

# When Science Bites Back

Bacterial Broadside & Orchid Obsession

*By Janice Rider*

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### **DEDICATION**

*To my youngest son, Matthew, who encouraged me to publish my plays in the first place. Matthew's creativity is an inspiration. Also to all the youth at St. David's United Church whose energy and enthusiasm keep me going!*

### **STORY OF THE PLAYS**

These two science fiction plays are inspired by H.G. Wells' works, *The Stolen Bacillus* and *The Flowering of the Strange Orchid*, and Alexandre Dumas' novel, *The Black Tulip*.

#### ***Bacterial Broadside***

Two students working on a science fair project get involved in a potentially deadly heist when unscrupulous villains steal an experimental sample from the famous bacteriologist, Professor Parvulus. Will the world population become infected or will certain guilty parties be easy to spot? This play proves that the little things in life, like Gulliver's Lilliputians, are sometimes the ones most likely to bring us to our knees.

#### ***Orchid Obsession***

Ethel is a successful woman by anyone's standards. Ethel, however, is not just anyone. What more does she want? No less than first prize at the "Exotic Blooms From Bulbs Competition!" The catch? A neighbor with a distinctly green thumb! Ethel receives a bulb under unusual circumstances, a bulb which is distinctly unique, perhaps even...dangerous.

### **ORIGINAL PRODUCTION**

Drama Club at St. David's United Church, April 27, 2014, Calgary, Alberta. Directed by Janice Rider. Costumes by Marilyn Buehning. Cast: Sophia Hartzheim, Emma Devenny, Nicholas Panos, Jordan Wilson, Zaakary Kwan, Zane Gaskin, Jacky Hansen and Kayla MacIntosh

## **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

### **BACTERIAL BROADSIDE**

*(3 f, 3 m, 1 flexible, 2 silent and flexible)*

**SUSAN (f):** A student and a friend of Emily's.

**EMILY (f):** A student who is determined to do well at the school science fair; the professor's daughter.

**PROFESSOR PARVULUS (m):** A famous bacteriologist who is very much focused on the little things in life.

**GENTLEMAN 1 (m):** A man whose mission it is to steal some bacteria from the professor. He poses as a journalist by the name of Samuel Struthers.

**GENTLEMAN 2 (m):** A man who is plotting to use deadly bacteria to help him in a bid for power.

**DR. PARVULUS (f):** A virologist married to the professor.

**OFFICER LITEM (f/m):** Police officer.

**TWO SILENT PEOPLE (f/m):** Suited up for a bio-hazardous environment, nonspeaking.

### **ORCHID OBSESSION**

*(2 f, 2 m, 1 flexible)*

**DR. ETHEL LUCROR (f):** An intelligent, competitive woman.

**GERTRUDE AMICUS (f):** Comfortable in her own skin and is forthright without being forceful. Ethel's friend.

**NEWTON NARRO (m):** Neighbor with a green thumb and an interest in Ethel, as well as her new plant.

**ORCHID (f/m):** An extraordinary plant that prefers humming to speaking. Although this is not a speaking part, it must be performed well.

**MICHAEL BATTEN (m):** A former professor at the university. He and Ethel competed academically.

### **OPTIONAL INTRODUCTIONS**

*(2 flexible)*

**ANNOUNCER (f/m):** Attempts to introduce the shows.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER (f/m):** Overly enthusiastic, interrupts announcer.

***See production notes at end.***

### OPTIONAL INTRODUCTION

*(AT RISE: ANNOUNCER, dressed in a futuristic fashion, enters to introduce the plays.)*

**ANNOUNCER:** Welcome! Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, children and youth, old and young! Welcome to our production *When Science Bites Back*. Today we will perform two sci-fi plays for your enjoyment. As you know, sci-fi is short for science fiction, and—

*(AUDIENCE MEMBER, dressed distinctly like a scientist and one of the cast, rises. SHE/ HE holds a beaker in one hand and a test tube in the other.)*

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I object, I strenuously object!

**ANNOUNCER:** I beg your pardon?

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** *(Storms onto the stage.)* You have used an oxymoron!

**ANNOUNCER:** I will not have you calling me a moron in front of all these people!

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I did not call you a moron; I said you had used an oxymoron. An oxymoron is a—

*(SUSAN enters SR and heads down to where the action is.)*

**SUSAN:** Figure of speech in which things that seem to contradict one another are used together. I know this for a fact. My mom's an English teacher.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Astute child! You are to be commended. An oxymoron is precisely that, which is why I cannot stand oxymorons.

**ANNOUNCER:** I'm still very confused.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** You used the term "science fiction." Science is about establishing facts based upon solid evidence, research, and observation. Fiction is about making things up, pretending, fantasizing; therefore, it stands to reason that the words science fiction should never be used together.

**ANNOUNCER:** But, I...

**SUSAN:** Let me handle him. Science fiction has ancient roots. In fact, some people say that the very first piece of recorded fiction, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, was science fiction because it concerned a search for immortality. It can be fun to weave fact and fantasy.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** This "weaving," as you call it, confuses people. If you bury facts in fiction, people can't tell fact from fiction.

**SUSAN:** You're not giving our audience enough credit! They'll be able to sort things out for themselves. Besides, science fiction can give rise to science fact.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Nonsense! How can fiction give rise to fact?

**SUSAN:** An example: ancient Hindu poetry describes flying machines that go to space and, now, here we are, people who are able to go to space using powerful rockets. That's fiction giving rise to fact, human imagination giving birth to something tangible, observable, researchable, and real.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** *(Strokes chin contemplatively.)* I must confess you have a point.

**ANNOUNCER:** Good, return to your seat, then, if you please.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** *(Begins to head towards former seat.)* Alright, I'm heading back to my place amongst the rest of the audience, but, be forewarned: I want this production to be handled with the greatest of care.

*(SUSAN returns to her place behind the curtain, exiting SR.)*

**ANNOUNCER:** Alright, let's just get right to it! Sit back and relax while you may, for you're going to be frightened before we're done! Our first play is *Bacterial Broadside*!

## **Bacterial Broadside**

### **Scene 1 -The Parvulus Kitchen and Lab**

*(AT RISE: EMILY enters from SR with SUSAN, talking. The girls are dressed fashionably, but their glasses speak to their academic acumen. Each of the girls has a binder.)*

**SUSAN:** You should count yourself fortunate to have parents who are scientists. I wish my parents did something exciting.

**EMILY:** Studying microbes isn't exciting, it's gross! Dad talks about bacteria all the time and Mom's into viruses. I know more about bacteria and viruses than anyone should ever have to know! So, what do your parents do?

**SUSAN:** Dad's a number cruncher, and Mom's an English teacher. If I'm not being quizzed on advanced mathematics, then I'm being asked questions about Shakespeare, Austen, and Dickens. *(Assumes different dramatic stances and voices for each quote.)* "Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them." That's Shakespeare. "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife." That's Austen. "Great men are seldom over-scrupulous in the arrangement of their attire."

**EMILY:** *(Laughs.)* Must be Dickens!

**SUSAN:** You guessed it!

**EMILY:** When you see the attire of my parents, you certainly won't think it scrupulous! Maybe we could switch parents sometime. That way we'd each get a break from the status quo. Have a seat, Sue, and feel free to get a cookie.

*(SUSAN sits, gets a cookie, and begins to eat it. EMILY follows suit after getting a pen out of the pencil case in her binder.)*

**EMILY:** *(Cont'd.)* So, we need a topic for the school science fair. Imagine forcing students to do a science fair project!

## **End of Freeview**

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