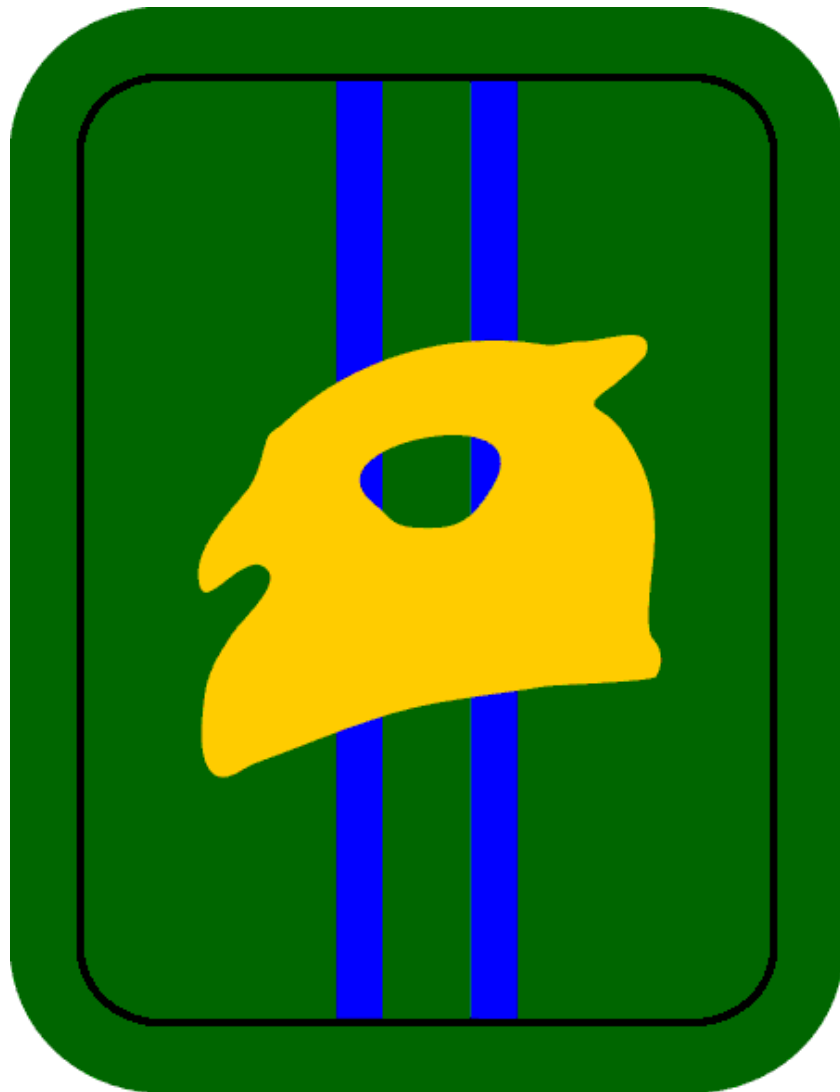


The Owls



THE OWLS

The cast: Old Man, Policeman, Small Scout, PL, Dick, Timber, Jimmy, Tom, Bradley, Smithy. The Owls: Spencer, Stagg, Baxter, Collins, Randle.

The scene is a deserted field late at night. As the curtains open a man is seen standing centre stage. He is wearing a raincoat and his trilby hat is slightly pushed back over his head. He is lost in thought. Then, a Policeman (obviously a local village type) enters with a bicycle.

The music is quietly playing “These are the times” but it stops the moment the policeman speaks to the man.

Policeman Good evening sir, are you lost?

Old Man No constable, I’m not lost.

Policeman I saw your car parked by the side of the road, sir, as I was cycling by and I thought I saw somebody standing here.

Old Man Just looking around, that’s all.

Policeman Have you been here before sir?

Old Man Yes constable, a long time ago. You see, I was driving my car back to town just now and suddenly the headlights of my car lit up a signpost. I saw the name of the village and I couldn’t resist the temptation to get out and take a look around.

Policeman Not much doing here these days sir. Desolate it is. The only thing we get around here is owls. The noise they make at night is something fierce!

Old Man Yes, the Owls always could make a noise. I was thinking about the Owls when you came along **(he takes out a cigarette case out of his pocket to select a smoke, then he takes out a lighter and offers the policeman a cigarette).**

Policeman Don’t go much on ‘em myself sir, but every man to his taste *(he pauses)*...that’s a nice lighter you’ve got there.

Old Man Yes, it was a present, **(then with reverie)** a present from the owls.

Policeman **(The policeman scratches his head as he wonders what this means)** I’m just going over to take a look at the old barn so I might see you on the way back. Just make yourself at home sir **(he smiles as he exits)**

Old Man It’s alright constable, I am home.

The man is alone. The music breaks into “These are the times”. The man looks at his lighter and the lights dim down to a “pin spot” on his face. Otherwise the stage is in total darkness. The man is remembering. He slowly walks back and lowers himself (carefully – to suggest old age) onto the stump of an old tree.

House curtains open up and lights begin to come up revealing a summer scene. Tents are around and we find ourselves in a Scout camp. A young scout enters and crosses over the stage towards the old man (He does not see the man and the man doesn't look up as he passes. He turns the lighter over and over in his hands).

Scout Hey! Skip! I've cut my finger. Can you put some iodine on it? I've cut my finger on a tin – can you put something on it skip? **(He exits. A PL enters and two other scouts enter from opposite sides of the stage).**

PL Anybody seen Johnson? He's supposed to be duty patrol and they've all gone out somewhere.

Dick They're *always* out. Old skip won't 'arf be mad. What time's dinner?

PL How do *I* know? *I'm* not duty patrol – it's the Owls.

Tom I'm *starving*. I'm *always* starving. **(To audience)** Maybe I've got a tape worm!

PL Don't be so conceited – a tape worm wouldn't be seen dead with you.

A few scouts enter, looking scruffy, and sit around listening to the conversation. Then another young lad enters. He's in full uniform and looking very smart.

Timber Hey, I've just come back from the post office. There's a *smashing* girl down there!

Dick You know something Timber? You suffer from a one track mind **(tapping his forehead as he says this).**

One of the other scouts is beginning to exit.

PL Oi! Bradley! Where are you going?!

Bradley I'm just going to take a walk down to the post office...

PL Then get into uniform. You're not leaving camp unless you're properly dressed.

Bradley Cor, luv-a-duck! All this talk about getting married, building a home, settling down – and you don't even get a chance to practice **(he exits).**

Timber Hey, Jimmy, there's a letter for you **(hands him the letter)**.

Jimmy Oooh, it from me mother. Hooray! **(ripping open the letter)**.

PL Some of you fellas might have to start getting dinner ready. The Owls have gone out somewhere and we're shorthanded.

Timber **(Looking over at Jimmy who has opened the letter and looks very sad)**. What's the matter Jimmy? Bad news?

Jimmy Yeah, it's awful! She hasn't sent me anything.

PL Nip to it, some of you, and get the spuds ready. Don't blame *me*, take it out on the owls when they get back.

Dick *Blow* the blinking Owls. I vote we give 'em a rough house. Always blinking dodging the work. Come on you two – you heard what the foreman said **(they exit)**.

Timber Bloomin' slaves – that's what we are. And this is supposed to be a holiday...just *imagine* – we have to *pay* for this! **(He exits. A boy walks across the stage carrying a bucket – as he walks he speaks to the audience)**.

Smithy This is about the tenth time today they've sent me for water. I don't know what the heck they do with it. They certainly don't wash!!! **(He exits. The PL also exits on the opposite side of the stage)**.

Then the Owls rush on. There are five of them and they are all dressed in uniform. For the first time in the scene the lines are directed directly at the Old Man. He looks at them. He does not otherwise move.

Spencer I know what you're going to say skip. We're on duty patrol and we shouldn't have gone out. Dinner is going to be late and we're always the cause of all the trouble in the group and we're a pain in the neck....HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

Collins You thought we didn't know, didn't you? Well we did.

Stagg We don't know how old you are, but we think it's around one hundred and seven.

Spencer Don't be disrespectful – he doesn't look a day over ninety.

Randle Go on, give him the bloomin' thing and let's get back to the spuds.

Spencer From your devoted brats, The Owls, please accept this as a token of what we think of you and we hope to be annoying you for the rest of our lives **(he throws the lighter to the man. The man catches it but there is no other movement from him. He merely looks up into the faces of the boys).**

The stage lights fade out and smoke fills the stage. We hear the sounds of air raid sirens, gun fire and dog fights overhead. The fades to nothing and a solitary figure marches onto stage. We see the other spot on this figure. The remainder of the cast a standing stock still – frozen).

Stagg Gee skip, I bet you didn't think I was going to be a sailor did you? I had a smashing time in the navy and I was on the best ship in the whole fleet. I wish you could've seen her skip, she was *great*. There'll never be another Prince of Wales. **(Marches off).**

Randle What about me skip? Remember the first time I came home on leave after getting my wings? Remember that time I flew right over your house? And the night we went on a binge together? That was my last party before I went down over Hamburg. **(Marches off).**

Spencer I didn't let you down either skip. That old PL badge was still with me at Arnhem. **(Marches off).**

Collins You loaned me that lighter once, when I was home on leave. But I gave it back to you and I guess you've still got it. The last letter I ever wrote to you was from Singapore. **(Marches off).**

Baxter I hope a lot of the others got back from Dunkirk skip. What a rum bunch of blokes the Owls turned out to me. **(Marches off).**

The lights come back on and the smoke stops.

Spencer Come on you mugs, let's get cracking with the dinner or he'll forget it's his birthday and start bawling us out again. Come on! **(They exit).**

The lights now return to their original level (at the start of the number). Whilst this takes place, the small boy with the cut finger walks backwards across the stage, from where he made his exit to his original entrance.

Scout Hey! Skip! I've cut my finger. Can you put some iodine on it? I've cut my finger on a tin – can you put something on it skip?

The man gets up from his seat and returns to centre stage. Then the policeman returns

Policeman Still here sir?

Old Man Yes, still here constable – but I think I'll be moving on now.

Policeman Didn't see anything of the owls did you?

Old Man Oh yes, I saw them.

Policeman Peculiar things owls, sir, you never know what they're going to do.

Old Man How right you are, I never *dreamed* what *they* were going to do.

Policeman How long did you live in these parts, sir?

Old Man Oh, just a couple of weeks.....a long time ago.

Policeman A fortnight?! You really mean to say you just *stayed* here.

Old Man Oh no, I was here for two weeks....and I lived. **(He looks at his lighter and then back at the policeman).** Goodnight.

The music plays the last eight bars of "These are the times" as the man slowly walks off. The constable just watches him. The curtains close on the last bars of the music.