

Merryborough

Blind Copy

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Character Breakdown

Erica: Executive Chair; 50s-60s

Carl: Co-Executive Chair; 50s-60s

Rachel: Chair of Education and Records; 50s-60s

Bill: Chair of Budgets and Finance; 50s-60s

Steve: Chair of Security and Public Order; 40s

SETTINGS

SCENE I: Merryborough City Council Meeting: 137th session

SCENE II: Merryborough City Council Meeting: 138th session

SCENE III: Merryborough City Council Meeting: 139th session

SCENE IV: Merryborough City Council Meeting: 140th session

SCENE V: Merryborough Tribal Council Meeting

SYNOPSIS

Merryborough was a quiet town. The City Council had never dealt with anything more serious than administrative issues: noise complaints, landscaping questions, zoning matters. Until now. With crime on the rise and mysterious neighbors incoming, the Council must adjust. Local bureaucracy takes a worrisome shape as dark forces threaten the town. Ready or not, change is coming to Merryborough.

SCENE I

AT RISE:

The 137th session of the Merryborough City Council. An elementary school. The walls are decorated with children's artwork. A clock upstage right. A window upstage center. A rectangular table with light refreshments stage left. The council sits at a semi-circular table centerstage, facing the audience. In the following order from stage right:

BILL (Chair of Budgets and Finance)

RACHEL (Chair of Education and Records)

ERICA (Executive Chair)

CARL (Co-Executive Chair)

STEVE (Chair of Security and Public Order)

Each council-member has a large name placard with their respective title. They remain seated unless directed otherwise. RACHEL takes minutes on a legal pad. ERICA holds a gavel.

ERICA

(Gavels)

Order!

(Pause)

I hereby call to order the 137th session of the Merryborough City Council. Welcome everyone. It's been a while since our last session; let's take a moment to reconnect.

Throughout the following sequence, actors stand and move around the stage to greet each other. They maintain the exact same intonation with each exchange.

ERICA

(Shaking Carl's hand)

Erica. How are you?

CARL
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

RACHEL
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

BILL
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

STEVE
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Steve.

CARL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

ERICA
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Erica. How are you?

RACHEL
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

CARL
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

BILL
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

STEVE
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Steve.

RACHEL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

ERICA
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Erica. How are you?

BILL
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

ERICA
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Erica. How are you?

STEVE
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Steve.

CARL
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

RACHEL
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

BILL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

STEVE

Steve.

(They return to their chairs. Pause. They sit.)

ERICA
Role call. Co-Executive Chair?

CARL
Present.

ERICA
Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL
Here.

ERICA

Chair of Budgets and Finance?

BILL

Present.

ERICA

Chair of Security and Public Order?

STEVE

Present.

ERICA

As usual, we'll review the agenda and open the floor for general comment. Proposals will be adopted by majority vote. Meeting minutes will be kept by the Chair of Education and Records.

RACHEL

Speak slow everyone, my note-taking isn't what it used to be!

(Polite chuckling.)

ERICA

At the top of our agenda is an item of grave concern.

(Pause.)

ERICA

I'm referring, of course, to the whereabouts of Mrs. Feldman's cat.

(Collective sigh.)

CARL

Again?

BILL

Wait, you mean--

ERICA

Mrs. Feldman's cat is once again...missing.

STEVE

How is that possible?

CARL

This isn't the first time.

BILL

Nor the second!

ERICA

Mrs. Feldman has been negligent.

RACHEL

Poor woman.

STEVE

A pity.

BILL

I have an opinion on the matter which may be controversial.

ERICA

Speak freely, this is a closed session.

(Pause.)

BILL

I don't believe that Mrs. Feldman's cat should be our responsibility.

(Disturbed murmuring.)

ERICA

Chair of Budgets and Finance! I will remind you that Mrs. Feldman is a tax-paying citizen, not to mention a pillar of the community.

BILL

To dedicate the Council's time to a stray cat--

ERICA

If you have a proposal, the Council will hear it!

(Pause.)

ERICA

Does anyone have any constructive thoughts?

We could put disseminate posters. RACHEL

With pertinent information. CARL

Pictures for instance. RACHEL

Her name and address. CARL

Good. ERICA

A search party. STEVE

To find the rascal! CARL

Excellent. A two-pronged approach: posters and a search party. ERICA

Seconded. CARL

All in favor? ERICA

(All hands go up.)

Passed. ERICA

(Gavel.)

Well done, everyone. ERICA

Thank you. UNISON

Moving on...ah, yes. The cyclist situation. ERICA

BILL

Cyclist situation?

CARL

(To BILL)

You haven't heard?

ERICA

(Explaining)

Merryborough's cycling community is becoming...a menace.

(Pause)

They ride at breakneck speed!

(Disturbed murmuring.)

RACHEL

Perhaps I should recuse myself.

(Pause.)

ERICA

Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL

I'm not...it's a touchy subject.

(Long pause.)

RACHEL

(Explaining)

My nephew used to be a cyclist.

(Disturbed murmuring.)

ERICA

We appreciate your candor.

CARL

It was good of you to say.

ERICA

However, unless there are any objections, I don't think a recusal will be necessary.

(Pause.)

ERICA

Would anyone like to propose a solution?

BILL

We could ticket the speedsters.

ERICA

That could work.

RACHEL

A safety training program?

ERICA

Proactive!

STEVE

We could give the worst offenders some jail-time.

(Pause.)

STEVE

Nothing serious. A day or two.

CARL

I love it.

ERICA

I move that we ramp-up ticketing, craft a training program, and pursue punitive deterrence in the form of light-touch detention.

CARL

Seconded.

ERICA

All in favor?

(All hands go up.)

ERICA

Passed.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

ERICA

Moving on--

CARL

Excuse me, Executive Chair?

ERICA

Yes, Co-Executive Chair?

CARL

May I add an item to the agenda and recommend that it be discussed immediately?

ERICA

Have you completed the relevant paperwork?

CARL

(Passing her the paperwork)

Here it is.

(ERICA reviews the paperwork in detail.)

ERICA

This seems to be in order. Whenever you're ready.

CARL

Thank you.

(Pause)

It's a serious matter...pertaining to...our gardens.

(Pause.)

CARL

I think you all know what I'm talking about.

(Silence.)

RACHEL

Our gardens?

CARL
(Dramatically)

They're being...trampled.

(Distressed murmuring.)

BILL
Would the Co-Executive Chair elaborate?

CARL
(Agitated)
Trodden turnips! Waltzed-on watermelon! Bruised bananas! Crushed corn still very much on the cob!

ERICA
You've made your point.

STEVE
What you're describing is...unnerving.

RACHEL
That someone would intentionally harm our gardens!

BILL
Who could be responsible for such untoward behavior?

RACHEL
The topic undoubtedly falls under the purview of the Chair of Security and Public Order.

STEVE
(Polite dispute)
Now, just a moment. This "garden trampler" problem could easily relate to Education and Records. It could just as easily concern Budgets and Finance.

(Murmuring in agreement.)

CARL
What do you propose?

STEVE
Instead of delineating responsibility to a single member, I propose the creation of a subcommittee.

RACHEL
In other words, a working group.

BILL

Would it be a subset of this body?

STEVE

Which body?

BILL

The one that we currently inhabit.

STEVE

I suppose it could be...yes.

RACHEL

Could the issue be handled by this very same body?

STEVE

Perhaps...theoretically.

(Murmuring in consideration.)

ERICA

I propose the creation of a body, identical in form and function to the one that we currently occupy, to address this “garden trampler.”

CARL

Seconded.

ERICA

All in favor?

(All hands go up.)

ERICA

Passed.

(Gavel.)

(Pause.)

ERICA

I hereby call to order the inaugural meeting of the Garden Trampler Subcommittee. Welcome everyone. As this is our first session, I believe introductions are in order.

The following introductions are made twice as fast as before. The characters stand and move quickly around the stage. The same intonation is maintained throughout. The new speed is maintained through role call.

ERICA
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Erica. How are you?

CARL
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

RACHEL
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

BILL
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

STEVE
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Steve.

CARL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

ERICA
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Erica. How are you?

RACHEL
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

CARL
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

BILL
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

STEVE
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Steve.

RACHEL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

ERICA
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Erica. How are you?

BILL
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

ERICA
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Erica. How are you?

STEVE
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Steve.

CARL
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Carl. You're looking well.

RACHEL
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Rachel. Good to see you.

BILL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Bill. How's it going?

STEVE
(Shaking Bill's hand)

Steve.

(They return to their chairs. Brief Pause. They sit.)

ERICA
Role call. Co-Executive Chair?

CARL
Present.

ERICA
Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL
Here.

ERICA
Chair of Budgets and Finance?

BILL
Present.

ERICA
Chair of Security and Public Order?

STEVE
Present.

(Pause. Return to normal speed.)

ERICA
The first item on the garden trampler subcommittee agenda is the so-called “garden trampler”--

STEVE
As the Chair of Security and Public Order, it only seems right that I take the lead.

(Murmuring in agreement.)

ERICA
By all means, Chair of Security and Public Order.

(Pause.)

STEVE
(Clearing throat)
This transgression strikes at the heart of our values.

(Long Pause.)

STEVE

In the interest of collaboration, I'll open the floor.

(Long pause.)

RACHEL

(Bursting)

Fine! I'll say it! This is clearly the work of a hoodlum from Greenville!

(Confused murmuring.)

RACHEL

You were all thinking it!

ERICA

Does the Chair of Education and Records have evidence to substantiate such a claim?

RACHEL

A citizen from Merryborough would never trample a garden. Greenville is full of rabble-rousers, everybody knows it.

ERICA

Without any witnesses...

STEVE

The culprit likely trampled after dark.

(Pause.)

ERICA

Alright. Hoodlums from Greenville. How to proceed?

BILL

We could demand clarification from the Greenville City Council?

ERICA

A fine start.

RACHEL

We could introduce an innovative educational curriculum about respecting private property, followed by an exchange program for unambiguous messaging.

ERICA

Forward-thinking.

STEVE

We could nestle cameras in the vegetation.

(Pause.)

CARL

(Slaps the table)

Now we're talking.

ERICA

Wonderful suggestions! I particularly like the surveillance.

CARL

(Delighted)

It's...devious.

ERICA

I move that we institute a new curriculum, an academic exchange program, and strengthened botanical security.

CARL

Seconded.

ERICA

All in favor?

(All hands are raised.)

ERICA

Passed.

(Gavels.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNSION

Thank you.

RACHEL

Excuse me, Executive Chair?

ERICA

Yes, Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL

Now that there's a plan to deal with this "garden trampler," what need have we for this body?

ERICA

Which body?

RACHEL

The "Garden Trampler Subcommittee?"

STEVE

It doesn't seem right to disband it entirely.

CARL

I agree.

STEVE

Perhaps we should suspend it temporarily, with the understanding that it be available as necessary.

ERICA

I move that we temporarily suspend the "Garden Trampler Subcommittee."

CARL

Seconded.

ERICA

All in favor?

(All hands are raised.)

ERICA

Passed.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

ERICA

Returning in our capacity as the Merryborough City Council, the next item on our agenda is the Hellermans' request.

CARL

I have some concerns.

ERICA

The floor is yours.

CARL

As I understand it, the Hellerman twins will be celebrating a birthday. And while we are happy for them--

RACHEL

We certainly are--

CARL

And wish them well--

BILL

We certainly do--

CARL

There are other factors to consider!

(Curious murmuring.)

CARL

They want to rent out the town square, install a dance floor and...play music!

(Distressed murmuring.)

CARL

Obviously, it can't happen.

STEVE

Think of the noise.

CARL

Exactly!

ERICA

What does the Co-Executive Chair suggest?

CARL

That we unequivocally deny their request!

RACHEL

They're such nice boys...

CARL

Do you suggest we let them proceed with this madness?

BILL

It seems wrong to reject them outright.

RACHEL

We could send cupcakes with the denial? To soften the blow.

(Contemplative murmuring.)

ERICA

I move that we deny the Hellermans' birthday request but send conciliatory cupcakes as a gesture of goodwill.

CARL

Seconded.

ERICA

All in favor?

(All hands go up.)

ERICA

Passed.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

ERICA

That concludes our official agenda. I'll now open the floor for general comment.

RACHEL

If I may, Executive Chair?

ERICA

Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL

I would like to report a disturbing educational trend.

CARL

Trend?

RACHEL

Attendance is down, fighting is up, and the teachers are grumbling about their pay.

ERICA

Their pay?

RACHEL

They feel they're being "short-changed."

(Pause.)

CARL

What are we supposed to do about that?

BILL

(Volunteering)

We could increase their salaries?

(Pause.)

(Excessive laughter.)

STEVE

(Through tears)

Chair of Budgets and Finance, I thought you had lost your sense of humor!

CARL

(Mocking)

Oh...the teachers! They work so hard!

(More laughter.)

ERICA

(Laughing)

Does anyone have...any...serious ideas?

CARL

I blame pop culture.

ERICA
(Lamenting)

More violent every day.

STEVE
It could have something to do with the weather.

BILL
The weather?

STEVE
Depressingly overcast.

ERICA
Valid point!

CARL
We should inform the teachers that any further complaints will be met with penalty.

STEVE
As for the students, I'm sure they'll return to form once the weather clears up.

ERICA
I move that we enact a policy of targeted negligence.

CARL
Seconded.

ERICA
All in favor?

(All hands are raised.)

ERICA
Passed.

(Gavel.)

ERICA
Well done, everyone.

UNISON
Thank you.

ERICA
Moving on--

BILL

If I may, Executive Chair.

ERICA

Chair of Budgets and Finance?

BILL

So far on the list of new expenses are: cat posters and patrols, cyclist training, a private property-focused educational exchange program, botany-based security, and...cupcakes.

(Pause.)

ERICA

Did you have a question?

BILL

Our township is in woeful financial shape. How will we pay for all of this?

CARL

Forgive me, Chair of Budgets and Finance, but...isn't that your job?

BILL

Isn't what my job, Co-Executive Chair?

CARL

To keep the budget balanced and our finances in order?

(Murmuring in agreement.)

BILL

Well, in a way, but I--

STEVE

The Co-Executive Chair is right.

BILL

Our fiscal flexibility is not without limit!

CARL

I don't see anyone else complaining about their responsibilities.

ERICA

Do you have a proposal, Chair of Budgets and Finance?

BILL

We could raise taxes.

That won't be popular.	CARL
It would be necessary!	BILL
(Pause.)	
How much?	ERICA
10% to cover new expenses.	BILL
(Pause.)	
I move that we raise taxes 10% to...assuage...budgetary concerns.	ERICA (Begrudgingly)
(Long Pause.)	
Seconded!	BILL (Frustratedly)
All in favor?	ERICA
(All hands go up, some quicker than others.)	
Passed.	ERICA
(Gavels.)	
Satisfied?	ERICA (To BILL)
Almost.	BILL
What now?	CARL (Groans)

BILL

I assume that you're all aware of our new neighbors?

CARL

Of course.

STEVE

A fine bunch.

RACHEL

Sorry. Who?

CARL

The Chair of Budgets and Finance is talking about the grocery store.

BILL

Excuse me, Co-Executive chair, but "*Wonder Goods*" is not just a grocery store. The company sells groceries, but they also purvey electronics, pharmaceuticals, household appliances, sportswear, alcohol, pet supplies, landscaping equipment, microprocessors and feminine hygiene products. They've purchased all the stores on main street and every lot in town.

CARL

I fail to see the problem.

BILL

Don't you see what is happening?

(Pause)

They're taking over!

(Pause. Laughter.)

CARL

The Chair of Budgets and Finance fears a grocery store.

BILL

It is not just a grocery store!

RACHEL

Personally, I enjoy the one-stop shopping.

ERICA

As do I.

STEVE

We haven't received a single complaint about them.

CARL

Do you have something against capitalism?

BILL

(Snaps)

That's not the point.

ERICA

They're transforming Merryborough into a hub of trade and commerce.

CARL

Don't you care about the future?

BILL

It is precisely because of the future that I'm raising this.

STEVE

I don't follow.

CARL

(To ERICA)

Executive Chair, can we please move on from this ridiculous topic?

ERICA

I propose that we strike the previous item from the meeting minutes and forcefully dismiss any enmity toward the profitability of our town.

CARL

Seconded.

ERICA

All in favor?

(All hands go up except for BILL.)

(Gavel.)

(Rachel erases on her notepad.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

STEVE

Executive Chair, I also have a matter to raise.

ERICA

Chair of Security and Public Order?

STEVE

Merryborough continues to grapple with various...security issues.

(Disturbing murmuring.)

BILL

What security issues?

STEVE

There are daily reports of malfeasance. Vandalism. Spray-paint. The perpetrators grow bolder every day. We must call these antics what they are.

(Pause.)

STEVE

You know the word that I'm referring to.

(Pause.)

STEVE

It begins with the letter, "T".

(Pause.)

CARL

Troublemaking?

ERICA

Treachery?

RACHEL

Tomfoolery?

(Pause.)

STEVE
(Ominously)

Terrorism.

(Disturbed murmuring.)

BILL
Wait a minute. How can you call a few childish pranks--

STEVE
(Darkly)
Do you condone this behavior?

BILL
Let's be reasonable!

CARL
I agree with the Chair of Security and Public Order. Why not call these attacks what they are? Terrorism, plain and simple.

RACHEL
(Catching on)
These...terrorists must be stopped.

ERICA
(To STEVE)
Thank you for bringing this to our attention. The Council will act without delay.

(Long pause.)

ERICA
What should we do?

STEVE
I'm concerned that certain...byzantine policies...inhibit me from doing my job.

BILL
(Incredulous)
What policies?

STEVE
(Explaining)
Red-tape. Choking innovation.

(Disturbed murmuring, except for Bill.)

That can't be.	CARL
No, it cannot.	ERICA
How did it get so bad?	RACHEL
Unacceptable.	CARL
I propose that we eliminate burdensome rules and regulations so that the Chair of Security and Public Order can properly confront the terrorist threat.	ERICA
What?	BILL
Seconded.	CARL
Passed.	ERICA
(Gavels.)	
Well done--	ERICA
We didn't even vote!	BILL
What could be more important than security?	STEVE (To BILL)
You'd leave the well-being of our children to chance?	RACHEL
Disgusting.	CARL
I don't understand.	BILL

STEVE

That's all from my end, Executive Chair.

ERICA

Thank you, Chair of Security and Public Order. If there is nothing further, I move that we conclude the 137th session of the City Council.

CARL

Seconded.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

To celebrate, I also move that we mark the occasion with coffee and donuts from our friends at *Wonder Goods*.

CARL

Seconded!

(Gavel.)

RACHEL

Delicious!

STEVE

I'm starving.

CARL

So thoughtful of them!

They all dig into the refreshments, except for BILL who remains seated, staring straight ahead.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE II

LIGHTS UP ON:

The 138th session of the Merryborough City Council. An unspecified amount of time has passed.

A rectangular table with refreshments, stage left. The same semi-circular table is centerstage, except that BILL is no longer present; his chair has been removed, and his name placard is empty. The rest of the characters are seated in the same positions. STEVE wears an earpiece. The children's artwork has been removed from the walls; the clock remains.

ERICA
(Gavels)

Order!

(Pause)

I hereby call to order the 138th session of the Merryborough City Council. Welcome everyone. Let's take a moment to reconnect.

Throughout the following sequence, actors stand and move around the stage to greet each other. They maintain the exact same intonation with each exchange.

ERICA
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Erica. Charmed.

CARL
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Carl. Pleasure.

RACHEL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Rachel. Hello.

STEVE
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Steve.

CARL
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Carl. Pleasure.

RACHEL
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Rachel. Hello.

ERICA
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Erica. Charmed.

STEVE
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Steve.

RACHEL
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Rachel. Hello.

ERICA
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Erica. Charmed.

CARL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Carl. Pleasure.

STEVE
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Steve.

(They return to their chairs. Pause. They sit.)

ERICA
Role call. Co-Executive Chair?

CARL
Present.

ERICA
Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL
Here.

ERICA
Chair of Security and Public Order?

STEVE
Present.

ERICA

As usual we'll review the agenda and open the floor for general comment. It has been decided that vote-taking is a roadblock to innovation. The meeting minutes will be kept by the Chair of Education and Records.

RACHEL

(Jokingly)

Apologies in advance for any hand cramps.

(Silence.)

ERICA

Before we begin, I'd like to open the floor to the Chair of Security and Public Order in case there's anything that he wishes to discuss.

STEVE

Thank you, Executive Chair. First and foremost, I'd like to report that our friends at *Wonder Goods* have offered to sponsor the Merryborough City Council. Naturally, I've accepted.

(A banner unfurls from the ceiling that reads "Merryborough City Council, paid for by *Wonder Goods*". They stand and applaud vigorously. RACHEL is more subdued.)

CARL

Splendid!

ERICA

Wonderful!

RACHEL

Wow.

STEVE

Yes.

(They sit.)

STEVE

Wonder Goods has also offered to provide a substantial injection of funds, the entirety of which have been earmarked for security.

CARL

As they should be.

ERICA

Prudent to do so.

STEVE

As a result, we've instituted 24-hour deterrent patrols, procured state-of-the-art night-vision goggles, and expanded our undercover operations.

RACHEL

Undercover operations?

(Pause.)

STEVE

I'm sure that the Chair of Education and Records does not need to be reminded that disloyalty spreads, like a noxious weed.

RACHEL

Right. It's just--

STEVE

It's crucial that we have information on the whereabouts, activities, and notions of Merryborough's citizens.

CARL

Such foresight.

ERICA

Absolutely.

STEVE

Wonder Goods is planning to expand its footprint in Merryborough. As a result, they've requested that all citizens relocate to new "efficiency" housing units.

ERICA

I received the notice.

CARL

As did I.

RACHEL

Packing by the deadline has been difficult.

(Pause.)

CARL
(Horried)

We're happy to help!

ERICA
(Horried)

Of course we are!

CARL
(Horried)

We're neighborly as can be!

ERICA
(Horried)

Right, Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL

I guess.

(Pause.)

STEVE

Finally, *Wonder Goods* will be establishing a perimeter around Merryborough. Spotlights. Barbed wire. For security. Movement in and out of town will be limited.

RACHEL

We can't leave?

(Pause.)

STEVE
(Derisively)

Of course you can leave.

CARL
(To RACHEL)

Don't be absurd.

STEVE

You'll just need the requisite paperwork.

RACHEL

And what does that include?

STEVE

Entry and exit permits.

	RACHEL
Exit and entry--	
	STEVE
6-8 months processing time.	
	RACHEL
6-8 months!	
	STEVE
That's all for now, Executive Chair.	
	ERICA
Thank you, Chair of Security and Public Order. Your diligence is greatly appreciated. Now, our first agenda item: it appears that Mrs. Feldman has once again...lost her cat.	
	CARL
Not again.	
	STEVE
How can she be so careless?	
	ERICA
The floor is open.	
	CARL
We could buy her a leash?	
	ERICA
She needs more than that.	
	RACHEL
A jingly collar...with bells?	
	ERICA
Insufficient, in my view.	
	STEVE
We could institute penalties for negligent pet ownership.	
	ERICA
What did the Chair of Security and Public Order have in mind?	
	STEVE
We'll inform Mrs. Feldman that the next time she loses her furry friend, the punishment will be severe.	

RACHEL

How severe?

STEVE

Well, death.

(Pause.)

RACHEL

(Disgusted)

You'd harm an innocent animal?

STEVE

I wasn't talking about the cat.

(Pause.)

STEVE

I'm joking.

(Long, forced laughter.)

STEVE

It only makes sense that we put the beast out of its misery.

(RACHEL stops laughing before the others.)

CARL

(Warming to the idea)

It spends half its time wandering anyway.

ERICA

Poor thing.

RACHEL

It's blameless!

STEVE

Are any of us really blameless?

CARL

The Chair of Education and Records doesn't have the stomach for justice.

STEVE

Sadly, I see no other way.

ERICA

It's settled. Mrs. Feldman will be informed that the next time she loses her cat, she will lose...her cat.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

ERICA

Moving on. The cyclist situation has taken a turn for the worse.

CARL

Could you clarify, Executive Chair?

ERICA

Certainly, Co-Executive Chair. Citations remain unpaid. Attendance at the trainings is laughable. And the cyclists who got a taste of jail-time...well, how do I put this?

(Pause)

It seems to have hardened their resolve.

(Pause.)

CARL

Should we round them up?

STEVE

They've started traveling in packs. Apprehending them has been...problematic.

ERICA

Any ideas?

(Pause.)

CARL

We could double the penalties.

ERICA

That might work.

RACHEL

Stipends in exchange for training attendance?

ERICA

Persuasion. Perhaps.

STEVE

We could create a few roadside hazards.

(Pause.)

RACHEL

(Incredulous)

What?

STEVE

Nothing life threatening. Quick changing lights. Potholes. To deflate their spirits.

(Uncomfortable chuckling.)

CARL

(Allowing)

It would show that we're serious.

RACHEL

And if someone gets hurt?

STEVE

There are worse things than a roadside spill.

ERICA

It's settled. Infrastructure-based coercion against the cyclists, effective immediately.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

ERICA

Our next agenda item has been designated as a subcommittee topic. All those not on the "Garden Trampler Subcommittee" should adjourn until further notice.

(No one moves.)

ERICA
(Gavels)

Order!

(Pause)

I hereby call to order the 2nd session of the “Garden Trampler Subcommittee.” Welcome everyone. Let’s take a moment to reconnect.

The following is delivered with the same intonation, at breakneck speed. They move around the stage as quickly as possible. This pace continues through role call.

ERICA
(Shaking Carl’s hand)

Erica. Charmed.

CARL
(Shaking Erica’s hand)

Carl. Pleasure.

RACHEL
(Shaking Steve’s hand)

Rachel. Hello.

STEVE
(Shaking Rachel’s hand)

Steve.

CARL
(Shaking Rachel’s hand)

Carl. Pleasure.

RACHEL
(Shaking Carl’s hand)

Rachel. Hello.

ERICA
(Shaking Steve’s hand)

Erica. Charmed.

STEVE
(Shaking Erica’s hand)

Steve.

RACHEL
(Shaking Erica's hand)

Rachel. Hello.

ERICA
(Shaking Rachel's hand)

Erica. Charmed.

CARL
(Shaking Steve's hand)

Carl. Pleasure.

STEVE
(Shaking Carl's hand)

Steve.

(They return to their chairs. Pause. They sit.)

ERICA
Let's begin with role call. Co-Executive Chair?

CARL
Present.

ERICA
Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL
Here.

ERICA
Chair of Security and Public Order?

STEVE
Present.

(Pause. Return to normal speed.)

ERICA
I believe that the Chair of Security and Public Order has the latest.

STEVE
Thank you, Executive Chair. Security cameras in the foliage captured a masked figure. Our facial recognition software - graciously provided by *Wonder Goods* - has identified the suspect as a citizen of Greenville.

(Disturbed murmuring.)

RACHEL

I had a feeling. Who was it?

STEVE

Does it matter?

CARL

I can't say that I'm surprised.

ERICA

(Viciously)

Barbarians

CARL

(Viciously)

Scum.

ERICA

I'll now hear proposals for--

STEVE

There's no need.

(Pause.)

ERICA

Chair of Security and Public Order?

STEVE

Wonder Goods is resolving the issue as we speak.

(Appreciative murmuring.)

RACHEL

What do our gardens have to do with *Wonder Goods*?

STEVE

They are safeguarding the public interest.

CARL

Marvelous neighbors.

ERICA

Always looking out.

RACHEL

How is *Wonder Goods* “resolving the issue?”

STEVE

I’m sure that the Chair of Educations and Records knows I can’t discuss that.

ERICA

Convey our thanks.

CARL

From the whole Council.

STEVE

Will do.

ERICA

If that’s all, I move that we disband the Garden Trampler Subcommittee.

CARL

It’s achieved its purpose.

STEVE

No need for it now.

ERICA

The Garden Trampler Subcommittee is hereby disbanded.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

ERICA

Returning in our capacity as the Merryborough City Council; we’ve received another request from the Hellermans. They would like to organize a celebration for their wedding anniversaries.

RACHEL

They have the same--

ERICA
A double wedding.

CARL
Years back.

ERICA
You couldn't make it?

CARL
Charming affair.

ERICA
The cocktails!

CARL
And canapés.

(Pause.)

ERICA
The Hellermans have requested to use the football field. They would like to erect a tent with lights and other decor.

CARL
Lights?

ERICA
And other decor, yes.

(Pause.)

CARL
I'm sure I speak for everyone when I say: it can't happen.

STEVE
Out of the question.

(Contemplative murmuring.)

RACHEL
May I ask...with all due respect...why not?

CARL
Safety hazards!

STEVE

Fire, for example.

CARL

Think of the revelry!

STEVE

Total bedlam.

ERICA

It would be...antithetical to our values.

RACHEL

They're not allowed to celebrate their anniversary?

(Silence.)

STEVE

I will remind the Chair of Education and Records that drunken revelry was banned last month.

RACHEL

I must have forgotten.

STEVE

What else have you forgotten?

(Pause.)

ERICA

We'll...inform the Hellermans that their request for celebration has been summarily denied.

RACHEL

Should we send cupcakes?

CARL

A condolence card should be sufficient.

STEVE

More than sufficient.

ERICA

Denial to the Hellermans in the form of a condolence card. Passed.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNSION

Thank you.

ERICA

I will now open the floor for comment.

(Pause.)

RACHEL

(Clears throat)

Executive Chair. If I may.

ERICA

Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL

There have been some education-related developments.

ERICA

Such as?

RACHEL

We only have one teacher left on payroll, and she teaches...for 30-minutes per day.

CARL

So little?

RACHEL

That's all she can afford, given her full-time job as a line-manager at *Wonder Goods*.

CARL

She can't just do both?

STEVE

Must be her fortitude.

CARL

Or lack thereof!

(Chuckling in agreement.)

ERICA

What happened to the other teachers?

RACHEL

They quit, citing dissatisfaction with their salaries.

(Pause.)

STEVE

How dare they.

CARL

Out of line.

STEVE

To leave us high and dry.

ERICA

What should we do?

(Pause.)

STEVE

It's obvious that the teachers are working to sabotage our school system and by extension...Merryborough itself.

CARL

I'm glad that someone said it.

STEVE

We should round them up for questioning.

RACHEL

Round up...the teachers?

STEVE

To understand their motives.

RACHEL

We know their motives...they told us--

STEVE

What if they're acting on behalf of external actors?

RACHEL

(Perplexed)

External?

STEVE
(Exploding)

Proxy warfare!

RACHEL
What are you talking about?

STEVE
We must detain them.

CARL
A wise course of action.

ERICA
I move that--

STEVE
(Touches ear)
It's done.

(Pause.)

ERICA
What's...done?

STEVE
The teachers have been rounded up. They're being questioned.

ERICA
(Marveling)
Such speed!

CARL
(Marveling)
Incredible!

ERICA
If there is nothing further, Chair of Education and Records?

RACHEL
I do have another item.

CARL
What now?

RACHEL

Most of the students stopped attending school months ago. In the time since, they've...well.

ERICA

Go ahead.

RACHEL

They've begun organizing into...tribal groups.

(Pause.)

CARL

What?

RACHEL

They've retreated...into the forest. We've seen them from a distance. Heads shaved. Faces painted. Dancing. Some say they're conducting arcane ceremonies. Ritualistic sacrifice.

STEVE

Has this been verified?

RACHEL

Verified?

STEVE

It sounds like poppycock.

(Pause.)

CARL

Chair of Education and Records, this doesn't seem to be an issue requiring the Council's precious time.

ERICA

I'm afraid that I agree with the Co-Executive Chair. Kids will be kids, no?

(Murmuring in agreement)

RACHEL

(Protesting)

But don't you see? We've lost the youth!

CARL

They'll come around.

ERICA

I'll remind the Chair of Education and Records that Merryborough has never been safer.
Or wealthier.

CARL

So what if they're acting out?

ERICA

The truth is, they don't know how good they have it.

STEVE

If I may, Executive Chair?

ERICA

(Cowering)

Please! By all means!

(Pause.)

STEVE

The status of the students will likely be solved by the new vocational training program.

RACHEL

Vocational training?

STEVE

All children in Merryborough will soon begin training towards either *Wonder Goods* employment or a Security Service contracting role.

RACHEL

What?

CARL

Terrific!

ERICA

Wonderful prospects.

CARL

The future has never been brighter.

RACHEL

Hold on. I have some concerns about--

ERICA

It's settled! The Chair of Education and Records will strike her own comments from the record as we eagerly await the new vocational training program.

(Gavel.)

ERICA

Well done, everyone.

UNISON

Thank you.

RACHEL

I'm not on board with any of--

STEVE

(Touches ear)

I have an announcement.

ERICA

Go ahead.

STEVE

(Touches ear)

I'm pleased to report that the teachers have confessed to treason, espionage, and conspiring to undermine the prosperity of our town.

RACHEL

(Incredulously)

Which teachers?

(Pause.)

STEVE

All of them.

(Distressed murmuring.)

RACHEL

That can't be.

STEVE

I'm afraid it's true.

RACHEL

What will happen to them?

STEVE

The problem is being addressed.

(Relieved murmuring.)

ERICA

That's a relief.

CARL

It certainly is.

RACHEL

(Cautiously)

How were they...questioned?

STEVE

That's all from me, Executive Chair.

ERICA

Thank you so much, Chair of Security and Public Order.

CARL

Thank you for everything.

(Pause.)

ERICA

There's just one more item. In order to mitigate operational inefficiencies, it has been decided that note-taking during Council sessions will no longer be necessary.

RACHEL

Decided by whom!?

ERICA

(Explaining)

Documentation is so burdensome.

CARL

(Explaining)

An administrative headache.

STEVE
(To RACHEL)

And such a bother for you, I imagine.

RACHEL

I actually like--

ERICA

I've already modified the bylaws and updated the relevant documentation, Chair of Education and Records, so you have nothing to worry about.

(ERICA gently takes RACHEL's legal pad.)

STEVE

That reminds me. I'm going to need control of the budget.

(Pause.)

ERICA

The budget?

STEVE
(Explaining)

For security.

CARL

Oh! Definitely!

ERICA

No problem at all!

STEVE

Thank you.

ERICA

Before we adjourn, I would like to open the floor once more to the Chair of Security and Public Order for any final questions, comments, concerns. We're at your disposal.

STEVE

Thank you, Executive Chair. I'll be reporting to *Wonder Goods* that we've had another successful session.

CARL

Excellent!

ERICA

To celebrate, I move that we enjoy flatbread pizza and malt whiskey, compliments of our benevolent sponsors.

CARL

Seconded!

(Gavel.)

STEVE

Aren't they the best?

CARL

Unparalleled generosity.

(They move to eat and drink, except for the RACHEL who remains seated, staring straight ahead.)

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE III

LIGHTS UP ON:

The 139th session of the Merryborough City Council. The same semicircular table centerstage, except RACHEL is no longer present; her chair has been removed, and her name placard is empty. The clock is broken. One of the lightbulbs is out, throwing a corner of the stage into darkness.

ERICA

(Gavels)

Order! Before we begin, I'd like to announce a few changes. First, the former Chair of Security and Public Order will continue to hold his previous position while also taking on the role of Executive Chair and Co-Executive Chair. The former Executive Chair has transitioned into the newly created "Executive Assistant" role and the former Co-Executive Chair has transitioned into the newly created role of "Co-Executive Assistant."

(They reverse their placards to reveal new titles.)

ERICA

All positions will serve at the pleasure of the Chair of Security and Public Order. Any questions?

(Pause.)

ERICA

(Handing the gavel to the STEVE)

The Council is yours.

STEVE

Thank you. I hereby call to order the 139th session of the Merryborough City Council.

(Pause.)

(Gavel.)

(Pause.)

CARL

He's a natural!

ERICA

Well done!

STEVE

I'll begin...as we do, with introductions. State your names.

(They stand.)

ERICA

Erica.

CARL

Carl.

STEVE

Steve.

(They sit.)

STEVE

We'll keep it...going. With. Role call? Executive Assistant?

ERICA

Here.

STEVE
Co-Executive Assistant?

CARL
Here.

STEVE
Chair of Security and Public Order?
(Pause)
Here.

(Pause.)

STEVE
(Whispers to ERICA)
What now?

ERICA
(Whispers)
Typically, you'd move to agenda items followed by general comment.

STEVE
(Whispers)
Agenda...items?

ERICA
(Whispers)
Anything you wish to discuss.

STEVE
(Whispering)
I see.

(Pause.)

STEVE
(Whispering)
And if I don't have an agenda?

CARL
(Whispering)
If I may?

STEVE
(Whispering)
Yes?

CARL

(Whispering)

The Executive Assistant is an expert at agendas.

ERICA

(Whispering)

You're too kind, Co-Executive Assistant.

CARL

(Whispering)

Why not let her take the lead?

STEVE

(Whispering)

Would it be right?

CARL

(Whispering)

Until you get the hang of it?

ERICA

(Whispering)

I'm at your disposal.

STEVE

(Loudly and uncomfortably)

I will now turn, uh, things, over to the Executive Assistant. For...a detailed...description of...items. On the agenda.

(Coughs)

(Gavels twice)

(Pause. STEVE hands the gavel back to ERICA.)

CARL

(Whispers)

Nice work!

ERICA

(Whispers)

Bravely done!

(Clears throat, normal volume)

Our first agenda item once again relates to Mrs. Feldman's cat.

CARL

I thought we had addressed that?

ERICA

In a way, we did.

(Pause.)

ERICA

Mrs. Feldman's cat escaped. The cat was found, detained, and after a short trial, summarily executed.

CARL

Good. Finally an end to the--

ERICA

Unfortunately, the cat was put to death quite brutally and very much in front of Mrs. Feldman. In quick succession she suffered a panic attack, a heart attack, and a cerebral stroke.

(Pause.)

CARL

And?

ERICA

(Gravely)

She didn't make it.

CARL

Tragic. Just tragic.

STEVE

It really is.

ERICA

While we're saddened by the loss--

CARL

We certainly are--

ERICA

And mourn the tragedy--

CARL

We certainly do--

ERICA

There are no excuses for lawbreaking.

STEVE

None whatsoever.

ERICA

I'm pleased to report that in the time since the Feldman...affair, negligent pet ownership has decreased by 100%. I move that we install a small plaque in Mrs. Feldman's memory, and consider the matter resolved.

CARL

Seconded!

(Gavels.)

ERICA

Thank you, Chair of Security and Public Order.

CARL

Yes, thank you.

STEVE

Don't mention it.

(Pause.)

ERICA

Our next agenda item concerns the cyclist situation.

CARL

They just don't get it, do they?

ERICA

In response to our infrastructure-based coercion, the cyclists have...radicalized.

CARL

How so?

ERICA

They've exchanged their bikes for automatic weapons. They're threatening to destroy the power plant.

CARL

They wouldn't!

ERICA

To make matters worse, the cyclists appear to be receiving tactical support from the teachers. Sorry. Former teachers.

STEVE

(Disgusted)

We have a plan to take care of the teachers. As for these...bikers. They're an annoyance. It's under control. There will soon be a...

(Darkly)

Final solution...

(With Menace)

To the cyclist situation.

(Pause.)

ERICA

(Nervously)

No follow-up questions here!

CARL

(Nervously)

Definitely not!

STEVE

Consider it solved.

ERICA

I move that we consider the cyclist situation, solved.

CARL

Seconded!

(Gavels.)

ERICA

Thank you, Chair of Security and Public Order.

CARL

Yes, thank you.

STEVE

No problem.

(Pause.)

ERICA

The next item pertains to members of the “Garden Trampler Subcommittee.” All those not on the “Garden Trampler Subcommittee” must leave--

CARL

Wasn’t that subcommittee disbanded?

(Pause.)

ERICA

(Shuffling papers)

Um. I’m not. Was that...

(Pause)

I suppose it was, yes.

(Pause.)

CARL

Is everything alright, Executive Assistant?

ERICA

Without meeting minutes I seem to have lost...it doesn’t matter.

STEVE

It was premature to disband that committee.

CARL

(Volunteering)

Should we reinstate it?

ERICA

Think of the paperwork.

(Pause.)

CARL

Executive Assistant?

ERICA

Yes, Co-Executive Assistant?

CARL

Might we discuss the topic here...as the Merryborough City Council?

ERICA
(Stunned)

That would break protocol.

CARL
An exception?

ERICA
I defer to the Chair of Security and Public Order.

(Pause.)

STEVE
(Solemnly)
I see no way around it.

(Pause.)

ERICA
Our next agenda item, being discussed here as a result of extenuating circumstances, concerns the Greenville “Garden Trampler.” Our marvelous sponsors have addressed the problem. *Wonder Goods* purchased Greenville and is converting the town into a sewage processing facility as we speak.

STEVE
(Proudly)
Since the expulsion of Greenville’s residents, our gardens have never been more vibrant.

CARL
Splendid!

ERICA
However, *Wonder Goods*’ elimination of the culprits has created...a minor refugee crisis.

CARL
Refugees?

ERICA
(Explaining)
The former citizens of Greenville.

CARL
Oh, them.

ERICA

Wonder Goods has generously provided each Greenville family with an efficiency housing unit in the newly founded town of Brownville.

CARL

They'll be housed in no time.

STEVE

Might I add something?

ERICA

(Excessive cowering)

Please!

CARL

(Excessive cowering)

Yes!!

ERICA

(Excessive cowering)

Go ahead!!

CARL

(Excessive cowering)

At your service!!!

(Pause.)

STEVE

As an additional precautionary measure, our Security Services have installed improvised explosive devices in and around our gardens.

ERICA

Better safe than sorry.

CARL

Our gardens are secure.

ERICA

I move that we consider the Garden Trampler problem resolved.

CARL

Seconded!

(Gavels.)

ERICA

Thank you, Chair of Security and Public Order.

CARL

Yes, thank you.

STEVE

You're welcome.

ERICA

Our next agenda item has to do with the Hellermans, who are planning a Christmas party.

CARL

(Grudging admiration)

They are persistent.

STEVE

We'll take care of it.

CARL

Do we want to entertain the possibility--

STEVE

(Slapping the table)

There will be no entertainment, of ideas or otherwise!

(Pause.)

ERICA

Right.

CARL

Of course.

ERICA

We could perhaps send--

STEVE

(Touching ear)

It's done.

ERICA

What's...done?

STEVE

The Hellermans have been handled.

ERICA

You've handled the Hellermans?

STEVE

Luckily, the Council outlawed event planning. The Hellermans have been apprehended.

ERICA

Sensible.

CARL

I would have done the same.

STEVE

In fact I--

(Touches ear)

I see.

(Silence.)

ERICA

Is everything alright?

(Pause.)

STEVE

(Touches ear)

It appears that the Hellermans...resisted arrest and fled the scene. They returned moments later, at the head of a pack of slobbering cyclists and tempestuous teachers. Sorry. Former teachers. My sources indicate that--

(Touches ear)

These groups have joined together in a campaign of guerrilla warfare.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

CARL

Well!

ERICA

Not ideal.

CARL

Certainly not.

STEVE

They'll be dealt with. Take my word for it.

ERICA

I move that we take the Chair of Security and Public Order's word for it!

CARL

Seconded!

(Gavels.)

ERICA

Thank you, Chair of Security and Public Order.

CARL

Yes, thank you.

STEVE

It was nothing.

ERICA

To recap, we're devising a...final solution to the cyclist situation, cleansing the garden trampers, taking care of the teachers and handling the Hellermans.

STEVE

I'd say that covers it.

CARL

(Admiringly)

Your work ethic is unmatched.

STEVE

Yes.

ERICA

That's all for the agenda. The floor is yours, Chair of Security and Public Order.

STEVE

Thank you, Executive Assistant. As a general update, Merryborough remains prosperous.

CARL

Brilliant!

ERICA

Wonderful.

STEVE

With the initiation of our vocational training program, the ranks of both *Wonder Goods* and the Security Services are engorged beyond our wildest dreams.

ERICA

A joy to hear.

CARL

Everything we hoped for.

STEVE

We've started workshopping hand-signals, call and response greetings, and other mechanisms to differentiate law-abiding citizens of Merryborough from...others.

ERICA

How exciting!

CARL

Nothing like cohesion!

STEVE

In Merryborough, there is no crime to speak of. Our town is the safest place on earth.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

CARL

Stupendous!

ERICA

Given these accomplishments, I move that we honor the Chair of Security and Public Order with our highest honor...the City Council Medal of Valor.

CARL

Seconded!

STEVE

It's too much.

ERICA

Nonsense.

STEVE

In that case, I accept.

ERICA

We'll organize a ceremony. Streamers, a band, cocktails. We'll start planning immediately.

STEVE

A ceremony?

ERICA

Only the best for our fearless leader!

(Silence.)

STEVE

Executive Assistant, may I speak with you a moment?

ERICA

Is there a problem?

STEVE

(Stands)

Not at all.

(To the ERICA)

In the hall, if you would.

(ERICA stands. They exit.)

(Pause.)

(STEVE returns and takes his seat.)

STEVE

(Explaining)

The event planning prohibition.

CARL

I see.

STEVE

She'll be questioned.

CARL

Naturally.

STEVE

Where were we?

CARL

Your medal.

STEVE

Send it to my home.

CARL

At once.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

STEVE

I forgot to mention. Merryborough will be...rebranded. Effective immediately.

CARL

What will it be called?

(A new banner unfurls to cover the old one. It reads, "*Wonder Goods*, supported and paid for by *Wonder Goods* with the expression permission of *Wonder Goods*.")

CARL

I love it!

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

STEVE

It's also been decided that I'll assume a new role.

CARL

Oh?

(STEVE flips his placard around, revealing his new title: VICEROY.)

CARL

Mazel tov!

STEVE

I was wondering if you might be interested in a new position.

CARL

A promotion?

STEVE

Of sorts.

CARL

What would it entail?

STEVE

Administration. Counting things. People. The numbers may go up. They may then, go swiftly and alarmingly down. But not for long. It's crucial work. Unpaid, but crucial. And plenty of potential for upward mobility. I'll be heartbroken if you decline.

CARL

I accept.

STEVE

Good.

CARL

Thank you for your confidence.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

STEVE

(Producing a cigar)

I move that we close this session of the Merryborough City Council, and that I enjoy this cigar.

CARL

Seconded!

(STEVE gavels. They shake hands.)

CARL

Viceroy: thank you. Your leadership has been peerless. Your guidance, an inspiration. You're a shining sword in the darkness. I would also add that - on a personal level - you have saved me. Saved us. As a result of your direction, our hand has been strengthened. Our position, secure. It's thanks to you. Thank you.

STEVE

You're welcome.

(STEVE lights the cigar.)

STEVE

To the future.

CARL

To the future!

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE IV

LIGHTS UP ON:

The 140th session of the Merryborough City Council. The same semicircular table centerstage. Only one name placard remains, it reads: "Viceroy." STEVE sits in a chair. He is alone on stage. The clock is gone, the walls are bare. Half the stage is in darkness, and a single light bulb flickers menacingly in the corner. The table is lit red from below.

STEVE

(Slaps the table)

Order!

(Pause.)

STEVE

(Slaps the table)

Order!

STEVE

Intern!

(Pause.)

STEVE
(Roaring)

CARL!

(Pause.)

(CARL runs onstage with a stack of paper.)

CARL
Viceroy!

STEVE
(Slaps the table)
Order!

CARL
Apologies.

STEVE
Where's my gavel?

CARL
Sold, Viceroy. Along with the furniture. To pay for the latest equipment.

STEVE
(Rubbing temples)
Right, right.

(CARL stands awkwardly without a chair).

CARL
(Head bowed)
Excuse my tardiness.

STEVE
Where were you?

CARL
The paperwork has been oppressive. Signed confessions. Detention reports. Our prisons are bursting.

STEVE
(Motioning at paperwork)
Don't we have people for this?

CARL

We're stretched thin.

STEVE

(Barking)

Status report!

(With each update, CARL places a new piece of paper in front of STEVE, which he ignores.)

CARL

(Placing paper on table)

First: the good news. Revenue is through the roof. The recent expansion in factory flooring has allowed us to quadruple production. In short order, *Wonder Goods* has become an international powerhouse, an indispensable link in the global supply chain.

STEVE

I'm glad to hear it.

CARL

(Placing paper on table)

Production has outpaced supply. We've depleted nearby resources quicker than anticipated. Therefore, we're finalizing import agreements with partner nations.

STEVE

Yes. Very good.

CARL

(Placing paper on the table)

Our shareholders are pleased, though there has been some grumbling that our international partners have a--

STEVE

What?

CARL

(Placing paper on table)

Nuanced perspective on human rights.

STEVE

(Disgusted)

Shareholders...can't we just shoot them?

CARL

(Excitedly; places paper on table)

My thoughts exactly! It would require trained assassins, hired through a shell company. I could start vetting the necessary--

STEVE

I was joking.

(Pause.)

CARL

Right.

STEVE

It was a joke.

CARL

(Retrieving paper from table)

Right! Me too. Haha!

STEVE

Continue.

CARL

In slightly less--

STEVE

Wait.

CARL

Viceroy?

STEVE

Can I offer some feedback?

CARL

Always.

STEVE

First of all, you're doing great.

CARL

Thank you, Viceroy.

STEVE

You're excelling.

CARL

That means so much to--

STEVE

However, you may wish to consider the comfortability of your superiors.

CARL

The comfortability--

STEVE

Of your superiors, yes.

(Pause.)

STEVE

You're forcing me to crane my neck, for instance.

CARL

Oh dear.

STEVE

And my legs! They're tired.

CARL

Your legs!

STEVE

(Gesturing)

If you would?

(CARL moves downstage center. He gets on his hands and knees; he is a footstool. STEVE puts his legs on CARL's back.)

CARL

Thank you for your feedback.

STEVE

My pleasure. Continue.

CARL

(Strenuously placing paper on table)

In slightly less optimal news, negotiations with the rebels have come to a standstill.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

STEVE

They've rejected our terms?

CARL

Unconditional surrender just isn't palatable.

STEVE

Thankless swine.

CARL

The movement's leaders are resolute.

STEVE

(Gritted Teeth)

The Hellermans.

CARL

They even sent subordinates to recent negotiations.

STEVE

The disrespect!

CARL

They sent you...a gift.

STEVE

A gift?

CARL

I'm not sure I--

STEVE

Out with it!

(From the floor, CARL produces a card and sets it on the table.)

STEVE

Is that...a condolence card?

CARL

Yes, Viceroy.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

STEVE

These vermin can't be reasoned with.

CARL

Their numbers have grown, exacerbated by recent prison breaks. Our spies indicate that in addition to refugees from Greenville, Brownville, and the town formerly known as Merryborough, their numbers have swelled with foreign fighters--

STEVE

Foreign fighters?

CARL

Global sympathizers. Supporters of cyclists, teachers, and of course, cats.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

STEVE

What do you mean, cats!

CARL

You remember the Feldman affair?

STEVE

A tragedy!

CARL

Mrs. Feldman and her cat have become international icons--

(Clears throat)

Martyrs for feline fanatics. Our spies indicate that these cat-lovers represent the more extremist wing of the MLM--

STEVE

What?

CARL

Sorry. The Merryborough Liberation Movement.

STEVE

This...pathetic band of criminals will be crushed.

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

STEVE

Why haven't we crushed them?

CARL

We're doing their best.

STEVE

Is it morale?

CARL

Morale is spectacular. Morale has never been higher. In fact, if morale were any higher, I'd be concerned.

STEVE

Good.

CARL

However--

STEVE

What?

CARL

There has been whispers of...dissension within our ranks.

STEVE

(Stands)

What did you say?

CARL

Our boys...are losing their spirit.

STEVE

(Pacing)

Our beautiful boys?

CARL

They don't have the stomach for protracted conflict.

STEVE

(Pacing)

It must be their training.

CARL
(Offended)

Wonder Goods security services are the finest private military contractors in the world. They've received training from some of the most heinous, contemptible, and horrifying individuals alive. The only plausible explanation is...their heart just isn't in it.

STEVE

Double their pay.

CARL

We don't have the margin.

STEVE

You said revenues are sky-high!

CARL

So are costs! Beyond personnel, equipment, and operating expenses, we also have the officers club, the fitness center, and the Viceroy's Nordic retreat.

STEVE

All essential!

CARL

I simply don't have the background for fiscal...creativity.

STEVE

Why don't you just cut that thing we talked about last time.

CARL

What thing?

STEVE

It was related to that guy.

CARL

Guy?

STEVE

We talked about expenditures!

CARL

I can't recall. If we had a record--

STEVE
It's fine. Shall we move on?

CARL
No problem.

(Pause.)

CARL
It's just--

STEVE
What?

CARL
I don't know what we should discuss now.

STEVE
You didn't prepare a...what's it called.

CARL
Program?

STEVE
No.

CARL
Lineup?

STEVE
Not that.

CARL
(Thick Accent)
Ordre du jour?

STEVE
What?

(An explosion sounds in the distance.)

CARL
I've been swamped, Viceroy. I apologize.

STEVE
Get up.

(CARL stands.)

STEVE
(Motioning to his chair)

Sit down.

CARL
Viceroy, is this really--

STEVE
(Patting his chair)
There you are.

(CARL sits in STEVE's chair. Spotlight on CARL. STEVE produces a small device which he places on CARL's finger. CARL's heart rate is projected onto the upstage wall, beeping steadily. STEVE places his hands on CARL's shoulders.)

STEVE
Intern...or if I may: Carl. You know that I'm here to support you.

CARL
Of course, but I don't--

STEVE
You've been under such pressure.

CARL
I'm not--

STEVE
Unburden yourself.

CARL
There's no burden.

STEVE
The hours.

CARL
An honor!

STEVE
The paperwork.

A delight!	CARL
Have you been having thoughts?	STEVE
Thoughts?	CARL
Noteworthy notions?	STEVE
Nothing noteworthy, no.	CARL
Do you dream of a different life?	STEVE
I'm not sure I...no.	CARL
Do you cherish our benefactors?	STEVE
With all my heart.	CARL
Our beautiful boys?	STEVE
My pride and joy.	CARL
Do you love...profit?	STEVE
Absolutely.	CARL
Private enterprise?	STEVE
Yes!	CARL

STEVE

Is this thing on? It must be broken...

(STEVE puts the clamp on his finger. His heart rate is steady. He examines the cords.)

CARL

Viceroy.

STEVE

(Checking the cords)

What is it?

CARL

Is there more that I could do?

(STEVE's heart rate increases)

STEVE

(Checking the cords)

What do you mean?

CARL

(Carefully)

Respectfully, Viceroy. You're...tense.

(STEVE's heart rate increases)

STEVE

Are you questioning my resolve?

CARL

(Noticing)

Of course not. It's just. Have *you* been having thoughts?

(STEVE's heart rate goes through the roof.)

STEVE

(Defensively)

How dare you! I haven't had a thought in years. Not a single notion! All of my attention has been focused on--

(Notices heart-rate)

What the--

CARL

Viceroy?

STEVE
(Ripping off the clamp)

I'm fine!

CARL
Yes Viceroy.

STEVE
Replace that machine.

CARL
Right away.

STEVE
Do you have something to say?

CARL
Of course not. It's just, that was the third loyalty check today and--

STEVE
We'll keep doing it until I'm convinced of your--

(Gunfire sounds offstage.)

STEVE
(Annoyed)
What now?

CARL
What was that?

STEVE
(Muttering)
For Pete's sake, how hard can it be to--
(Touches ear)

That's inexcusable. I--

(Pause)
What? What do you mean? What?

(Pause)
Hello?

(More frantic)
Hello? Are you there? Hello?

(Pause.)

CARL
Is everything alright?

STEVE
Yes of course.

CARL
Are you sure we have nothing to--

STEVE
(Casually removes his earpiece)
Hey! Listen. You've been doing such a great job. I think a promotion might be in order.

CARL
You mean it?

STEVE
I sure do. It only seems right to officially recognize your efforts.

CARL
I'm honored.

(An explosion and gunfire just off-stage.)

STEVE
(Quickly)
As I was saying, you've progressed by leaps and bounds. I think you're ready for the big-time.

CARL
The...big-time?

STEVE
Viceroy.

CARL
But isn't that your role?

STEVE
(Quickly)
To tell you the truth, I'm burnt out. You know how it is.

CARL
I sure do.

(An explosion and gunfire just off-stage.)

STEVE

(Quickly)

And so, I'll be pursuing an early retirement, effective immediately, and leaving the reins of the *Wonder Goods* security forces in your unquestionably capable hands.

CARL

Can I have some time to think about it?

STEVE

(Quickly)

It's now or never. Once in a lifetime!

CARL

(Delighted)

I accept!

(STEVE grabs CARL's hand and shakes with great fervor.)

STEVE

It's settled then! Congratulations!!

CARL

(Delightedly)

Thank you.

STEVE

Well-earned! I couldn't have dreamed of a successor with more--

(A commotion is heard off-stage, followed by a loud banging on the door.)

CARL

Who could that be?

STEVE

Why don't you go see, "Viceroy"?

CARL

(Pleased)

I like the sound of that. A nice ring to it. Very nice.

CARL walks offstage. STEVE grabs his placard, scribbles hastily on the back.

He slides it into place. It reads, "Intern." He sits calmly with hands folded, staring straight ahead.

LIGHTS FADE.

SCENE V

LIGHTS QUICKLY
UP ON:

The first session of the Merryborough Tribal Council. The woods. ERICA, RACHEL, and BILL, sit on tree stumps. Their heads are shaved, their faces painted. They sit around a single bicycle wheel, horizontal in the dirt. A skull is perched on the wheel's spoke. A small bonfire downstage left. A large cat statue glistens in the firelight downstage right.

ERICA
(Slaps the skull)

Order!

(Pause)

I hereby call to order the Merryborough Tribal Council. Welcome everyone. It's been a while since our last session; let's take a moment to reconnect.

LIGHTS FADE.

END OF PLAY.