

no sword no stone

*the adventures of ARTHUR and RATGIRL in
search of a sword*

dramatis personae

MERLIN: Geoff

ARTHUR: Adie

RATGIRL (also FRIENDJANE): Claire

SIR KAY: Neil

ELAINE: Jen

MORGAN LE FAY / TREE: Gioia

GREY KNIGHT / TREE: Daniel

RED KNIGHT / MASTER OF CEREMONIES: John

CROWD / SCENERY / INTERACTION WITH AUDIENCE: Everyone as and when they're available

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1.1 Merlin

Spotlight on upright older man. It is MERLIN, in full Gandalf gear: beard, hat, staff, the complete wizard kit. But not for long . . .

MERLIN:

Yes. Yes. I am MERLIN. I am MERLIN the magus. The king's enchanter. I am the dreamspeaker, swordbringer, kingmaker. I know the old secrets, I am MERLIN. *Myrthyn wyllt*, in the bardtongue: MERLIN wildman. I stand on the mountains, and make the weather move.

Thunder, lightning

Stormbringer. MERLIN.

Hah! you think this is me? MERLIN, archwizard, shapeshifter? You think this old man, this very inconvenient beard, you think this is MERLIN? MERLIN the wild?

He strips off the beard. He is now like Harpo Marx: baggy trousers, big baggy coat, wild eyes, deeply unreliable, god's clown.

No way! That is just one of my faces! Here, look, shapeshifter, watch me work! I am MERLIN the wolf, look, aaooooowl, I run with the pack; I am MERLIN the wild hunter, trickster, I can make anything vanish. *(does some tricks, sound effects)* I am the tumbler, the song and dance man, look: MERLIN the clown. *(pulls out horn: parp parp; does a pratfall)* I am where you least expect; I am what you don't want me to be. I can be anything, I know the dreamspeech.

Ok, so what's this dreamspeech then, I hear you ask *(he's turning, briefly, into a stand-up*

comedian) Well, and well you may ask, this is the deep secret, the one from the end of the world. The cats know it, the dreamspeech (*just briefly, he is a cat: rrrrowllll*). They sleep a lot... Prrr prrr

And how do you do the dreamspeech? Well you might ask. First, you have to sleep. Easy enough, you might say, easy enough. For a thousand years? Not quite so easy. How do you do that? Look, I'll show you. (*blinks*). There, that wasn't so hard, was it? Try it: all together, when I say 'go', shut your eyes for one second and make a thousand years go past.

GO!

Pause. Grimace.

Well, it takes a little practice.

But, look, when you have the dreamspeech, look what you can do: I am MERLIN, wild MERLIN, shapeshifter, dancemaster, I know the cool moves. I am the stone that trips you up (*falls*), I am the one note that makes your heart sing (*sings*), I am MERLIN. I shift shape. I speak dreams. MERLIN. Me.

Second spotlight on ARTHUR, the dreamy boy whittling the wood.

Here is ARTHUR. He can't see me: I have made the dream speech for him. I will make this boy a king: I will make him the greatest king there will ever be: ARTHUR! Camelot! The round table! ARTHUR the giant-killer, the bringer of peace, the saviour of the Island of Britain: king ARTHUR. I will make this scruffy youth into the magic king. Look:

He moves round ARTHUR, doing the cool moves: ARTHUR, who had been slumped and despondent, gradually straightens, becomes majestic: a slow spotlight. MERLIN raises him up, holds him there, and--drops him. Snaps fingers; ARTHUR comes

back to his former self, looks puzzled, shakes head and wanders off, in a daze.

There, see, that's how the dream speech works. It's in him, it will work and work. Thank you for your attention. I think I will now turn into a waterfall, very refreshing. See you later, hot potato!

He turns his back on the audience, walks to centre backstage and merges with a back projection of a big waterfall. Sound effects of waterfall increase as he disappears through the back curtains.

1.2 Arriving at the tournament

Stage and/or back projection full of colour, streamers, noise, all the fun of the fair. Roll up, roll up. Tumblers, jugglers, dancers etc.

The light changes to naturalistic daylight. Enter KAY and ELAINE, bustling, and in a hurry. ARTHUR staggers behind - several paces behind them. He is struggling to carry five or six bags that have KAY's and ELAINE's belongings in them. He drops things and bangs into ELAINE as he twirls around trying to pick them up again. RATGIRL brings up the rear; trying to help ARTHUR unobtrusively, and hoping not to be noticed by ELAINE. ELAINE does see her, but chooses to ignore her, even though this takes more physical effort than acknowledging her. Much physical comedy.

ELAINE:

Oh DO come on! We're going to be late! We've got to find our lodgings. I mean we need to find our lodgings and leave our stuff - our belongings - and get KAY all spruced up in his new fighting togs - posh clothes - jousting regalia - and we've only got half an hour to do it! Ouch! Oof! *(Arthur is dropping things on her foot and banging into her as he tries to pick them up again)* For heaven's sake ARTHUR. It's KAY's first day as a proper knight - oh golly gosh *(she simpers to Kay and giggles)* - that doesn't sound quite right does it? Your first day as a knight! *(she giggles again - then to Arthur, crossly)* I mean it's his first real go at a tournament thingy - opportunity. You need to smarten your act up little boy. You're squire to a proper knight now!

RATGIRL begins to hiss like a cat - ARTHUR gestures to her to stay calm. As the scene progresses she makes various cat fighting gestures behind ELAINE's back, which dissolve into peaceable cat gestures when ELAINE or KAY turn towards her. ARTHUR doesn't know whether to laugh or cry.

KAY: My Lady. We have plenty of time. And please, it is most unseemly to speak thus to my brother. I must ask you to be more civil to him.

ELAINE: Well actually, we both know he's only your adopted brother. And he's only here at this incredibly smart do because he's your squire - he's supposed to be helping us you know. Not getting in the way.

ARTHUR: Sorry - sorry KAY - sorry ELAINE

ELAINE: SIR KAY actually. Lady ELAINE as a matter of fact.

KAY: It's alright ARTHUR - we're all pretty tired. It's been a long journey up from the country. I wonder when Father will arrive?

ELAINE: Well excuse me for saying so - but it's really not alright. It says here (*she refers to her courtly life manual - as she will do many times*) under 'tournaments: squires - role of, duties appertaining to etc ` that (*she reads avidly but with difficulty*) well - to cut a long story short, and if I've got the drift of it right - that, well, basically, he should be taking care of everything and we should be sort of swanning about a bit and feeling that there's nothing much to think about except how I look and how you are going to perform.

KAY: My Lady, I have been preparing for this event for seven long years. I have trained day in and day out in all weathers and in all states of health. My father Sir Ector will be here shortly and will accompany us to his usual lodging place. We will have time enough for you to arrange your finery and for me

to consider my fighting strategies. Now, let us go peaceably forward, and trust young ARTHUR here to manage the baggage in his own way.

KAY has charmed her by this calm speech - she takes his arm coyly, and they exit.

RATGIRL does a little mime of ELAINE's mannerisms - clearly both annoyed and amused by them. In a comradely fashion, she helps ARTHUR out with the bags, and other paraphernalia.

RATGIRL:

My job help friend! I get you food! I get you sweet hay for smooth sleep. Absolutely. That she Man ELAINE - do this do that speech - spit spit. I take your part. No mess.

ARTHUR:

Oh she's not that bad. She means well. Tries to do it all properly - by the book, I mean. KAY seems to like her. So that's alright - I suppose. *(He is clearly doubtful)*

Exeunt - following the others in a friendly but slightly chaotic fashion.

1.3 Introductions

MERLIN:

Now: before we go any father, we need some introductions. Who are these odd people, I hear you asking. Well, by the power of my most potent art, I will introduce them.

Cool moves: brings them all on; they stand around, frozen, and he makes each in turn come forward and speak; the others become scenery or support characters as appropriate.

RATGIRL:

RATGIRL, me! Absolutely! Cheese and biscuits, hey, hey! Absolutely!

I takes care of rats. My job! Absolutely! I takes care of them. When I was little RATGIRL, the Men: Khaaaaaah (*spits*) the men said, take care of the rats, too many rats, they steal food, bad bad, take care of it.

Frightened. Heart hurt. Too small. Hey! Little RATGIRL. But myFRIENDJANE say, copy cats. Cats? Yes, she say, copycats, copycats. So I talks to the cats, the wild mousers, the range rovers, the lonely soldiers, I talks. Respect. I gives respect.

Absolutely. Then, in time, they teach. Here I am, wimply little me, and they lick me to shape, they licks and licks. They teach: spit! Khaaah! Yowl, mrrrowl, they teach don't mess with RATGIRL noises, first of all. Khaaaaaah! Don't mess! Then teach flow, yield and flow: men hit, you flow, men fall over, absolutely, cheese and biscuits! Jam sandwich!

Yes, friend. MyFRIENDJANE. I have such friend! She takes my part. She backs my back. She aids me, persuades me, hey hey! MyFRIENDJANE. She

is beautiful like God. She is a fire in the night. She is as lovely as a jam sandwich! Absolutely!

MyFRIENDJANE. She say, talk to ARTHUR.

ARTHUR! Yuk spit! Man man, khaaaaaah, furry cheese, spilt milk, spit! No, she say, RATGIRL, do this do; do it. He is beautiful too. Spit. I do. I talk. Not too bad. A bit stupid. Jam sandwich not much jam. Not too bad. Has some nice.

Then, one time, man man (*spit*) catch me. I had food. Ham for rat friend, nice ham, RATGIRL sneak silent, sneak, copycat, but he catch. Man caught me good. Lock door slam! I was caught. Man say loud loud thief, thief, shout bawl. Punish. He will punish. Whip, the whip. Spit. But but but, ARTHUR said he took ham! He took ham! RATGIRL put back! Absolutely! Cheese and biscuits!

They whip him hard, hard.

So, I loved him.

ELAINE:

ELAINE - that's me. Lady ELAINE now actually. I had a special do on my last birthday - my father invited all the smart set. So it's official.

Do you like my new dress? It's got the most adorable little bows hasn't it? And this lace? - it's the best from Brussels. Well, as mama says, 'nothing but the best for the future wife of SIR KAY.' She got me these shoes to match as well - do you think they go well? I wasn't sure about the twirly bits, but it's what they're wearing in Bruges. All the rage apparently. My aunt is married to the Count of Bruges, you know. I stay with her in the summertime sometimes. When it's too hot here. She's taught me a lot. Shouldn't say 'lot' really - she's taught me a great deal. She went to the best finishing school in Europe - Antwerp actually - and she sends me all the latest information on absolutely anything that a girl needs to know. Most

of it's stuff I'll need to know in the future - when I have SIR KAY's household to see to. Shouldn't say 'stuff' really - items, maybe - no - useful hints and tips - yes that's it - most of it's useful hints and tips that I'll need in the future when I have SIR KAY's household affairs to administer to . . . to which I'll be obliged to administer.

Oh golly gosh I'll never get this speaking thing sorted. Shouldn't say 'get' - shouldn't say 'golly gosh' - I wonder if sorted is alright? I'll ask Tante Mathilde - she'll know. She has a Diploma, you know. From Antwerp. She's just sent me this book actually - it's got absolutely everything I need to know in it. Shouldn't say 'got.' It presents one with all the hints and tips a girl could want. Could desire. It's the latest thing.

She smiles an even brighter smile.

ARTHUR:

Who me? Oh no, you don't need to know about me. It's SIR KAY you want - not me. I'll get him for you if you like, shall I? Shall I? He's not far away. Pardon? Me? I'm ARTHUR. I tend to SIR KAY's horses. I look after his things.

Pardon? Yes I am his brother - sort of - well not his real brother you understand - I was adopted. No I don't remember it - too small you see - too small. Well I do remember something - a long ride - a black horse - a windy night - a smell - a sweet sweet smell. And rain. So much rain. The raised voices. The hustle and bustle of the house as we come in. So many people. So many rules. So many things said that I can't understand. I pretend I do - so as not to get into trouble, you see. Too small you see - too small.

The light changes. A high sustained note sounds. This will recur later in the play; it is the start of his song. He listens to its call - paying proper aural attention for the first time, like an animal caught by

an important sound that must be attended to. He stands up gracefully, effortlessly. He becomes noble in his bearing and tall and flexible. His gestures are expansive and slow and curved. He is a dancer in time.

There is a song - yes - there is a woman's voice singing a song. It is for me. It is my song. It is a melody I have heard many times. They are words sung over and over since my beginning. Not this beginning - not this time. From that time - the time when there was only a spark of light. The moment before it all began. Before I was me. I love that song. It knows my name. I will follow it wherever it calls. It calls me. It calls the me before I was me.

Wakes from his trance with a start, goes back to being incompetent Arthur.

KAY:

I am KAY. This is my time. This is when I find out who I really am. I am KAY, son of Ector, lord of Caer Goch. When morning comes, I will be SIR KAY, knight, and one day after that I will be lord of the great castle, who rides with the king into battle, who carries on the line.

It is not easy, learning to be a knight; it is not easy, learning to love the sword.

He picks it up, puts it in front of him, point down, leaning on it.

I am the lord's son. I am KAY; soon, I will be SIR KAY. I will need to fight, to maintain my honour, to keep the king's honour. I will need to hunt, because that is what a knight does. I will need to kill animals. I will need to kill people.

Listen. Listen. This is a secret. I don't want to. I don't want to do this. I don't -- like -- killing things. The sword knows this, it knows: that's why it won't talk to me. I have no joy in it, and it can tell.

I will do it, yes, I will do it; I will be SIR KAY, I will be a knight fit to serve the next king. I will fight and I will hunt and I will kill, because I am KAY, because I have to do it, I have to. And look, I can: *(he picks up the sword and flourishes it, very skilfully: ends with a two handed cut, and you can see how deadly the weapon is and how he knows how to use it. Haaaah, he shouts, fierce: his face is suddenly a frightening mask--then smiles, back to normal)--* you see, years of practice.

But one day I will walk out from under. When the time is right: one day.

1.4 tournament

This is the big tournament, an annual event, where all the knights come together to fight and show their mastery of weapons. Much show and display, trumpets, the works. Noise and bustle. Use back projection video for sense of it, and big stylised display using actors on stage. Possibly use a commentator voice over announcing events and describing fights and outcomes.

ARTHUR as KAY's squire, is very submissive, in the background. RATGIRL sits in the corner, in cat mode, washing herself like a cat, then curls up to go to sleep. She is bored.

RATGIRL:

Fighting, huh! Not real. Kitten fights! Babies!

KAY's turn: his big moment. The fighting is very stylised and very macho. KAY is doing fine, then, at the crucial moment, his sword breaks. He is aghast. The MASTER OF CEREMONIES, very pompous stops the fight.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES:

Stop! No more! By the authority invested in me by the nobles of this ancient order of knights of this realm, I hereby command the immediate and absolute cessation of this fight.

KAY, son of Ector, I allow you one night, and one night alone, to acquire for yourself another sword worthy of the family honour and fit to meet the sword of your noble opponent. Return here tomorrow ready to fight again, or face disqualification and disgrace.

Exit MASTER OF CEREMONIES - sweeping out with pomp and flourish. He is not comical. He has authority and power.

1.5 The promise

KAY and ARTHUR are left alone centre stage - the bustle and noise faded and muted now. RATGIRL still asleep curled up.

KAY: Oh no! What am I going to do? There are no swords anywhere in this town . . . not even stupid, pathetic ones! Let alone the sort of sword I'd need to fight in this kind of show!

ARTHUR: I will find you a sword, KAY.

KAY: Don't be ridiculous, ARTHUR. Where will you find a sword? It's hopeless. Father will be furious. I knew I shouldn't have come. That sword was too heavy for me. Too heavy. Too heavy. You know that.

ARTHUR: *(first hint of nobility coming through)* KAY, you are my brother. I am your squire and your supporter in all things. I will find you a sword. I will.

KAY: *(still hopeless)* I must rest. I'm exhausted, I need strength for tomorrow.

ARTHUR: Don't worry, I will find you a sword. You have my word.

KAY hardly hears him. He is in a world of his own. Exits. RATGIRL is still asleep curled up.

ARTHUR: *(Arthur now deflated)* Where am I going to find a sword? What did I say all that for? Not my place to do this - too small me - too small. I just look after things. I don't do this. Not my place. Just wanted to help. Now what will I do?

RATGIRL: *(wakes up - though, like a cat, her ears have been listening all the while - she springs into movement)* You find, you will find.

ARTHUR: Really?

RATGIRL: Absolutely, cheese and biscuits, no problem.

ARTHUR: Where?

RATGIRL: Here, wait, here, sword will come. Wait, wait, learn to wait; learn to rest. Rest but listen. Same.

RATGIRL goes back to sleep. ARTHUR kneels, awkwardly, then moves into something quite like KAY's knightly kneeling posture (see monologues). Waiting. Daylight is fading.

1.6 Meeting Merlin

ARTHUR: Listen? Listen? What am I listening for? I don't know what came over me, promising KAY like that, I must have been crazy.
Enter MERLIN as Harpo.

MERLIN: Crazy is good. Crazy is not too bad at all. Stick with crazy - it will get you a long way.

ARTHUR: Who are you?

MERLIN: You'll find out. That's one of the things you'll find out. You're going to find out a lot tonight.

ARTHUR: Will I find KAY a sword?

MERLIN: No sword.

ARTHUR: You mean I won't?

MERLIN: No I don't (*hitting the rhyme*) No sword. No sword. No sword! (*chanting*)

ARTHUR: What on earth are you talking about?

MERLIN: You'll find that out, too. Stop! Don't move!
(Produces large flag from Arthur's ear). There, that must feel better. Wait, wait! *(Merlin gets another, from Arthur's other ear)*. Now, can you hear better?

ARTHUR: I don't know.

MERLIN: Try listening. Listen, listen.

ARTHUR: Listen to what?

MERLIN: Listen to the sound of the world. Can you hear it, spinning in space, whirling past the galaxies, (*quiet sound effect, growing, lighting effects - stars*)

ARTHUR: I can hear something .

MERLIN: Good, good, you're coming on. Now listen really hard.

ARTHUR listens

MERLIN: (Comes up behind him with a big horn - parp noise, ARTHUR jumps)

Did you hear that?

ARTHUR: Of course I heard it. Are you crazy?

MERLIN: Yes, yes, crazy is good.

RATGIRL: *(waking up)* Too noisy. Silly games. Find sword.

MERLIN: Absolutely right, my dear. Find sword.

ARTHUR: But where?

MERLIN: Well, obviously not round here. Oh dear me no. You must go to the sea, that's the first place to look.

ARTHUR: The sea? That's crazy! How will I get there?

MERLIN: Crazy. Exactly. By listening to the sound of the world. Listen . . .

MERLIN gets more majestic, up comes the world sound, stars. MERLIN is conducting it all. Orchestrating. Then he turns it into sea sound, sea lighting effects. They are on a seashore.

MERLIN: Right, this is your first place to look. Now, this could get a little dangerous. Not to worry, but you never know. This is a magic place, *(Arthur looks nervous)*, strange things can happen -- what was that? *(Arthur jumps)*, oh, nothing, I expect - nothing to worry about - nothing to concern you. I will give you the magic horn, the mighty horn of MERLIN. Blow on this and help will come to you. *(Gives him the parp horn)*.

ARTHUR: The mighty horn of MERLIN? This is a joke, isn't it?

MERLIN: Yes, you're getting it, hold that thought. And remember: NO SWORD!!! *(Merlin vanishes, in a puff of smoke)*.

1.7 Morgan le Fay

Darkness. A blue purple light slowly shows, then a huge photograph on the back screen slowly materializes. It is a woman in flowing purple blue robes, wearing a white mask. It slowly diminishes in size to human size, and out of it steps the woman herself: light, graceful, moving seductively. This is MORGAN LE FAY.

She comes up to ARTHUR and sweeps him away in a flowing feminine dance. ARTHUR is enchanted, spellbound, hypnotized. RATGIRL is disgusted: spits, paaah. She can't believe he has fallen for this trick.

Morgan offers ARTHUR a mask of his own, as part of the dance. He reaches for it and she teases him, not letting him quite grasp it; a slow motion dance. After a little of this RATGIRL loses patience with this nonsense, lets out huge cat scritch and leaps in, grabs ARTHUR's mask, and throws it off-stage. Morgan lets out an eldritch scream and faces up to RATGIRL: like cats, facing off for a fight, spitting and snarling. RATGIRL leaps in with incredible speed and snatches Morgan's mask. Morgan is revealed as who she is, the arch-enchantress, powerful, fascinating. Her gauzy robes fall away revealing a red and gold and black outfit, imperious power. The cat fight with RATGIRL continues, but it subtly modulates into a dance, it lightens up: a game. ARTHUR is totally bewildered; little boy lost.

RATGIRL:

Hey, hey, good fight friend

They slap hands in a high five and laugh. ARTHUR is still bewildered.

ARTHUR: You know her?

RATGIRL: Love her! My dear life friend!

ARTHUR: *(turns away, throws up his hands)* Women!

RATGIRL: Ha! Men! *(To Morgan)* Needs sword.

MORGAN: Yes, they all need swords, in my experience.

RATGIRL: No, needs, needs.
Morgan takes this in, turns to ARTHUR and looks at him assessingly.

MORGAN: You want to eat? I have food.
ARTHUR looks to RATGIRL for guidance, what to do? She gestures him forward, impatiently.

MORGAN: *(powerful and terrifying)* YOU WANT FOOD?

ARTHUR: Er . . . well, perhaps, it might be nice, but I have to find a sword and . . .

MORGAN: Swords, swords. Swords can wait. Everyone needs to eat. Sit, enjoy. You're a growing boy.
Magic food appears. Lots of it. For the following sequence, a large glass bowl of coloured liquid appears on top of a table. It needs to change colour (lighting?) as the characters taste different tastes. RATGIRL off observing,

MORGAN: Here try this - it's truly delicious. *(She gestures to the glass bowl. He sticks a finger in it, and licks his finger and makes a terrible grimace.)*

ARTHUR: Yuk! It's disgusting. It tastes like vinegar and milk!

MORGAN: *(dips finger in to taste it)* What do you mean? It's delicious, it tastes like honey and chocolate, with just a hint of orange blossom. Try it again.

ARTHUR: *(tries it again)* Yugh! It smells like horse pee. I know, I look after the horses. *(spits it out)*
The bowl is nudged to and fro between Morgan and ARTHUR - changing colour with each change of taste.

MORGAN: Mmmmmm. Vanilla and blackcurrant cream.

ARTHUR: Yuk! Burnt toast.

MORGAN: Mmmmmm. Maple syrup pancakes, with the merest hint of blueberry

ARTHUR: Yuk! Football socks!

MORGAN: Mmmmmm. Apricot jam pudding with an aftertaste of custard.

ARTHUR: Yuk! Stewed egg on lemon juice biscuit!

MORGAN: *(turns to RATGIRL)* What on earth is the matter with this child?

RATGIRL: No dreams.

MORGAN: No dreams! I don't believe it!

ARTHUR: What do you mean, no dreams? Of course I have dreams.

RATGIRL: Tell dream. One dream tell: one.

ARTHUR: Er. . . Er. . .

RATGIRL: No dreams. No dreams, no dreamspeech, no cheese, no biscuits. It doesn't speak.

ARTHUR: What doesn't speak?

RATGIRL: It. It, idiot kitten: IT doesn't speak. *(to MORGAN)* Teach, You can teach. Dreamspeech teach. Absolutely!

ARTHUR: My head hurts

MORGAN: Good, this is good: this is a start. Now: relax your eyelids.

ARTHUR: What????

MORGAN: DO AS I SAY!! RELAX YOUR EYELIDS IN A VERY VERY RELAXED FASHION IMMEDIATELY OR ELSE!!
ARTHUR flickers his eyelids a little

MORGAN: Well, it's a start. Now, find the centre of your mind.

ARTHUR: That's stupid.

MORGAN: DID YOU CALL ME STUPID?

ARTHUR: *(trembles)* No, sorry, sorry, not at all.

MORGAN: Do what I say! Relax your eyelids and find the centre of your mind.

RATGIRL: Look, easy easy, like this.
She goes into sleepy cat mode, purrs, centres herself the way cats do, and fantastic lighting effects start up, slowly, and increasing. Suddenly she snaps out of it, and we snap back into normal lighting.

ARTHUR: You did that? With your mind? How did you DO that?

RATGIRL: Want/not want. Keep/let go. Pull/push. Relax eyelids. Centre mind. No problem.

ARTHUR: My head hurts more.

MORGAN: Good! NOW DO IT!!!
ARTHUR screws up his face, goes red in the face with effort, holds his breath - and is getting nowhere.

RATGIRL: No no idiot kitten. Use mind. Use mind. Heart mind. Big sky mind.
RATGIRL bangs her own chest to try and get him to understand. ARTHUR continues to hold his breath - looking puzzled and not getting it. So RATGIRL tickles him. He explodes with laughter, breath rushes out, and a strange transformation takes place. He comes into himself, becomes centred. He gets taller (normally he tends to shrink and cower). His eyes open, and shine with power. He looks around him, as if seeing everything for the first time. He is dreaming, you can see, but his dream personality is more real than anyone else's normal mind, especially his.

ARTHUR: I call the world to witness; here everything begins.

Images of Camelot appear: the round table, kingship, happiness, peace, justice. RATGIRL and Morgan look on, amazed. There is the high sustained note that indicates the shift into the noble voice of ARTHUR - a woman's voice singing 'ARTHUR ARTHUR'. It rises to real beauty and power, and then--- snap, gone.

ARTHUR comes to himself, looks around. He wonders why they are they staring at him?

RATGIRL: *(awestruck)* Cheese and biscuits! (to MORGAN)
Who that? Who spoke that dream?

MORGAN: He did.

ARTHUR: Who?
They look at him.

ARTHUR: Please can I have a sword now?

MORGAN: The only way to have a sword is to have no sword at all.

Morgan starts to move backstage, preparing to exit. ARTHUR clearly wants her to stay.

ARTHUR: Don't go. Please don't go. I don't know what to do.

MORGAN: *(laughing - indicating Ratgirl)* She knows.
Morgan dissolves into a back projection of herself. A magical and visually gorgeous departure.

ARTHUR: *(to Ratgirl)* Now what do I do?

RATGIRL: *(cheerful, loving)* Hey hey. Flow some. Yield some.
Long night stay groovy. More sword search soon.
Absolutely. We sleep some beautiful sleep now.
Wake we heart high.

They curl up like kittens and doze. Lighting down on them and up on ELAINE and KAY

1.8 Quest

Enter KAY and ELAINE

- ELAINE: KAY, I am so sorry. You couldn't help it. It's not your fault.
- KAY: The sword broke because it doesn't love me; it broke because it didn't speak to me.
- ELAINE: KAY, I love you.
- KAY: My lady, you honour me with your love, beyond measure and boundaries, but I must be worthy of you or I am not a man. I am not a true knight. I must have another sword, or am lost, to you, to my father, to everyone.
- ELAINE: Where will you get - find - obtain - another sword?
- KAY: ARTHUR has gone to find one.
- ELAINE: ARTHUR? That yokel? That stupid youth?
- KAY: He is a good person. He tries hard.
- ELAINE: He is an idiot. And I suppose he took that oddball with him, that girl he spends all his time with?
- KAY: The RATGIRL.
- ELAINE: And you're relying on those two to find your sword for you? You must be mad.
- KAY: You are right: it is my quest, my manhood, my knightly duty. My duty to you, my lady ELAINE.
- ELAINE: Well, don't just stand there, do something. I'll come with you.
- KAY: (*aghast*) You? But you are my Lady, you can't come on a quest!

ELAINE: Yes, I know that's what the books say, but this is an emergency. Now, listen to me: this is what you must do. You must find a wicked knight, and fight him, and beat him, and take his sword. That's what it says here. (*patting the manual that's always with her*) You'll find him standing waiting at a ford or a gate or somewhere like that. They're quite common - available - wicked knights, according to the books. You challenge him, fight him, and there you are. Easy.

KAY: What do I fight him with?

ELAINE: Good point. Can't you sneak up behind him and hit him with a stick?

KAY: No! My honour is at stake here! No sneaking. That's right out.

ELAINE: Well, all right, if you insist. Let's first find the knight, then we can work out how you're going to fight him.

Exeunt.

1.9 Grey Knight

Lighting down, then up on the GREY KNIGHT, standing imposingly, with sword.

Enter KAY and ELAINE.

Maybe some stage business to indicate their journey to this new place - a little frightening - but more comic than anything else.

ELAINE: Aha! There you are! Told you so! He looks wicked.

KAY: How can you tell?

ELAINE: He's a GREY KNIGHT. All GREY KNIGHTs are wicked, don't you know that? Go on, challenge him!

KAY: Sir Knight!

GREY KNIGHT: Yes, young man?

KAY: I challenge thee to fight!

GREY KNIGHT: Oh, jolly good. I've been standing here for nearly two weeks waiting for someone to come along.

KAY: *(to Elaine)* He doesn't sound very wicked.

ELAINE: Listen, he's got a sword, hasn't he? Get on with it.

GREY KNIGHT: What, Sir Knight, is thy cause of combat?

KAY: I challenge thee because thou art a foul caitiff knight.

GREY KNIGHT: No I'm not. I'm a very nice person.

KAY: Oh. Well, er, I will challenge thee in the name of my fair lady ELAINE, whose honour thou hast besmirched.

GREY KNIGHT: I never did! I wouldn't do such a thing! She seems like a very nice girl.

KAY: Yes, she is, actually.

ELAINE: Get on with it!

KAY: Thou wearest grey, Sir Knight, and art therefore a foul miscreant.

GREY KNIGHT: No, no, that's a common error. I like grey. It's my favourite colour. Anyway, I can't fight you, you haven't got a sword.

KAY: I know, that is a problem. *(Elaine is sneaking up behind the knight with a stick)* ELAINE! Put that stick down!

GREY KNIGHT: Well, lovely to chat with you, but time's getting on, and I must go and have my dinner. I do hope you find someone wicked soon. But you'll need a sword
...
The Grey Knight exits

ELAINE: I could have knocked him out - overwhelmed him - easy as anything!

KAY: Mine honour, and thine own, is at stake here! Be serious! Come on, let's go and find someone wicked.

ELAINE: *(sarcastic)* Yes, maybe you can hypnotise him.

KAY: *(serious)* No, that wouldn't be fair. Exeunt.

1.10 Merlin again

Lighting up on ARTHUR and RATGIRL, uncurling from their doze

ARTHUR: What do we do now?

RATGIRL: Call MERLIN

ARTHUR: MERLIN, MERLIN

RATGIRL: No fool use horn

ARTHUR: Oh sorry.

He sounds the harpoesque horn: parp parp.

Immediately there is a huge clap of thunder, billow of smoke, left stage, all eyes on left stage, enter MERLIN stage right.

MERLIN: Hallo dears, how are you doing? How did you like my friend Morgana?

RATGIRL: She was nice strange, she was a jam cheese sandwich

MERLIN: She is, isn't she? Do you have no sword yet?

ARTHUR: No, no, that didn't work . . .

MERLIN: Wait, don't move, don't move - close your eyes
(He pulls coloured streamers out of ARTHUR's eyes)

MERLIN: There, that's better, isn't it? I bet you can see a lot better now.

ARTHUR: No, it all looks the same.

MERLIN: All looks the same! ALL LOOKS THE SAME! Look for the different!

ARTHUR: How do you do that?

MERLIN: Well, obviously, you look for the hole in the world.

ARTHUR: The hole in the world?

MERLIN: Yes, yes. (*impatiently*) The place where the world is open: it's where the light gets in. First you listen for the sound of the earth, you know how to do that, then you look for the hole in the world, then you go through it, and come to the enchanted forest.

ARTHUR: The enchanted forest?

MERLIN: For goodness sake, dear boy, will you please stop saying what I say and do what I say instead? Please?

ARTHUR: Yes. Sorry. Yes.

MERLIN: Good. Good. (*he disappears*)
ARTHUR concentrates. The sound of the earth starts up - the hum on which the universe is strung. Stars, and then the crack in the world appears, and ARTHUR and RATGIRL go through it.

1.11 Enchanted forest

They are in the enchanted forest. It is quite scary, because the trees have eyes and look at you, and whisper to each other.

- TREES: psssss, hissssssss, who is thissss? Shhhhh
shwiiisssh, make a wisshhhhhhhh,
- RATGIRL: Good good, cheese and biscuits, make wish quick.
They give you a wish!
- ARTHUR: *(gormless)* A wish?
- RATGIRL: *(bats him)* Make wish make wish!
- ARTHUR: Please I wish for a sword for KAY
- TREES: hisssss, wissssss, make a wisshhh
- RATGIRL: No no silly kitten, talk tree talk: hissssssss,
hissssssss, pleaaaasssssss, pleaaaasssssss, give
usssssssssss a ssssssssword. *(She is fluent in tree)*
- TREES: ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh, ssssssssword,
yessssssssssss, Ssssssssword, no
sssssssssword, Ssssssssword, no
sssssssssword.
- They do that for a bit, and there is a rising sense of expectation and danger: ARTHUR and RATGIRL get back to back, and look wary, looking round. Suddenly bang bang. Bang bang. Enter RED KNIGHT with huge sword: he is banging it on his shield. Stands there, huge and threatening. When he speaks, his voice echoes terrifyingly in his helmet.*
- ARTHUR cowers.*
- RATGIRL: You want sword: he has sword. Take.

ARTHUR: From him! Are you joking? He's ten feet tall!

RATGIRL: Ha! Big kitten. Floppy jelly. Pushover!

ARTHUR: Are you mad? He can slice you in half with that thing!

RATGIRL: Ha! Ha ha! Pease pudding! Soggy banana!

RED KNIGHT: Wait a minute (*huge voice*) Are you calling me names, you . . . you . . . GIRL?

RATGIRL: (*walks deliberately and insultingly over to him, and speaks, offensively*) Soggy banana!

RED KNIGHT: Aaahhhh (*a bellow of rage*)
Quite laboriously the knight lifts his sword to full height. As he does, RATGIRL crouches, springs up at him, hits him with a shoulder block and knocks him flat on his back.

RATGIRL: Puh. Big soft banana.

RED KNIGHT: That was strictly against the rules!

RATGIRL: Ha! Rules! Funny! (*She goes to side of stage, sits, starts to wash herself, like a cat*)
RED KNIGHT gets laboriously to his feet, takes his helmet off. Underneath, he is a kind of bank clerk: he has spectacles. He is wearing a suit. RATGIRL hackles up, looks at him, spits.

RED KNIGHT: Rules, I'll have you know, are what make this country great. (*He starts off very dull but gets increasingly manic*) Rules are what keeps everything in its place. Rules are what keeps you in your place. Rules are my food and drink. Rules are my bread and butter. I know more rules than you've had hot dinners. Rules rule OK. Rules R US. You're never alone with a rule. A rule is a rule is a rule.
 Rules are what keep us from going off the rails, from going off the deep end, from whistling in the dark. Show me a man who knows the rules and I

will show you a . . . *(he realises he has gone off the rails and coughs and pulls himself together)*

He now has a very boring bureaucrat voice.

Rules are important. Nothing is more important than the rules. Everyone knows that. That is well known.

ARTHUR: Who are you?

RED KNIGHT: I keep order. I make sure there is no chaos. I hold chaos at bay. That is my job. I won't allow nonsense. I am the government.

ARTHUR: Whose government? We have no king. Uther Pendragon is dead.

RED KNIGHT: I am the rules; kings come and go, but the rules remain. Now, girl, come here. *(He says this in a deadly evil flat voice, no emotion).*

RATGIRL: *(spits and hisses)* No, no, leave alone monster.

RED KNIGHT: *(shouts, terrifyingly)* Don't you dare talk to me like that! Come here at once.

He holds up the sword like a cross, hilt upwards. Astonishingly, she obeys him - against her will, as if he is pulling her towards him.

RED KNIGHT: This sword is my badge of office. You will treat it with complete respect.
It is as if the sword is pulling her, and she shrivels, and loses vitality as she gets close to it.

ARTHUR: *(weakly)* What are you doing to her? Stop it

RED KNIGHT: *(shouts)* Be quiet, young man, or it will be the worse for you.

ARTHUR cowers.

The RED KNIGHT holds the sword over RATGIRL like a cross. Maybe its shadow falls across her. She is trembling.

RED KNIGHT: What is your name, girl?

RATGIRL: RATGIRL, me.

RED KNIGHT: Where do you live?

RATGIRL: Dreams. Live in dreams.

RED KNIGHT: This is nonsense. Tell me the truth at once. Where do you live?

RATGIRL: *(starting to cry)* RATGIRL she lives in dreams, in greenwood, with ratfriends, where the songlines run.

RED KNIGHT: I think you may be illegal. You don't speak correctly.. *(She is crying openly now. His words wound her. She twitches at each one as if she is being beaten)* You must immediately get seen to. You need to go to school.

RATGIRL: *(screams)* School, no, dying place, not dying place, help me anyone, hurts hurts.

ARTHUR: *(His voice suddenly has power)* STOP!
Silence. They look at him.

ARTHUR: This is not law. This is evil. You are a monster. You are a sham.

RED KNIGHT: How dare you, youth!

ARTHUR: BE SILENT WHEN I SPEAK! You will let this woman be. She is under my protection.
ARTHUR's high sustained note and his song have arisen here. He has complete authority and majesty; he is not intimidated by the sword, which the RED KNIGHT tries to overawe him with. He walks up to the RED KNIGHT, who raises the sword crosswise; it has no effect. RATGIRL is in a crumpled heap in the corner. She looks up at ARTHUR, amazed.

RED KNIGHT: Who - who are you?

ARTHUR: I am who I will be. I am the island of Britain. I am the law of love. I make and break all rules. I am the peace bringer, the heart healer. I am your

master and your servant, I am the way things are.
I am ARTHUR. You will from now and always do
what I say, speak only the truth, and be utterly
ruled by kindness. That, only that, will you do. Do
you hear me? SPEAK!

*They look at him, astonished. the RED KNIGHT has
shrunk, the sword droops, he drops it.*

RED KNIGHT:

Yes, yes I hear you.

ARTHUR:

Now, go, and learn to be wise.

*The RED KNIGHT slinks away, ashamed. He has left
the sword behind.*

1.12 Tender little coda

*RATGIRL is looking at ARTHUR with wonder.
Crouching, she comes up to him, takes his hand,
kisses it, in awe of the power he has manifested.
ARTHUR shrinks back into his former self.*

ARTHUR: What are you doing? Please, please, don't do that,
I need you. *(lifts her to standing)* Please be my
RATGIRL friend again. *(She snuffles a bit)* Here,
look, I have something for you, I've been saving it:
look: *(brings something out of his pocket)* a jam
sandwich!

RATGIRL: Hey! Hey hey! *(she takes a bite)* Hey! Sweet
kindness, kingboy friend: absolutely! *(she takes
another bite)* Sweet strawberry! Share! Take!
*He has a bite, and they do a happy jam sandwich
dance.*
*ARTHUR breaks off: he has seen the RED KNIGHT's
sword.*

ARTHUR: Look, look, he's left his sword: a sword for KAY!
(He picks it up)

RATGIRL: Nooooooooooooooooooooo!
*She comes flying across the stage, lets out a
piercing kyai, chops at the flat of the sword with
her hand, and breaks it.*

RATGIRL: Bad evil, bad dream sword. Spit.

ARTHUR: How did you DO that?

2

2.1 Friendjane

The stage is dark and bare. Midnight blue, like the night sky, so that, when the silvery white spotlight lights up the appearance of FRIENDJANE she seems to be bathed in bright moonlight. She appears, mysteriously and deeply mysterious out of the darkness. She is hovering lightly in space and time. Spotlight on a graceful, youngish (but not girlish) woman.. She moves with exceptional grace and fluidity - like water in its different manifestations. It is the actress who plays RATGIRL. It is RATGIRL, transformed: her real self. It is not yet obvious to the audience that this is RATGIRL's real self.

FRIENDJANE:

I am FRIENDJANE.

You ask me who I am? I may not say.

You ask where you may find me. I tell you this:

You will find me wherever and whenever you call with the heart of one who truly loves the world and sees perfection everywhere. I will answer any call from a trusting heart. I will come with the speed and fury of the west wind at new day's dawning to anyone who calls for help.

I will say the names of the loved ones. I will promise hope to those who are willing to hear.

Do not ask me to be still. I am, already, stillness itself. Beyond beyond and whirling with unceasing delight and increase through the myriad galaxies of this precious moment.

You will find me in the hedgehog you save from the roadway. You will find me in the coin given freely to

the stranger in need. You will find me in the soft
word spoken to the crying child. You will find me
where the cat sits by the fireside washing cat face
with gentle and contented intensity. You will find
me in the bright clear eyes of the elders. And
always always in the birdsong before the day
begins and at its twilight fading.

I am FRIENDJANE. HerFRIENDJANE. She knows.

Darkness - FRIENDJANE disappears.

2.2 Wizard

Naturalistic daylight - sharp contrast with preceding scene. Enter KAY and ELAINE.

- ELAINE: Well that's no good then, is it? You can only get a sword from a knight if you fight him, and you can only fight him if you've got a sword.
- That was a stupid idea. Whose idea was that?
- KAY: It was yours, my Lady.
- ELAINE: Oh. Well, it wasn't a great idea. Not a sophisticated idea. We must move on to plan B.
- KAY: Plan B?
- ELAINE: Yes. It says here (*consults manual - and thumps Kay on chest with it*) that any competent wizard can create a magical sword out of thin air. So, all we need is a competent wizard.
- KAY: And how do we find a competent wizard?
- ELAINE: Well, I don't know. Say some magic words, I suppose.
- KAY: Do you know any magic words?
- ELAINE: Look, you have a very negative attitude, actually. If you want to serve me and have me as your liege lady in sickness and in health all the days of your life and so on - so forth, you've got to brighten your ideas up.
- KAY: (*humbly*) Yes my lady.
- ELAINE: Right. Thank you. Now, magic words. How about . . . Hey presto!

There is an immediate deafening bang stage right, big puff of smoke. They startle, and stare. MERLIN as Harpo walks in behind them.

- MERLIN: Hallo. *(they startle again, and leap round to face him)*
- KAY: Who are you?
- MERLIN: I am a competent wizard.
- ELAINE: Pardon me for saying so, but you don't look it, actually.
- MERLIN: *(big echoey voice, sound effects)* I am MERLIN the mighty, Archmage of the island of Britain. I am MORE than competent.
- ELAINE: Well, ok, if you say so. All right then: can you get us - magic us - a sword, please?
- MERLIN: Nothing could be easier. *(He makes the cool moves. Sound effects. A wooden sword appears, which he offers, with a flourish)*
- ELAINE: That's a wooden sword!
- MERLIN: So?
- ELAINE: We need a proper knightly sword. A sword sword.
- MERLIN: You should have said. *(He makes cool moves, sound effects, nothing happens)* Hmm. *(He tries again. Nothing happens)*
- Oh well. *(He pulls a sword out from under his coat)*
Will this do?
- KAY: That is a beautiful sword. It's perfect.
- MERLIN: Glad you like it.
- ELAINE: Golly gosh! I mean - excellent - jolly well done there good fellow! Well, go on, give it to him then.
- MERLIN: *(getting bigger)* Madam, this sword is the sword Excalibur. *(Sound effects)* It can only be wielded by the perfect knight, by the best of the best, by someone who has come through.

ELAINE: So?

MERLIN: So? So? So this, woman! (*Big sound effects, as he plunges sword into stone*) There, it's all yours. All you have to do is pull it out again. (*Merlin vanishes*)

ELAINE: Go on then, pull it out, we haven't got all night.
KAY pulls hard, can't budge it.

ELAINE: Pull harder, for goodness' sake!

KAY: (*he tries. Collapses, exhausted*) It's stuck in the solid rock. By magic.

There's nothing I can do.

ELAINE: (*who has been consulting the manual*) It says here, that magicians can be extremely unreliable. Well, that was a terrible idea, to rely on one then, wasn't it? Whose idea was that?

KAY: (*still panting*) Yours, my lady.

ELAINE: Oh. Well, it was a very bad idea. And what on earth are we going to do now?

KAY: What does that book of yours say?

ELAINE: Oh. Right. (*starts to consult manual*) what should I - should one - be looking up?

KAY: How about 'unreliable magicians; dealing with after effects of'?

ELAINE: Oh. Right. (*skims through pages*) Ah, well that's alright then.

KAY: Why, what does it say?

ELAINE: Well, it's just a bit confusing, and I'm not entirely sure I've got it - understood it - spot on - I mean . . . impeccably (*gestures to show she's really pleased with that word!*) but I think we have to find a reliable magician - or . . .

KAY: Or what?

ELAINE: Or - oh dear - I'd rather not say

KAY: Oh dear. Well we'd better get moving hadn't we?

ELAINE: Oh that's a relief.

KAY: What is?

ELAINE: One CAN say 'dbetter!' Jolly good. Which way shall we go now?

A bit of comic stage business whilst they try to choose the best direction. Possibly some voiced hints from magic in the air. Exeunt.

2.3 ARTHUR's dream

Naturalistic soft light. Enter ARTHUR and RATGIRL.

- ARTHUR: Well, we've got two broken swords now, and KAY still hasn't got anything to fight with.
- RATGIRL: Look: sword. (*Points at stone with sword sticking out of it*)
- ARTHUR: So it is! (*Tries to pull out sword.*) But it's stuck.
- RATGIRL: Not stuck.
- ARTHUR: It is too - no, wait a minute, there's something written on the stone. *Peers at it, wipes it with his sleeve.* It says: He who can pull this sword from the stone will be King of the Island of Britain.
- RATGIRL: You.
- ARTHUR: I beg your pardon?
- RATGIRL: You, you: you can do.
- ARTHUR: Don't be ridiculous, I can't be king of Britain.
- RATGIRL: (*growls, looks menacing*) You can do! Sword! From! Stone!
- ARTHUR: Ok, ok, I'll try it. (*Tries, heaves, strains, no good*) See, I can't do it. Only a king can do it, that's what it says on the stone.
- RATGIRL: Yes. Be king.
- ARTHUR: How can I DO that?
- RATGIRL: *growls.*
- ARTHUR: Ok, Ok, I'll do my best!
- He advances to centre stage, thinks. Pulls himself up to full height - it's like a parody of the true noble ARTHUR. Adopts a posh, rather squeaky*

voice. Exaggerated gestures. RATGIRL sits, looks at him, a developing expression of infinite contempt on her face - like cats have when they think you're being particularly stupid and behaving in a particularly human way..

ARTHUR: My Lords! My Ladies! I am very proud to be your King! I promise that I will reign wisely! I will choose wise counsellors, noble knights, *(he's starting to get into it, he's beginning to like what he is becoming)* I will raise a vast army, and conquer an empire! I will bring enormous riches into the Island of Britain, and everyone will be very happy! Kings will pay me homage! I will rule with kingly authority, I will give up all my unworthy friends. *(Ratgirl is starting to look very dangerous indeed: Arthur is unaware of this.)* I will talk to no-one lower than a Baron or Justice of the Peace! I will surround myself with Noble Lords and Beautiful Ladies, and there will be feasting and refined merriment -

RATGIRL lets out an earsplitting screech, stopping him dead: and shoulder-blocks him (as with the RED KNIGHT) and knocks him sprawling.

ARTHUR: Ow, ow!

RATGIRL: Not that way.

ARTHUR: *(from sprawling position, miserably)* How? Why?

RATGIRL: Why what why?

ARTHUR: Why am I like this? What is happening to me? I don't understand, and my head hurts. I feel like two people who don't know each other, I feel like I'm falling into two halves. Dreamspeech, no sword, find a sword, be a King, don't be a King, KAY, ECTOR, MERLIN, it's all whirling about in my head and I DON'T UNDERSTAND!

RATGIRL: Sleep.

ARTHUR: What?

RATGIRL: Go to school.

ARTHUR: School? I thought you didn't like school?

RATGIRL: No, silly, not that school, not dying school! Go to cat school. Sleep. Dream. Learn. Catschool. Cats cool! Absolutely!

They curl up like cats and sleep.

Enter MERLIN as Harpo, strolling on stage, whistling a merry tune; he has a yellow spotlight on him. It is clear that we are in ARTHUR's dream. RATGIRL sleeps on, inasmuch as she ever sleeps (like a cat): ARTHUR dreams his dream.

ARTHUR: *(normal boyish voice)* MERLIN, MERLIN, I'm so glad you're here.

MERLIN: Where?

ARTHUR: I don't know, I don't know what's happening, I can't bear it.

MERLIN: You are dreaming: I am in your dream.

ARTHUR: Somehow, that doesn't help.

MERLIN: Don't move!

ARTHUR: Oh, not again!

MERLIN pulls coloured ribbons out of ARTHUR's heart.

MERLIN: There: now your heart is clear. how do you feel?

ARTHUR: I feel - different.

MERLIN: Different is good. More is better.

ARTHUR: More?

MERLIN: More, more! You must feel the warmth of the world!

ARTHUR: How do I do that?

MERLIN: How many times do I have to tell you: listen to the sound of the earth. Look for the hole in the world

(sound effects) Feel the warmth of the world, all those people, animals, insects, birds, feel, feel them all: you are no different from them. You are them: all of them. Feel it!

Big lighting effects, light show suggesting myriads of beings.

ARTHUR: What is happening to me?

MERLIN: You are dreaming, dear boy.

ARTHUR: How can you DO that?

MERLIN: I wish you wouldn't keep saying that. Look: I will show you. This time you will learn it, because, ARTHUR, this is your time: time to wake up.

Darkness. The sound of rain. Fighting, confusion, fire, the clash of swords, chaos. Then: the sound of horses' hooves. Voices: escape, the king is dead, take the boy, the boy must go to safety. They must not find the boy, we must hide the boy!

Dreamlike fantasy shapes of horses and knights projected large, distorted, swirl around the stage. RATGIRL sleeps on; ARTHUR is awake, looking at all this. He gets to his feet, surrounded by shadows and flashes and voices, the rain noise, the horses hooves.

Recorded extracts from ARTHUR's monologue bubble up, and fragments of these phrases overlap and overlay each other as an accompanying mesmerising soundscape:

ARTHUR's voice: Yes - the long ride on the black horse - the dank sweet smell of bodies in the night rain - autumn surely - the heavy perfume of trampled gorse and crushed berries under foot - the sharp tang of drenched ferns starting to decay. They brush against us as we ride ride ride. I am cold. I am held safe in his arms. I am happy in the embrace of arms that know me. The arms are strong. They know me.

There is a song - yes - there is a woman's voice singing a song. It is for me. It is my song. It is a melody I have heard many times. They are words sung over and over since my beginning. Not this beginning - not this time. From that time - the time when there was only a spark of light. The moment before it all began. Before I was me. I love that song. It knows my name. I will follow it wherever it calls. It calls me. It calls the me before I was me.

The song singer comes closer now. She whispers secrets to me. I understand perfectly. And I understand also that I must forget. I am content. The arms are holding me. The song is singing me. I sleep.

MERLIN claps his hands, and it all disappears.

MERLIN: No horses. No rain. It's a dream. It's a dream of how you came to be who you are. ARTHUR, you are the son of Uther Pendragon, and you are the next king of Britain.

ARTHUR: Me?

MERLIN: Yes, you. When he died, his enemies searched for you; they wanted to kill you. I brought you on horseback to Ector, to hide you.

ARTHUR: You did? It was you? Those arms, holding me: that was you?

MERLIN: That was me. And I made you fall asleep, I said the dreamspeech, I cast a spell, I made you forget who you are. Your friend here, too, the RATGIRL: I brought her, and made her forget.

ARTHUR: RATGIRL?

MERLIN: Yes. She too is of noble birth. Her parents were killed in the fighting after the King died. I brought her to be your friend and guide, and, one day, soon now . . .

ARTHUR: What?

MERLIN: You will find out. Your time is coming. You have one final test. To pass the test, remember this. Stands up: with a flourish, produces a sword.

ARTHUR: A sword for KAY!

MERLIN: KAY needs no sword. *(The sword vanishes)*

ARTHUR: Where did it go?

MERLIN: It was never there. This is a dream.

ARTHUR: Are you dreaming?

MERLIN: No, I am awake. I am awake within the dream. If you are awake within the dream, you can do anything you want.

When you wake up from a dream, you just wake into another dream; the trick is, to wake within the dream. That is the key.

Listen to me carefully. We have only a few hours left. Tomorrow, when you get your last test, you must choose. You may choose to forget or you may choose to remember. If you choose to remember that you are dreaming, you can do anything you want. I will say to you, no sword, no stone; and then you will choose.

Remember, ARTHUR, remember: no sword, no stone.

MERLIN disappears - ARTHUR calls after him - frightened and lonely

ARTHUR: And if I forget?

His question hangs in the air for several moments. Then darkness falls.

2.4 The Last Test

The stage goes pitch black, then fills with spectacular lights and sound effects. MERLIN appears, making the cool moves, calling it all to life. It's a pull all the stops out spectacle. He brings in all the characters, like a dance.

there is a funfair showbiz feel to it. When it stops, MERLIN is standing behind the stone, and the others are standing looking at him and it.

MERLIN: ARTHUR of Britain, this is your time.

ARTHUR: Me?

MERLIN: Yes, you. Come here.

ARTHUR reluctantly approaches.

MERLIN: Listen, listen, to the sound of the world. (*Sound effects*) Look, look, for the hole in the world, where the light comes in. (*Lighting effects*) Feel the warmth of the world (*more effects*). Remember.

ARTHUR, take the sword from the stone.

ARTHUR: But I can't. It's stuck in the solid rock.

MERLIN: ARTHUR, listen to me. There is no sword.

ARTHUR: No sword?

MERLIN: No sword. And there is no stone.

ARTHUR: No?

He walks purposefully, but still with a trace of boy ARTHUR hesitancy, towards the stone. It's obvious that he won't be able to pull the sword out, but he tries anyway; his hand moves toward the sword - it is obviously the moment before the moment of

failure. RATGIRL knows he can't do it the way he is - gestures helplessly - concerned for her friend.

MERLIN:

Arthur, here is your fear.

MERLIN creates the last test: he claps his hands and darkness suddenly falls, noisy swirling winds arise, images of dragons and other dangerous creatures arise as back projection. Everyone on stage is overwhelmed by fear.

MERLIN:

Arthur, there are no dragons. No dragons, no sword, no stone.

ARTHUR hesitates, a sense of tension - that all might be lost - then he hears the high sustained note and wakes up enough to know that this is just a dream. He changes his posture to a noble one and his movements become fluid. He looks at MERLIN with quiet confidence and clarity. The noise of the wind disappears abruptly.

MERLIN:

Say it: no sword, no stone.

ARTHUR:

No sword, no stone. No sword, no stone. *(He grows)*

MERLIN:

ARTHUR, take hold of your sword. This is the moment. Now.

ARTHUR grasps the sword. There is a flash, and the sword begins to sing. High pitched, a woman's voice, piercing: just the one word, ARTHUR, ARTHUR. Light pours out of the sword, illuminating ARTHUR. He grows into kingship. As he grows, the frightening images fade and disappear, leaving only stillness and brightness.

MERLIN:

Who are you?

ARTHUR:

I am the servant and the master, the knight at the crossroads and the watchman by the door. I am the wrongdoer, the rightdoer. I am the song heard at midnight, the light in your heart. I am ARTHUR of Britain. I am king.

He pulls the sword out of the stone. Huge light illuminates him, flashes out. He holds the sword up

ARTHUR:

I am ARTHUR.

Music. The others kneel, one by one. Last of all, MERLIN kneels.

ELAINE:

(single minded) Excuse me.

ARTHUR:

Yes, Lady ELAINE?

ELAINE:

Could we borrow your sword, please? KAY hasn't got - doesn't possess - one.

ARTHUR:

KAY, approach.

KAY approaches, kneels.

ARTHUR:

Arise, SIR KAY, you will fight no more. You will be high counsellor of Britain, my chief magistrate, my friend. You need no sword

We hear a snuffling noise. It is RATGIRL, crying, as she kneels.

RATGIRL:

Lost, my friend lost. Absolutely.

ARTHUR:

Lady, arise.

RATGIRL:

Me? *(Wiping her nose with the back of her hand)*

ARTHUR:

Lady, you. Come here.

She comes up, cautiously, in wary cat mode.

ARTHUR:

Lady, remember your name.

She looks at him, suspicious, puzzled.

ARTHUR:

Your name is Jane. *(Friendjane appears backprojected)* Remember.

RATGIRL grows into FRIENDJANE. The image becomes her.

ARTHUR:

Your name is Jane: in the old speech, Guinevere. Thou art my lady and my queen.

Music, sound effects, light from sword.

RATGIRL becomes tall, stately. Maybe MERLIN drapes her with a cloth that suggests a courtly

dress. She looks at herself, and speaks in the Jane voice:

RATGIRL:

Cheese and biscuits!

Everyone laughs. General good humour, music, pageantry, everyone will obviously live happily forever after.