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Dramatic Publishing

KING CHEMO

A play for young people

by

BRIAN GUEHRING

King Chemo has been honored by
Southwest Theatre Association (SWTA)
(1997 Children's New Script Award)
and Nebraska Arts Council
(2002 Individual Artist Fellowship)



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(KING CHEMO)

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For Suzan Zeder.
Thank you for teaching me, challenging me,
and believing in me.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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King Chemo was originally produced in the spring of 1996 as a touring production of the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Texas at Austin. *King Chemo* opened at Austin Circle of Theater's Playfest '96 on March 13, 1996. The play was also performed at Brackenridge Hospital's The Park pediatric oncology outpatient clinic and at the University of Texas at Austin Lab Theatre. An excerpt of the play was also performed at a regional ASSITEJ-USA (International Children's Theater Association) conference in Dallas. The production team and cast were as follows:

Director Kati Koerner
 Dramaturg Charles Adams
 Costume Design Erin Slattery
 Original Music Allison Downey
 Education Director Amy Handler
 Stage Manager Cheryl Green
 Producer Suzan L. Zeder

Kevin Guilford Adams
 Melissa Amy Handler
 Doctor Pamela Ribon
 Nurse Jeff Long

King Chemo was subsequently produced by the Impromptu Players at Macon College in Macon, Georgia, as the playwright's thesis production for his MFA in Children's Theater/ Creative Drama from University of Texas at Austin. The production opened on April 24, 1997, on their main-stage and then subsequently toured the community with the following production team and cast:

Director Sydney Chalfa
 Set and Light Design Michael Evans Miller
 Costume Design Shelley Kuhen

Stage Manager Shanda Bizzle
 Dramaturg Suzan L. Zeder
 Outreach Michael Evans Miller

Kevin Jason Courson
 Melissa Amy Ferrell
 Doctor Rose Hunt Person
 Nurse Michael Stewart

King Chemo was then produced by the Teens N Theater program at the Omaha Theater Company for Young People at the Rose Blumkin Performing Arts Center in Omaha, Nebraska. This production and surrounding outreach was the high school interns' project in partnership with the Children's Hospital and the Nebraska Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. The project was awarded a grant from the Nebraska Arts Council. The production opened on September 6, 2003, in the Hitchcock Theater and then toured to a local elementary school and to Villisca, Iowa, with the following production team and cast:

Director Kevin Ehrhart
 Producer Brian Guehring
 Light Design Andrew Vance
 Marketing Fran Sillau
 Dramaturg Michael Evans Miller
 Outreach Jill Dibbern Manhart
 Sound Design Kevin Ehrhart

Kevin Joshua Mitchell
 Melissa Shannon Kyler
 Doctor Emily McTate
 Intern Emily Greenberg
 Nurse Erin O'Keefe
 Floor Nurse Darrell Hobbs

KING CHEMO

A play in one act
For 2m., 2w. or 1m., 3w.

CHARACTERS:

KEVIN a 10-year-old boy undergoing chemotherapy
MELISSA . . . a 10-year-old girl undergoing chemotherapy
DOCTOR female hemotologist/oncologist
 also plays: ICE QUEEN, DR. STRANGEGLOVE,
 ZYBOX, COUNTESS, AGENT 5
NURSE male R.N.
 also plays: PUPPET MAN, IGOR, QWICKBERT,
 NOSFERATU, AGENT X

CASTING NOTES AND EXPANSION:

The first two productions were played with 2 males and 2 females. The Nurse could be a female if needed. The Nurse and Doctor parts can also be split into 4 roles. The third production had a Doctor, Intern, Floor Nurse and Nurse.

SETTING:

MONDAY:

- Scene 1 - the torture chamber of the Ice Queen
- Scene 2 - Melissa's hospital room
- Scene 3 - the evil laboratory of Dr. StrangeGlove

TUESDAY:

Scene 4 - Melissa's hospital room

Scene 5 - the bizarre atmosphere of planet Wuwomp

Scene 6 - Kevin's hospital room

WEDNESDAY:

Scene 7 - Melissa's hospital room

Scene 8 - the creepy vampire lair of the Countess

THURSDAY:

Scene 9 - Kevin's hospital room

Scene 10 - the high-tech secret agent command center

NEXT FRIDAY:

Scene 11 - Kevin's hospital room

The hospital settings are antiseptic, metallic and shiny with harsh, white lighting. The fantasy settings are colorful, darker, and imaginative.

Transitions between scenes during the same day should be as quick as possible.

Set notes: Despite the fanciful set descriptions, this play can be produced very simply. The original production used one bed, two IVs, three rolling screens, props, great costumes and lots of audience imagination to create all the locations for the show. The second production had a beautiful, elaborate set that was able to transform and create all the fantastic locations from Kevin's imagination.

KING CHEMO

MONDAY — SCENE 1

(Superhero music fades up as lights reveal an icy prison-like torture chamber [remarkably also slightly resembling a hospital room]. A shiny, icy substance covers all furniture. KEVIN is trapped in the room.)

KEVIN *(in a recorded voice-over)*. Welcome back to “THE ADVENTURES OF INVINCIBLE BOY, Defender of Youth.” When we last left our hero [a normal boy in appearance, but born of superhuman strength, agility, and intelligence], he had just been captured by his evil arch enemy, the Ice Queen

(The ICE QUEEN enters wearing an ice-blue villainess costume [slightly resembling pastel-blue hospital scrubs].)

[the famous rising figure skating star who tragically crashed through thin ice transforming her into a villainess with an ice heart] and her devoted lackey, Puppet Man

(PUPPET MAN enters wearing a marionette outfit [also remarkably resembling hospital scrubs].)

[the famous championship rock climber who was caught in a treacherous avalanche changing him into a brainless, spineless sidekick].

KEVIN (*live*). So, we meet again, Ice Queen.

ICE QUEEN. Yes, Invincible Boy, and this time there is no escape.

KEVIN. Don't be so sure.

ICE QUEEN. Puppet Man, get our prisoner a glass of ice water.

PUPPET MAN. Yes, Your Iciness. (*PUPPET MAN goes to get a glass of water.*)

ICE QUEEN. I want you to feel welcome in my ice castle. Is it cold enough for you?

KEVIN. You can't freeze me, Ice Witch.

ICE QUEEN. We'll lower the temperature more and see, won't we?

KEVIN. You'll never keep me here, you Frozen Freak-azoid.

(PUPPET MAN returns with water and ICE QUEEN trips him sending the water into KEVIN's face.)

ICE QUEEN. Did that sting? Your pathetic powers are no match for me.

KEVIN. I'll enjoy seeing you sweat in a hot jail cell.

ICE QUEEN. You should really give up that heroism thing. It's so passé. You should join our side.

KEVIN. Join you? To do what?

ICE QUEEN. To eliminate fun, imagination, and everything that brings happiness. To create a world where pain, seriousness, and logic dominate the world. To establish a planet where only the Ice Queen will rule.

KEVIN. How do you plan to accomplish this?

ICE QUEEN. By stealing toys, freezing amusement parks, and making boring television. If all else fails, we'll kill all the happy people. (*PUPPET MAN laughs evilly.*) Why are you laughing in my presence?

PUPPET MAN. My Queen, it was an evil laugh, not a happy laugh.

ICE QUEEN. I don't care. (*ICE QUEEN pulls PUPPET MAN's string so PUPPET MAN slaps himself.*)

PUPPET MAN. Sorry.

ICE QUEEN. I could use you, Invincible Boy. Your super-human strength, agility, and intelligence would help us. What do you say, partners?

KEVIN. Never.

ICE QUEEN. Maybe we can change your mind. Puppet Man, give him "the pill."

PUPPET MAN (*brings out a pill*). This will help you cool off.

KEVIN. I won't take it.

ICE QUEEN. I think you will. (*ICE QUEEN opens a drawer and dry ice smoke falls out as she selects a torture device [resembling a stethoscope]. ICE QUEEN places the torture device on KEVIN's back.*)

KEVIN. AAAAHHHHH! (*PUPPET MAN drops pill in the shivering KEVIN's open mouth.*)

ICE QUEEN. So sorry, was that cold for you?

PUPPET MAN. This should answer any more questions you have about the plan of attack. (*PUPPET MAN hands him a pamphlet.*)

KEVIN (*reading*). "Cold-bloodedness and You: How an Emotionless Existence Increases Longevity." I'll never join you.

ICE QUEEN. Then we have no choice but to kill you.

KEVIN. You can't.

ICE QUEEN. Do you think you are strong enough to resist?

KEVIN. I train three times a day, eat lots of superheroes power snacks, and spend five hours each day on video fight simulation.

PUPPET MAN (*to ICE QUEEN*). He trains more than you do.

KEVIN. Would you like to be tortured or just put to death quickly?

ICE QUEEN. Neither. Puppet Man, begin the ice treatment.

PUPPET MAN. As you wish, Your Coldness.

KEVIN. You can never defeat me. I am Invincible Boy, Defender of Youth!

ICE QUEEN. You won't be for much longer. (*PUPPET MAN attaches a torture device [somewhat resembling an IV] on KEVIN's arm. KEVIN braces himself for the pain.*) This treatment will slowly replace your blood cells with ice crystals. Later we'll replace your bones with icicles and your spinal fluid with ice water. You have four days to either join our side or permanently become Icicle Boy.

KEVIN. I'm strong enough to resist you.

ICE QUEEN. We'll see. For now, sit back and chill, Invincible Boy. We'll be back soon to start with your bones and spinal fluid.

PUPPET MAN. Ready for your next prisoner? The new girl? (*PUPPET MAN hands ICE QUEEN a folder.*)

ICE QUEEN. Yes, the potential Polar Princess. Very logical and serious already. Let's go. (*ICE QUEEN and PUPPET MAN begin to leave as KEVIN begins to take*

out IV.) Oh, and Invincible Boy, I know what you are thinking, and I suggest that you don't take it out. Your body will go into immediate withdrawal, and you'll die now instead of Friday. Think about my offer, Invincible Boy. (ICE QUEEN and PUPPET MAN leave. KEVIN stands with his icy IV.)

KEVIN. Four days to escape this fiendish imprisonment and to save that poor girl. First I must avoid my ice surgery, then I must find the girl. The adventures of Invincible Boy, Defender of Youth have begun again! *(KEVIN exits with IV to dramatic fanfare.)*

MONDAY — SCENE 2

(The fantasy music fades into a sound collage of a hospital. Lights reveal a small room very similar to the set of the last scene, but now clearly a hospital room. [Note: the blocking during the first part of this scene parallels the blocking of the previous scene.] MELISSA is sitting in her room as NURSE and DOCTOR enter.)

MELISSA. Good morning.

DOCTOR. Good morning, Melissa. How are you doing today?

MELISSA. Pretty good.

NURSE. Melissa, would you like a glass of ice water?

MELISSA. Yes, please. *(NURSE goes to get a glass of water.)*

DOCTOR. Make sure you don't trip this time.

NURSE. I'll be extra careful not to spill it again.

DOCTOR. Melissa, we want you to be as comfortable as possible here. Is the room temperature OK?

MELISSA. It's fine.

DOCTOR. Good.

(NURSE hands MELISSA drink.)

MELISSA. Thank you.

DOCTOR. We are about to start the treatment, but remember I can't do this alone. I need your help.

MELISSA & DOCTOR. Partners.

NURSE. This is to help you so you won't get nauseated.
(Handing MELISSA a pill.)

MELISSA. Zofran? *(NURSE nods and MELISSA swallows pill.)*

DOCTOR. Now I'm just going to check your breathing. I'm sorry but this might be cold. *(DOCTOR uses stethoscope to check MELISSA's breathing.)*

NURSE. We brought you another pamphlet. *(NURSE hands MELISSA a pamphlet.)*

MELISSA. "Chemotherapy and You: How a Nutritious Diet Aids Treatment." Thanks. *(MELISSA adds new pamphlets to her hoard of information.)*

DOCTOR. Do you have any questions about the pamphlets we gave you last time?

MELISSA. I don't think so. I knew most of the information already. The one on clinical trials was pretty interesting, but the general one about cancer was so simple. I think it would be more appropriate for a younger age group.

DOCTOR. I'll make a note of that.

MELISSA. So what's going to happen today?

DOCTOR. Let's look and see what tests you're scheduled for...

MELISSA. Oh, I'm scheduled for a bone marrow test and a spinal tap to make sure the cancer cells haven't come back. I just wanted to know when the tests are.

NURSE. You're scheduled for 2:00 this afternoon. We're going to begin your IV now so we can start your chemotherapy soon. (*NURSE begins hooking up her IV to her infusaport.*)

DOCTOR. Have you been eating well?

MELISSA. Yes, ma'am. Three balanced meals each day, no salty or fatty foods, lots of fluids, and only healthy snacks.

NURSE (*to DOCTOR*). She eats better than you do.

MELISSA. Would you like a rice cake or some soybeans?

DOCTOR. No thank you. Is there anything you need? (*MELISSA shakes her head. DOCTOR and NURSE begin to leave.*) We'll be back shortly to begin the treatment.

MELISSA. Should I buzz the call button to remind you?

DOCTOR. Only if we aren't here by 2:05.

NURSE. I'll get Kevin so we can start his tests.

(NURSE and DOCTOR exit. MELISSA starts to read pamphlet. KEVIN sneaks into the room and sees MELISSA.)

KEVIN. Hey! Don't read that!

MELISSA. What are you doing in my room?

(KEVIN rushes and takes the pamphlet away from her and starts jumping up and down on the pamphlet.)

KEVIN. Don't believe a word in this.

MELISSA. What are you doing?

KEVIN. I'm destroying the evil propaganda from the Ice Queen. She gives it to everyone. (*KEVIN shows MELISSA his pamphlet.*)

MELISSA. What are you talking about?

KEVIN. I'm saving you from the evil villainess who wants to destroy us! (*KEVIN rips up the pamphlets.*)

MELISSA. You're ripping up pamphlets on nutrition.

KEVIN. You can thank me later. (*KEVIN throws pamphlets in trash.*)

MELISSA. Who are you?

KEVIN. Who am I? Who are you?

MELISSA. No, who are you?

KEVIN. Who are you?

MELISSA. I asked first.

KEVIN. I asked second.

NURSE (*off-stage*). Kevin!

KEVIN. Shhhh!

(KEVIN grabs MELISSA and both hide behind partition. NURSE enters and looks around. NURSE can't find KEVIN or MELISSA.)

NURSE. Kevin? Melissa? (*NURSE exits. KEVIN and MELISSA come out from behind the partition.*)

MELISSA. What are you doing in my room, Kevin?

KEVIN. Playing a game with the nurse, Melissa. Don't worry he thinks it's lots of fun. So what brings you here?

MELISSA. Considering this is the cancer floor of a hospital, it's probably a safe bet I have cancer.

KEVIN. Sassy. I like that. When were you diagnosed?

MELISSA. That's none of your business.

KEVIN. You must be a rookie. You see, I've been doing this for over a year now. I'm the king of chemotherapy. If you have any questions, just ask me. I've helped a lot of young kids get through chemotherapy.

MELISSA. How do you help?

KEVIN. I fill them in on what's really going on. For instance... (*KEVIN goes to the hall to check for signs of the DOCTOR.*) You have to watch out for the "doctor."

MELISSA. Why? She's been very nice to me.

KEVIN. Acting nice to you, but in reality she is pure...

(*NURSE opens door and KEVIN and IV dive behind curtain.*)

NURSE. I'm sorry to disturb you, Melissa, but you haven't seen Kevin, have you?

MELISSA. Who?

NURSE. I guess not. If you had met Kevin, you'd remember. I'm sure you'll meet him soon. He's another leukemia patient. Thanks anyway. (*NURSE exits.*)

KEVIN. Hey, thanks. You're all right.

MELISSA. What is the doctor really?

KEVIN. Pure Evil. She won't be able to hide it for much longer if you watch closely.

MELISSA. Kevin, not all doctors are mean.

KEVIN. Not all doctors. Just her.

MELISSA. Why would she be mean to me?

KEVIN. Because you're a leukemia patient.

MELISSA. She's mean to all leukemia patients?

KEVIN. Yes. You see, only the really special kids get leukemia. The few, the proud, the leukemia kids. It's actually a great honor to be chosen for chemo.

MELISSA. Chemotherapy is an honor?

KEVIN. No. Chemo is terrible. The honor is being chosen. It means you were too strong to be broken through the usual means.

MELISSA. Who wants to break us?

KEVIN. The Powers That Be. (*KEVIN pulls out his charts and maps.*) See, there is someone out there trying to control us Earth children. Obviously the entire hospital staff is in on the plan. I'm not sure who's behind it yet, but I think it's the "doctor."

MELISSA. And why do they want to control us?

KEVIN. Not sure. Probably for world domination.

MELISSA. Why are you telling me?

KEVIN. My mission is to discover who they really are and save the world's children from their evil plots.

MELISSA. Oh. (*Going back to her journal.*)

KEVIN. What are you doing? Don't bother doing any homework. Just tell your teachers you were too tired to finish. They won't say anything.

MELISSA. It's my health journal, not homework.

KEVIN. Good, because school is the number one way the Powers that Be try and control kids.

MELISSA. How do they use school?

KEVIN. To brainwash us.

MELISSA. And how do you fight this?

KEVIN. I think for myself. That really frustrates my teacher.

MELISSA. I believe it.