

ACT ONE

A Public Meeting - There is a lectern at the front and Arrowsmith is addressing the audience directly. He is giving a lecture about his prospective expedition and can read from notes.

ARROWSMITH: So, ladies and gentlemen, the supply depots are in place and we have established bases one and two; the essential foundations for when we make our dash for the pole. You can play your part in making this age, the Edwardian age, the greatest that this country has ever known. For my part, I can promise you that your money will go straight to the front-line of the expedition. Just one guinea from you, can finance a pair of tweeds. Indeed even one shilling can keep an explorer's pipe burning for one whole week. With our patriotism, endeavour and fortitude and YOUR money we can plant our flag at the South Pole. I thank you for your attention (*He looks around and then steps back from addressing the audience, finally spotting Jangles who has entered rather tentatively*) Jangles, as I live and breathe, what are you doing here. (*They embrace*) My dear, dear boy. Let's have a look at you man. (*Holds him away from himself for a moment and looks him up and down*) that lard and seal oil diet is doing you the world of good. You'll soon be fit for the South Pole.

JANGLES: (*He is pleased to see him, but obviously has something on his mind*) Dickie

ARROWSMITH: Yes Bo, what is it. Spit it out man.

JANGLES: It's the Pole sir

ARROWSMITH: The Pole?

JANGLES: Yes sir (*Hesitantly*) Another attempt has been announced. They are ready to go.

ARROWSMITH: (*Slowly as it sinks in*) My God. My God. I didn't think that anyone would be ready so soon (*Pauses*) That has fair taken the wind out of my sails. (*Pause*) Well fair-play. We should take our hats off to them. They are brave and courageous men.

JANGLES: (*Looking around as if he has heard murmuring*) I think that word is out in the room

ARROWSMITH: It doesn't take long for good news to spread

JANGLES: (*Surprised*) Good news sir?

ARROWSMITH: Let us not be churlish, Bo. Captain Scott is a fine ambassador for the nation, I do not doubt that he will lead a well-organised

expedition

JANGLES: Oh no. Not Captain Scott, Sir. (*Pauses for a moment*) I am sorry to report that it's the Norwegians

ARROWSMITH: Norwegians (*He is horrified*) Are you sure?

JANGLES: Positive, sir. Their ship is ready to sail.

ARROWSMITH: (*Slowly*) My God.

JANGLES: And what's more, they say that the expedition should be comparatively easy.

ARROWSMITH: (*Interrupts, he is greatly pained by this latest comment*) Don't tell me any more

JANGLES: There will be other expeditions won't there, Sir?

ARROWSMITH: (*Slowly smiles. He is touched by Jangles loyalty*) Oh Bo. My dear loyal Bo

JANGLES: There will be though. Won't there? You know 'Arrows and Jangles' like the old days?

ARROWSMITH: (*He resumes his place at the lectern to address the audience*) Gentlemen. Gentlemen if I can have your attention please (*The imagined murmur of voices dies down*) I understand news has reached the hall of the Norwegian attempt to bag the pole. We must congratulate them as they have out-flanked us good and proper and have prepared their expedition in no time at all. (*He pauses*) People will ask if I am downhearted and I say.. (*He pauses and looks across to JANGLES, he is nodding his head, smiling encouragingly and trying to calm his nerves*) I say, no, not one bit. (*He behaves as if there have been murmurs of approbation from the audience*) In fact, absolutely not. (*He is gaining confidence and getting a bit carried away*) I was thinking that the South Pole might be a little easy anyway. (*He is trying to think on his feet*) I was thinking of an altogether more worthwhile expedition. An expedition to (*Clearly hasn't thought of anywhere yet*) an expedition to... to the very....very... centre ofthe centre of the Earth. (*Suddenly there is 'complete silence' in the room and mystification on the face of Jangles*).

JANGLES: (*After a pause*) Are you sure, sir?

ARROWSMITH: Oh yes. The Centre of the Earth (*Growing enthusiastic now*) The planning I have made on the nursery slopes of the South Pole will be invaluable. (*He presses on clearly having done no research*). They talk of iguanas and ... and..earth worms down there and I

say to you 'No' that there are no such creatures. Well, not big ones in any case. They talk of fire-breathing pterodactyls, I say to you, bring them on. *(He is now behaving like an orator at a large political rally)* We shall be prepared. We will probably need more lightweight clothing than I have packed. Maybe maybe... some chinos. I don't expect we will need the snow shoes, maybe we will need a few more shovels andthings like that, but these are minor alterations, I do not suppose that South Georgia is so very different from... from... wherever we decide to start from. So, the core of the Earth is our target and where there is a goal, the British excel. *(Pauses)* I shall equip the expedition and we shall be ready to leave on..... on..... Tuesday *(He proclaims the last sentence with enthusiasm and great volume and exits leaving Jangles alone on stage)*

JANGLES: *(Rather pensively addressing the audience)* I wondered if Tuesday might be a bit soon. But such was the excitement that I went along with it. A ship was chartered: *The Abominable*. Constructed for the whalers of the Arctic, by shipbuilders who knew how to make ships to withstand the pack ice. For, that was the funny thing: although we were bound for the centre of the Earth, it would be from Iceland that we would gain entry.

FIRST MATE OF THE ABOMINABLE enters he is doing something nautical in the background

JANGLES: On the short build up to the voyage, we found out what we could about what we were to face down there. The Earth has a crust, maybe 25 miles thick, something like that. Then, under the crust there is an area that is many hundreds of times thicker and prone to high temperatures. How high these temperatures are, and what we will face, no one yet knows. It was to be a journey to the centre of the planet, to the very Core if that is possible, certainly deeper than anyone has been before. *(Up to now he has been talking to the audience directly, he now turns his attention to helping THE FIRST MATE load the ship)*

JANGLES: *(To first mate)* Shovels *(Passes him the crate)*

FIRST MATE: *(As if checking off an imaginary list takes the crate and repeats)*
Shovels

JANGLES: *(Back to addressing the audience)* Our studies revealed that there had been a few expeditions to the core but none have been fully successful. *(He counts them on his fingers)* The Blencowe expedition, the Arne Sagnussen expedition. These were fine attempts but not to the centre. Most recently the Otto Lidenbrock attempt, he was a fine scholar and geologist, but he never made the core. Now, we too may not make the core, but it is the boss's intention to go deeper, and further in, than all before us. *(Now*

talking to the first mate who had been waiting a bit impatiently for the next item) Ox-Tail soup (Passes him the crate)

FIRST MATE: *(Again checking off an imaginary list. He takes the crate and repeats) Ox-tail soup*

JANGLES: *(Back to addressing the audience) Before we left, a reception was hastily arranged with the King of England himself.*

FIRST MATE: *(Finally articulating his irritation) Come on you land-lubber, we ain't left Portsmouth yet.*

JANGLES: *(Ignoring the Mate) The King gave the expedition his blessing but he had one proviso, that we took a German soldier with us. (He picks up a small crate to pass to THE MATE) The situation in Europe was very uncertain - something of a..... powder keg (Says this loudly as he passes the crate to THE FIRST MATE)*

FIRST MATE: *(Again checking off an imaginary list. He takes the crate and repeats) Powder keg*

JANGLES: *(Back to addressing the audience) The king wanted to do something to placate the Germans. Dickie was unsure about this, but the King assured us that it will be alright, (He picks up a small crate to pass to THE MATE) He said, don't be stupid Dick (Says this loudly as he passes the crate to THE FIRST MATE)*

FIRST MATE: *(Again checking off an imaginary list. He takes the crate and repeats) Stupid Dick*

JANGLES: *The King told us that The Kaiser had promised to send one of his very best men, apparently the one that they had one in mind speaks perfect English. I am sure that we can knock him into shape.*

EDWINA enters as the other two fade into the background. She is alone holding a letter and carrying a cardboard box

EDWINA: *(Reading the letter out loud) My dearest sister, we have arrived safely in Iceland from Portsmouth. I will never forget that first view of the Icelandic coast. The whole crew gathered on deck and there was a round of applause. (In the background JANGLES and The MATE start cheering clapping and whooping. After a moment EDWINA glares at them and they stop and exit looking a little dejected. She continues) My knowledge of Iceland is limited. All I know about it, apart from all the eskimos, is that they earn their living from the endless supply of whales that live up there. My men all seem to be ready for the challenge and already we have found the ideal opening to commence our descent near Mount Hekla. This is a volcano. You may now open the box. (EDWINA*

reaches into the box and takes out an incredibly crude papier mache model of a volcano) This detailed model of the volcano was built by Bo and will give you some idea of what we now have to face. Hekla is a lively blighter and has erupted as recently as fifty years ago. We searched the mound until we found a crevasse and then, as quick as how's your father, we were in (*She blushes and looks embarrassed at the vaguely suggestive language, and pauses*).

Despite our destination being the centre of the Earth, our route will not be straight down. You need to understand that as the Earth cooled down it cracked and shrivelled like a nut. My dear, please look in the box again... (*EDWINA reaches into the box and this time pulls out a coconut, she holds it up and looks a bit perplexed*) the shrinking of the 'nut-like' Earth has left fissures and tunnels, all are possible routes for us to take. Careful selection is required and it may take many false starts before we are truly under way. We have started on the rations that will now be our lot until the core has been reached. We start each day with a slice of pie followed by a banana. Still, we try to keep our spirits up.

And the men? Well they are fit for purpose, each of them in their own way. As my immediate lieutenants I have two excellent specimens.

Of course there is Jangles (*As he says his name JANGLES steps forward to the front of the stage into the light*)

Bo has been as invaluable to me as ever. But you know Jangles of old. In a tight spot it would be to Bo that I would turn every time. He is as valuable to me as a thousand huskies. (*Pauses*) although, in fairness, a husky would be of little use at the core of the Earth.

Then there is Von Schultz, for that is the name of the German soldier.

(*As he mentions VON SCHULTZ she steps forward to the front of the stage to join JANGLES and stares into the audience in a heroic stance, albeit with something of a sneer on her face, for the duration of Arrowsmith's description*)

As with Bo, Von Schultz has served in Southern Africa although not, I fear, fighting on the same side. There is another aspect to Rita Von Schultz that I had not been expecting, she...well, she is a woman. This has complicated matters somewhat. She is the only member who was not hand-picked by me but, for all that, she seems a good sort. I only hope that Von Schultz has the ability to win over the men. In this hostile environment it is essential that we have complete co-operation and that we can trust each other with our lives. At present I do sense a certain friction between Bo and

Rita, but hopefully it will pass.

(In the background JANGLES and VON SCHULTZ look each other up and down with a slight expression of disgust. As EDWINA exits JANGLES and VON SCHULTZ begin the action of the next scene. They are now under the surface of the Earth. They are soon joined by ARROWSMITH..

JANGLES: *(Feeling his way through a passage)* God it's so dark in here *(in actual fact it is perfectly light and we can see well what they are doing)*. Oh no Von Schultz, it is another dead end. *(Quickly recovering from this disappointment)*. I suggest that we name this closed off corridor of rock after our gallant leader 'Arrowsmith's dead-end'

VON SCHULTZ: *(Slightly sarcastically)* I see, a bit like Arrowsmith's Cove, Arrowsmith's Hill, Arrowsmith's slope, Arrowsmith's boulderVye not King Edvard's back passage.

JANGLES: Because he is not down here and besides, they have already named a potato after him.*(He sees ARROWSMITH behind and says to Von SCHULTZ)* Let the Boss through

ARROWSMITH: *(Pushes through to the front to have a look at the dead-end)* Well, don't lose heart, the early stages may well be like this. I suggest that we rest here for a moment.

JANGLES: Are we staying here for the night Sir?

ARROWSMITH: Yes, I think that is enough for the first day. *(Looks around with wonder)* When one thinks how few eyes have seen these features, it really is extraordinary *(louder to both Jangles and Von Schultz)* Men.... and women, gather round, I have a few words *(Jangles and Von Schultz shuffle closer)*. I know that the whole show is about to kick off and all of us are nervous, anxious to do well, perhaps fearful that we might make an absolute ass of ourselves. Well in such circumstances, I say to you what my Father said to me 'If you have courage, willpower and drive my boy, then you can achieve anything in this world'

JANGLES: *(Enthusiastically)* That is so true. You know, I have been thinking of my own dear departed father of late.

VON SCHULTZ: *(Interrupting in a bored and sneery voice)* Vye vould that be? is it also because he is underground

JANGLES: *(Outraged)* You, you..... *(To ARROWSMITH)* forgive me sir I nearly insulted a lady

VON SCHULTZ: You are a sentimental British fool

JANGLES: Stop her sir, she is always having a go.

ARROWSMITH: Leave him Von Schultz. Come on, let's all sit down (*They do*) I know you are apprehensive, we all are, but let's relax. (*He pauses*) We're getting to know each other, getting to be a proper team. (*Having completed the 'talking to' he tries to change the subject*) Come, let's chat. (*There is an uneasy silence as no one seems to be able to think of anything to say*) So, here we all are. (*Pause*) Tell me Bo, how is your wife?

JANGLES: I find it hard to talk about while.... you know..... Anne and I are separated

ARROWSMITH: You're separated? I didn't realise

JANGLES: No, not separated like that, I mean we are apart while I am over here in, or rather under, Iceland.

VON SCHULTZ: (*With disgust in her voice*) You will not be blubbing I hope. Weeping and wailing.

JANGLES: Yes, well I don't suppose that she (*indicating Von Schultz*) could have a...you know... a gentleman friend

ARROWSMITH: (*Shocked*) No call for that, Bo. (*Pauses and then looks around trying to change the subject*) Look at all those rocks, eh (*Pauses again and then points to one side*) Here we have rocks that are as old as the first second when the Earth was created, as old as the moon. (*Pointing to the other side*) while over here we have lava flows where new rocks are actually being created. A new order driving out the old ... a bit like what is happening in Britain these days, if you know what I mean?

JANGLES: (*Puzzled*) No, not really, Sir

ARROWSMITH: No? Well, I was just thinking the other day that sometimes I feel like something of a dinosaur myself (*There is a corresponding roar, almost animal-like coming from the Earth*) Back home progress has been so fast over the last few years, everything is..... I don't know.... changing. Sometimes I wonder if us explorers might be the last of a dying breed. (*He pauses and pulls himself together*) But that's enough of that sort of talk (*He holds up three tins*) Come now, who's for a spot of dinner? I think I'll have some alphabet spaghetti (*He offers, in the direction of Von Schultz and Jangles the two remaining tins*) What about you two?

VON SCHULTZ: I shall have the spaghetti hoops (*she snatches both tins*) and you, Mr. Jangles, you shall have the ravioli (*She hands over the tin that she does not fancy to Jangles*)

JANGLES: You swine. That is hardly fair

VON SCHULTZ: And vot is more I shall be the one to have first use of the stove

JANGLES: You can keep the stove. *(Completely losing his cool)* In fact, in fact you can shove it up your.....

ARROWSMITH: *(Telling him off)* Bo!

VON SCHULTZ: You British, you are so... so.... stupid

JANGLES: *(He is twitching the anger but just manages to control himself as he moves away)* Anyway, ravioli is a dish best served cold.

ARROWSMITH steps forward he is now reading from his diary. The other two are in the background 'packing up camp'. We cannot hear what they are saying but they are obviously mad at each other and not co-operating in what they are trying to do.

ARROWSMITH: Progress has been slow and difficult. The magnetism is playing havoc with the compass. *(he taps the pocket compass)* I cannot even say how many miles we have travelled as we have zig-zagged all over the place. On top of this, Jangles has had an attack of food poisoning and that has set us back a few days *(In the Background we see JANGLES grabbing his own stomach and bottom and run off stage with some urgency)*. I really feel for my old chum. Day after day it has been the endless trudging. The heat is becoming really unpleasant. I have given them all permission to unfasten the top button of their tunics. Understandably Von Schultz prefers to keep hers buttoned. *(JANGLES tentatively re-enters walking a bit bandy)* I have kept spirits up by doing some of the scientific chores that we are bound to do. This being part of my promise to the Royal Geographical Society. I have been looking for fossils and collecting rock specimens *(In the background JANGLES ever eager to please, picks up a rock and shows it to VON SCHULTZ. She throws it away and there is a little scuffle in the background)* And then something altogether more interesting happened. Today, after weeks of slow progress and low rations, we were just warming the pot for afternoon tea when a gigantic insect scurried across the periphery of our vision. It was the strangest creature that I have ever seen, a truly huge dung beetle. I said to the others: *(ARROWSMITH now talks directly to the other two)* you know what that means? where there is a giant dung beetle there must be giant dung and in front of the giant dung..... there must be a giant creature.

ARROWSMITH, looking excited, puts his diary away and exits. VON SCHULTZ and JANGLES are left on stage.

VON SCHULTZ: *(Very calmly directly to audience)* And zat is not all. Earlier I saw a footprint

JANGLES: You did not

VON SCHULTZ: I did *(Pauses)* Not human. It was the mark of a strange three toed beast

JANGLES: You did not

VON SCHULTZ: As you vish

JANGLES: Well why didn't you say anything to me or the boss?

VON SCHULTZ: I did not want to frighten the British men, besides ve vill find the animal soon enough

JANGLES: *(Pauses exasperated)* Well what manner of beast made the footprint?

VON SCHULTZ: Prehistoric of course. A dinosaur.

JANGLES: No that cannot be !

VON SCHULTZ: *(ARROWSMITH is re-entering, he is spotted by VON SCHULTZ and he gives Jangles a stern instruction)* Not a verd

There is a sudden silence as ARROWSMITH returns with a flask and starts pottering around with it.

JANGLES: *(Straining to keep quiet but failing and exploding with the news)* Von Schultz has seen something else

VON SCHULTZ: *(Clamming up)* I have seen nuzzing

JANGLES: You swine

VON SCHULTZ: Nuzzing at all

JANGLES: *(Totally exasperated)* But... but ... You really are impossible Schultz *(He is furious. He pauses and then asks ARROWSMITH)* Tell me sir, do you think that there are monsters and such-like down here?

ARROWSMITH: *(After a pause)* Perhaps.

JANGLES: Dinosaurs?

ARROWSMITH: We cannot know that *(Pauses)* But I now think so. *(He pauses again and looks around then unscrews the flask)* Whatever we do

we stay calm. It seems to me that we are entering an area that is dangerous. Somewhere that is positively primordial (*He pauses and then offers the flask to the other two*) Soup?

JANGLES: Sir, you are a marvel, how can you stay so calm, we are among the first men to see such sights

ARROWSMITH: Bo, I do not doubt that we are on the brink of achieving something truly important, but our situation is grave. (*He pauses and then addressing both of the other explorers*) Fellow explorers, we are now entering the most difficult phase of the expedition. (*He pauses to collect his thoughts*) As you know, it's been some weeks since we set off and the water is virtually exhausted and, in truth, so are we. I propose to ration the water to just two teaspoonfuls a day. (*Pauses*) But on the plus side, there is as much ox-tail soup as we can drink

JANGLES: (*Still enthusiastic*) Very well, Sir.

VON SCHULTZ: (*Quizzically*) Mein Gott, it has come to this already?

ARROWSMITH: I am afraid that it has. (*Pauses*) Bo, you go an ahead, it's your turn have a look at what we have to face next.

JANGLES: Yes sir. (*Bo leaves*)

ARROWSMITH: (*To Von Schultz*) You look pensive Schultzie. A penny for them? (*VON SCHULTZ shrugs*) Finding the going rough?

VON SCHULTZ: Nein.

ARROWSMITH: (*Trying to be a comfort, although clearly not needed*) I understand, you can tell me. Women's problems?

VON SCHULTZ: I have no problems

ARROWSMITH: (*Pauses*) Tell me Schultzie, when you return home what are you going to do?

VON SCHULTZ: I vill go back to Germany or maybe to zouth-vest Africa, there is much vork to be done.

JANGLES returns, he looks a little concerned

ARROWSMITH: Everything alright Bo?

JANGLES: Well not really sir

ARROWSMITH: What do you mean? spit it out.

JANGLES: The floor of the cave in front of us is carpeted in burning coals

ARROWSMITH: Let me see (*He goes to another part of the stage and looks off-stage, the other 2 follow*) My God you are right. It looks impassable (*Pauses*) yet there must be a way

JANGLES: I could try and jump it

ARROWSMITH: No it's too far.

VON SCHULTZ: (*Speaking with a calm detachment*) There is a way. If we have the bravery and belief that you need.

ARROWSMITH: I don't see how

VON SCHULTZ: It is something that I once saw in India some years ago. I have never attempted it. Indeed I do not know if it can be done by anyone other than the Holy men of Rajasthan. They have the ability to walk over burning coals. It is a matter of willpower and faith as they walk slowly in bare feet over the coals.

JANGLES: (*Enthusiastically*) I will give it a go, well that is as long as I can wear my boots.