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Dramatic Publishing

From the book by
Josh Hanagarne

THE WORLD'S STRONGEST LIBRARIAN

Drama/Comedy

Adapted by
Jeff Gottesfeld
and **Elizabeth Wong**



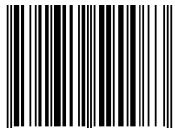


THE WORLD'S STRONGEST LIBRARIAN

Drama/Comedy. Adapted by Jeff Gottesfeld and Elizabeth Wong. From the book by Josh Hanagarne. Cast: 1w., 5 either gender. Extras possible. A play about the power of books, muscles and human kindness. Josh (or Jo, since almost any role can be cast male or female) is the children's librarian at a poor public library facing a huge budget crisis. He's also a power lifter, pumping iron in the library basement and running a video blog about young adult and children's books, weights and life. Kids flock to his unconventional story time and check out books by the dozens. All but one kid, that is—a loner named Mr. T (or Ms. T), who has the loud tics of Tourette syndrome. Slowly, Josh and Mr. T form a friendship, and Mr. T finally ventures to Josh's basement gym, where a friendship is born. The stakes go up when the town says the library needs to close for monetary reasons. This hits Josh and the kids hard and leads to them staging a '60s-inspired Read-In rather than letting their library be shut down. At the play's end, a *Sixth Sense*-like ending reveals the true identity of Mr. T. *The World's Strongest Librarian* will get kids pumped up to read, to work themselves into shape and especially to be kind to others. *Simple, flexible set. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: WH4.*

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The World's Strongest Librarian

CHARACTERS

All roles may be cast either male or female, except for Quintessence (w).

JOSH: age 30s/40s, the World's Strongest Librarian. The bigger the better. Has Tourette's but doesn't tic until the end of the play. If female, call her Jo.

MISS GARCIA: age 30s/40s, head librarian. Tense but a good heart. If male, call him Mr. Garcia.

MR. T: age 12, has Tourette's. Defiant but lonely. If female, call her Misty.

QUINTESSENCE: age 12. Bright, outspoken, a young feminist rebel-with-a-cause.

PEYTON: age 12, a follower.

BOBBY: age 12, jokester.

TIME: The present

PLACE: A town library

AUTHORS' NOTES

All popular culture and time-sensitive references may be updated and adjusted at the discretion of the director. Dialogue also may be adjusted depending on gender casting choices. Cast is expandable. Multicultural casting preferred.

Josh's video blogs (V-blog) should be pre-recorded. If this is not possible, then he can be seen in a special space with a special light. Or, he can be seen in front of a mounted camera/ smartphone with no video and no screen.

The World's Strongest Librarian

(JOSH, alone, training in a simple gym equipped with a bench, two big barbells, big plates (realistic fakes), and resistance bands. Under his bench—a book.

The unspoken message: gyms don't have to be fancy to be effective.

Lights up on JOSH in mid-bench presses. He's dressed for library work. A smartphone on a tripod records him.)

JOSH. Three ... four ... five ... six ... seven ... eight...
(Maxing out ...) Nine!

(He settles the barbell on the rack, taps a timer, then goes to his mark and speaks toward the phone.)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. Here's crap I can't stand. "If you believe it, you can achieve it!" "Everyone can be a star!" What a crock. Ever know a kid who wants to make the NBA but can't shoot a picture? How 'bout the girl who wants to be Beyoncé, but shatters the shower door when she sings? How 'bout the dude who wants to be a male model, but whose face screams "zoo" instead of Zoolander? I rest my—

(The bell on the timer goes off with a DING!)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. Excuse me.

(He goes to a barbell and sets up a 310 lb. clean-and-jerk bar with plates on each end.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). Clean-and-jerk. My max is 280. This is 310. Someday, 340!

(JOSH settles, focuses, then does a perfect clean-and-jerk at this weight. When he's done, he does a happy dance, punching the air for joy.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). Yes! 310! That's a personal best. Yes! I am the man! (*Faces the camera.*) Life isn't about believing it and achieving it. It's about small victories. It's 310 instead of 280. It's a C+ instead of a C. It's 20 pages read in an hour instead of 19. I train like I do because small victories build up to big triumphs.

(He starts toward his phone, then stops.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). Here's what's great about the gym. The iron never lies to you. It never says, "Good job!" You can walk outside, listen to all kinds of talk, get told you're a god or a total idiot. The iron makes no judgment. It's always there, like a beacon in the pitch black. Kind of like a book. (*Snaps his fingers.*) Which reminds me.

(He retrieves the book, then comes back to his mark.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). Last piece of business for today. It's big when we start a new book. It always reminds me of the first girl I ever loved. Fern. When I was in first grade, my mother walked in on my kissing her in the library. She was on page 11 of *Charlotte's Web*. Fern loved her pig Wilbur so much. I kissed the picture. "I'm in love with Fern," I told my mom. She didn't yell at me. Or tell me not to soak library books with my spit. Or say normal people don't lock lips with girls on page 11. Instead, Mom said, "I'm proud of you." Small victory.

(He clears his throat and opens the new book.)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. No kissing in this story. Just a lot of action, fights and blood. I know. Right up your alley. What's the title and the author? Not telling till we're done. A story is a like a person. To be any good, it has to stand on its own. The hero isn't a person, by the way. It's a dog.

(He reads the first lines of Jack London's public domain The Call of the Wild.)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. "Buck did not read the newspapers, or he would have known that trouble was brewing, not alone for himself, but for every tidewater dog, strong of muscle and with warm, long hair, from Puget Sound to San Diego. Because men, groping in the Arctic darkness"—

(A voice interrupts from offstage over intercom. It's MISS GARCIA.)

MISS GARCIA *(offstage)*. Josh, you in there?

JOSH *(startled)*. Yeah!

MISS GARCIA *(offstage)*. If you could kindly suspend your quest to be the World's Strongest Librarian and get your glutes to the children's room for storytime, a bunch of kids and their moms would be most grateful. Track me down afterward. I want to check in with you on something.

JOSH. You got it, boss.

(He waits a moment to be sure the head librarian has clicked off. Then he faces the camera again, this time with a frying pan in his hand.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). Guess the rest has to wait. See you next time here at the V-blog of Josh Hanagarne, World's Strongest Librarian.

(He bends the pan in half.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). Now it's a George Foreman grill. Booyah!

(Blackout.)

Two video screens illuminate with JOSH speaking in an earlier edition of his V-blog.)

JOSH (*cont'd, on screen*). Who says that the World's Strongest Librarian can't be funny? How many reference librarians does it take to screw in a light bulb? Hmmm ... I don't know, but I know where to look it up!

(Blackout.)

Lights up on the town library children's department. BOBBY, PEYTON and QUINTESENCE sit or sprawl on floor as they await JOSH and storytime.)

BOBBY. Come on, admit it, Quinn. You know it's true. It's funny. Everyone thinks it's funny.

PEYTON. Be nice, you. Be nice to new kids, that's what my mom always says. If you can't say something nice, don't say it at all.

QUINTESENCE. Well, as a matter of policy, I don't like gossip. Unless it's about other people. Then it's OK.

BOBBY. Quinn, I will gossip about you all day long.

QUINTESENCE. Oh please do. Just don't use my name unless you want a *lumpectomy*!

(Enter JOSH. Whenever the kids see him, they beg for a feat of strength, but he's a professional.)

ALL KIDS. Bend a pan. Bend a pan. Bend a pan!

JOSH. No clamshell cookware today. Sorry I'm late. Hi Bobby, Peyton. Where's your mom?

PEYTON. She got a job, so she's at work.

JOSH. Great to hear. Congratulations to Mom. *(A beat.)* As always, nice to see you, Quintessence.

QUINTESSENCE. Nice to be seen, Mr. Josh.

JOSH. We're a small but mighty little group today. Small but mighty. Let's get started. Whaddya say?

ALL KIDS. Yayyyyyyy!

JOSH. Parents' choice day, and I've got a real page turner for you.

(Pulls out a Disney picture book, tada!)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. *Cinderella*. Pretty girl tormented by her evil stepsisters, rescued by a prince, happily ever after.

(All GROAN, even JOSH.)

QUINTESSENCE. *Cinderella* is offensive. I don't need some boy to complete me. But I do like the shoes. Not as cool as the ruby slippers, but I'll take those glass pumps. Especially, if it has a kitten heel.

BOBBY. Do kittens even have heels?

(QUINTESSENCE gives a "no" face, and flings some attitude at BOBBY. PEYTON raises a hand, and JOSH acknowledges.)

JOSH. Peyton?

PEYTON. Over the summer, my mom took me to New York City to see the Broadway show. Cinderella's dress changed like, now you see rags, then it was like, poof! Ball gown. How did they do it?

(BOBBY wiggles all 10 fingers.)

BOBBY *(to PEYTON)*. Magic. Ooooooo. *(Faux sneeze.)* Gullible.

PEYTON. Well Bobby, if gullible means I suspend disbelief so I can be swept away by the magic, then I'm gullible. I don't mind and I don't care. I love the story. I think the prince is dreamy. I don't mind hearing it again and again and again. Go on, Mr. Josh.

JOSH. Well thank you. Miss Peyton.

(QUINTESSENCE raises her hand.)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. Quintessence?

QUINTESSENCE. Firstly, thank you for using my full name. All the *lazy* people shorten it to Quinn. But I only accept Quintessence, no shortcuts. Or Quintessa.

BOBBY. Good to know. *Quinn*.

QUINTESSENCE. And secondly, before I'm rudely interrupted, even though I know this story inside and out, and even though I think *Cinderella* sets feminism back like 50 years, I give permission to be redundant and quaint.

JOSH. Why, thank you Quintessence, most kind.

QUINTESSENCE. You're welcome. Proceed with the retreat.

PEYTON *(to QUINTESSENCE)*. What's feminism?

QUINTESSENCE. Gurl, I'm gonna rock your world. You, me, one-on-one later.

(PEYTON nods. JOSH puts down the Disney Cinderella and swaps out for Grimm's Fairy Tales.)

JOSH. From the original, the Brothers' Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Shall we?

(Enter MISS GARCIA to talk to JOSH. JOSH notices, but she motions "please continue. No rush.")

JOSH *(reads)*. "A rich man's wife became sick, and when she felt that her end was drawing near, she called her only daughter to her bedside and said, 'Dear child, remain pious and good, and then our dear God will always protect you, and I will look down on you from heaven and be near you.' With this, she closed her eyes and died."

BOBBY. They are always killing off the parents.

QUINTESENCE. That's why they are called The Brothers Grimm. Get it. Grim. Grrrimmm.

PEYTON. You guys. Double shhhhhh. Shhhhhh. Shhhhhh.

JOSH. A little self-control please?

(Satisfied, MISS GARCIA exits for the moment.)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. She gone?

(All kids nod. JOSH ditches the book.)

JOSH *(cont'd)*. Cool. So. This smokin' hot girl has to deal with her mom being dead *and* the fact her grieving dad wastes no time and marries some bimbo with two skanky daughters. Probably thinking it would be great for Yeh-Shen to have big sisters and a new loving mom.

PEYTON. Who's Yeh-Shen?

JOSH. Yeh-Shen is Chinese for Cinderella.

QUINTESENCE. Are you doing that thing you do, Mr. Josh?

BOBBY. I like it when he does that thing he does.

JOSH. Yup. Cinderella is actually a story from China, and probably the Brothers Grimm heard it from the Italians, who heard it from the Chinese, who probably heard it on the grapevine. This Chinese version is 1,000 years older than the Brothers Grimm, if you get what I'm sayin'.

BOBBY. I don't get it.

QUINTESENCE. Cultural appropriation, peabrain. Black and brown getting shoved to the background per usual.

JOSH. So! These new skanky sisters make Yeh-Shen do all their chores, take out the trash, brush and braid their oily hair, clean their smelly rooms, wash their Lululemons down by the river, by hand. They work poor Yeh-Shen like a mangy dog from sunup to sundown. 24/7.

BOBBY. Sounds like my life.

PEYTON. Mine too.

QUINTESENCE. Me three. I have five brothers. They are always mixing whites with colors. Which as we all know is a prescription for pink socks, shirts and tighty whities. Then they blame me.

JOSH. So, to get away from her skeezy stepsisters, she goes down to the pond to feed a beautiful fish, who turns out to be the reincarnation of her sweet and dearly-departed mother. The skanky stepsisters follow her, kill the fish and force Yeh-Shen to pan-fry her mom, along with a little sherry vinegar gastrique and dollop of truffle cream.

(Re-enter MISS GARCIA, but JOSH doesn't notice her. PEYTON tries to signal JOSH about the head librarian's presence, but JOSH is on a roll.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). So our smokin' hot heroine, Yeh-Shen, buries the bones, and poof poof poof the bones transform into an amazing wardrobe from Forever 21 including these sick shoes.

(BOBBY tries to stop JOSH. He rolls on.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). A pair of bling'd out awesome high-top gold kicks with a swoosh sparkling like a diamond.

(QUINTESSSENCE tries too, to no avail.)

JOSH (*cont'd*). Then, in defiance of her skanky stepfamily, Yeh-Shen puts on the clothes and the shoes, and sashays to the blowout of the year, the spring festival, where she dazzles the eye of the emperor, who has the biggest shoe fetish ever.

MISS GARCIA. Josh!

(JOSH shakes his finger at the kids.)

JOSH. You guys. (*Sotto voce.*) You're supposed to have my back.

QUINTESSSENCE. We tried to warn you. We'll have to work on your survival instincts.

MISS GARCIA. Mr. Hanagarne, a moment please.

JOSH. Of course, Miss Garcia. (*To kids.*) Thanks for nothing. In trouble now, you little Draco Malfoys.

(Kids make stabbing motions to the heart. Or perhaps a "playing the violin" motion.)

BOBBY (*to the others*). Let's go find some books.

QUINTESSSENCE. *Diverse* books.

(The kids head out. JOSH joins MISS GARCIA.

Enter MR. T, standing near enough for JOSH to notice. MR. T has a few physical tics. Perhaps, head scratching or eye blinking. The few verbal ones initially resemble videogame sounds.

IMPORTANT NOTES: None of MR. T's verbal tics are to be offensive or multiculturally insensitive. Also, no one interacts with MR. T. Only JOSH and the audience can see and hear the kid, for a very good reason. But JOSH doesn't know that. Not yet.)

MR. T *(sounding like laserfire)*. Phew phew phew boom!

(MR. T takes out a cellphone, plays a videogame.)

JOSH. Miss Garcia, hi. How long were you standing there?

MISS GARCIA. Stop messing with the fairy tales, Josh. This is parents' choice day.

JOSH. Hey, if they don't show up. This is what they get. Chaos. Anarchy. Chaos *and* anarchy.

MISS GARCIA. Josh.

JOSH. Duly noted. If I may, today is an anomaly. Statistically, my storytime has gotten huge numbers. Which is what we want, right? Because when they leave, the kiddies check out books. Lots and lots and lots of books. Which is what their parents want, which is what teachers want, which is what God in heaven wants. No? Yes? Maybe? Shut up, Josh? You're fired, Josh? Say something, the suspense is killing me.

MR. T *(sounding like a lightsaber)*. Pzzzzt. Pzzzzt. Pzzzzt. Hah!

JOSH *(to MR. T)*. Hey, can you keep it down over there in the 590's? I'm getting a beatdown from my boss.

MISS GARCIA. Very funny. But they can't hear you. Look. Your, uh, unconventional rewrites are amusing, even funny. The kids like how you add your, uh, unique spin on the written word, but—

MR. T. Ratatatatat! Bang! Bang bang! Bang!

(JOSH swings the kid an anxious please-shut-up look.)

MISS GARCIA *(continuing)*. Let's not embellish when parents could show up.

JOSH. Of course. That goes without saying. I'm sure by the time they get to postmodernism, these kids will be over the trauma of learning that *Cinderella* was originally a Chinese girl.

MR. T *(sound of Marvel's Wolverine's claws)*. Snikt. Snikt. Snikt. Zap!

(JOSH appears distracted by MR. T. MISS GARCIA, though, seems not to notice.)

MISS GARCIA. Josh, I told you I wanted to check in with you about something. There's no easy way to say this. So I'll just say it.

(Here it comes, he thinks he's being fired.)

JOSH. I'm fired?

MISS GARCIA. Well in a sense, we're all are.

JOSH. What? What do you mean?

MISS GARCIA. The city council wants to close the library. For budgetary reasons.

JOSH. Seriously?

MISS GARCIA. Apparently, in the age of the internet, we're irrelevant. Especially if there's a deficit. I'll be making a formal announcement later, but I thought I'd tell you personally.