



DOCTOR CERBERUS

BY ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA



★
DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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DOCTOR CERBERUS was commissioned by South Coast Repertory Theatre
(David Emmes, Producing Director; Martin Benson, Artistic Director)
and received its world premiere there in April 2010.

DOCTOR CERBERUS received a workshop reading
in the 2009 Pacific Playwrights Festival.

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DOCTOR CERBERUS was commissioned by and received its world premiere at South Coast Repertory Theatre (David Emmes, Producing Director; Martin Benson, Artistic Director) in Costa Mesa, California, opening on April 14, 2010. It was directed by Bart DeLorenzo; the scenic design was by Keith Mitchell; the costume design was by Shigeru Yaji; the lighting design was by Rand Ryan; the sound design and original music were by Stephen Cahill; the projection and video design were by Christopher Ash; the dramaturgy was by Kelly Miller; and the production stage manager was Kathryn Davies. The cast was as follows:

DOCTOR CERBERUS and others Jamison Jones
FRANKLIN ROBERTSON Brett Ryback
LYDIA ROBERTSON Candy Buckley
LAWRENCE ROBERTSON Steven Culp
RODNEY ROBERTSON Jarrett Sleeper

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CHARACTERS

DOCTOR CERBERUS, a television horror host

FRANKLIN ROBERTSON, desperately wants to be Doctor Cerberus's apprentice

LYDIA ROBERTSON, his mom, works at a bank

LAWRENCE ROBERTSON, his dad, an accountant

RODNEY ROBERTSON, his older brother, a pain in the ass

MR. CHOW, their Asian next-door neighbor

COACH STAPP, Franklin's insane P.E. teacher

SEAN FITZSIMMONS, Rodney's hot jock friend

UNCLE JACK, Franklin's uncle, Lydia's younger brother

MR. WALSH, Franklin's senior-year English teacher

CREEPY EDDIE, an Eddie Munster-like youth, not necessarily real

RICHARD BENNICK, the television personality who plays Doctor Cerberus

PLACE

Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb outside of Washington, D.C.
Various locations suggested minimally: a couch is a living room, etc.

TIME

Years pass. Franklin is 13 years old when the play begins, 24 when it ends. Everyone else ages, as well.

NOTES

The same versatile actor who plays Doctor Cerberus also plays Mr. Chow, Coach Stapp, Uncle Jack, Fitzsimmons, Mr. Walsh, and Richard Bennick.

Also: Though Franklin and Rodney start the play as kids, they should be played by actors in their early- to mid-twenties, who “read” young.

A NOTE ABOUT STYLE

Doesn't need to be — and perhaps *shouldn't* be — realistic. The characters' emotions are real, but everything is heightened/filtered through Franklin's consciousness, shaped by the millions of schlocky horror movies he's watched.

A NOTE ABOUT VIDEO

Doesn't have to be elaborate, but it's great to “see” Doctor Cerberus on video, except for his first monologue, where/when we see him in the flesh.

A NOTE ABOUT “CREEP EDDIE”

If we only see him in video, he can be played by the same actor who plays either Franklin or Rodney (disguised, of course). If we see him “live” (or un-dead), he can be played by a hand puppet Dr. Cerberus manipulates.

DOCTOR CERBERUS

ACT ONE

Lightning, thunder, mist. Cheesy, creepy theme music. Lights up on a cheap-looking TV studio set. A gravestone, a gnarled tree, a swinging, creaking sign that reads: "Nightmare Theatre."

From the mist, a ghoul-like man — complete with black top hat and red-lined cape — emerges. This is Doctor Cerberus. He is a cheese-filled character and speaks, perhaps, with a Transylvanian accent and strange inflections.

DOCTOR CERBERUS. *Ghoul* evening, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of Channel 20, in the Nation's Capital, I bid you *velcome* to ... *Nightmare Theatre*. (*Lightning, thunder.*) I am your host, Doctor Cerberus ("Doctor" because I have a Ph.D. ... in *fear*), and I bring you greetings and salutations from ... *the other side*. (*More thunder, lightning.*) Tonight's movie is an American classic in the tradition of *Citizen Kane* and *Gone with The Vind* ... A little gem called *Firestarter*, which is about a young girl who ... *vell*, the title kind of says it all, doesn't it? But it stars George C. Scott (right before he fired his agent) and Drew Barrymore — or, as I like to call her: *Drool Evermore* ... (*Enjoying himself.*) Now you're going to *vant* to pay close attention to this one, folks. In several key sequences, if you look close enough, you can actually *see* the hair dryer that blows on little Drew's face every time she squints her little eyes and sets something on fire with the pow-ver ov her mind — So sit your *veary* bones down — (Oh, look at that, you already *are* sitting.) Dim the lights, double-check that the doors and *windows* are locked, no monsters under the bed...? Good, good ... Now — vithout further ado — I give you:

FIRESTARTER! (Thunder, lightning. The lights come up on Franklin, sitting on a couch with his brother Rodney. His parents, Lydia and Lawrence, standing, looking down at them, pissed as shit.)
LYDIA. All right, Franklin, from the beginning. (A quick spot on Franklin Robertson.)

FRANKLIN. (To us.) The beginning: You're a little kid, lying in bed, waiting to go to sleep, wishing you were someone else. Whatever that thing is. Your secret dream of yourself. For me, it was — Luke Skywalker's son. Or Robin, the boy wonder. Or teen adventurer Jonny Quest.

LYDIA. We're waiting, buster. We can wait *allllll* night if we have to. Your dad and I are like sharks, we don't need sleep.

FRANKLIN. (To us.) Eventually, of course, most people stop wishing — pretending. Or, you know — (He smiles.) — they go for it.

RODNEY. Douchebag —

LYDIA. Lawrence?

LAWRENCE. Franklin —

FRANKLIN. (To us, quickly.) At this moment in time, in history, I'm 13 years old — my mom buys me clothes from the husky aisle at Sears ('cause, well, I'm pretty husky) — it is 1983 — and my older brother and I are —

RODNEY. Can I just ask: Why am *I* here? This isn't my fault. I didn't *do* anything. I wasn't even at home!

LYDIA. Actually, Rodney? Not being at home *is* doing something, a *punishable* something. Not being at home is ignoring, *willfully* ignoring your fraternal duties.

LAWRENCE. How did it come to pass, Franklin, that our house was on fire? (Rodney glares at his younger brother, shakes his head.)

FRANKLIN. Well. Uhm. I was in the basement, watching TV —

LYDIA. That's first on the list. (To her husband.) Keep a list, Lawrence. (To her sons.) All television privileges — suspended indefinitely, for the both of you. No, not indefinitely, *infinitely*.

RODNEY. But I didn't do shit!

LAWRENCE. Mouth, Rodney, shut it.

LYDIA. Go on, Franklin: You were watching that thing you will never watch again, I promise you, and? (The loud sound of a door slamming — almost like a mini-explosion.)

FRANKLIN. I heard, like, a door slamming, and I thought it was Rodney, slamming a door.

RODNEY. I wasn't even home, you homo!

LYDIA. Logical assumption since your older brother's never met a door he hasn't slammed — and you go ahead and call Franklin that *one more time*, Rodney! You go ahead and push me! (*Back to:*) Continue, Franklin. You heard something like your brother slamming a door, and?

FRANKLIN. I went to investigate.

RODNEY. Sherlock Homo ...

LAWRENCE. Thin ice, Rodney, *cracking* —

LYDIA. (*To Franklin.*) Then what?

FRANKLIN. I ... searched the house for any sign of Rodney or possibly an intruder, but there wasn't anyone. And nothing seemed disturbed.

LYDIA. No, because the only disturbed thing in this house is *me*, and I was at work, go on.

LAWRENCE. Don't start down that pathology, Lydia. I work, too. This is my busiest time.

LYDIA. Yes, tax time, but you know what, Mr. H&R Block? At my bank? Where I'm head teller? *It's always our busiest time.* (*Rodney leaps to his feet.*)

RODNEY. Can I go now, please?

LYDIA and LAWRENCE. SIT DOWN! (*Rodney does, glaring at his younger brother.*)

LYDIA. You searched the house, no sign of anyone, and so you...?

FRANKLIN. I. Uhm. Poured myself a bowl of Lucky Charms.

LYDIA. Sugary cereals — that's second on the list, Lawrence. No more sugary cereals, ever. Lucky the Leprechaun? Buh-bye! Toucan Sam? History! Tony the Tiger? Where's my shotgun? From now on, unflavored, lukewarm, overcooked oatmeal for everyone! (Oh, yes. Yes, I *am* going Oliver Twist on this family.)

RODNEY. A *vat* of cereal even though I'd made his fat ass, like, *two* Hungry Man dinners half an hour before.

LAWRENCE. I thought you weren't at home?

RODNEY. I wasn't, I was at Sean's!

LYDIA. *Then why are you speaking right now?* (*To her younger son.*) Go on, Franklin, what happened while you were stuffing your pudgy face with dehydrated, cancer-causing, poison-dyed, mini-marshmallows? (*The doorbell rings.*)

FRANKLIN. The doorbell rang, and I answered the door, and it was Mr. Chow. (*Mr. Chow, their next-door neighbor, rushes on, agitated.*)

MR. CHOW. Frank-lean! Frank-lean!

LYDIA. Of course *he'd* be involved — proceed.

FRANKLIN. Okay, well, you know how Mr. Chow talks?

LYDIA. Gobble-dee-gook, yes, every other word unintelligible —

LAWRENCE. Lydia —

LYDIA. — I'm just stating a *fact*, Lawrence, I *love* that Mr. Chow and his multi-generational family live next door to us, I *love* Grandmother Chow, she brings such a wonderful sense of, of, of *mysticism* to our Neighborhood Watch meetings — (*To Franklin.*) — *go on.*

FRANKLIN. Well, he was talking real fast, and I *thought* Mr. Chow said, “My house is on fire,” meaning Mr. Chow's house, so I told him to come in, and I called 911, and they transferred me to the Fire Department —

LYDIA. (*To Lawrence.*) Can you imagine? (Which means, by the way, they now have a file on us.)

FRANKLIN. Someone came on the line, and I said, basically, “Hi, I'm here with my neighbor, he says his house is on fire,” but then Mr. Chow started shaking his head, and he said:

MR. CHOW. No! No! *Your* house on fire!

FRANKLIN. Mine?

LAWRENCE. Meaning ours?

LYDIA. Meaning this roof, here, over our heads?

MR. CHOW. Yours, yes. Hurry, hurry!

LYDIA. *Meaning our home?*

FRANKLIN. I had ... misunderstood him, I guess.

RODNEY. Retard! Fat-ass! Faggot!

LAWRENCE. *Rodney* —

LYDIA. But then, when the true meaning of Mr. Chow's gibberish came clear, you gave the Fire Department our address — or had they already traced the call by this point?

FRANKLIN. No, I —

MR. CHOW. No! No! What you do?

FRANKLIN. — I hung up.

LYDIA. On the Fire Department?!

RODNEY. Dumb-ass!

FRANKLIN. I wanted to assess the situation for myself before involving the authorities.

LAWRENCE. (Unbelievable —) And?

FRANKLIN. Mr. Chow was like:

MR. CHOW. Come, come, I show you!

FRANKLIN. We went outside, around to the backyard, and — uhm — (*From offstage, the orange glow and the loud crackling of a HUGE fire.*) ... the woodpile was on fire.

LAWRENCE. The — ? *My* woodpile?

LYDIA. Your *father's* woodpile...? The one he's been stockpiling in preparation of a nuclear winter we won't even *live* to see because the warheads, when they come — oh, and they're coming; on *that* point, there's little doubt — but the warheads, knowing our luck, the *ollll'* Robertson luck — they will most *certainly* be aimed right at our block? (*No one responds to this tangent.*) The woodpile that is flush-up against the side of the house, even though I *assured* your father that it was a fire hazard? That we were *begging* for some arsonist to target us?

FRANKLIN. ... Yes.

LYDIA. Never imagining that the arsonist would be a member of our own family!

LAWRENCE. (*Hard-hit by this.*) I ... *loved* that woodpile. I ... *amassed* that woodpile, split-log by split-log, with my own two hands ...

RODNEY. (*To his brother.*) No way are we related! No way do we share the same DNA! (*Mr. Chow has run offstage and re-entered with two garden hoses. He gives one to Franklin. They both point their hoses towards the offstage fire. Hose/water noise begins.*)

FRANKLIN. Anyway, Mr. Chow got his hose — and our hose — and we both, like, *trained* them on the fire.

LYDIA. Which, by this point, must have been a towering inferno — I'm surmising, based on the *blackened* scorch marks — the *melted* drainpipe — the *acrid* stench of *smoke* that has permeated *every* fiber of this house!

FRANKLIN. It was pretty big, yeah. But after, like, half an hour —

LYDIA. (Oh my God!)

FRANKLIN. — We, uhm, you know. Managed to put it out.

MR. CHOW. High-five! (*The orange light goes out. The hose noise stops. Mr. Chow turns to Franklin, they high-five, and Mr. Chow exits, taking the hoses with him.*)

LAWRENCE. How did it *start*, Franklin? The fire? (*Roars.*) *HOW DID IT — GODDAMN — START?* (*Everyone — including Lydia — looks at Lawrence. A beat.*)

FRANKLIN. I think maybe —

LYDIA. Wait one second! Before you answer your father! May I say

DOCTOR CERBERUS

by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

5M, 1W (doubling)

In this coming-of-age comedy, thirteen-year-old Franklin Robertson is just trying to survive life in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. in the mid-1980s. He's overweight. He's sexually confused. He doesn't have friends. His overworked parents don't understand him. His jock brother torments him non-stop. He'd rather write stories than go on dates (not that he could get a date). His great comfort comes from the horror movies he watches every Saturday night at midnight, on a black-and-white TV set in his basement, introduced by the horror host Dr. Cerberus. In fact, Franklin feels *certain* that Dr. Cerberus can save his misfit life ...

"In its darkest moments, DOCTOR CERBERUS sails into the deep waters of theater's favorite sea of tragedy, dysfunctional-family drama, and you realize what a cunning trick the playwright has performed: slipping a heartrending tragedy into the sleeve of a domestic comedy."

—The Orange County Register

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—The Los Angeles Times

Also by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

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