TILDA AND THE WITCHES

A Drama in Five Acts

by Tachybaptus

ACT 1

SCENE 1

The Royal Palace at Purdonium, in the Country of Uraemia.

Enter TILDA, Queen of Uraemia, with the Queen Mother, VULPECULA, and her Children JESSICA, aged six, and VUSILLUS, four, with their Nurse MAISIE, and ETTY, the Court Poet.

JESSICA: Mother, why must we fight these wretched Thetans?
I'm sick of wars, I miss my father so.
TILDA: As do we all, dear child. Would it were over.
This war was not our choice: the Thetans swarmed
Over the border from Opuntia,
Which they have conquered, and laid waste to it.
They will not stop until the world is theirs,
Or till we drive the last one from our land.
JESSICA: But what is it that makes them want the world?
TILDA: They worship Satan, and they do his bidding,
Or what their priests pretend is Satan's will
– And that is, that they must subdue all men
To Satan's rule. They think of nothing else:
Music and dancing, wine and merriment,
Sweet arts that ease men's lot upon the earth,
Are all forbidden to them. They must curse
And utter Satan's name with every breath
So he should favour them, and when they die,
They'll feast with him in hell, while others burn.
VULPECULA: Truly they are the slaves of their beliefs,
Which make their lives no less than hell on earth.
'Tis terrible to be a Thetan woman:
Their men keep them in chains, pent in the house,
To toil for them. They never see the day,
For when they go to fetch food from the market
They're swathed in sacks, led along by a eunuch.
They may not speak a word, on pain of death.
JESSICA: O granny, that is terrible! But father
Will slay them all, for he is brave and good.
TILDA: Sadly, the war doth not go well for us.

They come in myriads, and for each one killed
Ten more rush in, waving their bloody swords.
They have no fear of death, for they believe
They shall be welcomed to the arms of Satan
And given all the joys they lacked on earth.
(A Sound of Trumpets. Enter KING FELIX, his brother PRINCE VISCUS, and SOLDIERS, in Haste and Disarray. TILDA rushes to embrace FELIX.)
TILDA: Welcome, my Felix, how I have longed to see thee!
FELIX: My love, I wish I came with better news.
Our army is o'erwhelmed and put to flight,
The Thetans press upon Purdonium
And will be here in hours. My dearest Tilda,
Thou and our children, and my reverend mother
Must flee the town and seek a safer place,
And that right soon. Dress ye in peasants' garb
And haste to th' harbour of Opprobrium
To find a ship sailing to Tapioca
Where Sago, husband of my sister Sheba,
Shall surely welcome you into his court.
As for myself and Viscus, and our men –
All that remain after the last affray –
We'll take to th' hills and fight them tooth and nail,
But it will be a long war and a bitter
To extirpate these devils from our land.
VISCUS: Aye, it hath been bitter enough already:
I like not my first taste of war at all.
Would I could sail to Tapioca with you
To Princess Semolina, my betrothed.
TILDA: Felix, I'll fight, thou know'st what deeds I did
When I did rescue thee from the foul Tartars
These eight years gone.
ETTY: And I shall stand beside thee,
With sword in hand, as we did stand before
Against the foe in far Kamysyak.
FELIX: Indeed, my love, I know that thou canst fight
Like a great tigress standing by her cubs.
But this is not the time, nor yet the place.
Thy duty's to our children: guard them well
With all thy strength and courage, and the day
When we have beaten down the hideous foe,
Bring them both safely to Purdonium
To live in peace and plenty once again.
Now flee t' Opprobrium and take to sea
Before th' invaders cut off your retreat:
Lose not a minute, for this town is lost.
TILDA: My love, thou speakest sooth, though 't tears my heart
To part from thee after so brief a moment.
But what must be, must be. A fond farewell;
May God and all his angels keep thee safe
Against the devil's horde, till thou prevail.

(They embrace. Exit FELIX, VISCUS and the SOLDIERS.)
VULPECULA: ’Tis well dear King Vusillus, two years gone,
Lived not to see this fate fall on our land.
TILDA: Ho, courtiers, there is no time to lose.
I ask for one last duty, ere ye flee:
Throw all our treasure in the castle well
And then be off to hide as best ye may.
We’ll to Opprobrium with all due speed:
Come, dear Vulpecula, my children, Etty,
This is not our first time upon the ways.
We shall live hard, but hope for better days.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 2

The Road to Opprobrium.

Enter TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY and JESSICA, with MAISIE carrying little VUSILLUS. All are in the garb of Peasants.

VULPECULA: Night falls, and I am weary to the bone.
We’ll halt and sleep, and march on in the morn.
JESSICA: For all thou saidst this was a great adventure
There’s so much walking in it, so much dust.
I’m tired, my feet hurt, and I want my supper.
VULPECULA: Bear up, my darling, in a day or so
We shall be on a ship to Tapioca,
And thou canst take thine ease like a princess.
TILDA: Is this a monastery by the road?
Perchance the monks are hospitable folk
Who’ll grant a bed to weary wanderers.
VULPECULA: They are the order o’ Saint Convolvulus,
The country folk call them the Swivelling Monks.
(She knocks on the Door. It is opened by a MONK.)
MONK: Welcome, good travellers, seek ye food and rest?
VULPECULA: Aye, that we do, kind sir, may we come in?
MONK: Enter, and may a blessing be upon you,
And ye shall share what viands we can offer,
Though naught but turnips from our barren fields.
While these are dressed, we practise our devotions
After the rule of Saint Convolvulus.
(They enter. Inside, there are Rows of revolving Stools on which Monks are spinning.)
TILDA: Pray tell me, sir, why do ye swivel so?
MONK: We have no gaudy rites of pomp and power;
Hymns, vestments, incense are unknown to us.
A humble stool suffices all our needs:
We spin till we are giddy, and we see
Visions of glory and the saints in heaven.
(While he is speaking, JESSICA climbs on to a Stool and starts spinning in Imitation of the Monks.)

MONK: Thy little girl already hath the way of ’t.
Mark how she twirls, and laughs for th’ love of God.
JESSICA: O how I love this twirly whirly thing!
It makes me giggle, and I feel so dizzy.
(The Room is filled with pink Bears and Unicorns.)
MONK: What devilry is this?
TILDA: ’Tis but my girl,
And there’s no harm in her envisioned beasts.
She hath such power in her imagination
That what she sees is often seen by all.
MAISIE: Jessica, dear, do put away those creatures!
It is not good to fright our gracious hosts.
MONK: In all my years of seeing holy visions
I have seen naught like these. But if they mean
No harm to us, nor any disrespect
To th’ holy monks of Saint Convolvulus
Why, let her have her strangely coloured beasts.
But tell me sooth, what fate brings you folk here?
Ye are dressed like simple peasants, but thy speech
And thy demeanour are of noble kind.
TILDA: I fear I have unwelcome news for thee
And for thy house: we are in headlong flight.
The fiendish Thetans are in full advance,
Purdonium is theirs; in a short span
Their army will sweep south and overwhelm you.
Our troops are scattered, heading for the hills,
They’ll fight as best they can, but for the present
Ye’ll be in the fell power of Satan’s own.
MONK: Ah, that is heavy news. But do not grieve
For us, for we are poor, and have no gold
That they can seize. And if we are cast out,
We’ll take to th’ fields and woods, and swivel there
And none can stop us spinning as we please.
Did not the great Convolvulus himself,
When he was cast out of Forsythia,
Wander the roads, rotating as he went,
Sustained by ravens who brought berries to him?
Fear not for us, but take care of yourselves,
And of the children, guardians of the future.
I know now who thou art, our good queen Tilda –
But I shall say no more, and I do bow
Only before my Maker. Eat and sleep,
And in the morn we’ll send you on your way
And pray you may survive these evil times
To ride in triumph through Purdonium.
TILDA: I thank thee from the bottom of my heart,
As do we all. And when peace comes again
We shall remember that in time of need
The swivelling brethren rallied to our aid.
(Enter SECOND MONK, reeling and staggering.)

SECOND MONK: O, I have seen a holy blessed vision!
I saw three ladies riding on pink horses
Crushing rank reptiles ’neath their rosy hooves.
I know not what it means, but it bodes well.
The Lord be praised!
TILDA: Let him be praised indeed,
And may it be a harbinger of victory.
ETTY: Now, while we can, to supper and to bed
To fortify us for the road ahead.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 3

A Cabin on a Ship bound for the Island of Tapioca.

Enter TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY, JESSICA and MAISIE with little VUSILLUS.

ETTY: ’Tis sad to see Uraemia fall away
Beneath the dim horizon of the sea,
Ruined by heathens, while we feebly fly.
TILDA: Yet I remember, not so long ago,
When thou and I were hands aboard the Cockroach;
In desperate times, my Felix held to ransom,
Ourselves penniless and clothed in rags,
What japes we had, skylarking in the rigging!
We were young then, but we were full of hope;
Are we so hopeless now? Nay, we shall rally
And find a way to set our country free.
Once we are at the court of Tapioca,
The children safe under King Sago’s care,
Then thou and I shall find a battleground
– Not that of men, we’ll fight in our own way –
And we shall be the terror of the foe.
ETTY: Bold words, my friend, and I am cheered by them.
VULPECULA: Our army’s beaten, but our people live.
We’ll fight the enemy on our own soil
In every town and field, by day and night:
How can we not prevail? This is no war
Of armoured men upon a battlefield,
But of a million angry folk against
A few invaders, be they ne’er so savage.
I am old, but I have power. I am a witch,
Of a long line of witches not the strongest,
But anger shall lend vigour to my spells.
ETTY: I have no gift beyond the power of words,
But words can have great strength in time of war:
Poems and songs and slogans spur the people
To action when mere orders will not move them.
MAISIE: I have no power at all, save that of love,

But what I have, I offer to my country;
I'd give my life to cast out these foul Thetans.
TILDA: Well said, good Maisie. And if all our folk
Have faith like thee, we shall yet win the day.
(A sound of Pistols and clashing Cutlasses.)
TILDA: What noise is this? It seems that war hath found us.
Quick, let me tie our purse upon a string
And hang it out the porthole to be safe.
(Enter PIRATES. TILDA and ETTY fly at them, but are held by three Men each.)
TILDA: Unhand me, pirate dog!
FIRST PIRATE: Not on thy nelly,
Thou horrid bitch, thou kicked me in the bollocks.
O how they smart! Thou'lt surely pay for that.
SECOND PIRATE: And this one broke my nose, the little trollop.
(Enter RED KEVIN, the Pirate Chief.)
KEVIN: What ho, my men, I see that ye are bleeding
Though all the crew yielded like frightened sheep.
Who did this to you?
FIRST PIRATE: Sir, 'tis hard to say:
These women seem to have some demon in them,
They fought like tigers.
KEVIN: Are ye beat by women,
Ye lily-livered scum o' th' seven seas?
Fie, fie for shame, ye puny pack of pussies!
Search them, we'll take such money as they have,
And then I'll think of what to do with them.
(There is a Struggle, during which TILDA kicks KEVIN in the Face and ETTY bites him on the Hand, but they are gagged and bound.)
KEVIN: Now I see what ye mean. They are she-devils;
Even the old dame dealt me a cruel blow.
But they have not a penny to their name,
And we gain nothing. I had thought to sell them
At the slave market in Tangier. But who
Would pay a ducat for such vicious shrews?
We'll sell the sailors off for galley slaves
For a fair profit. But ye know full well,
A woman on a ship portends ill fortune,
And they have dealt us more than enough harm.
Yet I respect their courage, when the men
Yielded so soon at the mere sight of us.
Go set them in a boat and cast them off
To meet what fortune hath in store for them.
Give them some biscuit and a cask of water:
I am a pirate, not a murderer.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 4

A small Rowing Boat on the high Seas.

In it are TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY, JESSICA, and MAISIE with little VUSILLUS.
TILDA and ETTY are at the Oars.

TILDA: Pull, Etty, pull, as thou ne'er didst before!
ETTY: I have done plenty o' pulling in my time,
But not to save my life. We'll make this island:
The current drives us to it. Let us hope
It is not ringed by fangs of coral rock
Nor girt by inaccessible cliffs
'Neath which the breakers fling us to the sharks.
TILDA: Away with all these dire imaginings,
We are alive and well, and yet retain
The gold that I concealed upon the ship.
Land beckons, though we know not where it be.
(They land on a sandy Beach fringed with Palms.)
VULPECULA: Well rowed, my girls; once more ye save our lives.
See, here's a flowing stream, the palms bear dates,
'Tis well for now, whate'er the morrow brings.
JESSICA: O what a fine adventure we are having,
Better than any in the books at home.
Thinkst thou there will be dragons? I would like one
With scaly wings of pink. I'll call him Fred.
TILDA: Jessica, think not overmuch of dragons
Or they'll appear, and at this time they are
The last thing that we need. Say, canst thou climb
This tree, and pluck a bunch of dates for us?
(As JESSICA goes to the Tree, she halts, frozen to the Spot. All are gripped by a Spell and cannot move or speak. Enter OROSIUS, a Wizard, with ATTENDANTS.)
OROSIUS: What have we here? E'en when this little boat
Was a full league from shore, I sensed such power
Of magic as I never yet have seen.
(He points at VULPECULA.)
Lady, I free your voice from out my spell.
VULPECULA: Good sir, I bow to your superior power.
I am a witch indeed, but not so strong
As to provoke you when far out to sea.
We are the royalty o' Uraemia;
I the queen mother, Tilda here the queen.
We come in peace: we are forced from our land,
Uraemia, by the invading Thetans.
To save of children from the ravening horde
We took ship, bound for th' isle of Tapioca;
'Twas seized by pirates, we were set adrift,
And wind and current bore us to your shore.
OROSIUS. Your majesty, I sense your witch's power,
Yet ye speak sooth: this is not what I sensed
And called me to the shore. Let me look more –
(He points at JESSICA.)
Ah! What great might streams from this little child!

Tell me true, is ’t safe to let her free?
VULPECULA: Aye, sir, she is but young, and until now
She hath done naught but conjure gaudy visions,
Pink unicorns and such – yet sooth I say,
We knew not that she had the power for more.
Pray you, unbind us, we intend no harm.
(OROSIUS gestures, and they are released from the spell.)
JESSICA: O, that was magic, like my granny does!
I can make magic too: see how I can.
(She conjures a pink Dragon. With a wave of his hand, OROSIUS turns it golden. It flies around their Heads and vanishes in a Thunderclap. They both laugh.)
OROSIUS: So thou canst, child. But know, I am a master;
I’ll teach thee tricks not yet seen on the earth.
JESSICA: I should like that indeed, good wizard sir.
OROSIUS (to Vulpecula): Pray, madam, let us introduce ourselves.
I am Orosius, master o’ Polenta island
Where ye do stand, a small one but a fair.
VULPECULA: And I Vulpecula, queen of Uraemia
Till king Vusillus died these two years since.
My son, king Felix, reigns now, and his queen
Tilda stands on the strand before you now.
They have two children: Jessica, the girl
With whom ye conjured dragons, and their son
Vusillus, in the arms of Maisie, th’ nurse.
The other lady’s Etty, the court poet –
Eight years ago, when an ill tide of war
Brought my son to captivity, Tilda and she
Ventured with staunchest hearts to distant lands
And rescued him and brought him home to reign;
I love them from the bottom of my heart.
But now, the tide of war is ris’n again:
The filthy Thetans, worshippers of Satan,
Have poured into our land from th’ eastern marches
And taken our great city of Purdonium.
Felix’s men are scattered, yet they rejoin
And harry the foul foe as best they can.
We were sent out to th’ isle of Tapioca,
Whose rulers are allied to us by marriage
To keep the children safe, but fain we’d fight
To rid our country of barbarians.
OROSIUS: Dear lady, I have no love to the Thetans;
Their vile ways threaten to engulf the world.
I’ll help you as I can to overcome them;
For now all decent folk must stand together.
Let us repair t’ my castle, a mile hence,
Where food and rest await you, and we’ll plan
To bring the Thetans down, as well we can.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 5

Orosius' Castle, the following Morning.

Enter OROSIUS, TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY and JESSICA, and MAISIE with little VUSILLUS.

OROSIUS: Now ye are rested, let us hold a council:
I have been plotting the best course for you.
Your majesties …
TILDA: No more of majesties
And deference. We are but wandering folk,
And now your pupils, learning as we can.
OROSIUS: 'Tis well, for I have much to teach you all.
Witchcraft shall be your weapon, and a strong one.
The little lass hath an astounding power
The like of which I never yet have seen,
Which must be used with wisdom, and with caution.
With one word she could blast your enemies
And turn them all to dust – but in so doing
She'd lose her soul, becoming a dark witch
Who'd harm you more than the whole Thetan army.
Vulpecula, thou canst do good and harm
And hast done both; but hast thou often felt
When changing some poor rascal to a toad
That part of thee was changing for the worse?
VULPECULA: Aye, well I know this, and do try t' avoid it.
OROSIUS: In such a powerful witch as Jessica,
At such a tender age, doing aught to harm
Would drain the good from her beyond repair.
'Tis both for her sake and for yours I warn you.
Yet we will find ways in which she can work:
She may create illusions to deceive
That harm her not, and what charms they shall be
After tuition in the magic art!
VULPECULA: Thanks for this timely warning; so 't shall be.
OROSIUS: Ye all know well that witchcraft doth work best
When there's a coven o' three: crone, mother and child.
VULPECULA: Well can I play the crone, and here's the child,
But who's the middle member of the coven?
OROSIUS: Tilda, I sense some latent power in thee,
Ne'er used nor felt, but I can call it out.
Wilt thou allow me to turn thee t' a witch?
TILDA: With all my heart: I have been feeling weak
Beside the might of my good mother-in-law
And the untutored strength of my dear daughter.
In our dire plight, let us use every weapon
Our armoury affords, to win the day.
OROSIUS: Etty, I find no magic powers in thee

Save that of charming men into thy bed
– A power that is by no means despicable,
For it allows thee great control of them –
And something more than that: the power of words
Which shall prove vital in the coming struggle.
We shall speak more of this; but now ’tis time
To school the others in the occult arts.
ETTY: So be it then, and I shall look on gladly
While my dear friend becomes a mighty witch.
OROSIUS: I said not mighty, but she shall have skills
And can draw on her daughter’s awful power
Like to a copper strip upon a steeple
Which draws the lightning, guiding it to earth.
(He waves; enter his Assistant, PIXEL.)
Pixel, I now do charge thee with this duty:
Prithee, conduct Etty to thy workshop
And teach her the great art o’ lithography,
How one may, with a stone, and soot, and grease
Print posters that arouse the folk to war
And others to confuse the enemy.
So wars are fought with words as well as arms.
ETTY: O joy! This is a task dear to my heart.
(Exeunt PIXEL and ETTY.)
Tilda, let us begin, while th’ others watch.
To start, a simple spell for a witch light –
A lamp upon thy hand, to see i’ th’ dark.
All spells have three components: first, intention –
Thou must envision what thou mean’st to make;
Second, the gesture; third, the words of power.
Mark what I do. I hold out my right hand,
Palm upwards; with my left I point to it,
And say the magic words, E tenebris lux!
(A Light appears above his right Hand.)
Now try thyself, Tilda.
TILDA: E tenebris lux!
(A small Light appears on her Hand for a Moment and vanishes.)
O but that burns!
OROSIUS: Aye, thou must think of it
Above thy hand, not on it. See ’t as cold,
Like to the moon, beneath whose chilly light
Witches exert their powers.
TILDA: E tenebris lux!
(A Light appears above her Hand, but quickly fades.)
OROSIUS: Thou must hold it in mind to make it stay.
But ’tis a good start. Say, Vulpecula,
Wilt thou show Tilda how to frame her mind
So that she keeps the light while she doth work
On what she hath to do?
VULPECULA: E tenebris lux!
(A steady Light appears above her hand, and continues to burn.)

OROSIUS: Jessica, canst do this?
JESSICA: E tenebris lux!
(A brilliant Flash of Light and a loud Explosion. All are thrown to the Ground.)
That was exciting, shall I do ’t again?
OROSIUS (picking himself up): It was astounding; but thou need’st the skill
To moderate thy power, lest we be blasted.
No matter, I shall teach thee quick enough;
At thy age learning comes with little work.
We have made a start: what wonders thou shalt do!
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 6

Orosius’ Castle, several Days later.

Enter OROSIUS, TILDA, VULPECULA, JESSICA and ATTENDANTS.

JESSICA: Uncle, say, may I do the moving trick?
OROSIUS: Aye, sweetest child, but prithee take more care;
Thou nearly hadst the house down the last time.
Try with the table: move it near the wall
Slowly – and halt it just before it strikes.
(A Table laden with Food and Drink rises in the Air, moves to the Wall and Hovers.)
Well done, my dear, now set it on the floor.
(The Table descends slowly.)
Thou hast not spilt a drop from any cup;
’Tis well indeed, I could not do it better.
(To TILDA) Thy girl astounds me; not in all my years
So apt and quick a pupil have I seen.
Now let us see how well thy power hath grown.
Say, wilt thou move that chair? Hold out thy hand
Just so, fingers extended; say the words.
TILDA: Commoveo.
OROSIUS: Alas! I did say move,
But thou hast turned it to a bunch of flowers.
Thou didst not fully concentrate thy mind.
Practice makes perfect; prithee work on this.
(He restores the Chair to its proper Form.)
VULPECULA (to TILDA): Nevertheless, the arts thou hast acquired
In a few days have won my admiration;
I had not seen the slightest gifts in thee.
And I myself, thinking to be a witch
Of mighty power, have found there’s much to learn,
And have gained spells and skills I never knew,
All thanks to you, Master Orosius.
OROSIUS: We’ll learn a few more things i’ th’ coming days,
But there’s no time to strive for full perfection.
Your country writhes under the tyrant’s hand
And to release it from his deadly grasp

First we need knowledge. As the marshal said
So wisely, time spent in reconnaissance
Is seldom wasted. (To an ATTENDANT) Bring me my scrying glass.
VULPECULA: Ah, I had one of those in former times;
We never knew whether we saw the truth
Or an illusion made of our false hopes.
OROSIUS: Its use needs skill: first thou must clear thy mind
Of expectation, then must fasten on
The person whom thou seek'st, and on naught else.
See, I will show thee Gonbad, chief o' th' Thetans.
(The Glass having been set before him, he gazes into it.)
VULPECULA: Alack! I see him in our own king's chamber
Lolling beside the fire, feet on the table.
And with his muddy boots on our fine damask!
May he be struck with griping of the guts,
The pox and palsy and the marthambles;
Pustules and carbuncles blacken his skin;
May molten lead course through his bursting veins,
Meteors rain upon his scabby head!
(The Room trembles and is filled with Smoke.)
OROSIUS: Prithee, contain thy wrath. No curse can reach him
Through the mere agency of the scrying glass;
It is an image, not of flesh or blood.
Nevertheless, thy power comes on apace.
Tilda, wouldst thou desire to see thy king?
(He gazes into the Glass once more.)
TILDA: Felix, my dearest love! How gaunt thou art,
Muddy and ragged in a rainy wood.
But O my darling, thou art safe and well,
And Viscus stands by thee, and ye are laughing.
Would I could hear thy voice, and speak with thee!
OROSIUS: This scrying glass, though of the latest mode
Can only summon images, not words.
Nevertheless, I have some strange devices
Called skyping crystals which, if thou hast one,
And someone hath another, lets ye converse;
And furthermore, if thou canst set a glass
In an unnoticed corner of a room,
Thou'lt see and hear everything a man does.
I'll give ye some of these when ye depart.
VULPECULA: Again, our grateful thanks for all your aid.
But tell me, pray you: here we have three strong witches
Well versed in arts. What do we strive against?
What witches have the Thetans of their own?
OROSIUS: I have good news for thee: they are so vile,
No witch will work for them; and their religion,
Such as it is, imparts no power at all.
They can exert their will through deeds of blood
But in no other way. To our advantage,
Their dark beliefs bring on such superstition

That suitable illusions, justly used
Will drive them into panic and confusion.
This is your strongest weapon: use it well;
With it ye shall defeat the power of hell.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

ACT 2

SCENE 1

A Wood in Uraemia in the Rain.

Enter FELIX, VISCUS and SOLDIERS.

VISCUS: Behold us sitting ’neath a dripping tree
Soaked to the skin, our garments caked with mud,
Trying to coax a fire from soggy twigs
To roast snared rabbits for our scanty meal.
Long weeks without a roof over our head
Have turned us into beggars, and we lack
E’en powder, ball and flints to serve our pistols.
What kind of soldiers are we, may I ask?
FELIX: The best kind, brother: what the Spanish call
Guerillas – they who always win i’ th’ end;
We are of the people, and th’ invading throng
Will drown deep in the sea of hostile folk.
VISCUS: I do not like that name, we sound like apes.
FELIX: I trow the Thetans like it even less.
Thou know’st we cannot dwell in villages:
If any folk are thought to give us any aid
The Thetans murder them and burn their houses.
Like it or not, we live i’ th’ fields and woods.
Now, men, I have a plan to win us powder,
Bullets, and all the military gear
We need to fight our war. Do ye remember
The ruined village shop in Librium
Where I made you collect the paper bags
And put them in a sack, and keep them dry?
VISCUS: Only too well: we have been lugging them
Around for days, the silly worthless things.
FELIX: Tonight they’ll prove their worth: listen to me.
Ye know that, at the bottom of the hill,
A company of Thetans is encamped.
We’ll raid them in the dark, and take their stores.
VISCUS: How will we do that, prithee?
FELIX: On this wise:
Remember ye the tale of Gideon
The Israelite, and how he overcame
The hosts of Midian who outnumbered him?
VISCUS: Aye, he sent out his men with lamps and pitchers,
And trumpets, which they blew, and smashed the pitchers,
And waved their lamps and made a horrid din,
And the foe thought they were a mighty army
And fell to panic, and slew one another.

We have no trumpets, and but two cracked pitchers,
And not a single lamp. And every child
Hath heard this tale: it would not trick a toddler.
FELIX: It would not trick a true Uraemian;
We are schooled i' th' Bible, and know all the tales.
But think on this: the filthy Satanists
Read only a black book of windy nonsense
Penned by a madman. They know naught of Gideon.
We have few pitchers, not a single trumpet
Nor lamp, but we have swords and we have armour
And, most essential, we have paper bags.
Men, I shall divide ye in two parties.
One, under Viscus, goes to th' forest edge.
And when ye hear my signal, an owl hoot,
Ye clash swords on your armour, run around
Shouting loud orders in the army fashion,
Blowing up paper bags and bursting them
With a blow o' th' hand. And thus the foe will think
A sizeable troop's advancing, firing guns –
But they'll not panic like the Midianites:
They'll come for you, and when ye see them coming
Climb up a tree and wait for them to pass.
Meanwhile I and th' other men will run
Into their empty camp, take what we can,
And hasten out again. We'll not return:
This place is far too near. Instead we'll meet
At th' waterfall beside Delirium hill.
Now, men, I'll take Dudgeon, and Sprout, and Wormwood,
Merkin, Wee Gonk and Stinker for my party.
The rest o' ye go with Viscus. When ye are placed
I shall hoot thus.
(He utters the Cry of a Barred Owl.)
'Tis an exotic owl,
Lest that a true Uraemian owl should cry
And set you off before the proper time.
VISCUS: He saith Who, who, who cooks for you?
O how I wish we had some proper cooking!
– But trust me, brother, I'll not let thee down.
FELIX: I trust thee: now go down to th' forest edge
And take your places. We shall follow soon.
(Exit VISCUS and his SOLDIERS.)
Men, what we need foremost is ammunition,
Look to that first. Seize only what we need
And we can carry. Now, let's to our station.
(Exit FELIX and his SOLDIERS, leaving the Stage empty. A Moment later, the Cry of an Owl is heard, followed by Shouts, Clashing and Explosions, and sounds of confusion. Enter two THETAN SOLDIERS, in Haste.)
FIRST THETAN: In Satan's name, where are these damned Uraemians?
SECOND THETAN: They flit around the woods like sodding squirrels;
We cannot touch them. Satan's blood! I wish

We'd stayed in Theta, reading our black book
That comforts and resigns us to our lot.
I wish not to be shot i' a northern wood.
FIRST THETAN: Hold thy tongue, man, or by the grace of Satan
Thou'lt find thyself being thrashed with red-hot wires.
Now to the chase, for if we find them not,
By Satan, we'll be flogged and burnt and shot.
(Exeunt.)

SCENE 2

Orosius' Castle.

Enter OROSIUS, TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY and JESSICA, with MAISIE carrying little VUSILLUS.

OROSIUS: My friends, I have taught you much in a short space;
'Tis but the rudiments of wizardry
But there's no time for more. And in the field
Necessity, the mother of invention,
Will teach you devious twists and cunning stunts.
'Tis time for you to sail t' Uraemia
And take the battle to the grisly foe.
Yet I do hesitate to send a child,
However strong she be, into a war.
TILDA: And I: my mother's heart is rent in twain
At what my dearest daughter must endure.
I have seen killing, and myself have killed
More than my share, and it doth blight the soul.
VULPECULA: But yet the soul is withered by inaction:
We cannot sit in a safe place, and watch
Our countrymen abused, and crushed, and slain.
JESSICA: Though I be little, yet I know full well
How mother frets for me. But let me speak:
I cannot sit here while my friends are killed.
I will do all I can to save their lives,
Careless of danger, till the foe be vanquished.
TILDA: Well spoken, child, thy courage blazes bright,
And thou'lt have need of it i' th' coming days.
OROSIUS: Thy son and Maisie shall stay here with me;
No foe can touch them on th' enchanted island.
And when the battle's done, I will dispatch them
To join thee gladly in a rescued land.
A ship awaits to bear thee to Uraemia,
– But ere ye sail, let's talk of strategy.
The scrying glass tells us King Felix's men
Lie in the east, and ye can reach them soon
From landfall to the north of Erbium.
The shore is wooded, so that ye can land

In a small boat, the enemy none the wiser.
Yet Felix and his men can do naught here
Against a numerous and well armed foe;
They are but few, with only swords and pistols,
And they are hampered, since the bloody Thetans
Will level any village thought to help them.
Therefore the battleground must be moved north
To the deserted mountains near the border
Of Zinnia, a friendly nation still at peace.
Your task, therefore, is to mislead the Thetans
To think a Zinnian army's on its way
To aid th' Uraemians. This will draw the Thetans
Into the mountains, where it will be easy
To harry them with raids and pin them down
And pick them off, a few men at a time.
Thy daughter's talent for delusive visions
Shall be thy standby in the coming days.
With her power, ye must form a fictive army
For Thetan spies to see, and report back,
And draw their forces up to their destruction.
I would suggest the valley of the Drongo
As a place to lure them to: the way is narrow
And a few men can hold a larger force
And gradually destroy them from the heights.
History is full of stories of invaders
Lured to the mountains of a foreign land
Where they have perished at the hands of few.
TILDA: I thank you, 'tis a plan of wondrous merit.
My Felix told me of Thermopylae
Where a small band of Spartans in a vale
Opposed the myriad forces of the Persians
And beat them with three hundred men. All died
In the attempt; we'll try t' avoid their fate.
Though we have barely forty on our side
We are aided by the magic powers that ye
Have fostered in us; surely we shall win.
OROSIUS: Before ye go, I have some gifts for you:
Two scrying glasses of the latest mode
Wherein ye may see anyone ye name;
Alike to th' glass we used to find King Felix.
VULPECULA: Aye, and it worked far better than the glass
I used eight years ago when Tilda and Etty
Wandered the eastern ways to rescue him.
Such is the march of progress, by my troth.
OROSIUS: And these are new, and still far from perfection:
A pair of skyping crystals – if thou have one
– And thou the other – ye two may converse.
They carry sounds as well as images.
Though th' image flickers and the sound distorts,
They'll serve you well enough in their own fashion.

VULPECULA: I had not known of these: what wondrous things!
OROSIUS: When thou wast walking in my kitchen garden,
Saws't thou the empty space upon the wall
Tended by my blind gardener Antipas?
VULPECULA: Indeed I did, and wondered greatly at it.
OROSIUS: He cultivates th' invisible tree that bears
Peaches whose stones confer invisibility.
It bears but few fruit; this year's crop was six,
But ye shall have the stones.
VULPECULA: Ah! I had two o' those
Eight years ago; Tilda and Etty found them
Essential in the rescue of my son.
I'd no idea they came from your own garden.
These are precious gifts indeed, Master Orosius;
We stand awed by your generosity.
TILDA: Indeed we do; a rare thing in this world.
OROSIUS: Think no more of 't, ladies. I possess great power
Gifted to me by heaven; but with it comes
The duty of responsibility.
If I failed in this duty, I would be
No better than Khan Gonbad and his minions
Whose power pollutes the world. Come, it is time
To say farewell to th' boy and his good nurse,
And board the ship bound for Uraemia.
TILDA (embracing VUSILLUS): My darling boy, I shall be gone awhile;
Maisie shall cherish thee, and keep thee well,
And I shall see thee soon as fate permits.
MAISIE: Your majesty, I'll guard him with my life.
TILDA: I know thou wilt, my good and faithful servant.
(Exeunt all but MAISIE and VUSILLUS.)
MAISIE: My boy, the world's at war. Here we have peace
To rest awhile until the conflict cease.
(Exeunt.)

SCENE 3

A Road in Uraemia.

Enter FELIX, VISCUS and SOLDIERS.

FELIX: Alack! The Thetan troops pursue us hotly.
They are a scant two hours behind ourselves,
Driven along by torturers with whips
Who flog to th' bone any who fall behind.
Ahead lies nothing but the treeless plain
Devoid of hiding place; yet we've no choice
But to traverse it, and to take our chances.
VISCUS: But what is this? A sign beside the way:
Honey for sale, made by our local bees.

Let's purchase some with our remaining ducats;
'Twill give us strength upon the dusty road.
Ho, shopkeeper!
(Enter MELIBEE.)
MELIBEE: I come, good sir – but lo,
Ye are king Felix and his brother Viscus;
Felicitations be upon you both. (He bows.)
What brings your majesties t' my poor abode?
FELIX: Nothing for good, I fear; the bloody Thetans
Are hot upon our trail, and soon their army
Will sweep over thy home like a poisoned wave
Engulfing it with horror. We fly before them
Till we can find a fastness in a wood
Or on a mountain, from whose lofty crags
We'll harry them – but there is naught ahead
But open land that would not shield a mouse.
Yet, ere we march again, pray may we buy
Some of thy wares, to stay us on the road?
MELIBEE: Your majesty, I'd give you all I have
And ask no payment, save for a dire drawback
That would undo you if you took my wares.
FELIX: What is this dreadful thing of which thou speak'st?
MELIBEE: I am a beekeeper from Lithium,
One of a hundred there who ply this trade;
Last year I moved to this secluded spot,
Set up my hives, and hoped to reap good profit.
The local people bought my wares at first,
But soon I heard bitter complaints from them.
They said my honey conjured strange delusions
And vomiting that left them weak as kittens.
I tried 't myself: sadly, they spoke the truth.
I cannot sell a pot for a halfpenny.
FELIX: Thy tale reminds me of old Xenophon
Whose soldiers, fleeing much as we flee now,
Encountered honeypots left by the road
And took them, as one would. They too went mad
And sick, and could not lift a cucumber
For three days' space. He knew not of the reason,
Yet I do now: see'st thou these spreading bushes
Beauteous with glossy leaves and purple flowers
That cluster round thy mansion? Rhododendron
The shrub is named, and honey from its blossom
Hath just th' effect thou hast so well described.
MELIBEE: Alas that I should choose this poisoned spot!
Yet greater poison spreads along the road.
I'll flee: your majesty, may I join your troop,
I and my lusty sons Ashbee and Bumblebee?
The future's dark; what can we do but fight
Till we have lightened it, or lost our lives
In trying? But we shall not die in vain.

Ho, sons! Come out, king Felix doth await ye.
(Enter ASHBEE and BUMBLEBEE. They bow to FELIX.)
FELIX: Indeed ye may, and welcome to my band;
We are honoured by your trust. Come, let's away,
But ere we go, let's pile up all your wares
Upon the tables set before the shop.
Mayhap we'll pull the selfsame trick that felled
Xenophon's men, and gain some time thereby.
(MELIBEE and his Sons bring out Pots of Honey, and FELIX and his Men begin setting them upon the Tables.)
VISCUS: We are short of arms; pray, have you any weapons
Fit for the fray to come?
MELIBEE: We have no swords
Or pikes, or halberds, helms or brigandines;
Yet my old blunderbuss may serve us well
Loaded with rusty nails and shards of flint.
Naught else but th' agricultural implements;
Ye see them there piled up against the wall.
Sons, pray you take your pick.
ASHBEE: A pick I'll take,
And I shall excavate the Thetans' heads.
BUMBLEBEE: And I an axe, and with it I shall fell
These fell folk who presume to plant themselves
In the good soil of our beloved land.
VISCUS: Soldiers, take up any remaining tools
That fit your fancy; for a humble mattock
Wielded with strength and skill in a close fight
Succeeds where a Toledo rapier fails.
FELIX: My brother, a bare month ago I thought
Thou wert a foolish and limp-wristed fop
Who could not swat a fly. Yet I do see
That grim necessity hath now brought out
The warrior spirit of old King Vusillus
Who slew a hundred Turks at Antioch
Wielding his gilded double-handed sword,
And then sat down mildly to eat his dinner
As if he'd spent the morning at his ease.
VISCUS: Sadly we lack the dinner: all we have
Is stringy mutton and an old stale loaf.
I would have liked some honey for my tea,
But thy Greek writer gave us timely warning.
FELIX: When I was but a lad, my tutor Priscus
Told me that education in the classics
Would be a boon to me throughout my life.
I knew not what he meant, and scoffed at him.
He beat me for it, but I mocked the more.
Yet now that danger looms, and the veneer
Of modern life peels from the wood of war,
Vegetius, Caesar and Thucydides
And Xenophon and all the ancient crew

Stand by to aid me in the hour of need.
Old friends are best, and these are old indeed.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 4

The Coast of Uraemia.

Enter TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY and JESSICA, all garbed as Peasants.

ETTY: Back on the dear soil of Uraemia,
We breathe the scent of our familiar herbs;
’Tis well. And yet, in these oppressive times,
Danger attends our every step. Say, Tilda,
What doth thy scrying glass tell thee of Felix?
TILDA: It points to the northwest, mayhap a day
Or two days’ march. If I might make a guess,
I’d say he was nigh to Delirium,
Where the deep woods gave shelter to his men.
This road would lead us there, if we could follow
A way used daily by the Thetan troops,
Passing through populous towns; ’tis fraught with peril.
ETTY: Ho, I hear hooves! Quickly, behind this bush.
(They conceal themselves. Enter a Haywain drawn by a Horse. It is driven by HUMPHREY, an Innkeeper, also disguised as a Peasant.)
TILDA: ’Tis but a farmer carting home his hay.
We’ve naught to fear from him, and he doth fare
In our direction; shall we cadge a lift?
Ho, honest farmer! May we board thy wain?
We seek Delirium, and the way is long.
HUMPHREY: Your majesty, why are ye garbed so strangely?
And Lady Etty too, and thy little daughter,
And queen Vulpecula, if my eyes do serve me.
(He leaps from the Haywain and bows low.)
TILDA: Thou hast sharp eyes, my friend. But by my troth,
If we are recognised so easily
We’ll have to think anew on our disguise.
HUMPHREY: I too am now obliged t’ disguise myself:
Humphrey, an innkeeper, formerly of th’ Old Ship;
Yet I am forced from home to roam the land.
TILDA: What drove thee from thy inn?
HUMPHREY: Have ye not heard
What fate hath smitten th’ inns o’ Uraemia?
TILDA: Nay, we are new returned from overseas.
HUMPHREY: The Thetans drink no spirituous liquor,
And forced that prohibition on ourselves.
All inns are shut, landlords obliged to flee.
TILDA: May asses dance on th’ graves o’ their ancestors!
Inns are the solace of the working man,

An evening's pleasure at a modest price;
Part of the life of our dear countrymen.
Well dost thou know I am of peasant birth
And quaffed ale after a hard day in the fields.
HUMPHREY: Well do ye speak, 'tis solace to mine ears.
Patrick, 'tis safe t' emerge. We are with friends.
(PATRICK appears out of the Hay.)
PATRICK: God bless your majesties and you fair ladies;
May heaven prosper all your enterprise.
I am an Irish soldier, sailor, adventurer,
Whatever fortune brings; now that my friend
Humphrey hath need of help, I gladly aid him.
TILDA: A fighting man! Our land hath need of such.
Since we are friends, I'll tell thee of our mission.
When the vile Satanists o'ertook Purdonium
We fled abroad, headed for Tapioca
To keep the children safe. 'Twas not to be:
Our ship was taken by the pirate Kevin.
PATRICK: Kevin! I've sailed with him; not a bad man.
TILDA: He set the women drifting in a boat,
Furnished with food and water, it is true,
To find what fortune the wild waves allowed us;
And fortune favoured us: we found the shore
Of old Orosius, the famed enchanter.
Know that Vulpecula, myself, and th' child
Are witches of some power. Orosius
Tutored us, setting up a coven o' three,
A fighting force of magic. We seek king Felix
To aid him with our spells in time of need.
PATRICK: Fain would I fight beside thee and the king!
I feel the thirst for war mount in my veins.
TILDA: He will be glad of thee and all good men
To help him in his struggle. But pray tell us
Why do ye hide beneath this heap of hay?
HUMPHREY: Beneath the hay we carry various casks
Of ale and claret, malmsey and usquebaugh.
Whenever chance permits, we raise the sign
Of the Old Ship, and then refresh the people.
TILDA: A worthy task! But why doth Patrick lurk
Within thy load?
PATRICK: Sure, I am six feet tall;
My ginger hair resists the deepest dye.
All folk remember me, so I must hide.
'Tis not my choice, but these are troublous times.
HUMPHREY (to TILDA and the Women): Speaking of dye, pray take this walnut juice
And rub it on your faces and your hands.
'Twill stain them brown, so ye do look like peasants,
As ye are garbed. I use it on myself
To hide the pallor of an indoor trade.
But now I am on the road, the rays o' th' sun

Are burning me towards a natural brown,
And soon I shall have no more need of it.
TILDA: Grateful thanks, Humphrey. When I was a girl
I was brown as thee, from labour i' th' fields.
Palaces turn folk pale as much as inns.
ETTY: Forsooth, what a fair fortune falls on us
To meet with thee and with thy warrior friend!
Truly we gather allies on our way
To join the fight; surely we'll win the day.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 5

A Road near Delirium.

Enter TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY, JESSICA and HUMPHREY aboard the Haywain, with PATRICK half concealed in the Hay.

TILDA: O but a barmaid's life's a pleasant one
Compared to that of a crowned queen. The folk
May clamour and demand, but in my palace
The courtiers thronged in droves, and their requests
For patronage and titles and estates
Were more outrageous than the need for beer.
I have missed being among the people.
ETTY: I too, though a poet's life's a pleasant one:
Rising whene'er I like, wandering i' th' fields
Waiting for lines to fall into my head.
There's ease in idleness, but greater pleasure
Comes from immersion in a worthy task,
And what more worthy than t' refresh good folk
With liquor at the ending of the day?
HUMPHREY: Aye, I did love my life as a publican;
What greater joy than to bring joy to others?
But see, we are coming to Delirium
Where we may gratify the honest folk
One time, before we join the king i' th' woods.
VULPECULA: Beware! I sense th' approach of something evil.
Ah! 'Tis a gang of dismal Thetan thugs
Waylaying honest folk upon the road,
Demanding ransom in the guise of tolls;
And, should they find aught that displeases them,
Calling the guards, with whom they are hand in glove.
Patrick, get down within the load: they come.
(Enter three THETANS, armed with Pikes.)
FIRST THETAN: Ho, serfs, what have we here? A cart of hay?
Yet hay may hide much that displeases Satan.
We'll search thy load: stand aside from th' wain.
(All but PATRICK climb down.)

VULPECULA (aside, to Jessica): Quick, Jessica, make an enormous goat!
I will speak through its mouth.
(A vast and hideous pink Goat appears next to the Wain.)
VULPECULA (as the Goat): Ho, Thetan folk!
What do ye here, waylaying travellers
For bribes and theft, when now ye should be reading
My holy book writ by the prophet Badmash
To glorify my name, thy ruler Satan?
Down, miserable wretches, in the dust!
(The Thetans grovel.)
FIRST THETAN: O glorious Satan, hallowed be thy name!
SECOND THETAN: Satan, our master, we but seek to serve thee!
THIRD THETAN: Great Satan, smite us not! We are thy folk,
And seek to serve thee every waking hour.
VULPECULA: Avaunt, vile scum! If I see ye again
Looning around when ye should be at prayer
T' my gracious deity, I'll burn you black
And cast you in the nether pit of hell
Where ye shall fry for all eternity.
I have spoken: run to save your worthless lives!
(Exit the THETANS in great Haste.)
VULPECULA: Ah, that went passing well. Thanks, Jessica,
Thy goat did save us all. But I must ask:
Pray, why is everything thou makest pink?
JESSICA: It is my favourite colour.
VULPECULA: Well enough;
'Twill serve.
TILDA: Maisie did say often enough
It was a phase that she was going through –
Starting when she was two; that's a long phase.
But say, Vulpecula, why choose a goat?
VULPECULA: They worship Satan as the Goat of Mendes,
The Hornèd One, and other goatish names.
All goats are sacred to them; they'll not eat
Their flesh – as if any sane person would.
A sacred goat is penned in all their temples
And fed with costly fare, when it would rather
Be out i' th' fields, bolting down thorns and thistles.
PATRICK (emerging from the Hay): By all the saints! What did I see anon,
Peering between the stems? A fiery goat
Of monstrous size, speaking in tones of thunder?
Who conjured up this fearsome beast?
JESSICA: 'Twas I.
VULPECULA: And I gave to the goat its dreadful voice.
PATRICK: Faith, what a power this little child doth wield!
She'll smash our enemies to smithereens,
And I will scarce need to unsheathe my sword.
VULPECULA: Hold thou thy horses. Jessica may not use
Her power to harm any folk, e'en the Thetans.
If she should do so at her tender age

She’d grow to be a dark witch of such evil
She’d make the Thetans look like fluffy bunnies.
Visions and trickery are not forbidden,
And thou hast seen what she can do with them.
PATRICK: We fight with one arm tied behind our backs,
Seeking to rout the evil ones with good.
And yet, I see some righteousness in this:
What profit, if we win but lose our souls?
Besides. I’ll have a chance to wield my sword
That hath been rusting in a farmer’s cart.
HUMPHREY: Let’s head for th’ hills without undue delay.
Th’ town swarms with foul Thetans, clustering
Like bluebottles upon a week-old corpse;
Though we can scare them, there’s no purpose in’t.
We’ll find king Felix: left the fight begin!
PATRICK: My friend, I thought thou wert a man of peace,
And slow to anger. But when roused to wrath
Thou’rt fierce as any Glasgow gallowglass.
ETTY: And I was peaceful too, among my books,
When I read of a war, how I did tremble!
And now the war is real, I still do fear,
For every moment may bring my undoing.
But danger heightens th’ senses: I feel keen
And wary as a deer upon the plain,
And there’s the joy of good companionship
Among shared dangers. Let us to the hills:
We shall have frights and woes, and laughs and thrills.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 6

FELIX’s Encampment in the Hills above Delirium.

Enter FELIX, VISCUS and Soldiers.

VISCUS: Brother, what are we doing? Here we sit
Up on this hill, i’ th’ wind and rain, making
Infrequent raids upon the enemy,
Winning some powder here and victuals there,
But in the main achieving naught at all.
We have lost Jenkin, may God rest his soul,
And Tubby hath a nasty wound i’ th’ bum.
How can we shift to do them serious harm?
FELIX: I hear what thou art saying, brother mine.
I have been thinking deep about this matter.
We are few and weak, but are on our home turf,
Surrounded by our folk in countless numbers
Who hate the Thetan thugs with all their soul.
How can we rouse them to unite against

The foe, and drive them from our motherland?
(Enter TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY, JESSICA, HUMPHREY and PATRICK.)
FELIX: Tilda, my darling love! What dost thou here?
My dearest Jessica, mother dear, and Etty –
I though ye all were safe in Tapioca
With Sago and Semolina at their court,
But here ye are, right in the dragon's jaws.
(All embrace.)
And who are these friends that ye bring with thee?
TILDA: My darling Felix, how I have missed thee lately!
These are my stalwart friends Humphrey and Patrick.
The former is an innkeeper, and below
This place we have left a wain loaded with liquor.
SOLDIER: Aha! Show us the way, for we are thirsty.
ETTY: Ye always are for one thing or another;
Patience, and ye shall have a pint or two.
TILDA: And Patrick is an Irish soldier o' fortune,
A mighty man of war, who'll be our ally.
FELIX: Welcome, good people, to our humble home.
HUMPHREY: Your majesty …
FELIX: Forget these silly titles:
We are soldiers now, intent on our campaign
– Such as it is, with our scant band of men.
All who join us are welcome as valued equals.
TILDA: We never saw the coast of Tapioca:
Pirates assailed us.
FELIX: Ah, I know that feeling.
TILDA: The crew surrendered and we could do naught.
They set the women adrift i' an open boat.
FELIX: Alackaday!
TILDA: But 'twas to our advantage:
We fetched up on th' isle of Orosius,
A strong enchanter, who befriended us
And taught us skills that thou wouldst scarce believe.
Little Vusillus stays there, cared for by Maisie.
My love, I have something to say to thee:
I am a witch.
FELIX: Thou always didst enchant me.
Fear not to say that, for my dearest mother
Is too – so welcome to the sisterhood.
They have always been as nice as pie to me.
TILDA: And Jessica …
FELIX: Yes, she's one, but we knew it
From those pink bears that drifted from her thoughts.
TILDA: She can make more than bears, after our teaching.
Fear not for her safety, she's the strongest of us.
Bare hours ago, she saved us from the Thetans
By conjuring up a monstrous goat that brought them
Down to their knees and gibbering in terror.
She's not permitted to do any harm

To folk, lest she grow into a dark witch
And yet, aside from that, the sky's the limit.
She could call up an imaginary army
Routing the foe, before a shot was fired.
FELIX: Come to my arms, my lovely magic daughter!
What hast thou wrought, to save thy mum and granny?
(They embrace.)
JESSICA: I made a goat, and granny did its voice;
'Twas funny, but O, how it scared the Thetans.
TILDA: Thinking of this, may I suggest a plan
We hatched with th' counsel of Orosius?
FELIX: Gladly, for we have not a plan at all.
TILDA: There's little we can do here in the hills:
We must move the Thetans to a killing ground
Where our small forces can dispose of them.
The northern mountains are just such a place
Where armoured regiments creep through the valleys,
And our irregulars upon the crags
Wreak ruin and destruction on their ranks.
We must entice them to the Drongo valley,
A narrow gorge where we command the heights.
FELIX: A splendid plan, but how do we get them there?
TILDA: The Thetans send their spies about the country;
But shepherds in the hills know they are there.
We must discover them; then Jessica
Will conjure up an army in their sight.
They'll think the northern Zinnians are invading
And flee to Gonbad with a false report,
And he shall send his army up to meet them.
FELIX: Jessica, canst thou really make an army?
JESSICA: O yes, father, should they be unicorns
Or goats or men? I can do all of them.
FELIX: Men would be best; we'll save the goats for later,
My lovely daughter, strongest of us all!
ETTY: Come, we'll refresh ourselves with wine from th' wain,
And dine in style. Soon we'll move on again.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

ACT 3

SCENE 1

The Town of Tritium, in the North of Uraemia, on Market Day.

TRADERS are at their Stalls.

FIRST TRADER: Who'll buy my fine butter, fresh from the dairy?
O what a snip at two sols for the pound!
SECOND TRADER: Radishes, radishes, get your radishes here!
A sol a bunch, hey, who could rival that?
Cutting my own throat giving you that price.
THIRD TRADER: Ho, bring your pots and pans here to be mended!
'Tis high-class work, a three-hour guarantee.
FOURTH TRADER: Fine ridgels, dongs and parbuckles, wombles and spliffs!
All you could wish for, and at wholesale prices.
FIFTH TRADER: Eggs fresh from the cow; sorry, the hen!
SIXTH TRADER: Bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread!
(Enter surreptitiously GHASTLI and ORFEL, two Thetan Soldiers.)
GHASTLI: In Satan's name, we'll hang around and listen;
There may be rumours that we can report.
ORFEL: Aye, may the grace of Satan light on us!
I'll go round this way, you go round the other.
(Enter above VULPECULA and ETTY, swathed in Peasants' Cloaks, carrying Baskets.)
VULPECULA: Etty, do thou go down and buy our goods.
With what we have, we'll get a dozen eggs,
A loaf of bread and a new frying pan.
Ah, when I think last month we were in a palace
And could have bought frying pans by the million!
But I've seen worse than this in my long life;
And I can laugh at th' scurvy tricks of fortune.
Remember now, at every stall to pass
Rumours of an invasion from the north.
ETTY: Aye, so it shall be – lo, the Zinnians come
With many a horse, vambrace and arquebus,
Scallions, embrasures, all that befits an army.
(She goes down to the Market.)
FIFTH TRADER: The freshest eggs, buy them before they go!
ETTY: Before they go what? Dost thou mean go bad?
FIFTH TRADER: See'st thou this pail of water by my feet?
Drop in an egg and it will surely sink –
A sign that it is fresh as morning dew.
(ETTY tests an Egg, which sinks.)
ETTY: Aye, they will pass, I'll pay a sol for a dozen.
FIFTH TRADER: In thy dreams, lass. I want three sols for them,
And that's my final price.
ETTY: One and a halfpenny.

FIFTH TRADER: Two and a half.
ETTY: Two.
FIFTH TRADER: Ah, very well, ye'll have 'em,
Daughter o' a shark upon the seven seas.
ETTY: Say, hast thou heard? The Zinnians are coming,
Their army throngs through th' valley o' the Drongo
To bring us succour in our hour of need.
FIFTH TRADER: By th' saints, speakest thou sooth?
ETTY: Aye, verily;
My friend saw them with snow upon their boots.
FIFTH TRADER: O, how I pray that this account be true!
(ETTY moves on to the SIXTH TRADER.)
SIXTH TRADER: Bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread, bread!
ETTY: I do not mean to interrupt thy discourse,
But, an it please you, may I have some bread?
SIXTH TRADER: Bread? Aye, bread: a sol for a quartern loaf.
ETTY: 'Tis stale and, see, there's sawdust in the flour.
SIXTH TRADER: Raise not thy voice, and I'll say half a sol.
ETTY: One loaf, and here's the coin. Say, didst thou hear
The news from th' north?
SIXTH TRADER: Nay, prithee tell me of it.
ETTY: The Zinnians bring us aid, coming down the Drongo.
SIXTH TRADER: Joyful tidings indeed, worth the half sol
That thy hard heart hath chiselled out of me.
(ETTY goes to the THIRD TRADER's Stall.)
ETTY: Pray, gentle sir, hast thou a frying pan?
THIRD TRADER: Of course I have, my lass; hast thou no eyes
To see the pots and pans upon my stall?
ETTY: How much for th' big one with the dent in it?
THIRD TRADER: That is no dent: a sign o' artisan work.
Only the cheapest pans are without blemish.
ETTY: Marry, 'tis dented: I'll give thee two sols.
THIRD TRADER: Six.
ETTY: Let's get on with 't, four: my final word.
THIRD TRADER: Done, though thou woundest me to th' very soul.
ETTY: Hist! A friend tells me that the Zinnian army
Is coming to our aid through th' northern passes.
He saw them marching in their countless thousands.
THIRD TRADER: I will believe that story when I see them.
But O, with what joy we would welcome them!
(ETTY takes her Goods and stands at the Side, listening.)
SIXTH TRADER (to FIRST TRADER): Say, didst thou hear? The Zinnians are coming!
SECOND TRADER: The Zinnians, saidst thou? Coming from the north?
FOURTH TRADER: Our allies come to stand against the Thetans?
If it be true, I will take up my grapnel
And stand in line with them, shoulder to shoulder.
(GHASTLI and ORFEL meet again.)
GHASTLI: Orfel, heardst thou, by Satan? There is talk;
They say the Zinnians march down from the north.
ORFEL: I heard it, Ghastli. By the horns of Satan,

We must report this news unto headquarters.
GHASTLI: Satan is great! But we'll make sure of it;
Else it will be the rack and thumbscrews for us.
(Exit GHASTLI and ORFEL. ETTY goes up again to meet VULPECULA.)
VULPECULA: How didst thou?
ETTY: Six and a half sols for it all,
I've spread the rumour: mark how they do chatter.
And see those Thetans scurrying away;
They heard it too, and run off to report it.
VULPECULA: Heardst thou their names?
ETTY: They are Ghastli and Orfel.
VULPECULA: Aye, so they are. But tell, what are their names?
ETTY: Those are their names!
VULPECULA: 'Tis what I need to hear:
For if I have their names, my scrying glass
Will find them both, wherever they should go.
We'll trick them, and bring ruin to the foe.
(Exeunt.)

SCENE 2

A wooded Hill above Tritium, overlooking the Valley of the River Drongo.

Enter TILDA, VULPECULA and JESSICA.

VULPECULA: My scrying glass tells me the spies are near.
TILDA: Aye, I can hear one lower down the hill,
Lurching about the bushes like a cow.
VULPECULA: Let's hide within this thicket while he comes;
Surely he'll climb the hill to take a view.
Jessica, art thou ready?
JESSICA: Say the word, granny.
(Enter GHASTLI, dishevelled and perspiring.)
GHASTLI: May Satan's malison rest on this country!
Two days I have been thrashing through the thorns,
Steaming up sodding hills and down again,
And not a whiff of the damned Zinnian army.
O, were I at headquarters in Purdonium,
Sitting behind a desk with a mug of blood.
VULPECULA (whispering): Jessica, now! An army on that mountain.
(On the side of the Mountain an Army appears, clad in pink Armour, with Cavalry on pink Horses under a pink Banner. A Sound of Clashing, Neighing, and shouted Orders.)
GHASTLI: By Satan's trousers, what a fearful sight!
The foe is come upon us! I must flee.
(Exit in Haste.)
VULPECULA:
Jessica, thou canst let that army go.
The other spy is coming up the valley
Less than a mile hence. We will wait for him,
Then do thy trick again, where I shall point.

JESSICA: O what a jape!
TILDA: We'll lead them such a dance
'Twill outdo the fandango and the twerk.
(Enter ETTY. She looks about her.)
TILDA: Quick, Etty, we are hiding in these bushes;
One spy is not long gone, and t'other comes.
What news of Felix?
ETTY: He sent me to tell thee:
They go to th' Chankly gorge three leagues upstream,
'Tis a precipitous place with snowy slopes
Fit for an ambush of the deadliest kind,
If we can lure the Thetans t' enter it.
VULPECULA: Aye, for these spies know naught of where they go;
They blunder and see visions that dear Jessica
Doth fashion for them. Wait to see her army!
'Tis a gay spectacle, all clad in pink.
TILDA: In truth, I fret about that nursery colour;
It seems not serious in a time of war.
VULPECULA: Nay, for the Thetans it shall be a hue
Laden with terror, vengeance, wrack and death.
Also, it shows most sharply at a distance:
There's no way that a spy can overlook it.
ETTY: Think'st thou the slogan The Pink Revolution
Would serve our cause?
VULPECULA: Aye, there have been full many
Uprisings named for red and green and black,
But never one called pink: go for it, Etty.
Hast thou contrived to print in the wild woods?
ETTY: Aye, I have soot, bear's grease and a paving stone
We lifted from the streets of Delirium.
It takes two men to haul, but 'tis a weapon
As full of power as fifty arquebuses.
Paper we stole from a Thetan quartermaster.
When we are met again at Felix's camp
I'll show thee what I've made, and we shall post them
Upon the walls of Sputum and Delirium,
Yttrium, Erbium, Terbium, and Ytterbium
And all the local towns with silly names,
Fomenting the resistance of the people.
They'll rise when we do call: mark how they will.
VULPECULA: Witch though I be, this is a power I lack.
If my kind had the glamour that thou wieldest
We'd never have to face a ducking stool.
TILDA: All sorts shall fight together in this war,
Yet none as mighty as my little lass.
VULPECULA: Quiet, for the spy approaches: he's below us
Plodding along the riverbank, seeing naught.
Jessica, make thine army on yon hill!
(The Army reappears on the Hill. The voice of ORFEL is heard in the Distance.)
ORFEL: O mighty Satan! Shield me from these terrors!

I’ll sacrifice my eldest son to thee
If thou preserve me from this frightful foe!
(A Sound of Running.)
VULPECULA: Jessica, ’twas well done: let go thy army,
But we shall need it in the days to come
When the whole Thetan force is lured this way.
Then we shall meet them in the Chankly hills
And find a cure for our poor nation’s ills.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 3

The Entrance of the Royal Palace at Purdonium.

Enter GONBAD, in a Chariot drawn by twelve of his Wives chained together.

GONBAD: Halt, bitches! On your faces in the dust,
And move ye not until I bid you rise!
(Enter from the Palace his Chief Vizier SKUMBAGH.)
GONBAD: Ho, vizier, tell me news of the campaign.
Let it be good, or else, by Satan's hooves,
I'll have thee spitted like an ortolan.
SKUMBAGH: Our scheme goes well: we have subdued the country,
Barring some paltry rebels in the north. If Satan wills,
We shall have killed them all within a week,
And then we will drive north to Zinnia.
GONBAD: ’Tis well, and thou mayst keep thy head for now.
But where do these last rebels take their stand?
SKUMBAGH: Thanks be to Satan, they do sit like sheep
Within a day’s march of the northern pass:
We’ll fall on them like wolves, Satan be praised.
(Enter an ATTENDANT.)
ATTENDANT: May Satan’s grace shine on your majesty!
Word from the north: a spy is new returned.
GONBAD: Bring him at once, by Satan, no delay.
(Exit ATTENDANT. Enter GHASTLI, dishevelled and in Haste.)
GHASTLI: By your Satanic majesty’s request
I come from th’ north, bringing you my report.
GONBAD: Quick, spit it out, thou wretch, in Satan’s name.
GHASTLI: Satan is great! I come from Tritium
In the far north, below the Drongo valley.
Here in the marketplace, I heard some rumours
Of how the Zinnians had massed an army
Threatening to come south and stand against us.
GONBAD: Rumours heard in a market? Satan, what care we
For th’ tales of tinkers and of travelling quacks?
Com’st though to me with ribbon-sellers’ gossip?
GHASTLI: For love of Satan, let me tell my tale.
GONBAD: Speak out or, Satan, ’twill go ill with thee:

Thou shalt be strangled with thine own intestines.
GHASTLI: I was with private Orfel: we resolved
To head into the hills to find the truth;
May Satan blast me if I speak not truly.
We travelled northward up the Drongo valley,
I to the hills, he up the river bank;
And when I climbed a hill, thanks be to Satan,
I saw a mighty army, clad in pink armour,
Astride pink horses, under a pink banner.
In Satan's name, I ne'er saw such a sight.
GONBAD: Pink, thou say'st, pink? Thou mock'st me, traitor loon!
By Satan's hooves! Attendants, seize this man
And put him to the death o' th' red-hot stones.
GHASTLI: By Satan's beard, I tell ye but the truth.
(ATTENDANTS drag out GHASTLI.)
SKUMBAGH: Pish, 'twas a waste of time, in Satan's name,
To send that loon into the northern hills.
He hath been drinking that forbidden brew
That makes weak fools forget the words of Satan
Set down within the sacred book of Badmash:
Tell naught but truth to th' faithful, naught but lies
Unto the faithless folk that know not Satan;
Behead them, lest they lead thy soul astray.
(Enter an ATTENDANT.)
ATTENDANT: Your majesty, may Satan grant you ease,
Another spy is new come from the north.
GONBAD: Send him in quick then and, by Satan's liver,
Let his words bring some comfort to our ears.
We have heard lies enow to spoil our lunch.
(Exit ATTENDANT. Enter ORFEL, halting and besmirched.)
ORFEL: Your majesty, may the dark light of Satan
Shine coruscating on your noble head;
I am come from the north, where private Ghastli
And I pursued a rumour o' Zinnian troops
Massing to march down through the Drongo valley
And stand against us.
GONBAD: Then, by Satan's nose,
Tell me what thou didst find; and if thy words
Deviate from the truth by a hair's breadth,
Then 'tis the pincers and the hooks for thee.
ORFEL: By th' smell of Satan's farts, my words shall be
True as the words of the great prophet Badmash,
Blessed be he, and blessings unto Satan.
GONBAD: Satan! Get on with it, thou poxy churl.
ORFEL: Satanic eminence, I travelled north
With private Ghastli.
GONBAD: Aye, Satan, that liar,
He screams now for his drunken taradiddles.
ORFEL: I went along the valley of the Drongo
And soon, far to the north, I saw the dust

And heard the clamour of a marching army;
By Satan's moobs, I hid within a bush
And waited for the forces to approach.
GONBAD: By Satan's armpits, what didst thou see then?
ORFEL: Satan! They numbered thousands, tens of thousands:
Infantry, cavalry, engineers with mortars;
A mighty retinue marched in their tracks,
Armourers, farriers, cooks and prostitutes,
All that befits a force upon the march.
GONBAD: Think well, by Satan, ere thou answer this:
What colour were their armour, horses, banners?
ORFEL: Sire, 'twas the strangest thing I e'er did see:
In Satan's truth, it was a sea of pink,
The banners, the camp followers, e'en the chickens.
GONBAD: Pink, fool? Then, by the hairy arse of Satan,
I'll have thee racked till thou dost tell the truth;
Attendants, take him to the torture chamber
And write down every word that he doth shriek.
(ATTENDANTS drag ORFEL away.)
SKUMBAGH: He speaks as foolishly as his sad fellow;
Yet, majesty, by all the dung of Satan,
Two fools speak of an army from the north
And, midst their drunken words there may be truth.
Let us dispatch three regiments that way,
For if, praise Satan, we be bound for Zinnia,
They'll have to tread the road in any case.
GONBAD: 'Tis well, true spawn of Satan: let them go
To th' Drongo valley. Satan! Make it so.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 4

A Rock on a snowy Mountain, overlooking the Chankly Gorge in the Valley of the Drongo.

Enter FELIX and VISCUS.

FELIX: This is the narrow place where we must hold them.
With all the people who have joined our force
We number but a hundred, against thousands
– If we have lured them here; we know not yet.
O, we can halt them for a space, forsooth,
Like the bold Spartans at Thermopylae;
But they died, and their courage won the war
Only because their allies battled on.
There's none but us; for though th' Uraemian people
Hate the invaders to their dying breath,
They have no arms and know not how to use them.
They'll rise when the time comes, but for the present
Our band must live to fight another day.

What can we do?
VISCUS: We must construct a trap:
Roll rocks down th' valley sides to block their way
Before them, then behind.
FELIX: 'Tis heavy work
Without a troop of skilful engineers
With windlasses and ropes and all their gear.
We'd do 't in time, but haste is needed here.
One thing we have: that wain of gunpowder
We took i' th' night outside Dysprosium;
'Twould loosen a few rocks.
VISCUS: But not enough.
E'en if we built a wall at front and back
To trap them, they'd be near as hard to beat:
Would we could drop a mountain on their heads.
(Enter a SOLDIER, with DUFUS, an old Man.)
SOLDIER: Sire, we have met this man, a lonely goatherd
Whose cabin overlooks the Chankly gorge;
And he desires to speak, and give you warning.
His name is Dufus.
FELIX: Welcome, Dufus, my friend;
Pray tells us all thy tidings without fear.
DUFUS: Your majesty, pray go not in the valley:
There's mortal danger at this time of year.
No local man will pass it in this season.
FELIX: I heed thy warning, but what danger looms
In a deserted valley?
DUFUS: Avalanche!
See ye that field of snow upon the slope,
Virgin, untrod, and innocent to th' eye?
FELIX: I do. But if that snow should come to slide
Into the valley, and upon our heads,
We'd get a fright, but we could struggle out.
'Tis snow, not rocks, where is the harm in it?
DUFUS: Your majesty, I see, begging your pardon,
Ye know not of the power of th' avalanche.
When ye are under fifteen feet of snow
Ye know not which way's up, or which is down.
The snow holds you: there's no way to climb up
Or float to th' surface as ye would in water.
Less ye are found, and dug out ere ye freeze,
A lonely death comes, i' a soft cage of white.
In times of peace, when snow lay on the slopes
Thick'ning with every storm, and when the spring
Started it melting, threatening to slide,
We'd use gunpowder to bring it down
Before it fell, and make the valley safe.
But now barbarians swarm in our land
All civil order's lost, and naught is done.
FELIX: Gunpowder, say'st thou? We have much of that.

Say, hast thou seen, from out thy lonely cabin,
Where the men placed the charges on the slope
To loose the snow and roll it harmless down?
DUFUS: Aye, that I have, sire. Pray you come with me,
Bringing your men. I'll show you how 'tis done.
FELIX: Harmless the snow fell in a peaceful time,
In a deserted valley. But in time of war
'Twill crash upon the Thetan regiments
And drown them slowly in a chilly hell
Before they go to th' hot hell of their master.
(Enter TILDA.)
TILDA: My love, our charm hath worked. Three regiments
Will be here in a day, heading for Zinnia,
And this the only way that they can take.
The scrying glass can see into our palace,
Where Gonbad and his goons befoul our floor,
And out the window to the palace square
Where myriad soldiers mass before they march.
But say, what shall we do when they arrive?
Pink armies of the mind cannot resist them.
FELIX: Fear not: we have a plan to loose a wave
Of tumbling snow t' engulf the mightiest force.
If we can do it rightly, not a shot
Will fly between us and the filthy foe.
TILDA: 'Tis passing well; but when the Thetans come
And march insensibly towards their doom,
I must be far from here: our dearest daughter
Must not see such a grisly spectacle,
Nor hear the Thetans shriek as they're engulfed.
'Tis a game to her: we must keep it so
And hold her innocence aloof from woe.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 5

The same Rock overlooking the Chankly Gorge.

Enter FELIX, bearing a Horn, VISCUS and SOLDIERS.

FELIX: The Thetan army files into the valley.
Men, take good care your slow match stays alight:
There can be no delay firing the charges.
Now to your stations. When I blow my horn,
Light ye your fuses and run up the slope
Quick as ye can: we know not what will happen.
(Exeunt SOLDIERS.)
VISCUS: Nay, we do not. We may not shift the snow,
Or the whole valley may come tumbling down
Bearing us with it to a dismal death.
FELIX: What would we do without thy cheerful words?

We are secure: we stand upon a rock,
And all the men save those who fire the charges
Are drawn well back behind the mountain edge.
But see: the Thetans reach the fatal zone.
(He blows his Horn.)
Now brother, brighten thou thy gloomy visage
And hope with me that we shall crush the foe.
Nature is on our side; let her rain down
Destruction on these most unnatural men.
(Explosions, followed by a growing Hiss and a deafening Roar.)
VISCUS: O what a scene! The mountainside doth melt
And flow in tumult like a stormy ocean
Bearing away the trees, the very rocks,
Cascading ruin on the hapless foe;
Glad as I am, I tremble at the sight.
Brother, forgive me for my feeble doubts;
We win a battle as no army could.
FELIX: I too had no idea of what a force
We would unleash with a few pounds of powder.
Moments ago there was a valley floor,
A road, a teeming throng of well armed men;
Now, nothing but a formless sea of white.
Pray for their souls – although I fear that Satan
Will disappoint them in their foolish hopes.
(Enter a few SOLDIERS.)
Say, are our men all safe after the fall?
FIRST SOLDIER: Aye, all climbed up in time except Wee Gonk,
Who lost his footing; nearly carried down,
He saved himself by clinging to a tree.
But next time, sire, we should use longer fuses.
FELIX: I doubt there'll be a next time for this trick;
Once is the only chance that we shall get.
VISCUS: Not so, brother: none know what we did.
Those who saw are all buried in the snow.
(Enter more SOLDIERS, leading SLAVES in Chains.)
SECOND SOLDIER: Your majesty, we found these men below;
They lagged behind the Thetan regiments
And 'scaped engulfment in the avalanche.
They are slaves, chained and driven by overseers,
But when they saw the snow swallow their masters
They gained new courage and dispatched their guards,
Strangling them with their bonds of slavery.
FIRST SLAVE: O gracious majesty, pray spare our lives!
We are Gromboolians, captured by the Thetans,
Fettered and made to do their menial tasks.
We hate them from the bottom of our hearts
And long to wreak our vengeance on them all.
The Thetan armies raped our native land,
Stole the gold from our mines and bore it home.
I was brought there on one o' their treasure ships,

A galley rowed by slaves, where I'd be yet,
Had not an overseer's blow broken my arm,
So I was stranded on the Thetan shore
To toil in chains until a welcome death.
'Twas fate that spared our lives: now let us strive
To bring the foe the fate that they deserve.
FELIX: I hear thy plea. Now ye are slaves no more:
The farrier shall strike off your galling fetters.
Then, soldiers, bring them back one at a time
To take the oath to join our ragged army.
A word of caution: when ye swear that oath
Ye'll hold this chalcedony of Etruria
Given me by my mother, a powerful witch.
If ye swear true, it will not do thee harm,
But if ye lie, 'twill burn you to the bone.
SECOND SLAVE: We hear, sire, and obey. We shall be true:
We live in hope to see the filthy Thetans
Cast down to hell to meet their master Satan.
He'll give them a warm welcome, by my troth.
(SOLDIERS lead the Slaves away. Enter more SOLDIERS, leading a Band of ragged WOMEN.)
THIRD SOLDIER: Sire, we have found these ladies on the road
Straggling along behind the regiments.
FIRST WOMAN: Your majesty, we are camp followers,
Winning a few coins ministering to the Thetans;
They treated us like dogs, but we must live.
We'll follow any camp that we can find:
We offer our professional services
To comfort and relieve your mighty army.
FELIX: Mighty? My army? Lass, thou mak'st me laugh.
We number scarce ten score, a motley crew,
Soldiers and farmers standing side by side,
Armed with whatever we could find or steal,
Quite without money for your services.
If ye desire to see Uraemia
Freed from the Thetan yoke, then come with us,
And serve us upright at the barricades
Rather than on your backs i' a muddy thicket.
That is the best that I can offer you:
Take it, or else begone. What do ye say?
(The WOMEN confer.)
FIRST WOMAN: Sire, we have little love for our old trade;
A military career is a step up.
We'll stand beside your soldiers, come what may.
FELIX: Then welcome to my band of ragged ruffians
Scraping a bare existence in the woods.
We live in peril, but within our souls
A flame burns, for we fight to free our folk.
SECOND WOMAN: Sire, we will join your cause with all our hearts:
Better to serve as soldiers than as tarts.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 6

Felix's Camp in the Mountains.

Enter FELIX, TILDA, VULPECULA, ETTY, JESSICA and VISCUS.

JESSICA: And did the snow really kill all those men?
I wish I'd seen, it would have been such sport.
TILDA: Nay, child, 'twould not have been. There is no sport
In seeing folk engulfed in glaciers;
Bad though they be, they are still mortal men,
And one man's death's a little death for all.
Killing is what we do when other means
Have failed, and we can find no other way.
O that we could evict the enemy
Without one murder more: just let them go,
And leave our country in its wonted peace!
VULPECULA: Remember, Jessica, thou must not kill:
A single death brings ruin to thy soul.
JESSICA: Granny, I know. And yet I sit and chafe:
I conjure armies, fiends disguised as goats,
Anything I can think of – there it is!
And it can frighten folk, but nothing more.
'Tis naught compared to the great fall of snow
That took so many of the Thetan army.
FELIX: Jessica, 'tis thy talent, and a great one.
Do not dismiss it: we shall use thy skill
And deem it great as any avalanche.
– But now, let us consider what we've done,
And what we may do: we have won a battle,
And not a small one, for three regiments
Are gone; but seven more are still at large
And garrisoned within Purdonium
Beyond our reach, while we hide in the hills
With our intrepid but innocuous band.
What can we do to further our campaign?
ETTY: I have thought much on that. We are but few
And struggle feebly 'gainst the numerous foe.
Today good fortune gave us victory
But, in the long run, who can count on fate?
Here in the hills there's little we can shift;
Where can we do more? Then within my mind
The germ of an idea began to sprout.
Mayhap 'tis foolish.
VULPECULA: Etty, tell us more;
Foolish ideas may have wise consequences.
ETTY: May we have words with that Gromboolian slave

Who was a rower in the treasure ship?
FELIX: Ho, guard, come hither, I've a task for thee.
(Enter a SOLDIER.)
Pray find the slave who brought his fellows to us.
SOLDIER: I hear, sire, and obey; I know the man.
(Exit SOLDIER.)
ETTY: How can we hurt the Thetans worst of all?
Taking their treasure ships would be a start,
And who could do it better than Red Kevin,
The boldest pirate on the seven seas?
TILDA: Dear friend, 'tis brilliant. From old times I knew
In times of trouble I could count on thee.
When we cannot defend, we shall attack;
We'll take the war right to the enemy.
VULPECULA: I'll find their vessels with my scrying glass
If I but know the name of each ship's captain.
The scrying glass is of the latest mode,
Giving the bearing and distance of its visions:
We'll find a ship within a mile or two
Though it be hid in farthest Madagascar.
Etty, I thank thee – lo, here the man comes.
(Enter FIRST SLAVE.)
FIRST SLAVE: Sire, I am here to do your gracious bidding.
FELIX: Welcome, good comrade. We have questions for thee.
ETTY: On th' treasure ship, how was the captain called?
FIRST SLAVE: Why, Rottun, captain of the Pestilence.
ETTY: And didst thou hear of th' other treasure ships?
FIRST SLAVE: Aye, there were six in all: the others were,
If memory serves well, the Inflammation
Captained by Filthi, and the Carbuncle
With captain Septik, and the Teratoma –
What was the captain's name? I have it – Pus.
The last two were the Ulcer, under Sordid,
And captain Snotragh's old Abomination.
VULPECULA: 'Tis well remembered. Prithee, stay awhile
And look into this glass that I shall show thee.
(She speaks to the Scrying Glass.)
Show captain Rottun, of the Pestilence.
(To FIRST SLAVE:) Is that the captain of thy treasure ship?
FIRST SLAVE: Aye, curse the dog, that is his evil visage;
May festering infection sear his loins!
VULPECULA: He stands some fifty-seven miles from here;
The bearing is southeast by south – we have him!
FIRST SLAVE: A short way off the shore o' Opuntia
He creeps coastwise to bear his cargo home
Lest ocean storms should sink his golden burden.
Aye, in our ship the ballast in the bilges
Was bars of purest gold stacked three feet high
Till she could barely float, and in a storm
We nearly foundered as the waves broke o'er us.

ETTY: We'll turn this image to reality
If we can list Red Kevin to our cause.
Surely he'll rally to us if we offer
Riches beyond the dreams of avarice.
TILDA: We have a plan, Felix my dearest love.
FELIX: And in the morn we shall be on the move.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

ACT 4

SCENE 1

A Tavern in Hafnium, a Port City in the Country of Hedera, near the Border of Uraemia.

Enter FELIX, TILDA, VULPECULA, VISCUS and JESSICA, with the LANDLORD of the Tavern.

FELIX: I thought we'd never pass over the frontier,
With Thetan border guards as thick as thieves.
JESSICA: Those bears I made were good.
TILDA: Indeed they were;
I never saw grown men run off so fast.
VULPECULA: Our scrying glass doth tell me that this tavern
Is oft frequented by our friend Red Kevin;
When he's in harbour, in he comes most nights.
FELIX: Ho, landlord, bring us five pints of thy best;
We are weary travellers, seeking Red Kevin th' pirate.
LANDLORD: O, do not say that word among our patrons;
It tends to scare them off to other inns.
FELIX: Here are two ducats for our drink, and more.
Pray tell us privily how to find this Kevin:
We've business with him.
LANDLORD: Ha, 'twixt thee and me
And th' doorpost, he should be here very soon.
Yet, looking at thy company, ye seem
Not of the sort that most consort with him:
Ye have a certain air of quality
Though ragged and besmeared with dust and mud.
FELIX: Needs must when th' devil drives, tak'st thou my meaning?
LANDLORD: Say no more, friend, we live in troubled times.
TILDA (to JESSICA): Go easy on that beer, 'tis passing strong.
(Enter RED KEVIN with PIRATES.)
KEVIN: Ho, landlord, bring a quart o' sack and a fowl.
We had fine sport today with a merchantman
Laden with jujubes and opoponax,
Mangosteens, bdellium and the sardine stone.
I am in generous mood: here's twenty ducats.
LANDLORD: I thank you, sir, and run to do your bidding.
Yet ere I go, some folk have business with you.
(Exit LANDLORD.)
KEVIN: Where are these folk? Come forward and be seen.
FELIX: Greetings, good sir.
KEVIN: O, 'tis those bloody women!
One bit me on the hand; I've the scar yet.
TILDA: 'Twas done with th' best intent – of getting away.
KEVIN: I must allow, all's fair in love and war.

But now, sir, what have ye to say to me?
Most of the time ’tis I who do the talking.
FELIX: There’s lucre in it: may we speak in private?
KEVIN: I like the sound of that, let’s go upstairs
Where common folk hear nothing of our plans.
(They go above.)
TILDA: Kevin, we shall speak plainly. We can give thee
Riches above the wealth of Solomon.
KEVIN: ’Tis music to mine ears, but where’s the catch?
TILDA: Thou and thy men shall have to fight for it.
KEVIN: No problem there, that is what pirates do.
(Enter LANDLORD, with Food and Drink. Exit.)
Ah, I have earned that – a hard day at the’ gunwales.
Here’s to the health of all. Now tell me more.
TILDA: We offer thee the Thetan treasure ships,
All six of them, laden with bars of gold
Piled a yard high.
KEVIN: Offer? What dost thou mean?
To pick them up like apples from a stall?
We long to take them, but these ships are galleys
Able to row swiftly against the wind.
We never got within a league of them.
TILDA: We’ll show you where they are, within a mile
Or closer when we are in striking distance.
How would it go if thou cam’st up at night
And dropped down silently with no light showing?
KEVIN: How so?
VULPECULA: Look closely in this scrying glass:
Here’s captain Rottun of the Pestilence.
KEVIN: Well, stap my vitals, there the bugger is!
Where does he stand?
VULPECULA: Prithee, give me a chart.
KEVIN: Ho, Darryl, bring the chart we bought this morn.
VULPECULA: He’s there – creeping home, hugging th’ coast;
The galley’s almost sinking with that gold.
KEVIN: If thou speak’st sooth, we’d round the cape in days
And cut him off ere he turns south to Theta.
But there’s the rub: the galley is well guarded
And, though we may be bold, we are but few.
TILDA: But we are many: look outside the inn.
FELIX: I offer thee two hundred fighting men
And twenty simply terrifying women,
And thou canst have thy pick o’ th’ best of them.
KEVIN: ’Tis well, and if the women are like those
Who fought my men and me upon my ship,
Then they must be the terror of the world.
But ye must have some interest in this:
One does not offer wealth and men for naught.
FELIX: Nay, indeed, for we truly need thine aid.
The price we ask is succour in our fight.

Our country is invaded; we can do
Little against the goons that grip our land.
But we can take the battle to the Thetans
And hit them where it hurts the most, i' th' purse.
So I ask thee to raid the Thetan ports
Aided by all our folk, to carry off
What wealth thou findest; it will not be small.
ETTY: The instruments of torture in their temples
Are solid gold; even th' cords o' the racks
Are made of golden wires twisted together.
In the great temple porch at Thurralibad
The Golden Virgin, wherein men are crushed
To please their lord, weighs seven hundredweight;
Even the spikes are gold – and thou canst have her.
FELIX: All that we ask for this in recompense
Is a pirate's share, according to thy laws,
For each of ours, what thou would'st give to thine.
What say'st thou?
KEVIN: I say aye, with all my heart.
Pirates no longer, we are privateers
In th' honoured service of Uraemia.
FIRST PIRATE (aside): Ah, pull t' other one, it hath bells on it.
SECOND PIRATE (aside): Belay that, lad, for silence may be golden.
KEVIN (to FELIX): We'll harry them like beagles at a hare,
Unresting till we have them in our grasp;
The nation of Uraemia shall be free!
(Aside, to the PIRATES) And a little gold doth always come in handy.
FELIX: Then I the king shake hands with thee, my friend.
Together we will fight for our common end.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 2

Aboard the Pirate Ship.

Enter TILDA, ETTY and KEVIN.

TILDA: 'Tis grand to be aboard a ship once more.
Yet I confess, when climbing up the rigging
I felt quite breathless ere I reached the top.
ETTY: So did I. We are sadly out of training,
E'en after months of climbing bloody mountains.
We need to sharpen up before the fight.
KEVIN: I never saw a lady scale the ratlines;
Ye did it well enough despite those skirts.
Might I suggest, before the fray begins,
Ye rummage in the slop chest for some breeches?
(Voice of a LOOKOUT, from above): Sail ho! Due east, it looks to be a galley.
KEVIN: They'll not have seen us yet from their short mast.

(Enter VULPECULA, bearing the Scrying Glass.)
VULPECULA: ’Tis captain Rottun, as I promised thee.
See, here he is, having a rower flogged.
KEVIN: Aye, there’s the bugger. When we seize the galley
The rowers all will turn against their masters
And be the best prize crew ye can imagine.
A handful of our men to guide their way,
And they will row t’ a safe port and their freedom
And thank us for it, while we take the gold.
TILDA: Dusk falls. Are we sufficiently upwind
To close upon them when ’tis fully dark?
KEVIN: Aye, and the plan’s well laid. We’ll strike her side,
Where th’ gunwale’s low, and boarding a short leap.
’Twill crush the oars and hamper her retreat
So we can cast our grappling irons upon her
And haul ourselves alongside in a trice.
’Tis well ye had a dozen blacksmiths with you
To break the rowers’ fetters. We shall arm them,
And they will marmalise the Thetan crew
With all the bitterness seared in their souls.
(Enter JESSICA.)
JESSICA: O I have had such sport upon the rigging!
The sailors showed me how to pass the top
By th’ futtock shrouds, not through the lubbers’ hole,
I would not be a lubber for all th’ world.
KEVIN: She is the favourite of all the crew,
And clambers on the rigging like a monkey.
JESSICA: I’ve made a new illusion for you all:
A great big navy of a hundred ships.
O, may I show you?
KEVIN: Aye gladly, my poppet,
But make it on that side, away from th’ galley;
We do not wish them to see anything.
(A huge Navy appears.)
KEVIN: ’Tis wondrous finely done, and I can see
Thou hast the rigging perfectly correct;
Thy time i’ th’ shrouds hath truly served thee well.
Even the sails are filling as they should
I’ th’ westerly breeze. But pray, why are they pink?
ETTY: ’Tis a girl thing, thou wouldst not understand.
KEVIN: ’Twill puzzle th’ enemy, and that is good.
But I’ve a thought: canst thou remove the sails
And show the ships moving without a wind
And all manned by a crew of skeletons?
’Twould terrify the trews off th’ enemy.
JESSICA: Aye, that I can. Say, how do ye like this?
(The Illusion changes. Enter PIRATES.)
FIRST PIRATE: Jesu Maria! Fly, or we are doomed!
SECOND PIRATE: ’Tis nothing but the little maid’s illusion.
Brace up, man, thou dost look a proper wally.

KEVIN: ’Tis brilliant, lass, truly they’ll soil their breeches.
Now save thy grand illusion for the future,
For we creep softly like a rat i’ th’ dark.
(The Navy vanishes.)
KEVIN: Now, men, ’tis time to clear the decks for action:
As night falls, we shall fall upon the galley.
Knock the partitions down, run out the guns,
Break out the cutlasses, daggers and pistols,
Set pails of water all about the deck,
Let the damned sawbones sharpen all his knives;
Ye know the drill. And Jessica, my dear,
When we come close, thou’rt going below deck.
I know thou hast more power than any o’ us,
But all the more we need to keep thee safe.
And sooth, we wish not thy young eyes to see
The carnage there will be upon the deck.
JESSICA: Aye, I will go. But Kevin, if ye need
A navy suddenly, ye know who to call.
TILDA: We’ll stay, for ’tis not our first sea battle.
Etty, my dear, let’s garb ourselves in trews
And choose ourselves a brace of cutlasses
And take a little practice on the poop
To get our arms true for the coming fray.
ETTY: Aye, for eight years and more have passed
Since we slew Tartars with our yataghans.
We’ll add some Thetans to our hunting bag.
TILDA: I think me not that we have lost the knack.
They fought us down; now we are fighting back.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 3

Aboard the Pirate Ship. Night.

Enter TILDA and ETTY in Sailors’ Garb, FELIX, VISCUS, KEVIN and PATRICK, with PIRATES. They speak in hushed Voices.

TILDA (to ETTY): Is’t not passing fine to be in breeches?
We’ve not worn them since we were in the Cockroach,
Poorly disguised as jolly sailor boys
With bosoms battened down with bandages.
I tire of petticoats of bombazine,
Of corsets, hoops and stomachers, and all
Those sad bags stuffed with horsehair that they say
Are necessary adjuncts for a lady.
ETTY: Aye, I feel young again in mind and body.
They say war’s terrible, and so it is,
But ’midst the terror there’s some sport to have.
FELIX: What ravening tigresses ye are, my dears;
I never was as warlike as ye twain,

But when a fight approaches, still I deem
That I can wield a blade as well as you.
PATRICK: Faith, it reminds me of my time with th' Greeks,
Ransacking Turkish galleys in th' Aegean.
What days those were, when I was but a lad.
KEVIN (whispering): Quiet, for we are but fifty yards from them
And still unseen. I hear the rowers snoring,
And, may I dare to hope, their guards as well.
Helmsman, steer for the midst of th' bank of oars
And when we strike, then set us well alongside.
Men with the grapnels, stand ye by to cast them.
Be sure that all your pistols are well primed.
Gunners, aim high: we must not kill the rowers.
PIRATE: Aye sir, but we have done all this before.
KEVIN: We strike! Grapnels away! One broadside now!
(The Ship's Cannon fire. SAILORS and all rush on to the Galley, where they encounter THETANS roused from Sleep. Cries, Clashing of Swords, and Shots.)
THETANS (severally): Satan! Satan is great! By th' beard of Satan!
By Satan's arse, what th' hell is going on?
PATRICK: Go to thy master Satan, Thetan swine!
KEVIN: Blacksmiths, below! Men, guard them as they work.
Have ye the bale of extra cutlasses
To give them as they're freed?
PIRATE: Aye sir, we do.
(Exeunt KEVIN and SAILORS, with VISCUS.)
ETTY: Tilda, beware! A Thetan with a gun!
(PATRICK flings himself on TILDA and bears her to the Ground. The Bullet aimed at her strikes him.)
PATRICK: By all the saints, I'm hit.
TILDA: Alack, I see
'Tis next thy heart, and there's no staunching it.
Patrick, dear friend, I had not known thee long,
Yet thou becam'st my loved and faithful comrade
Till in the end thou gav'st thy life for me.
'Tis truly said: Greater love hath no man
Than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends.
(Enter HUMPHREY.)
HUMPHREY: Patrick, alas, what have they done to thee?
PATRICK: I've had a short life but a merry one;
'Tis over now, but I have no regrets.
Humphrey, old friend, the best times were with thee.
(He dies. HUMPHREY seizes his Sword and runs into the Fray.)
TILDA: Ah, no! Humphrey is not a man of war;
He'll surely perish.
FELIX: Tilda, let him be;
This is the only way that he can go.
He may kill dozens ere they cut him down,
And then he'll be united with his friend.
(Re-enter VISCUS.)
VISCUS: The rowers are all freed, and coming up;

Kevin sent me to warn you to take care
We do not shoot our friends wi' our enemies.
But say, is Patrick gone?
ETTY: Aye, Humphrey too;
Patrick saved Tilda from a Thetan bullet
And Humphrey, mad with grief, ran into th' fray.
VISCUS: I know not what to say, for good or ill.
We lost two pirates on the lower deck,
But th' day is ours: we are masters of the galley.
(Enter KEVIN.)
KEVIN: 'Tis done. I never saw such a pile of gold,
Ye'd build a goodly house with half of it.
But th' butcher's bill is higher than I'd hoped:
We have lost Spigot and old Turpentine,
And Lurcher is sore wounded in the belly
And may not live.
TILDA: Let me minister to him;
I have no small skill in the medical arts,
And herbs and simples to allay infection.
KEVIN: 'Tis well: for all our surgeon Jones the Butcher
May boast his skill, he knows not what he does.
(Enter a PIRATE.)
PIRATE: We've thirty Thetans, what to do with them?
Throw them o'er the side?
KEVIN: Nay, stay thy hand.
Chain them to th' oars, and we shall give our rowers
An easier time during the voyage home.
When ye reach port, ye'll sell them in the market;
I do not think they will fetch very much,
Since no one wants to buy a scurvy dog
Sold to the devil, and well whipped for it.
FELIX (to KEVIN): I am sorry for thy loss.
KEVIN: And I for thine;
At least they died to free Uraemia.
FELIX: Patriotism is a tawdry cause,
But when the enemy comes, we must oppose him
And bear our losses.
KEVIN: Aye, and when these men
Joined with our company, it was for gold.
They knew the risks, and gambled, and have lost.
We'll give a double share t' their families;
It is the rule. And as for their poor chattels,
My men will auction them for a high price
Paid out of kindness, adding to the sum.
But now, we must not brood on these sad matters:
We have our tasks, to set up a prize crew
To take the galley back to Hafnium
While we sail on to sack Thurralibad
And add the Golden Virgin to our treasures
With all the jewels that deck her evil body.

Ye serve your country, we our lust for gold;
What boots it, if it makes our soldiers bold?
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 4

Outside the temple at Thurralibad. The Street is deserted.

Enter TILDA, FELIX, ETTY, VULPECULA, JESSICA, KEVIN, Uraemian SOLDIERS and PIRATES.

KEVIN: Men, stand round Jessica and guard her well.
She is the greatest weapon that we have,
Yet she's a little girl of seven summers;
A puff of wind'll blow her like thistledown.
ETTY: Jessica dear, those skeletons were wondrous,
Twenty feet tall, enwrapped in glowing mist;
The citizens are skulking 'neath their beds.
TILDA: I had my doubts at bringing her with us,
But look what she can do! How wrong we were
To shut her below decks in the last fight;
We'd not have lost a man were she with us.
And yet my mother's heart is full of care
To see her treading in a hostile city.
Let's not expose her longer than we must:
On to despoil the temple of its wealth!
(Exeunt SOLDIERS and most of the PIRATES. Enter two other PIRATES with a Horse and Cart.)
FIRST PIRATE: Captain, this is the best that we could find.
'Twill bear the Virgin, but regard that horse!
Starving and drooping, sadly scarred by th' whip.
SECOND PIRATE: How cruel those Thetans are! We gave him an apple,
And now he follows us like a tame dog.
KEVIN: We'll set him free. Now let him crop the weeds
I' th' temple precinct, while we set to work.
Men, go in boldly, fear not Satan's wrath;
I do not think he loves his worshippers.
(A few THETANS come out in the Street.)
VULPECULA: Jessica! Make a goat, and make it big.
(A huge pink Goat appears. VULPECULA speaks through it in a dreadful Voice.)
VULPECULA: Down, Thetan dogs! Ye have not served me well,
Torturing prisoners for your own delight,
Not for my glory. Now your goods are forfeit:
My demons bear your Virgin and your rack,
Thumbscrews and pincers, scourges and tickling sticks,
To my domain, where they'll be rightly used
On you, when death shall gather you to me.
Your cities shall be pillaged, one by one,
And there is naught that ye can do to save them.

I have spoken. Now, run for your wretched lives,
Or what remains of them till I shall claim you.
(Exit THETANS in Haste.)
TILDA (to JESSICA): Well done, my love, that is a fearful goat;
See how they run in fear and consternation.
Put it away now, for its task is done.
(The Goat disappears.)
JESSICA: Why are these silly men scared of a goat?
ETTY: They think it is the devil, lord of this world,
Master of hell, which is where they shall go.
JESSICA: He's a good goat, I'll call him Lucifer.
(Re-enter some SOLDIERS and PIRATES, ten of them bearing the Golden Virgin on their Shoulders like a Coffin.)
FIRST SOLDIER: Gadzooks, this thing is heavy.
SECOND SOLDIER: Where's the cart?
I have to put this lump down in a minute,
Else it will slip my hand and crush my toes.
(They set the Golden Virgin down on the Cart. Enter more PIRATES, carrying a golden Rack and other Instruments of Torture.)
FIRST PIRATE (on the Cart): Any old iron, any old iron, good prices paid!
SECOND PIRATE: Let's melt these down as quick as e'er we can,
They fair give me the creeps, and no mistake.
JESSICA: What do they do with that big golden coffin?
Is there the body of a king within?
FIRST PIRATE: Best that thou shouldst not know, my little girl;
'Twould give thee nightmares. Let's away with it.
(Exit SOLDIERS and PIRATES with the Cart. As they go, a THETAN appears with a Pistol.)
TILDA: Jessica, down!
JESSICA: Thetan, I conjure thee
By th' demons Xbox, Sega and Nintendo …
(TILDA rushes over and claps her hand over JESSICA's mouth.)
VULPECULA (continuing the Spell): … To turn t' a toad and wallow in the mire.
(The Thetan is transformed into a Toad.)
VULPECULA (To TILDA): Didst thou catch her in time?
TILDA: Aye, but 'twas close.
Jessica, darling love, hear what I say:
Never exert thy power to harm a man,
Not even if thy life depends on it.
Better – I hate to speak so, but I must –
To lose thy life than to invoke a doom
That casts thy soul to bottomless perdition.
Granny can do this: she is old and tough …
VULPECULA: I thank thee. But 'tis true, I must confess.
TILDA: … But not thou, precious. Keep thy power in check.
JESSICA: Mother, I know. I shall. But I was frightened.
TILDA: As were we all: war is a dreadful trade.
Thou shouldst not have to ply it at thy age.
And yet thou art the strongest of us all.
ETTY: Thy bears and goats shall cause the foe to fall.

(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 5

The Deck of the Pirate Ship. A Month later.

Enter TILDA, FELIX, ETTY, VULPECULA, JESSICA, KEVIN and PIRATES.

Voice of a LOOKOUT, from above: Sail ho! Bound this way on the starboard beam.
KEVIN (to FIRST PIRATE): Take up a glass, tell me what thou dost see.
(Exit FIRST PIRATE.)
My friends, ye have been faithful to your word.
We've sent four treasure ships to a safe port
And sacked the temples in six coastal cities;
We are rich beyond a miser's wildest hopes.
Yet, with the other ships some months away,
We must bide our time for now. Therefore I deem
'Tis time to head for Hedera, and for home.
TILDA: Aye, it hath been a profitable voyage:
We have more gold than we can shake a stick at;
But what of gold?
KEVIN: I like it, anyway.
LOOKOUT (from above): She is the Cockroach of the Seven Seas,
I'd know that tatty mainsail anywhere,
'Tis patched with all the colours of the rainbow.
TILDA: She's not worth taking: I know her of old;
Etty and I once made a voyage in her
And nearly sank three times. I stand amazed
The rotten scow is still above the waves.
Kevin, prithee run up a flag of truce:
We'll speak with them and hear the latest news.
KEVIN: Fly the white flag, and steer a course to meet her.
SECOND PIRATE: Aye, sir. (Exit.)
TILDA: It will be good to meet the captain
And speak of old times. But, while she approaches,
Let us confer to plan our course ahead:
We have more pressing matters than mere riches.
We have struck the enemy in his very vitals.
His ships are robbed, his sacred temples looted;
The Thetans rush around like poison ants
When ye destroy their anthill with a stick.
Say, shall we look to see how Gonbad fares?
(VULPECULA looks into her Scrying Glass.)
VULPECULA: See how he foams at th' mouth and chews the carpet!
His vizier is gone.
FELIX: I trow, to the headsman:
'Tis perilous to serve an angry tyrant.
TILDA: How heartening to see him in such straits!
But I regret our carpet. When we come back,

We'll have to fumigate the whole royal palace
And burn the furnishings, fouled with the fell miasma
Of Gonbad and his crew of hideous henchmen.
At least we can afford new furniture.
VULPECULA: Kevin, when we reach port we must part ways.
We have a land to save, and thou'lt return
Unto the usual business of a pirate.
But I have one more boon to ask of thee:
In some days we have need to sail to Theta
And land in secret on a lonely shore
To carry out a task I have in mind,
And then return as softly as we came.
To do this, and to find the other ships,
I'll give thee this: it is a skyping crystal,
The fellow of the pair I shall retain.
When thou dost wish to speak with me, rub it
And say the magic words, Alexa, Open.
Where'er I be, my crystal shall hear thine
And call me with a burst of cheesy music,
And then we'll see each other in its lens
And speak together; and when we are done,
Alexa, Close shall set the spell to rest.
I warn thee that the image is not clear,
The voice distorted; we may lose the link
And have to start anew, but it will serve.
Thus, by its aid, we can call thee to come
When we quit Theta. But to thine advantage,
I'll call thee when a treasure ship comes nigh
And tell thee of its bearing and its distance
As well as if I stood on th' deck with thee.
Thou shalt have all the ships, as I did promise.
KEVIN: 'Tis well. I shall be faithful to my word
And carry thee where'er thou need'st to roam.
But here's the Cockroach, lowering a boat.
ETTY: Ho, captain, my old friend, we have not seen thee
These eight years, but I see thou'rt still afloat
If only just.
CAPTAIN: Etty, my lass, what cheer!
Tilda! I heard thou wert a royal queen,
But now I see two pirates dressed in breeches.
TILDA: 'Tis a long story. But well met indeed;
Pray come aboard, and tell us of thy news.
(The CAPTAIN comes up on the Deck.)
KEVIN: Welcome aboard my ship, good sir. Fear not,
We've no desire to seize thy precious cargo,
Whate'er it be.
CAPTAIN: Forsooth, thou wouldst not want it:
We bear firewood, ironware and cheap tin trays.
Tilda, is this thy daughter? A fine lass.
TILDA: Jessica, meet the captain of the Cockroach.

JESSICA: It is an honour. Mother told me o' you
And how ye saved her life, and she saved yours
When your ship fell to pieces in a storm.
FELIX: Good sir, pray tell us of Uraemia.
CAPTAIN: Why, 'tis king Felix. Gracious majesty,
'Twill be my pleasure.
FELIX: No need for fine words:
Our land's invaded, we are on the run,
But fighting back against the poxy Thetans.
CAPTAIN: Then ye'll be glad to hear what I shall tell.
The Thetans, hearing of their country's losses,
Withdrew four regiments to guard their ports.
I heard they'd lost three others in the north,
But how I know not.
FELIX: Truly, 'twas our doing:
We buried them with snow i' a mountain pass.
This is fine news: three regiments remain
From ten they launched at us. Were we an army
Fighting 'gainst soldiers on a battlefield,
We'd call it victory, crown ourselves with bay,
And have a grand parade through th' city streets.
But we're not finished till we oust them all.
KEVIN: Dine in my cabin, and we'll take our ease
And talk of old times on the seven seas.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 6

A Chamber in an Inn in the Port of Hafnium.

Enter TILDA, FELIX, ETTY, VULPECULA, JESSICA and VISCUS.

FELIX: Now we have made a pirate very rich,
And won some wealth ourselves, it must be said.
But we've not won our struggle. Thetans still
Oppress our land, and though three regiments
Are all that stay out of the ten they sent,
Their cruelty t' our folk prevents us yet
From rising up. We must reduce them more
Till we can rouse the people to rebellion.
They'll know when th' time hath come, thanks to our Etty
Whose pamphlets circulate throughout the land,
Passed hand to hand and read by everyone.
Yet here we sit, with a few hundred men,
Powerless against their thousands. What's to do?
TILDA: We have a stratagem, but 'twill not please thee.
Thy mother, Etty and I hatched it in secret;
We trow 'twill serve.
FELIX: If so, why dost thou falter

In telling me? Forsooth, my dearest Tilda,
We have no secrets.
TILDA: What is the Thetans' weakness?
'Tis this: their women. Half the population
Is bound with chains and prisoned within doors.
We must arouse them to o'erthrow their masters.
But here's the rub: to gain th' desired effect
We needs must go to Theta and awake them
– I and Vulpecula and Jessica.
'Tis perilous for all; my mother's heart
Is full of apprehension at the thought.
Yet we must stand together, or we'll fall.
We go not unprotected, for we have
Magic of divers sorts: Jessica's phantoms,
Thy mother's powerful spells of transformation,
My few weak tricks and, most importantly,
The peach stones of invisibility
With which we rescued thee from the foul Tartars.
What dost thou say, Felix my darling love?
FELIX: It rends my heart to hear what thou dost say:
My dearest Tilda and my darling daughter
And mother, though I know how strong ye are,
In the foul stronghold of the enemy
Exposed to death at every fleeting moment.
And yet I know 'tis right: we must dare this,
A gambler's throw to win all or lose all.
I do believe the odds are in our favour
Thanks to your magic powers and dauntless hearts.
Besides, I know that, were I to forbid you,
Ye'd take no notice of my feeble words
And rush into the lion's maw all the quicker.
But stay, we have not heard from Jessica,
The youngest of the three, but not the least.
Say, lovely daughter, what's thy word on this?
JESSICA: Father, I am afraid, but I will go;
We must do this, and so it shall be done.
FELIX: This is true courage, dearest Jessica:
To feel the fear and do it anyway.
TILDA: We'll guard her to the utmost of our power,
Though she hath power beyond the two of us.
ETTY: Tilda, I know that thou wilt win the day
With thy companions, but it grieves me sore
That I cannot be with thee on the road
As once we were. Yet 'tis a witches' matter,
And I must play my part in our own land
Rousing the folk when it is time to strike,
For magic is beyond my power.
TILDA: Not so,
Etty, thou hast the magic of thy words,
A potent spell indeed to move a nation.

In war a word is worth a thousand arrows
To energise our friends and crush our foes.
But I shall miss thee on this desperate quest.
VULPECULA: Kevin is still ashore, guarding his galleys.
We'll visit him tomorrow and take passage
T' a lonely place upon the Thetan coast.
Felix, I'll give thee one o' th' scrying glasses
So thou canst see that all is well with us.
FELIX: Aye, and if 'twere not, know I would rush
With all the meagre force at my command
To rescue you from th' very pit of hell.
But let's not dwell on that. Say, brother Viscus,
Are our men ready to decamp tomorrow
And cross the border to our native land?
VISCUS: Aye, they stand ready. 'Twill be easier
To enter than to leave. The Thetans watch
To stem the flow of folk leaving the land
As thousands have, t' escape their tyranny.
Though Jessica's pink bears would come in handy,
We'll do it fair enough in our own way.
'Tis well we left the printing press i' th' mountains;
Such things are hard to haul about in secret.
ETTY: Would we had better means to spread the word
Than cumbrous presses made of wood and iron
And boxes full of heavy leaden type,
And paper purchased in the dead of night
From honest stationers whose lives we risk.
Yet better ways will come; of that I'm sure.
FELIX: My family, my friends, my loyal folk:
The tide of war hath turned. It flows our way
To wash our enemies out of our land.
Come, let us raise our mugs of frothing beer
And drink a toast, for victory draws near.
(All cheer. Exeunt Omnes.)

ACT 5

SCENE 1

A lonely Road in Theta, outside the Capital City of Uttalibad. Evening.

Enter TILDA, VUPECULA, JESSICA and KEVIN.

KEVIN: Less than a mile to go. Ladies, ’tis time
To don your hideous bags of slavery
And buckle on your fetters. Are ye sure
Ye’ll get them off when needed, with your spells?
VULPECULA: I have it perfectly: the scissor gesture,
The magic word of Rumpo, and they’re gone.
Jessica too can break a chain at will,
Though often she brings down the wall with it.
TILDA: And I at least can turn a chain to cheese,
Easy to slice, convenient, nutritious.
KEVIN: Now I must don the costume of a eunuch
To chaperone thee in the city streets.
’Tis well my face is swathed i’ a flannel scarf
As th’ ginger beard would be a giveaway.
Darkness is falling; with its friendly aid
Wardrobe malfunctions will not be apparent.
(All don Thetan Apparel.)
KEVIN: My dears, ye all look simply horrible.
TILDA: And thou look’st worse than us, i’ thy frilly skirt
And coat of hessian, pointed leather hat
Topped with a bell, slippers of donkey skin,
And face all muffled up in a great cloth.
Truly these Thetans have no fashion sense.
KEVIN: It mocks me as a eunuch; I feel th’ shame.
But we’ve a task to do, and on my word
Of honour as a pirate, I’ll perform it.
(Enter a THETAN.)
THETAN: In Satan’s name, an evil evening to thee.
KEVIN: May Satan’s hand caress thee on thine arse.
Know’st thou the way to our dear leader’s palace?
I’ve concubines for him when he returns
Fresh from his triumph in Uraemia.
THETAN: One of them seems a little under age;
Yet, Satan, if that is how he prefers them,
’Tis not our business.
KEVIN: Nay, by Satan’s spleen.
But say, will this road bring us to the palace?
THETAN: ’Twill bring thee to the western city gate;
From there, thou’lt see the palace straight before thee.
’Tis hard to miss, by Satan: nine floors tall,

Faced with black granite, bleak and terrible.
But stay, a friendly word ere ye depart,
For sons of Satan must assist each other;
No one else will. Affairs go ill at th' palace
Since Gonbad left to take Uraemia
And left it in the charge o' his vizier Scuzzi.
News from abroad is ill, and any folk
Who bring such news, or do aught to offend him,
Are racked until their sinews burst asunder,
Then flung i' th' fire to soothe his wounded feelings.
I trow thou may'st be safe, bringing him women,
But take good care to hold thy tongue before him.
KEVIN: I thank thee, friend; may Satan do thee th' honour
Of voiding his noble bowels over thy head.
But say, I have not heard news from abroad:
How goes it with his majesty's campaign?
Surely he triumphs, as he always has.
THETAN: Truly, 'twixt thou and me and th' doorpost
– May Satan's ear be turned away from us –
The conquest of Uraemia goes ill.
Their king, with a gang of ragged terrorists,
Can roam throughout the country as he pleases,
Harrying our men and stealing their provisions;
The country folk all aid him, though we slay them
And burn their villages to keep them sweet.
There's worse to tell, for three whole Thetan legions
Perished when snow buried them in a valley.
We think it was their work, Satan knows how.
KEVIN: Grave news indeed, by Satan's hairy bollocks.
THETAN: And graver yet, pirates assail our shores
To loot and burn our lord's most holy temples.
They steal the instruments of gold, and – Satan smite them –
Have impiously taken th' Golden Virgin
Crusted with gems from all our conquered lands.
Gonbad hath brought three regiments back home
To stem the raids, but what's the use of them
When raiders can strike freely on our coast?
Worst of all, they have seized four treasure ships
Laden with gold from the Gromboolian mines.
Our people, hitherto his willing slaves,
Are murmuring: the air is full of rumours.
When Gonbad shall come home, go thou not near him.
Even with all the women thou hast brought,
One word, one look, one gesture out of place
And thou art headed for the rack and th' fire.
His vizier's cruel, but he is crueller still,
And not the least of it to his own folk.
By Satan, may the concubines thou bring'st him
Restore his mood before he burns us all.
KEVIN: Amen to that, by Satan's brimming bowels.

I thank thee, friend, for thy most timely warning.
I'll be a very paragon of discretion.
THETAN: I must be off: if I be late arriving,
My master'll flog my back to th' very bone.
KEVIN: May Satan's farts waft thee along thy way.
(Exit THETAN.)
TILDA: 'Tis everything we hoped: the state is failing.
What better time than now to spark rebellion?
On then to Uttalibad and, come what may,
We shall not rest till we have won the day.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 2

The Seraglio of Gonbad's Palace in Uttalibad.

CONCUBINES are chained to the Wall, including ETHYLENE and OCTANE. Enter TILDA, VULPECULA and JESSICA, escorted by KEVIN, accompanied by a EUNUCH GUARD.

GUARD: Stand while I lock your fetters to the rail;
Ye may remove the bags from off your heads.
(To VULPECULA): Say, art thou not too old for th' ruler's bed?
KEVIN (in a high Voice): She was the choice of Pervi, the selector;
He called her milfy, and 'tis not for us
To question his decisions, Satan be praised.
GUARD: Nay, brother eunuch. By the warts of Satan,
If Gonbad like her not, she's for the pit
Where she'll be torn apart by starving dogs,
And Pervi's back shall feel the lash, not ours.
KEVIN: I must be on my way. Farewell, my brother;
May Satan spew his supper on thy head. (Exit.)
GUARD: Ladies, I leave you to your lovely dreams;
Ye'll get your bread and water in the morning. (Exit.)
VULPECULA: So this is how Gonbad doth treat his women.
We'll lose these chains: Rumpo! They are all gone.
(All the CONCUBINES are unchained. They stand astonished.)
ETHYLENE: What hast thou done? We shall be slain for this.
By Satan's horns, restore our chains to us.
OCTANE: Art thou a witch, that thou canst do such things?
Canst thou unmake our bonds and put them back?
VULPECULA: Aye, Retro!
(OCTANE is chained again.)
VULPECULA: Rumpo!
(The Chains vanish.)
VULPECULA: See, a moment's work.
We three are witches: crone, mother and child,
A threefold coven armed with mystic powers,
And we have come to free you, and your nation.

ETHYLENE: Free us? From what? This is our role in life,
To comfort master Gonbad, the great ruler
Of Theta, the chief state of all the world
Whose conquests have amassed a mighty empire
Of boundless domination for all time.
What's freedom when compared to Satan's glory?
TILDA: Glory, ye say? Ye squat i' a filthy cellar
Chained to a wall, waiting for master Gonbad
To roger you upon his stinking bed.
Ye are prisoners, the lowest of the low,
And with you, all the womenfolk of Theta,
Fettered and bagged and led about by eunuchs.
Ye are half the population of the land
– Aye, more than half, for many men are lost
In Theta's stupid everlasting wars –
And yet ye let yourselves be shoved around
Like cattle waiting for the butcher's axe.
Have ye no pride? Do ye not long for freedom
To walk the city streets with heads held high,
Unchained, unveiled, on level terms with men?
ETHYLENE: But 'tis the will of Satan we are here,
To serve him giving comfort to our ruler
Who is his intermediary on earth.
Men are our masters, and by pleasing them
We may please Satan, master of the world.
TILDA: Who said men were your masters?
ETHYLENE: Why, our priests.
TILDA: And they are men; of course they told you this.
Did Satan speak to you to tell you so?
ETHYLENE: Satan speaks not to us, but to the priests.
TILDA: How do ye know Satan talks to your priests
Or anyone? Why ever should he wish to?
His business, a task laid on him by God,
Is to preside in hell and punish sinners.
He doth not care a jot for all your priests,
Nor they for him. All they desire is power
And comfort, aided by your stolen gold.
ETHYLENE: Blasphemy! Satan sure will strike thee down
For these unruly words.
TILDA: See, am I struck?
OCTANE: I do confess I see no sign of 't.
TILDA: Is there a temple in the palace precincts?
OCTANE: Aye, 'tis above. They take us there each Friday
And torture us to glorify his name;
See how my hands are burnt from the last session.
TILDA: They torture you, and yet ye praise his name?
This is abominable. Come, let's to the temple,
Where we shall break their dismal instruments;
Then let us see if Satan smites me down.
ETHYLENE: He surely will, and gladly I shall watch it.

OCTANE: I am not sure. But say, we are unchained;
Let's go above and put them to the test.
(All go above to the Temple.)
TILDA: See here a host of gruesome golden engines:
Pincers and tongs, braziers filled with coals,
Hooks, racks and the whole horrid apparatus
Of humans thinking that they serve their god.
Come, let us smash them all to smithereens.
Rumpo!
(Some of the Instruments break.)
VULPECULA: Rumpo!
(All the Instruments are reduced to small Fragments.)
JESSICA: Rumpo!
(The Building trembles and part of the Wall collapses.)
JESSICA: Was that too strong?
TILDA: Nay, in the circumstances 'twas just right.
Now see, ladies. We have profaned your temple
To some effect: the place is laid in ruins.
Is Satan raining fire upon my head?
Do ye smell brimstone, see a hornèd goat,
Or hear the faintest mutter of dissent?
Nay, this is not a seat of hellish power;
'This nothing but a room where wicked men
Amuse their evil selves with vicious pastimes.
Ye have it in your power to overthrow them:
Armed with our magic, will ye not prevail?
Let us away before the roof collapses,
And call the womenfolk throughout the city
To march with us and overthrow our tyrants!
OCTANE: I stand with thee.
CONCUBINES (severally): And I, and I, and I.
ETHYLENE: And I, though my heart is filled with bitter fear;
But when the chance is offered, we must seize it.
Better to die in battle than in chains.
TILDA: Onward to Uttalibad to free our sisters!
Today the town, tomorrow all of Theta!
All men must yield to our united might;
The wrong shall ne'er prevail against the right.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 3

A Street in Uttalibad.

Enter TILDA, VULPECULA, JESSICA, ETHYLENE, OCTANE and CONCUBINES.

TILDA: Where to begin to set a country free?
Myriads of women lurk behind these walls
And we must reach them one step at a time,

First in this city, then throughout the country.
ETHYLENE: This is the house of Grievas, the high priest,
On whose dark altar thousands have been slain;
Even the walls and doors are stained with blood.
He hath six wives and forty concubines;
Let's free them for a start. How to get in?
TILDA: Jessica, break the doors.
JESSICA: Aye, mother. Rumpo!
(A huge Hole appears in the Wall.)
TILDA: I only said to blow the bloody doors off;
Hold up the ceiling while we fetch them out.
VULPECULA: Ladies, 'tis time to leave. I break your chains:
Rumpo! Run out before the building falls.
Nay, do not swathe your heads in bags; that time
Hath gone, and now we walk the streets unveiled.
(Enter WOMEN, including the Priest's first Wife, STYRENE.)
STYRENE: Ethylene, cousin! What glad day is this?
Is it the dawn we were all waiting for?
(They embrace. The Building falls, unheeded.)
ETHYLENE: It is, and we shall march through all the streets
And all the land, till everyone is free.
See ye these three? They form a witches' coven
More powerful than a battery of brass cannon.
They will break doors and chains, and Thetan men
Foolish enough t' oppose our growing might.
Let's to another house, and free some more.
OCTANE: I deem we'll meet a mite of opposition:
Here come the guards, clanking with iron and spite.
(Enter GUARDS.)
VULPECULA: No matter, I can hold them. Teneo!
(The GUARDS are rooted in their Tracks.)
TILDA: And I can maze their minds. I say, Confundo!
(The GUARDS look around, dazed.)
JESSICA: Please, mother, may I do Oblivio?
TILDA: Aye, my love, but take heed thou dost not harm them.
JESSICA: I will be careful, mother. Oblivio!
They know not who they are or where they go.
FIRST GUARD: Ladies, it is a pleasant afternoon.
Where do ye fare, and may we walk with you?
ETHYLENE: Aye, willingly, but see the arms ye bear.
We are an army, and ye fight with us
To set all Theta free from tyranny.
Women unchained, and all men of good will
Shall join our growing force and march with us
Till we establish freedom everywhere.
FIRST GUARD: I do remember now: we are the guards,
And what to guard better than liberty?
TILDA: Welcome to our small force; indeed, 'tis well
We have men in our ranks now, for a war
Of women against men were a sad campaign.

Let all the folk of Theta strive together
T' unseat the tyranny that holds them down
With books and racks and sermons from the pulpit.
VULPECULA: Our struggle's easy here, with our magic powers,
But we are three, and only in one city.
We shall not win until the whole of Theta
Stands up to overthrow her evil priests.
Her women are in chains: how may they rise?
TILDA: See here this smithy, and the hanging sign:
Chains forged for women at the lowest prices.
STYRENE: I had not known such places did exist;
O fie for shame, that folk should do such work!
ETHYLENE: A filthy trade, but someone has to do it.
TILDA: Let's speak with th' smith, and use no magic here;
We need to know how things stand in the country.
Ho, smith! We wish to have some words with thee.
(Enter DUFF, a Blacksmith.)
DUFF: Good morrow, ladies. Why, ye are unchained,
Unbagged and free, a wonder to behold;
Hath sanity prevailed at last i' th' land?
I do our rulers' bidding to chain women;
'Tis a sad task I and my brother smiths
Perform reluctantly, for fear of torture.
Ye should hear what my wife doth say of me.
TILDA: Sanity grows, but O, 'tis a frail plant
Easily stamped under the tyrant's heel.
We bear the seeds of it and hope to sow them
That they may sprout and flower throughout the nation.
DUFF: 'Tis grand to hear. Ho, wife, come out the front,
There is great news for us.
(Voice of DUFF's Wife PROPANE): I come at once;
Let me put on my chains.
DUFF: There is no need;
Come as thou art. (To TILDA): She hath the key to th' lock;
'Tis often thus in more enlightened households.
(Enter PROPANE.)
PROPANE: O gladsome sight, women without chains!
What means this, shall we all be free at last?
TILDA: That is our hope, and this is the beginning.
We can unchain this city within days
And have the priests buzzing like angry bees;
But how can we spread word throughout the land
Of what's done here, that all may follow us?
PROPANE: I have a sister, Butane, in Realibad,
My cousins Methane and Hexane in Terabul;
They have their cousins and their confidantes.
Rumour doth spread like wildfire among women.
DUFF: And among smiths, as all o' a certain trade.
I warrant, if thou set free the whole city
And keep the priests and guards from harming us,

The word will circulate within a week.
We pay lip service to the priests of Satan
With all their guards and racks and scary tales,
But they are few and we, the folk, are many.
ETHYLENE: Aye, and forget not the ten thousand slaves
Who toil in building Gonbad's monstrous palace
At Realibad, which covers ninety acres
And every week encroaches on five more.
Chained, they writhe under th' overseer's lash.
But if those chains were broke, how they would rise
And smash their torturers to smithereens!
So it would be with slaves throughout the land
And on the galleys, robbed from Christian towns.
PROPANE: We light the fuse, and soon the powder blows
And brings the palace down upon their heads.
TILDA: Then let us strive to set off an explosion
Whose thunder shall resound throughout the land.
Come, people, let's rampage across the city
Unchaining women and recruiting all
Who'll join with us to swell our growing ranks.
Thus mighty oaks from little acorns grow;
Thus a few folk can fell a fearful foe.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 4

Felix's Camp in the Hills overlooking Purdonium.

Enter FELIX and VISCUS.

VISCUS: Say, brother, goes it well with our tigresses?
FELIX: Last night I looked into the scrying glass
And saw the three with a great band of folk
Marching along the streets of Thurralibad,
All armed with pickaxes, cleavers and scythes.
VISCUS: Knowing our mother, that doth not surprise me;
She had a marshal's baton in her handbag
For many a year, and I have felt its blows.
FELIX: Only because thou wert a mardy brat,
My dearest brother. Any blows received
Were no more than thou truly didst deserve.
But that's behind us; thou'rt a soldier now
Tried in the field – rather, the muddy woods
Where we are forced to skulk in this campaign.
(Enter a SOLDIER.)
SOLDIER: Sire, I have tidings from Purdonium:
Gonbad hath sent two regiments home to Theta,
Leaving but one to hold Uraemia down.
That much is certain; but I met a sailor

Newly arrived from th' port of Opprobrium
Who spoke of turmoil broken out in Theta:
Great bands of women ranging through the streets,
And all the people rising 'gainst their rulers;
Riots in cities right across the land.
And when the priestly guards ordered the army
To fire upon the mob, they mutinied
And shot the guards instead, and th' officers
Who ordered them to murder their own folk.
Gonbad himself, cowering in your palace,
Hath called two hundred men back from the shires
To shield him from the anger of the people,
But will they serve him in his hour of need?
FELIX: 'Tis joyful news indeed. And didst thou hear
Gossip i' th' market, merest rumour, yet
Something that we should heed, if not believe?
SOLDIER: Aye, there is wild talk of pink bears and goats
Rampaging through the streets of Uttalibad,
Aiding the people to o'erthrow the priests.
I paid it not much mind, but since ye ask
I tell you.
FELIX: Aye, I can believe that tale:
This is the doing of my little daughter
Who hath powers well beyond her tender age
But not the judgement to control them well;
She can call spirits from the vasty deep,
But when they come, they are of gaudy hue.
(Enter ETTY, bearing a Sheet of Paper.)
ETTY: We've made ten thousand of this little pamphlet
And sent our riders all about the kingdom
To spread it to the folk. 'Tis very simple:
Uraemians, when ye see the beacon's light
Take up your arms, the hour is come to fight!
See, here's a picture of a fire on a hill,
And one of farmers armed with staves and axes
For the unlettered, who will get the drift.
FELIX: 'Tis well, Etty, and done i' th' nick of time.
This soldier brings us news of revolution
In Theta, sparked by Tilda and my mother
And little Jessica; their troops fall back,
Leaving too few to hold our kingdom down.
'Tis time for us to rise and cast them off.
Soldiers, draw nigh; hear what I have to say.
(Enter more SOLDIERS.)
FELIX: Men of Uraemia, the time is come!
Theta is fallen into rank disorder;
Their bullies scuttle home like frighted rats.
A few remain; we'll swiftly deal with them:
We march upon Purdonium i' th' morn.
Now let the beacon blaze upon the hill

To spread the word throughout Uraemia;
Our folk will rise and fight, and who's like us?
We are slow to anger but, when th' cause is just,
No one can face us in our righteous ire.
Huzza! Uraemia shall be free tomorrow.
SOLDIERS: Huzza, huzza, our country shall be free!
ETTY (sings): The people's flag is shocking pink;
O how it makes the Thetans shrink!
We beat their army to its knees
With animals of bright cerise.
Then raise the rosy standard high,
To make the cowards cringe and cry;
Though they have Satan on their side,
Our flag will make them run and hide.
(Exeunt SOLDIERS, cheering.)
ETTY: 'Tis a brave song, but Jessica's abroad;
We have no magic to assist us now.
Yet I believe the tide has turned for us
And as it sweeps in, we'll sweep them away.
FELIX: Gonbad remains within the royal palace;
He dare not sail back to the Thetan shore
For fear of being torn to bloody shreds,
Yet he hath still some power to harm our land.
He is our target for tomorrow's raid;
If we cut off the head, the body dies.
ETTY: Indeed, brave Tilda and her sister witches
Have crushed the head o' th' spider with their power.
Gonbad is but a pimple on that head;
Without blood to sustain it, it will wither.
What though he's guarded by two hundred men?
We have the same, and anger on our side,
Worth hundreds more. Should Satan show his face,
He'll quail at one verse of Amazing Grace.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 5

The Royal Palace at Purdonium.

Enter FELIX, VISCUS, ETTY and SOLDIERS.

FELIX: So we have come into the tyrant's lair,
Or what we once called home.
VISCUS: And when 'twas home,
Footmen would bow and smile to welcome us,
But now we have to smash our way through guards.
ETTY: Well, we did smash 'em. Just look at that carpet;
We'll never get the bloodstains out of it.
FELIX: 'Tis nothing to the wreck Gonbad hath wrought:

I found the portraits of our ancestors
– Norman the Terrible, Montague the Fat,
Queen Halitosis and the Thane of Throop –
Out in the garden on the compost heap.
He hath been wiping something on the curtains;
I'd rather not think of what it might be.
But that is naught beside our pressing question:
Where is the coward Gonbad lurking?
(GONBAD springs out from behind an Arras, seizes FELIX and holds a Dagger to his Throat.)
GONBAD: Here!
I have thee, and if any of you move,
I'll slit his throat as one would kill a swine.
FELIX: Alas, I am surprised! Do as he bids.
VISCUS: Gonbad, we'll have thee!
FELIX: Brother, stay thy hand.
GONBAD: Nay, lift thy sword: see what befalls thy brother.
(Enter TILDA, invisible, wielding a Cutlass. She strikes GONBAD down, then becomes visible.)
FELIX: Tilda, my love! Just in the nick of time;
Things had become a little difficult,
But thou hast saved me, as thou always dost.
(They embrace.)
TILDA: That was the last stone of invisibility
And the best used. Felix, my love, well met!
GONBAD: May Satan's curse lie heavy on you twain:
May molten lead pour from the stinking sky
And rains of burning crocodiles impede you
Where'er ye stagger, racked with searing cramps,
Festooned with boils, bleeding from every pore.
And when at last, after an age of pain,
Ye kick the bucket, may my master Satan
Devise new tortures for the pair of you
Fiercer than any seen before in hell. (He dies.)
ETTY: Truly he had a mouth on him. I wonder
What welcome he'll get from his precious devil.
(Enter VULPECULA and JESSICA.)
FELIX: Mother! And O, my darling little daughter,
What deeds ye wrought while we hid in the woods!
VULPECULA: Nay, sons, ye fought like bears of Turkestan;
I am proud of you. That trick with th' avalanche
Was something that I never would have hatched.
It turned the tide in our favour; after that
A little witchcraft helped to win the day.
FELIX: Mother, thou art too modest. And thou, Jessica,
Thy beasts and navies decked in brilliant pink
Were worth an army of ten thousand men.
Not only have ye saved Uraemia
But have brought Theta crashing to the ground;
Her threat to th' world eternally destroyed.

JESSICA: ’Twas so exciting, I have had such sport,
But O, ’tis good to be back home again.
How long is it till supper? I am hungry.
TILDA: We’ll try to rustle up a goat or two;
People are trickling back from their hiding places.
ETTY: Say, what of Theta? Are the priests o’erthrown?
VULPECULA: Aye, they are slain or fled, the temples burnt,
The golden racks and flesh-hooks melted down.
Ethylene reigns as queen o’er a humbled nation;
The people breathe a sigh of sheer relief.
And, in thanksgiving for our aid to her,
She gave us a good share o’ th’ temples’ gold
To mend the damage wrought upon our country.
Kevin hath brought it home; he hath so much,
He knows not what to do with it. E’en a pirate
Can have a surfeit of the prize he seeks.
(Enter KEVIN, with PIRATES.)
KEVIN: I’m not so sure of that: a little gold
Is always welcome, and a load of it
More welcome still. But now there’s so much gold
Floating around, its worth hath dropped by half.
My advice is to sit on it awhile
Until the price recovers. When it doth,
I’ll buy an island and set up a nation.
What do ye think to th’ name Kevinia?
ETTY: Nay, never change the name of anything,
A ship or an island; it attracts ill fortune.
Though it be called The Buttocks, let it be.
KEVIN: Thou sayst sooth, though I draw the line at that;
How could I style myself the king o’ th’ Buttocks?
FELIX: Welcome, good Kevin, to our humble home,
Though it hath need of tidying.
KEVIN: Hail, king:
We tidied up some Thetans that we found
Skulking around the scullery and the stables.
Methinks it is game, set and match to us.
VULPECULA: Aye, so it seems. But peace is an illusion,
Merely the interval between two wars,
For fighting is the natural state of men.
Yet, while we can, let’s drink to our success.
The day brings victory: we’ll take the chance
To eat and drink and love and laugh and dance.
(Exeunt Omnes.)

SCENE 6

The Royal Palace at Purdonium.

Music. Enter COURTIERS, dancing. Enter FELIX, TILDA, VULPECULA, JESSICA, ETTY, VISCUS and KEVIN.

FELIX: Is it not passing fine to be a king
And dance the polka in Purdonium?
TILDA: Aye, when I think of us some months ago
Scurrying into holes like frighted rats.
VISCUS: I thought that war would be a glorious thing,
Riding proud horses, clad in shining armour,
Instead of which we sat around i' th' mud
Dining on turnips stolen from a field.
We had our moments, but I have to say
Peace is my choice for the foreseeable future.
FELIX: Mine, too, but it is bought at a high price.
KEVIN: Word comes from th' harbour at Opprobrium:
All Thetan troops have quit Opuntia;
They have abandoned all their conquered lands.
FELIX: And when the dust hath settled from this conflict
We shall exchange ambassadors with Theta.
'Tis well to keep an eye on them in case
The lurking devil worshippers should rise
And grip the country with their golden pincers.
Though their ambassador will spy on us
He shall see naught but strength and happiness
And what they might copy in their own nation.
VULPECULA: Felix, my dear, thou'rt such an optimist;
But he shall see folk doing what folk will do
Without oppression by satanic priests.
And mayhap Ethylene will rule the land
With righteous equity; or maybe not.
'Tis their affair, if they do us no harm.
ETTY: When I was making posters in the woods,
I had a thought. What if I printed news
Gathered from near and far by travellers?
Sailors bring tales when ships come into harbour,
Some of them true, others mere fantasies.
Do ye think folk would pay five sols to read it?
I thought I'd call the sheet a news paper.
TILDA: In truth they would. Besides, the more folk know,
The better for the country and the world.
We've seen how ignorance can twist men's minds.
(Enter MAISIE with little VUSILLUS.)
TILDA: Vusillus, darling boy, come to thy mother!
I missed thee so these many months! Maisie,
'Tis grand to see thee safe returned to us
From far Polenta.
MAISIE: Master Orosius
Sent us when word came that our land was saved.
I heard that Jessica wrought mighty wonders.
JESSICA: I made armies, navies and bears and goats,

And we lived in the woods, and pirate ships;
’Twas such a grand adventure.
MAISIE: Dearest lass,
Thou’lt tell me all of it when we have leisure.
(Enter SATAN, arrayed as a handsome Youth clad in Black. He bows to FELIX.)
FELIX: Welcome, good stranger, to our celebrations;
Pray tell thy name, and whence thou com’st to us.
(SATAN removes his cap, revealing Horns.)
SATAN: My name is Satan, and I come from hell.
But fear ye not, I am not come to damn you,
Nor even tempt you into mortal sin;
Ye can do that well enough by yourselves.
Nay, rather, I stand here to thank you all,
For putting down the Thetans, worst of nations.
Though they pretended to revere my works
They far outdid me in malignity
And, worst of all, used my name as a swearword
In every sentence of their daily talk.
All I could hear was Satan, Satan, Satan;
All day, all night: truly ’twas most annoying.
And when they died, their souls came down to me
Expecting banquets, virgins and the like,
And when they got none, they set up a whine
As if all hell were filled with little dogs
Denied the comfort of a mistress’s lap.
I had to build a new domain for them
At nine leagues’ distance from the central precinct,
All walled with lead, and with a leaden roof
To drown the wretched din of their complaints.
’Tis over now: the last to come was Gonbad,
Worse than them all, but he is there with them,
And if they torture him in bitter fury
It saves my demons work. But I say truly,
Hell is no worse than earth. When folk arrive,
Denied the favour of the man upstairs,
They may fit in at once, and join our revels,
And if not, we will tweak them till they do.
Sometimes Archangel Michael, my old foe
And now my friend, will come down for a visit
And we will swap tall tales of former times
When I defied th’ Omnipotent to arms.
I’ve even visited Michael in heaven
Though, to my taste, it is a trifle dull.
But sooth, enough of this. I’ve said my thanks,
And now ’tis time to dance. Vulpecula,
Will ye do me th’ honour of the first galliard?
VULPECULA: Gladly, sir Lucifer. Let me take your arm.
(They dance.)
TILDA: Now we have seen it all. Satan himself

Is sick of satanists and their dark ways.
Let's hope that we have crushed their cult for ever.
(To FELIX:) Mark how thy mother trips it on the toe
With Lucifer; how fleet he is of foot.
My darling, thou tread'st often on my toes.
I'll have the next dance with him, by my troth.
FELIX: Indeed thou shalt, my love, but after that
I'll trip with thee and do my level best
To keep my great hooves off thy dainty tootsies.
TILDA: I'd rather dance with thee than anyone,
My darling Felix, clumsy though thou be.
ETTY: And I shall have the third with Lucifer;
Think of the headline: in large type I'll write,
DANCE WITH THE DEVIL ON OUR VICTORY NIGHT!
(All dance.)

THE END