

THE VALHEIL WORLD

A Comedy in One Act

by

SEBASTIAN HAYES

SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

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THE VALHEIL WORLD

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SchoolPlay Productions Limited,
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CHARACTERS

Male:

JACK VALPA *Managing Director Valheil Cosmetics Incorporated*
AL NORTH *Production Manager, Valheil Inc.*
FREDDY NORTH *Al's son, Advertising Executive, Valheil Inc.*
'LUCKY' LAFFERSON *Computer Expert, Valheil Inc.*
HELMUT THOREWALL *An Astronaut*
JAKE PAPHNER, *A Space Engineer*
*DOMESTIC *(one line)*
*CHAUFFEUR *(one line)*

Female:

FREDERIKA VALPA *Fourth wife of Jack Valpa*
FAY NORTH *Al's daughter, Chemical Research Supervisor,
Valheil Inc.*
*AU PAIR GIRL *(non-speaking, optional part)*

** These parts could be doubled and / or played by the opposite sex.*

The time is some years into the twenty-first century.

All the action takes place in the house of Jack and Frederika Valpa.

Only one set is required.

THE VALHEIL WORLD

A Play for Young Performers

by Sebastian Hayes

The curtain reveals a large room in the house of JACK and FREDERIKA VALPA which has been arranged temporarily for a Boardroom meeting of Valheil Cosmetics Inc., a family company. This room will serve as the unique set whether the scenes are supposed to take place in the office or at home. Front stage left or stage right there is a curtained recess containing a large upright computer.

(FAY NORTH, a glamorous young professional woman, is walking up and down in front of a long table where JACK VALPA, AL NORTH, FREDDY NORTH, FREDERIKA VALPA and LUCKY LAFFERSON are sitting. She is giving an exposé but we do not hear what is being said: it is all like a television programme with the sound off. We hear a narrator as Voice Over and, when required, the same voice can indicate passage of time or other details when a new scene begins. FAY NORTH continues her [soundless] exposé during Voice Over).

Voice Over: Now, although the gods had already established Asgard, with the great hall of Valhalla within it, and possessed the apples that gave perpetual youth, still they did not feel safe. But one day there came a certain builder who offered to build the gods a fortification so strong that it would protect them against mountain-giants and frost-giants even though they should come in great numbers from Middle Earth. But the builder said that in payment, amongst other things, he must have Freya, the goddess of Youth and Health, as his wife. Then the gods went into discussion and they decided that the builder should get everything he demanded if he managed to build the fortification in one year, but that if, at the end of this time, there was anything left unfinished then he should forfeit all payment. And he was to receive no help from any person for this work. The gods said this, thinking that he would never be able to finish such a great task in the allotted time. And when the gods told him these terms, the builder asked that he might have the help of his stallion Sleipnir. And it was Loki who was responsible for this being granted to him.

(FAY NORTH brandishes a large bottle of brightly coloured pills).

Fay: And so, with these pills I can bring to the world what everyone wants -- eternal youth!

(Murmurs as everyone relaxes after speech with some nodding of heads. Very loud clapping from LUCKY, a flashily dressed man sitting extreme right behind desk. Others look at him disapprovingly).

Frederika: *(Frowning)* I'm sorry, Fay, but I just can't see it working - it's against the laws of science.

Fay: Am I the Head of the Chemical Research Department, or are you?

Al North: I'd like to hear a bit more about production costs.

Fay: Once we get started costs will come down.

Al North: Yes, but at present.

Fay: *(Holding up bottle)* Well, I suppose this bottle cost about £1,000 to produce.

Jack: And how many bottles are needed for a complete treatment?

Fay: About five.

Frederika: So if we only add on 20 % profit that's £6,000 for a full treatment - too expensive.

Fay: Think what people pay for plastic surgery.

Jack: Maybe. But we're in cosmetics.

Al North: Have you tested the stuff at all, Fay?

Fay: Of course. On myself. *(Strikes a model pose.)* I don't look too ancient, do I? I've also tried it out on a hundred and fifty hamsters.

Jack: *(Shakes head)* Hum, that may have been unwise

Al North: In any case, the real objection is the cost.

Fay: Do you think our rivals British Industrial Glamour ever bother about trivial things such as production costs? That's why they're overtaking us. *(Points to graph on wall which shows two curves, one falling and one rising.)*

Freddy: I'm not sure that taking it as a pill is the right way. People forget, lose count

Fay: Well, a more efficient method would be to put it in the air you breathe. *(Takes out can.)* I've produced some concentrate as a spray actually.

Lucky: I've got it, mates! Spray the stuff into an areoplane.

Al North: Actually, Lucky does have a point. We could have renewal flights. Valheil Air gets you there quicker AND younger.

Lucky: Every minute spent on Valheil Air is a minute backwards in time!

Frederika: I'm more worried about whether it works or not.

Lucky: *(To FAY)* How much is there in that can?

Fay: Oh, this is concentrate. I'd say there's enough here to rejuvenate about five large mammals - provided they got a good whiff of it.

Lucky: Can I have a dekho? *(Takes can out of her hand and examines it.)* Well, folks, I hope you had a good look at yourselves in the bathroom mirror this morning because what you'll see tomorrow *(brandishing can)* won't be the same! *(Squirts spray straight at JACK VALPA.)*

Jack: Stop that!

(LUCKY squirts everyone in the Boardroom before they can prevent him and rushes out laughing uproariously).

Fay: *(Rushing out after him)* Here! Don't run off with my Health Spray!

Frederika: You really must do something about that fellow, Jack!

(FREDDY offers a handkerchief to FREDERIKA to wipe her face).

Jack: I admit he's getting impossible. But he's the best computer man I ever had

....

Frederika: *(Getting out mirror and looking at herself.)* I can feel myself changing already! How do we know the stuff doesn't have a reverse effect?

Al North: No, no, it couldn't do that.

Frederika: I wish I'd never come to this meeting!

(Meeting breaks up in disorder. Characters exeunt or blackout).

Same set on another day.

(JACK VALPA, FREDDY NORTH and AL NORTH are working flat out on some project, typing on laptops, studying dossiers etc).

Jack: Let's take a break. *(Relaxes)* Well, chaps, there's no doubt that this stuff of Fay's really works. I haven't felt as good as this for forty years. *(Flexes muscles).*

Al North: Dead right, Jack. *(Does a few splits)* I don't know what sort of chemicals she put into that spray, but they seem all right by me. Good job Helmut's not here - if he had any of the stuff he'd be bending crowbars with his bare hands.

Freddy: *(From ground where he is doing sit-ups)* Where is Helmut?

Jack: *(Pulling FREDDY to his feet with left hand.)* Mars. There's trouble on Mars. Come to that we've got trouble ourselves - B.I.G. trouble, British Industrial Glamour. They're sweeping the beaches with their new suntan lotion, our stuff doesn't rate a scratch. Only a miracle can save us now.

Freddy: Fay's hair-spray IS a miracle.

Jack: Ye-e-s.

Al North: It's brilliant but

Freddy: Look what it's done to us. *(Takes up sparring position and shadow boxes.)*

Al North: In a way, that's just it - it's TOO successful.

Freddy: How do you mean?

Al North: The social consequences would be pretty dire. Everyone will say, why him and not me?

Freddy: Get it put on the NHS then.

Al North: No government would risk it - be worse than Viagra. In any case, would we want that? There'd be more and more people but there wouldn't be any more space.

Freddy: Guess that does pose a problem. *(Thinks)* Why not keep it for the Valheil Board of Directors plus a few friends?

Jack: *(Looking at AL NORTH)* Well, your lad's got a point - why don't we just keep it for ourselves?

Al North: Yes, but we'd be sort of conspicuous. Anyone coming to meet the Board would get a bit of a shock. They'd be getting older every year while we'd be going the other way.

Jack: *(Thinks while holding up a heavy-looking lot of files with one hand.)* What we really need is a place all to ourselves.

Freddy: Dead right. So how're we going to fix it? We get hold of some asteroid and charge it up with Fay's youth spray. Then we'd be young and healthy for ever!

Al North: Fay's not actually tested it for ever. Ever is a long time.

Jack: It's no time at all. *(Slight pause)* Listen boys, this may be Providence. If business carries on like this, within a year at most Valheil Cosmetics will be KO.

Al North: So we need a place to retire to. Main problem's going to be finding someone who's smart enough to build the place but fool enough not to insist on money up front.

Freddy: AND someone we don't let into the secret.

Jack: Yes. Well said, Freddy. The place we're going to have built must only be for the few. The very few. We'll sleep on that, boys. In the meantime

(JACK picks up some heavy object which he uses like a pair of dumb-bells while FREDDY does a few more press-ups and AL NORTH does splits like a maniac. Exeunt or blackout).

Evening.

(FREDERIKA VALPA enters with a MAID and lays the table for a buffet. AL NORTH enters with FREDDY NORTH and FAY. JACK VALPA comes onstage with an enormous basket which he places on the table and from which he extracts an outsize bottle of champagne. He uncorks it amidst general merriment and some of it splashes over FAY who takes it in good spirit).

Jack: *(Raising glass)* Here's to Fay, the inventor of the Valheil Youth and Health spray! *(Drinks deeply).*

Al North: *(Raising glass)* To my brilliant daughter, Fay North!

(Others raise glasses and drink).

Freddy: Without you, sis, I wouldn't be half the man I am!

Jack: You know, when I first heard of the stuff, I didn't believe a word of it. But now I'm convinced, utterly convinced.

Frederika: Dare I point out that we still do not know anything about possible side-effects?

Jack: Perhaps not. But I personally am absolutely sure they don't amount to much. Who was it said: "With side-effects like these, who needs a main effect?" You know, folks, I can't believe it, for once we've actually got a decent product!

Fay: All the more reason to get it on the market quickly.

Jack: Ye-es. Have some more, Freddy?

Freddy: Surely, it's great stuff.

Fay: Yes, but you're not thinking of letting this opportunity slip, are you?

Jack: Course not. We could produce the stuff but - not for the market.

Fay: For whom, then?

Jack: For OURSELVES! That was Freddy's idea here. And it's a great idea, an

idea in a hundred million.

Freddy: You get it, Fay - we'd be different from the rest of them. We'd be kind of like the immortals. Like the gods. Think of that. That's why we don't want to market the stuff.

Fay: I see. And the idea is to have my spray put into the air we breathe.

Freddy: You've got it, Fay.

Fay: We'd need a place all to ourselves. Desert island?

Jack: Nah. Not much on this planet left. Too many companies like Valheil Cosmetics producing rubbish and fouling the atmosphere. *(Pointing)* What we want is somewhere up in the sky.

Fay: A satellite, you mean?

Al North: Not a satellite, no - an ARTIFICIAL WORLD.

Freddy: And all belonging to Valheil Incorporated. It'll be Paradise.

Al North: Nobody'll ever get sick.

Jack: Nobody'll ever get old.

Freddy: Nobody'll ever die.

Jack: To the Valheil World of Health and Strength! And to us, the people who'll live in it!

(All raise their glasses solemnly and drink).

Jack: Only trouble is - we haven't got anyone to build the place.

Frederika: Does Lucky know about this? We don't want --

(Loud ring at door making everyone start.)

Frederika: What's that?

Jack: Might just be the man of the moment.

(JACK goes to open door. Enter LUCKY accompanied by another man).

Frederika: He's brought someone with him.

Fay: I don't like the look of that man.

(JACK ushers the two men in. General frosty reception).

Jack: Have a drink, Lucky? *(To Newcomer)* And you, Mr.?

Newcomer: Paphner. Jake Paphner.

(JACK pours him out a glass of champagne.)

J. P.: Cheers. You people got something to celebrate?

Freddy: Not really.

J. P.: Must have - don't expect you drink this stuff every day. *(Examines the label on the champagne bottle. Whistles.)* Costs a bomb, this does. Good, though. *(Downs it in a couple of gulps.)* Okay if I have a fill-up?

(Helps himself to another glass. LUCKY watches with amusement, everyone else turns away with disapproval.)

Lucky: My friend here is an engineer.

Frederika: How interesting.

Lucky: Yes, he's just come back from the Moon.

Freddy: Is that so?

(JAKE wanders about the room looking at the furniture and the pictures. Stops in front of an oil painting. He takes it off the wall and beckons to FREDERIKA.)

J. P.: This must be worth quite a bit.

Frederika: Possibly.

J. P.: How much?

Frederika: I've not had it valued. *(Takes it from his hands and puts it back on the wall.)*

J. P.: Should do - I like to know the value of things. *(Goes up to FAY who turns away in disdain.)* I don't think the governor introduced us - who do I have the pleasure of ...?

Fay: *(Coldly)* I am known as Fay North.

J. P.: Up on the Moon there's not a lot of female company, you know. And I need female company. There's blokes can go for months without meeting a girl, but I'm not like that - I appreciate beauty. *(To FAY.)* And you're a pretty good-looking woman. I mean it. I really do.

(Helps himself to more champagne. FREDERIKA takes away the bottle.)

J. P.: Not a very talkative lot, are you?

(Pause.)

Jack: Er, Mr Paphner, I was wondering whether I could drop you off somewhere?

J. P.: You mean, you want me out? Yes, you can give me a lift home if you want, old fellow. That would be spot on. Save me paying for a taxi.

Jack: Where do you live?

J. P.: Good way from here. Well, so long folks. (*Doffs an imaginary hat to FAY*).

Jack: Yes, yes.

(*JACK escorts the unwanted guest out of the house*).

Frederika: Really, Lucky, this is the absolute limit! Bringing that character into our home.

Lucky: He's not such a bad guy when you get to know him. (*Helps himself to champagne*.)

Fay: Where'd you dredge him out from?

Lucky: Oh I've known him off and on for years.

Frederika: Why'd you bring him round here?

Lucky: (*Sipping his champagne*) Thought he might come in useful one day. (*Pause*.) You know who that guy was?

Frederika: Jake Paphner, something like that.

Lucky: Yes, that's his private name. But he's better known as J. P.

Al North: What! THE J. P. - the Space-fixer?

(*Lucky nods*.)

Freddy: He developed the hidden side of the Moon! He used to be Chief Engineer for Up-in-the-Air! That was the Space-Fixer!

Frederika: You should have warned us, Lucky!

Fay: Whoever he is, I thought he was an odious little man.

Freddy: But he could make our

Lucky: Your what? Why don't you say it? You're thinking of setting up a place to retire to when we go bust, aren't you?

Frederika: Well, maybe.

Al North: We could still approach him

Freddy: Listen, sis, you seem to have made quite an impression on him. I wonder

Fay: Absolutely not! I wouldn't go on a date with that rat to save my life!

Freddy: Yes, Fay, but supposing he could build us our space station? We need somewhere to go to, we deserve it

(*JACK VALPA returns*).

Jack: Do you know who that guy was?

Al North: We do now.

Jack: The Space-fixer! The greatest space engineer in the West! Of all the people And we showed him the door! To think we showed him the door!

(Party breaks up in disorder).

Same scene but laid out more as a Boardroom.

(Same people as before plus J. P. who is lounging around with a cup of coffee in his hand. There is a table with coffee and two large jars marked SUGAR and SALT).

J. P.: So You people want me to make you a Space-station?

Al North: Artificial world.

J. P.: *(Taking out notepad)* You want scenery - mountains, lakes, trees, mammals - what sort of mammals?

Jack: *(Looks at AL NORTH, who shrugs.)* Haven't really thought.

J. P.: Here, that's what I gen'rally come up with.

(Tosses a sheet of paper towards the desk. It falls to the floor but J. P. makes no attempt to pick it up. FREDDY eventually crawls under the table and picks up the sheet which he offers to JACK. JACK gestures and it is offered to AL NORTH instead.)

Al North: Deer, hedgehogs, badgers *(Ticks with pen).* Kangaroos, desert rats alligators? Do we really want to have alligators?

Jack: Yes. I like alligators. Reminds me of the time I spent living native in Brazil.

Frederika: I didn't know you lived in Brazil.

Jack: That was before my first wife, let alone my fourth.

Lucky: Can I have a dekkko? *(Flips through.)* Yeah - pass that. *(Hands paper to FREDERIKA.)*

Frederika: Hyenas - no, we most definitely do not want any hyenas.

J. P.: *(Looking up sharply.)* Why not? They never attack humans.

Frederika: Even if what you say is true, Mr Paphner - which I very much doubt - they're far too noisy. Could you get me some sugar, please, Lucky - you're

nearest.

Lucky: *(with exaggerated politeness)* Certainly. *(Brings across the jar labelled SALT, smiling to himself and FREDERIKA helps herself absent-mindedly.)*

Frederika: *(Frowns)* This coffee tastes positively revolting.

Lucky: Shall I get you another cup?

Frederika: It's all right.

Lucky: It's no trouble at all -

Frederika: *(Raising voice)* I said it's ALL RIGHT thank you. Where were we?

Jack: The, er, question of suitable mammals.

Frederika: So no hyenas - is that settled?

J.P.: No. No hyenas, it's no go. I never build an artificial world without putting hyenas on it.

Jack: I see. *(To FREDERIKA)* We'd better have one pair of hyenas.

Al North: *(To JACK)* You haven't mentioned the question of er protection to Mr Paphner.

J.P.: Call me J.P. if you like.

Jack: Ah yes. Listen Mr. J.P., we don't really want ordinary space-travellers dropping in on us once we're up there.

J.P.: Get you. You want the place sealed off, then?

Jack: Well, yes.

J.P.: Easy. I'll put the whole thing in Dimension Five and three-quarters.

Jack: What exactly is Dimension Five and three-quarters?

J.P.: Bit difficult to explain to you guys. Stuff in Five and three-quarters is all there but you can't get to it from our side - unless you have a rainbow laser torch. But it's there all right.

Frederika: And is there anyone at present living in Five and three-quarters?

J.P.: Yeah - but not round this way.

Frederika: I'm very glad to hear it.

Jack: There's another point. We'd like this place to be finished within a year.

(J.P. whistles.)

Al North: Well, if you can't do the job in the time, we'll ask Superspace.

J.P.: You don't wanna have anything to do with them amateurs. Guess I might be able to

Jack: Yes, what is it, Freddy?

(FREDDY leans over to say something in JACK's ear.)

Jack: Ah, yes, quite so. Thank you, Freddy. *(Clears his throat.)* We'd also like

you to work on this project solo. No assistants.

Freddy: That's it - absolutely no assistants.

J.P.: Yeah? All very hush-hush, is it? What you going to put in this place, I wonder.

Frederika: You see, Mr Paphner, we trust you but

J.P.: Let me tell you right off I can't agree to this condition.

Jack: Why ever not?

J.P.: (*Holds up his hand*) I'd need to have Slepner with me at least.

Frederika: Who's Slepner - your Number One?

Lucky: (*As if explaining to a child*) Slepner is his robot.

Freddy: Yes - but do we actually want robots mixed up in this? I hope I'm not speaking out of turn.

Al North: Not at all, Freddy boy. I agree. I think we ought to draw the line at robots. Too talkative.

J.P.: (*Bashes on Boardroom table with a paperweight.*) I want Slepner. I want Slepner. I want Slepner. No Slepner, no go. I want Slepner. I want Slepner. No Slepner, no go.

(Everyone looks at J.P. with irritation and alarm, except LUCKY who is carrying out some calculations on a laptop computer).

Frederika: Do you mind not making such a racket, Mr Paphner?

Lucky: You know, I've worked out it'll be okay to let J.P. have his robot. (*To JACK VALPA*). I'll tell you why afterwards.

Jack: All right, J.P., we agree to let you have one robot - but only one.

(AL NORTH leans over to say something to JACK who nods sagely.)

Al North: There's one matter we need to clear up right at the beginning - the, er, estimated cost.

J.P.: You go first.

Jack: For yourself, we thought of letting you have 25% of all shares in Valheil, Inc.

Al North: That's a very handsome offer, Mr Paphner. It's not something we'd do for just anyone.

J.P.: Hum. It's OK just so long as your company keeps its place in the market. Otherwise it's a handful of cobblers

Jack: Oh, we'll keep our place in the market all right - I shouldn't have any doubts about that, J.P. Just look at us. We're living proof of what our health and beauty products can do for people.

(JACK takes off his coat and rolls up his sleeves to show his muscles.)

Jack: Not bad for sixty-three, is it?

J.P.: Hum. I'd say you guys are looking a bit too fit.

Frederika: Nonsense. You can't be too fit.

J.P.: Yeah, I wasn't born yesterday. What you taking?

Frederika: What do you mean, Mr Paphner? We don't take steroids or anything like that. We're respectable business people.

J.P.: You lot're on to something - I can see that.

Al North: We just have a well-balanced diet.

Fay: Supposing - I say supposing - we did have some sort of a formula, it would be quite useless to you.

J.P.: Why?

Fay: You're not a trained chemist, Mr Paphner. The formula would be worthless without the person who invented it.

J.P.: That's all right. I'll take the person as well.

Fay: I have not heard you, Mr Paphner.

J.P.: You know, I've never been married. And yet most women'd jump at the chance. *(Doffs an imaginary hat.)* Why not join forces with the one and only J.P., the greatest space engineer there ever was - we'd sweep the board, me and you.

Fay: I am sorry, Mr Paphner, I ask you to put any such idea entirely out of your head.

J. P.: You aren't engaged, are you?

(FAY frowns but does not answer.)

Fay: If you'll excuse me, I've got some work to finish. *(Goes out.)*

J. P.: *(Looks after her and then at the others.)* I see - family don't think I'm good enough. Listen to me, folks. I make you your Health-and-Beauty-station, but in return I get the magic formula AND me and Miss North go waltzing up the aisle.

Al North: I am sorry, Mr J.P. but that is absolutely out of the question.

J. P.: All right. But then no Space-station. Think it over. *(J. P. exits.)*

Frederika: I'm a woman so I understand Fay's position. She doesn't want to get landed with a man she can't stand the sight of.

Jack: Oh, there's worse things in life can happen than that, much worse *(Raising voice.)* You got a print-out of those calculations, Lucky?

Lucky: *(Rushing forward and handing a sheet to JACK.)* Yes. There's absolutely no chance of him finishing the job within a year. He'd need at least a hundred

mega-robots to do that.

Frederika: But what's the good of a Space-station if it isn't finished?

Jack: *(Shrugs)* We get someone else to put the final touches. If not we sell it. So either way, we win.

Frederika: J.P. will cut up rough.

Jack: Helmut will be back from Mars by that time. Helmut will deal with him.

Freddy: Bit tough on J.P., isn't it?

Jack: Not really. He gains experience - that's what life is about, Freddy, gaining experience.

Al North: I don't think he rates any sympathy. He's doing all right.

Jack: No. We're the people that need sympathy. We're at the brink. The tax people have given us a year and that's it.

Al North: We'll keep 'em at bay, Jack!

Jack: Yes, But you can see why I'd like J.P. to show up with his ladders next Monday morning and get cracking.

Frederika: What are you going to say to Fay?

Jack: May not consult her at all.

Frederika: She's the one who developed the formula.

Jack: Yes, but we're a team. There's no divorce in this outfit.

(Moves towards FREDERIKA as if to put his arm round her but she withdraws with an expression of distaste.)

Jack: If the going gets too hot here, well, it's over to Five and three-quarters. So either way, we win.

Al North: That's the spirit, Jack. We'll show 'em.

Jack }

Al North } : *(Together)* We're not bothered by what's happening.

Freddy }

Al North: We're not bothered one bit.

Jack: And why aren't we bothered by all that's happening?

Al North: It's because

Freddy: we're used to sticking together, used to sticking together

Jack: AND when chaps like us keep sticking together

Jack }

Al North } : *(Together, linking arms)* Either way, we win. Either way, we win.

Freddy }

Same scene.

(JACK, FREDDY and AL NORTH are poring over photographs laid out on the table).

Jack: *(Holding up photograph)* I can't believe it - look at this, that guy's already completed the tropical rainforests of the Valheil World! There's enough crocodiles and alligators up there to fill Brazil.

Freddy: Where is he now?

Jack: Oh, gone out to stock up on ostriches or something. He's only down for the afternoon.

Al North: Maybe he's doing too well.

Jack: What do you mean?

Al North: He might actually meet the deadline.

Jack: No, no, that's out of the question. Lucky worked it out.

Al North: But I'm concerned about Fay.

Jack: Do you think I'm not? But, like I told you, he can't make that deadline. It's impossible. *(Slight pause.)* And look here, Al, supposing - I say supposing - he did finish by June the 30th, which we all know is impossible, would it be such a terrible thing to be married to a slap-up genius like that fellow?

Al North: Hum. I don't think we could make out on the Artificial World without Fay.

Jack: Why not?

Al North: The atmosphere would need checking, she'd have to top up the dosage from time to time. We need her there, Jack. We can't let her go.

Jack: *(Thinks)* So J.P. mustn't make that deadline. We let him go full steam and then, when he's nearly there - CRUNCH.

Al North: Yes, but how?

(Slight pause).

Freddy: There's one thing occurred to me - can I speak my mind?

Al North: Go ahead, Freddy, go ahead.

Freddy: I'd say it's a bit, well, suspicious, that he's doing as well as he is. Last night I met this guy works for Satellite News. And he said they've picked up some pictures showing an asteroid being built. But where? It sort of looked near - but he said it couldn't be in our system. They've checked everything up to the Sun.

Jack: It's what J.P. said, it's in Five and three quarters. It's sort of there and it isn't.

Freddy: Yes, butYou know what this guy said? They got these pictures, right,

and there were these robots, hundreds of them, robots like he'd never seen before.

Al North: Maybe it was aliens.

Freddy: No, he said they can tell. It was robots, nothing but robots in all directions. It was like ants - he said it was like big black ants crawling all over the place! A crater with great big ants crawling all over it!

(JACK and AL NORTH shake their heads in horror and stupefaction.)

Al North: I'm glad I didn't see them myself.

Freddy: But you know what I think? J.P.'s pulling a fast one - he's got hundreds of robots up there, not just one. That's why he's doing so well.

Jack: But if that's true, he's breaking the agreement.

Al North: Think we could get him on this?

Jack: Certainly could. Then we won't have to pay at all. Let's drink to that, boys! We'll get our asteroid AND we'll keep Fay and the magic formula as well.

Freddy: So either way, we win.

Jack: You've said it, Freddy boy!

Al North: *(Chanting)* We're not bothered by what's been happening

Jack: We're not bothered one bit -

Freddy: Ssssh!

(J. P. enters dressed as an astronaut. FREDERIKA enters from another door and looks over the photographs).

J.P.: Not bad, is it? Course, there isn't any atmosphere yet.

Frederika: I suppose the atmosphere is going to be added later?

J.P.: Yeah. I shall want Miss Fay up there to help me with that. Where is she?

Frederika: She's on an assignment.

J.P.: Always is when I'm here. You -

Jack: Mr Paphner, if you don't mind me asking, do you feel confident about meeting the deadline?

J.P.: Oh yeah. Way it's going at the moment, I'm actually ahead of schedule. I'm starting on Europe next week.

Frederika: Do I take it this is to be a miniature Earth, Mr Paphner?

J.P.: More or less. *(Slight pause.)* But there's no Himalayas.

Al North: *(Gesturing broadly)* We can live without the Himalayas.

Jack: We certainly can - one can live very well without any Himalayas at all. I've always said that. *(Slight pause.)* On the other hand You know, Mr Paphner, Freddy here has got a friend who works on Satellite News.

J.P.: (*Shrugs.*) So what? I've got hundreds.

Jack: Yes, but this friend of Freddy's - what was it he said?

Freddy: He said they picked up some shots of an asteroid being built. Couldn't work out where it was.

J.P.: (*Laughing*) Don't suppose they could! That's Five and three quarters for you!

Freddy: Yes, but there was something else. There seemed to be whole teams of robots carting around forests and hilltops.

J.P.: Could be.

Al North: We don't want to make you feel that we're looking over your shoulder, but wasn't there something in the agreement about not using robots?

J.P.: I'm allowed Sleafner and Sleafner is worth a thousand ordinary robots.

Al North: Maybe his brain is, but he hasn't got a thousand arms.

J.P.: Sleafner is a new sort of robot I've invented -- a virus robot. He can make copies of himself as many times as you like. And then he eats them all up again.

Jack: Is that so?

J.P.: (*Laughing*) Without a virus robot I wouldn't have had a chance in hell of finishing the world in the time limit. Well, if you'll excuse me, I reckon I must be getting back. Give my regards to Miss Fay.

(*J. P. exits. General consternation. A domestic or butler enters.*)

Domestic: There's a gentleman here to see you.

Jack: Oh, better show him in, I suppose.

(*A very tall, athletic looking man in a space suit enters.*)

All: Helmut!

Helmut: Al! Great to see you! (*Slaps AL NORTH on back and knocks him flying.*)
Freddy boy! How's it going? (*Slaps Freddy on back and nearly knocks him over.*)
Frederika! (*Embraces her.*)

(*FAY, hearing voices, re-enters from other door.*)

Helmut: Fay! You're looking more beautiful than ever! (*Embraces her.*) Well, it's great to be back! How's things down here since I left you?

Jack: Part good, part bad, Helmut. For the time being, the main thing is you're back!

Helmut: Gosh, you're all looking pretty good - I'd say you actually look younger than when I left!

Al North: Yes. We'll tell you about that in a minute.

Helmut: What's this - some sort of magic potion you've been taking?

Al North: *(Smiling)* Could be.

Helmut: All sounds very mysterious.

(While HELMUT is talking FREDERIKA, perhaps assisted by an AU PAIR, lays out food and drink on the table - not sandwiches, whole loaves of bread, whole hams and a vast tankard of beer).

Al North: You sorted things out up there, Helmut?

Helmut: *(Expansively)* Pretty well, pretty well. We've left a few guards and a patrol team just in case but basically the aliens are gone. They've had enough. Very nasty lot. I don't mind admitting they put the wind up me once or twice.

Freddy: No!

Helmut: Yes, Freddy. One time I was cornered in a canyon up on the west side of Mars and there were one, two, three, four aliens moving in. And those kind of aliens, they're really mean, not like those you get here or on the Moon. They're thirty feet high and they've got sort of razor teeth sticking out in front of them.

Freddy: No!

Helmut: Yes, Freddy, and they've eyes on stalks, they can revolve them, see in any direction. You can't sneak up on a Mars alien - they see you coming.

Freddy: But you dealt with them, Helmut.

Helmut: Had to - it was them or me. In that sort of situation the main thing is not to give them time to gang up on you, go for the most dangerous one first. You've got to pass to the attack straightaway - I'll show you. Here.

(HELMUT takes up a fighting posture. AL NORTH and JACK VALPA hastily move tables and chairs out of the way).

Helmut: I get out my boomerang gun and I let fly, and while I'm firing I'm flying through the air - less gravity on Mars you get me - and hrum! into one of them with my foot, and hrum! hrum! with my head into the other - and all this while I'm firing you get me. And well, I'm still here, you see the outcome.

Freddy: Fantastic!

Frederika: *(Indicating table spread with food)* I would have opened some champers but I know you don't care for it.

Helmut: *(Tucking in)* Quite right. I'm strictly a beer man. *(Swills down a*

tankard.) I wouldn't want to go on another mission like that again, I'm telling you. (*Helps himself to more beer.*) So, what's with you all down here? Valheil still up in the charts?

Jack: Afraid not, Helmut.

Helmut: What!

Al North: Yes, we didn't want to tell you before

Jack: (*Gravely*) Financially, we're in deep trouble, Helmut.

Helmut: That so?

Jack: B.I.G. is overtaking us. No one buys our lipstick or after shave any more.

Helmut: That IS bad.

Jack: Yes, and some stupid model is suing us for two million - says our stuff gave her pimples. Her fault for using the junk.

Frederika: Yes, but there's good news as well. Fay has made a brilliant discovery - she's developed a spray that will give you back your youth!

Helmut: Come on! Is that so, Fay?

Fay: (*Bashfully*) Yes, it is.

Helmut: But that's wonderful - give you back your youth! And that's why you're all looking so good. Give you back your youth! I don't think B.I.G. can come up with anything to equal that. But if that's so - you're laughing.

Al North: Yes, Helmut, but what's the point of being young if you're bankrupt and behind bars?

Helmut: Point taken. I should get out if I were you. Go to South America.

Jack: South America's not so safe as it used to be.

Helmut: Yeah. I know what you mean. Sort of global village. What you people need is a place all to yourselves.

Al North: We're having a place built actually - an asteroid.

Helmut: You're going to retire there?

Jack: If the going gets too rough, we're going to retire there.

Helmut: Uh-huh. (*Helps himself to more beer and picks up a whole ham and an entire cheese.*) Excuse me if I tuck in - but I'm still listening. Superspace doing it?

Jack: No. We've employed a fellow called Jake Paphner.

Helmut: J. P.? The Space-fixer?

Al North: That's right.

Helmut: That figures. And how's he doing?

Jack: Pretty well.

Helmut: So what's the problem?

Jack: We can't pay him. Or rather we don't want to.

Helmut: No one wants to foot a big bill like that. But after all a world is a world.

Al North: Yes, Helmut, but you don't know what he asked for.

Helmut: A billion?

Jack: No.

Helmut: Two?

Al North: No, Helmut.

Helmut: I'd say you'd have been better off with Superspace.

Al North: *(Moving over to stand with his arm round FAY.)* It's not so much the money. He wants my daughter!

Helmut: Of all the! He's got a nerve! I'll settle his hash for him!

Al North: Yes, Helmut, but there's an agreement - a legal agreement. If he finishes the world in time, we'll never see Fay again.

Helmut: *(Munching a whole loaf of bread and washing it down with a tankard of ale.)* DON'T panic. I've been in tight spots before. There's always a way.

Freddy: Helmut will find a way round it.

Helmut: Give me a night on this. But where's Lucky? Can't he help?

Jack: *(Looks at others.)* It's mainly his fault we're in such a spot.

Helmut: That so? Maybe I should go and pay him a visit.

(While rest of cast exit, HELMUT strides forward to the recess, pulls across the curtain revealing the wall-size giant computer with LUCKY LAFFERSON sitting in front of it. HELMUT stands over him).

Lucky: *(Not turning round, carries on computing.)* I heard you were back.

Helmut: Yeah, I'm back. *(Slight pause.)* What you got on there? Oh, Human vs. Alien - let's have a look. *(Sits down alongside LUCKY).*

Lucky: Hey! don't press that!

Helmut: These games are pretty feeble really - no alien would behave like that. I wish these guys would do a bit more research. *(Slight pause.)* Sorry not to have seen you at Jack's.

Lucky: I was tied up. I wanted to come but

Helmut: It's all right, I know

Lucky: Listen, Helmut, it wasn't my fault

Helmut: That's not what they told me. Hey! you're the alien, keep to your side of the field.

Lucky: Sorry.

Helmut: YOU were the one who brought J. P. into the deal.

Lucky: What's wrong with that? He's building the world, isn't he?

Helmut: At a price.

Lucky: Worlds are expensive bound to be

Helmut: I knock you out.

Lucky: You can't do that, I'm on my own territory, see It's in the rules
Helmut: Let you off for once. It was you said they ought to let him have his robot.
Lucky: Listen, Helmut, how do you expect me to know that Sleafner was a virus robot?
Helmut: I say you should have checked up.
Lucky: I'm into computers - not robots. Your go.
Helmut: Let's leave that. (*HELMUT stands in a menacing position towering over LUCKY*). So what you going to do about it?
Lucky: I well, I'm sorry for what's happened I really am.
Helmut: You find a way - because if Fay ever has to marry that jackass it'll be you that's fed to the aliens. And not in one of your games.
Lucky: Yes, but
Helmut: Any ideas? (*Folds arms.*) I'm waiting.
Lucky: But with Sleafner he'll meet that deadline - I can't stop him.
Helmut: Well, do something to Sleafner, then.
Lucky: I would if I could Sleafner's not an ordinary robot, he's a virus robot.
Helmut: Why not give him a taste of his own medicine?
Lucky: Who - J.P.?
Helmut: No, Sleafner.
Lucky: Hang on, you might have something there let's see, Sleafner is a VIRUS robot - I could give him a computer VIRUS! That's a great idea, Helmut.
Helmut: Well, you make sure it works. We'll have another round. I'll play the alien this time and you can be the space cop.
Lucky: All right.

Back to main set.

(FREDERIKA, FAY, FREDDY and AL NORTH rush in lugging suitcases around and packing stuff in crates. Sound of torrential rain).

Al North: When's Jack getting back?
Frederika: Soon. He's at a shareholders' meeting.
Al North: Humm. I don't envy him. He'll get soaked.
Frederika: I think it's easing up.
Al North: Not the storm on the Stock Market. You got everything ready, Frederika?
Frederika: More or less.

(Hammering on door).

Frederika: Who's that?

Freddy: Probably Helmut, I'll let him in.

Frederika: Oh!

(J. P. bursts into the room. FAY turns away and walks up the stairs).

J. P.: Hey! Don't run away I want to speak to you.

Fay: You'll have to excuse me, Mr Paphner I must get ready. *(Exits upstairs).*

J. P.: *(Hesitates, not sure whether to follow her. Decides against it.)* What's going on here? You lot taking a holiday?

Frederika: We're going to have a look at the beautiful artificial world you made for us.

J. P.: And you haven't finished paying for.

Al North: That's enough, Mr Paphner - we've given you your expenses.

Freddy: AND 25% shares in our company.

J. P.: Yeah. *(Takes out newspaper from his pocket which he holds up. The headline in very large print is: COSMETICS GIANT CRASHES).* Those shares you gave me are worth about a penny each.

Al North: It's not our fault if the shareholders panicked.

J. P.: Listen. I want Ms North and I want that formula.

Frederika: But, Mr Paphner, the world you built has not been completed.

J. P.: What d'you mean? There's everything there well, except for China and Siberia...

Al North: AND a dimension valve.

J.P.: So what?

Freddy: Ah, but a dimension valve is an absolutely essential item when it comes to artificial worlds.

Al North: Well said, Freddy boy.

J. P.: Grr! I'd have finished the thing if Sleafner hadn't got a bout of measles. Can't understand who he caught it from. *(Looks around).* I wonder *(Advances on FREDERIKA and AL NORTH in a menacing fashion).* Listen. You just gimme Fay and gimme the formula

Helmut: *(From doorway.)* Take it easy, J. P.

(J. P. turns round abruptly to see HELMUT in Space-police uniform with a laser-gun in his hand).

Helmut: This guy causing you any trouble, Frederika?

J. P.: Just keep out of this, Helmut. I've got the law on my side.

Helmut: I'm not so sure about that. You've been paid.

J.P.: Yeah. Peanuts. *(Throws down handfuls of shares).* Have some more.
(Throws down other packets). I'm giving 'em away.

Frederika: We can hardly be held responsible for the changes on the Stock Market.

Al North: Tough luck, old chap.

J. P.: I'll sue. I'll take you to Court.

Helmut: I wouldn't advise you to do that, J. P. I've been having a look at your file - you signed a contract with B.I.G. about a year ago, didn't you?

Al North: What! Worked for B.I.G.! We never knew that!

J. P.: Why shouldn't I? I work for who pays - or promises to.

Helmut: Yes, J.P., but there was a secret clause in that deal, wasn't there? They knew Ms North was working on something important and they told you they'd pay you anything you wanted if you got hold of that formula.

Al North: Disgusting!

Freddy: That's spying!

J. P.: You can't prove this.

Helmut: I think I can. And that's not all. I have no doubts that your feelings for Ms North are sincere, but you're not in any position to offer marriage.

J. P.: Why not?

Helmut: Because you're married already!

Frederika: What a disgrace! Really, Mr Paphner

J. P.: Oh, her she doesn't count I'm getting a divorce. *(Raising voice)* I'm getting a divorce, I tell you.

(Sound of door being slammed and JACK VALPA comes rushing in. Sound of angry voices offstage).

Jack: Just in time. Nearly got lynched Listen, folks, we've got to get out Best thing is to go straight to the Valheil World *(Stops short as he catches sight of J.P.).* You here?

J. P.: Yeah. I'm here. Thanks for your shares.

(HELMUT steps forward to interpose between J. P. and JACK).

Helmut: J.P., it's time you went.

J. P.: *(Hesitates but eventually decides his best option is to leave. Starts backing out.)* All right, all right. But I'll get the last laugh. You won't be able to get into the world without me. And even if you do, I'll tell you something else. Without a dimension valve the Valheil World will blow up. It might last two years, might last twenty, but it'll blow up - and you with it! You'll be burned

alive! Fat lot of good your health and strength will be to you, then!
Burned alive

Helmut: That's enough, J. P.

(J. P. exits shaking his fist).

Jack: Thanks a lot, Helmut. But we've got to get out.

(Sound of hammering outside).

Jack: That's not J.P., it's them

Al North: Who's them?

Jack: The shareholders. And the taxmen are with them followed by the Receiver himself. They're all mad at us. Everyone here? Where's Fay?

Frederika: Upstairs getting ready.

Jack: The twins and Gemma?

Frederika: They're ready.

Jack: They know where we're going to?

Frederika: Sort of. They think it's part of a computer game.

Jack: What about Lucky?

Frederika: We don't really want Lucky on the Valheil World, do we?

Al North: He DID give Slepner the computer bug, you know. He got us out of a pile of trouble. Who's that?

(A ridiculous figure in old clothes climbs through the window. HELMUT at once goes up to him).

Man (Lucky): Don't shoot, it's me - Lucky. Yes, I had to disguise myself as a shareholder.

Jack: All right. There's no time to lose. You'd better come with us now you're here.

Lucky: Where are you off to?

Jack: The Valheil World of Health and Strength, of course.

Al North: The place where no one gets old.

Freddy: No one gets sick.

Jack: And where there's no auditors and no shareholders.

Lucky: How are you going to get there?

Jack: Drive to Heathrow Then we'll hire a spaceship. *(Stops as if struck by a thought).* But I've just thought of something This is terrible

Frederika: What's the matter?

Jack: The world is in Five and three-quarters no spaceship would ever get into it

(Sound of hammering and bursts of shotgun fire).

Helmut: It's all right, I'll keep them at bay.

Al North: You coming with us, Helmut?

Helmut: Why not? I'll give it a try.

Jack: Yes, but we've got to get into dimension five and three-quarters

Freddy: Don't I remember J. P. saying something about flashing a laser beam?

Lucky: Yes, that's right. A rainbow laser beam - that's the way into Dimension Five and three-quarters. And as it happens *(Takes a torch out of his pocket and flashes a beam of light which has all the colours of the rainbow. Sensation. Turns it off).*

Lucky: Oh, I made a copy of J.P.'s laser torch - thought it might come in useful.

Al North: So everything's gonna be all right then.

Lucky: Everything's gonna be all right.

(FAY appears looking like a goddess, all in white and holding an enormous can of Youth and Health Spray. Cheers).

Jack: It's Fay - the inventor of the Valheil Youth and Health Spray!

Al North: The greatest discovery made by mankind!

Frederika: And now she's going to lead us to the Valheil World!

Freddy: We're different from the rest of them.

Jack: Everyone will be happy when we get up there.

(CHAUFFEUR in livery appears from offstage left).

Chauffeur: The cars are waiting, madam.

Jack: *(Shouting.)* Helmut, you'd better come back now.

(All cast start moving off in procession led by FAY who walks as if in a trance. JACK, AL NORTH and FREDDY follow with HELMUT, continually looking over his shoulder with his laser-gun pointing, bringing up the rear).

Jack: Everything's going to be OK from now on.

Al North: Nobody will ever grow old.

Freddy: Nobody'll ever get ill.

Jack: Nobody'll ever die.

Al North: *(To audience, waving)* We'll be on a different level from the rest of you.

Jack: *(To audience, waving)* We'll be like the gods.

Freddy: *(To audience, waving)* Think of that.

Helmut: *(To audience, waving)* Like the gods. Like the Norse gods.

CURTAIN or BLACKOUT as all disappear one by one offstage, waving to audience.

EPILOGUE

(for use with younger audience)

(After applause has died away and cast has exited, LUCKY LAFFERSON reappears holding a large can of hairspray.)

Lucky: *(To Audience)* You thought this was all a joke, didn't you? But we've also got some stuff with a reverse effect. *(Brandishing can)* So, I hope you all had a good look at yourselves in the mirror before you came out, because what you'll see tomorrow **WON'T BE THE SAME!** *(Squirts water at audience and rushes off laughing.)*

CURTAIN

