Acting Edition

The Phantom Tollbooth

by Susan Nanus

Based on the book
by Norton Juster

SAMUEL FRENCH

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Maximum of 37 roles for 19 performers.

THE CLOCK

MILO – a boy

THE WHETHER MAN

SIX LETHARGARIANS

TOCK – the Watchdog (same as The Clock)

AZAZ THE UNABRIDGED – King of Dictionopolis

THE MATHEMAGICIAN – King of Digitopolis

PRINCESS SWEET RHYME

PRINCESS PURE REASON

GATEKEEPER OF DICTIONOPOLIS

THREE WORD MERCHANTS

THE LETTERMAN – Fourth word merchant

SPELLING BEE

THE HUMBUG

THE DUKE OF DEFINITION

THE MINISTER OF MEANING

THE EARL OF ESSENCE

THE COUNT OF CONNOTATION

THE UNDERSECRETARY OF UNDERSTANDING

A PAGE

KAKAFONOUS A. DISCHORD – Doctor of Dissonance

THE AWFUL DYNNE

THE DODECAHEDRON

MINERS OF THE NUMBERS MINE

THE EVERPRESENT WORDSNATCHER

THE TERRIBLE TRIVIUM

THE DEMON OF INSINCERITY

THE SENSES TAKER

SUGGESTED DOUBLING-UP OF ROLES

The six Lethargarians may serve as a chorus that plays all the smaller roles throughout the play. I would suggest that the Ministers of King Azaz's Cabinet be played by separate actors, but they also, may be played by the Lethargarian chorus.

Several other small parts may be played by the same actor, as well. The following is a suggested division of roles:

THE CLOCK / TOCK . . . . . 1 actor

MILO . . . . . 1 actor

THE WHETHER MAN / GATEKEEPER OF DICTIONOPOLIS / THE DODECAHEDRON . . . . . 1 actor

LETHARGARIAN #1 / WORD MERCHANT #1 / THE EVERPRESENT WORDSNATCHER . . . . . 1 actor

LETHARGARIAN #2 / WORD MERCHANT #2 / THE TERRIBLE TRIVIUM . . . . . 1 actor

LETHARGARIAN #3 / WORD MERCHANT #3 / THE DEMON OF INSINCERITY . . . . . 1 actor

LETHARGARIAN #4 / THE LETTERMAN / THE SENSES TAKER . . . . . 1 actor

LETHARGARIAN #5 / SPELLING BEE / A DEMON . . . . . 1 actor

LETHARGARIAN #6 / A PAGE / THE AWFUL DYNNE . . . . . 1 actor

AZAZ THE UNABRIDGED . . . . . 1 actor

THE MATHEMAGICIAN . . . . . 1 actor

PRINCESS SWEET RHYME . . . . . 1 actor

PRINCESS PURE REASON . . . . . 1 actor

THE HUMBUG . . . . . 1 actor

THE DUKE OF DEFINITION / KAKAFONOUS A. DISCHORD . . . . . 1 actor

THE MINISTER OF MEANING / A NUMBERS MINER . . . . . 1 actor

THE EARL OF ESSENCE / A NUMBERS MINER . . . . . 1 actor

THE COUNT OF CONNOTATION, A NUMBERS MINER . . . . . 1 actor

THE UNDERSECRETARY OF UNDERSTANDING / A NUMBERS MINER . . . . . 1 actor

THE SET

It is recommended that the setting be either a platform set, employing vertical pipes from which banners, etc., are hung for various scenes, or a book set, with the spine UC, the leaves of the book being painted drops which are turned like book leaves whenever the scene changes.

The settings should be impressionistic rather than realistic:

1. Milo's bedroom – with shelves, pennants, pictures on the wall, as well as suggestions of the characters of the Land of Wisdom.

2. The road to the Land of Wisdom – a forest, from which the Whether Man and the Lethargarians emerge.

3. Dictionopolis – a marketplace full of open air stalls as well as little shops. Letters and signs should abound. There may be street signs and lamp posts in the shapes of large letters (large O's and Q's) and all windows and doors can be in the shape of H's and A's.

4. Digitopolis – a dark, glittering place without trees or greenery, but full of shining rocks and cliffs, with hundreds of numbers shining everywhere. When the scene change is made to the Mathemagician's room, set pieces are simply carried in from the wings.

5. The Land of Ignorance – a grey, gloomy place full of cliffs and caves, with frightening faces. Different levels and heights should be suggested through one or two platforms or risers, with a set of stairs that lead to the castle in the air.

Pantomime and simple placards can be effective in the setting of a scene. Lighting is also important in helping differentiate one place from another.

Props and scenery should be two-dimensional and very colorful in order to give the effect of an imaginary place.

STAGE EFFECTS

The following are some suggestions as to how to create certain stage effects:

1. The movement of Milo's car can be simulated by setting the car in a permanent or fixed position and having the characters pantomime the movement of travel. They can sway, swing back and forth, and bump up and down to create the idea of riding in a car.

2. The appearance of the Awful Dynne can occur in the wagon, so that Dynne merely pops out after the explosion. Or smoke can actually be used so that Dynne steps forward from the smoke.

3. All the sounds of Dr. Dischord can be recorded on tape.

4. The attack of the Demons can be staged by using real actors who chase the heroes through the audience; or by projecting slides all over the walls of the theatre, accompanied by recorded sound effects; or through a pantomimed reaction by the heroes to what they see; or any other way the director can invent. The more invention in this play, the more fun.

ACT I

Scene One

(The stage is completely dark and silent. Suddenly the sound of someone winding an alarm clock is heard, and after that, the sound of loud ticking is heard.)

(Lights up on the **CLOCK***, a huge alarm clock. The* **CLOCK** *reads 4:00. The lighting should make it appear that the* **CLOCK** *is suspended in mid-air (if possible). The* **CLOCK** *ticks for thirty seconds.)*

CLOCK. See that! Half a minute gone by. Seems like a long time when you're waiting for something to happen, doesn't it? Funny thing is, time can pass very slowly or very fast, and sometimes even both at once. The time now? Oh, a little after 4, but what that means should depend on you. Too often, we do something simply because time tells us to. Time for school, time for bed, whoops, 12:00, time to be hungry. It can get a little silly, don't you think? Time is important, but it's what you do with it that makes it so. So my advice to you is to use it. Keep your eyes open and your ears perked. Otherwise it will pass before you know it, and you'll certainly have missed something!

Things have a habit of doing that, you know.

Being here one minute and gone the next.

In the twinkling of an eye.

In a jiffy.

In a flash!

I know a girl who yawned and missed a whole summer vacation. And what about that caveman who took a nap one afternoon, and woke up to find himself completely alone. You see, while *he* was sleeping, someone had invented the wheel and everyone had moved to the suburbs. And then of course, there is Milo.

> *(Lights up to reveal* **MILO***'s bedroom. The* **CLOCK** *appears to be on a shelf in the room of a young boy – a room filled with books, toys, games, maps, papers, pencils, a bed, a desk. There is a dartboard with numbers and the face of the* **MATHEMAGICIAN***, a bedspread made from* **KING AZAZ***'s cloak, a kite looking like the* **SPELLING BEE***, a punching bag with the* **HUMBUG***'s face, as well as records, a television, a toy car, and a large box that is wrapped and has an envelope taped to the top. The sound of footsteps is heard, and then enter* **MILO** *dejectedly. He throws down his books and coat, flops into a chair, and sighs loudly.)*

Who never knows what to do with himself – not just sometimes, but always. When he's in school, he wants to be out, and when he's out, he wants to be in.

> *(During the following speech,* **MILO** *examines the various toys, tools, and other possessions in the room, trying them out and rejecting them.)*

Wherever he is, he wants to be somewhere else – and when he gets there, so what. Everything is too much trouble or a waste of time. Books – he's already read them. Games – boring. TV – dumb. So what's left? Another long, boring afternoon. Unless he bothers to notice a very large package that happened to arrive today.

MILO. *(Suddenly notices the package. He drags himself over to it, and disinterestedly reads the label.)* "For Milo, who has plenty of time." Well, that's true.

(Sighs and looks at it.)

No.

(Walks away.)

Well...

(Comes back. Rips open envelope and reads.)

A VOICE. "One genuine turnpike tollbooth, easily assembled at home for use by those who have never traveled in lands beyond."

MILO. Beyond what?

(Continues reading.)

A VOICE. "This package contains the following items:"

*(***MILO** *pulls the items out of the box and sets them up as they are mentioned.)*

"One (1) genuine turnpike tollbooth to be erected according to directions. Three (3) precautionary signs to be used in a precautionary fashion. Assorted coins for paying tolls. One (1) map, strictly up to date, showing how to get from here to there. One (1) book of rules and traffic regulations which may not be bent or broken. Warning! Results are not guaranteed. If not perfectly satisfied, your wasted time will be refunded."

MILO. *(Skeptically.)* Come off it, who do you think you're kidding?

(Walks around and examines tollbooth.)

What am I supposed to do with this?

(The ticking of the **CLOCK** *grows loud and impatient.)*

Well...what else do I have to do.

*(***MILO** *gets into his toy car and drives up to the first sign. Note: The car may be an actual*

toy car propelled by pedals or a small motor, or simply a cardboard imitation that Milo can fit into, and move by walking.)

A VOICE. "HAVE YOUR DESTINATION IN MIND."

MILO. *(Pulls out the map.)* Now, let's see. That's funny. I never heard of any of these places. Well, it doesn't matter anyway. Dictionopolis. That's a weird name. I might as well go there.

(Begins to move, following map. Drives off.)

CLOCK. See what I mean? You never know how things are going to get started. But when you're bored, what you need more than anything is a rude awakening.

(The alarm goes off very loudly as the stage darkens. The sound of the alarm is transformed into the honking of a car horn, and is then joined by the blasts, bleeps, roars and growls of heavy highway traffic. When the lights come up, **MILO***'s bedroom is gone and we see a lonely road in the middle of nowhere.)*

Scene Two
The Road to Dictionopolis

(Enter **MILO** *in his car.)*

MILO. This is weird! I don't recognize any of this scenery at all.

(A sign is held up before **MILO***, startling him.)*

Huh? *(Reads.)* WELCOME TO EXPECTATIONS. INFORMATION, PREDICTIONS AND ADVICE CHEERFULLY OFFERED. PARK HERE AND BLOW HORN.

*(***MILO** *blows horn.)*

WHETHER MAN. *(A little man wearing a long coat and carrying an umbrella pops up from behind the sign that he was holding. He speaks very fast and excitedly.)* My, my, my, my, my, welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome to the Land of Expectations, Expectations, Expectations! We don't get many travelers these days; we certainly don't get many travelers. Now what can I do for you? I'm the Whether Man.

MILO. *(Referring to map.)* Uh…is this the right road to Dictionopolis?

WHETHER MAN. Well now, well now, well now, I don't know of any *wrong* road to Dictionopolis, so if this road goes to Dictionopolis at all, it must be the right road, and if it doesn't, it must be the right road to somewhere else, because there are no wrong roads to anywhere. Do you think it will rain?

MILO. I thought you were the Weather Man.

WHETHER MAN. Oh, no, I'm the Whether Man, not the weather man.

(Pulls out a sign or opens a flap of his coat, which reads: "WHETHER.")

After all, it's more important to know whether there will be weather than what the weather will be.

MILO. What kind of place is Expectations?

WHETHER MAN. Good question, good question! Expectations is the place you must always go to before you get to where you are going. Of course, some people never go beyond Expectations, but my job is to hurry them along whether they like it or not. Now what else can I do for you?

(Opens his umbrella.)

MILO. I think I can find my own way.

WHETHER MAN. Splendid, splendid, splendid! Whether or not you find your own way, you're bound to find some way. If you happen to find my way, please return it. I lost it years ago. I imagine by now it must be quite rusty. You did say it was going to rain, didn't you?

(Escorts **MILO** *to the car under the open umbrella.)*

I'm glad you made your own decision. I do so hate to make up my mind about anything, whether it's good or bad, up or down, rain or shine. Expect everything, I always say, and the unexpected never happens. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, good…

(A loud clap of thunder is heard.)

Oh dear!

(He looks up at the sky, puts out his hand to feel for rain, and runs away. **MILO** *watches puzzledly and drives on.)*

MILO. I'd better get out of Expectations, but fast. Talking to a guy like that all day would get me nowhere for sure.

(He tries to speed up, but finds instead that he is moving slower and slower.)

Oh, oh, now what?

(He can barely move. Behind **MILO**, *the* **LETHARGARIANS** *begin to enter from all parts of the stage. They are dressed to blend in with the scenery and carry small pillows that look*

like rocks. Whenever they fall asleep, they rest on the pillows.)

Now I really am getting nowhere. I hope I didn't take a wrong turn.

(The car stops. He tries to start it. It won't move. He gets out and begins to tinker with it.)

I wonder where I am.

LETHARGARIAN #1. You're…in…the… Dol…drums…

*(***MILO** *looks around.)*

LETHARGARIAN #2. Yes…the… Dol…drums…

(A yawn is heard.)

MILO. *(Yelling.)* WHAT ARE THE DOLDRUMS?

LETHARGARIAN #3. The Doldrums, my friend, are where nothing ever happens and nothing ever changes.

(Parts of the scenery stand up or **SIX PEOPLE** *come out of the scenery colored in the same colors of the trees or the road. They move very slowly and as soon as they move, they stop to rest again.)*

Allow me to introduce all of us. We are the Lethargarians at your service.

MILO. *(Uncertainly.)* Very pleased to meet you. I think I'm lost. Can you help me?

LETHARGARIAN #4. Don't say think.

(He yawns.)

It's against the law.

LETHARGARIAN #1. No one's allowed to think in the Doldrums.

(He falls asleep.)

LETHARGARIAN #2. Don't you have a rule book? It's local ordinance 175389-J.

(He falls asleep.)

MILO. *(Pulls out rule book and reads.)* Ordinance 175389-J: "It shall be unlawful, illegal and unethical to think, think of thinking, surmise, presume, reason, meditate or speculate while in the Doldrums. Anyone breaking this law shall be severely punished." That's a ridiculous law! Everybody thinks.

LETHARGARIANS. We don't!

LETHARGARIAN #2. And the most of the time, you don't, that's why you're here. You weren't thinking and you weren't paying attention either. People who don't pay attention often get stuck in the Doldrums. Face it, most of the time, you're just like us.

(Falls, snoring, to the ground. **MILO** *laughs.)*

LETHARGARIAN #5. Stop that at once. Laughing is against the law. Don't you have a rule book? It's local ordinance 574381-W.

MILO. *(Opens rule book and reads.)* "In the Doldrums, laughter is frowned upon and smiling is permitted only on alternate Thursdays." Well, if you can't laugh or think, what can you do?

LETHARGARIAN #6. Anything as long as it's nothing, and everything as long as it isn't anything. There's lots to do. We have a very busy schedule…

LETHARGARIAN #1. At 8:00 we get up and then we spend from 8 to 9 daydreaming.

LETHARGARIAN #2. From 9:00 to 9:30 we take our early midmorning nap…

LETHARGARIAN #3. From 9:30 to 10:30 we dawdle and delay…

LETHARGARIAN #4. From 10:30 to 11:30 we take our late early morning nap…

LETHARGARIAN #5. From 11:30 to 12:00 we bide our time and then we eat our lunch.

LETHARGARIAN #6. From 1:00 to 2:00 we linger and loiter…

LETHARGARIAN #1. From 2:00 to 2:30 we take our early afternoon nap…

LETHARGARIAN #2. From 2:30 to 3:30 we put off for tomorrow what we could have done today...

LETHARGARIAN #3. From 3:30 to 4:00 we take our early late afternoon nap...

LETHARGARIAN #4. From 4:00 to 5:00 we loaf and lounge until dinner...

LETHARGARIAN #5. From 6:00 to 7:00 we dillydally...

LETHARGARIAN #6. From 7:00 to 8:00 we take our early evening nap and then for an hour before we go to bed, we waste time.

LETHARGARIAN #1. *(Yawning.)* You see, it's really quite strenuous doing nothing all day long, and so once a week, we take a holiday and go nowhere.

LETHARGARIAN #5. Which is just where we were going when you came along. Would you care to join us?

MILO. *(Yawning.)* That's where I seem to be going, anyway. *(Stretching.)* Tell me, does everyone here do nothing?

LETHARGARIAN #3. Everyone but the terrible watchdog. He's always sniffing around to see that nobody wastes time. A most unpleasant character.

MILO. The Watchdog?

LETHARGARIAN #6. THE WATCHDOG!

LETHARGARIANS. *(Yelling at once.)* RUN! WAKE UP! RUN! HERE HE COMES! THE WATCHDOG!

(They all run off and enter a **LARGE DOG** *with the head, feet, and tail of a dog, and the body of a clock, having the same face as the character* **THE CLOCK**.*)*

TOCK. What are you doing here?

MILO. Nothing much. Just killing time. You see...

TOCK. KILLING TIME!

(His alarm rings in fury.)

It's bad enough wasting time without killing it. What are you doing in the Doldrums, anyway? Don't you have anywhere to go?

MILO. I think I was on my way to Dictionopolis when I got stuck here. Can you help me?

TOCK. Help you! You've got to help yourself. I suppose you know why you got stuck.

MILO. I guess I just wasn't thinking.

TOCK. Precisely. Now you're on your way.

MILO. I am?

TOCK. Of course. Since you got here by not thinking, it seems reasonable that in order to get out, you must *start* thinking. Do you mind if I get in? I love automobile rides.

(He gets in. They wait.)

Well?

MILO. All right. I'll try.

(Screws up his face and thinks.)

Are we moving?

TOCK. Not yet. Think harder.

MILO. I'm thinking as hard as I can.

TOCK. Well, think just a little harder than that. Come on, you can do it.

MILO. All right, all right... I'm thinking of all the planets in the solar system, and why water expands when it turns to ice, and all the words that begin with "Q" and...

(The wheels begin to move.)

We're moving! We're moving!

TOCK. Keep thinking.

MILO. *(Thinking.)* How a steam engine works and how to bake a pie and the difference between Farenheit and Centigrade...

TOCK. Dictionopolis, here we come.

MILO. Hey, Watchdog, are you coming along?

TOCK. You can call me Tock, and keep your eyes on the road.

MILO. What kind of place is Dictionopolis, anyway?