

Thunderer

A dramatic hypothesis in two acts

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Dramatis personae

There are 10 acting parts: 5 male and 5 female:

Thunderer, adult male, king of the Chalky Cliff Tribe, tall and strong

Walker, adult male, warrior of the Peace and Progress Tribe

Slasher, young male

Digger, young male

Holyorder, elderly male, tribal shaman

Moonlake, adult female, Thunderer's mate, tall and strong

Snowbright, young female

Fernfrond, young female

Rosethorn, young female

Hearthstone, elderly female, tribal matriarch

All characters except Walker are members of the Chalky Cliff Tribe. This is readily apparent from their costume: animal skins and ornaments of bone and stone for the Chalky Cliff Tribe, woven cloth and ornaments of bronze and silver for the Peace and Progress Tribe. Their general appearance should be outlandish, with wild hair arrangements, body paint, etc. All characters should have tails.

For a reason which becomes obvious at the end of act 1, the female characters do not have prominent breasts.

Locations

There are five different locations:

The Wild – with a large rock upstage left or right (scene 1)

The Camp of the Chalky Cliff Tribe (scenes 2, 5, 8, 11, 13)

A nearby Hollow – with a large white rock upstage centre (scenes 3, 7, 12)

A nearby Cave – with a stone alcove upstage which houses the Sacred Egg
balanced upright in it (scenes 4, 6, 9)

The Marsh – flat and shrouded in swirling mist (scene 10)

The setting is southern North America, in the past.

Running Time

Approximately 2 hours.

ACT 1

Scene 1

The Wild. Daytime. A large rock is located upstage on one side, with room for two characters to hide behind it.

The sounds of the wild: the wind in the grass and bushes, and distant, mournful, birdlike cries. A great sense of space and quietness.

On stage at lights up: nobody. In the wings: Thunderer, Moonlake, Walker.

ENTER Thunderer and Moonlake, running, half crouched, carrying spears with flint tips. They are afraid of something in the sky.

Thunderer It's coming this way! Shall we hide behind this rock?

Moonlake Get down! *(Dives behind rock, pulling Thunderer after her)*

The sky begins to darken. Thunderer's head is still exposed.

Thunderer Yes, I think we'll hide here!

Moonlake's arm reaches out and pulls him down out of sight. Only the tips of their spears remain visible.

The sky darkens close to blackout. There is a sound of giant wings flapping overhead. The sky lightens again. There is a terrible, plaintive, receding squawk from above. Full daylight illumination is restored.

Moonlake's head appears first, followed by Thunderer's. They follow the creature with their eyes as it flies away, and emerge from their hiding place when it is safe to do so.

Thunderer That was a big one. Real monster! Did you see its claws?

Moonlake *(Glancing around)* Get down again! *(She pulls Thunderer down out of sight again)*

ENTER Walker, half-crouching. He is carrying a bronze-tipped spear and is equally mesmerised by the aerial predator. He comes centre stage and relaxes.

Thunderer and Moonlake creep out from behind the rock, leap up and force Walker to the ground with a shout. Walker tries to defend himself, but they quickly disarm him. While Thunderer holds his spear-point to Walker's throat, Moonlake takes charge of Walker's spear, and examines its metal head, curious.

Thunderer and Moonlake Haaarr!!!

Walker All right, all right, take it easy now. Peace, brother. You too, sister.

Thunderer Silence, rat-eater! Or the next thing you swallow will be my spear-point! This is the hunting ground of the Chalky Cliff Tribe.

Walker I've come to the right place, then. It's the Chalky Cliff Tribe I'm hunting for.

Moonlake You're speaking to its king. This is Thunderer, the mighty king of the glorious Chalky Cliff Tribe.

Walker *(Stretches out his arm as if to shake hands; the spear at his throat prevents him from reaching Thunderer's hand)* I'm very pleased to meet you.

Thunderer What are you doing on our hunting ground?

Walker I've been sent to find you. We have a proposition for you.

Thunderer That's too bad, rat-eater! I'm going to kill you now. *(To Moonlake)* Dearest, shall I kill him now?

Moonlake No.

Thunderer Better let *me* do it. Shall I tell you when it's over?

Moonlake Let's hear what he's got to say first.

Thunderer What does the rat-eating Long Valley Tribe want with the glorious Chalky Cliff Tribe?

Walker Why don't you let me sit up and then we can all talk about it in comfort?

Thunderer *(Holds spear closer to his throat)* Grrr!!!

Moonlake Let him sit up.

Thunderer *(Hesitates, then removes spear; points to a spot on the ground)* Sit. There.

Walker (*Gratefully rubs his throat and sits in the place indicated*) Thank you. Phew! Right. Thank you. Firstly. We've changed our name. We used to be known as the Long Valley Tribe. But now we've become the Peace and Progress Tribe.

Thunderer Peace and Progress?

Walker That's right. Working for a brighter future for all creatures on Earth.

Moonlake What does that mean?

Walker That's our mission statement. Working for a brighter future –

Moonlake Your mission...

Walker For all creatures on Earth. Our mission statement. Don't you have one?

Thunderer How about: Roasting rat-eaters over a slow fire?

Moonlake Thunderer! (*To Walker*) Please continue.

Thunderer Get talking, rat-eater!

Walker My name's Walker, and I've never eaten a rat in my life.

Moonlake Walker. Nice name.

Thunderer Moonlake! (*To Walker*) Well please continue, honourable tribesman Walker, if it's not too much trouble and if you're sitting comfortably and not at all out of breath, and (*changes tone*) if you don't want the pointed end of a spear up your rat-eating backside!

Walker The Peace and Progress Tribe – which is working for a brighter future for all creatures on Earth... has decided that its goals can be met by creating a prosperous, free society.

Thunderer What?

Walker We must tackle poverty, relative and absolute. We must address the causes of juvenile delinquency and crime. We must stimulate industrial growth. We must responsibly manage the natural resources on which we all depend.

Thunderer (*Looks at Moonlake, shrugs*)

Moonlake What are these words? – dustril, zorces?

Walker Industry: making spears. Building wooden shelters.

Thunderer I suppose that's *our* wood you're thinking of?

Walker Resources: the great herds that wander the plains. The nuts and berries and mushrooms in the forest.

Thunderer Our herds! Our forest!

Walker (*Stands up*) So we've decided to make a stand for prosperity, peace and progress.

Moonlake I don't understand how.

Walker (*Steps forward, gazing into the distance*) Through a project that will unite us all, an enterprise whose benefits will touch every member of every tribe throughout the whole world. We will join hands with the wild tribes of the far north and enlist their strength and passion. We will summon the scattered tribes of the deep south and reconcile them with our united vision. The tribes of east and west will contribute their skills and ingenuity. In order to achieve this great reunion of our kind, this giant leap forward for peace and progress, we have decided to embark on the great enterprise of building... a giant stone pyramid.

Moonlake A pyramid?

Walker A giant stone pyramid that will touch the sky.

Thunderer Our stones! Our sky!

Walker So the Peace and Progress Tribe has a proposition for the Chalky Cliff Tribe: forget our ancient enmity. Once we were united; we can be reconciled and united again. Join us! Be part of this historic enterprise.

Moonlake Why do you need us?

Walker We can't do it alone. We need... masonry technicians.

Thunderer and Moonlake look at each other blankly.

Walker Industrious labourers who will – in the name of our shared vision of the future – will accept egregious deprivation of all juridical remedies through their discriminatory subjection to punitive regulation and unconsenting incorporation into collectives of gruelling coerced exertion – don't worry about that, that's just

legal language. The point is: together we can achieve anything, apart we are mere squabbling savages!

Thunderer Like this, you mean? Grrr... (*Forces Walker to a crouching position on the ground*) Shall I kill him now? You don't have to look, Dearest, it'll be over in a moment.

Moonlake (*Restrains him*) Thunderer! Behave!

Walker I take it that means you need more time to think about it?

Moonlake Yes, Walker, that's a very interesting proposition. Very nicely stated. (*To Thunderer*) Put that spear down!

Thunderer The Chalky Cliff Tribe will consider your offer – and reject it!

Moonlake (*To Thunderer*) What if a moonbeam whispered in your ear that we ought to accept Walker's offer and make a place of honour for ourselves in the songs that future generations will sing by reconciling the tribes of north, south, east and west and building that great stone... pyramid!

Thunderer Turn ourselves into rat-eaters?!

Moonlake You're the king. You only have to say yes!

Thunderer What will the others think?

Moonlake Lead us, and we'll follow. We're depending on our king to make the right decision.

Thunderer What is a pyramid, anyway? (*Pulls away from her, thinks, returns to centre stage*) I have decided...

Moonlake and Walker look at him expectantly.

Thunderer The proposal of the so-called Peace and Progress Tribe is... a subject that will be a topic... that will be presented for the fullest consideration of the Chalky Cliff Tribe... and put to the vote.

Walker So your tribe will make a collective decision?

Thunderer Still not satisfied?

Moonlake It will be our king's decision.

Thunderer It will be my firm decision for the whole tribe. Then I tell them what it is, and everyone asks me to do it, and that's what we call voting for it.

Walker Very democratic!

Thunderer Exactly. My firm decision. *(To Moonlake)* It won't be easy. What about Hearthstone? She'll be dead against it.

Moonlake If you lead, they'll follow.

Thunderer Yes...

Moonlake I know. Supposing we take Walker with us? Maybe he can persuade them?

Thunderer He's certainly turned your head.

Moonlake Let's take him back to camp as our prisoner, tie him to the big white rock, make people take it in turns to guard him. I'll guard him first.

Thunderer Have you got some rope?

Moonlake *(Produces a length of rope)*

Walker *(Approaches them)* Is it all agreed, then?

Thunderer *(Brandishing his spear again)* Turn around, prisoner!

Walker *(Holding his hands up to ward them off)* Take it easy, this isn't part of our agreement.

Moonlake *(Approaching Walker with rope in her hands)* Don't worry, we're not going to hurt you, Walker. Just a little light restraint.

Thunderer Or else it'll be the point of a spear right up your peace and progress!

Moonlake Trust me, I won't let anything happen to you, Thunderer's only joking.

Walker *(Gives up, lets her tie him up)* His sense of humour's a bit too pointed for my liking.

Moonlake You'll be our guest of honour. *(Pulls on rope)*

Walker Ooofff!!!

Moonlake We just want to play a little game, make it look like you're our prisoner.

Walker Don't let me put you to the trouble of too much realism – ouch!

Moonlake (*Her mouth very close to Walker's ear*) That's not too tight, is it? Soon you'll be free to return to your own people, we just need you to stay with us for a little while, tell us about your plans, (*caressing him*) your dreams, your deep desires...

Thunderer All you have to do is to persuade everyone in our tribe to vote in favour of my decision to join with your tribe. Nothing to it!

Moonlake (*Her arms on Walker's shoulders from behind*) You've convinced us already.

Thunderer Moonlake, Dearest, is that really necessary?

Moonlake Is what necessary?

Thunderer You're fawning on him.

Moonlake I'm not fawning on him.

Thunderer Yes, you are.

Moonlake I'm preventing him from running away.

Thunderer Does it look like he's running away?

Moonlake Why don't you trust me to take proper care of our guest?

Thunderer Why don't you ever fawn on me like that?

Moonlake Because, Dearest, you never let me tie you up!

Walker Am I intruding?

Thunderer You keep out of this.

Walker I wish I could, but your slave has got her arms around my neck.

Thunderer She's not my slave.

Moonlake Yes I am.

Thunderer Then why do you never do what I say?

Moonlake Oh but I do, Dearest, I do.

Thunderer But... *(To Walker)* Do you think she always does what I say?

Moonlake Of course he does, Dearest. *(To Walker)* Don't you.

Walker *(Nervously)* Yes.

Moonlake So that's settled. And now we're just waiting for your word of command to take Walker back to camp.

Thunderer I'm not sure I have decided to take him back... What will Hearthstone say? What about Holyorder? *(He fingers his spear menacingly)*

Moonlake *(Scanning the sky)* Thunderer! We're too exposed up here.

Walker *(Scanning the sky)* It could come back any time.

Thunderer Well, let's go, then. What are you waiting for?

They turn to go.

Thunderer There's no need to hang on to his arm like that.

Moonlake I'm supporting him. He'll find it hard to balance when we go downhill.

Thunderer But we're not going downhill yet.

Moonlake The rocky bit? Where it's very steep?

Thunderer *(Exiting)* Why don't you ever support me over rocky bits?

Moonlake *(Exiting)* Oh, Thunderer!

Blackout.

Scene 2

The Camp of the Chalky Cliff Tribe. Daytime.

On stage: Snowbright, Fernfrond, Rosethorn. Snowbright and Fernfrond are playing a game with pebbles on the ground. Rosethorn has a hollow piece of bone and is experimenting with blowing down it in different ways like a flute or recorder. Sometimes she succeeds in piping a note, other times there is just a blowing sound. Scattered at the girls' feet are animal skins similar to those they are wearing, some coarse thread and some bone needles.

In the wings: Hearthstone, Slasher, Digger, Thunderer, Moonlake, Walker.

Snowbright (*Moving stones*) You're dead, you're dead... and I win. I win!

Fernfrond Hey, that's not right. You can't kill both of them at the same time.

Snowbright Course I can. Cos they're lined up.

Fernfrond But it's my move. You can't have two moves at once.

Snowbright It's in the rules. I told you.

Fernfrond No it isn't.

Snowbright I explained it all before.

Fernfrond You're just making up rules as you go along. Cos you want to stop me getting a king.

Snowbright Rosethorn!

Rosethorn (*Looks at them, continues blowing*)

Fernfrond Not playing with you again.

Snowbright Rosethorn! Tell her I'm right.

Hearthstone (*Off*) Girls, have you finished those tunics yet?

Fernfrond (*Calls*) Just doing them, Auntie.

Snowbright (*Calls*) Nearly finished.

Rosethorn (*Continues blowing*)

Snowbright *(To Rosethorn)* You're a great help.

Fernfrond That's because she agrees with me.

Snowbright *(To Rosethorn)* I told you to sew these tunics. *(Picks one up)* Why haven't you started?

Fernfrond Leave her alone.

Snowbright *(To Rosethorn)* Put that down and get sewing. *(Grabs her flute)*

Rosethorn Give it back!

Snowbright You can have it back when you've done this tunic. *(Holds one out to her)* Take it.

Rosethorn *(Shrinks from the proffered tunic)*

Fernfrond Give it here, I'll do it.

Snowbright No, Rosethorn does this one.

Fernfrond I said I'll do it. *(Grabs for the tunic)*

Rosethorn Give it back! *(Grabs for her flute)*

There is a scuffle, in which the tunic is torn with a loud ripping sound. The three girls freeze in embarrassment, then giggle.

Snowbright *(Still holding the torn garment)* Oh, dungheaps!

Rosethorn *(Grabs back her flute and retreats)*

Fernfrond Auntie Hearthstone'll murder us.

ENTER Slasher and Digger. Slasher is swaggering and has a spear in his hands. Digger is carrying a reed basket. Digger is completely subservient to Slasher, and is mesmerised by Fernfrond.

Slasher *(Sees Snowbright holding torn garment)* It suits you. *(Guffaws)*

Snowbright Oh, it's Slasher. *(To Fernfrond)* Stinker!

Snowbright and Fernfrond giggle together.

Slasher You wanna see what we found?

Snowbright (*Concealing her curiosity*) Not really.

Slasher (*Concealing his anxiety to show her*) I wasn't gonna show you anyway.

Fernfrond We're too busy.

Slasher Yeah. Like tearing up tunics.

Fernfrond We're mending them actually.

Snowbright Not that you'd know the difference.

Digger approaches Fernfrond, tries to show her what is in his basket.

Slasher Yeah, right. Well, we got stuff to do.

Snowbright Could've fooled me.

Digger F... f... f...

Fernfrond Ahh! He's trying to say my name.

Slasher No, Fernfrond, he's trying to say: flatulence frequently fails to foster feminine friendships.

Fernfrond and Snowbright giggle together.

Digger (*Crestfallen; again offers his basket to Fernfrond*) M-mush... m-m-mush...

Slasher Digger, stop it! They're for Snowbright.

Snowbright For me?

Slasher If you give me a kiss first.

Snowbright and Fernfrond (*Together*) Uuueeerrr!!!

Slasher They're good ones. There was a raptor in the forest, I had to fight it off to get them for you. (*Makes a thrusting movement with his spear*)

Snowbright Mushrooms first, kiss later.

Fernfrond When she's so stoned out of her mind she can't see you.

Snowbright Or smell you.

Snowbright and Fernfrond giggle together.

Slasher Kiss first, mushrooms after.

Snowbright *(After a pause)* All right.

Slasher *(Approaches her eagerly)* Oh, yeah, let's do it, baby?

Snowbright When Fernfrond's kissed Digger.

Fernfrond *(Laughs)*

Digger gazes wistfully at Fernfrond.

Slasher I mean you and me, baby.

Snowbright You can kiss my shadow on the bogs.

Snowbright and Fernfrond giggle together.

Slasher *(Tries to grab Snowbright)* Come on, Snowbright, come on, babe...

Snowbright *(Evades him)* Make yourself tribal king and I'll think about it.

Fernfrond *(Aside to Snowbright)* Tribal stinker!

Snowbright and Fernfrond giggle together.

Slasher Yeah. Right. Well I'm gonna be tribal king pretty soon, and then you'll show me a whole lotta respect.

Fernfrond *(Nudges Snowbright)* Pay some respect to the great king Slasher!

Snowbright and Fernfrond make mocking obeisances.

Slasher You wait. You'll see. You just...

ENTER Hearthstone. The others quickly become serious.

Hearthstone Slasher, Digger, stop pestering the girls. *(Scatters the pebbles with her foot, not realising they were being used as a game)*

Slasher We're not doing anything, Auntie Hearthstone.

Snowbright Huh. They couldn't pester us if they tried.

Hearthstone Haven't you done those tunics yet? What's happened to that one?

Fernfrond (*Conceals the torn tunic from Hearthstone*) It's all right, Auntie Hearthstone, we just need a bit more time.

Hearthstone You've already had all morning. How much longer is it going to take?... Well?

Snowbright We can't finish them... (*With her back to Hearthstone, but facing the audience, she picks the bone needle out of the tunic she's holding and surreptitiously tries to snap it in two*) The needle's broken... (*Presses harder on the needle*) It's a rotten piece of bone off an old animal... and...

Hearthstone Let me see.

Slasher (*Behind Hearthstone's back, gleefully mimes the slapping of somebody's face*)

Snowbright (*Still trying to snap the needle*) I can't work with a broken needle...

Hearthstone I said let me see! (*Takes the work from Snowbright*) It's a perfectly good needle. Snowbright the trouble-maker, as usual. If this sewing isn't finished by nightfall you all go hungry till it is finished. Understood?

Snowbright (*Nods mutely*)

Fernfrond Yes, Auntie Hearthstone.

Hearthstone You too, Rosethorn.

Rosethorn (*Nods*)

Hearthstone Slasher and Digger...

Slasher We're just going...

Hearthstone What've you got there?

Slasher Just hazel nuts. Blackberries. Usual stuff.

Hearthstone You're not to give the girls anything till they've finished their work, understand?

Slasher and Digger nod mutely and back off.

Hearthstone Where have you put all the firewood you collected?

Slasher Digger, where did you put the firewood?

Digger F... f... f...

Hearthstone Very funny. Where did you put it, Slasher?

Slasher We're just fetching it, right now. (*Turns to go*)

Hearthstone (*Grabs Slasher, prevents him from leaving*) All morning, and not a single stick?!

Slasher But there was a raptor in the forest, we could hear it prowling, looking for meat.

Hearthstone Nonsense, they never come this far north.

Slasher But I heard it. So did Digger. Didn't you!

Digger (*Nods agreement*)

Slasher Digger saw it too. Tell us what you saw, Digger.

Snowbright, Fernfrond and Rosethorn pull faces at Digger behind Hearthstone's back, mimic a hungry raptor, etc.

Digger I sa-sa-saw a ra-ra-ra...

Hearthstone (*Shouts impatiently at Digger*) What did you see?

Digger A ra-ra-raptor's f... f... f...

Hearthstone (*Follows Digger's glance, turns around, to the girls*) Stop that! Get on with your work!

Snowbright, Fernfrond and Rosethorn, suddenly solemn, pick up their work.

Hearthstone The whole Chalky Cliff Tribe is falling to pieces, and it's hooligans like Snowbright and Slasher who are pushing us over the edge.

Slasher (*Plaintively*) That's not fair! I could've been eaten alive.

Hearthstone (*Ironically*) Poor Slasher, you must have been terrified.

The girls giggle; this time Hearthstone ignores them.

Hearthstone In my day it was different: we had packs of them coming at us day and night, in the forest, on the plains, there was no escape. Then there were the wars after we split up with the Long Valley Tribe. They were even worse: if they captured one of us or we captured one of them, the prisoner was strung up in full view of the other tribe and roasted alive over a slow fire. That's what the rat-eaters did to my generation, one by one, without pity, without mercy. But then when all seemed lost the mighty King Stormblaster rose up to lead us. Here comes Thunderer. He knows the old songs. Let him tell you about the days of desperate marches and heroic deeds, how King Stormblaster defeated our enemies and once strangled two raptors at once with his bare hands.

ENTER Thunderer and Moonlake with Walker, the latter bound as at the end of scene 1.

Thunderer Greetings, Hearthstone, tribesmen!

Hearthstone Thunderer, the tribe is going soft for lack of a challenge. We must return south, seek out the enemy and destroy him. Unless... (*Approaching Walker, sniffing at him, animal-like*) the enemy is already in the vicinity.

Moonlake This is Walker. He's going to tell us about some recent changes in his tribe.

Hearthstone Walker, eh? I don't suppose you remember me, Hearthstone, the very same who smashed the skulls of your elders with a hearthstone while you were still a fluffy little chick?

Walker I'm very pleased to meet you. Times have changed, haven't they!

Hearthstone Don't think the passage of the years is going to save you. Beware of any large stones you see in our camp, because in the name of justice the same fate is creeping up on you.

Thunderer Now, Hearthstone, we're going to treat our prisoner with fairness and civility, isn't that right, Dearest?

Hearthstone Fairness?! When I think of what the Long Valley Tribe did...

Walker We're not called the Long Valley Tribe any more. Nowadays we're known as the Peace and Progress Tribe. Working for a brighter future for all creatures on Earth...

Pause.

Hearthstone A weak point! They're going soft. We must seize the advantage.

Thunderer Before we do anything hasty, I think we should ask Walker what the people in his tribe are doing.

Hearthstone Certainly we should. We shall need a lighted fire and a sharpened axe.

Moonlake They've started building a great stone pyramid.

Hearthstone Good. We can launch a surprise attack.

Moonlake Tell us, Walker. Go on, don't be afraid.

Walker The Peace and Progress Tribe has a proposition for the Chalky Cliff Tribe... in accordance with our mission statement: working for a brighter future for all creatures on Earth.

Hearthstone The rat-eater's talking gibberish. Prepare the fire.

Thunderer We must prepare the fire.

Walker (*Anxiously*) Moonlake...

Moonlake This time let's do it differently. We'll hold Walker prisoner in the hollow with the big white rock. We'll take it in turns to guard him while Thunderer decides what we're going to do.

Thunderer We must hold him prisoner.

Hearthstone (*Facing Moonlake, with Walker sandwiched awkwardly inbetween*) Not unless we've all gone soft in the head.

Moonlake And while we decide whether to accept his tribe's proposition.

Hearthstone Justice! I must have justice!

Moonlake We must look to the future now.

Hearthstone For my lost generation!

Moonlake Not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Hearthstone The only future worth having is one in which every rat-eater is torn limb from limb.

Moonlake It's precisely that attitude –

Hearthstone Otherwise we don't deserve to survive.

Moonlake – that attitude which drives these endless, senseless wars.

Hearthstone We might as well be destroyed ourselves. Wiped from the Earth, wiped even from the memory of the Earth.

Walker Am I intruding?

Hearthstone Shut up, it's nothing to do with you!

Moonlake You're wrong, Hearthstone, you're so wrong.

Hearthstone And you're naive, Moonlake, you're just a fluffy chicken like these spotty adolescents here, like Snowbright, like Slasher.

Walker I'd be happy to get out of your way...

Thunderer Tribeswomen...

Moonlake What does the Peace and Progress Tribe say? Continue this endless cycle of violence in search of justice which never comes, or reconciliation and forgiveness?

Walker Definitely reconciliation.

Hearthstone You fool. Can't you see? It's a trap.

Moonlake Can't you see? It's our only hope.

Hearthstone You may be the mate of our king, but your brain's like an egg that's gone putrid.

Thunderer Tribeswomen...

Moonlake At least my whole body isn't so old and putrid that it's good for nothing except feeding to the forest raptors!

Hearthstone At least I don't offer my body around the whole tribe like a spare shoe – one size fits all!

Moonlake You... you... are you trying to say something, Hearthstone? Are you?

Hearthstone Are you trying to deny it?

Moonlake Thunderer, you heard what she said. Banish her to the wilderness!

Hearthstone Banish Moonlake for abusing the dignity of old age!

Moonlake Banish Hearthstone!

Hearthstone Banish Moonlake!

Walker For God's sake banish both of them!

Thunderer Tribeswomen, please be quiet! ... Thank you. Nobody's going to be banished. Walker will sit in the hollow by the big white rock with someone to guard him... (*Looks around*) Ah, Slasher.

Slasher If I was tribal king, I'd hang him from a tree and cut his arms and legs off one by one and roast them and make him watch us eat them.

Hearthstone Roast them with what? Where's the firewood I told you to collect?

Thunderer Not collected the firewood? What did I tell you about always being obedient to your Auntie Hearthstone?

Slasher But she just told you to banish –

Thunderer Silence! You will go up the hill to the Cave. Confess your disobedience to the Sacred Egg.

All the others present (except for Thunderer, Slasher and Walker) place their hands in an attitude of prayer and intone reverently: "Oh Almighty Egg!"

Thunderer You will pray to the Sacred Egg for forgiveness. You will not leave until you have done penance and obtained absolution. Understood?

Slasher (*Mutters*) Dungheaps!

Thunderer What was that?

Slasher I said, yes, Uncle Thunderer, right away.

Thunderer Off you go, then. (*To Moonlake*) I'm not being too severe with him, am I? He's only a chick.

Slasher takes the basket from Digger and is about to exit.

Moonlake What've you got there?

Slasher Apples. Chestnuts.

Moonlake Show me.

Slasher (*Does not allow her to see*) For the holy guardian of the Sacred Egg.

The others (*As before*) Oh Almighty Egg!

Moonlake All right. Off you go.

Slasher Yes, Auntie Moonlake.

EXIT Slasher.

Hearthstone Now who's going to collect the firewood?

Walker I can help you.

Hearthstone You can shut up and pray the firewood doesn't get too close to you.

Walker (*To himself*) If it ever gets collected at all.

Thunderer Digger. And Fernfrond.

Moonlake He'll be an adult next year. We need to watch him: he's a rebel. Ambitious, too.

Fernfrond I don't want to go with Digger, Digger's bo-oring!

Hearthstone Shut up and do as you're told.

Fernfrond Yes, Auntie Hearthstone.

EXEUNT Fernfrond and Digger.

Thunderer He'll grow out of it. We'll put him in charge of a hunting trip. A few weeks battling with the raptors will season him.

Moonlake What about Walker?

Thunderer Him too.

Moonlake Our prisoner. The hollow. The big white rock.

Thunderer Oh, the hollow. Yes, Walker will sit in the hollow, and – who have we got? Snowbright! Come here, Snowbright.

Snowbright comes forward. Rosethorn hesitates, then rushes forward to Snowbright's side.

Thunderer Ah. And Rosethorn too. Fetch some of the men and help them take the prisoner to the hollow, secure him to the big white rock and guard him.

Snowbright Yes, Uncle Thunderer.

Thunderer See that he doesn't escape.

Moonlake See that he's comfortable.

Hearthstone Keep him ready for immediate interrogation.

Moonlake See that no-one harms him.

Hearthstone Keep him away from anyone with loose morals.

Moonlake See he's kept away from anyone who nurses old grudges.

Thunderer Tribeswomen, thank you, I'm sure Snowbright and Rosethorn know what they have to do. Off you go.

Snowbright takes charge of Walker, Rosethorn hovers near them.

Hearthstone Take the tunics with you as well.

Snowbright Sorry, Auntie Hearthstone, too busy!

Hearthstone (*Fiercely*) Take the tunics with you!

Snowbright jumps with fear, hides behind Walker.

Moonlake Why don't I give you some help? (*Picks up tunics, gives one to Rosethorn, carries a couple herself*) Snowbright, you lead Walker. Rosethorn, you take one of these. We'll find the men over there by the river, so let's go.

*EXEUNT Snowbright leading Walker, Moonlake and Rosethorn.
Rosethorn does not forget to take her flute with her.*

The light begins to fade. The whistling of the wind is heard from afar.

Thunderer What a wonderful woman. I don't know what I'd do without Moonlake.

Hearthstone The summers are too cold. The winters are too windy. The sky at sunset is charged with the blood of burning mountains. The raptors are on the move.

Thunderer She always seems to know the right thing to do.

Hearthstone You think because it's autumn now we can enjoy ourselves in the cool breezes from the northern plains. But I tell you, Thunderer, there is something in the air.

Thunderer Yes, indeed... what's that?

Hearthstone Change is in the air.

Thunderer Ah, change. Yes. Indeed.

Hearthstone Change is in the air, Thunderer. But the Chalky Cliff Tribe is not ready for change.

Thunderer Aren't we?

Hearthstone Those who are not ready for change will be wiped away like footprints in the sand before the flooding tide.

Thunderer The survival of the fittest?

Hearthstone We must prepare for change. We must not let winter catch us unawares. That's why I'm telling you: we must restore tribal discipline before it's too late.

Thunderer Nothing wrong with a bit of discipline.

Hearthstone We must get on the march. We must prepare for Armageddon. We must annihilate the Long Valley Tribe.

Thunderer But... they're building a giant stone pyramid!

Hearthstone Exactly!

Thunderer You don't mean...

Hearthstone I mean... change is in the air.

Thunderer I'm glad we've settled that!

They listen to the whistling of the wind. Fade to blackout.

Scene 3

The Hollow near the Tribal Camp. Evening. An unlit campfire front centre. As the scene proceeds, the ambient light gradually fades.

On stage: Walker, secured to a big white rock upstage centre. Snowbright sewing a tunic. Rosethorn blowing her flute: she has managed to coax a scale of a few notes out of it, and plays obsessively up and down that scale.

In the wings: Slasher, Moonlake, Thunderer.

Walker *(To Rosethorn)* If you keep practising, you'll soon be ready for a place in the Peace and Progress Philharmonic Orchestra.

Rosethorn *(Stops blowing and stares at him)*

Walker No, really. The woodwind section.

Rosethorn *(Resumes blowing)*

ENTER Slasher.

Slasher Is the rat-eater there? Still alive?

Snowbright Slasher, what are you doing here?

Slasher *(Coming close to Walker)* How would you like your throat slashed wide open with a sharp flint axe?

Snowbright *(Laughs at Slasher's childish bravado)*

Walker How would you like it?

Slasher Shut up, rat-eater, who asked you? *(Looks around, laughs)*

Walker Nobody of any importance asked me. I'm telling you for free. Your tribe will join forces with ours. Then you'll be accountable to my people –

Slasher You wanna see what I got here? Eh? Eh?

Snowbright Stop it, Slasher! This could be important. *(To Walker)* Why will we join your tribe? Supposing we don't want to?

Walker I'm sure you will.

Snowbright But supposing we really don't?

Walker If you value your survival in the face of overwhelming force... I'm sure you will.

Snowbright Why, what are you going to do to us?

Slasher *(Threatens Walker)* Well I got me a newly sharpened flint axe...

Walker *(Contemptuously)* Flint?!

Snowbright Slasher, give it a rest!

Slasher And if I was tribal king I'd know how to use it...

Walker Do you really want to spend the rest of your life stuck in the stone age?

Snowbright *(To Slasher)* If you're trying to impress me you're wasting your time.

Slasher *(Stops threatening Walker)* Who says I'm trying to impress anyone?

Snowbright If you have a quarrel with Walker you should untie him. Let him defend himself.

Slasher I'm not doing that!

Snowbright Coward!

Slasher No, you don't understand, it's like a tribal king.

Snowbright Coward, coward, coward! Slasher, if you set him free and fight him man to man, I'll give you a big kiss. But only if you win! *(Giggles at Rosethorn)*

Slasher What if the rat-eater wins?

Snowbright Then I'll give him a big kiss! *(Giggles at Walker)*

Slasher You don't understand how kings do things. *(Striking a pose)* The art of kingship is to make life hell for your enemies at the least possible risk to yourself.

Snowbright (*Laughs at Slasher's pomposity*)

ENTER Moonlake.

Moonlake Slasher, what are you doing here?

Slasher (*Deflated*) Just going, Auntie Moonlake.

Moonlake You should be in the Cave doing penance. Firstly, for failing to bring in firewood when Hearthstone told you to. Secondly, for answering back when Thunderer told you off. And now thirdly for dawdling in the Camp and not going to the Cave when you were told to.

Slasher But it's nearly dark.

Moonlake Nonsense, there's plenty of light. (*Looks upward*) The moon will rise at midnight. And the Waterfall Star is still there... it's brighter than ever tonight.

Snowbright He's afraid of the dark, Auntie.

Slasher I'm not afraid of nothing! I'm not afraid of rat-eaters and I'm not afraid of the dark!

Moonlake (*Sudden burst of animal ferocity*) Slasher, go to the Cave!

Slasher (*Meekly*) Yes, Auntie Moonlake.

EXIT Slasher.

Slasher (*Off*) Dungheaps!

Moonlake You can go too, Snowbright.

Snowbright But he's interesting to talk to. He tells us all sorts of stuff about his tribe.

Moonlake You can talk to him again tomorrow. (*More forcefully*) I'll guard him tonight. Off you go.

Snowbright (*Departing sulkily*) It's not often I get to talk to a real man.

Moonlake You too, Rosethorn.

EXIT Snowbright, carrying tunics. EXIT Rosethorn, running after her, still clutching her flute.

Moonlake *(Her manner changes completely: no longer the imperious tribal queen, Moonlake is now shy and self-consciously humorous)* Well. Now it's just the two of us. Alone together. Strangers in the night.

Walker Some of your tribesmen are a menace to public safety.

Moonlake Don't you worry about Slasher, he's all thunder and no lightning. *(Sighs)* Like most of the men in our tribe. Still, it's a lovely evening. Clear and not too cold. Look at the stars coming out. So bright, they seem closer than ever tonight. *(Tests the ropes holding him)* Are you comfortable?

Walker No.

Moonlake Not too tight, are they?

Walker Yes, they are actually. If you could just untie me for a few minutes?

Moonlake That's a beautiful pendant you're wearing.

Walker I promise not to run away. Word of honour.

Moonlake Oh, but what would the others think? We've got to keep the charade going a little longer. *(Fingers the pendant Walker is wearing on a cord round his neck)* Hard as stone, but shiny. What's it made of?

Walker We call it bronze. It's a metal.

Moonlake Where do you get bronze from?

Walker We dig it up out of the ground.

Moonlake I've never seen anything like this in the ground.

Walker It doesn't look like that at first. It's just a coloured streak in the stone. There are different kinds. We get the metal out by heating them in a fire.

Moonlake I'd never have guessed you could get such a beautiful object out of the ground.

Walker You have to look for special stones. There's a secret place near our village where we find them.

Moonlake You're so clever! (*Leans against him and begins stroking his cheek*)
What are the women like in your tribe?

Walker The women? They do as they're told. For example, if I was tangled up in a piece of rope and asked one of them to untie me...

Moonlake Poor Walker. Is it such a trial being my prisoner? (*Kisses his cheek*)

There is a sudden bright flash of light from the sky.

Walker A meteor!

Moonlake A lightning star! Walker, do you believe our future is reflected in the stars?

Walker If so, it's a strange future.

They watch for a while, and are rewarded with another bright flash of light.

Moonlake There's another one.

Walker What did you call that one? (*Nodding in its direction*) The Waterfall Star?

Moonlake Doesn't it look like it's pouring water into the sky? Like a waterfall?

Walker We call it a comet. We believe it's getting closer to us. That's what our astronomers say.

Moonlake What who say?

Walker (*Patronisingly*) Our tribal shamans?

Moonlake Perhaps it holds the secret to our future. But then why is it weeping?

Walker The astronomers don't know yet. They have a number of speculations.

Moonlake They should discuss it with Holyorder, he knows about mysteries and speculations. He's our tribal shaman.

Walker Who?

Moonlake Holyorder. (*Solemnly*) He guards the Sacred Egg

Walker (*Laughs*) The what?

Moonlake You mustn't laugh, Walker. It's a very special egg. It came from the sky. Perhaps it even came from the Waterfall Star.

Walker How can an egg come from the sky?

Moonlake Don't let's talk about that now, Walker. (*Snuggles close to him again*) Let's talk about you. Do you know you've got such a cute little nose? (*Kisses it*)

Walker (*Embarrassed, trying to shrink back from her*) That's what everyone tells me.

Moonlake If I give it another little kiss, do you think it'll grow bigger for me?

Walker I... I expect so.

Moonlake (*Kisses Walker again, and giggles shyly*)

Thunderer (*Off*) Moonlake! Moo-oonlake!

Moonlake (*Calls back, irritated*) I'm here. I'm guarding Walker. (*To Walker*) Just when we were getting to know each other properly!

ENTER Thunderer.

Thunderer Are you down here?

Moonlake (*Detaches herself from Walker*) I'm busy talking to the prisoner.

Thunderer There you are, Dearest. Where's Snowbright? Why isn't she guarding Walker?

Moonlake I told her she could go. I'm guarding him tonight.

Thunderer Let me fetch Snowbright again, and then you can come to sleep.

Moonlake (*Stands up*) No. I'm tired and... I've got a headache. You'd better guard him instead.

Thunderer Moonlake!

Moonlake I'll see you in the morning. (*Stalks off in a huff*)

Thunderer But Moonlake... come to sleep...

EXIT Moonlake.

Thunderer (*Watches her go, then folds his arms in annoyance and looks at Walker*) You can shut up!

Blackout.

Scene 4

The Cave near the Tribal Camp. Night. Firelight from a campfire offstage flickers at the entrance, lighted torches hang on the walls. In an alcove upstage centre sits the Sacred Egg: a smooth black object about the size and shape of a rugby football, with strange veined markings like marble.

On stage: Holyorder, kneeling, his back to the audience, chanting to the Egg.

In the wings (cave entrance side): Slasher.

Holyorder Laudatum theeverum aigarum sakrum,
Ansestoynia, ungebornia,
Sinarum fagivarum, grantalonium
Futuris aiternis antikum semblis.

Holyorder varies/repeats this chant ad lib. Finally he stands, takes a step backwards and finishes his routine. Pause. He turns and faces the cave entrance.

Holyorder Rosethorn? Is that you? Rosethorn?

ENTER Slasher, nervously, carrying the basket.

Holyorder Oh, Slasher. More disobedience, I suppose. Step forward, sinner. Well?

Slasher (*Holds out basket*) Your mushrooms!

Holyorder (*Takes the basket*) Aha! That's different!

Slasher Auntie Hearthstone told me to collect firewood. But I went looking for your mushrooms instead.

Holyorder Put some more wood on the fire.

Slasher Yes, Uncle Holyorder.

EXIT Slasher to cave entrance. After a moment we see the firelight flare up and hear a crackling sound.

Holyorder takes a mushroom out of the basket, sniffs at it, puts it back and tries another, eventually nibbles it.

RE-ENTER Slasher.

Holyorder These are no good, Slasher, they're rubbish. There's no conversation with the spirit world in these.

Slasher Best I could find, Uncle Holyorder.

Holyorder (*Sudden burst of terrible anger*) I said they're no good, you disobedient mouse! On your knees!

Slasher (*Kneels before the Sacred Egg*)

Holyorder (*Calmly*) Confess.

Slasher Oh Almighty Egg...

Holyorder Oh Almighty Egg!

Slasher I failed to get any firewood when Auntie Hearthstone told me to. Because I was collecting mushrooms instead. And then Uncle Thunderer brought the prisoner and was about to put me in charge of the prisoner –

Holyorder What prisoner?

Slasher Thunderer and Moonlake brought in a prisoner from the Long Valley Tribe.

Holyorder What sort of prisoner?

Slasher Only they've changed their name, now they're called the Peace and Progress Tribe, and Auntie Moonlake –

Holyorder The prisoner! Male or female? Old or... young?

Slasher Female. And young.

Holyorder Is she pretty?

Slasher She's got big round eyes that follow you wherever you go and whenever they threaten her with a beating a little tear trickles down her pretty little nose and past the corner of her perfectly shaped lips and all her supple young limbs tremble cos she's thinking what's gonna happen to her.

Holyorder Mmmm! Sweet... Continue.

Slasher Uncle Thunderer wanted me to look after the prisoner, but I said we should kill him – her, and roast her limbs over a fire, I mean do the roasting first, and kill her later. But Thunderer didn't like that. Only it was Moonlake really, she was standing up for the prisoner, and Thunderer's such a wanker, I mean he never does anything except what Moonlake tells him, and what we need is a king who can take firm decisions for the tribe without fluttering all over the place like an old woman who's lost her marbles...

Holyorder (*Who has clearly not been listening*) That's enough. Repeat. Laudatum theeverum aigarum sakrum.

Slasher Laudatum theeverum aigarum sakrum.

Holyorder Ansestoynia, ungebornia.

Slasher Ansestoynia, ungebornia.

Holyorder Sinarum fagivarum, grantalonium.

Slasher Sinarum fagivarum, grantalonium.

Holyorder Futuris aiternis antikum semblis.

Slasher Futuris aiternis antikum semblis.

Holyorder It is good. The Egg has forgiven you.

Slasher Thank you, oh Almighty Egg.

Holyorder Oh Almighty Egg! Now run along... Wait! Tell Thunderer that the Egg demands that the prisoner must be presented to it without delay.

Slasher Yes, Uncle Holyorder.

Holyorder Don't forget. And bring me the right mushrooms next time. That's all.

EXIT Slasher. Blackout.

Scene 5

The Camp of the Chalky Cliff Tribe. The following day.

On stage: Hearthstone, Rosethorn. Hearthstone is mending the animal-skin tunics they wear, Rosethorn blowing scales repetitively on her flute.

In the wings: Thunderer, Snowbright, Fernfrond, Slasher, Digger.

Hearthstone This is no good, I'll have to do it all over again. Which one of you sewed this one?

Rosethorn *(Looks at her, continues blowing)*

Hearthstone It'll be that hooligan, Snowbright, I suppose. That girl needs a thorough whipping. That's how they punished me when I was naughty, and it did me good. I deserved it. It straightened me out, made me realise my responsibilities to the tribe. But now we've got a soft leader who can't stand anything that smacks of discipline... Will you stop that dreadful whistling! Give me that!

Rosethorn *(Stops, frightened, but hides the flute from Hearthstone)*

Hearthstone Did you hear?... Ah, you're all the same! Rebellious, disobedient, disrespectful. I suppose you think you're like the devil-may-care youths of the Long Valley Tribe? Flaunt authority, do what you like? Take this tunic, unpick this seam here and sew it up again using the special stitching I taught you! Or have you forgotten even that?

Rosethorn *(Takes the tunic obediently)*

ENTER Thunderer.

Hearthstone If you sew it up wrong, it'll fall apart when you wear it. Where are Snowbright and Fernfrond? Have you seen them?

Rosethorn *(Shakes her head)*

Hearthstone Winter's coming, and there's going to be war with the rat-eaters; we can't afford to be complacent. Thunderer, these girls need to be made an example of! All three of them, disobedient little hussies. When are you going to give the order?

Thunderer Oh, surely they're not as bad as all that? Look at Rosethorn here, doing her work diligently. *(To Rosethorn)* Are you getting on with the work Auntie Hearthstone gave you?

Rosethorn *(Nods shyly and continues working)*

Hearthstone She's just spent half the day blowing whistling noises and driving everybody crazy!

Thunderer No harm done, I hope? Hearthstone, I wanted to have a quick word with you...

Hearthstone And I've got all these tunics to finish before we can move camp.

Thunderer It concerns the proposal currently before the tribe concerning our relations with the, ah, Peace and Progress...

Hearthstone You mean the prisoner? Walker? When is he going to be dealt with?

Thunderer I'm dealing with his proposal right now. I'll gather the whole tribe together tomorrow and will lead a collective decision.

Hearthstone Gut the rat-eater!

Thunderer I beg your pardon?

Hearthstone Gut him! String him up in front of the tribe and remove his entrails with a flint axe! His blood goes up to the Cave, of course.

Thunderer Now, now, Hearthstone.

Hearthstone Or I'll do it myself!

Thunderer We have to think about his proposal. He's asking us to join his tribe, and take part in their great building project.

Hearthstone I thought I made my views on that perfectly clear.

Thunderer Think of the advantages. Their vision of the future. They're going to unite all the tribes of the world.

Hearthstone Annihilate them, more likely.

Thunderer Build a great stone pyramid.

Hearthstone Why do we need a pyramid?

Thunderer Why?... because... because it's the future!

Hearthstone What is a pyramid, anyway?

Thunderer A pyramid... don't you know what a pyramid is?! Well... it stands for peace among all tribes and progress towards...

Hearthstone Listen to me, Thunderer! If we want to survive, we must fight for it! The Long Valley rat-eaters offer us nothing but destruction. That's the way it was when I was a chick, and that's the way it's always been. We must reject their so-called offer, or trap, which you seem to be so keen to fall into, and destroy their emissary. Then we must attack them before they attack us. Is that clear?

Thunderer Yes, I suppose you must be right.

Hearthstone You said so yourself the other night.

Thunderer I did?

Hearthstone The survival of the fittest, you said. A strange expression, but appropriate. Those who submit will be annihilated, only the strong will survive.

Thunderer What about those who cooperate in a friendly way?

Hearthstone Rosethorn, when you've finished that one do the same to these others. I've got to go down to the river and fetch the water. (*To Thunderer*) Remember, we reject their offer.

EXIT Hearthstone.

Thunderer The voice of experience...

Rosethorn (*Puts down her work, picks up her flute and starts playing exactly the same scales as she was earlier*)

ENTER Snowbright and Fernfrond from the direction in which Hearthstone had left.

Snowbright I hate these tunics.

Fernfrond She's always picking on us.

Snowbright As if we didn't have more important things to do.

Fernfrond Hello, Uncle Thunderer.

Snowbright and Fernfrond reluctantly pick up the tunics that need mending.

Thunderer Wouldn't you like to wear some more stylish clothes? Not just rough animal skins, but woven out of cloth in different colours?

Fernfrond Where can we get those from?

Thunderer Where do you think? From the Peace and Progress Tribe!

Snowbright You mean like what Walker's wearing?

Thunderer You've noticed they've got better clothes than us? If we cooperate with them, they'll show us how they make them. You could be wearing silky things with real... sleeves... collars – is that what they're called? You could be dressed in red, and green, and blue, and pink.

Fernfrond That'd be fantastic!

Snowbright We'd look like princesses!

Fernfrond Like rat-eaters!

Snowbright Who cares? With dresses and silks like they have...

Thunderer All you have to do is to vote yes tomorrow.

Fernfrond What's happening tomorrow?

Thunderer I'll be calling a meeting of the whole tribe to decide to accept Walker's offer and join together with the Peace and Progress Tribe. I want you all to vote in favour.

Snowbright And then we'll get real clothes?

Thunderer Not immediately... Well, yes, very soon. Just as soon as we've moved camp and joined the camp of the Peace and Progress Tribe.

Fernfrond Their camp is very large. I've seen it from a distance.

Thunderer That's where we'll go.

Snowbright Why won't they come to us?

Thunderer Because their camp is permanent. It's fixed in the same place, while we move around every season. So naturally we'll move to them.

Snowbright And then we'll go and live next to them?

Thunderer That's right. We'll actually live among them.

Fernfrond Among them? (*Doubtfully*) There are a lot of them. More than us.

Thunderer That'll make it easier for them to teach us how to make real clothes.

Fernfrond We'll appear strange, awkward. They'll set the rules, and we won't know what the rules are.

Snowbright We'll be given the shabbiest clothes, the ones the trendy set have already thrown away. Their young men will laugh at us.

Fernfrond We'll be ignored, pushed aside.

Snowbright We'll be made to do all the work.

Fernfrond Just like now.

Snowbright Except there there'll be twenty Hearthstones all demanding that we sew their dresses for them.

Thunderer Now wait a minute, girls, I think you're jumping to conclusions!

Fernfrond Sorry, Uncle Thunderer. Too risky.

Snowbright Maybe we could, you know, just be friends with the other tribe at a distance, get their dresses in exchange for firewood or something?

Thunderer (*Shakes his head*) They're talking about a tribal merger. So let's give it a try, shall we?

Fernfrond No thanks.

Snowbright No way.

Snowbright and Fernfrond pick up their tunics. EXEUNT.

Rosethorn watches them go, then EXIT Rosethorn too.

Thunderer What did I say? I thought the advantages were self-evident. Why does nobody believe me?

ENTER Slasher and Digger. On seeing Thunderer, Slasher tries to back off without being noticed, but Thunderer spots him.

Thunderer Slasher! Wait a minute! I want to talk to you.

Slasher reluctantly comes on stage, followed by Digger.

Thunderer It's about Walker. His offer to us to join the Peace and Progress Tribe.

Slasher Oh, that. Are we gonna roast him?

Thunderer We're going to accept his offer and join his tribe.

Slasher You mean, we're gonna pretend to?

Thunderer No, we'll join for real. So I want you both to vote in favour of the resolution at our tribal meeting tomorrow.

Slasher And then we'll attack them afterwards?

Thunderer No, Slasher, we're going to cooperate peacefully.

Slasher Cooperate?

Thunderer That's right. We'll be part of this great reunion of all the tribes that have been scattered all over the world. Peaceful. Progressive.

Slasher (*Hesitantly*) Yeah. Sure. If you say so, Uncle Thunderer.

Thunderer So you'll vote yes?

Slasher Why not? Looks like it's gonna be unanimous approval of the cunning plan of our glorious king! Let's join em – (*aside, to Digger*) show em what pathetic losers we are!

Thunderer You're sure?

Slasher Course I'm sure.

Thunderer Don't vote yes unless you really want to.

Slasher Just said I would, didn't I? You're the king, and I'm furiously following your fastidious footsteps like the faithful flunkie I am!

Digger F... f... f...

Thunderer I mean, if you have any doubts, now's the time to get them out in the open.

Slasher The hunters'll be back soon with fresh meat, and before we can start feasting I've got some firewood to gather. C'mon, Diggs!

EXIT Slasher.

Thunderer Wait a minute, Digger!

Digger *(About to follow Slasher, looks mutely at Thunderer)*

Thunderer He says yes, but obviously means no. But what about you? You'll vote with me, won't you, Digger? To join the Peace and Progress Tribe?

Digger *(Shakes his head)*

Thunderer Please, Digger, think of the future! And what am I going to say to Auntie Moonlake? I promised her we'd vote in favour of joining the Peace and Progress Tribe. I assured her I'd win everybody round. The vote would just be a formality, like it's always supposed to be. But they refuse to listen. Some just say no, and mean no, and some like Slasher say yes, and mean no. So what am I going to tell Moonlake? What?

Digger runs off after Slasher. EXIT.

Thunderer Holyorder! If I could convince him the Sacred Egg commands us to cooperate... yes!

Blackout.

Scene 6

The Cave. Daytime. A shaft of sunlight falls into the cave from its entrance. The torches on the walls are unlit. The Sacred Egg sits in the alcove upstage as before.

On stage: Holyorder, repairing the wickerwork basket which they use to transport the Sacred Egg from one camp to another. He is humming monotonously to himself.

In the wings (cave entrance side): Thunderer, Rosethorn.

ENTER Thunderer.

Thunderer Good afternoon, reverend father Holyorder.

Holyorder Reeds.

Thunderer I beg your pardon?

Holyorder I need more reeds. (*Gestures towards his work*) The Sacred Cradle's falling to pieces. It must be repaired before we move south for the winter.

Thunderer Ah. I see. The transportation of the Sacred Egg is a consideration... or maybe not?

Holyorder (*Grunts, continues working on the basket*)

Thunderer It's possible we may not be moving south this winter.

Holyorder We always go south. The rhythm of the seasons is immutable.

Thunderer Yes... Tell me, Holyorder, why is it that you never took a woman for your partner?

Holyorder A woman? Me? How can you ask such a question?

Thunderer There could be plenty of women who'd be glad to be your companion through life... maybe not in our tribe, but if we were to expand our vision, so to speak, and include among the possibilities the women of, say, the Peace and Progress Tribe?

Holyorder I am married!

Thunderer You are?

Holyorder To the Sacred Egg!

Thunderer I see. Well, in a manner of speaking, of course... and you've never... no, you've never. Never mind. What I wanted to say is really this: we may not be moving south this winter.

Holyorder (*Fixes Thunderer with a hard stare*) What nonsense has she been feeding you this time?

Thunderer I don't know what you mean.

Holyorder That impertinent queen of yours. Moonlake.

Thunderer Why Moonlake? It concerns Walker.

Holyorder I don't know any Walker.

Thunderer Didn't they tell you? We have a prisoner – a guest – from the Peace and Progress Tribe. The Long Valley Tribe, as they used to be.

Holyorder I was told. A young girl. When is she being presented to the Egg?

Thunderer No, a man.

Holyorder A man?

Thunderer A warrior, in fact.

Holyorder A warrior? What nonsense was that young idiot Slasher...? Well it's all the same to me. Even better. His blood will honour the Sacred Egg.

Thunderer Actually, we're doing things differently this time. Walker proposed that we should join together with his tribe. They have a permanent camp not far from here, so if we join them that means we'll spend the winter in these parts, and the Egg can stay right here. This cave would become not just a summer resting place, but a permanent temple to the worship of the Egg. It could be enlarged, decorated. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if the Egg itself was commanding us to cooperate with the Peace and Progress Tribe to...

Holyorder (*Slowly rising to confront Thunderer*) Do you know what you're saying? Join with these rat-eating infidels? With people who'd mock the Egg and try to overturn our sacred religion? Is that your plan?

Thunderer Couldn't we convert them, or something?

Holyorder Now you tell Moonlake that she can forget the whole thing! Unless she wants her own blood splashed over the Sacred Egg to feed future generations!

ENTER Rosethorn from the cave entrance. She stares, open-mouthed, at the confrontation. Thunderer stares dumbfounded at Holyorder. Holyorder stares angrily at Thunderer, and then at Rosethorn.

Holyorder (*To Rosethorn*) What do you want here?

Rosethorn You wanted me to come and play that game with you.

Thunderer What game?

Rosethorn (*Cringes under their stares, unable to reply*)

Holyorder Not now! Go away!

EXIT Rosethorn.

Holyorder I'm teaching her the sacred liturgy...

Thunderer Ah. Very right and proper. And your views on the Peace and Progress Tribe are also perfectly correct. But I'd like you to meet Walker and make up your own mind. We're holding him at the big white rock in the hollow, taking it in turns to guard him. Sit with him for an hour or two, ask him your own questions about what's happening in his tribe and his proposal for us.

Holyorder My place is here, tending to the Egg.

Thunderer It's only for an hour or two, and someone else can take your place here while you're gone.

Holyorder My only business with this outsider is to offer his blood to the Egg.

Thunderer Yes... that's exactly what Moonlake told me you'd say. That's why she's telling everyone that your opinion can be ignored, because she's talked to Walker personally and formed an impression of him, and you haven't.

Holyorder I'll sit with him for an hour, no more. This evening.

Thunderer I'll send someone up here to tend the Egg in your absence.

Holyorder And send me some more reeds! We must be ready to move south for the winter!

Thunderer I'll send you some more reeds.

Blackout.

Scene 7

The Hollow near the Tribal Camp. Evening. A campfire has been lit downstage centre. As this scene proceeds, the ambient light gradually fades and the main source of illumination switches to the campfire.

On stage: Walker, secured as before to the big white rock upstage centre. Digger and Rosethorn are guarding him. Rosethorn has her flute with her, but is not blowing it on this occasion.

In the wings: Moonlake, Holyorder.

Sound: in the blackout preceding this scene we hear the sounds of voices off, feasting and partying, and the crackling of flames. As the lights slowly come up the sounds fade, as of the point of view of someone walking away from the party and towards the hollow. They remain faintly audible at a low level for most of this scene.

Walker (*Shifting with discomfort*) These ropes are so tight, I can hardly move. And I'm frightened of rats. Couldn't you just loosen them for me a bit?

Rosethorn (*Shakes her head*) It's not allowed.

Walker But if the rats come out, I'm defenceless. And I'm getting cold... we like to spend the night under cover, not out in the open like you do. That's how we can stay here even in the cold of winter.

Rosethorn I don't want to be shut up in a house. Like being in a cave. With that creepy Uncle Holyorder.

Walker In our tribe, each family has their own house. Parents and children together. Wouldn't you be happy being close to your own father and mother?

Rosethorn We don't have fathers and mothers. Everyone just belongs to the whole tribe.

Walker A whole tribe of orphans! When you come and join us, you'll be much better organised. Each family controlled by the father. Each clan under a clan chief, and all the clan chiefs under the command of the emperor.

Rosethorn What's that?

Walker That's organisation. It's what allows us to get things done. Stone has to be quarried, wood cut down, metals smelted, houses built – little houses for the little people, individual families, a little circle of stone up to shoulder height with wooden rafters and thatch, then big houses for the clan chiefs, plenty of room for

their families and servants, then a palace for the emperor, all stone carefully cut and shaped and fitted together with cement. Getting all that done takes organisation. The chiefs organise the work gangs, the family heads detail family members to join in the work.

Rosethorn If we join you, will we be clan chiefs?

Walker Not all of you! Just one. Chief of the Chalky Cliff Clan. The rest of you are members of that clan.

Rosethorn What about Digger? He can't talk properly.

Walker Yes, there'll be a place for Digger, too. Lots of hard work to be done!

Rosethorn Supposing we don't want to carry stones for you?

Walker Oh but you will. We know how to persuade everyone to work together for the common vision of the future. Would you like to be part of a great project that benefits everybody?

Rosethorn (*Nods*)

Walker Do you believe me when I say I'm also part of that project?

Rosethorn (*Nods*)

Walker Then won't you please loosen these ropes and let me move around a bit?

Rosethorn hesitates, motions Digger to silence and goes to Walker's aid.

ENTER Moonlake, carrying a large folded leaf.

Rosethorn jumps back away from Walker. She has not had time to undo any of the knots.

Moonlake Rosethorn, Digger, time for you to go the feast.

Rosethorn Auntie Moonlake, Walker says we're going to be a clan and sleep in a house at night! And we're going to spend our days carrying stones everywhere and building a palace for an emperor!

Moonlake Did he tell you about the nice clothes we'll get to wear?

Rosethorn (*Nods*)

Moonlake And the nice food we'll have? And never go hungry again? Go along, both of you, there's plenty for everyone tonight.

Rosethorn C'mon, Diggs!

EXEUNT Rosethorn and Digger.

Moonlake Well. Alone together again. Just you and me. Look, Walker, I've brought you some nuts and berries. (*Unwrapping them*) And here's a piece of meat.

Walker Is it cooked?

Moonlake Roasted over the fire. It's off a young animal the hunters cornered away from the rest of the herd. Young and tender and tasty. (*Holds it up*) It's good.

Walker I can't take it from you till you untie me.

Moonlake Silly boy, I'm going to feed you. Open wide.

Moonlake feeds Walker.

Moonlake I sent Thunderer out to persuade everyone to support your proposal. I think he's doing very well. He tells me everyone's very excited. Especially about the pyramid.

Walker Thunderer's not really in control at all, is he? I think you're the real power behind the scenes.

Moonlake I serve my king as best I can.

Walker I know what you mean.

Moonlake (*Looking around*) Another lovely evening, but getting chilly. I think it might be rather nice and cosy in one of your houses. Oh, look! It's moved!

Walker Yes, our astronomers have been watching it move through the constellations for weeks.

Moonlake The Waterfall Star's moved...

Walker And it's bigger and brighter than before.

Moonlake That's a good omen. Our prospects are brighter than ever, now we've got you. Have some of these, fresh today... Oh look, there's some juice on your

chin. Let me help you. (*Leans forward and licks it off his chin, slowly, sensuously*) Mmmm, tasty! (*Snuggles closer to him*) Do you gather these berries in your tribe?

Walker Of course not. Do you think we're savages? We grow them all in one place under controlled conditions so we don't have to go hunting for them.

Moonlake How clever you are! I think I'm going to enjoy being a member of the Peace and Progress Tribe. And we will see a lot of each other, won't we?

Walker As much as you like.

Moonlake (*Kisses him*) Mmmm! I think the friendship between our tribes is about to be celebrated by a special event.

The campfire is burning low, the characters on stage hardly visible.

Walker What are you doing?

Moonlake Don't your women do it like this?

Walker Moonlake, you're very nice and I appreciate what you've done for me, but –

Moonlake Don't talk, Walker. Just enjoy the feeling of the connection between your tribe and ours.

Walker When I said our tribes should join together, I didn't mean like this!

Moonlake Oh, yes! You're a real man, aren't you!

Walker If you want to do that, you've got to untie me first!

Moonlake We belong to each other now, for all the future generations!

Walker I said, untie me! Oufff!

Sounds of heavy breathing. The two figures glimpsed in the gloom of the stage move together rhythmically.

Moonlake Do it for me, Walker, do it for me, baby! Yes, yes, yes-ss!!

The sounds and movements are stilled. Pause. The sounds of feasting in the distance also fall silent.

Walker When Thunderer hears about this I hope I'm free with a spear in my hands!

Moonlake You were beautiful! Now our two tribes really are one.

ENTER Holyorder, unseen in the darkness. He pokes the campfire with a stick, and there is a crackling sound. The light suddenly flares up, revealing Walker and Moonlake in a loving embrace.

Holyorder They told me I'd find one rat-eater here, but I'm seeing two!

Moonlake (*Detaches herself from Walker and stands up*) What do you know about other tribes? Go back to your hole in the ground, old man, and mumble your stupid hymns to the Egg!

Holyorder (*Circling like a boxer*) I will, and it'll be your blood that'll honour the Egg!

Moonlake (*Circling*) Come and get it if you dare!

Moonlake hisses and unsheaths her claws like a cat. Holyorder, despite his advanced years, does likewise. The two skirmish.

Holyorder You've been spreading unbelief and depravity for years, you mouse!

Moonlake Old man, stuck in the past, time we were rid of you and your superstitions!

Holyorder When the tribe hears about this!

Moonlake And what are you going to tell them? That you saw me trying to put an end to the senseless wars that have destroyed so many of our generation? That you saw me extending peace and friendship and winning the former enemy over to our side? Tell them, old man, and watch them laugh at you!

EXIT Moonlake, running. EXIT Holyorder, in hot pursuit.

Walker Savages!

RE-ENTER Rosethorn stealthily. She goes up to Walker and this time manages to free one of his arms.

RE-ENTER Holyorder.

Holyorder What do you want here?

Rosethorn (*Gives Holyorder a frightened look, and runs away*)

EXIT Rosethorn.

Holyorder The little hussy. What was she doing to you? (*Examines Walker, sniffs at him, but Walker maintains his former pose and Holyorder does not notice that one of his arms is now free*) So you're Walker. I've heard about you and your lies and tricks! And perhaps you've heard of our Sacred Egg, that feeds on the blood of our enemies.

Walker Eggs don't feed externally. They contain all the food they need until they hatch. Is this the egg that came from the sky?

Holyorder The same.

Walker How do you know it came from the sky?

Holyorder We saw it fall. When we found it it was still warm, like an egg that had just been laid. We took it and put it in a cave to protect it. Sometimes during the night it speaks to me.

Walker How can an egg speak?! What does it say?

Holyorder It tells me that the flow of the universe must continue without interruption forever. Every day must be followed by night, and every night by day. Every summer must be followed by winter, and every winter by summer. Every old generation must create a new generation before it dies.

Walker You needed a cosmic egg to tell you that?

Holyorder Every year the great herds will migrate north, and every year they will return south, and we will follow them as we've always done.

Walker We found a better way to live.

Holyorder For what is life without meat, and where can we find meat, if not from the herds of hadrosaurus and stegosaurus that we follow?

Walker It's too dangerous. We're in competition with the tyrannosaurus and the velociraptors. If they find us, it's them that'll eat us!

Holyorder Yes, the hunter's life is a dangerous one. So it has always been, and so it will always be.

Walker No. There is a better way.

Holyorder (*Makes dismissive gesture*)

Walker Village life. We have a settlement with stone buildings surrounded by a wall. The animals we need, we keep in pens. The dangerous animals that prey on us, we drive them away or kill them. The grasses, nuts and berries we eat, we grow in fields. The benefits are obvious. Our population has doubled in the past ten years.

Holyorder You're subverting the balance of nature.

Walker Maybe we're creating a new balance of nature?

Holyorder That's not possible. What has always been must always be.

Walker With a settled life, we built up our infrastructure. Rather than just consume meat when we kill it, we store it for the future. We now have storehouses, stockpiles, reserves, capital assets!

Holyorder Do you have the slightest idea what that means? The Egg tells me all. The Egg showed me in a vision where your corruption will lead. Yes, you'll make yourselves safer, more efficient. Your population will double, and double again. Your village will become two villages, four, eight. Soon there'll be settlements all over the world, crowding out people who live a traditional life, crowding out even the hadrosaurus and the stegosaurus. You'll kill all the tyrannosaurus, drive them to extinction in your damned pursuit of infrastructure and capital assets!

Walker Why only this world? Some of us dream of emulating the powers of the great winged pterosaur, the quetzalcoatlus, and creating a means of flight, so that our astronomers can soar into the sky and visit the stars and planets!

Holyorder A damned perversion of nature!

Walker Yes, even visit the great comet, which you call the Waterfall Star, and establish its true nature.

Holyorder That's impossible!

Walker Impossible today, yes. But why should it still be impossible tomorrow?

Holyorder Because there's nowhere up in the sky for you to go.

Walker Why should our world be the only one in the universe? What other worlds might we find up there, among the stars?

Holyorder In pursuit of your damned infrastructure, you'd even pollute worlds not yet known? You must be stopped before you destroy everything!

Walker You're too late, Holyorder! The industrial revolution has begun!

Holyorder (*Pulls a flint axe out of his robes*) Not while I live and breathe!

Holyorder tries to kill Walker. With his one free hand, Walker seizes Holyorder's hand and uses the flint axe to cut the remaining ropes binding him to the rock. Walker struggles free.

Holyorder You won't escape! We'll hunt you down!

Walker (*Wiping blood from his head, where Holyorder has struck him*) Ignorant savages!

EXIT Walker.

Holyorder Help! Gather the warriors! The prisoner's escaped!

EXIT Holyorder.

Pause.

ENTER Moonlake and RE-ENTER Rosethorn from opposite directions.

Moonlake Walker? Walker! What's happened? Has Holyorder taken him away already? (*Examines the rock, sniffs at it*) There's blood here! Rosethorn, go and call Thunderer at once, he must make sure Walker's safe!

Rosethorn (*Nods and runs off*)

EXIT Rosethorn.

Moonlake I can't let that old charlatan harm him. Walker's essential for the future of our tribe. (*Faces audience, pats her belly*) I can feel our love moving inside me. The tribes will be united in the next generation. The shell is hardening. (*Ecstatic joy*) I'm going to have an egg!

Blackout. Interval.

ACT 2

Scene 8

The Camp of the Chalky Cliff Tribe. Daytime. About a month later.

On stage: Hearthstone, Snowbright, Fernfrond, sitting on the ground together. Hearthstone is teaching the girls how to chip flints to make stone axes.

In the wings: Holyorder.

Snowbright (*Hitting one flint with another*) You're dead, you're dead, you're dead!

Hearthstone Stop, that's too fast. Slow down, think about every stroke. You've got to strike the blade at just the right angle to get an edge on it.

Snowbright Chipping flints is boring. I'm never going to get it right.

Hearthstone That's because you're not concentrating on your work. Wait till you're alone in the forest and a velociraptor's creeping up on you, and then you'll know what it is to have a well-sharpened flint in your hand.

Fernfrond I've finished mine.

Snowbright (*Makes rude gesture at Fernfrond*)

Hearthstone Let me see... not bad. You could kill your raptor with this. And skin it. Snowbright here would be down that raptor's throat and into its belly before she even had time to say "Dungheaps!"

Snowbright That's nonsense; everyone knows the raptors attack in packs.

ENTER Holyorder.

Hearthstone Not always. In my day we often had to fight them one on one. If you had a well sharpened flint in your hand, you survived to tell the tale. If you didn't, the only one who ever survived that encounter was the mighty King Stormblaster. The old songs tell of how he used to charge into battle against our enemies riding an adult triceratops, and how he learned to speak the language of the ichthyornis bird... (*Standing up*) This is an unexpected honour, Holyorder.

Holyorder May the peace of the Sacred Egg be with you and yours forever.

Hearthstone Oh, Almighty Egg! (*To Snowbright and Fernfrond*) Take your work over there, girls, and produce two new pieces each before sundown. Then I'll show you how to fix them to the end of a spear.

Snowbright Dungheaps!

Fernfrond Watch out, there's a raptor!

Snowbright Yeah, yeah.

EXEUNT Snowbright and Fernfrond, taking the flints with them.

Hearthstone (*Offers Holyorder a small fruit*) Can I offer you a forest apple?

Holyorder (*Accepts it*) Thank you, Hearthstone. (*Eats fruit*)

Hearthstone Those girls need to be reminded again of the heroic deeds of the past. We all do. It's high time we should have another recital of the Song of Stormblaster the Mighty... what brings you away from your care of the Sacred Egg today?

Holyorder This morning at sunrise there was a mist over the land.

Hearthstone Certainly there was.

Holyorder The autumn is well advanced.

Hearthstone Certainly it is.

Holyorder The chill in the air is more of winter than of autumn. We should have set out on our journey south long ago, but still we linger here.

Hearthstone Agreed. The hadrosaurus and stegosaurus are long gone.

Holyorder So when will Thunderer give the order to move?

Hearthstone Thunderer's obsessed with the Long Valley Tribe. Walker came here, and vanished again, at the moon's third quarter. The moon has gone around to the third quarter again, and still he vacillates, talks about calling a tribal meeting and then postponing it again.

Holyorder Why do the warriors not urge him to act?

Hearthstone They do, but their strength is gone, wasted in the futile pursuit of game which can no longer be found.

Holyorder Then we must confront him together, you and I. We must force him to act.

Hearthstone We're old. Why should we succeed where younger and fitter ones have failed?

Holyorder Because we know what is preventing him from action.

Hearthstone Do you mean...?

Holyorder (*Lowering his voice*) Yes. We must kill the evil witch.

Hearthstone But then Thunderer will kill us. He may be weak, but he's still a warrior.

Holyorder We must do it secretly, and ensure that the blame falls on the Long Valley Tribe.

Hearthstone Is this the will of the Sacred Egg?

Holyorder It is.

Hearthstone I have some newly sharpened flints.

Holyorder And I'll soon have some newly ripened mushrooms, if those rascals Slasher and Digger can be relied upon. Ground up and added to her meat, the mushrooms will dull her senses, and then we act.

Hearthstone If the hunters can find any meat to add them to.

Holyorder They can still bring back fish, even this late in the season, even though hard pressed by the hunters of the Long Valley Tribe.

Hearthstone This place is cursed by their presence. The sooner we leave, the better.

Holyorder Then we act this evening. I'll bring the mushrooms, and you must add them to her food. Tonight we lead her away from the camp towards the Long Valley village, and do what must be done.

Hearthstone Agreed, we act this evening.

Blackout.

Scene 9

The Cave. Day. A shaft of sunlight falls into the cave from its entrance and the torches on the walls are unlit. The Sacred Egg sits in the alcove upstage as before.

On stage at lights up: nobody. In the wings (cave entrance side): Slasher, Digger, Thunderer, Holyorder.

ENTER Slasher and Digger, the latter carrying a reed basket.

Slasher Uncle Holyorder? Uncle Holyorder! I've brought you what you wanted. *(Looks around)* Dungheaps! Where's the old codger got to? *(Turns and stares at the Sacred Egg)* Oh, Almighty Egg! Liddletum, thiddletum, ansestum, borium! *(To Digger)* You wouldn't understand that. Special Egg talk.

Digger Au... au... au...

Slasher ...mighty Egg. That's right. Gimme some of those. *(Reaches into the basket and takes a mushroom out, sniffs at it and eats it)*

Digger M... m... mush... *(Reaches into the basket)*

Slasher *(Stops him)* No, Digger, not for you. You couldn't cope. Only tribal leaders can eat these ones. *(Helps himself to some more mushrooms)* Hm. Funny taste. Suppose one gets used to it. When I'm king I'll have a special supply delivered every day. *(Chews on a mushroom, shakes his head as if drunk)* Whoa, that's nice!

Digger I wa... wa... want... *(Reaches into the basket)*

Slasher *(Stops him)* How many times do I have to tell you, they're not for you. You haven't got the stomach for them. *(Helps himself again, begins to speak in a slurred voice)* Yeah, baby, these're good'uns. Hold onto your skirt, Snowbright, you'n me are going on a trip cos I'm your tribal king... *(Suddenly pensive)* I'm not king yet, but when I work out a way... *(An idea dawns on him, and he slowly smiles at Digger, then at the Sacred Egg and then back at Digger)* Well, whaddya know...

As Digger watches, Slasher goes to the Egg, picks it up and brings it downstage, testing its weight in his hands.

Digger Au... au... au... mighty...

Slasher Almighty Slasher! Diggs, you'n me've just discovered the way to take this joint over. *(Hears a sound from outside the cave)* Quick, there's someone coming. Hide! This way!

EXEUNT Slasher and Digger further inside the cave.

ENTER Thunderer from the cave entrance.

Thunderer Holyorder? Reverend father? Are you there? (*Faces upstage, kneels*) Forgive this intrusion, Oh Almighty Egg. (*Pause*) Dungheaps! Where are you? (*Gets up, looks around*) Oh, Egg, where are you? (*Runs around in a panic, searching every corner, finally looks further into the cave and sees Slasher and Digger*) Slasher, Digger, what are you doing here?

ENTER Slasher, holding the Egg, and Digger, holding the basket. They separate. Digger gets past Thunderer, Slasher does not. Digger puts down the basket. Thunderer tackles Slasher, rugby style, and Slasher passes the Egg to Digger, rugby style. After several moves of this kind, with appropriate calls of "to you!", "over here!" and so on from Slasher and "stop!", "put it down!" and so on from Thunderer, Slasher and Digger succeed in both getting to the cave entrance side of Thunderer while in possession of both the Egg and the basket. They escape out of the cave. EXEUNT.

Thunderer collapses on the floor and hammers his fists on the ground in impotent rage.

Thunderer Thieves! Hooligans! Damn you, damn you forever! (*Pause, slowly realises*) If anybody hears about this, I'm finished! (*Gets up and walks slowly and thoughtfully towards the cave entrance*)

ENTER Holyorder from the cave entrance.

Thunderer Oh!

Holyorder Everything safe and sound?

Thunderer Yes...

Holyorder (*Like Thunderer before him, faces the upstage alcove and kneels*) Laudatum theeverum aigarum sakrum...

Pause.

Holyorder (*Quietly and distinctly*) Where is the Sacred Egg?

Thunderer (*Embarrassed and fearful, small voice*) S-safe and sound.

Holyorder (*Stands, confronts Thunderer, shouts*) I said, where is it?!

Thunderer There was a threat. To steal it. So I moved it to a safe place. A-a-a place of safety...

Holyorder (*Furious*) For the third time, where is my Sacred Egg?!

Thunderer (*Gaining confidence*) Yes, a threat from the Peace and Progress... er, Long Valley Tribe. They wanted to steal the Egg. Destroy our holy religion. Moonlake told me about it. They were pretending to be friendly so they could creep up on us unawares and steal the Egg. What could I do? Everyone knows the Egg is housed in this cave. So the Egg had to be moved. Away to a secret place. Could I tell you? Everyone knows that you're the guardian of the Egg. When the Long Valley Tribe discover the Egg isn't here, the first person they'll capture and torture will be you. So you mustn't know where the Egg really is. Only I know, and I'll be the last to be captured.

Holyorder (*Backs off during above speech, walks around disoriented, grieved, finally faces Thunderer again*) This means war with the Long Valley rat-eaters!

Thunderer It does, indeed.

Holyorder (*Confronts Thunderer again*) The war will not come until next spring. Now we must depart. To the south.

Thunderer Maybe I can negotiate a truce? I'll speak to Moonlake.

Holyorder Moonlake has the confidence of the rat-eaters?

Thunderer She'll negotiate the safety of the Egg.

Holyorder (*Smiles*) Yes, she will indeed. Listen to me, Thunderer, Moonlake has one day to reach an agreement with the rat-eaters! If she fails to reach an agreement, or if she suffers an accident during that time that prevents her from reaching an agreement...

Thunderer South?

Holyorder We break camp immediately. With the Sacred Egg in my possession!

Thunderer Yes, of course. It's only a temporary... while I ensure that it's safe to... I'll talk to Moonlake right away. (*Turns to go*)

Holyorder (*Calls after him*) Make sure the Egg is not jostled or scratched. See that it's held in an upright position at all times. Address it with the holy liturgy twice a day, at dawn and dusk.

EXIT Thunderer to cave entrance.

Holyorder (*Quietly, to himself*) You're lying, Thunderer. But it makes no difference. The witch-queen will die, and the tribe will go south, as it always has done, as it always will do forever and ever.

Blackout.

Scene 10

The Marsh. A flat and boggy landscape hidden under swirling mists. Daytime.

On stage at lights up: nobody. In the wings: Slasher, Digger, Moonlake, Hearthstone, Rosethorn.

ENTER Slasher, with the Sacred Egg now wrapped in an animal skin, and Digger, with the basket.

Slasher We'll hide it here, Diggs. Nobody'll look for it here, and if they do they'll never find it.

Digger E... e... egg...

Slasher Yeah, sometimes people lay real eggs here to incubate. The ground's warm, see. Feel the ground.

Digger (*Feels the ground*)

Slasher Can you feel it? It's warm. When one of the women is pregnant and the tribe's staying here for a while, it's safe to leave the egg here till it's ready to hatch. That's why I wrapped our piece of sacred shit in a skin, just like a real egg. So if anyone does find it, they'll think it's a real egg and just leave it alone.

Digger Ra... ra... rap...

Slasher No, the raptors don't come here. The marshy fumes upset them, and they don't know we keep eggs here. Anyway, they've all gone south for the winter now.

Moonlake (*Off*) Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah!!! (*Ad lib*)

Slasher (*Listens*) It's Moonlake... sounds like she's dropping an egg! (*Mockingly mimes egg-laying*)

Digger (*Laughs with Slasher*)

Slasher Well we've got our own eggs to lay. (*To the Sacred Egg*) You will lie just... here!

Slasher lays the Sacred Egg on the ground. It is concealed under the swirling mists.

Slasher (*To Digger*) Gimme a mushroom. (*Takes a mushroom out of the basket and eats it*)

Digger (*Plaintively*) M... m... mush...

Slasher Oh, all right. Just one. Special treat to celebrate my becoming tribal king. No more than one, now.

Digger (*Takes mushroom out of the basket and carefully eats it under Slasher's supervision*)

Slasher Right, Diggs, let's go!

EXEUNT Slasher and Digger, the latter surreptitiously helping himself to another mushroom.

ENTER Moonlake, cradling an egg in an animal skin, and Hearthstone. Moonlake's egg is the same size and shape as the Sacred Egg, but predominantly white where the Sacred Egg is predominantly black.

Moonlake (*To her egg*) Coochy, coochy, coo!

Hearthstone (*Looks around*) This place will do.

Moonlake Who's going to hatch and grow into a great tribal leader, then? (*Kisses her egg*)

Hearthstone (*Feels the ground*) The ground here is the right temperature. Lay it down here, Moonlake.

Moonlake (*Holds the egg out to Hearthstone*) You lay it down for me.

Hearthstone Oh no, it's your egg, you must do it.

Moonlake You won't tell anybody, will you? You won't tell Thunderer?

Hearthstone Your secret will be quite safe with me. Lay it down. (*Pulls a flint axe out from under her robes*)

Moonlake (*To the egg*) If you hatch a girl, I'll name you Waterfall, after the Waterfall Star. If you hatch a boy, I'll name you Fallwater. No, wait, I'll name you Fallwalker, to honour both the star and the father.

Hearthstone (*Raises the axe*) Lay it down, Moonlake. (*Quickly conceals the axe again when Moonlake turns to her*)

Moonlake Hearthstone, do you think the appearance of the Waterfall Star was an omen predicting the union of the tribes under my baby's leadership?

Hearthstone Yes, I think it was an omen of great changes. Lay the egg down.

Moonlake (*Kneels down, holding the egg tenderly*) Great changes. I can't help feeling fearful of change, no matter how hard I persuade myself it'll be for the best.

Hearthstone (*Raises the axe, higher this time, and is about to strike*) Don't be afraid, Moonlake. All will be well.

Noises off: the sound of a flute is heard, playing a weird fragment of melody.

Hearthstone (*Looking around wildly*) Rosethorn!

Moonlake (*Lays her egg where it is concealed by the swirling mists, and rises to her feet again*) Lie there, my baby, till you are ready to hatch and take command of all the tribes of the world!

Hearthstone (*Conceals axe again*) That damned little hussy of a girl, always blowing that piece of bone!

Moonlake Now back to camp. Thunderer's decided to hold a meeting at last.

Hearthstone When that's decided, won't you be going to visit the Peace and Progress Tribe to tell them the result?

Moonlake Yes. I'll lead a delegation of our warriors to their village. There'll be a lot to arrange, so that we can stay here for the winter.

Hearthstone If we do stay for the winter.

Moonlake Oh, we will. Thunderer's already decided.

EXEUNT Moonlake and Hearthstone.

ENTER Rosethorn from the opposite side, blowing her flute. She crosses the stage, following the adults. EXIT Rosethorn.

Blackout.

Scene 11

The Camp of the Chalky Cliff Tribe. Daytime. A pile of logs on one side.

On stage: Snowbright, Fernfrond. They are cutting up a log, stage centre, with flint axes.

In the wings: Thunderer, Moonlake, Digger, Rosethorn.

Snowbright *(Hitting log)* You're dead, you're dead, you're dead!

Fernfrond *(Imitating Hearthstone)* No, Snowbright, you're doing it all wrong. Think about each stroke of the axe. Gently, at just the right angle, like this. Caress the wood. *(Chops log, equally ineffectually)*

Snowbright Teacher's pet!

Fernfrond *(Laughs)*

Snowbright I'm doing it my way, so shut up!

A mouse runs across the stage. The girls scream and shrink back from where they saw it.

ENTER Thunderer.

Thunderer What happened?

Fernfrond Uncle Thunderer, there was a mouse!

Thunderer *(Instantly alarmed)* A mouse? Where?

Snowbright It went that way.

Thunderer Look under the logs. Fernfrond, you look over there. Try to kill it. Be quick.

Fernfrond But it might still be there!

They search the stage, flint axes at the ready, but in vain.

Snowbright (*Shuddering*) Horrible! I don't feel safe here any more. Uncle Thunderer, are we moving south soon?

Thunderer Yes, horrible little animals. Vermin. But we don't have to be frightened of them. The best way to protect ourselves from mice and rats is to live in a village like the Peace and Progress Tribe.

At the mention of "mice and rats", Snowbright and Fernfrond shudder again.

Fernfrond (*Reluctantly*) Are we going to live in a village, then?

Thunderer We'll decide that at today's meeting. Think of the advantages. Nice dresses. Good food. Year-round protection against tyrannosaurus and raptors, and especially against those nasty mice and rats. Wouldn't you like to live in a nice warm village?

Snowbright (*Reluctantly*) I suppose so.

Fernfrond (*Reluctantly*) If we have to.

Thunderer Don't forget to say how enthusiastic you are at today's meeting. Now run along and fetch some more logs in, girls. We're going to need plenty of fuel for the winter.

Snowbright and Fernfrond turn away and go past the pile of logs.

Fernfrond (*Spots something on one of the logs*) Oh! A spider!

Snowbright (*Reaches past her and quickly grabs it*) Mine!

Fernfrond (*Jostles Snowbright*) Hey, I saw it first!

Snowbright (*Stuffs the spider into her mouth and chews with relish*)

ENTER Digger, still carrying the basket. He offers the basket to Fernfrond.

Digger M... m... mush...

Fernfrond Da... Da... Da... Digger! (*Laughs*)

EXEUNT Snowbright and Fernfrond.

EXIT Digger, following them forlornly.

Thunderer (*Looks around, calls*) Moonlake! Moo-oonlake!

ENTER Moonlake.

Thunderer It's nearly time, Dearest. Where have you been all morning? I want you to address the meeting in favour of the resolution.

Moonlake In favour of joining the Peace and Progress?

Thunderer No. In favour of sending the delegation we talked about, to discuss relations between their village and ours.

Moonlake We don't have a village.

Thunderer In a manner of speaking... this camp is our village. It just needs a little, er, infrastructure. Some wood and stones and things like that. The Peace and Progress Tribe will send advisers to us to help. We'll reward them with, er, whatever we have handy, such as fish and wood and so on. Stones for their pyramid, and so forth.

Moonlake So we're joining their tribe?

Thunderer I don't think there'll be any difficulty about that. In fact, it's probably not worth even discussing any more. We just need an agreement for mutual help and assistance, friendly relations, and so on and so forth. That's where your delegation comes in.

Moonlake About time!

Thunderer To begin with I'll make a speech introducing the resolution: that we send a delegation to visit the Peace and Progress Tribe and agree on terms. Next, I'll get someone to speak against the resolution, so that all the objections are fairly brought out into the open. Thirdly, you'll speak in favour of the resolution. And finally I'll sum up and lead the vote in favour.

Moonlake So simple, isn't it!

Thunderer I beg your pardon?

Moonlake So simple to plan a meeting and carry it out. And we've been shilly-shallying over this for a whole moon while you've been making up your mind.

EXIT Moonlake.

Thunderer But, Dearest, a momentous decision like this, the whole future of the tribe...

EXIT Thunderer in pursuit of Moonlake.

ENTER Rosethorn from the opposite side. She sits down on a log upstage and starts playing her flute. She can get a reasonable tune out of it now.

RE-ENTER Digger, with the basket. He still looks forlorn. He sits down, downstage of Rosethorn, and furtively sniffs at and swallows a mushroom.

RE-ENTER Thunderer.

Thunderer Digger, my boy, do you know where Slasher is?

Digger (*Conceals the basket of mushrooms with a guilty movement*) S... S... Slash...

Thunderer (*Does not notice the basket*) Obviously no point asking you. And yet... (*An idea dawns on him*) Why not? Digger, how is everything with you? Getting on well with Fernfrond?

Digger (*Sadly*) F... F... Fern... Fern-frond...

Thunderer Still no luck?

Digger (*Shakes his head sadly*)

Thunderer Never mind. But think how much worse it would be if we joined the Peace and Progress Tribe. There'd be even more pretty girls ignoring you and mocking you, and even more young men making fun of you. You don't want that, do you!

Digger (*Shakes his head more vigorously*)

Thunderer At our meeting this afternoon, will you be sure to vote against joining?

Digger (*Nods*)

Thunderer I'll tell you what. How would you like it if I gave you a chance to win Fernfrond's love? You'd like that, wouldn't you!

Digger (*Nods more vigorously*)

Thunderer Don't forget, wait for that special moment when I give you a chance to shine before Fernfrond and win her love forever. Do you understand?

Digger (*Nods*)

Thunderer Of course you do, my boy. Then everything's ready. As soon as the sun reaches the zenith the meeting will begin.

EXIT Thunderer, greatly satisfied with himself.

Digger nervously snorts and eats another mushroom.

RE-ENTER Snowbright and Fernfrond with another log.

Fernfrond Out of the way, Diggs! We've got work to do.

Snowbright Rosethorn, are you going to sit and watch us all day? Grab an axe and get chopping!

Rosethorn The meeting begins at noon.

Snowbright Well it's not noon yet, so put your flute away and come and join us!

Blackout.

Scene 12

The Hollow near the Tribal Camp. Daytime. Big white rock upstage centre as before.

On stage: all the characters from the Chalky Cliff Tribe, except Holyorder, are coming on stage from both sides, and finding places to sit. Digger still has his basket and for most of this scene is still furtively snorting and nibbling the mushrooms, while concealing this activity from Slasher and the others. Slasher is carrying a spear.

In the wings: Holyorder, Walker.

Buzz of conversation, youngsters jostling each other playfully, etc.

Thunderer (*Positions himself centrally in front of the white rock, raises his voice, addresses characters on stage but also includes the audience, who stand in for the majority of tribespeople obviously not present on stage*) Members of the mighty and venerable Chalky Cliff Tribe...

The buzz of voices dies down.

Hearthstone Thunderer, there may be danger at hand. The great quetzalcoatl monster's been seen again!

People look up at the sky anxiously.

Thunderer Thank you, Hearthstone, I'm sure we're all prepared to fight it off. Are the warriors ready with their spears?

Slasher raises his spear.

Thunderer Good. We've got nothing to fear from the quetzalcoatlus. So let the meeting begin. One moon ago, as you remember, we were visited by an emissary from the Peace and Progress Tribe...

ENTER Holyorder, disturbing the others as he looks for a place to sit next to Hearthstone.

Thunderer Hurry up, reverend father Holyorder, we've already begun the meeting.

Holyorder I demand that this meeting instructs Thunderer to return the Sacred Egg to its proper guardian, meaning myself!

The others Oh Almighty Egg!

Moonlake And I demand that it punishes a certain member of this tribe who attacked our guest and allowed him to escape!

Holyorder The rat-eater attacked me! I was lucky to get away with my life!

Moonlake I think not, old man. You attacked him, and I have a witness to prove it!

Moonlake exchanges a meaningful glance with Rosethorn.

In the distance we begin to hear the approaching sounds of drums and flutes.

Thunderer Quiet, please! Holyorder, sit down! The purpose of this meeting is to pass a resolution that the Chalky Cliff Tribe sends a delegation to the Peace and Progress Tribe to agree terms of peaceful collaboration... what's that drumming sound? Slasher, go and have a look!

Slasher Right away, oh great king and keeper of the Sacred Egg!

EXIT Slasher.

The others Oh Almighty Egg!

Thunderer *(To himself, while the attention of the others is distracted by Slasher leaving)* I'll have you gutted, you thief! *(Aloud)* Members of the Chalky Cliff Tribe, the purpose of this meeting is to pass a resolution –

Hearthstone Who says we're agreeing terms? Why do we need to agree anything, when we're about to go south for the winter?

Snowbright Because we're staying here for the winter, Auntie Hearthstone.

Hearthstone Who says? Who decided that?

Thunderer Ladies, tribesmen, as your king and leader I have discussed the matter extensively and comprehensively with all members of the tribe over the past moon.

Moonlake Endless procrastination!

Thunderer I have balanced the advantages and disadvantages, the pros and cons, a wide variety of opinions from all quarters, and come to the inevitable conclusion that, er – Moonlake, help me out here – that the long-term interests of the Chalky Cliff Tribe are irrevocably linked with our friendly relations of peace and progress with the, ah, Peace and Progress Tribe...

The drums and flutes are getting louder.

RE-ENTER Slasher.

Slasher Thunderer, we're surrounded by hundreds of warriors!

Thunderer Thank you, Slasher. In that case we may not need to send a delegation, as it appears they've already sent one to us...

The drums and flutes reach a crescendo and fall silent.

ENTER Walker, his head bandaged, carrying a bronze-tipped spear.

Thunderer Welcome, honourable tribesman Walker.

Moonlake (*Jumps up and runs to embrace him*) Walker! You're safe! Thanks be to the Egg!

Walker (*Pushes Moonlake away roughly*) Get away from me, you whore!

Moonlake Walker!

Walker Chalky Cliff Tribe, listen to me! One moon ago we proposed to you a peaceful merger of our tribes. We have lost patience waiting for your answer. You have exactly one day to agree to join us. Tomorrow at noon we shall return and receive your answer. From that time onwards the Chalky Cliff Tribe will cease to exist. Either you join us peacefully, and get to work quarrying stone for the pyramid programme. Or we annihilate you. Consider your answer carefully.

Thunderer Why such haste? Sit down with us, Walker, and share a roasted haunch of stegosaurus!

Hearthstone (*Aside, to Snowbright*) As if we had any meat left, after lingering here too long!

Walker We don't want your meat. But in order to focus your minds on the right decision, we're taking one of you as a hostage.

Roll of drums, and a cluster of bronze-tipped spearpoints appear from one wing, as of a well drilled company of warriors just offstage.

Walker (*Advances to centre stage, seizes Snowbright's arm*) You! Come now!

Moonlake Take me, take me!

Walker (*To Moonlake*) I'll have you bound to a rock and left out for the rats! (*Punches Moonlake to the ground and drags Snowbright away*)

Thunderer Tribesman Walker...!

Snowbright (*Struggles*) Help me! They're going to cut me up and feed me to the velociraptors! Slasher, help me!

Slasher stands dumbstruck, spear in hand, unable to move, mouth open in horror.

Snowbright Huh! (*Holds her head high and marches proudly into captivity*)

EXIT Snowbright past the spearpoints, which close up behind her and disappear from view.

Walker Our warriors have surrounded your camp. Don't even think of trying to escape, or you'll be destroyed. Remember, noon tomorrow.

EXIT Walker.

Moonlake You bastard!

Hearthstone Well done, Thunderer! Now look where your dithering and soft treatment of the prisoner have got us!

Holyorder We must march south immediately!

Fernfrond We can't leave Snowbright here to die!

Rosethorn I agree with Fernfrond, we've got to rescue Snowbright!

Thunderer Tribesmen, tribeswomen, please! I call this meeting to order! Thank you. The resolution is now amended to... (*Thinks*)

Hearthstone Do we tear your treacherous queen to pieces, or burn her with fire?

Holyorder Both at once!

Moonlake Shut up, Hearthstone, if we'd joined them earlier we'd now be full partners!

Thunderer The resolution is: do we or do we not join the Peace and Progress Tribe by noon tomorrow?

Hearthstone We must move at once. We don't have time for this.

Thunderer Silence, Hearthstone! We're not savages! I must have democratic legitimacy for my decision. We have brains, so let's use them! We're not triceratops, horn on our heads and horn inside our heads, butting each other senseless. We are an intelligent race of beings. We are Dinosaur sapiens!

Pause.

Thunderer So let's discuss this reasonably. First, to speak against the resolution I call upon... (*Goes up to Digger and raises him to his feet*) Digger! Come this way, Digger. (*Leads him to centre stage*) Now you speak against the

resolution, explain why we must run away from the Peace and Progress Tribe like cowardly mice and go south for the winter.

Digger (*Still holding a piece of mushroom, looks around wildly*)

The others laugh nervously.

Digger S... s... south...

Thunderer Yes, it's all right, go on.

Digger G... g... go... s... south.

More nervous laughter.

Digger (*Snorts and swallows the piece of mushroom, oblivious to the fact that all eyes are on him*) For the w-winter. L-leave us alone. All we w-want to do is l-live peacefully minding our own business. All we want is l-love. We don't need the Peace and Progress Tribe to l-live and l-love one another.

Thunderer (*Over Digger's speech*) All right, Digger, that's enough!

Digger (*Continues without a break, accelerating in tempo and fluency*) We want to choose the girl of our dreams and devote ourselves to her tender embraces! We want to live with the beautiful Fernfrond, the prettiest girl in the tribe, and bring her fresh berries every morning and fresh meat every night! We want to bathe her in cool streams of fresh mountain water! Fernfrond, I love you! I adore you! I'm coming to you!

There is a stunned silence.

Fernfrond Digger!

Digger rushes to Fernfrond, embraces and kisses her. She returns his passion. EXEUNT Digger and Fernfrond, holding hands.

Thunderer So... the arguments for rejecting the resolution, presented in surprisingly eloquent terms by tribesman Digger. I now call upon tribeswoman Moonlake to speak in favour of the resolution.

Moonlake (*Without getting up*) What, that we join them? It's too late. Whatever we do, we're fucked.

Thunderer Ah, I said, I call upon tribeswoman Moonlake –

Moonlake Didn't you hear me? I said we're fucked! We had our chance and we blew it – *you* blew it, with your dithering!

Hearthstone That's it, Thunderer. Let's move!

Holyorder Wait! What about the Egg?

Thunderer Yes, Holyorder, the Egg has not been forgotten. This meeting is adjourned while I retire to a secret place and consult the Sacred Egg for guidance!

Holyorder I'm coming with you.

Thunderer I'd really rather you stayed here.

Holyorder But only I know the sacred liturgy.

Slasher (*Loudly, waving his spear*) To hell with liturgy! Thunderer can't consult the Egg, because he doesn't have it. The Egg has been stolen!

Thunderer I have the Egg... in a safe place!

Slasher Thunderer's lost the Egg. He's no longer fit to be king!

Thunderer Sit down, Slasher!

Slasher Show us the Egg, Thunderer!

Thunderer No!

Slasher He can't show us the Egg, because he hasn't got it! (*Runs to one side, grabs an egg wrapped in an animal skin, returns to centre stage*) I've got the Egg!

Thunderer You're the thief! (*Addresses the audience*) You warriors, arrest him!

Slasher Too late, Thunderer, I'm the new tribal king! It's time for war against the rat-eaters! (*Addresses audience*) You warriors, prepare to march!

The skin slips off, revealing a white, real egg. Pause.

Slasher Huh?!

Holyorder It's a miracle! The Sacred Egg is ready to hatch! (*Rushes to Slasher*)

Moonlake My baby! Give me my baby! (*Rushes to Slasher*)

Hearthstone Destroy it, rat-eaters' spawn! (*Rushes to Slasher*)

Thunderer As tribal king, I claim custody of this egg! (*Rushes to Slasher*)

Slasher, Thunderer, Holyorder, Hearthstone and Moonlake scrummage for possession of the egg. Finally the egg is broken over Thunderer's head. It releases a great quantity of sticky egg-white and egg-yolk. Thunderer slumps to the ground in eggy absurdity.

Moonlake mourns the catastrophe.

Slasher leaps up onto the top of the great white rock.

Slasher Tribesmen, tribeswomen, there you see our former king in his true colours! Incompetence and bungling! As your new tribal king, I've got a vision for the future. We take firm steps to guarantee safety! We fight for our freedom! We resist the enemy and drive him off our hunting grounds! We lead an army against the rat-eaters! Destroy their village and rescue our future queen, Snowbright!

The stage darkens, and a sound of the flapping of great wings is heard. The others cower, but Slasher does not notice.

Slasher Then we march south and feast once more on stegosaurus every night! Follow me, King Slasher, for fairness, freedom and feasting!

The darkness is total for an instant, and in that instant a terrible squawk is heard from above, and a shriek from Slasher. The lights come back up. Slasher is no longer onstage, and we glimpse his feet disappearing into the sky.

Hearthstone The quetzalcoatl monster... just as I said.

Thunderer (*Brushing egg off himself*) Now who's the incompetent bungler?

Holyorder (*Examining the fragments of eggshell, sniffing at them*) This cannot be the Sacred Egg.

Rosethorn (*Helping Holyorder*) But then where can it be?

Moonlake (*Wiping away her tears*) That's right, we're faced with annihilation, so best to worry about the Egg rather than save our own skins! You can do what you like, but I'm going to wait till sundown, and try to escape through the marsh.

Hearthstone They'll be watching for us.

Moonlake Too bad. At least we'll be trying to survive.

Hearthstone Moonlake, you brought this disaster on us by your own stupidity, but in this case I agree with you. It's survival or extinction.

Blackout.

Scene 13

The Camp of the Chalky Cliff Tribe. Dusk.

On stage: Thunderer, Moonlake, Holyorder, Hearthstone, Rosethorn. Rosethorn is playing tunes skilfully on her flute (I had in mind the melody from Winter in Vivaldi's Four Seasons).

The flash of a meteor above. The characters all glance up.

Thunderer Shall we make a move, Dearest?

Moonlake You've ruined everything!

Thunderer What have *I* done? I did my best for the tribe. I tried to persuade them you were right. Not my fault it took so long... Whatever's happened, we've still got each other. *(Tries to put his arm around her)*

Moonlake Get away from me!

Thunderer retreats upstage and sulks.

Holyorder I've got an idea. Couldn't we let her *(nods in Rosethorn's direction)* play her flute and draw the rat-eaters away from us?

Moonlake Then how would Rosethorn escape?

Holyorder Just so some of us survive? Maybe she could give herself up?

Moonlake Why don't you give yourself up? You and your stupid Egg!

Holyorder Infidel whore!

Moonlake Senile old man!

Pause.

Moonlake (*To Hearthstone*) Look how bright the Waterfall Star is tonight! It looks different. It's long after sunset, and yet the whole sky is ablaze with light.

Hearthstone Too bright. The moon doesn't rise till after midnight. We should be under a dark sky, and yet it's lit up like the night of the full moon.

Moonlake They'll spot us easily.

Hearthstone If we could only get as far as the marsh without being seen...

Moonlake I believed in these people, Hearthstone, I really believed in our future together.

Thunderer (*Approaching them again*) It will happen, Moonlake. We may not have convinced anyone else, but you've convinced me. I've been thinking.

Hearthstone And what has our glorious Dinosaur sapiens been thinking?

Thunderer The tribes will one day join together. The wars will end. The pyramid will be built. Things we merely dream of will become reality.

Hearthstone You're wrong, Thunderer! I sense change in the air. And the change will not be for the better.

As in scene 11, a mouse runs across the stage. All dinosaur characters tense, some stand up in fright.

Moonlake A mouse!

Hearthstone An omen! Those vermin think they're taking over the world!

Thunderer Not while we live!

The flash of another meteor above. The characters all look up.

Moonlake It's moved!

Thunderer What?

Moonlake The Waterfall Star. It's... (*in fearful awe*) it's moving right now! You can see it moving!

More meteor flashes, increasing in frequency. The light from the comet increases. Rosethorn stops playing her flute and clings to Hearthstone. Holyorder adopts a posture of prayer.

Hearthstone It's falling to the horizon!

Thunderer It's getting brighter! It's coming towards us!

Hearthstone Now where's your vision of the future, great leader?

Moonlake What does this mean? I've never seen anything like it before.

The characters, now brightly illuminated from the front, follow the movement of the comet down to the horizon in front of them.

Thunderer It's fallen to the ground a long way south of us. Phew! Had me worried for a moment.

The light shining in their eyes dims, but then suddenly brightens to maximum intensity, and they shield their eyes from the glare.

Moonlake (*Clings to Thunderer's side*) Thunderer, what's happening? Why is it so bright? What is that glowing cloud?

Hearthstone This is greater than anything in the Song of Stormblaster.

Holyorder (*Rises from his knees*) A miracle has occurred! A new Sacred Egg has landed!

Thunderer Don't be afraid, Dearest. It can't hurt us now.

Moonlake But I am afraid. I'm very afraid!

Thunderer It's all right, Moonlake, it's over now!

Pause. Suddenly the loudest possible explosion is heard. All characters onstage are thrown to the ground by a tremendous shockwave. The roar of the explosion gradually subsides and becomes the desolate whistling of a great wind as the lighting fades to the final blackout.

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