?

MALECOPPIUM. You've set your dirty foot on Roman soil—that'll be your *last* mistake, fool!

BALTHASAR. Why don't you bring me to this Caesar of yours. Perhaps we can set things straight, king to king.

MALECOPPIUM. How *dare* you? Caesar would never lower himself to chat with a cockroach like you!

BONOCOPPIUS. Well, that and the fact that his palace is thousands of miles away. Look, Battlestar: I like you. I really do. But if we see someone wandering around saying crazy stuff like, oh, he's a king, for instance—well, we have to look into it. Why don't you take a walk with us to our headquarters and have a little chat.

BALTHASAR. But I really don't know what I've done wrong. What's more, I have an important job to do, and I'd really like to continue with my journey now.

MALECOPPIUM. Nuh-uh, buddy. We're not asking you—we're telling you. Now get with the program if you don't want a pair of black eyes and a busted butt.

BALTHASAR. I am not accustomed to being spoken to this way! I'm a king, after all!

MALECOPPIUM. And I'm a gorilla's girlfriend. Now shut up and get walking!

BALTHASAR. You, sir, have gone too far. I'm afraid I'll have to challenge you to a—*(Reaches for his sword, but it's missing.)* Hey, what happened to my sword?

BONOCOPPIUS. Oh, do you mean this one? *(Holds up sword.)* Yeah, I took it away while you weren't looking. It's for your own safety, you understand. I feel bad it has to be this way, but maybe, just maybe, we can work this out, and you can spend the rest of your life working in the salt mine instead of getting fed to the lions. Mmkay?

BALTHASAR. I think you're making a big mistake.

BONOCOPPIUS. And if we are, I am truly and sincerely sorry. But we should start walking now. Our headquarters is a few miles away, right outside a little town called...*Bethlehem.*

(They exit.)

Scene Six

LEMUEL. See—there it is again—Bethlehem! It's just like I said before, they're all—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. You're right. Boy, I'm terrible at keeping secrets. Well, let's see what's happening with Caspar instead—I'm saving Melchior for last because—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. ...well, you'll see.

(CASPAR enters on camel.)

LEMUEL. Caspar ended up taking a small side road that wandered way up into the mountains and became a twisty, narrow path that barely had room for a camel. The road was empty, but, at one particular perilous pass, he found his way blocked by a giant boulder!

(A giant boulder [actually GRYPHON covered in a gray blanket] rolls on.)

CASPAR. A monumental mineral deposit obstructs my peregrination! I'll attempt to dislodge it from its locus.

(CASPAR struggles to budge the boulder. After a few attempts, it starts to move.)

GRYPHON. Hey...stop that...

CASPAR. The boulder stirs!

GRYPHON. I'm trying to sleep here...

CASPAR. I've never conversed with stone before—a novel occurrence!

GRYPHON. Come on...just five more minutes...

CASPAR. Arouse and articulate yourself, rock!

GRYPHON. What...what do you mean, rock? I'm not a rock.

(GRYPHON throws off the gray blanket and reveals herself.)

Look, I was using a sheet of rock for a blanket—it gets chilly up here. *(GRYPHON yawns, rubs her eyes and stretches.)* Nggrhh—ggllleeuuh—uffff! Mmm, that's better. Now how can I—wait a minute, you're a human!

CASPAR. Verily, that is factual.

GRYPHON. *(Starts to walk around nervously.)* Oh man oh man oh man... I haven't seen a human in ages! I'm totally not ready.

CASPAR. Forgive me for inquiring, but who and/or what are you?

GRYPHON. Hold on a sec, it's been a while since I've done this. *(Clears throat.)* I am the Mighty Gryphon of the Mountain—half eagle, half lion and all monster. Roar! Caw caw! I have guarded this path for hundreds of thousands of hundreds of years! No one shall get past me unless they can answer my super-hard riddle! Caw caw! Roar!

CASPAR. A riddle? I am superlative at riddles! If I provide the suitable response I can proceed?

GRYPHON. Yuh-huh.

CASPAR. And if I fail?

GRYPHON. Well then I eat you. Duh.

CASPAR. Very well—proceed.

GRYPHON. Okay—here we go. *(Makes a big production of clearing her throat—short pause.)* Oh no.

CASPAR. Oh no?

GRYPHON. I forgot it.

CASPAR. You what?

GRYPHON. It's been like centuries since anyone's taken this path, so I haven't had a reason to remember the riddle! I'm so embarrassed...

CASPAR. Perhaps then you can allow me to advance untroubled.

GRYPHON. What? No way. The thing is, it was a very hard riddle—no one ever answered it right, so I ended up eating them all. And it's been so long—I'm really hungry!

CASPAR. Uh...mayhaps I'll retrace my route and return whence I came...

GRYPHON. No! That's against the rules. How about this—if you help me remember my riddle, I'll give you three chances to answer it. Most of the time I give only one, so it's actually a really good deal.

CASPAR. I don't know...

GRYPHON. Final offer: If you help me remember it and then get it right, I'll fly you anywhere in the world you want to go. I've been lonely up here for so long, I could use the company, Whaddayasay?

CASPAR. Apparently I am without a choice.

GRYPHON. Awesome! Now let's see...how did that thing go?

CASPAR. What was the subject of the riddle—animal, vegetable or mineral?

GRYPHON. Oh, animal, definitely—it was about people. The best riddles are about people—when it comes to people, you guys don't know *what* you're talking about.

CASPAR. Hrm. Was it the riddle about what walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon and three legs in the evening?

GRYPHON. Are you kidding? The sphinxes ruined that riddle for all of us monsters—now *everybody* knows that it's man, who crawls around on four legs as a baby, walks all regular when he's grown up, and then walks on two legs and a cane when he's old. But that's the *kind* of riddle it is. Okay, wait—no, that's starting to jog my memory. Good call!

CASPAR. Thank you.

GRYPHON. Let's see...it's coming to me...okay...okay...got it! Great. Are you ready?

CASPAR. Indubitably.

GRYPHON. Ahem.

"Can you tell me what manner of man

Spreads his arms to a thousand-foot span,
Lives for hundreds and hundreds of years
And can fill up an ocean with tears,
Laugh so loud as to shake the whole earth
And to millions of babies give birth,
And be born to himself and then die
All during one blink of his eye?"

CASPAR. Hmm... I'm cogitating. Yes. The "arms of a thousand-foot span" implies someone humongous, colossal, gargantuan. I now recall the tale of a mythical giant from this vicinity named Goliath. That's the answer: Goliath, a massive man who could accomplish all of these feats.

GRYPHON. Ooh, I'm sorry. That's not it. Popular answer, though. Lucky for you, you get two more chances.

CASPAR. I see. Well. Hrmph. Let me try mulling this time. Hmm... hmm...hmm... Yes. Of course! Who else could it be but the great Caesar of Rome? As the father to an entire Empire, it could be said that he metaphorically has the power to fill oceans and shake the earth. Am I right?

GRYPHON. Ouch—two strikes. It's a shame—you seemed like a smart guy.

CASPAR. (*Nervously:*) Heh heh. Well... Are you sure I can't withdraw from the contest and depart?

GRYPHON. Nope. You're in it to win it, baby. Double or nothing. Either you solve the riddle or I swallow you whole.

CASPAR. (*Despairingly:*) Then I'm afraid I might have to give up. *Nobody* answers to the description of that riddle!

(GRYPHON *gasps dramatically and ambiguously.*)

Scene Seven

LEMUEL. (*Interrupts:*) Hey! Hi! It's me! I'm sorry to interrupt—I know this is a really suspenseful moment and all, but I'm just really excited about what comes next. We'll come back to you guys later, okay?

(CASPAR and GRYPHON *scoff indignantly and walk off.*)

Thanks, guys! Now let's check in with Melchior, because he's about to meet—

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. Quiet, Zondalina! Anyway, instead of the big highway or the treacherous mountain pass, Melchior took a side road that passed through a small village. It was normally a bustling place, but on this particular afternoon it was completely empty.

(Over the past few sentences, MELCHIOR has entered, holding up his map.)

MELCHIOR. I knew there would be a village here. Maps are cool!

SHAB. *(Off:)* Who-who goes there?

MELCHIOR. A tired traveler, in search of some food and drink and rest. Where's your local inn?

SHAB. *(Peeking out:)* The inn's c-c-closed.

MELCHIOR. That's no way to run an inn. Now let's see...my research tells me that this is a bustling village of some 377 residents. Why is it so empty?

SHAB. *(Entering timidly:)* B-b-b-b-because—

MELCHIOR. Yes?

SHAB. O-o-o-o-o-o-f—

MELCHIOR. Mm-hmm...

SHAB. Th-th-th-th-th-th-the—

MELCHIOR. Come on, man, spit it out!

SHAB. Because of the angels!

MELCHIOR. Angels? What do angels have to do with it?

SHAB. A g-group of shepherds came through here the other day from the c-c-ountryside—they said that angels came d-down and told them to travel to B-B-Bethlehem to meet a new baby k-k-king. Same thing as that st-st-star.

MELCHIOR. That's great news! But where did everyone go?

SHAB. They're h-h-h-h-hiding.

MELCHIOR. But why?

SHAB. First that b-ball of fire appears in the night sky—then g-glowing winged m-m-monsters come down and start telling people what to do. These are scary times!

MELCHIOR. But you said yourself that a new king was being born. Isn't that good news?

SHAB. Have you ever met our k-k-king?

MELCHIOR. Do you mean Herod? Yes, I have.

SHAB. Then you know why we're sc-scared to have an-an-nother one.

MELCHIOR. So you're afraid of stars and angels and kings? What a bunch of cowards. Would it scare you to know that I'm a king too?

SHAB. (*Scared:*) Aaaahh!

MELCHIOR. It's true. Now where's this inn you say is all closed up?

SHAB. I c-c-can't let you go there. I was the only one here b-b-brave enough to s-stand guard, and I can't let you f-f-frighten the other v-villagers.

MELCHIOR. Boy, you *are* a bunch of scaredy-cats. Come on, stop being silly. I'll give you a piece of gold for your trouble.

SHAB. G-g-get away from me!

MELCHIOR. (*Taking a step towards him:*) What? I'm trying to give you gold!

SHAB. HELP! HEEEEEEELP!

(Two little girls, FENNEL and ZIFFY, run out.)

FENNEL. What's wrong, Daddy?

ZIFFY. Is this guy bothering you?

SHAB. Girls! Go back inside—your mother would lose her mind if she knew you were out here.

ZIFFY. She won't find out.

FENNEL. She's hiding under the bed.

MELCHIOR. Finally, someone who's not too busy shivering to help me out. Girls, I'll give you this nice shiny gold piece if you show me the way to the inn.

FENNEL. Why should we?

MELCHIOR. Because I asked politely. And because everyone likes gold.

ZIFFY. I don't like gold!

FENNEL. I hate it!

SHAB. Careful, girls—don't provoke him! He's a k-k-k-ing!

ZIFFY. We're not afraid of kings!

FENNEL. It's the grown-ups who are afraid of everything!

ZIFFY. We hate kings!

FENNEL. We hate shepherds too!

ZIFFY. And we also hate stars!

FENNEL. And angels!

ZIFFY. And everything else that makes our mama hide under the bed!

MELCHIOR. I had nothing to do with your mama hiding under the bed. It's true that I'm a king, and that I'm following that star and that I'd like to find out more about these shepherds, but that doesn't make me a bad guy!

FENNEL. You're a bad guy if you make our mama hide under the bed!

ZIFFY. You're bad and you're ugly and you smell even worse than your camel!

SHAB. Be quiet girls—he could cut your heads off with that s-s-sword he's carrying!

MELCHIOR. I would never use my sword to hurt innocent children—even if they were obnoxious, irritating, bratty little punks.

ZIFFY. Does that mean you wouldn't hurt us if we did this?

(ZIFFY and FENNEL punch Melchior's camel out of his hands.)

MELCHIOR. *(Shocked but determined not to react:)* Nope—I sure wouldn't.

FENNEL. How bout if we did this?

(They knock him on the back of the head.)

MELCHIOR. Nope.

ZIFFY. Or what about this?

(They stomp on his feet, causing him to hop around.)

MELCHIOR. *(Regaining his composure:)* Ow! I'm a man of my word.

FENNEL. Then it doesn't matter what we do, does it?

ZIFFY. No, it doesn't.

(The girls proceed to beat him up, and there's nothing he can do about it. SHAB eggs them on.)

FENNEL. This is for our mama!

ZIFFY. And this is for our grandpa!

FENNEL. And this is for calling us obnoxious!

ZIFFY. And this is for calling us irritating!

FENNEL. And this is for calling us bratty little punks!

ZIFFY. And this is for being a king!

FENNEL. And this is for scaring everybody in town!

SHAB. (*Starts poking him with the spear:*) And this is for calling us c-c-cowards!

MELCHIOR. Hey—you keep out of this!

ZIFFY. And this is for the shepherds and their spooky angels!

FENNEL. And this is for putting that creepy star in the sky!

MELCHIOR. That wasn't me!

ZIFFY. And this is for making those shepherds tell us freaky stories!

MELCHIOR. (*With one girl holding him down and the other pulling on his nose:*) Ow—I just wish some of those shepherds were still around to talk some sense into you people!

LEMUEL. (*Leaping out into the action:*) Check it out—this is the part where I come in! (*To MELCHIOR:*) I'm a shepherd!

SHAB, ZIFFY and FENNEL. A shepherd!?

LEMUEL. Why are you beating up that man?

FENNEL. Because he's a king!

ZIFFY. And we don't like kings!

LEMUEL. Did he try to hurt you or something?

FENNEL. No.

ZIFFY. We just don't like kings!

SHAB. And we d-d-don't like sh-shepherds neither!

LEMUEL. Why don't you like shepherds?

FENNEL. Because they tell us scary stories!

ZIFFY. Scary stories about angels!

LEMUEL. Stories about angels? Those must have been my friends. How long ago did you see them?

SHAB. A couple of d-days ago.

LEMUEL. Which direction did they go?

MELCHIOR. (*Still being held by the nose:*) Excuse me stranger, but my nose hurts. Can you help me get rid of these little girls?

(*LEMUEL steps towards them, and they all step away in fear.*)

LEMUEL. Hey, why don't you all take a step away from that man?

VILLAGERS. Aaah!

LEMUEL. That's it...just move right on over there.

(LEMUEL takes another step, and they all step away again.)

VILLAGERS. Aaah!

LEMUEL. Okay, nice and easy...

(LEMUEL continues to walk around, holding his shepherd's staff, and the VILLAGERS keep moving away from him, screaming in a way that increasingly sounds like sheep going "Baaaa.")

Now let's get you all out of the way and into someplace safe, like this house here. Easy does it...one at a time...there you go!

(LEMUEL shepherds the VILLAGERS offstage, leaving him with MELCHIOR.)

MELCHIOR. What just happened?

LEMUEL. I've worked with sheep for a long time, and sometimes they get scared over nothing. I guess it can happen with people too.

MELCHIOR. Well, King Melchior the Navigator thanks you.

LEMUEL. You're welcome! My name's Lemuel—pleased to meet you.

MELCHIOR. So why aren't you with all the other shepherds looking for that baby king?

LEMUEL. Well, it's embarrassing to say, but me and my lamb Zondalina here...we got lost. We ended up getting into a heated conversation about whether or not the baby king would actually be born with a tiny crown on his head, and before we knew it, everyone else was gone and we couldn't catch up.

MELCHIOR. Boy, that's too bad. I'm also looking for the baby king, but I had an argument with my companions and we went our separate ways.

LEMUEL. Wow, that's even worse than getting lost.

MELCHIOR. Well at least I had an argument with other people instead of a sheep!

LEMUEL. Well, when me and Zondalina argue we don't split up—we figure it out together!

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

MELCHIOR. Well, maybe that's because you're not a king.

LEMUEL. What does being a king have to do with it?

MELCHIOR. Well, we're used to being in charge, and getting our way, and—well, you know, being the king!

LEMUEL. Boy, being a king just sounds like a big hassle to me.

MELCHIOR. Then you're a simple man, Lemuel.

LEMUEL. Well, maybe I like being simple. (*Pause.*) I, uh...guess I'll see you around.

(*LEMUEL starts to exit.*)

MELCHIOR. Wait! (*LEMUEL stops.*) Will you...let me travel with you?

LEMUEL. Why—do you need someone else to argue and break up with? Or do you just want someone to boss around—being a king and all.

MELCHIOR. No—it's just—I'm sorry. I guess I don't always know when I'm being a jerk. Maybe it would be a nice change to hang out with someone who seems to be about three and a half times simpler than I am.

LEMUEL. Well...we *are* going to the same place. Apology accepted.

MELCHIOR. Great! Let's get going!

(*MELCHIOR trots off on his camel, but LEMUEL only follows him part of the way before turning back to address the audience.*)

Scene Eight

LEMUEL. So I'm in the adventure now. Yay! Melchior turned out to be alright in the end, but it's true what he said about being a king—it can turn some people bad. Remember King Herod?

(*HEROD enters with a ROYAL ALCHEMIST.*)

ALCHEMIST. I'm sorry, your Highness, but it just can't be done.

HEROD. I did not hire a Royal Alchemist to tell me that things can't be done! Or to run around whining like a little girl with a snotty nose. Or to bounce around on his rear end saying, "Look, my butt's made of rubber!"

ALCHEMIST. But I didn't—

HEROD. It's very simple what I'm looking for. Ice. Cream. A delicious, creamy, frozen dessert that will bring happiness to jillions of people and make me the most powerful king in the world!

ALCHEMIST. But your Highness, I've taken ice and I've taken cream and I've mixed them up in every possible combination, but it doesn't come out anything like you describe.

HEROD. Look...it's not just for me. It's for history.

ALCHEMIST. History?

HEROD. I've made some crazy promises over the years. That I could wrestle a lion. That I could turn the sky into polka dots. That I could hide inside the mouth of a tiny, tiny bird. But none of those things have happened. I'm tired of being a second-rate king—I want to be the greatest king in history! And the first step is inventing ice cream—once that happens, I'll share it with the people of earth and they'll all think I'm the best. Then, when everyone is all sleepy and lazy from eating too much, I'll take them all prisoner and make them my slaves—forever!

ALCHEMIST. And so...why am I helping you do this again?

HEROD. Because if you don't, I'll cover you in sticky, gooey molasses and leave you out in the sun for the ants.

ALCHEMIST. That's a good reason.

(*EBULCHANEZER enters and bows.*)

EBULCHANEZER. Greetings, your most skyward-scraping resplendentness.

HEROD. Ebulchanezer! Thank goodness you're here! What news do you have about the baby king? It's good news—right?

EBULCHANEZER. Not exactly, your most awe-inspiring marvelousness.

HEROD. It had better not be bad news—because for every piece of bad news you give me, I'll...hit this poor, defenseless alchemist.

ALCHEMIST. What?

HEROD. Quiet, you. Well?

EBULCHANEZER. It's about the Three Kings.

HEROD. Yes?

EBULCHANEZER. They've parted ways.

HEROD. (*Hitting* **ALCHEMIST**;) What?

EBULCHANEZER. The spies of my spy network have been following them. Balthasar has been taken prisoner by Roman soldiers.

HEROD. (*Hitting* **ALCHEMIST**;) No!

EBULCHANEZER. Caspar has run afoul of a deadly gryphon.

HEROD. (*Hitting* **ALCHEMIST**;) I can't believe it!

EBULCHANEZER. And Melchior was soundly beaten by two little girls.

HEROD. (*Hitting ALCHEMIST:*) Two little girls?

EBULCHANEZER. I've also heard tell of a secret network of shepherds who plan to reach the baby king first. If they do, they might smuggle him out of the country so you won't be able to kidnap him—I mean, *adopt* him.

HEROD. (*Hitting ALCHEMIST:*) No no no no no! This is terrible! Abominable! Catastrophic! Also very very bad! That baby is my last shot at ruling the world through tasty dairy goodness! This alchemist is clearly useless. (*Tosses ALCHEMIST.*) All the books and prophets and smart people say that baby's going to grow up to be the greatest king who ever lived. But I want *me* to be the greatest king that ever lived! And so I'm going to take that baby and lock him up and make him do all the work while I take all the glory! Is that so wrong of me?

ALCHEMIST. (*Weakly, from the ground:*) Actually...

HEROD. (*Stepping on ALCHEMIST:*) That makes me so mad! I am going to issue a royal decree! Is someone writing this down?

EBULCHANEZER. I can remember it, your golden-tongued eloquentness.

HEROD. Let it hereby be proclaimed that anyone who catches those two-faced cowardly so-called kings anywhere in Judea is to bring them directly to me so I can personally throw them into my deepest, darkest, most rat- and cockroach-infested dungeon, and swallow the key right in front of them, and go Nyaah nyaah nyaah nyaah nyaah! (*Dances around mockingly.*) Did you get all that?

EBULCHANEZER. Yes, your most effectively ludicrousness.

HEROD. Can you read me back that last part?

EBULCHANEZER. "Nyaah nyaah nyaah nyaah nyaah!"

HEROD. Very well—now be gone with you! And don't come back until you have news of those kings and that precious little baby!

EBULCHANEZER. Indeed, your decisive scene-endingness.

(*EBULCHANEZER exits. HEROD looks at the nervous ALCHEMIST.*)

HEROD. Boo.

(*ALCHEMIST runs away terrified, and HEROD follows, chuckling.*)

Scene Nine

(LEMUEL enters again, followed by MELCHIOR.)

LEMUEL. So yeah, King Herod. Yuck. Anyway, back to me and my new friend Melchior!

MELCHIOR. (*Looking at map:*) Bethlehem should be 3.8 miles away, in a south-southwesterly direction.

LEMUEL. You sure are smart with maps and stuff. So how are you going to scale the walls?

MELCHIOR. What walls?

LEMUEL. Well, Bethlehem is surrounded by big stone walls, and the Romans won't let anyone through the gate unless they have special papers like everyone else in Judea.

MELCHIOR. I'll just tell them I'm a king.

LEMUEL. How has that worked out for you so far?

MELCHIOR. You're right. Drat! I wish that I had some sort of special rope-and-pulley device I could use to get up the walls... wait a minute! Balthasar had something just like that! But I have no idea how to find him.

LEMUEL. That's too bad.

MELCHIOR. I could always try to talk my way past the guards...but I have a hard time telling stories, and I'll probably just lose my temper. I wish Caspar were here...he could talk his way through anything.

LEMUEL. Wow...I can't believe you split up from those awesome-sounding people on *purpose*.

MELCHIOR. Yeah, well...it seemed like a good idea at the time...

LEMUEL. (*Spotting something in the sky:*) Look—up there—in the sky!

MELCHIOR. Where in the sky?

LEMUEL. *There* in the sky!

MELCHIOR. What is it—all I see is the sun...and some clouds... and... some sort of strange winged monster flying right towards us!

LEMUEL. Strange winged monster?? Run!!!!

(LEMUEL runs around in circles, but MELCHIOR takes out his sword.)

MELCHIOR. It's landing! I'll take care of this...

(GRYPHON enters, carrying CASPAR on her back.)

Prepare to feel the steel of Melchior's blade, you...strange winged monster!

CASPAR. Melchior—it is indeed your figure I detected from a great height!

MELCHIOR. Caspar! Be careful! There's a strange winged monster underneath you!

CASPAR. Don't be absurd—this gryphon is my new compatriot. Julie, this is King Melchior of the East.

GRYPHON. (*Puts out her talon to be kissed:*) Ooh, another king! Charmed, I'm sure. My name's Julie.

MELCHIOR. (*Nervously taking and kissing the talon:*) Hello...Julie. (*Steps aside to reveal LEMUEL, who has been shivering behind him.*) I'd like to introduce you both to my friend Lemuel. He's a shepherd.

LEMUEL. Melchior—do you realize that's a gryphon? And that gryphons eat people? And that we're people?

GRYPHON. No no no... I only eat people who try to pass me on the mountain road and can't answer my riddle. Besides, I'm on my break right now.

MELCHIOR. Does that mean you answered the riddle, Caspar?

CASPAR. Affirmative.

LEMUEL. But how?

GRYPHON. It was a trick question.

GRYPHON and CASPAR. "Can you tell me what manner of man
Spreads his arms to a thousand-foot span,
Lives for hundreds and hundreds of years
And can fill up an ocean with tears,
Laugh so loud as to shake the whole earth
And to millions of babies give birth,
And be born to himself and then die
All during one blink of his eye?"

MELCHIOR. So what's the answer?

GRYPHON. The answer is nobody—which is to say, everybody.

LEMUEL. Whaaaah?

CASPAR. I had nearly surrendered with despair after two incorrect solutions, so I claimed that *nobody* fit the description.

GRYPHON. And he was right. No one person can do all of the things listed in the riddle, but together, *many* people can accomplish them.

MELCHIOR. Wow, good riddle.

LEMUEL. Sure thing—can we go now?

MELCHIOR. I guess. Well...thanks for dropping in, Caspar. It was nice seeing you.

CASPAR. Oh, poppycock. Didn't you hear the riddle? We were buffoons to allow a rift in our relationship. King Herod sent us on this mission together, and he was correct—we need all of our skills to accomplish our goal and meet this baby.

MELCHIOR. But what about Balthasar—how do we find him?

LEMUEL. If he took the highway then he was almost definitely picked up by Roman soldiers. They have a base right outside the walls of Bethlehem.

MELCHIOR. That's where we're going! The baby king should be right inside!

CASPAR. We too were oriented in the direction of Bethlehem. Julie, mayhaps our fellow wayfarers could accompany us upon our flight?

GRYPHON. Ooh, I don't think so. I'm only one Gryphon—I don't have the strength to carry three people, two camels and a sheep.

CASPAR. Then I'll join my friends here on the ground. Julie, you have kept your word, and I am grateful. If you ever require help devising a new riddle, I would be pleased to offer my services.

GRYPHON. Thanks, Caspar. If you ever end up on a scary mountain road in the middle of nowhere, look me up!

(GRYPHON flies off as everyone calls out "Goodbye!" etc.)

GRYPHON. Caw caw! Roar!

MELCHIOR. Well, gentlemen...to Bethlehem!

CASPAR. To Bethlehem!

LEMUEL. To Bethlehem!

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

(CASPAR, MELCHIOR and LEMUEL run out.)

Scene Ten

LEMUEL. *(Running back out:)* Oh right! Meanwhile, right outside of Bethlehem...

(LEMUEL *runs out as BONOCOPPIUS and MALECOPPIUM march in with BALTHASAR, who sits on some kind of stool or block or something.*)

BONOCOPPIUS. Okay okay okay, hold on, so let me get this straight: what the heck is myrrh?

BALTHASAR. (*Sighs.*) Myrrh is a precious ointment. You can rub it on your skin and it makes you feel nice. Would you like to try some?

MALECOPPIUM. He's trying to poison us! You're trying to poison us, aren't you?

BALTHASAR. No, I just thought that—

BONOCOPPIUS. Woah, let's back it up a step. So this myrrh—if it's so precious, why are you running around carrying so much of it on your camel?

BALTHASAR. I'm carrying it as a gift to give to the baby ki— (*Catches himself.*) ...I mean, I'm carrying it because I happen to... really like myrrh.

MALECOPPIUM. Something about this stinks like a fish wearing old shoes that refuses to take a bath.

BONOCOPPIUS. (*To BALTHASAR:*) I gotta admit, it's not looking too good for you, buddy. You're carrying around all of these funny inventions no one's ever heard of, and you got a pot full of this fancy ointment and you can't say what you're gonna use it for. And with this crazy king business and all that stuff—either you're a loony or you're a crook. So why don't you make it easy for yourself and just come out and admit it?

BALTHASAR. There's nothing to admit—I'm a king!

MALECOPPIUM. A king—a *king*—a KING! That's it—I've had enough. (*Storms over.*) Listen, you weirdo, you've had your chance, but we're done being gentle with you. From now on, we're gonna do this my way. Starting with...a noogie!

(MALECOPPIUM *puts BALTHASAR in a headlock and gives him a noogie.*)

And then an Indian burn!

(MALECOPPIUM *gives BALTHASAR an Indian burn.*)

And then, Hey—stop hitting yourself. Why are you hitting yourself?

(MALECOPPIUM *makes BALTHASAR hit himself.*)

BALTHASAR. I'm not! Stop it!

(MELCHIOR and CASPAR and LEMUEL creep up "outside" the guard house.)

MELCHIOR. This must be the place—Balthasar's inside!

CASPAR. And he's being accosted!

LEMUEL. What are we supposed to do?

MELCHIOR. (*Pulls out his sword.*) Let's go get him!

CASPAR. No, we require a more effective plan. I spy a janitor's shed over yonder—let us repair there to discuss this further.

(MELCHIOR, CASPAR and LEMUEL exit.)

BONOCOPPIUS. (*Pushing MALECOPIUM away:*) Okay, that's enough, that's enough... (*To BALTHASAR:*) You see? This is just the beginning. So come on, just fess up so we can lock you up and get this all squared away. Okay, Brontosaurus?

BALTHASAR. My name is Balthasar!

BONOCOPPIUS. Look, I'm at about the end of my rope here, Bagelzebraguitar. If you don't cooperate soon, I'm going to start acting mean. And then *he's* going to have to start acting nice.

MALECOPIUM. (*Grimly:*) You don't want to see me nice.

BALTHASAR. There's nothing nice about either of you! Doesn't the Roman Empire have anything better to do than just walk around all day arresting innocent people?

MALECOPIUM. Nope.

BONOCOPPIUS. That's pretty much what the Roman Empire does.

(*The sound of marching feet.*)

BONOCOPPIUS. Wait, what's that?

BALTHASAR. Sounds like marching feet.

MALECOPIUM. We weren't expecting any marching feet.

(BALTHASAR, CASPAR, LEMUEL, and ZONDALINA all enter, crudely dressed as Roman soldiers. They've tied brushes to their heads, and they're carrying mops as spears and buckets for shields, with aprons as tunics. CASPAR is in front.)

CASPAR. (*Stopping:*) Company halt!

(MELCHIOR and LEMUEL run into CASPAR. When CASPAR speaks, it is like a completely different character—he's a very good mimic.)

CASPAR. Who is in charge of this platoon?

BONOCOPPIUS. I am, sir.

MALECOPPIUM. Are you kidding? I'm in charge!

BONOCOPPIUS. Since when?

MALECOPPIUM. Since ever!

CASPAR. Silence! I am Major General Figmentium of the Roman Empire's Elite Prisoner Collection Unit.

MALECOPPIUM. I've never heard of that unit!

CASPAR. That's because we're so elite.

MALECOPPIUM. Your uniforms look kind of funny.

CASPAR. They're specially designed for our elite unit. Now stop interrupting me! We're here to pick up any prisoners you might have.

MELCHIOR. Especially if they think they're kings, for some reason.

BONOCOPPIUS. I don't get it...usually we just throw our prisoners into the dungeon and then forget about them. We've never had anybody come to pick them up before.

CASPAR. That's all changed, thanks to a new decree sent down from the Great Caesar himself. I can read it to you right now. Imaginatus!

MELCHIOR. Yes, sir!

CASPAR. Hand me the decree!

MELCHIOR. Yes, sir! (*To LEMUEL:*) Makebelievium!

LEMUEL. Yes, sir!

MELCHIOR. Hand me the decree!

LEMUEL. Yes, sir! (*To ZONDALINA:*) Notrealius!

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. Hand me the decree!

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. Seriously?

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. (*To MELCHIOR:*) Sir!

MELCHIOR. What, Makebelievium?

LEMUEL. Notrealius has eaten the decree!

MELCHIOR. (*To CASPAR:*) Sir!

CASPAR. What, Imaginatus?

MELCHIOR. Notrealius has eaten the decree!

CASPAR. Notrealius has eaten the decree?

MELCHIOR. Yes, sir!

CASPAR. That makes me angry, Imaginatus. And you know what happens when I get angry? Fire comes out of my eyes! I knock down everybody in sight! I yell so loud that anyone standing in the same room goes deaf! You don't want that to happen, do you Imaginatus?

MELCHIOR. No, sir!

CASPAR. Then it's your duty to find another copy of the decree!

MELCHIOR. Yes, sir!

CASPAR. In the meantime, I need to remove this prisoner as per my orders—unless you want me to get angry. Do you want me to get angry?

BONOCOPPIUS and MALECOPPIUM. No, sir!

CASPAR. Imaginatus! Makebelievium! Seize the prisoner!

(*MELCHIOR and LEMUEL seize BALTHASAR.*)

MELCHIOR. (*Stage whisper:*) Don't be worried, Balthasar—it's me, Melchior!

BALTHASAR. Boy, am I glad to see you!

CASPAR. Thank you for serving us, soldiers. I'll speak well of you in my report to the Great Caesar himself. Hail, Caesar!

BONOCOPPIUS and MALECOPPIUM. Hail, Caesar!

CASPAR. Forward, march!

(*CASPAR, MELCHIOR, LEMUEL, and BALTHASAR almost leave, when they're intercepted by the JANITOR, who is all tied up, with a gag in her mouth. After hopping on, she spits out the gag.*)

JANITOR. Help! I'm the janitor! Those hooligans tied me up and stole all my cleaning stuff!

BONOCOPPIUS. What?

MALECOPPIUM. Imposters!

BONOCOPPIUS. Get back here!

(*A scuffle ensues. LEMUEL and the Kings use the mops, buckets, etc. to fight the soldiers. Throughout the fight, the JANITOR hops around and gets in everybody's way.*)

MELCHIOR. (*At some point in the middle of the fight:*) Whose idea was it to leave our weapons outside?

(Eventually, someone whips the rope off the JANITOR and spins her so she hits the wall. They then use the rope to tie the SOLDIERS together, after which they put two buckets on their heads and knock them together.)

MELCHIOR. Come on, let's get out of here!

LEMUEL. (*To JANITOR:*) Sorry about the mess!

(LEMUEL, ZONDALINA, and the Kings exit as the SOLDIERS stand there, all tied up.)

JANITOR. (*Gathering up all the stuff on the floor:*) It's always the same with you guys—you junk everything up and then I have come in and clean up after you. If it weren't us janitors, there wouldn't even be a Roman Empire. Now come on, get moving.

(JANITOR scoots the SOLDIERS, who hop offstage.)

Scene Eleven

(LEMUEL, ZONDALINA, and the Kings all run back on, with their camels.)

BALTHASAR. (*With the extendoglass to his eye:*) Look—up in the sky! The star is directly overhead! This is definitely where we'll find the new king!

LEMUEL. That was a great plan, Caspar!

MELCHIOR. You do a mean Roman soldier impression—from now on, I'm leaving the disguises to you!

BALTHASAR. (*Putting away the extendoglass:*) We need to hurry! Those soldiers could get loose at any minute!

MELCHIOR. Let's go behind the city walls—it's the last place they'll look!

LEMUEL. Melchior's right—but unless you have papers, like I do, the guards won't let you in.

CASPAR. Then how do you propose we infiltrate Bethlehem?

BALTHASAR. Melchior—how high would you say those walls are?

MELCHIOR. About 47 and a half cubits tall. Why do you ask?

BALTHASAR. Remember the invention I told you about—the grapparatus?

LEMUEL. What's a grapparatus?

BALTHASAR. *(Pulling it out of a saddlebag and putting it on:)* It's a special harness with a rope-and-pulley gun that shoots out a hook and pulls you up to high places. It also works in reverse, to lower you safely to the ground.

MELCHIOR. And you can use it to pull us all up to the top of the walls?

BALTHASAR. I hope so. My new friend Lemuel, can you take our camels and meet us inside the town once you've passed through the gate?

LEMUEL. Sure thing, boss.

(They give LEMUEL their camels and go to BALTHASAR.)

MELCHIOR. Is this thing really going to hold all of us?

BALTHASAR. I'll be honest—I have no idea. But since we only have time to try it once, our only chance to get into Bethlehem is to do it together. Are you ready to take the risk?

MELCHIOR. Yes!

CASPAR. Unquestionably!

BALTHASAR. Great! Lemuel, we'll see you on the other side. Grab on to me, kings—we've only got one shot.

(BALTHASAR raises the grapparatus and shoots it upwards. [This can be done simply, with a sound effect and all the Kings jumping while LEMUEL spins offstage behind them, giving the illusion of them flying away from him]. The Kings all scream and then land on the top of the wall.)

MELCHIOR. We did it!

BALTHASAR. Not yet—we're only halfway there. We still need to get down.

MELCHIOR. Wait—look at the town. It's like a big map spread out in front of us. Now let's see...if I were a newborn king, where would I be right now...?

CASPAR. *(Leaning over:)* Seek out the most luxurious inn your eyes can discern!

BALTHASAR. Careful—don't slip!

MELCHIOR. I can see one—over there, right underneath the star! A huge inn with a fancy courtyard and everything. Four blocks north,

two blocks west, a diagonal across the alley and another block north. I've got it!

BALTHASAR. (*Who's been adjusting and rearranging the apparatus:*) Great. Now hold on tight—we don't want anyone falling off on the way down. Ready...set...gooooooooo!

(*Once again, they jump while holding onto the apparatus [Sound effect, etc.] They hit the ground and tumble and roll across the floor. LEMUEL comes in with their camels.*)

LEMUEL. That was *awesome!* You guys rule!

CASPAR. As kings, that can be interpreted literally as well as figuratively.

MELCHIOR. No time to chat—quick! To the new king!

(*They all run through the town, following Melchior's directions.*)

Four blocks north...two blocks west...a diagonal across the alley... and another block north. Here we are!

BALTHASAR. The fanciest hotel in Bethlehem!

CASPAR. This must be the establishment in question!

MELCHIOR. Let's go inside!

(*The INNKEEPER enters holding a hotel bell.*)

MELCHIOR. (*Ringing bell:*) Innkeeper!

BALTHASAR. (*Ringing bell:*) Proprietor!

CASPAR. (*Ringing bell:*) Hotelier!

INNKEEPER. Can I help you?

MELCHIOR. We're here to see the new king!

INNKEEPER. I believe the old one is *quite* sufficient, thank you.

BALTHASAR. We don't mean Herod, we mean the one that was just born, right here in Bethlehem.

CASPAR. The bright star shining above your place of business predicted his appearance.

INNKEEPER. Oh yes—dreadful nuisance. It's so bright it's been keeping all my rich guests awake.

MELCHIOR. So you don't know anything about the baby king?

INNKEEPER. All I know that we don't allow camels in this lobby so I'm going to have to ask you to leave.

BALTHASAR. Have there been any babies born here tonight?

INNKEEPER. Egad! That's a filthy business. It would soil the sheets. But come to think of it, a pregnant woman *did* pass through here earlier...she rode up on a donkey, so I told her that she could spend the night in the stables at a special discount rate.

MELCHIOR. Is she still there?

INNKEEPER. Oh goodness knows I would never *dream* of setting foot in that repulsive place. Go see for yourselves, if you must.

BALTHASAR. Quick—let's go around back!

(They all run away.)

INNKEEPER. What, no tip?

(INNKEEPER exits as the Kings and LEMUEL reach the stable.)

LEMUEL. Well, here are the stables.

MELCHIOR. It's dark back here.

BALTHASAR. And it's cold.

CASPAR. And it is a grievance to the olfactory sense.

(They all look at him.)

CASPAR. It smells.

MELCHIOR. This is the last place I'd expect to find a king.

BALTHASAR. But look—the star is directly up ahead—and it's huge!

CASPAR. There must be substance to the innkeeper's statement.

LEMUEL. But where do we look?

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. What's that, Zondalina?

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. They're right over here? Behind this door?

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

LEMUEL. Well, you heard the girl. They're right back here. *(Pause.)* Isn't somebody going to knock?

MELCHIOR. I'm nervous, all of a sudden. Balthasar, you do it!

BALTHASAR. Um, no—Caspar, you do it!

CASPAR. Alas—I also am paralyzed with anticipation!

LEMUEL. Oh fine, I'll do it. *(Knocks.)* Hello? Is anybody home?

MARY. *(Off:)* Who is it?

LEMUEL. It's a lost shepherd and his super-smart sheep. Oh, and a few kings too.

MARY. You can come in.

MELCHIOR. Take a deep breath everyone.

BALTHASAR. Here we go...

CASPAR. Squee!

(The door opens to reveal a cozy little nativity scene. MARY and JOSEPH stand next to the baby's manger, perhaps surrounded by a few animals.)

LEMUEL. Hi.

MELCHIOR. Hello.

BALTHASAR. Greetings.

CASPAR. Salutations.

MARY. Who are you all?

MELCHIOR. Um...

BALTHASAR. Um...

CASPAR. Um...

LEMUEL. These are my friends, Melchior, Balthasar and Caspar. They're kings, and they've come from far, far away to meet your baby. I'm Lemuel and I'm a shepherd. I'm not from very far away at all. Oh, and this is Zondalina.

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

MARY. I'm Mary, and this is my husband Joseph. And this...this is Jesus.

KINGS. Wow...

(Awkwardly long pause as they stare at the baby.)

JOSEPH. Can we...get you something to drink or anything?

MELCHIOR. Sorry, it's just that, we've traveled a long way, and...

BALTHASAR. ...and it's nice that everything worked out.

CASPAR. Yes, he is an exemplary newborn. Jesus, you say his name is?

MARY. Yes.

CASPAR. We desire to bestow benefactions upon the diminutive youngster.

JOSEPH. Excuse me?

BALTHASAR. We brought gifts.

JOSEPH. Ah.

MARY. You shouldn't have.

MELCHIOR. But we did. I'll start. I've brought gold—the most precious metal on earth. Enough to give him a start in life.

CASPAR. And from myself, frankincense. A reminder of life's beauteous offerings.

BALTHASAR. And this is from me. It's myrrh. It'll come in handy some day, I promise.

MARY. Thank you. We hardly know what to say.

JOSEPH. (*To LEMUEL:*) What's wrong, sir? You seem upset.

LEMUEL. It's just...I didn't bring anything for the baby.

ZONDALINA. Baaaa.

MARY. That's okay—nobody asked you to.

LEMUEL. I just feel bad. I was supposed to be here sooner, but I got lost and I couldn't find my friends.

JOSEPH. Are the other shepherds your friends—the ones that saw the angel?

LEMUEL. Yes, have you seen them?

JOSEPH. They got here just before you—they brought their sheep out back, because there were too many to fit inside the stable.

LEMUEL. That's great—I missed them so much! I'm going to go out and say hi to them! (*To the Kings:*) Don't go anywhere, okay? I'll be right back.

MELCHIOR. Take your time, friend.

(*LEMUEL exits.*)

BALTHASAR. I feel terrible that you have to stay out here with all the animals. Can we pay to get you a room inside the inn?

JOSEPH. Thank you, but we're comfortable here.

MARY. And the baby is asleep—all the fuss would just wake him up.

CASPAR. The babe, he slumbers!

MELCHIOR. And here we are, acting like it's a big party or something.

BALTHASAR. We'll close the door and wait outside for a bit.

MARY. Sure—but come back in whenever you like.

CASPAR. Farewell for now, madam.

(The Kings leave the stable.)

MELCHIOR. That is the cutest baby I've ever seen.

BALTHASAR. Such a tiny little nose!

CASPAR. And an intelligent demeanor, despite his tender years.

MELCHIOR. It's funny for a great king to be born in a place like this. We were all born in big palaces, surrounded by servants.

BALTHASAR. Well, it's clear that he's not a normal king, that's for sure. I doubt any of us had new stars appear in the sky when we were born.

CASPAR. Or angels to trumpet the path to our dwelling.

MELCHIOR. I guess not. Hey, you know why I think Herod wants to get to the baby?

BALTHASAR. Why?

MELCHIOR. Because he's jealous. He doesn't want there to be another king in Judea.

BALTHASAR. I'm worried about what he'll do if he finds out where the baby is.

CASPAR. I concur. If you'll pardon my colloquialism, he is a big fat creep.

MELCHIOR. We need to make sure he doesn't find out we're in Bethlehem.

BALTHASAR. If we can help Mary and Joseph find their way out of Judea without running into any of Herod's spies, the baby will stay safe.

CASPAR. By that logic, we should prepare to leave forthwith, before any menace can accrue.

MELCHIOR. Agreed. We should gather up the family and then hit the road.

(HEROD enters.)

HEROD. Excuse me, but does this happen to be the stable where the new baby king was just—oh my goodness! What an unexpected surprise!

MELCHIOR. King Herod!

BALTHASAR. Where did you come from?

**THIS PLAY IS
NOT OVER!**

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