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Dramatic Publishing



NigHt of tHe pterodActyls

by
JULIAN WILES



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JULIAN WILES

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(NIGHT OF THE PTERODACTYLS)

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NIGHT OF THE PTERODACTYLS

A Full-Length Play
For Five Males, Five Females and Extras*

CHARACTERS

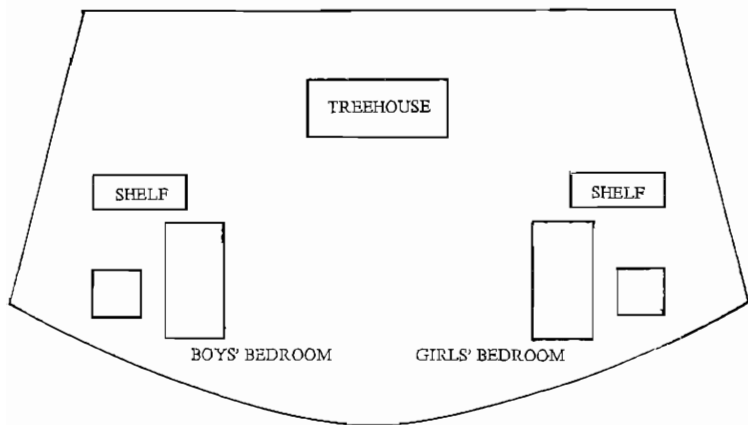
CAROL ANNISTON recently separated, insecure, about 40
WHIT Carol's self-assured, 12-year-old son
DREW Whit's shy but nice teen-age brother
BARB LAMBERT. divorced, self-centered, late 30's
CARLY Barb's daughter, unkempt, intelligent, about 12
KRISTA Carly's pretty, boy-crazy teen-age sister
ERIC Whit's friend, intelligent, a leader
SAM Whit's friend, a follower, not too bright
MISS WEBSTER the Lambert's elderly neighbor
TV REPORTER typical news reporter

*NATIONAL GUARDSMEN, TV SOUND MAN,
WORKMEN, SIGHTSEERS

TIME: Sometime next summer.

PLACE: Small town near the South Carolina coast.

Stage Chart



NighT of tHe pterodActyls - Wiles

AUTHOR'S AND PRODUCTION NOTES

The first production of *NiGht of tHe pterodActyls* took place in Charleston, South Carolina as a part of the Piccolo Spoleto Festival in May of 1987. Some notes on that production may be helpful to those who are interested in producing this work. (Why does the play's title use upper and lowercase letters? I simply like the look of that spelling.)

THE CHARACTERS: CAROL--Trying to raise two boys. She is convinced that if she only lost a few pounds everything in her life would work out okay. DREW--Carol's oldest son, not yet sure of himself. WHIT--Completely sure of himself until Carly moves in. BARB--Married three times, most recently to a National Park Service guide she met at a gas station in Dinosaur, Colorado. More interested in herself than her daughters. KRISTA--Barb's oldest daughter. Though not as jaded, she's quickly learning her mother's ways with men. CARLY--Homely, bright. Not really as ugly as she thinks she is, but makes no effort to improve her appearance. She has never had anyone in her life she could really trust. When she puts her trust in Whit and thinks she is betrayed, she is devastated. ERIC--Plays the piano (electronic keyboard). SAM--A follower, not too bright. MISS WEBSTER--Cantankerous. Shouldn't be a stock character. Her rage over what Carly does to her rose garden is because those roses are like her children.

THE MOOD: While this play has its serious side, it should not in any way be preachy or heavy-handed. We received good audience response and reviews when the show opened, but only after playing it "lighter" later in the run, did the show really win its audience over. There are many important issues such as peer pressure, the nature of beauty, honesty in relationships, that are explored but they should not be obvious. The play is about people, not ideas.

THE LOOK: The play is set "sometime next summer" and should be very contemporary. Kids fashions, slang, music, etc. should be updated based on "what's in" at the time of each production. We often asked the kids in the show to help us with this and they rallied to this idea and provided some great moments.

SPECIAL EFFECTS: Several special effects added greatly to the effectiveness of this production. They are actually quite simple to create. The first involved the use of four TV monitors placed on either side of the proscenium. For the "Live Remote Broadcasts" we tied a VCR camera into these so that the onstage TV reporter was also seen on the TV screens L and R. Also for scene changes we used these TVs to show things like an excerpt from a Godzilla movie, a McDonald's commercial before the McDonald's restaurant scene, etc. To control the volume, we used the external speaker jack on the VCR and fed it into the house sound system. (Most VCRs have such a jack.) For one of the TV reports we had a reporter from a local TV station tape a segment which was shown. This was very successful and it would be great if such a local TV personality could be persuaded to appear in the show for all the TV reporter segments.

WARNING: Although I suggest the use of TV commercial clips, movie clips, etc., for insertion between scenes, this is only to give you some idea of what I have in mind. Copyright laws on all these materials must be observed with proper permission from copyright holders sought before they are incorporated into an actual production. An alternative might be to create your own TV commercials, movie previews, etc.

THE PTERODACTYL: At the end of the show, a pterodactyl must fly from the stage out over the audience. We thought this would be very difficult but it actually was very simple. The pterodactyl was made of the lightest materials possible. We used muslin and PVC pipe. It didn't have to be very detailed because it was seen in shadows and only briefly. On each wing we placed two screw eyes through which the guidelines ran. These were

made of 100 pound test clear fishing lines from the proscenium to the balcony. A third line, actually a black rope, was tied to the pterodactyl's tail. This black rope was used to pull it upstage, hiding it behind the proscenium. When the pterodactyl flew, the black rope was released, and gravity pulled it down and out over the audience. In our theatre it would only reach about halfway to the back of the theatre. To overcome this problem, we had the lights fade just as the pterodactyl began to fly. when it began to slow down, the lights were out and in the darkness we quickly pulled the pterodactyl back to its hiding place behind the proscenium arch. In the audience's imagination, however, the bird continued to fly and when the lights came up in the next scene, many audience members turned to look up in the balcony to see if the bird was up there

THE SET: A tree house UC. The boys' bedroom was represented by shelves DR, the girls' bedroom with shelves DL. On these were appropriate props, airplane things for Whit, dinosaur things for Carly. Beds and a desk were made of boxes which were rearranged DC for the kitchen and McDonald's scenes. Upstage, panels of chain link fence were hung which gave the set a contemporary, somewhat mysterious and abstract look. For the excavation scenes, a tarp (actually a plain muslin drop) was hung and lights upstage behind the chain link fence were used to create silhouettes on it. For the excavation of the eggs, the shadow of a crane was made with pieces of wood on which was attached a pulley and rope with a hook at the end. The silhouetted construction workers wore hard hats. We kept lights dim and had some searchlights actually shining directly at the audience. The effect was remarkably realistic.

ACT ONE

"Live From the Excavation Site"

SCENE: *Stage lights rise to reveal a construction site. It is night. Searchlights are blazing from upstage, almost blinding the audience. The roar of heavy construction machinery is heard, drowning out all other sound. A tarp has been stretched upstage. Workmen are scurrying around behind it. We see them silhouetted against the tarp along with the shadows of large construction equipment, perhaps a backhoe, a crane, ropes, etc. The site is filled with construction workers, and by curious sightseers who are held back by National Guardsmen. Something is obviously being excavated but because of the din of the machinery, the dust and the blazing lights, we cannot make out just what is going on. After a moment, more blinding lights, this time from a television crew, appear in the back of the theatre. They follow a harried TV REPORTER as he makes his way to the stage. He is intercepted by GUARDS who indicate he can't get any closer. His SOUND MAN taps the TV REPORTER on the shoulder, points to his watch to indicate that air time is approaching. A moment later, the TV REPORTER leans over, holds his ear piece, quickly brushes his hair, and then lights fade somewhat onstage as the bank of TV sets, located DR and L next to the proscenium, come on. On them we see the image of the TV REPORTER. (The cameraman's camera is actually a portable VCR camera that is tied into the banks of TV monitors.) As the TV REPORTER talks, SAM, ERIC and other KIDS arrange themselves behind him, trying to make sure that they will appear on the evening news.*

TV REPORTER. Carly Lambert, the little girl who discovered this prehistoric nest has refused to meet with reporters or appear here tonight. Her mom told us that her statement yesterday to Live Five News reporter Michael Finley was all that she had to say about the matter. With me here tonight, however, is one of her friends, Sam Hannover. Sam, I understand that Carly's something of a character around this neighborhood since she moved in.

SAM. Yeah, she moved in about a month or so ago... from Dinosaur, Colorado. I guess that's why she's into dinosaurs. We all thought she was a nerd except--

TV REPORTER. Can you tell us a little about her digging?

SAM. Yeah, we all knew about her digging, she's been digging for fossils all around the neighborhood, but who would have thought that digging up Miss Webster's rose garden would lead to something like this?

TV REPORTER. I see, well, tell us... (*Lights start to fade.*)

ERIC (*grabs the microphone and takes the spotlight*). We found out she was moving in the night we were watching "Godzilla Crosses the Pacific."

SAM. No, it was "Godzilla vs. Megatron."

ERIC. Yeah, remember the part where Godzilla was-- (*Lights fade and on the TV monitors L and R we see a videotape of a Godzilla movie. As it plays the tarp flies out or is taken down and the scene shifts.*)

SCENE TWO

"This House Has Been Sold"

SCENE: Carly's bedroom, the night before she moves in. We discover a group of BOYS who are illuminated by the glare of the small screen of a portable TV set. As lights rise we see they have turned the bedroom of this vacant house, which is next door to Drew's and Whit's house, into a hideout for their club, The

G.A.'s (The Gross Associates). There are posters of outrageously dressed rock singers on the walls and the room is littered with candy wrappers and other junk food cast-offs. The BOYS sit around the TV on the floor because there is no furniture in this room. Tonight they have gathered to watch the Godzilla movie.

ERIC (*looking out the window*). Okay, he's gone. (*He races back to SAM, who has opened his backpack to bring out all sorts of gross foods. They're playing a trick on WHIT who has gone home to pick up some more cokes.*)

ERIC. Catsup.

SAM. Catsup. (*He pours it into a box of popcorn.*)

ERIC. Honey.

SAM. Honey. (*He pours honey in.*)

ERIC. Raw egg.

SAM. Raw egg. (*As he cracks an egg in the box, they hear a noise.*) Hurry up, here he comes. (*They hide the catsup bottle, etc., set the popcorn bag in front of the TV. Innocently they watch the movie on the TV.*)

(WHIT climbs in the window with backpack on.)

WHIT. Got the drinks.

ERIC. Shhh... Now watch this part, Godzilla grabs for the kid's dog... the kid cries.

MOVIE. Toby, oh, poor Toby.

BOYS (*imitating*). Toby, oh, poor Toby.

ERIC. Then old Toby wriggles loose and falls right splat on the power lines and is fried. (*We hear a dog howl and then electrical sounds.*)

BOYS (*ad lib reacting in mock horror*). Oh, gross, yuk, french fried dachshund. (*WHIT takes off his backpack and tosses out diet cokes.*)

WHIT. I couldn't find anything but diet coke.

ERIC. Yuk.

WHIT. I'm sorry, Mom's on Weight Watcher's again.

SAM. It's okay.

ERIC. Shhh... Want some popcorn?

WHIT. Great, I'm starving. *(He plunges his hand into the popcorn bag and suddenly realizes his hand is in muck.)* Gross! *(SAM and ERIC explode in laughter. WHIT threatens to fling the muck at them, they retreat in mock horror. WHIT picks up Sam's T-shirt and cleans his arm.)*

SAM. Hey, that's my shirt.

WHIT. I'll give it back. *(He throws the shirt, all covered with cat-sup, etc., at SAM.)*

ERIC. The look on your face...

WHIT. Go ahead and laugh. I wouldn't want to spoil your last night here.

ERIC. Last night?

WHIT *(stalling by taking a swallow of Coke)*. This house has been sold.

ERIC. But the sign's still up.

SAM. How do you know?

WHIT. Sally Morris' mom told my mom, her agency sold it.

SAM. When?

WHIT. Saturday.

ERIC. So who's moving in?

WHIT. Family from Colorado.

SAM *(dejectedly)*. Bronco fans?

WHIT. I doubt it, they're both girls.

SAM. Great, our hideout'll be turned into a girl's bedroom.

ERIC. Pink curtains.

SAM. Cuddly stuffed animals on a white and brass bed.

ERIC. A ruffle and lace bedspread.

WHIT. And Rob Lowe smiling down from where Twisted Sister used to be.

ALL THREE *(falling back on their sleeping bags)*. Ugh. *(Black-out. Between scenes, a shampoo TV commercial is seen on the TV monitors.)*

SCENE THREE

"They're Probably Nerds..."

SCENE: *Drew's and Whit's room. In the darkness we hear the whine of a blow dryer. After a beat, lights rise and we see DREW, Whit's older brother. He is dressed in a towel, just having taken a shower and he's drying his hair. After another beat, WHIT enters. He is wearing a Walkman and carrying the remote control unit of a model airplane.*

DREW. Where you been, shrimp?

WHIT (*can't hear*). What?

DREW (*pulls headphones off Whit's ears*). Where you been, shrimp? (*WHIT grabs hair dryer, points it at Drew's face. They tussle and WHIT turns it off. DREW picks up a brush and continues to brush his hair. Louder.*) I said, "Where have you been, shrimp?"

WHIT. Tokyo.

DREW. Right. (*Sees Whit's shirt with "The G.A.'s" written on it.*)

What are The G.A.'s? Another of your secret societies?

WHIT. Maybe.

DREW. How do you get in? I might want to join.

WHIT. It's a secret.

DREW (*playfully grabs WHIT and holds him down.*) It was a secret, shrimp, how do you get in?

WHIT. You're hurting me.

DREW. How do you get in?

WHIT. Ow. You have to gross the members out.

DREW (*letting WHIT go*). What did you do? Show up?

WHIT. I brought in a jar of squished frogs.

DREW. What did your buddies do?

WHIT. Sam locked us in his attic. (*DREW gives him a puzzled look.*) It's full of bats.

DREW. And Eric?

WHIT. Eric beat us all. He brought in a maggot-covered dead cat. *(He sits at his desk and puts new batteries in the remote control unit for his model airplane.)*

DREW. High-class group you hang out with. You still got a hideout next door?

WHIT. What if we have?

DREW. Nothing, but I heard they sold it today.

WHIT. I heard that, too.

DREW. Did you hear that there are two girls moving in, one about your age and--

WHIT. One about yours. They'll probably be nerds. *(Finishing the battery replacement he starts to play a video game on his computer.)*

DREW. At least they're girls.

WHIT. I guess it could be worse, they could be hunchbacks or dwarfs.

DREW. Maybe they are. Move, I've got to work on my term paper. *(He pushes WHIT aside and takes over the computer but continues the video game.)*

WHIT. All right, all right, I've got a book report to do anyway. *(Crosses to put the remote control unit on his shelf. On the way he tests it, lowering and raising the flaps on his model airplane which is on the top shelf of his shelves. Seeing that it works okay, he puts the remote unit down and gets a book to read. Crossing back to his bed.)* You know, if they're dwarfs and hunchbacks and girls, I'm moving.

DREW. When are you going to grow up, Whit? Girls are what it's all about.

WHIT. Yeah. *(Sits up on bed. Pause. In the pause all we hear are the sounds of the video game. WHIT picks up the game box. He reads:)* "Commando Raid III." Sounds like you're making great progress on your term paper. *(Whit's question break's Drew's train of thought and he misses a shot. The computer plays a losing tune. DREW stands.)*

DREW. Ah, you know you're one to talk. How's your book report coming? *(Crosses to the bed.)*

WHIT *(hiding his magazine)*. Fine.

DREW. Yeah? Whatcha reading?

WHIT. Nothing.

DREW. Yeah? Let me see. *(DREW and WHIT have a tussle over the magazine. As they do, the room is turned upside down, dirty clothes thrown around, etc.)*

DREW and WHIT *(ad libbing)*. Don't! Leave me alone! Let me see! *(Finally DREW grabs the magazine.)*

DREW. Oh, now this is great literature. *Garbage Pail Kid* magazine.

(CAROL appears at the door.)

CAROL. This room looks like a page out of *Garbage Pail* magazine.

WHIT. Mom...

CAROL. Straighten it up and get to bed.

WHIT. Ah, Mom.

CAROL. Don't "ah, Mom" me. You promised to help Miss Webster transplant her roses in the morning and I don't want to have to drag you out of bed.

WHIT. That's after lunch.

DREW. Let us sleep late, Mom, we've only got a week of summer left.

CAROL. Sorry, Drew, you've got to get up early too. I need to take the car in first thing. You don't want it to break down with you at the "Back to School" dance next week, do you?

DREW. Might not be a bad idea... if I ever find a date.

CAROL. I bet Katie doesn't have a date yet.

DREW. Katie and I are finished, Mom.

CAROL. I'm sorry. I liked Katie.

DREW. Then maybe you should invite her to the dance.

CAROL. I'll wake you up early in the morning.

DREW. Ah, Mom, can't we take the car later? I want to be here when the new neighbors arrive. I want to be neighborly.

CAROL. Neighborly? You? *(Then, understanding.)* Don't worry, Whit'll tell you what they look like.

DREW. He thinks they're going to be dwarfs and hunchbacks or something.

CAROL. *Good night, boys. (She turns out the light.)*

DREW. Jesus, Mom, this isn't summer camp.

CAROL *(turns lights back on, surveys the mess)*. Well, it sure looks like one. Now get to bed.

DREW. Yes, Ma'am. *(As lights go out he throws a pillow at WHIT. Blackout. Between scenes a clip from a war movie is shown on the TV monitors. The noise from the movie sequesters into the next scene.)*

SCENE FOUR

"Any Action?"

SCENE: *The tree house. In the darkness we hear the buzz of military radios which turn out to be the BOYS playing with walkie-talkies. At rise of lights we discover SAM in the tree house, looking through binoculars. He is dressed in combat fatigues. WHIT, similarly dressed, enters. They are playing army.*

WHIT. Any action? *(Lies down beside SAM, takes out his own binoculars.)*

SAM. The C-5A's deployed their gear. They seem to be well supplied, must be a M*A*S*H unit. So far all I've seen are three females, must be nurses.

WHIT. Roger. Where's Sgt. Matthews, private?

SAM. Hasn't checked in, sir, shall I give him a call? *(He hands WHIT a walkie-talkie.)*

WHIT. Affirmative.

SAM. Ranger one zero niner, this is Lt. Forrest, do you copy? *(After a moment he repeats the call.)* Ranger one zero niner, this is Lt. Forrest, do you copy? *(ERIC answers, via walkie-talkie. He is in the back or in an aisle of the theatre.)*

ERIC. Roger, ranger one zero niner, this is vector charlie 645.

Sgt. Matthews speaking. I read you.

WHIT. Someone's coming out of the house, get down.

SAM (*whispering*). Stand by, vector charlie, we've got bogies at 12 o'clock.

WHIT. Take a look at this.

(CARLY, with a shovel, approaches the moving boxes which are stacked up near the proscenium DL.)

SAM. Get a load of those clothes.

WHIT. She's got to be the ugliest girl I've ever seen.

SAM. Are you sure it's a girl?

ERIC (*via walkie-talkie*). Ranger one zero niner, this is vector charlie 645, do you read?

SAM. We read, over.

ERIC. Do you desire air support?

SAM. Negative, vector charlie, repeat, negative, not at this time.

WHIT. Tell him to get over here.

SAM. Sgt. Matthews, Lt. Anniston requests that you join us.

ERIC. Vector charlie, tell Lt. Anniston he was Corporal Anniston yesterday, and tell him I can't come right now.

WHIT. Ask him why.

SAM. Why can't you come, Eric? I mean Lt. Anniston requests a report on your status.

ERIC. Tell Lt. Anniston that Sgt. Matthews has been ordered by Lt. Col. Matthews to cut the grass first.

SAM. Roger, Sgt. Matthews.

WHIT. Tell him we'll rendezvous at the checkpoint Baker at 0100 hours.

SAM. Can you make a rendezvous at 0100 hours?

ERIC. Affirmative.

SAM. Then meet us here at checkpoint Baker.

ERIC. The tree house? (*CARLY crosses onto the floor in front on the stage. This gives the illusion that's she's climbed in a hole. A trap could be used if available. She digs, throwing dirt up onto the front of the stage.*)

SAM. Affirmative. What's she doing?

WHIT. Digging.

SAM. Digging? What's she looking for?

WHIT. Maybe she's burying something.

SAM. Maybe she's an alien that's assumed human form, and she drinks human blood and she's burying the bodies of her victims.

WHIT. If she is, we'll have to save the world from humanity.

Come on. *(Climbs onto the tree house ladder.)*

SAM. Where you going?

WHIT. I'm going on a reconnaissance mission, you coming?

(Climbs down.)

SAM. I'll cover you.

WHIT. What are you doing?

CARLY. Digging.

WHIT. I can see that, any particular reason?

CARLY. I'm looking for evidence of a pre-cambrian strata.

WHIT. Well, why didn't you say so.

CARLY. I did.

WHIT. My name's Whit. I live next door. *(She throws dirt.)* Do you have a name?

CARLY. Carly... Lambert. *(Throws more dirt.)*

WHIT. Are you this nasty to everyone or just to strangers?

CARLY. You're not a stranger, you just introduced yourself.

WHIT. So what have you found?

CARLY. Not much, this place is a geological desert.

WHIT. What's this?

CARLY. Just a bunch of petrified shark's teeth.

WHIT. Really?

CARLY. They're no big deal. They're very common.

(KRISTA, as beautiful as CARLY is plain, enters.)

KRISTA. Carly, Mom's going to kill you when she sees that hole.

CARLY. So?

KRISTA. So why do you have to antagonize her?