

THE RATBUSTERS

A Short Comic Play

by **Andrew Rice-Oxley**

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

THE DASTARDLY DEEDS OF LORD SWINDLEHAM
and THE RATBUSTERS

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CAST

Citizen 1

Citizen 2

Citizen 3

Police Inspector

Constable

Mayor

Councillor 1

Councillor 2

Councillor 3

**"King" Ratbuster }
Prof. }
"Ringer" Ray }**

Ratbusters

Chief Rat

1st Rat Sidekick

2nd Rat Sidekick

1st Youngster

2nd Youngster

3rd Youngster

4th Youngster

5th Youngster

Rats / Youngsters

[Can be doubled]

Customers

THE RATBUSTERS

By Andrew Rice-Oxley

(Loosely based on 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin' and even more loosely on 'The Ghostbusters')

SCENE 1

Littleborough Market

(Token Stalls arranged Centre, Left and Right with samples of things such as fruit and vegetables, packets of cereals, sweets, plastic bottles of fruit juice etc., some clothes, anything that can be knocked about a bit without too much trouble. A stallholder behind each stall and one or two customers perusing the articles for sale.

After a few moments, Enter Right a horde of squealing RATS (6 or more), who swarm everywhere grabbing food and generally creating havoc, then exit Left.

These Rats are very humanoid; they are bipeds with arms and, but for their brown or grey tops and rat masks, they might be mistaken for humans. The appalled and outraged stallholders and customers survey the damage. The Customers run off.

Enter Right, a POLICE INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE. They are panting and very harassed. One of the stallholders - CITIZEN 1 - rushes forward to meet them, closely followed by other stallholders, CITIZENS 2 and 3).

Citizen 1: Did you see them, Inspector, swarming everywhere?

Citizen 2: Rampaging and wreaking havoc worse than ever!

Inspector: We've been following them - thought they might come here, didn't we Constable?

Constable: Oh, yes, I've been making notes: *(extracts notebook and reads)* "I first laid eyes on them gathering in large numbers at the end of Righton Street. Immediately my suspicions were aroused and I sensed an imminent breach of the peace. So I radioed for assistance within minutes assistance arrived in the shape of Inspector -".

Inspector: Yes, thank you, Constable, that'll do. These citizens don't want to hear all that.

Citizen 1: We certainly don't, we want to know what you're going to DO about these rotten rats.

Citizen 2: Yeah, while you were making your stupid notes, those vile rats were smashing up our market.

Citizen 3: And not just 'breaching the peace' but blowing it to kingdom come!

Citizen 1: Look, there's hardly anything left on these stalls.

Inspector: You have got SOMETHING left then?

Constable: Oh dear.

Citizen 2: What do you mean, 'Oh dear'? *(Anxious)* You don't mean?

Inspector: I'm afraid he does. (*Looking Left*) Look out, here they come again! (*Enter Left, swarming again, the RATS. They sweep to the floor or carry away everything portable, then exit Right. The CITIZENS try to protect their goods, to no avail, whilst the INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE take cover.*)

Citizen 1: You great big cowards! Call yourselves policemen!

Citizen 2: They're utter wimps - I've never seen anything like it - cowering behind our stalls while the Rats broke the law to their hearts' content!

Citizen 3: And put us out of business.

Citizen 1: If YOU don't protect us from crime who will?

Citizen 2: You're a disgrace, you two!

Citizen 3: Ought to be ashamed of yourselves.

Inspector: Steady on, steady on! 'Discretion is the better part of valour' and all that. No point in our trying to stop them, was there? We were hopelessly outnumbered. Don't want to add bloodshed to criminal damage, do we? Eh, Constable?

Constable: Oh no, sir. In view of the circumstances, your course of action was very wise, sir.

Inspector: MY course of action, eh? Not yours? Why didn't you radio for more help, Constable?

Constable: I was too busy taking notes, sir.

Citizen 1: You two are just a couple of incompetents. I bet you couldn't even arrest ONE rat between you.

Inspector: Now, now, sir, don't get carried away. We are not dealing with single, solitary rats but vast numbers of them - hordes in fact.

Citizen 2: (*Very sarcastic*). Brilliant deduction, Sherlock! How long did it take you to work that one out?

Citizen 3: I don't suppose you have an 'elementary' solution for us, do you?

Inspector: Not a solution, no, but police reinforcements would help, wouldn't they, Constable?

Constable: They certainly would, sir. We're stretched wafer thin as it is.

Inspector: These rats are worse than flying pickets or protesters and yet no-one will send us extra police.

Constable: A few horses would come in handy too.

Inspector: (*Acidly*). But can you get them?

Constable: No.

Inspector: If you ask me, what YOU ought to do is to get on to the Council.

Constable: THEY ought to do something about police reinforcements.

Inspector: Matter of fact, they ought to handle this whole thing direct. They've got a Pest Control Officer, haven't they?

Citizen 2: We tried him. He said he only dealt with household pests.

Citizen 3: Typical.

Citizen 2: As if we haven't got 'em in our houses as well.

Citizen 1: Ah, but he maintains that now they're running all over the streets, they're a threat to public order - so they're the police's responsibility.

Citizen 3: So it's back to square one. These two - *(only just holding back an insult)*.

Inspector: Don't say anything you might regret, sir. I would hate to arrest you for abusing a police officer in the course of his duty.

Citizen 3: Duty? You mean 'dereliction of duty'.

(INSPECTOR draws himself up indignantly; the CONSTABLE reaches for his notebook like a referee about to book a player for a bad foul).

Citizen 1: All right, all right, let's keep cool, shall we? Our main enemy is the rats, right? So don't let's turn on each other.

Citizen 2: What are we going to do?

Constable: Have you tried the Council, sir, apart from the Pest Control Officer?

Citizen 2: We've been on the phone to them every day.

Citizen 1: And got nowhere.

Inspector: Well, Citizens, I suggest you go to the Town Hall and see the Council PERSONALLY. It might be more effective.

Citizen 1: If we can get in.

Citizen 2: The main door has been pretty firmly locked recently.

Citizen 3: And a policeman posted at the back door.

Inspector: Well, sir, you let me know when you're going and I'll see the policeman at the back door, eh, Constable? *(Winks at CONSTABLE)*.

Constable: Oh, yes, I think we can arrange something. *(Winks too)*.

Citizen 1: Right, we'll go tomorrow morning. *(To CITIZEN 2)* Coming?

Citizen 2: You bet I am. *(To CITIZEN 3)* You coming?

Citizen 3: I'm going to the doctors' tomorrow morning - about my migraine attacks.

Inspector: If we don't get rid of these rats soon, we'll all be suffering from migraine attacks.

Constable: Yes and R.S.S.

(The others look baffled).

Constable: Repetitive Stress Syndrome.

Inspector: Oh that. Oh yes. It's been happening enough times hasn't it?

Citizen 1: Come on, let's clear this mess up.

(The three CITIZENS begin to tidy up).

Citizen 1: *(To INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE)* Want to help?

Inspector: Er, we must be off now and monitor the rats' movements. Best of luck tomorrow. Let's go, Constable!

(INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE exit Left).

Citizen 2: *(Scornfully)*. "Monitor the rats' movements" - that's all they can do.

Citizen 3: Pathetic isn't it?

Citizen 1: *(Surveying the damage)*. Oh blow this! I couldn't be bothered. Let's get ready for that meeting tomorrow. *(Moves off Right)*. Come on.

(CITIZEN 1 exits Right).

Citizen 3: If that doesn't work we may have to take the law into our own hands.

Citizen 2: *(Sceptically)* Oh yes? What are you going to do?

Citizen 3: I don't know but I'll think of something - when I've got rid of my headache.

Citizen 2: *(Sarcastically)*. I bet you will.

(CITIZEN 2 exits Right, CITIZEN 3 following his lead).

SCENE 2

Littleborough Town Hall.

(Room in the Town Hall. COUNCILLOR 1 - seated Right - is reading 'The Times' newspaper and scoffing sweets. THE MAYOR and COUNCILLOR 2 are playing snooker on a table Centre Stage. [This could be mimed]. COUNCILLOR 3 is seated Left nearby and is occupied with a TV computer game. There is a phone near the TV and phone books).

Councillor 3: *(Feverishly pressing buttons on his computer)*. Come on, come on get up there, will you! Dammit that could have been my best score!

Councillor 2: What IS your best score?

Councillor 3: Two thousand and fifty seven.

Mayor: *(Laughing)*. Two thousand and fifty seven - you'd better give up!

Councillor 2: *(Indicating MAYOR)*. He got three thousand the first time he played it.

Councillor 3: *(Sarcastic)*. I bet he did.

Mayor: I did. Mind you, THIS is the game for me. *(To COUNCILLOR 2)*. What's my break so far?

Councillor 2: Twenty-seven - as you very well know.

(The MAYOR pots another red).

Mayor: Twenty-eight now. *(The MAYOR pots again).* And the black again - thirty-five now *(Chuckling).* Oh, ho, ho - here I go, no stopping me now. Eat your heart out Stephen Hendry, here I come!

Councillor 3: Big-head!

Mayor: Jealousy will get you nowhere, my friend.

(Enter purposefully Right, CITIZENS 1 and 2).

Councillor 2: What do you think you're doing? Who said you could come in here?

(The MAYOR is in the middle of his shot and fluffs it. COUNCILLOR 3 continues with his/her video game).

Mayor: What the - *(Turning to the CITIZENS).* Well of all the flipping cheek! Who do you think you are? Barging in here when I'm in the middle of a game of snooker. And in the middle of a record break too!

Citizen 1: *(Sardonic).* It's your lunch hour, of course, and you can't see us now. That's what your secretary said.

Councillor 2: And she was absolutely right! You've got to make an appointment to see the Mayor and he's certainly not seeing anyone in his lunch hour.

Mayor: No I certainly am not! Now get out!

Citizen 2: Your lunch hour at eleven o'clock in the morning?

(COUNCILLOR 1 has lowered his newspaper and is looking indignant too).

Councillor 1: What's the time got to do with it? We work "flexi" time here.

Citizen 1: Oh I see. That explains why - whenever we rang you last week - it was your lunch hour.

Councillor 1: Very probably.

Councillor 2: Bound to be someone's lunch hour, isn't it?

Citizen 2: Very convenient for you, when you're trying to avoid an unpleasant issue.

Councillor 1: What are you talking about?

Citizen 1: He's talking about the RATS, Councillor! Or hadn't you noticed they're overrunning the town?

Councillor 2: The rat question IS a problem but one that the police can handle perfectly well.

Councillor 1: We have every confidence in them.

Citizen 1: Well we DON'T. We've seen their attempts to deal with the rats and frankly ...

Citizen 2: They're pathetic.

Mayor: Look, you two, if you want to register an official complaint, will you kindly use the correct procedures. Go and see my secretary, make an appointment and then -

Citizen 1: No! We want you to do something here and now.

Citizen 2: And we're not going until you do.

Councillor 2: But this is outrageous!

Councillor 1: It certainly is. We'd better get the police.

Mayor: What I'd like to know is how these two got IN here. The police had strict instructions not to admit anyone without a pass.

Citizen 1: The police are just as concerned about the rats as we are.

Mayor: You don't mean they let you in?

Citizen 2: Mayor, if you would deign to come out of your hermetically sealed office for a while, you'd see just how vicious and destructive these rats are.

Citizen 1: And they're totally out of control. The police can't handle them. Some drastic action is needed now.

Mayor: Nonsense, they're just a little high spirited that's all.

Citizen 1: Just a little high-spirited! Do you know how many shops they've plundered?

Citizen 2: And how much food they've devoured?

Councillor 2: Well they've got to live, haven't they?

Councillor 1: Be reasonable.

Mayor: Quite right. We can't let them starve, can we? We don't want those Animal Rights people down on us, do we? *(Chuckles weakly).*

Citizen 1: What about OUR rights?

Citizen 2: What about our property?

Citizen 1: What about our businesses, our livelihoods?

Citizen 2: We'll all be ruined if these rats aren't removed.

Mayor: I think you're exaggerating. Just keep calm - things will settle down, you'll see. You may even be able to claim compensation from the Government, you never know. *(To COUNCILLOR 2).* What do you think?

Councillor 2: Yes, they might be able to swing it. We can get you the claim forms, if you like.

Citizen 1: The only people who are going to 'swing' are you and your Councillors, Mayor, if you don't stop wriggling and start taking these rats seriously!

Citizen 2: We mean it!

Mayor: *(Trying to placate the CITIZENS).* Look, just relax. Sit down, have a whisky or something. Everything will be all right - no need to get worked up. These rats will soon go away to another town. Just stay calm - let it all blow over. *(Tries to put his arm on CITIZEN 1's shoulder but it's brushed aside).*

Citizen 1: We're not waiting any longer!

(A squealing noise can be heard off Right, even by COUNCILLOR 3 who is jolted out of the

video game).

Councillor 3: Can you hear that noise, Mayor, or is it just me?

Mayor: It's not just you, I can hear it very clearly.

Councillor 2: So can I.

Councillor 1: So can I.

Mayor: And it's coming this way.

Citizen 1: I think it's the rats.

Citizen 2: So do I.

Citizen 1: Take cover everyone!

(The bemused COUNCILLORS and MAYOR rush for cover, only just in time as the RATS sweep on from Right. They create general havoc, carry off several items, including COUNCILLOR 1's sweets, and exit Left. The MAYOR, COUNCILLORS and CITIZENS emerge from 'hiding').

Mayor: Well, of all the I've never seen anything like it!

Citizen 2: WE have.

Citizen 1: Yes, indeed. Now you know what we're up against.

Councillor 3: Look what they've done to my video and my cassettes!

Councillor 2: Look what they've done to the snooker table! *(To MAYOR).* Look, Mayor, look at this!

(The MAYOR inspects the snooker table).

Mayor: Good God! I don't believe it! They've ripped the cloth! This is unforgiveable!

Councillor 1: Look what they've done to my 'Times'. *(Holds up a very tatty 'Times' newspaper).*

Councillor 2: These rats have got no decency at all!

Councillor 1: It's absolutely outrageous! And they've taken my sweets!

Councillor 3: They've taken some of my cassettes!

Councillor 1: They've taken my sweets!

Mayor: Never mind your sweets, they've taken some of the snooker balls!

Citizen 1: Only SOME of the snooker balls?

Mayor: What do you mean only SOME? To take ONE would be a heinous crime.

Citizen 1: I'm afraid, Mayor

Mayor: Yes?

Citizen 2: He's afraid they might return.

Mayor: What? Just let them, I'd show them, I'd -

(Same squeaking noise as before can be heard, only this time off Left).

Citizen 2: Take cover again! *(All take cover again as before. The RATS swarm in again from Left and complete the damage they caused the first time, carrying off the snooker cues too: then exit Right. The MAYOR, COUNCILLORS and CITIZENS emerge again).*

Mayor: How the blazes did they get in, that's what I'd like to know? There's going to be a few sackings round here.

Councillor 2: Just look what those flaming rats have done! How can we play snooker now? With no cues!

Councillor 1: What about my sweets? And my 'Times' - they've even taken my 'Times'! Of all the cheek!

Mayor: 'Cheek' isn't the word, it's it's those rats are going to pay for this!

Citizen 1: Oh, you are prepared to DO something now, are you?

Mayor: You bet I am. *(Paces round angrily).*

Citizen 2: Nice to see you appreciate the problem now.

Mayor: I'm getting straight onto the police - they can jolly well sort this out here and now!

Citizen 1: We've TOLD you: the police are no good!

Citizen 2: Not without massive reinforcements - that's what they reckon.

Mayor: Really, and who's going to send us reinforcements? The Government's still haggling over who foots the bill for the last outbreak of civil disorder. Those anti-road protesters cost us thousands!

(COUNCILLOR 3 starts consulting the YELLOW PAGES).

Councillor 1: Couldn't we perhaps BARGAIN with the rats?

Mayor & Councillors 2 & 3: What?

Councillor 1: Well, they seem to have some intelligence. They must do to steal 'The Times', mustn't they?

Mayor: Oh don't be a fool. They just grabbed anything they could. If you'd been reading 'The Sun', they'd have grabbed that.

Councillor 2: Quite: Hardly a sign of intelligence.

Councillor 1: They looked to me like TALKING rats, anyway - and if they TALK it must be possible to bargain with them. Come to some arrangement.

Citizen 1: Well it's worth a try.

Citizen 2: If you can get hold of their leader.

Mayor: No, no, no! Never will I negotiate with that mob. It would be beneath my dignity. They're just a load of yobbos and vandals. Probably don't know the first thing about snooker. Look what they've done to the table!

Citizen 1: Well what do you propose to do to get rid of them then?

Citizen 2: Yes, what?

Councillor 3: How about 'The Ratbusters'?

Mayor: The who?

Councillor 3: 'The Ratbusters', They've got an advert in the 'Yellow Pages' - quite a big box, in fact.

Councillor 2: Where did you find them?

Councillor 3: Under 'Pest Controllers'. Listen: "Highly skilled and professional team of pest experts guarantee to free you from all pests for very reasonable fee. Rats a speciality. Ring 'Ratbusters' on 0800 676767 and everything will be put right." (*Laughing*). Sounds more like everything will be put at 'sixes and sevens'!

Mayor: (*Sarcastic*). Oh, ha, ha, very funny. Give me the book, will you. (*MAYOR grabs the 'Yellow Pages' book from COUNCILLOR 3 and reads*). Hmm "Rats a speciality" I wonder.

Councillor 1: Worth a try isn't it?

Mayor: "Very reasonable fee" wonder what they consider "reasonable"?

Citizen 1: If they get rid of the rats they'll deserve a small fortune.

Mayor: As long as it's not all Local Authority money. We've got to balance our budget, you know.

Citizen 2: No time to be miserly, Mayor. We've got a crisis on our hands.

Councillor 1: Let's us at least TRY them.

Councillor 3: Yes, why not? No one's got any other ideas.

Mayor: Oh very well. (*To COUNCILLOR 3*). Ring them will you. Tell them our problem and ask them to come as soon as they can.

(*COUNCILLOR 3 picks up phone and dials*).

Councillor 3: (*Into phone*). That the Ratbusters? This is Littleborough Town Hall. We've a slight rat problem - perhaps you might help us. You will, good, fine! (*Rings off and turns to the others*). They'll be here right away.

(*There is a knock on the door Right*).

Mayor: Come!

(*Enter Right, three 'RATBUSTERS': KING RATBUSTER with a bag; the PROFESSOR [PROF] who is bespectacled and who carries a camera and a barometer-type instrument, and 'RINGER' RAY who carries a large hoop. They also carry equipment on their backs. All are eccentrically dressed, particularly KING RATBUSTER who has coloured hair and mohican hair cut or something equally outlandish. PROF. has an intellectual look and RINGER looks like a gypsy*).

King Ratbuster: Hello, we're the Ratbusters.

Councillor 2: Good God, that was quick!

K. Ratbuster: Well, we don't hang around, do we lads?

Prof: No sir.

Ringer: We sure don't.

K. Ratbuster: As soon as there's a niff of a pest problem

Prof.: We're there

Ringer: Pronto!

K. Ratbuster: Especially if it's rats!

Prof.: Haven't you heard our rap?

Mayor: Your rap?

Ringer: Our little rhyme

K. Ratbuster & Prof.:
(*reciting together*).

*If you've got pests pests pests
Driving you up the wall wall wall
If you've got pests pests pests
Driving you up the wall
Who you gonna call call call?*

Ringer (*joins in*)

Ratbusters!

K. Ratbuster & Ringer:

*If you've got mice mice mice
Running round your hall hall hall
If you've got mice mice mice
Running round your hall
Who you gonna call call call?*

Prof. (*joins in*)

Ratbusters!

Ringer & Prof.:

*If you've got rats rats rats
In numbers that appall 'pall 'pall
If you've got rats rats rats
In numbers that appall
Who you gonna call call call?*

K. Ratbuster (*joins in*)

Ratbusters!

All Three Ratbusters:

If you've got....

Mayor: (*Shouting*): All right, all right - we've got the point! Thank you!

(The RATBUSTERS fall silent).

Mayor: This promotion of yourselves is all very well but what are your qualifications?

Councillor 2: What are your credentials?

Councillor 1: Have you got any references?

Mayor: Other than your own that is.

K. Ratbuster: Fair questions indeed. Let me introduce ourselves. I'm the Chief Ratbuster, generally known as 'KING Ratbuster'. I have years of top level leadership and a proven track record second to none. On my right is the Professor, affectionately known as 'Prof'. He's our chief analyst and detector - he can suss out a rat at a range of fifty miles - hence our speedy arrival here. The instrument he carries is infallible. Let me prove it to you. *(To MAYOR)*. Where and when did you last have a rat sighting?

Mayor: Here, in this very office, barely five minutes ago.

K. Ratbuster: What do you say to that, Prof?

(The PROF consults his instrument).

Prof.: Well, how about that? Absolutely right - according to the dial there was a rat here about five minutes ago.

K. Ratbuster: You see, it never fails.

Councillor 1: We had a whole horde of rats here actually.

Prof.: *(Nodding)*. That's right, yep, it's registering a large number of rats now. Yes, definitely. A large number of rats was here about five minutes ago.

K. Ratbuster: Brilliant, eh?

Citizen 1: We know the rats were here; they were all over the market yesterday. The question is: what are you going to do about them?

K. Ratbuster: Another fair question. I'm glad you asked that. Let me introduce the third member of our illustrious group - 'Ringer' Ray, carrying, as you see, a large ring, hence the name.

Councillor 3: So what?

Councillor 2: Hoola Hoops are a bit dated, old chap.

Councillor 1: Rather childish too.

K. Ratbuster: Perhaps, perhaps, but this is not an ordinary hoop. Oh no, it's a magic hoop!

Ringer: That's right - when the rats jump through this hoop they vanish just like that!

Mayor: Ha, ha, ha! I can see we've got some practical jokers here. You think it's April the first, don't you?

Councillor 2: What do you take us for: fools?

Councillor 1: Magic indeed, what a load of rubbish!

K. Ratbuster: No, no, we get rid of the rubbish!

Prof.: We've banished bats from Bolton!

Ringer: Wiped out wasps in Worcester!

K. Ratbuster: And routed rats from Rochester! Our success rate is 101%.

Mayor: (*Dryly*). Using a magic hoop?

K. Ratbuster: Not JUST the hoop, oh no. We use a secret magical formula - known only to us three - and a magic mouth organ. (*He delves into his bag and produces a harmonica*). The magic formula is uttered, silently, the mouth organ is played with esoteric skill and the pests jump through the hoop and disappear.

Prof.: Magic!

Ringer: Amazing!

Mayor: (*Dryly*). Wonderful, yes. And where do all the pests go? They just melt away into nothingness, do they?

K. Ratbuster: They usually reappear in another town, sadly, but then YOU'RE not bothered about that, are you? You just want LITTLEBOROUGH free of rats, don't you?

Mayor: It's some trick, isn't it?

K. Ratbuster: Call it a trick if you like; we call it magic!

Councillor 2: This is stuff and nonsense Mayor! You're surely not going to listen to another word of it.

Citizen 1: Why don't we TRY them? They can but fail. They MIGHT succeed. Worth a try.

Councillor 2: If they fail, they'll make fools of us. We don't want that, do we?

Citizen 1: YOUR failure to get rid of the rats has made fools of you already.

Citizen 2: Quite right.

Citizen 1: As far as I am concerned anything's worth trying - so let's see what they can do.

Councillor 2: But magic, really!

Citizen 2: If it works, does it matter what you call it?

Councillor 3: I think it could prove quite amusing seeing them try.

Councillor 1: Yes, be a bit of a laugh.

K. Ratbuster: Then you want to hire us?

Mayor: How much?

K. Ratbuster: These are TALKING rats, are they?

Councillor 2: We think so.

K. Ratbuster: You've never tried talking to them?

Mayor: (*Scornful*). No thank you.

K. Ratbuster: Good, good, very sensible. Talking to them only encourages them.
Never talk to rats, that's our advice.

Mayor: So how much do you want then?

K. Ratbuster: For talking rats - five thousand pounds.

Mayor: Five thousand pounds! Just to get rid of some measly rats.

Councillor 2: And using magic too.

K. Ratbuster: Magic isn't cheap, sir, it has to be constantly renewed from secret places in inaccessible lands - the travel costs alone to these places are astronomical!

Councillor 2: Poppycock! Mayor shall I call the police and have them thrown out?

K. Ratbuster: OK, if that's the way you feel. Come on lads, let's go and do that job in Smalltown. They're offering us six thousand there.

(K. RATBUSTER, PROF. and RINGER start to leave Right).

Citizen 1: Just a minute, hold on! WE don't want you to go and we represent the people of this town.

Citizen 2: Yes.

Citizen 1: *(To MAYOR).* If you let those three walk out of here without giving them a chance to rid us of our rats, I'll let the whole town know. The people of this town wouldn't begrudge five thousand pounds in an emergency like this.

Citizen 2: We've lost thousands already.

Citizen 1: And if they heard you've let them go and maybe lost our only chance of eliminating the rats, they'll come in here in a body and tear you all from limb to limb!

Councillor 1: Steady on, that's pitching it a bit strong isn't it?

(Pause).

Mayor: Oh very well. I don't suppose the town WOULD be too pleased about it.

Councillor 2: You don't mean you're going to EMPLOY these charlatans?

Mayor: More than my job's worth if we don't *(To K. RATBUSTER).* All right, you're hired. But not a penny until the job is done. Right?

K. Ratbuster: Five thousand pounds when the rats have all gone - agreed? *(He holds out his hand to the MAYOR and they shake on it. The PROF. takes a photo).*

Prof.: Just to verify the deal. *(He smiles).*

(The Scene freezes on the handshake and the lights fade).

SCENE 3

A Street in Littleborough.

(Enter Left. KING RATBUSTER carrying large cube on which the word CHEESE is written. He crosses Right and is closely followed by three rats - CHIEF RAT, 1st RAT SIDEKICK, 2nd RAT SIDEKICK).

K. Ratbuster: I thought you'd be interested in a nice chunk of cheese.

Chief Rat: Only if it's Stilton - I'm sick of all that mouse trap cheese people keep leaving around the place.

1st. Rat Side: Shall we grab it off him, Chief?

2nd. Rat Side: Yeah, don't look like he'll give us much trouble.

K. Ratbuster: Wrong there, my friend. If you so much as twitch in my air space, Prof. here, *(pointing Right)* will blow your head and whiskers off with his exterminator.

(PROF. steps out from Right and holds up his rat detector smiling. The rats retreat a pace or two).

Chief Rat: Hold on boys, that thing looks lethal. *(To K. RATBUSTER).* We don't want no violence, mate. We're prepared to talk.

K. Ratbuster: Great, glad to hear it - that's all I want to do. *(To PROF.)* OK, Prof, you can go, but stay close. OK?

Prof.: Sure thing, King. *(He exits Right).*

Chief Rat: What's your game?

K. Ratbuster: Dismiss your sidekicks, then we can talk man to man. *(Laughing).* Sorry, man to rat.

Chief Rat: Clear off, boys, I'll whistle if I need you.

(1st and 2nd RAT SIDEKICKS exit Left).

Chief Rat: That cheese IS Stilton, isn't it? I can smell it.

K. Ratbuster: 'Course it is - and it's yours when we seal our bargain.

Chief Rat: Bargain?

K. Ratbuster: Yes, you see, I want you to gather all your rat friends together and get out of this town.

Chief Rat: You must be joking - we're having a great time here. And no-one's stopping us.

K. Ratbuster: I'll make it worth your while.

Chief Rat: How much?

K. Ratbuster: One thousand pounds.

Chief Rat: One thousand? Not bad, but not enough.

K. Ratbuster: Look son. I'll put my cards on the table. The Mayor's giving us two thousand to get rid of you. So what I'm offering you is fifty per cent. Can't say fairer than that, can I?

Chief Rat: What's to stop me going to the Mayor for a higher price?

K. Ratbuster: He won't bargain with you - he hates your guts. So do the whole town, come to think of it.

Chief Rat: Yeah, I've heard that. I can't think why.

K. Ratbuster: All you've got to do is move on to some other place - and there's plenty of pickings in other towns - and you have one thousand quid in your pocket to ease you on your way. You can't get ALL you want from smash and grab raids, can you?

Chief Rat: Too true. Not like the 'good old days'. Too much good stuff locked away these days.

K. Ratbuster: Is it a deal then?

Chief Rat: How are you going to pay?

K. Ratbuster: By cheque, of course.

Chief Rat: You've got a cheque card, I hope?

K. Ratbuster: 'Course I have, old boy. Wouldn't expect you to trust a cheque without a cheque card.

Chief Rat: What's to stop me cashing the cheque and staying here?

K. Ratbuster: They'll be two cheques, both postdated. You stay, and I'll stop them both.

Chief Rat: Make it twelve hundred and you're on.

K. Ratbuster: Eleven hundred and that's my final offer.

Chief Rat: Done! If you give me the cheese now. (*Reaches out for it*).

K. Ratbuster: You can have the cheese so long as you leave precisely WHEN and HOW I want you to.

Chief Rat: All the same to me when we leave and how - 'long as we can do it in style. No humiliating retreat!

K. Ratbuster: Certainly not. In fact, your 'withdrawal' should be a whole heap of fun for you and your rats.

Chief Rat: Fun?

K. Ratbuster: That's right. Let's go somewhere quiet to fix the deal and I'll tell you exactly what I have in mind. (*Tosses CHIEF RAT the cheese*).

Chief Rat: Ta! Whatever you like, man. Lead the way!

(K. RATBUSTER moves off Right and CHIEF RAT follows him. As he does so 1st and 2nd RAT SIDEKICKS appear from Left).

1st Rat Side: Hey, wait for us!

2nd Rat Side: We want some of that cheese!

(The CHIEF RAT follows KING RATBUSTER off Right with 1st and 2nd RAT SIDEKICKS in hot pursuit).

SCENE 4

The Same (A Street) 30 minutes later.

(Enter Right KING RATBUSTER, PROF. and RINGER).

K. Ratbuster: All set then?

Prof. and Ringer: All set!

K. Ratbuster: Great! *(Looks at his watch).* The Mayor and his cronies should be here any minute. Ah

(Enter Left, MAYOR and COUNCILLORS 1, 2 and 3)

K. Ratbuster: Glad you could make it, Mayor.

Councillor 2: Oh, we wouldn't miss this for the world. Seeing you lot make fools of yourselves will be a pleasure.

K. Ratbuster: You're in for a surprise, Councillor!

Prof.: You'll see.

Ringer: No mistake.

Mayor: Get on with it, will you.

K. Ratbuster: By all means. OK, Prof., play your harmonica.

(PROF. plays his mouth organ tunelessly but confidently. After a few bars the RATS begin to appear from R. RINGER, standing Upstage Left, holds his hoop out. KING RATBUSTER silently mouths 'magic words' with closed eyes and hands upraised. One by one the RATS pass eagerly through their hoop and exit Left. Soon all the RATS have gone and the harmonica and silent incantation cease).

K. Ratbuster: Voilà!

Councillor 3: Nice show that!

Councillor 2: Doesn't prove anything, though.

Councillor 1: They could be back in five minutes.

K. Ratbuster: I don't think so. But we'll see. (*Opens his bag and produces a large cube of CHEESE*). If the rats are still around, they'll soon come back for this. Agreed?

Mayor: I suppose so.

(*The other COUNCILLORS seem to agree*).

Councillor 2: Well how long do we have to wait?

K. Ratbuster: Not long if they're still here.

(*Enter Left, INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE*).

Inspector: It's incredible!

Mayor: What is?

Inspector: They've gone!

Constable: Vanished!

Councillor 2: Who has?

Inspector: The rats.

Mayor: Are you positive?

Constable: Not a doubt of it.

Inspector: We've just seen them heading off in one mad horde towards Smalltown.

Constable: They should be halfway there by now.

K. Ratbuster: Well, Mayor?

Mayor: Hmm. Well, that's good news.

Councillor 1: Certainly is.

Councillor 2: Maybe the citizens will stop pestering us now.

Mayor: Let's hope so. Well, this calls for a celebration. (*To INSPECTOR*). Go and inform the public will you.

Inspector: Right away, sir.

(*INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE exit Right*).

Mayor: Let's go and have that celebratory drink, guys!

(*They make to leave Left*).

K. Ratbuster: Just a minute, Mayor.

Mayor: Yes?

K. Ratbuster: What about the little matter of our fee?

Prof.: The five thousand pounds.

Mayor: Five thousand pounds? Did we promise you that?

K. Ratbuster: You know very well you did, Mayor.

Mayor: I don't recollect promising that much. (*To other COUNCILLORS*). Do you? (*They shake their heads*). And anyway YOU didn't get rid of those rats. They just decided to go. Obviously, they were tired of Littleborough - looking for something more downmarket. I said they'd soon move on, didn't I?

K. Ratbuster: Mayor, we had a deal.

Mayor: A deal? I don't remember. (*To COUNCILLORS*). Do you? (*They shake their heads*). Can you prove it?

Prof.: We have a photograph.

Mayor: (*Contemptuous*). A photograph! Huh! We just happened to shake hands, that's all.

Ringer: And a tape-recording.

(*He points to tape recorder and K. RATBUSTER and PROF. nod*).

Councillor 2: (*Slyly*). You say you used magic?

K. Ratbuster: That's right.

Councillor 2: Then how can we possibly pay you?

K. Ratbuster: What do you mean?

Councillor 2: If it got out that we employed people who used MAGIC we'd be in serious trouble. (*Winking at MAYOR*).

Mayor: That's right. We're a respectable Council. Can't deal with folks who dabble in the Occult, can we? BLACK magic, maybe.

K. Ratbuster: Black Magic? Never!

Mayor: How do we know? You use magic powers. As far as we're concerned you could be in league with diabolical forces.

K. Ratbuster: Rot!

Prof.: Poppycock!

Ringer: Piffle!

Mayor: Sorry, lads, but that's the way it looks. Look, I'll tell you what I'll do I'll give something for your TIME. Must have taken you all of ten minutes to do the job. (*To COUNCILLOR 3*). How much was that anonymous donation to the Mayor's Special Purposes Fund you got the other day?

Councillor 3: Ten pounds.

Mayor: Ten pounds. Right, you can have all that. Ten pounds. That's a pound a minute. That's very generous, you'll have to admit.

Councillor 2: (*Bitting*). What does a 'King ' want with money, anyway?

(KING RATBUSTER, PROF. and RINGER are paralysed with outrage).

Mayor: That's it. Take it or leave it. We've got to get back to work now. Come on, Councillors!

(They move off Left and then MAYOR turns back to KING RATBUSTER).

Mayor: You can pick up your ten pounds at the Town Hall whenever you like.
(To COUNCILLORS) Fancy thinking we promised five thousand pounds!

Councillor 2: What a joke!

Councillor 1: Do they think we're a 'support group' for weirdos or something?

(They exit Left, laughing).

Ringer: They're not getting away with that!

K. Ratbuster: They're certainly not!

Prof.: What are we going to do, King?

(KING RATBUSTER pauses for thought).

K. Ratbuster: *(To RINGER).* You still got those forged FA Cup tickets?

Ringer: Quite a few. And some European Cup ones too. In my pocket. In case we need them.

K. Ratbuster: We DO need them.

Prof: What are you going to do?

K. Ratbuster: We'll offer them to all the kids in the town.

Ringer: What'll that do?

K. Ratbuster: It'll empty the town of half its children.

Prof: So what? Some parents would love that. And the Mayor won't care.

K. Ratbuster: Won't he? What about GCSEs?

Prof.: GCSEs?

K. Ratbuster: You're not as bright as I thought you were, Prof. If all the kids in the town rush off to Wembley and Europe how many of them will pass their GCSEs? The local schools' positions in the School League tables will slump to an all time low.

Ringer: You're dead right, King.

K. Ratbuster: And who'll be blamed?

Prof. and Ringer: The Mayor?

K. Ratbuster: Exactly. When the parents learn we did it because he wouldn't pay what he'd AGREED to pay. And they WILL learn. Those citizens were there

when we clinched the deal, weren't they? Right, play your harmonica, Prof. Quick!

(PROF. plays his mouth organ again. KING RATBUSTER takes out a batch of tickets and holds them up. Enter CITIZENS 1 and 2 and 1ST. 2ND. 3RD. and 4TH. YOUNGSTERS).

K. Ratbuster: Roll up, roll up, you young ones, for free Cup tickets! Just jump through the hoop and follow our friend Ringer and he'll hand them out to anyone under 18. We got rid of the rats for you, now we're getting rid of FA Cup tickets and European Cup tickets. Absolutely free!

1st. Youngster: That's true - they DID get rid of the rats. Jimmy Johnson saw them.

2nd Youngster: So did I - from my window. It was fantastic!

K. Ratbuster: They've all got to go, so don't delay!

1st Youngster: If they were right about the rats

2nd Youngster: They'll be right about the tickets. Come on, let's tell the others.

(They rush off Right).

Citizen 1: *(To 3rd and 4th YOUNGSTERS).* Listen, you two, don't take it seriously!

Citizen 2: No, don't trust them.

K. Ratbuster: Come on, you two, just jump through the hoop and follow Ringer.

3rd Youngster: Come on. Why not?

4th Youngster: Why not? Let's go!

(They run through the hoop and exit Left, following RINGER, who is waving his wad of tickets. 5th YOUNGSTER, who is on crutches, remains).

Citizen 1: *(To KING RATBUSTER).* Why are you doing this?

K. Ratbuster: Ask the Mayor.

Prof: Something to do with his not paying the five thousand pounds he promised.

Citizen 1: What?

Citizen 2: Why not?

K. Ratbuster: Ask HIM. Come on, Prof., let's go!

(They hurry off Left).

Citizen 1: Hey wait a minute! Where've you taken our kids?

Citizen 2: Come back! We'll call the police!

Citizen 1: Fat lot of good they'll be!

5th Youngster: It's not fair! I've always wanted to go to Wembley. And I've lost my chance now because of my rotten broken leg. How can you jump through a hoop with a broken leg?

Citizen 1: Don't worry, lad, you'll be jumping through a hoop all right.

5th Youngster: What do you mean?

Citizen 1: When you take your exams.

5th Youngster: I'd rather go to Wembley.

(He exits, hobbling, Left).

Citizen 2: Wouldn't we all?

(Enter Right, MAYOR and COUNCILLORS 1 and 3, closely followed by INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE).

Mayor: *(To CITIZENS).* I hear those rascals have spirited our youngsters away. Is it true?

Citizen 1: 'fraid so.

Mayor: Right, Inspector, get after them will you!

Inspector: Which way did they go?

(CITIZENS 1 and 2 point Left).

Inspector: Come on, Constable, let's go.

(INSPECTOR and CONSTABLE exit Left).

Citizen 2: *(Sarcastically).* That's right, go and "monitor their movements".

Citizen 1: I bet they won't find them.

Mayor: *(Shaking his head).* I don't know kids nowadays! A smooth-talking smart-alec comes along and offers them the moon and they fall for it.

Councillor 3: Soft lot, aren't they?

Councillor 1: And always out to get something for nothing.

Councillor 3: That's right.

Mayor: That's it - something for nothing. Typical of today's youth.

Citizen 1: "Something for nothing", eh. Bit like you, in fact, Mayor.

Mayor: What do you mean?

Citizen 1: You wanted the Ratbusters to get rid of the rats, didn't you?

Mayor: I wanted the rats to go, of course.

Citizen 2: But you weren't prepared to pay them, were you?

Mayor: Well, I mean, that 'magic' business, all that stupid jumping through hoops. Would you?

Citizen 2: You promised.

Mayor: Yes, well I mean

Citizen 1: And YOU lot will be jumping through hoops soon.

Mayor: What are you talking about?

Citizen 1: Next month's elections. When this story gets out, I think we'll be having a totally new Council. YOU'LL be jumping through hoops and vanishing.

Citizen 2: Into thin air!

Citizen 1: *(To CITIZEN 2).* Come on.

(CITIZENS 1 and 2 exit Left. Long Pause).

Mayor: Looks like there's a moral to this story.

Councillor 1: Keep your promises, you mean?

Mayor: No 'Never trust a policeman'

(COUNCILLORS 1 and 3 look puzzled).

Mayor: Don't you see? If that policeman on the door had done his job, those bolshie citizens would never have been let in to the Town Hall. If THEY hadn't got in, the Rats wouldn't have got in and there wouldn't have been the extra pressure on us to hire those Ratbuster rascals. If it hadn't been for the wretched Ratbusters everything would have been fine.

Councillor 3: For us.

Mayor: For us, yes. So it's all down to that negligent policeman.

Councillor 1: That's one way of looking at it.

Mayor: It's the only way.

Councillor 3: You pierce right through to the heart of things, don't you Mayor?

Mayor: Every time.

Councillor 3: It's all the police's fault. Brilliant!

Councillor 1: So what are you going to do? Sue?

Mayor: Maybe. Right NOW I'm going back to the Town Hall to enjoy its amenities whilst we're still in office. *(Winks at COUNCILLORS).*

Councillor 3: Smart thinking.

(Enter Left, CONSTABLE, a little breathless).

Councillor 1: Talk of the devil.

Mayor: Ah, Constable. Any progress on the case of the missing children?

Constable: No sir. Afraid not, sir. I've just come to inform you they've all left town.

Councillor 3: And you've done nothing to stop them.

Mayor: Never mind. I'm sure he's done his best. I want you to take down a statement, Constable.

Constable: Certainly sir. *(Taking out his notebook and pencil).*

Mayor: "The Case of the Rats, the Ratbusters and the Missing Children".

Constable: *(Writing and speaking at the same time).* "The Case of the Rats, the Ratbusters and the Missing Children".

Mayor: "Everything from beginning to end was the police's fault".

(CONSTABLE writes this down and there is a pause).

Constable: Is that all, sir?

Mayor: That's all. I'll sign it later. Right now, my Councillors and I are going straight back to the Town Hall to work. Work, Constable, do you know what that is?

Councillor 1: It certainly isn't capering around with a note book, playing wide games.

Councillor 3: Achieving absolutely nothing.

Mayor: Come on, Councillors, we haven't got time to stand around chatting.

(MAYOR and COUNCILLORS 1 and 3 exit Right, casting scornful looks at the CONSTABLE. Pause).

Constable: "Everything from beginning to end was the police's fault". Well, that's nice to know, isn't it? The Mayor's a clever man so he must be right. No need for an 'enquiry', it solves everything. It was all the police's fault! Simple as that. So *(Comes Down closer to AUDIENCE and adopts more of a Dixon of Dock Green manner).* Sleep well and don't have any more nightmares. Just remember, violent crimes -

(Enter Left, at some speed, the INSPECTOR, holding a sheaf of papers).

Inspector: Hang on a moment, Constable, hang on! I've got a Crime Watch update here. *(Waves the papers in his hand).*

Constable: An update?

Inspector: An update. The response from the public has been phenomenal! We've

had a stream of information coming in - in the last few minutes alone.

Constable: Sightings of the missing children?

Inspector: Not much on them, no, but plenty of tip-offs about alleged crimes. In fact we should be able to make some arrests pretty soon. (*Hands CONSTABLE a sheet*). Have a look at that. (*Hands CONSTABLE another sheet*). And that. (*CONSTABLE scans the two sheets*). Very interesting, eh? We've got something big here, haven't we?

Constable: This, sir, is dynamite. Dynamite! If it's corroborated.

Inspector: Oh it will be, it will be. You haven't seen the rest of what I've got. (*Holds up remaining papers in his hand*).

Constable: But why's all this coming out now? It must go back years.

Inspector: Anger, Constable, sheer anger. Fury! They blame the Mayor for the missing kids because he didn't pay the Ratbusters. Now they want blood, even if it implicates them.

Constable: I always suspected that Mayor - and his cronies. But we never had anything on him.

Inspector: We have now. Plenty. Evidence of SLEAZE on a large scale and going back a long way. We've all been ripped off!

Constable: Right, sir, let's go and bust them - now!

Inspector: Now?

Constable: That's right, sir. WE'LL be Ratbusters now. We'll bust those rats NOW.

Inspector: RATBUSTERS, eh? I like it, Constable. But let's make a splash of this, do it in style. Show them, all of them, what we're made of - for once! I'll radio a couple of patrol cars and you blow your whistle.

(INSPECTOR takes out his radio phone and activates it).

Constable: Don't worry, I'll blow the whistle all right! (*Brandishes his whistle*). Town Hall here we come! Mayor, here we come! (*Gives two full blasts on his whistle*). The whole town shall know! (*Smiles at the INSPECTOR*). Let's go!

(CONSTABLE exits Right blowing his whistle. The INSPECTOR follows him, speaking into the phone as he goes. The CONSTABLE'S whistle can be heard offstage for a few seconds. Then, as it fades, police sirens can be heard reaching a pitch, then fading into the distance).

THE END