

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Messenger

by Wayne Macauley

EXTRACT

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CHARACTERS

1st MESSENGER: From the West. Dark boots, light grey trousers tucked into brown socks, black jacket with yellow trim over dirty undershirt and black cap with yellow band, all lightly covered in dust. Should vaguely resemble an old-fashioned postman's uniform.

2nd MESSENGER: From the East. Ditto but with blue trim on jacket and blue band on cap.

OLD MESSENGER: From the North. Ditto but with red.

SCENE

A rock-strewn desert.

NOTE:

The PROJECTIONS, if used, are imagined as being back-projected onto a cyclorama at the upstage limit of the performance space - at other times this cyc will form a desert/sky backdrop to the action. If PROJECTIONS are not used, it is assumed the space will be big enough to accommodate the slow (Noh-like) approach of OLD MESSENGER, live.

ACT ONE

LIGHTS UP ON A ROCK-STREWN DESERT. MORNING. UPSTAGE-CENTRE A WELL, CONSISTING OF A SMALL MOUND OF ROCKS, TO OBTAIN WATER FROM WHICH A BATTERED ENAMEL CUP IS LOWERED AND RAISED ON A PIECE OF STRING. UPSTAGE-RIGHT OF WELL IS A RUSTED BIKE RACK, WITH AN OLD FASHIONED BIKE PARKED IN IT. SLIGHTLY DOWNSTAGE-LEFT OF WELL A ROCK (1), LARGE ENOUGH TO SIT ON; AND ANOTHER (2) AT A FURTHER DISTANCE DOWNSTAGE-RIGHT, ALMOST FRONT-OF-STAGE, DEPENDING ON DEPTH OF PLAYING SPACE.

1st MESSENGER IS SITTING ON ROCK (1), DRINKING FROM THE CUP. HIS CAP RESTS ON THE GROUND BESIDE HIM. EXTENDED SILENCE AS HE DRINKS, TAKES HANDKERCHIEF FROM POCKET, DIPS IT INTO CUP AND WIPES HIS BROW AND NECK. PUTS AWAY HANDKERCHIEF, EMPTIES CUP INTO WELL AND PLACES IT ON EDGE. TAKES A SMALL COMPASS FROM HIS POCKET, CHECKS IT, AND LOOKS OFF IN ALL DIRECTIONS. PUTS AWAY COMPASS AND TAKES PISTOL FROM ANOTHER POCKET. BREAKS IT OPEN, CHECKS CHAMBER, SNAPS IT SHUT AGAIN, TOYS WITH IT A WHILE, THEN RAISES BARREL TOWARDS HIS MOUTH. THE APPROACHING SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS AND SINGING, OFF. **1st MESSENGER** STOPS, LISTENS, COCKS PISTOL, AND STEPS AWAY FROM SOURCE OF SOUND TOWARDS ROCK (2) AS HE LISTENS MORE INTENTLY. **2nd MESSENGER** ENTERS STAGE-LEFT, WHEELING A

SIMILARLY OLD-FASHIONED BIKE AND SOFTLY SINGING TO HIMSELF. **1st MESSENGER** STEPS BACK AND POINTS PISTOL AT HIM. **2nd MESSENGER** LOOKS UP, STOPS IN FRIGHT AND RAISES ONE ARM IN THE AIR. PAUSE AS EACH ASSESSES THE OTHER. **2nd MESSENGER** GINGERLY LOWERS HIS ARM AND POINTS TO HIS CAP.

2nd MESSENGER: I'm a messenger. That's all.

PAUSE. STILL POINTING PISTOL, **1st MESSENGER** GLANCES AT HIS OWN CAP LYING ON THE GROUND BESIDE ROCK (1). **2nd MESSENGER** CATCHES HIS GLANCE AND GLANCES ALSO AT CAP. THEIR GLANCES MEET TO RESUME A STARE.

2nd MESSENGER: I'm going East.

1st MESSENGER: I'm going West.

1st MESSENGER BEGINS TO TENTATIVELY LOWER PISTOL. **2nd MESSENGER** TENTATIVELY LOWERS HIS ARM.

1st MESSENGER: I lost my way last night - the fog, the quiet, the silver light...

1st MESSENGER HAS LOWERED PISTOL, **2nd MESSENGER** HIS ARM. PAUSE. **2nd MESSENGER** PICKS UP **1st MESSENGER'S** CAP, SUBTLY DUSTS IT OFF AND HANDS IT ACROSS.

2nd MESSENGER: So you're on your way back West?

1st MESSENGER: (accepting cap) On my way back... yes. (PUTS CAP BACK ON HEAD AND PISTOL BACK IN POCKET.)

2nd MESSENGER: I'm on my way back East myself. (AWKWARD PAUSE)

1st MESSENGER: Drink?

2nd MESSENGER: I'm parched.

1st MESSENGER MOVES TO WELL AND LOWERS CUP. 2nd MESSENGER PARKS HIS BIKE IN THE RACK.

1st MESSENGER: Hot work.

2nd MESSENGER: Tortuous.

1st MESSENGER: So early in the day.

2nd MESSENGER: It'll bake by lunch. (**1st MESSENGER OFFERS CUP. 2nd MESSENGER ACCEPTS IT GRATEFULLY.**) Here's looking up your girlfriend!

1st MESSENGER SMILES MEEKLY AND WATCHES HIM DRINK. 2nd MESSENGER FINISHES, WIPES HIS MOUTH AND HANDS BACK CUP. 1st MESSENGER PLACES CUP ON TOP OF WELL AS 2nd MESSENGER SITS ON ROCK (1). HE THEN TAKES OUT HANDKERCHIEF AND WIPES HIS BROW AND NECK. 1st MESSENGER STANDS BESIDE WELL, WATCHING, STILL A LITTLE UNSURE OF HIMSELF.

2nd MESSENGER: The war goes on.

Ist MESSENGER: And on...

2nd MESSENGER: (smiling) And on. (PAUSE) And on...

Ist MESSENGER: And on.

2nd MESSENGER: And on.

Ist MESSENGER: And on... (BOTH CHUCKLE. AWKWARD PAUSE.

2nd MESSENGER SEARCHES HIS POCKETS.) Do you...

(CHUCKLES AWKWARDLY.) Do you stop here often?

2nd MESSENGER: Me? No. I've never seen the place before. (TAKES SMALL COMPASS FROM HIS POCKET AND EXAMINES IT.)

Ist MESSENGER: And you're going East?

2nd MESSENGER: Yes... (LOOKING OFF IN ALL DIRECTIONS.)

Ist MESSENGER: I'm going West myself. (PAUSE) Do you know where we are?

2nd MESSENGER: Well... (VARIOUSLY INDICATING) That's East over there, and that's West. That's North that way and that's South... and we're in the middle. God help us if we were anywhere else, eh? (**Ist MESSENGER LOOKS OFF IN ALL DIRECTIONS, CONFUSED.**)

Ist MESSENGER: But... where's the front?

2nd MESSENGER: Yours or mine?

Ist MESSENGER: Ours both. Where our forces meet. The front.

2nd MESSENGER: Well... that's East over there, and that's West. That's North that way, and that's South... (THINKS) I don't know. But if I had to hazard a guess, I'd say that one of us is now sitting in enemy territory. (**Ist MESSENGER LOOKS OFF IN ALL DIRECTIONS, CONFUSED AND NOW CONCERNED.**) But I don't know.

(SMILES) Does it matter? (TAKES OUT A PACKET OF SWEETS) Mint? (**Ist MESSENGER** SHAKES HIS HEAD WITHOUT LOOKING. SILENCE AS **2nd MESSENGER** SUCKS HIS MINT. **Ist MESSENGER** SITS ON ROCK (2) AND STARES OUT TOWARDS AUDIENCE.) It was a strange one all right. To have fog here. Like that. Like soup.

Ist MESSENGER: It came from nowhere.

2nd MESSENGER: And gone again. First light and it was gone. (PAUSE)

Ist MESSENGER: Did you hear...?

2nd MESSENGER: What?

Ist MESSENGER: I mean have you heard...? (PAUSE. **2nd MESSENGER** SHAKES HIS HEAD.)

2nd MESSENGER: No. I've never heard it. Have you? (PAUSE. **Ist MESSENGER** SHAKES HIS HEAD.) I've felt the ground tremble... sometimes, slightly...

Ist MESSENGER: Yes... I taste a flavour in the air sometimes.

2nd MESSENGER: I've smelt an acid smell.

Ist MESSENGER: But you've never seen...?

2nd MESSENGER: No, I've never seen it.

Ist MESSENGER: (a statement) You've never seen it either. (PAUSE)

2nd MESSENGER: I stole a commander's binoculars once and looked out across the plain. But all I saw was...

Ist MESSENGER: ... a greyish haze.

2nd MESSENGER: A greyish haze.

Ist MESSENGER: A greyish haze is all I saw.