

THE RACE

A short comedy by
Kemuel DeMolive

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

NARRATOR(S), a single individual or a chorus of performers.

BECQUEREL, a clown with weak ankles.

FRITTS, Becquerel's younger, dumber, brother; also a clown. He pulls a donkey cart.

CHEVRONEXXON, an ogre in an SUV.

ARDJUNA, a refined young man on a skateboard. Ardjuna is one of the heroes of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*. His name means "bright," "shining" or "silver." The third of the five Pandava brothers.

SETTING

Somewhere in Southeast Asia. The production can be performed entirely by puppets operated by a single performer, or it can be performed by multiple individuals. If it is being performed over video conferencing, then live performers and puppets can mix as needed for the production.

Ideally the production is in the style of an Indonesian Wayang Kulit play.

NOTES

If there is more than one Narrator, then the dialogue can be broken up and distributed as the director sees fit.

Performers of any gender can be cast. All pronouns and gendered demarcations (i.e., "brother," "young man," etc.) can be changed to suit the casting needs of the production.

The "All" portions of the script can be either sung or musically chanted. I leave it up to the needs and abilities of the individual production to decide on the sound and style of those sections.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The play was developed under Dr. Kirstin Pauka as part of a Wayang Kulit for Western Actors Project, 2006. The play was further developed by Dr. Dennis Carroll and had an invited audience production at The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa in 2006 under the direction of Ashley DeMoville.

NARRATORS.....Kemuel DeMoville & Devika Wasson
BECQUEREL.....Frank Kaash Katasse
FRITTS.....Sharon Wezelman
CHEVRONEXXON.....Jordan Savusa
ARDJUNA.....Nina Buck

DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to The Elrod Family Chevron Station. This is a place that took on a kind of mythic significance in my childhood. My grandparents, Richard and Karen Elrod, owned the service station from the mid-1970s until the early 1980s. Most of my aunts and uncles worked there. My mom, Kathy, did the books, and my dad, Bob, was a mechanic there. As a child, I remember it as a place filled with joy and laughter, and the loss of The Station was one of the great tragedies of my grandparents' lives.

PART ONE

(All of the performers' video conference windows show a kajian – or tree of life – puppet that they created especially for their window. The kajians block the actors' faces, so it looks like a forest of individualized trees.)

ALL: THE GRAY OF DAWN TURNS RED,
 THE CHIRRUPING OF BIRDS BEGINS.
 OOOOOO...
 THE SCENT OF EXHAUST
 SMOTHERS SEER'S PRAYERS
 LIKE A BLANKET OF STONE AND SMOKE.

(When the NARRATOR[S] speak, they move their individual kajians out of the way.)

NARRATOR(S): The world is smoke and ash! Clouds of pollution cover the land as if to smother the world. Crops cannot grow. Animals starve. Children lie wheezing in the gutters, their small lungs yearning for clean air. Tiny birds bump into buildings and branches, unable to see clearly through the thick layers of smog. Grown men try to flee, but they don't get too far; after a few blocks, they run out of breath and walk home. The people appeal to their seers, but their seers cannot meditate and are helpless. They turn to their kings, but their kings have no power. The world is as dark as a dust-clouded night. In the midst of nature's upheaval, there appears a funny creature, seemingly unconcerned...

(The performer portraying BECQUEREL moves their kajian. They are dressed ostentatiously and are waiting for someone impatiently.)

BECQUEREL: Where is he?! If he takes much longer, we'll be late for the start of the race! Doesn't he realize how important this race is? The King has offered to name the winner of the race as his heir and let them inherit the kingdom. I could be a prince!

Why did I ask my good-for-nothing brother Fritts to be on my race team? Why? He's probably sleeping in a ditch somewhere, the lazy turd.

(The performer portraying FRITTS moves their kajian. Fritts appears to be pulling a donkey cart. He surprises Becquerel.)

FRITTS: Excuse me, Becquerel, my soon-to-be-noble brother, but who are you talking to?

BECQUEREL: What?! Oh, it's you. You shouldn't sneak up on people like that when they're doing exposition. I could have killed you with one of my martial arts moves.

(Becquerel does a bad demonstration of martial arts moves.)

FRITTS: I didn't know you practiced martial arts.

BECQUEREL: I am a master of Noe-Kan-Du.

(Fritts waves his hands over his face, pinches his nose, etc. as if smelling something terrible.)

What's wrong?

FRITTS: That joke stunk.

(Becquerel hits Fritts.)

BECQUEREL: Hurry up. Enough of this babbling. If we don't get to the starting line soon, we'll be disqualified.

(Becquerel looks around.)

Where is the donkey?

FRITTS: What donkey?

BECQUEREL: The donkey for the cart.

FRITTS: Oh, that donkey.

BECQUEREL: Yes, that donkey. Where is he?

FRITTS: I sold him.

BECQUEREL: You did what?

FRITTS: I sold him.

BECQUEREL: What?!

FRITTS: (*Louder:*) I sold him! You should really think about getting your hearing checked.

BECQUEREL: I'm not deaf, you moron, just shocked. Why did you sell the donkey?

FRITTS: Well, you said after you won the race you'd be king, so I got to thinking and I realized that a future king would never lower himself to be shuttled around on a donkey cart. So I sold the donkey.

BECQUEREL: But who will pull the cart?

FRITTS: Can't you pull the cart?

BECQUEREL: Don't be stupid—you know I've got weak ankles.

FRITTS: I suppose I could pull the cart.

BECQUEREL: I suppose one donkey is as good as another. Quickly, let's go!

(Becquerel and Fritts move behind their respective kajians.)

PART TWO

ALL: ECHOING OVER THE COUNTRYSIDE
IS THE THUNDEROUS SOUND
OF TRUMPETS AND DRUMS,
GONGS ARE STRUCK
AS IF TO BREAK THEM
OOOOOO...
THE RACE WILL SOON BE RUN.

NARRATOR(S): And now our story moves to the starting line of the great race – the race that decides the fate of a nation. Two racers have already distinguished themselves as likely champions. One is the ogre Chevronexxon, who scars the land with his giant SUV, the other is Ardjuna on a humble skateboard.

(When the Narrator[s] say their names, CHEVRONEXXON and ARDJUNA come out from behind their respective kajians.)

CHEVRONEXXON: *(Laughing:)* Are you the greatest challenge I am to face?! Silly energy-conserving hippie, you will be dust beneath my wheels. I will run you down like a three-legged rabbit who lacks depth perception.

ARDJUNA: I am afraid it is you who are the rabbit in this scenario. You are crippled by your dependence on non-renewable fossil fuels, and you lack the foresight to invest in an alternative energy source. Your vehicle may be faster, but it is I who will win this race.

CHEVRONEXXON: Ahhh! Your insolence offends me, boy. When I am king, my first order will be to lock you in chains.

ARDJUNA: Don't count your kingdoms before they're won, my friend.

NARRATOR(S): The racers take their marks...

(Becquerel and Fritts remove their kajians.)

BECQUEREL: Wait for us!

NARRATOR(S): ...and the starting shot resounds throughout the kingdom.

(Chevronexxon and Ardjuna replace their images with new artwork that shows them racing across the countryside.)

BECQUEREL: Hurry up, you fool, or we'll lose this race for sure.

FRITTS: Can I have a drink of water first?

BECQUEREL: It will only slow you down. Ya! Ya! Giddy-up!

(Becquerel and Fritts replace their images with new artwork that shows them racing across the countryside.)

PART THREE

ALL: THE RACERS MAKE THEIR WAY
ACROSS THE COUNTRYSIDE.
SPEEDING LIKE LIGHTNING
TO THE DISTANT FINISH LINE.

(Chevronexxon removes his racing artwork.)

CHEVRONEXXON: Ha ha ha! I am miles ahead of everyone else. I'll win this race for sure. When I am king, I will cover the forests with asphalt and fill the land with Walmarts and Starbucks. Ha ha ha!

(Ardjuna removes his racing artwork.)

ARDJUNA: Don't be so confident, ogre.

CHEVRONEXXON: Ardjuna! How did you catch up to me so quickly?

ARDJUNA: One inch, repeated over time, makes a mile.

CHEVRONEXXON: What?! That doesn't explain how you caught up to me so quickly.

ARDJUNA: Through the magic of alternative energy.

CHEVRONEXXON: Enough of your hippie riddles! Soon you'll be choking on my dust.

ARDJUNA: I'm afraid it will be you who is choking, friend, on the very exhaust your vehicle creates.

(Chevronexxon and Ardjuna replace their racing images. Becquerel and Fritts remove the racing artwork. Fritts is tired and sets the cart down.)

BECQUEREL: Why are you stopping? We'll never win the race with you constantly stopping to rest.

FRITTS: Can't we trade places? Just for a little while.

BECQUEREL: I told you, I've got weak ankles...and I think one of my legs has fallen asleep. I could never pull a cart in this condition.

FRITTS: But I'm so tired.

BECQUEREL: The problem is you aren't moving fast enough. If you were moving faster, we'd be practically finished by now, then you'd be able to rest.

FRITTS: So the faster I pull the cart, the sooner I'll be able to rest?

BECQUEREL: It's the obvious solution.

FRITTS: I can't fault your logic.

BECQUEREL: Then pick up the cart and let's go!

(Fritts picks up the cart and farts from the exertion.)

Ohh! You did that on purpose!

FRITTS: It was just the cart creaking—it wasn't me.

BECQUEREL: Ohh... I can taste it in my mouth! You're disgusting.

FRITTS: Well never make it to the finish line. I'm just too tired. Can't we just go to that McDonald's over there and get something to eat?

BECQUEREL: Hmmm... I could go for some chicken nuggets. Change course, Fritts, we're going to McDonald's!

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