

**The Clever Country**

A play in two acts

By Bruce Hoogendoorn

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**CAST**

ANDREW: Neurophysiologist. Late twenties.

SARAH: Advisor to the Minister. Twenties.

MINISTER FOR SCIENCE: Fifties plus

FIONA: Student, 17

PATRICK: Director of Fashion and Textile Design at UTS

PHILLIP: Scott's manager. Fifty.

ERIC: Prospective student, 18

JIM: Prospective Student, 17

STEPHANIE: Host of Good Morning Australia

ERICA: Director of Research school, forties plus

The following doubling is recommended:

- 1) Patrick and Phillip
- 2) Erica and Stephanie
- 3) Eric and Jim

**The Clever Country**

**ACT 1**

**SCENE 1**

*Darkness. We hear PHILLIP playing guitar and singing. His playing is awful, but his voice is not too bad, though it falters due to his guitar playing.*

PHILLIP: (*sings*)

I used to laugh at people who said follow your dreams  
You can be whatever you decide to be  
“What about talent?”, I’d scream at the box  
“Can they be a singer if they don’t have the chops?”

*Lights up on a science laboratory. PHILLIP is sitting in a chair, totally absorbed in singing and playing his guitar. Behind him is a scientist – ANDREW - very fit and handsome, wearing casual work clothes. He is adjusting the dials on a box-shaped machine which sits on a table behind Phillip. He is not listening to the song.*

PHILLIP: Then one day that all changed for me  
Woke up knowing exactly what I had to be  
A song from my dreams was spinning round in my head  
I had to be a singer or I’d rather be dead

Now I tell everyone to follow their dreams  
Be the person they’re meant to be  
Don’t ignore who you really are  
If you do, you’ll never go far

Dream it! Live it! Dream it! Live it!

ANDREW: That’s great, Phillip, but you can stop now.

*PHILLIP keeps playing, oblivious to ANDREW.*

PHILLIP: Dream it! Live it! Dream it! Live it!

ANDREW: Phillip, you can stop now.

PHILLIP: Dream it! -

ANDREW: Phillip!

*He stops.*

PHILLIP: Oh, sorry, Andrew. I got so absorbed in my music, I just -

ANDREW: Yes, I understand. Now -

PHILLIP: Did you like it?

ANDREW: Um...yes, great tune.

PHILLIP: Thanks. It's about following your dreams no matter what.

ANDREW: Yes, I got that.

PHILLIP: So many people don't, you know. They just give up.

ANDREW: It's very sad.

PHILLIP: Not you though.

ANDREW: Sorry?

PHILLIP: You don't give up on your dreams, despite what people say.

ANDREW: What have they been saying?

PHILLIP: Well...that your research is a waste of money. That there are far more important things it should be spent on.

ANDREW: Well, I can't imagine anything more important than unlocking the brain's full creative potential. If we're to solve the world's problems we need to be as creative as possible.

PHILLIP: I agree. And I really admire what you're doing.

ANDREW: Thank you. What about you, Phillip? You were going to be scientist, but all of a sudden you gave up.

PHILLIP: It wasn't my destiny.

ANDREW: But it sounded like a first-class PhD.

PHILLIP: I know, but something happened. My music happened.

ANDREW: But all these years I've known you I never knew you were musically inclined.

PHILLIP: I wasn't, I know. But like the song says, about a year ago I woke up with a song in my head. And I couldn't get it out until I learnt to play it. Then the songs kept coming. *(beat)* It's like I'd repressed this side of myself all these years, and suddenly it burst out of me.

ANDREW: Oh. That's unusual.

PHILLIP: Yeah. You'd think that sort of inclination would show itself much earlier.

ANDREW: So you want to be a professional musician?

PHILLIP: That's all I think about. In fact, I'm going to audition for Australian Idol this year.

ANDREW: Australian Idol?

PHILLIP: You haven't heard of it?

ANDREW: It's all my two nieces talk about. They've even taken up singing lessons so they can audition next year.

PHILLIP: That's great.

ANDREW: *(pause)* They're both highly intelligent girls, but whenever I talk to them about science they switch off, and start talking about the latest Idol show.

PHILLIP: Well, they're young.

ANDREW: I s'pose.*(pause)* So do you think you're good enough to make the final twelve?

PHILLIP: Not on my voice alone. But if I can improve my guitar playing that might give me the edge. That's why I took up your offer.

ANDREW: Well, I know I can help. I've got people to draw cats before undergoing TMS, and they were like a child's scribble. Then during and after TMS, they improved out-of-sight - Van Goghs all of them.

PHILLIP: I hope it can do the same for my playing. Even though I've practiced hour after hour it's just not happening.

ANDREW: Well, let's get this on you and see how we go.

*ANDREW picks up the Transcranial Magnetic Stimulator cap. It looks like an old-fashioned shower cap with metal nodes all over it. It has cord attached to it which in turn is connected to the machine.*

PHILLIP: It won't hurt, will it?

ANDREW: You won't feel a thing. It's only a very gentle electro-magnetic pulse.

PHILLIP: The brain's amazing, isn't it? We're probably using only a small percentage of it.

ANDREW: I'd be surprised if we're using twenty percent. Okay, are you ready?

PHILLIP: Ready.

ANDREW: Right. Here we go.

*He turns it on. There is the sound of humming over the top of the scene.*

PHILLIP: I can't feel anything.

ANDREW: Told you. So how about playing me a tune?

*PHILLIP starts to play and sing.*

PHILLIP: (*sings*) I used to laugh at people who said follow your -

ANDREW: Just the guitar, okay?

PHILLIP: Oh, okay.

*PHILLIP starts to play, but is abysmal. He has a number of false starts.*

PHILLIP: What's on-going?

ANDREW: Sorry?

PHILLIP: And what say did I?

ANDREW: Oh. Your brain's a little disoriented at the moment. That's why you're making linguistic mistakes and your playing's a little off. You'll be all right in a moment. Now, how about you give us a little more rock 'n' roll? Hit it!

*PHILLIP plays and is abysmal. Like a child banging away for the first time.*

PHILLIP: On-going what's?

ANDREW: Your brain hasn't adjusted yet. Let's give it another minute.

PHILLIP: No-oh, no-oh. Off get! Off Get!

*PHILLIP tries to pull the cap off.*

ANDREW: Calm down, Phillip, I'll turn it off.

*Unseen by PHILLIP he doesn't turn it off. He looks at his watch.*

ANDREW: Just sit quietly for a moment, and your speech will return to normal. And I wouldn't be surprised if within a few minutes you're strumming away like Hendrix himself.

PHILLIP: You tink, really? Really tink, really?

ANDREW: I do.

*ANDREW looks at his watch again, then turns off the machine. The humming sound stops.*

ANDREW: Now let's get this off you.

*He takes the cap off.*

ANDREW: I'm sorry you were stressed by that. It's happened a few times before, but I'm pleased to say that no harm has ever been done. In fact, quite the opposite.

PHILLIP: I soap so. I dooly do.

*We hear someone knocking.*

ANDREW: Come in.

*ERICA enters, a scientist of about sixty. He looks like the classic absent-minded professor, dressed in sandals with socks, shorts, etc.*

ANDREW: Oh, Erica.

ERICA: Andrew. Hello, Phillip. How are you?

PHILLIP: Lo, lo, terrier.

ERICA: Terrier?

ANDREW: He's just had TMS. He's making a few linguistic mistakes at the moment.

ERICA: So he's got you drawing cats too, has he, Phillip? Turned you into a Picasso, has he?

PHILLIP: No-oh, no-oh.

ERICA: That's no good. I did it myself and Andrew swore my drawings were much better than before. Although I must admit I couldn't tell the difference.

ANDREW: They were much better, Erica.

ERICA: Well, I'll take your word for it. *(beat)* Andrew, have you got a moment?

ANDREW: Ah...sure. Phillip, how about you take a walk, and come back in fifteen minutes? I'm sure you'll be fine then.

PHILLIP: Thokay.

*PHILLIP exits.*

ERICA: Look, he's left his guitar here. We should take our chance and smash it to pieces.

ANDREW: Why?

ERICA: Come on, you've heard him play. I can't believe he's given up science to follow this musical delusion. What are his drawings like? Better than his music I hope.

ANDREW: We were using TMS to improve his guitar-playing.

ERICA: And did it?

ANDREW: Don't know yet.

ERICA: If you can improve *his* playing you could write your own ticket.

ANDREW: Well, we'll see. So, you want to talk?

ERICA: Yes, I do. (*beat*) I'm sorry, Andrew, but Future Technologies has decided not to continue funding your research.

ANDREW: What?

ERICA: They said you haven't made the progress they were hoping for.

ANDREW: But when they were here a few weeks ago they were very impressed.

ERICA: I think they were just being polite.

ANDREW: Jesus Christ! It takes time. They said they understood that.

ERICA: Yes, but they think you're no closer to developing the Thinking Cap than you were a year ago.

ANDREW: I'm closer, much closer.

ERICA: Well, they're not convinced of that.

ANDREW: Jesus.

ERICA: I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news.

ANDREW: Well...we have to find another company. You have to get Finance and Research Support onto it straight away. Have you spoken to them yet?

ERICA: (*pause*) No.

ANDREW: Why not?

ERICA: (*pause*) I'm sorry, Andrew, but the review committee has decided not to continue support for your research.

ANDREW: What?

ERICA: We also think your research has not advanced very far.

ANDREW: You've got to be joking!

ERICA: And now you no longer have a commercial partner, we need to give preference to those that have a better chance of getting one.

ANDREW: What are you talking about? There are dozens of companies that will leap at funding my research.

ERICA: No, Andrew, there aren't.

ANDREW: Of course there are! This could be one of the greatest inventions of all time. It'll make a fortune.

ERICA: So you say.

ANDREW:(*pause*) You've never believed in my research, have you?

ERICA: I think there's something in it. But I think it's a bit rich you claiming it will lead to solving the world's problems.

ANDREW: I didn't say -

ERICA: Particularly when all you have to show for it is that people who receive TMS can supposedly draw better cats than without it.

ANDREW: You know there's much more to it than that! And there's no "supposedly" about it.

ERICA: As I said, when I did it I could not tell the difference. And if there was, it was simply because as I drew cat after bloody cat I happened to get better at it, as anyone would.

ANDREW: (*pause*) I can see that you more than anyone need TMS. I doubt you're using ten percent of your brain.

ERICA: Well, I did use that ten percent on your research. I brought in my cousin – Wilbur Saunders - who I'm sure you know is one of Australia's leading painters. I put him on your machine -

ANDREW: You what?

ERICA: I gave him TMS while you were away.

ANDREW: How dare you do that?

ERICA: I'm the director of the school - I can do what I like! (*pause*) If anything his drawing was worse.

ANDREW: Well, that goes against all the results so far.

ERICA: That's because you never tested a professional artist! All your research is good for is making bad drawers slightly better, but still bad. And how is that going to help the human race?

ANDREW:(*pause*) It's pointless even talking to you. Your mind is completely closed.

ERICA: I'm sorry.

ANDREW: Well, what am I going to do now? You've left me out in the cold.

ERICA: Actually, I've put your name forward for a position.

ANDREW: What?

ERICA: It's right up your alley, too. (*beat*) The Minister is looking for an award-winning researcher to promote science. He's worried about the decrease in students studying science and wants enrolments to increase dramatically.

ANDREW *laughs*.

ERICA: What?

ANDREW: Look at the way I've just been treated. Is it any wonder kids decide to look elsewhere for a career?

ERICA: (*pause*) Science has dropped so far down that you now need a higher tertiary entrance score to get into fashion design.

ANDREW: I know. *I* told you that. You probably even need a higher score to get into modelling school, if there is such a place.

ERICA: I wouldn't be surprised.

ANDREW: Kids today just want glamour and fame. They all want to act and model and play music. It's sickening. The bloody media have brainwashed them.

ERICA: That's why I thought you'd be perfect: you're always banging on about kids being distracted by celebrity. Now you can do something about it.

ANDREW: But why would they want me, particularly now I've lost my job?

ERICA: You're still a respected scientist. You won a Eureka prize for your PHD.

ANDREW: Five years ago.

ERICA: And you're young. They're very keen on getting someone to promote science who kids can relate to.

ANDREW: Because I'm young?

ERICA: Yes. And...presentable.

ANDREW: Presentable?

ERICA: All right, let's not beat around the bush - incredibly good looking.

ANDREW: So it's my looks that could get me the job?

ERICA: It certainly helps, but without the science it wouldn't help.

ANDREW: So the idea is to appeal to kids' shallow side to lure them into the most intellectually-demanding profession there is?

ERICA: That sounds right.

ANDREW: This society is fucked.

ERICA: It's the reality of what we're dealing with. But once you get their attention you can give them the exciting, meaty truth about science.

ANDREW: "The meaty truth"? Then perhaps I can tell them about you.

ERICA: What do you mean?

ANDREW: I can tell them that you cut my funding because you don't have any patience or belief. You're only interested in research that can make you money fast. Do you think that will get them enrolling?

ERICA: (*pause*) A woman from the Minister's office is coming to see you tomorrow. Whether or not you get the job you have to be out of here by the end of the semester.

ANDREW: What about the Magna Pro? What will happen to that?

ERICA: We'll sell it, I expect.

ANDREW: You can't do that!

ERICA: What else can we do with it? We won't need it here.

ANDREW: Let me have it.

ERICA: You know private individuals can't own one. But if you become attached to a new research school, ask if they'll buy it for you.

ANDREW: And who do you suggest?

ERICA *shrugs and exits.*

ANDREW: Fuck!!

PHILLIP *enters.*

PHILLIP: I'm all right now, Andrew. I can talk again.

ANDREW: Oh...good. See, I told you you'd be fine.

PHILLIP: I'm ready to play. I'm so excited.

PHILLIP *picks up his guitar and plays. He is terrible. He stops and tries again.*

PHILLIP: I can't play. I can't play at all.

ANDREW: I'm sure you'll be fine.

PHILLIP: You said I'd be fine after a walk.

ANDREW: It can take longer. Maybe a few hours.

PHILLIP If I can't play -

ANDREW: You will, I promise.

PHILLIP: - I will sue you!

ANDREW: Oh, Phillip, come on.

PHILLIP: I was going to win Australian Idol. But you've taken away my dream!

PHILLIP *runs out with his guitar.*

ANDREW: Phillip!

*Quick Blackout. There is the sound of crackling electricity, suggesting TMS.*

*Lights up on the same scene with ANDREW in the same spot, demoralised.*

*Suddenly SARAH bursts in, and stares at him.*

SARAH: Oh my God, look at you!

ANDREW: I beg your pardon?

SARAH: I don't have to change a thing. You're gorgeous, you dress well, and smell good too. The girls will go mad!

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: And your voice will sound fantastic on radio and television.

ANDREW: Who are you?

SARAH: What about your walk? Walk for me, and give me a bedroom look. Don't be shy, just do what I do.

*(She does it.)*

Go on, try it. See if you can get my heart pounding.

ANDREW: I am not doing anything until you tell me who you are.

SARAH: Sorry. I'm Sarah Dawn from the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. I work in the Minister's office.

*They shake hands.*

ANDREW: Oh, Erica mentioned you.

SARAH: And you, I gather, are the award-winning scientist Andrew Dean.

ANDREW: Well, five years ago -

SARAH: Award-winning! Just what we're looking for.

ANDREW: I thought you just wanted someone with looks?

SARAH: Yes, but also a first class scientist. It wouldn't be much good using a b-grader with looks, would it?

ANDREW: Do you even know what I'm researching?

SARAH: Of course. Transcranial magic stimulation.

ANDREW: *Magnetic* stimulation.

SARAH: Yes, magnetic. About improving the brain, isn't it?

ANDREW: Basically.

SARAH: Well, that's great. I have some relatives who could do with a zapping from you.

ANDREW: Sorry, I can't help you. My funding's been cut.

SARAH: Yes, I'm sorry about that.

ANDREW: You knew?

SARAH: Erica told me.

ANDREW: And you still want me?

SARAH: Especially now. You're free to give us all of your time.

ANDREW: But won't it look bad if the scientist promoting science has had his research dumped?

SARAH: Of course. But we're going to say that you've put your research on hold while you do your selfless work for us.

ANDREW: The school won't back that up.

SARAH: They will, because the Minister will speak to Erica personally.

ANDREW: *(pause)* How long will the job be for?

SARAH: A year.

ANDREW: Only a year? So what do I do after that?

SARAH: Oh, Andrew, show me how this thing works. I'm going to zap you to the maximum.

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: For a scientist you're not very bright, are you? You will be in advertising campaigns, appearing on radio and television, and at career expos. You'll be the most famous scientist in the country! If you make a success of it and increase enrolments, you'll have to hire an agent to help you sift through the dozens of job offers you'll get.

ANDREW: Are you serious?

SARAH: Deadly serious.

*Pause. ANDREW thinks.*

SARAH: So are you interested?

ANDREW: *(pause)* Yes.

SARAH: Wonderful!

ANDREW: So, I've got the job?

SARAH: No, you haven't.

ANDREW: Oh.

SARAH: I can't give it to you. Only recommend you.

ANDREW: So who makes the final decision?

SARAH: The Minister. It's his first ministry and he wants to set the world on fire. So when he discovered science enrolments have been plummeting he swore to do something about it.

ANDREW: I see.

SARAH: Now, I just need to find out a few more things about you, so I can brief the Minister. You're single, aren't you?

ANDREW: Yes.

SARAH: Thank Christ. The girls will love that. So do me a favour and don't fall in love for the next year. We want to get you into Cleo's bachelor of the year.

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: Now you're clearly as fit as a fiddle. So what exercise do you do?

ANDREW: Um...running and I go to the gym.

SARAH: Good, good. How about rock-climbing?

ANDREW: No.

SARAH: But you could do it?

ANDREW: I have no idea. Why do you ask?

SARAH: I'd just love to get a photo of you gripping the wall with your tight buns in the foreground. The girls will love that, too.

ANDREW: Oh God, I don't know if I can do this. It's everything I despise.

SARAH: Oh, Andrew, it's just a bit of fun. And if you care about science you'll do it. If not, you can always become a high school teacher.

ANDREW: You've got to be kidding. I'm a serious researcher!

SARAH: Then accept this is what you have to do to get back to doing what you love.  
(beat) Now, you don't have any criminal convictions, do you?

ANDREW: No.

SARAH: No embarrassing skeletons in the closet, like beating up old girlfriends?

ANDREW: I'd never do that!

SARAH: Good. I don't want to waste my time covering things up. What about hobbies? Anything that kids could relate to?

ANDREW: I spend all my time here.

SARAH: Oh. Then I'll make some up for you. I think you may enjoy going to rock concerts, nightclubs and -

ANDREW: - rock climbing.

SARAH: Oh yes. In very tight shorts. Ooh! Now, how about a sense of humour? Do you have one?

ANDREW: (*pause*) Not really. Except after a TMS session. I always become more humorous, but it doesn't last long.

SARAH: A pity. But with looks like yours it doesn't matter. Can you at least be nice?

ANDREW: Of course I can. I'm very nice.

SARAH: That's good enough for me. I think you're going to do very well, Andrew. I'll call the Minister.

*She pulls out her mobile phone.*

*Blackout. Sound of crackling electricity.*

*Lights up on ANDREW and SARAH in the same spot, now joined by the MINISTER, an impressive man in his fifties.*

SARAH: Minister, this is the man who wants to help you save Australian science - Andrew Dean.

MINISTER: Andrew, a pleasure to meet you.

*They shake hands.*

ANDREW: Hello, Minister.

MINISTER: My God, I can see why Sarah recommended you. You must have to beat off the women.

*ANDREW is embarrassed.*

SARAH: He would, if he wasn't so hard-working.

MINISTER: I bet he even had to beat you off, didn't he, Sarah?

SARAH: Of course, Minister. As soon as I saw him I started wrestling him.

MINISTER: Excellent. You know I like my staff to take plenty of exercise.

ANDREW *doesn't know what to say.*

MINISTER: Don't worry about us, Andrew. We're just joking. A pair of jokers, aren't we, Sarah?

SARAH *nods.*

MINISTER: So Sarah tells me you're ready to lead science into the future for me?

ANDREW: Ah...yeah, yeah.

MINISTER: Oh dear, Andrew, you don't sound very convincing. You are committed, aren't you?

ANDREW: Well...

MINISTER: There's something on your mind, isn't there? Well, you'd better tell me about it before we go any further.

ANDREW: Well, I do really want to do the job, but...

MINISTER: Yes, Andrew?

ANDREW: Look, I hate to be pushy, but I want a guarantee that I'll get funding to resume my research when this is over.

SARAH: Andrew, we talked about this before. The job offers will pour in if you make a success of it.

ANDREW: But what if it's not a success?

MINISTER: Let's not think like that. Let's be positive.

ANDREW: I am positive, but I'm also being realistic.

MINISTER: *(pause)* Andrew, why don't you tell me about your research.

ANDREW: You don't know about it?

MINISTER: Only the broad outline. You give people electric shock treatment so they can draw better cats.

ANDREW: It's not electric shocks, it's electro-magnet pulses. I put a very low level of pulses into the left anterior temporal lobe to temporarily disable that part of the brain. That allows the right hand lobe to flourish. It contains the unconscious abilities used by savants.

MINISTER: What use is that?

ANDREW: Well, you can draw better, proof-read better, improve your memory. You can even play music perfectly. There's an autistic savant who can listen to any piece of music just once and play it immediately, and he's never had any training. Ultimately, I want to develop a thinking cap that anyone can use to help them access these skills.

MINISTER: Well...that sounds very exciting.

ANDREW: It is. The people who've participated have been amazed at some of the drawings they've done.

MINISTER: *(pause)* I have to try it!

SARAH: Minister!

MINISTER: How do you hook me up?

SARAH: You can't do this. It's too dangerous.

ANDREW: It's not dangerous at all. I've done it dozens of times.

SARAH: I cannot risk the Minister becoming brain-damaged.

ANDREW: You can't brain-damage someone with a pulse of half a hertz.

SARAH: I will not allow -

MINISTER: Sarah, stop being such a worry-wart. I'm doing it and I don't want to hear another word.

SARAH:*(pause)* All right. But if you feel the slightest discomfort, you let me know and I'll whip that thing straight off you.

MINISTER: Yes, yes, Sarah.

ANDREW: Minister, if you could sit here, please.

*The MINISTER sits down.*

ANDREW: Before we start, I'll get you to draw a cat.

*He gives him a pen and paper.*

MINISTER: This should be embarrassing. I haven't drawn anything since primary school.

ANDREW: Doesn't matter. Just do your best.

*He draws. SARAH and ANDREW watch.*

MINISTER: Oh God, it feels so unnatural.

*He finishes.*

MINISTER: There, that's the best I can do.

*A picture of the cat is projected onto the back wall. It's hopeless. It is a side-on drawing of a cat, a basic outline.*

SARAH: That's quite good, Minister.

ANDREW: What? It's terrible.

MINISTER: Don't take her seriously, Andrew. She was just being a brown-noser. Weren't you, Sarah?

SARAH: That's my job.

ANDREW: Right. Let's put the Magna Pro on you and see how you do now.

*ANDREW puts the cap on the MINISTER.*

MINISTER: Ooh! The Magna Pro! Sounds impressive.

SARAH: Have you checked the level?

ANDREW: Yes, it's only half a hertz. See for yourself.

*ANDREW points at the Magna Pro. SARAH looks.*

SARAH: Remember, Minister, if you feel the slightest discomfort let me know.

MINISTER: Yes, Sarah, I will.

ANDREW: Here goes.

*ANDREW turns it on. The humming begins.*

MINISTER: Is it on?

ANDREW: Yes.

MINISTER: But I can't feel anything.

ANDREW: Told you.

MINISTER: So should I start drawing now?

ANDREW: Whenever you're ready.

*The MINISTER starts drawing, this time with far more confident, faster strokes.*

MINISTER: There...finished.

*ANDREW picks up the drawing, and it is projected onto the back wall. It's an enormous improvement. And the cat is looking straight out at the viewer, with a vivid expression.*

ANDREW: What an improvement! Look at the cheeky expression on its face. And you've drawn it looking straight at us rather than side-on. You'd think it was done by an experienced artist.

MINISTER: I can't believe I've drawn it.

SARAH: It really is good, Minister. And for once I actually mean it.

MINISTER: In fact, I can't remember doing it.

ANDREW: A lot of people say that. I think it's because your conscious mind has been switched off, allowing your unconscious mind to thrive.

MINISTER: It's amazing! And I feel...I feel...

SARAH: Minister, are you all right?

*SARAH hurriedly takes the cap off.*

MINISTER: I feel fantastic! Refreshed!

ANDREW: People have said that, too. That TMS gives them a burst of energy.

MINISTER: Exactly! I've been feeling tired all morning, and now I feel I've got the energy of ten men! It's the science of the future!

ANDREW: It is! It will allow human beings to use abilities they've never used before. It's going to take intelligence to a new level.

MINISTER: The kids will love this. It's...it's sexy science! Not that boring old physics stuff. This will get them queuing up round the block to enrol. In fact, you should take it on the promotional tour!

ANDREW: The school won't let me. In fact, Erica said he was planning to sell it.

MINISTER: Like Hell he will! Where is he? I'll put him straight.

ANDREW: Minister, before you do that, could we go back to our discussion about the...?

MINISTER: The what?

ANDREW: The...guarantee

MINISTER: (*pause*) Andrew, I have a dream. That science will regain its lost prestige and kids will start flocking to study it again.

ANDREW: That's my dream, too.

MINISTER: In two-thousand-and-three, thirteen thousand students enrolled in science, but this year only ten thousand did. If this trend continues, we'll end up with a country where we're all great at sport, but no-one can even light a Bunsen burner.

ANDREW: It's a horrifying thought.

MINISTER: And it doesn't fit in with the rest of my dream.

ANDREW: What's that, Minister?

MINISTER: That Australia leads the world in all the disciplines: Physics! Medicine! Botany! Geology! Astronomy! Chemistry! Biology! Neurology! And the jewel in the crown...Scientology!

ANDREW & SARAH: Scientology?

MINISTER: Calm down, you two, I'm only joking. Andrew, with your help we're going to be known throughout the world as...The Clever Country!

ANDREW AND SARAH: The Clever Country?

MINISTER: Yes, the Clever Country. And if you can help make my dream come true, I'm going to give you a decade of funding.

ANDREW: A whole decade!

MINISTER: But you'll only get it if you reach your target.

ANDREW: What's that?

MINISTER: You have to raise enrolments by twenty percent.

ANDREW: Twenty percent!

MINISTER: That's right, twenty percent!

ANDREW: That's a bit high, isn't it? How about ten?

MINISTER: Twenty percent!

ANDREW: Fifteen?

MINISTER: Twenty percent! Non-negotiable. What do you say?

ANDREW: *(pause)* Twenty percent it is.

MINISTER: Congratulations, Andrew, you've got the job. I'll see you next week at the press conference announcing my plan.

*As the MINISTER exits he says...*

MINISTER: Well done, Sarah.

*SARAH smiles, delighted. She spontaneously gives ANDREW a big hug and a kiss on the cheek.*

SARAH: Congratulations.

*She follows out the MINISTER.*

ANDREW: Twenty percent? Shit.

*Blackout.*

**SCENE 2**

*The MINISTER stands behind a lectern. He addresses the audience directly. SARAH stands by his side holding a folder.*

MINISTER: Ladies and Gentlemen, I've asked you here today to inform you that – thanks to the previous government's incompetence - Australian science is now in crisis. Tertiary enrolments are down to such low levels it now takes a higher TES score to enrol in Fashion Design. Some universities are so desperate to get students that they've dropped their minimum entry score as low as 72%. Also, many teachers don't have sufficient qualifications to enable them to teach many branches of science. This does not augur well for our country's future. I'm determined to lure our country's best young minds into science, away from less important professions. I've created a number of strategies to do that. Firstly, science teachers' salaries will now be performance and qualification-based. This will increase some teachers' pay as much as fifty percent.

Secondly, early career researchers will receive longer-term funding, up from three years to five; while funding for mid-career researchers will increase from five to eight years.

Finally, I am about to launch the biggest promotion of science ever undertaken in Australia. To head this I have hired a scientist from the Alice Cross School of Neurological Research here in Canberra. He's only thirty years old, yet he has already won a Eureka prize for his work in Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation - TMS. The goal of TMS is to unlock the full creative potential of the brain. I myself have participated in his study. He used magnetic pulses to temporarily shut down the left-hand side of my brain to allow my right-hand side to flourish. This side has all sorts of unconscious talents buried there. So let me show you what I did.

*SARAH opens the folder and he takes out his first bad drawing of a cat.*

This is the cat I drew before getting TMS. Shocking isn't it?

*The journos crowd around and enthusiastically agree. But one goes further...*

CHRIS: It doesn't even look like a cat.

MINISTER: No, it doesn't, does it? However...

*He puts the drawing down, and picks up the good one.*

MINISTER: ...this is the cat I drew a few moments later, while receiving TMS. Good, isn't it?

*The journos all agree enthusiastically, all except CHRIS...*

CHRIS: It's not that good.

MINISTER: Yes it is. Especially compared to the first one.

CHRIS: Anything would look good compared to the first one.

MINISTER: But look how the cat is more expressive. And it's from a new perspective. Without TMS that would never have occurred to me.

CHRIS: That's great, but how's that going to help anyone?

MINISTER: Well, obviously it will make people better drawers, and... Look, instead of me answering these questions, let me introduce the young man responsible for the work. Please welcome Andrew Dean.

*ANDREW enters to polite applause. He is dressed very fashionably and looks incredibly handsome. ANDREW and the MINISTER shake hands and smile broadly as they are photographed.*

ANDREW: Firstly, I want to thank the minister for choosing me for this role. It's an enormous honour, and I am committed to making the promotion a success.

CHRIS: How exactly were you chosen? I didn't see it advertised anywhere.

ANDREW: Um...I was asked personally by the Minister.

CHRIS: Well, how did he find out about you?

ANDREW: I don't...

MINISTER: It's all right, Andrew, I'll answer this. I contacted many research schools around the country and asked them to nominate any first-class young researchers who would be interested in promoting science. We met with many impressive young people, but it was Andrew who impressed us the most.

CHRIS: But why him? I could name six young scientists off the top of my head who have far more impressive research than his.

MINISTER: Well, that's your opinion.

CHRIS: But what was it that set him apart from the others? Could it have anything to do with - ?

MINISTER: It's his science! His aim is to make people the best they can be, so they can make the world the best it can be. *(pause)* Does that answer your question?

CHRIS: *(pause)* Andrew, is it true that your research funding has been cut?

ANDREW: Um...

MINISTER: That's not true. It's simply on hold until his role with us is complete.

CHRIS: Well, I heard -

MINISTER: What you heard was wrong. His research is far too important to be ignored.

CHRIS: Andrew, what will be different about the way you promote science to how it's being promoted now? Why will young people want to do it?

ANDREW: Because...because this is the most exciting time to be a scientist. The world's turning against us now and we have to stop it. So I want to say to the students out there that if you have scientific ability, and you want a planet that is going to be habitable for your children and grandchildren you must take up the challenge and not sit back and expect others to do it for you. And a career in science is now better paying and more secure than ever thanks to the Minister. And it's not before time, because time is running out for our planet. That's why young people will want to do it, and why they must do it.

MINISTER: Fantastic! Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming today. And don't worry, you'll have plenty more chances to talk to Andrew, because he'll be popping up everywhere. (*whispers to SARAH, while looking at CHRIS*) Have a word with that clown.

*The MINISTER and ANDREW exit, followed by the all the journalists except CHRIS, who is making notes. SARAH walks up to him.*

SARAH: Hello, I'm Sarah Dawn, from the Ministers' department.

CHRIS: Oh yeah.

*She offers her hand. He shakes it half-heartedly.*

SARAH: And you are?

CHRIS: Chris Davis. Science Today.

SARAH: Science Today. Wow. Important magazine.

CHRIS: Yes.

SARAH: Interesting questions you asked.

CHRIS: Thanks.

SARAH: Perhaps a little negative, though, I thought.

CHRIS: Oh, here we go. I should warn you that anything you say will be used against you in my article.

SARAH: Why against me?

CHRIS: The whole thing's so bloody cynical. Using beefcake to sell science.

SARAH: Is it his fault that he's good-looking?

CHRIS: Don't act like it's all a happy coincidence. Looks came first, the science second.

SARAH: Absolutely not true.

CHRIS: Rubbish.

SARAH: He is a first-class scientist who happens to be good-looking.

CHRIS: "First class"! It's trivial science.

SARAH: You've got to be joking.

CHRIS: Yuppie science. All it can lead to is ambitious professionals using TMS to help propel them up the corporate ladder. It's sickening.

SARAH: *(pause)* Do you actually care about the state of science in this country?

CHRIS: Of course I do.

SARAH: Then why write an article questioning the reason for his appointment?

CHRIS: Because there are a lot of people in the scientific community who won't regard him as the best representative for them.

SARAH: Why not? Not dorky enough? Would they be happier if we got him into some long socks and sandals?

CHRIS: So it is his looks.

SARAH: For years science has been represented by funny little dorks. Now it's in crisis. So if you care about it so much why don't you give it a chance before scuttling it?

CHRIS: Tell me, is Dawn spelled D A W N?

*SARAH just stares at him. CHRIS shrugs and starts to walk out. SARAH chases him and jumps in front of him. CHRIS writes down notes as she talks.*

SARAH: Oh come on, Chris. I know it's cynical, but kids today are so superficial. If you're not young or gorgeous they'll ignore you.

CHRIS: It doesn't mean you should stoop to their level.

SARAH: We're only stooping in order to raise them up to our level.

CHRIS: Ooh, good quote. Keep them coming.

SARAH: And what about the Minister increasing teachers' pay and researchers' Contracts? Surely you can't be against those?

CHRIS: No, they're good. I wish they'd been implemented when I was a researcher.

SARAH: You were a researcher?

CHRIS: I was part of a team at the CSIRO researching methods to stress-test wool.

SARAH: Oh.

CHRIS: But out of the blue, management cut our funding and gave it to areas they thought could make more money. After that there was no way I was going to continue as a researcher. No job security.

SARAH: The Minister's changing that.

CHRIS: He needs to do more.

SARAH: And he will be. So why don't you focus on the good things the Minister is doing rather than questioning Andrew's appointment?

CHRIS: *(pause)* Why don't we discuss this in more depth over dinner?

SARAH: Dinner?

CHRIS: Yeah. Your shout.

SARAH: *(pause)* Chinese food, okay?

*Blackout.*

**SCENE 3**

ANDREW *behind a microphone giving a talk at a Careers Expo.*

ANDREW: I suppose you're all wondering when you're going to see some fun scientific experiments. Perhaps you're hoping I'll pour some liquid nitrogen onto a balloon to crumple it, and then merely blow on it to return it to its full size. Or put my hands on a Van de Graff Generator so you can all laugh as the electricity makes my hair stand on end. Well, I'm sorry, but you won't be seeing any of that. To me those scientific demonstrations come under the banner of, "Look, kids, don't be put off by science, because science is fun!" I hate science being promoted as fun. Because most of the time it isn't fun - it's hard work. Scientific discoveries can take decades to make. Nature only gives up its secrets to the most persistent, hard-working people. And now more than ever we need to discover those secrets, because I believe time is running out for the human race.

If any of you are interested in a career in science, you're welcome to come and speak to me. Thank you.

*Moderate canned applause. SARAH enters.*

SARAH: That was great. Well done.

ANDREW: We'll see.

SARAH: What do you mean?

ANDREW: This is the fourth talk I've given, and so far only two primary school kids have talked to me afterwards.

SARAH: Well...you're being very serious.

ANDREW: What's wrong with that? It's a serious field.

SARAH: Yes, but it's all doom and gloom, and appealing to people to help save the world. Which is great! It is. But...perhaps you could mix it in with a bit of fun stuff. For instance, I wouldn't mind seeing that liquid nitrogen on the balloon trick. How does that work?

ANDREW: I refuse to promote science as fun! Scientists have been doing that for years and it hasn't worked.

SARAH: That's because they were ugly little dorks, but you're not. Always remember: the message is never as important as the messenger.

ANDREW: God help us if that's true.

SARAH: What if I got you a sexy female assistant?

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: It would be like a magic show. The kids would love it.

ANDREW: Sarah, just stop, or I'll pour liquid nitrogen on you.

SARAH: Well, we have to do something to compete with The University of Technology's Department of Fashion Design.

ANDREW: Why?

SARAH: They're holding a fashion show in the next building and the kids race over as soon as it starts. It's packed out.

ANDREW: Fashion should not be allowed at career expos!

SARAH: We've got half a dozen more of these expos, so we have to compete with them. Any suggestions?

ANDREW: Yes...we could set off their fire alarm.

SARAH: Not bad, but I can do better. How about your lovely assistant comes out dressed in a labcoat, and then at a critical moment in an experiment she whips it off revealing that she's wearing a skimpy bikini. Tell me, what would happen to the bikini if you poured liquid nitrogen onto it?

*ANDREW just stares at her, unimpressed.*

SARAH: Andrew, I have to be honest. The Minister is very worried by our lack of progress.

ANDREW: But we've only been going a month.

SARAH: Yes, but we haven't even managed a blip on the radar.

ANDREW: I'm sure it's only a matter of time.

SARAH: We have to try something new.

ANDREW: I'm not having a half-naked assistant.

SARAH: You need to be a bit flexible. After all, it's not just your career that's on the line.

ANDREW: So you're really worried about yourself?

SARAH: Is there anything wrong with that? *(beat)* This is my first major project for the Minister. If I blow it I won't get another.

ANDREW: I'm sorry, but -

SARAH: Oh my God!

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: A teenage boy is headed our way!

ANDREW: Where?

SARAH: There. *(beat)* Oh shit.

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: He's with Chris?

ANDREW: Who?

SARAH: The journalist who attacked you at the Minister's press conference.

ANDREW: That prick. I can't stand him.

SARAH: Neither can I. I had to have dinner with him to stop him writing a negative article about you. Most boring night of my life. All he talked about was science.

ANDREW: What's wrong with that?

SARAH: Um...Chris! Hello.

*CHRIS enters with ERIC, a laid-back eighteen year old.*

CHRIS: Hi, Sarah, good to see you again.

SARAH: You too.

CHRIS: Andrew.

*ANDREW grunts in reply.*

CHRIS: Sarah and Andrew, this is Eric. He's interested in studying science.

SARAH: Wonderful.

ANDREW: That's great, Eric, what field of science interests you?

ERIC: Oh, I thought maybe forensics. You know, solving murders and stuff. I love that CSI show.

ANDREW: I see. I've only seen it once, but I noticed it wasn't all that realistic.

ERIC: Yeah, I know they exaggerate it, but it's based on fact.

ANDREW: Maybe, but crimes can take years to solve. It's not just the push of one computer button and a suspect's name comes up.

SARAH: I'm sure Eric knows that, Andrew.

ERIC: Yeah. I'm not a victim of the media or anything.

ANDREW: Are there any other areas of science that interest you: climate change, alternative fuels?

ERIC: Ah, not really.

ANDREW: Well, what other sciences are you studying at school?

ERIC: I've finished school. I took the year off to go snowboarding in Japan and the US.

SARAH: That sounds great. Bet there were some wild parties?

ERIC: You can say that again. I can barely remember them.

SARAH: So you're all refreshed and ready to get stuck into your studies?

ERIC: Yeah.

SARAH: Fantastic. You know, Eric, Andrew's into rock climbing.

ANDREW *gives her a glare.*

ERIC: Cool. What have you climbed?

ANDREW: Um...Ularoo.

CHRIS: Ularoo? Everyone climbs that. There's a footpath with a rail.

SARAH: And Kosciusko.

CHRIS: Well, it's not exactly treacherous, is it?

SARAH: It was the way he went.

CHRIS: And what way was -

SARAH: He's also into running, and he goes to the gym. So like you, Eric, he knows its important to look after his body.

ERIC: Yeah, great, that's cool.

SARAH: But he's not averse to having fun, and can often be found at the hottest nightclubs, painting the town red. Can't you, Andrew?

ANDREW: (*pause*) So tell me, Eric, what was your TES score?

ERIC: Um...seventy-two.

ANDREW: Seventy-two? That's not very high.

SARAH: Andrew!

ERIC: It's enough to get into science.

ANDREW: Yes it is, unfortunately.

ERIC: What's that supposed to mean?

SARAH: Nothing. He didn't mean anything by it.

ERIC: Well, why say it?

ANDREW: I'm sorry, Eric, but science is a very intellectually-demanding field, and I wonder if you've really thought about whether you're suited to it?

ERIC: Are you saying that I'm not smart enough for it?

ANDREW: Well, a lot of people with low TES scores often fail or pull out.

ERIC: You are saying I'm not smart enough!

ANDREW: Have you considered becoming a snowboarding teacher? Wouldn't that be cool making a living doing something you really love?

ERIC: I don't have to listen to this shit.

*ERIC turns to leave, but SARAH takes his arm.*

SARAH: Eric, Andrew's only joking. He's got a very warped and youthful sense of humour. Don't you, Andrew?

ERIC: It's not funny telling someone they're stupid and only good for teaching snowboarding.

ANDREW: I didn't say that. There are lots of things you could do. Perhaps a shop assistant, or maybe even a cleaner.

ERIC: Fuck you, you science geek!

*ERIC gives him the finger and storms off.*

ANDREW: Later, dude!

SARAH: Eric, come back! (*but he's gone*) Andrew, don't talk to anyone else until I get back. And, Chris, don't move - I have to talk to you about dinner tonight.

SARAH *races off.*

SARAH: (*off*) Eric!

CHRIS: Well, I can see why they recruited you to promote science.

ANDREW: Come on, how do you think a kid like him would go studying it?  
Honestly?

CHRIS: I don't know. Sometimes people can surprise you.

ANDREW: Not him. Five minutes after he walked into a lab the place would be ablaze.

CHRIS: But your job isn't to make judgements on the quality of people - your job is to get them enrolling.

ANDREW: My job is to get the best kids into science! The only reason a kid like Eric can even consider it is because the best kids have gone elsewhere. So science departments have to keep lowering their entry scores so they can fill their student quota. And if they actually manage that, their failure rate goes up, or, worse still, they lower their pass rate. Either way, science is the loser.

CHRIS: So you're after the cream of the cream who are looking at other careers?

ANDREW: Exactly.

CHRIS: Right. Leave it with me.

CHRIS *hurries off.*

PHILLIP, *unseen by ANDREW, enters.*

PHILLIP: Andrew.

ANDREW: (*under breath*) Shit. (*he turns*) Phillip! Hi. How are you?

PHILLIP: All right. And you?

ANDREW: Fine fine. I haven't seen you for a while.

PHILLIP: No, not since that day in the lab.

SARAH *races back in.*

SARAH: Andrew, how could you have been so rude...oh, hello. I'm Sarah Dawn with the Minister's office.

*They shake hands.*

SARAH: And you are?

PHILLIP: Phillip.

SARAH: So you're interested in studying science?

PHILLIP: Um...

ANDREW: Phillip *is* a scientist.

SARAH: Oh, wonderful.

ANDREW: We were together at Alice Cross.

PHILLIP: I even participated in Andrew's experiment.

SARAH: You mean you let him zap your brain?

PHILLIP: Yes.

SARAH: And how did that go? You seem normal enough.

PHILLIP: Actually -

ANDREW: It went really well.

PHILLIP: Well, the truth is -

SARAH: Oh my God!

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: Where's Chris?

ANDREW: He went that way.

*SARAH hurries off. Uncomfortable silence.*

ANDREW: Phillip, I'm really sorry about what happened in the lab.

PHILLIP: Don't worry about it. Everything's fine.

ANDREW: So you can play the guitar again?

PHILLIP: No, I can't.

ANDREW: I'm so sorry. If there's anything -

PHILLIP: No, don't worry about it. It's like I've woken up from a crazy dream.

ANDREW: What do you mean?

PHILLIP: Well, a few days after I undertook TMS I couldn't understand why I ever wanted to be a musician. Suddenly the whole idea seemed nuts to me.

ANDREW: You're kidding?

PHILLIP: It made me realise that I'm a scientist, and there's nothing else I should be doing. So I've resumed my PhD.

ANDREW: Phillip, that is the best news! Science can't afford to lose people like you.

PHILLIP: Thanks. Actually, that's what I wanted to say - thank you. Even though you didn't intend it, you've made me see things more clearly. It seems the TMS might actually be capable of things you hadn't realised.

ANDREW: Yes.

PHILLIP: Which was good for me, but not for you, since it wasn't the result you were after.

ANDREW: Well, we scientists have to accept that sometimes things don't work out the way we hope.

PHILLIP: No.

ANDREW: So how about lunch? On me.

PHILLIP: Thanks, but I actually want to get back to work. I wasted a whole year on music so I'm desperate to catch up.

ANDREW: You'll get there. I know you will.

PHILLIP: Thanks again, Andrew.

*PHILLIP hugs him, then leaves.*

ANDREW: It works. It works! It works!! I'm a genius!!!

*ANDREW lets out a yell of delight and leaps up and down. SARAH returns.*

SARAH: What are you so happy about?

ANDREW: Um...nothing. Nothing at all.

SARAH: It's going to be a secret, is it?

ANDREW: Looks like it.

SARAH: And thankfully so is your treatment of poor little Eric. I had to promise to buy him his dream snowboard to keep him quiet.

ANDREW: Great.

SARAH: Worse still, I'm having dinner with Chris again, and God knows what his expectations are for second dates, but the thought terrifies me.

ANDREW: Fantastic.

SARAH: It is not fantastic. You're not on drugs, are you? You seem as high as a kite.

ANDREW: No no, I'm fine.

SARAH: Whatever it is, just keep yourself under control. I can't have you insulting any more prospective students. So just - oh no, not again!

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: Chris is dragging another teenager this way. A girl this time. So listen, no matter how low her TES score, I don't want you suggesting she become a parking inspector, okay?

ANDREW: Don't worry, I will be polite and encouraging.

SARAH: Good.

*CHRIS and FIONA enter. FIONA is dressed in stylish home-made clothes.*

SARAH: Chris, back again?

CHRIS: I certainly am. Andrew and Sarah, this is Fiona. Fiona, this is Andrew and Sarah.

ANDREW & SARAH: Hi, Fiona.

*They shake hands.*

FIONA: I really liked your lecture. Really thought-provoking.

ANDREW: Thanks. Are you planning to study science?

CHRIS: *(quickly)* Fiona got a TES score of ninety-nine, and she won the college Bancroft Science Award for her work on sequestering carbon dioxide into...marine micro-algae, to curb the effects of global warming? Is that right?

FIONA *nods.*

ANDREW: That is fantastic, Fiona, well done. Really important research.

SARAH: It sure is.

ANDREW: So which uni' do you plan to study at?

FIONA: Um...the University of Technology.

ANDREW: Oh. That's a good university, but there are far better science departments in the country. Have you considered the ANU?

FIONA: Well...

CHRIS: The ANU wouldn't be much good to Fiona.

ANDREW: Why not?

CHRIS: Because she's not studying science.

ANDREW: What?

CHRIS: In fact, she's going to be studying fashion and textile design.

*Stunned pause.*

ANDREW: Is this true?

FIONA: Yes.

ANDREW: Why would you waste your clearly first-class mind on fashion?

SARAH: Andrew!

ANDREW: Sorry, Fiona, it's just we need people like you to attack the problems that are devastating the world.

FIONA: I agree completely. In fact, I seriously considered science, but my nature kept pulling me back to fashion.

ANDREW: But you can still do fashion as a hobby. You could even sell your clothes on-line.

FIONA: I s'pose. It's just...

ANDREW: Yes?

FIONA: A career in science isn't very secure.

ANDREW: The Minister's just changed that. Early career scientists will now get five year contracts instead of three.

FIONA: But there's still the pressure to constantly produce results and publish papers. My Dad was a research chemist and he was always stressed out of his brain. In the end he joined the public service. He's much happier now.

ANDREW: I admit there's pressure, but I'm sure it would be worse in the fashion industry. I bet most designers don't make a living out of it.

FIONA: That's true, but I believe I can.

SARAH: Did you make these clothes yourself, Fiona?

FIONA: I make all of my clothes.

SARAH: That's amazing. They're so beautiful.

FIONA: Thank you so much.

SARAH: In fact, I would kill for that top.

FIONA: I could make one for you, if you like?

SARAH: Would you?

ANDREW: Sarah! Please.

SARAH: Sorry.

ANDREW: Fiona, I have to be honest - I think you're letting down yourself and the country.

SARAH: Oh, Andrew, don't be so melodramatic. And look at her clothes - they're beautiful! *(to FIONA)* Maybe you could do science as a hobby.

FIONA: Yes, I could probably do that.

ANDREW: No-one has ever discovered anything of value doing science as a hobby.

*PATRICK, a man wearing wildly colourful clothes, races in excitedly.*

PATRICK: Fiona! You have to come with me - there are some important industry people who are dying to see your clothes.

*He takes her by the arm and starts to lead her away. ANDREW takes her by the arm and stops her.*

ANDREW: Excuse me, but I'm in the middle of talking to Fiona.

PATRICK: That will have to wait. This is too important.

ANDREW: Not as important as this.

PATRICK: Let her go! Who do you think you...? Oh. You're that sexy, science super hero. Gonna save the kids from us evil fashion designers and make them scientists.

ANDREW: And who are you?

PATRICK: Patrick Francis, Director of Fashion and Textile Design at UTS. The most successful design course in the country.

ANDREW: You should be ashamed of yourself for wasting the minds of talented kids on something so trivial.

PATRICK: We're so wicked, aren't we? You know how we get them to enrol? We drug them, then force them to design sexy clothes to make us all look hot.

*CHRIS starts to take notes on their conversation.*

ANDREW: I wouldn't be surprised, but it's going to end. Cause when I'm through with fashion only a zombie will enrol.

PATRICK: You're too late, super science hero. We've already got the best, but you can have the dregs.

ANDREW: Don't you realise you're endangering the future of the country?

PATRICK: Yeah yeah, the sky's gonna fall, the world's gonna end. You geeks always say that, but nothing ever happens. You just try to scare us so you can feel important. Come on, Fiona, let's get away from this madman.

*ANDREW pulls FIONA away from him and stands in front of her, blocking PATRICK from getting to her.*

ANDREW: I will not let you destroy her life.

PATRICK: Why would she want to spend her life in a lab? Kids want excitement and glamour! Watching bacteria grow won't provide it.

ANDREW: You have such a clichéd view of science.

PATRICK: Oh go away, and sign up your dregs. Now get out of my way.

*PATRICK pushes him in the chest. ANDREW pushes him back. CHRIS starts taking photos with his mobile phone.*

PATRICK: Get your chemical-stained hands away me! This shirt is fine cotton. Now move.

*PATRICK shoves him in the chest again.*

*The MINISTER enters pushing a trolley with the TMS machine on it. He stops and watches.*

*ANDREW shoves PATRICK back. PATRICK throws a punch, but ANDREW ducks, then punches him hard in the mouth. Blood spurts out. PATRICK falls to the ground.*

FIONA: Patrick!

*ANDREW looks like he is going to go in for the kill, but SARAH pulls him back.*

SARAH: No, Andrew!

*FIONA rushes to PATRICK. CHRIS continues taking photos.*

PATRICK: Oh my God! Blood's on my shirt! I need salt and water before it's too late. Fiona, help me.

*FIONA helps him up and starts to walk him off.*

ANDREW: What a baby! Go use some Napisan.

PATRICK: Go to Hell. This was made for me by Leo Rossi himself. If it's ruined I will sue you!

*PATRICK and FIONA exit. CHRIS runs after them.*

SARAH: Chris, come back!

*SARAH starts to chase him when...*

MINISTER: Sarah! Get back here.

SARAH: Minister! What are you - ?

MINISTER: How could you let this happen?

SARAH: The fashion designer attacked him.

MINISTER: Don't lie to me. I saw the whole thing.

SARAH: But Minister -

MINISTER: That's enough. You're through here.

SARAH: What?

MINISTER: Go outside and wait in my car.

SARAH: But -

MINISTER: Go!

*SARAH leaves.*

MINISTER: You're finished too.

ANDREW: But he attacked me.

MINISTER: I cannot have the face of Australian science bashing people.

ANDREW: You have to give me another chance.

MINISTER: You've had your chance. I even bent rules to get the Magna Pro for you.  
And this is how you repay me.

ANDREW: But what about my career?

MINISTER: That's no longer my concern.

*The MINISTER pushes the TMS machine out.*

ANDREW: No!

*Blackout.*

**ACT 2**

**SCENE 1**

*The MINISTER's hotel room. The stage is pitch black. Thunder and lightning begins, revealing the MINISTER sitting down, undergoing TMS by himself. He is yelling...*

MINISTER: Come on, TMS! Show me how else I can help science. Inspire me!

*We begin to see pictures projected onto the wall behind him. These represent his unconscious mind. We see the Minister cutting a red ribbon across the doorway to a new science lab, people applauding; the Minister being held aloft by a group of scientists wearing lab coats; a naked woman; the Minister wearing a gown and mortar board clutching an honorary degree; a naked woman; the minister on a ship dressed as the captain; and again the Minister receiving his honorary degree. These pictures can change rapidly and be in different orders.*

MINISTER: Come on, TMS, what does it mean? Be more specific!

*THE pictures speed up, rotating between only two now: the Minister as the captain of the ship, and receiving the honorary degree.*

MINISTER: I should be called Captain, not Minister? I should create a new department called The Department of Science and Shipping! No no! Lobby the ANU for an honorary degree? I certainly deserve it. And I look the part - very scholarly. *(pause)* Wait a sec! Scholar...and ship. Of course! - Science scholarships!

*The storm ceases. He whips off the TMS cap.*

MINISTER: One thousand of them! And students who get them won't incur a HECS debt! Free science education! Brilliant! TMS, you've done it again!

*He kisses the TMS cap, then does some vigorous shadow boxing.*

*An urgent knocking at the door. It continues for a few moments. Finally the MINISTER stops shadow boxing and heads off stage.*

MINISTER: I'm coming, for God's sake, just wait on.

*He goes off stage.*

MINISTER: *(off)* Get out of here, Andrew!

ANDREW: *(off)* I'm coming in!

*ANDREW barges in, followed by the MINISTER.*

MINISTER: There's nothing you can say, so don't make a fool of yourself.

ANDREW: I'm not here to beg you. I'm here for the Magna Pro.

MINISTER: Don't be ridiculous.

ANDREW: No-one else will use it. It'll just sit there and rust.

MINISTER: I use it.

ANDREW: What?

MINISTER: It makes me feel as strong as an ox and gives me idea after idea.

ANDREW: You shouldn't do that. I don't know what the long-term effects are.

MINISTER: I'll risk it.

ANDREW: You don't know what you're doing.

MINISTER: We'll see.

ANDREW: Just give it to me.

MINISTER: I should warn you I've just had TMS and I feel like Anthony Mundine.

ANDREW: I'm taking the Magna Pro.

MINISTER: Like Hell you are, you little geek.

*The MINISTER takes up a fighting stance. They start to circle around each other.*

ANDREW: If I'm a geek, you're the ultimate geek. You're the Minister for Science.

MINISTER: I'm not a geek. I never even studied science.

ANDREW: What?

MINISTER: Actually, that's not true. I studied Political Science.

ANDREW: You're the Minister for Science and you don't know anything about it?

MINISTER: I don't have to. My advisers do and that's all that matters.

ANDREW: No wonder science funding is so woeful.

MINISTER: That's the previous government's fault. I'm rectifying that.

ANDREW: You're not doing nearly enough.

MINISTER: Oh shut up, pretty boy. You don't know anything about science except what goes on in your own little lab. You've got your head up your arse.

ANDREW: Your head's gonna be up your arse in a sec.

MINISTER: Not bloody likely.

*They are about to swing at each other when SARAH runs in holding a newspaper.*

SARAH: Stop!

*They stop and look at her.*

SARAH: You're not going to believe this.

MINISTER: What?

SARAH: Chris got his story in The Sydney Morning Herald.

MINISTER: Oh shit!

SARAH: No, it's good. Look at the headline: "A Blow for Science!"

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: And look at the picture.

*Projected onto the back wall is a picture of ANDREW's punch connecting with Patrick's jaw. The headline above says, "A Blow for Science".*

MINISTER: My God, you look like a superhero. I could've been in trouble, despite the TMS.

ANDREW: Come on, read the story.

SARAH: "Careers expos are usually dull affairs, but last night Expo 2008 exploded into life when Andrew Dean, the face of Australian Science, and Patrick Francis, director of fashion design at UTS, came to blows over high-flying student Fiona Casey. Dean was trying to convince her to enrol in science, when Francis barged in and tried to drag her away. When Dean politely objected, Francis threw a punch, which Dean just managed to duck. Then out of self-defence, he threw one back that connected perfectly to Francis' jaw. Francis ran off screaming for some water to get a blood stain out of his shirt. As for Fiona Casey, it is not yet known what she will study next year. What will she choose? Stay tuned."

ANDREW: That's unbelievable. Did you sleep with him?

SARAH: Of course I -

MINISTER: You slept with him?

ANDREW: He's her boyfriend.

SARAH: He is not my -

MINISTER: Sarah, that is first-class work!

SARAH: But I didn't sleep with him!

ANDREW: She's had dinner with him, though.

SARAH: Dinner's dinner, not sex.

MINISTER: Just imagine the story he would have written if you'd slept with him!  
Sarah, we need this sort of publicity to keep coming. Dinners alone won't do it.

SARAH: But -

MINISTER: This is the twenty-first century. Employers demand more of their employees. If you can't give that little extra, then I'm sorry, but -

*A mobile phone goes off. It's SARAH's.*

SARAH: Hang on.

*She answers it.*

SARAH: Sarah Dawn. *(pause)* Stephanie! How are you? *(pause)* Of course he can make it. See you tomorrow.

*She hangs up.*

SARAH: That was Stephanie Knight from Good Morning Australia. He wants Andrew on the show tomorrow to talk about the fight and the future of science!

MINISTER: It's happening! I knew it would!

SARAH: He didn't want a bar of us a month ago, but now he's my best friend.

MINISTER: Of course he is. We've created excitement. Now we have to work out what you're going to say on the show.

ANDREW: You mean I'm going on it?

MINISTER: Of course you are. That's your job.

ANDREW: But you fired me.

MINISTER: For God's sake, Andrew, that was when you were a liability, but now you're an asset. Try to keep up, will you. Now - wait a second!

SARAH: What is it, Minister?

MINISTER: I'm an absolute genius! Just imagine the sensation it will cause if Andrew goes on with Fiona and she tells the whole country she's decided to study science!

SARAH: Minister, that's brilliant!

MINISTER: It's the TMS again! Now tell me, is she good looking?

SARAH: She's beautiful.

MINISTER: Fantastic! And wait - here's another brilliant idea. She and Andrew could be the golden couple of Australian science. Like Angelina and Brad!

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: Minister, she's only seventeen.

MINISTER: That's fine, she's legal. You could even start doing the promotions together! Imagine the hysteria that will cause!

SARAH: Minister, it will look terrible. Andrew's thirty.

ANDREW: It probably would be a bit off.

MINISTER: (*pause*) All right. Pity she's not eighteen. That wouldn't be so bad. Right, the first thing we have to do is get her to do science. Do you think we have a chance?

ANDREW: She seemed determined to study fashion.

SARAH: And I think she was appalled that Andrew punched Patrick.

MINISTER: I doubt it, Sarah. Seventeen year olds are very basic creatures. She was probably turned on.

SARAH: And I have to admit her clothes are beautiful. In fact, she's promised to make me a top.

MINISTER: Don't tell me you were encouraging her in her fashion career?

ANDREW: She was.

MINISTER: Well done, Sarah. You should have told her she was useless. Made her lose faith in herself.

SARAH: Sorry, Minister.

MINISTER: So you should be. Now, if we can convince her to do science, do not let her wear her own clothes on television. If Stephanie likes them it could cause all sorts of trouble.

SARAH: Fine.

MINISTER: So do we know where to find her?

SARAH: No. But Chris might.

MINISTER: Who?

ANDREW: Sarah's boyfriend.

SARAH: He is not -

MINISTER: Yes, Sarah, we've got it. He's not your boyfriend, okay?

SARAH: Thank you.

MINISTER: Good, now phone this lover of yours and find out where Fiona is.

SARAH: Yes, Minister.

*Sarah hurries off.*

MINISTER: Right, Andrew, when you meet with her I want you to use all your God-given advantages. Smile at her, compliment her, laugh at her jokes and generally make her feel like a natural woman. After that she's bound to enrol in science.

ANDREW: Okay.

MINISTER: Good. Now we need to come up with some other sweeteners for her. So let's have a TMS session.

*The MINISTER sits down and puts the cap on his head. Short burst of thunder and lightning, then blackout.*

**SCENE 2**

ANDREW *stands alone on the stage looking at his watch. After a moment* FIONA *enters.*

ANDREW: Fiona! You came.

FIONA: Hi.

ANDREW: It's good to see you.

FIONA *nods.*

ANDREW: Look, I'm sorry I punched Patrick. I momentarily lost control of -

FIONA: He threw the first punch.

ANDREW: He did! You saw that?

FIONA: Yes.

ANDREW: But you went with him.

FIONA: Well, he was hurt, and....he was going to introduce me to some industry heavyweights.

ANDREW: Of course.

FIONA: But thanks to the bloodstain emergency, that never happened.

ANDREW: Did he get it out?

FIONA: I don't know. He was still trying three hours later when I had to go.

ANDREW: It really is a tragedy, isn't it?

FIONA: Yes, Shakespearian.

ANDREW: *(pause)* I'm sorry you didn't get to meet those industry people.

FIONA: That's okay. It's not like they were going to guarantee me a career on the spot or anything.

ANDREW: No, but we can.

FIONA: What?

ANDREW: The Minister is very keen for you to study science, and he's offering you the very first science scholarship he's just created. You won't have to pay any fees and you'll have enough money to live on.

FIONA: You're kidding?

ANDREW: No.

FIONA: But why?

ANDREW: Because you're exactly the sort of person we're trying to get into science. Highly intelligent with a strong science background.

FIONA: Well, that's incredibly flattering, but -

ANDREW: Not only that, but he'll get you post-doctoral work at any overseas uni you like. Again, expenses paid.

FIONA: My God.

ANDREW: It's a wonderful offer, isn't it? I wish I had it when I was studying. I'm still paying off my debt.

FIONA: *(pause)* It's fantastic, but...

ANDREW: You want to study fashion?

*She nods.*

ANDREW: *(pause)* Do you realise the fight between Patrick and me has become public?

FIONA: Yes, I saw the article.

ANDREW: It's being built up as a battle between science and fashion design to win your enrolment. And if you don't study science it will seriously damage our efforts to recruit students.

FIONA: Oh, come on.

ANDREW: I'm going on Good Morning Australia tomorrow because they want to know what you're going to study.

FIONA: Are you serious?

ANDREW: Yes.

FIONA: But...why's it so important what I study?

ANDREW: Because you're a first-class student, multi-talented, and...you're beautiful.

FIONA: Oh, I am not.

ANDREW: You are. And if people see someone like you going into science, they'll think, "if it's good enough for Fiona Casey, it's good enough for me." But if you turn your back on it, it will reinforce the stereotype that it's only for geeks and they'll turn their back on it, too.

FIONA: But -

ANDREW: Do you think the world is facing serious problems in the coming years?

FIONA: Of course. Climate change, depletion of oil reserves, the lack of alternative energies.

ANDREW: Exactly. So who do you think is in a better position to tackle that: scientists or fashion designers?

FIONA: That's not fair, Andrew.

ANDREW: (*pause*) How about this: You defer studying fashion design for one year and work with me to help promote science. You'll earn enough to pay off your entire university debt. You'll still have the career you want, and you'll have been an enormous help to your country. What do you think?

FIONA: (*pause*) It's...it's a tempting offer.

ANDREW: It is, isn't it? Have the fashion people offered you as much? Have they offered you anything at all?

*Silence.*

ANDREW: And seriously - what other seventeen year old has ever been offered such an opportunity?

FIONA: Actually, I'm almost eighteen. Next week, in fact.

ANDREW: Next week. Really?

*He takes her hands in his.*

ANDREW: So what do you say, Fiona? A year of your life to help the future of your country?

*They stare at each other. Blackout.*

**SCENE 3**

*Good Morning Australia set. Spotlight on STEPHANIE in a chair. He speaks directly to the audience.*

STEPHANIE: The competition between university departments for students has reached an extraordinary level. Two days ago at Careers Expo 2010, Andrew Dean, the public face of Australian science, got into a punch-up with the Director of Fashion Design at UTS, Patrick Francis, over a student they were both trying to enrol. To tell us all about it is Andrew Dean himself.

*Lights up on ANDREW, sitting in a chair next to STEPHANIE.*

STEPHANIE: Andrew, the first thing I think we need to know is who won the fight?

ANDREW: I did, and very easily. But he started it, and I threw only one punch in self-defence

STEPHANIE: And all this over a student?

ANDREW: Not just any student. One of the cream of the crop. Fiona Casey who got a TES score of ninety-nine, and won last year's Bancroft College Science Award.

STEPHANIE: But why such desperate measures?

ANDREW: Because science enrolments have been falling steadily since 2003. If it continues, we're going to have a shortfall of nearly twenty thousand scientists by 2013, at a time when our society needs them more than ever. Not only that, we need the very best people, but for various reasons they've been going elsewhere.

STEPHANIE: Why do you think that is?

PATRICK: *(off)* Because they don't want to hang out with a bunch of boring geeks!

*PATRICK enters holding his stained shirt.*

STEPHANIE: *(to audience)* Patrick Francis, Director of Fashion and Textile design at UTS.

PATRICK: This is the shirt he ruined. I rinsed it in cold water, rubbed it with shampoo, and even used hydrogen peroxide, but I couldn't get the stain out.

STEPHANIE: Did you try toothpaste? My mother swears by it.

PATRICK: I tried everything, but it wouldn't come out.

STEPHANIE: I'm sorry to hear that, but can't you just buy the same shirt?

PATRICK: You can't buy this shirt! It's one of a kind, made especially for me by my former student, Leo Rossi, the best designer in the country.

ANDREW: I can't even see a stain.

PATRICK: Then you must be blind, as well as stupid.

*ANDREW stands and moves towards him. STEPHANIE jumps between them.*

STEPHANIE: Hey, hey, steady on, fellas. We don't want any more violence.

PATRICK: I'm happy to fight him. If I hadn't had to get this stain out I would've stayed and decked him.

ANDREW: Decked me? You couldn't deck an anorexic model, you strutting peacock.

PATRICK: Let's go then! I'll take you on right now. Come on! Come on!

*They take up their fighting stances*

STEPHANIE: Fellas fellas, surely this is no way to promote your respective disciplines?

PATRICK: I don't have to promote my discipline. Everyone wants to do it. But we only take the best, while he has to scramble for the dregs.

ANDREW: That's about to change.

PATRICK: It will never change! Who wants to spend their whole life bent over a microscope?

STEPHANIE: Why don't we ask the person who's at the centre of this fight - Fiona Casey. Fiona, come on out.

*FIONA comes out, looking nervous and apprehensive, dressed in elegant, but fairly standard corporate clothes.*

PATRICK: Fiona! Where have you been? I spent all yesterday trying to find you, but...why are you wearing these clothes? Where are your beautiful clothes?

FIONA: I didn't feel like wearing them today.

PATRICK: But you should have. *(to STEPHANIE)* People will kill for them. She is the most talented young designer I've come across since Leo Rossi himself.

STEPHANIE: Fiona, how does it feel to have these two fellas fighting over you?

FIONA: Oh, a bit overwhelming actually.

PATRICK: And there's no fight anyway, because Fiona will be studying Fashion design at UTS.

STEPHANIE: Is that right, Fiona?

*Silence.*

PATRICK: Well, go on, Fiona, tell him.

FIONA: Um...

PATRICK: Fiona, tell him.

FIONA: I'm sorry, Patrick, I'm going to study science.

PATRICK: What!

STEPHANIE: Are you serious?

FIONA: Yes.

STEPHANIE: This is incredible. Why have you decided to go with science?

FIONA: Well, I think it's important to make a contribution to the nation.

PATRICK: Fashion is an important contribution! It makes the beautiful people more beautiful and the ugly tolerable.

STEPHANIE: Patrick, can you let her speak, please?

PATRICK: Fine, fine. I just can't believe what I'm hearing.

STEPHANIE: Fiona, go on.

FIONA: The world's facing so many problems, but we can't solve them without scientists.

PATRICK: You'll have far less money, and working in labs you'll get old and ugly before you know it.

STEPHANIE: Patrick!

*PATRICK shuts-up and shakes his head in disbelief.*

STEPHANIE: Fiona, was it a hard decision to make?

FIONA: Very hard. I love both disciplines, but I've become so worried about the state of our world that I have to help.

STEPHANIE: That's a fantastic attitude! I hope other young Australian are inspired

to take responsibility for the world like you are. Andrew, what's your reaction to Fiona's decision?

ANDREW: I couldn't be happier. Knowing that someone of Fiona's intelligence is going to work in science gives me renewed hope for our future.

PATRICK: He's drugged her!

STEPHANIE: What?

PATRICK: Or altered her brain somehow. He gives people electric shocks! Fiona would not do this if she was in her right mind.

ANDREW: I think *you're* the one on drugs. (*to STEPHANIE*) It's rampant in that industry I believe.

PATRICK: I demand she be taken to a doctor immediately for an examination.

ANDREW: Why don't you just respect her decision, and leave her alone.

PATRICK: No! Fiona, you're coming with me.

*Once again he grabs her and tries to drag her off!*

ANDREW: Get your hands off her.

*STEPHANIE gets between them again.*

FIONA: Patrick, please let me go.

*PATRICK lets her go.*

FIONA: I'm sorry my decision has upset you. But I stand by it.

*Silence.*

PATRICK: You could have been the best. The best.

*PATRICK slinks off. ANDREW puts his arm around FIONA and smiles.*

*Blackout.*

**SCENE 4**

ANDREW and FIONA stand either side of a Van Der Graaf Generator. They both wear lab coats. ANDREW addresses the audience.

ANDREW: Okay, kids, this is where we say goodbye. Fiona and I will now put our hands on the Temporal Displacement Generator and travel back in time.

*Sound of kids laughing and making disbelieving sounds.*

ANDREW: What? You don't believe me?

KIDS: *(recorded)* No!

ANDREW: Well, we'll prove it, won't we, Fiona?

FIONA: You bet. We're going back in time just before you all came in. When we get there we'll pinch a few of your wallets, bring them back and return them to you.

ANDREW: So check your wallets now, kids. Make sure you have them.

*Sounds of kids checking their wallets.*

ANDREW: Do you have them?

KIDS: *(off)* Yes!

ANDREW: Good. Right, Fiona, protective glasses on.

*They take out cool sunglasses and put them on.*

ANDREW: See you soon, kids. Don't muck up while we're gone or you won't get your wallets back.

ANDREW *turns on the generator. It starts to whirr away loudly.*

ANDREW: Okay, Fiona, one two three!

*They put their hands on the Van de Graaf Generator and their bodies start to sway involuntarily.*

ANDREW: Oh my God, something's gone wrong! We're not going back in time!

FIONA: It must be the wrong generator! It think it's the funky dance generator!

ANDREW: Funky dance Generator? No! We have to abort! Abort! Abort!

*Modern rock music starts to play. ANDREW and FIONA let go of the Van Der Graff Generator and start to do a sexy dance together.*

**SCENE 5**

ANDREW and FIONA are sitting behind a desk with two calendars lying on it. A young man, JIM, is watching FIONA as she signs a calendar.

FIONA: There you go.

JIM: Fantastic. Thanks for that.

FIONA: No problem.

JIM: I think it's great what you're doing for science.

FIONA: Thanks.

ANDREW: Will you be studying it?

JIM: Ah, no. I've never been any good at it. But I've got some friends who are doing it.

ANDREW: Because of our promotion?

JIM: No, they've always been total gee...into it. But I'm sure lots of other people will have been inspired by you.

ANDREW: Yes, I'm sure.

JIM: Oh, before I go, could I get a picture with you, Fiona?

FIONA: Sure.

JIM: *(to Andrew)* Would you mind?

ANDREW: No, not at all.

*JIM gives ANDREW his mobile phone. JIM puts his arm around FIONA, and ANDREW takes the photo. He gives the phone back.*

JIM: Fantastic. Thanks for that, Fiona, and you too...

ANDREW: Andrew.

JIM: Of course. I can't wait 'til my friends see this. Thanks again.

*He exits.*

SARAH *enters.*

SARAH: Well, that's it. They've all gone.

FIONA: You mean it's finally over?

SARAH: All over, bar the announcement of the enrolment figures.

FIONA: Thank God!

ANDREW: See, I told you you'd get through it.

FIONA: No more autographs, no more smiling all the time, no more guys giving me their phone numbers. I can just go back to being myself. Fashion design here I come!

*ANDREW and SARAH look at each other.*

*SARAH sees the calendar on the table.*

SARAH: Oh. We've still got one left.

ANDREW: Oh no! What a failure it's been today. Science is the loser.

SARAH: All right, but I like it when we sell out. I hope it's not a bad omen.

ANDREW: We've gone all around the country selling these things, and we have all of one left. I think we've done pretty well.

SARAH: Of course. I'm just being silly. I'll keep it as a memento.

CHRIS: *(off)* Can I buy it?

*They look off stage and CHRIS enters.*

SARAH: Why hello there, stranger. Haven't seen you for a while.

CHRIS: No.

SARAH: Come back for one last big story, have you?

CHRIS: That's right. Find out how you fare on the big day.

SARAH: Big day?

CHRIS: The enrolment figures coming out tomorrow.

SARAH: Of course.

CHRIS: Find out if the whole circus has been worthwhile.

ANDREW: Circus?

CHRIS: Sorry, your promotional tour. It was my editor who described it as a circus. That's why she stopped me covering it. There didn't seem to be much science being promoted.

ANDREW: The science was promoted. Don't worry about that.

CHRIS: Oh yeah? You two touring the country like a Hollywood couple selling a movie.

SARAH: Actually, they're better looking than most Hollywood couples, and a Hell of a lot smarter.

CHRIS: And much classier. Particularly when Andrew signed that young woman's breast.

SARAH: It was just a bit of fun. And probably got some kids thinking about studying biology.

CHRIS: Ha ha.

ANDREW: For the record I didn't want to -

SARAH: Andrew, whatever you're going to say, it's *off* the record. Remember, you're talking to a journalist.

CHRIS: That's right. We can't be trusted under any circumstances.

ANDREW: All right. *Off* the record, I didn't want to do it, but Sarah pressured me into it. Said it would be good publicity.

CHRIS: Oh, you poor, bullied boy. Too frightened to stand up for yourself?

ANDREW: (*pause*) You do remember that I have quite a good punch, don't you?

CHRIS: Oh, don't like the truth, do we?

ANDREW: Well, what about you? You started the whole thing: "A blow for science!" Remember?

CHRIS: (*pause*) How much for the calendar?

SARAH: Fifteen dollars.

ANDREW: No, no. It's on me. To thank you for making it all possible.

ANDREW *hands him the calendar.*

ANDREW: Go on, have a look. You'll love it.

*CHRIS opens the calendar. As he does, projected on the back wall is ANDREW lying naked on a benchtop with his genitals hidden behind a boiling flask with a Bunsen burner flaming away under it. Liquid is bubbling out of the flask.*

CHRIS: Very educational. Teaching kids the reality of lab conditions.

SARAH: Ha ha.

*He turns the page. ANDREW and FIONA are in a lab. ANDREW is in board shorts, and FIONA is in a bikini. They are leaping around laughing as liquid spurts high into the air out of numerous vials. They are getting soaked.*

CHRIS: Excellent. Kids need to know they should always wear swimmers under their labcoats as beach parties often erupt spontaneously.

*SARAH glares at him. He turns the page again, and there is ANDREW and FIONA rock-climbing in tight, revealing lycra.*

CHRIS: I give up. I can't see any science in this one at all. Or am I supposed to be looking for Wally?

*SARAH snatches the calendar away from him.*

CHRIS: For God's sake! You used sex to sell science. And what's worse - without the science!

SARAH: That's not true. Look. There are interesting science facts at the bottom of each page.

CHRIS: You can barely see them. And with all this flesh, who's going to look anyway!

SARAH: I'm sorry your delicate, middle-class sensibilities have been offended, but this is what gets people interested. So don't blame us - blame society.

CHRIS: You promised me the promotion was going to focus on the -

SARAH: Oh, give it a rest!

CHRIS: *(pause)* Well, what about you, Fiona? Do you like being exploited in this way?

FIONA: I'm not being exploited. It's just a bit of fun.

CHRIS: You've been turned into a sex object.

SARAH: She's not a child, you know. She made her own choice.

CHRIS: She's only seventeen.

ANDREW: Eighteen. In fact, not far off nineteen now.

FIONA: A month away.

CHRIS: Doesn't matter. You'll never be taken seriously as a scientist because of this.

ANDREW: Ignore him, Sweetheart. Let's go back to the hotel.

CHRIS: Sweetheart? Oh my God, you really are a couple.

SARAH: Chris, it's been great catching up with you, but I think it's time you pissed off.

CHRIS: Just one more thing, Fiona. I went to UTS this morning and saw Patrick.

FIONA: You did?

CHRIS: He said if you change your mind and decide to study fashion, he won't let you in his course.

FIONA: What?

CHRIS: He said he'll never forgive you for damaging the reputation of fashion design.

FIONA: Oh my God! Oh my God!

ANDREW: It's okay, just calm down.

CHRIS: Why are you so upset? You don't want to study it anyway.

FIONA: But I do.

CHRIS: You want to study fashion?

SARAH: Of course she doesn't. She's just tired.

CHRIS: Why don't you let her answer!

SARAH: Andrew, get her back to the hotel. She needs some rest.

CHRIS: What's going on here?

SARAH: All that's going on is you're deliberately upsetting a tired young woman.

FIONA: I have to talk to Patrick.

CHRIS: What for?

SARAH: Get her out of here.

ANDREW *takes her out.*

CHRIS: She doesn't want to study science, does she?

SARAH: Of course she does. She's just tired, that's all.

CHRIS: I don't believe you.

SARAH: What a negative mind you have.

CHRIS: I think you hired her to promote science for the year, knowing she'd return to fashion at the end. But now she's realised it might not be possible she's panicking.

SARAH: Breathtaking. And I suppose you think the moon landing was faked, too?

CHRIS: Mock all you like. I'm going to get to the bottom of this.

CHRIS *starts to hurry off.*

SARAH: Chris, wait.

CHRIS: What?

SARAH: How about dinner tonight?

*He shakes his head in disbelief and hurries off.*

SARAH: Shit!

*She runs off.*

**SCENE 6**

ANDREW's hotel room. There's a couch, and the TMS machine is on a table with a chair in front of it. FIONA is shepherded in by ANDREW and SARAH.

FIONA: I have to call Patrick. I have to tell him the truth.

*She takes out her mobile phone.*

SARAH: Let's just talk about this before you do anything rash.

*SARAH takes the phone from her.*

FIONA: Give it back!

SARAH: You're not in the frame of mind to talk to him at the moment.

FIONA: Give it back!

*Silence. SARAH stands firm.*

FIONA: I should have known this would turn him against me.

SARAH: He can't stop you from doing the course.

FIONA: He can say my designs aren't good enough.

SARAH: But he's already said on national television that they're beautiful.

ANDREW: Fiona, why don't you sit down and try to -

FIONA: I can't sit down! I'm too tense.

ANDREW: All right. I'll get you a drink.

*ANDREW exits.*

SARAH: Believe me, the Minister will guarantee that you will get into the –

FIONA: The Minister! The Minister! Will you please stop talking about him as though he is God who can make everything all right. Even if he got me in, he couldn't change how Patrick treats me!

*Silence. FIONA sits down.*

*ANDREW returns with a glass of water.*

ANDREW: Here you go.

*FIONA takes it and drinks.*

ANDREW: Sarah, can I have a word?

SARAH *and* ANDREW *move away from* FIONA.

ANDREW: Can you give me some time alone with her? She probably feels like she's being ganged up on. Alone I think I can talk some sense into her. Okay?

SARAH: (*pause*) Fine. But don't let her make any phone calls, and if she tries to leave just tackle her. Because if this gets out it will ruin the Minister and damage science.

ANDREW: Give me about an hour.

SARAH *exits*.

ANDREW: How are you feeling?

FIONA: Stressed.

ANDREW: Well, there's no need to be, because I'll explain to Patrick what happened. I'll make sure he thinks you were a victim of a bullying Minister and a mad scientist and all will be forgiven. And I'm sure the Minister will do something for his department so he never says a word about it.

FIONA: You mean a bribe?

ANDREW: No, a grant.

FIONA: (*pause*) Thanks, Andrew. That does make me feel better.

*She goes to hug him, but almost falls off the couch.*

ANDREW: Fiona! Are you okay?

FIONA: I feel a little woozy.

ANDREW: Perhaps you should have a lie down. It's been a tiring day.

FIONA: That's a good idea.

*FIONA goes to stand and falls back on the couch.*

ANDREW: What's wrong?

FIONA: I can't stand.

ANDREW: You must be a bit faint. Just lie there for a bit.

FIONA: No, I feel weird. I feel...

FIONA falls back, unconscious. ANDREW looks at her in a detached manner.

ANDREW: Fiona? Fiona?

*He gently taps her face a few times. No response. She is out cold.*

*He leaps into action. He drags her over to the chair next to the TMS machine and sits her on it. He puts the cap on her head. He twists the dial to the top level. It comes off in his hand.*

ANDREW: Shit!

*He unsuccessfully tries to put it back on a few times before succeeding.*

*He starts the machine. After a few moments SARAH races in.*

SARAH: Don't panic, but I think I saw Chris drive into...what the Hell are you doing?

ANDREW: Um...she's feeling tired, and wanted a pick-me-up. She's used it before.

SARAH: But she's asleep.

ANDREW: It's very relaxing. You should try it some time.

*SARAH moves towards FIONA. ANDREW stands in her way.*

ANDREW: Don't! She needs it.

*SARAH stares at him for a moment.*

SARAH: What are you really doing to her?

ANDREW: Nothing.

SARAH: Stop lying! What are you doing?

ANDREW: *(pause)* I'm destroying her desire to study fashion design.

SARAH: What?

ANDREW: Kids today have been brainwashed into chasing the wrong dreams! Modelling, acting, singing, fashion design. The media bombards them with this stuff and it makes them crave fame and adulation. It's a mental illness!

SARAH: You can't be serious?

ANDREW: The left frontal lobe becomes overstimulated, so I have to shut down part of it so they can be immune to the hype. That's what I've been really researching.

SARAH: *(pause)* You're mad.

ANDREW: I'm not mad! Remember Phillip? He gave up his PhD to chase his dream to be a musician, but his playing could make dogs howl. So I gave him TMS and he went back to science where he belongs. It will do the same for Fiona.

SARAH: *(pause)* I'm getting her out of here.

ANDREW: Do you want the promotion ruined? The Minister ruined? Your career?

SARAH: My career?

ANDREW: If I'm going down, you're coming with me.

*SARAH stares at him, deciding what to do, when CHRIS enters.*

CHRIS: What's going on?

SARAH: Chris, have you changed your mind about dinner? How about Vietnamese? Come on, let's go.

CHRIS: What are you doing to Fiona?

*CHRIS hurries over to her, but ANDREW blocks his way.*

CHRIS: If you don't move, I'll call the police.

SARAH: For the record, this has nothing to do with me.

ANDREW: Sarah, don't say anything on the record, remember?

CHRIS: This is all on the record, no matter what you say.

*CHRIS tries to get past ANDREW, but ANDREW pushes him away.*

CHRIS: If you care one iota for Fiona's welfare you'll let her go.

ANDREW: She'll be fine once the Rohypnol wears off.

SARAH: You gave her Rohypnol?

CHRIS: Sarah, if you really aren't involved in this, help me get her to hospital. I'll make sure it's in the story.

ANDREW: Sarah, remember what you said - never trust a journalist.

CHRIS: Please, Sarah.

*(SARAH hesitates.)*

CHRIS: That's it. I'm calling the Police.

*CHRIS starts to leave, but SARAH trips him and he falls behind the couch, out of sight. She jumps on him and we hear a struggle and the sound of someone's head being banged on the floor repeatedly. ANDREW watches, shocked. Finally there is silence and SARAH stands up behind the couch.*

SARAH: I haven't killed him, have I?

*ANDREW checks.*

ANDREW: No.

SARAH: Thank God.

*ANDREW takes the TMS cap off Fiona and heads towards CHRIS.*

SARAH: Not him, too?

ANDREW: I'm going to try and wipe his short-term memory.

SARAH: I thought it was supposed to enhance memory?

ANDREW: Not at the level I'm going to give it to him.

SARAH: Why did I choose the department of science? I should have taken the job in fisheries.

*Blackout.*

**SCENE 7**

*Andrew's hotel room. As it was before, but no-one is there.*

*After a moment, there is a knock at the door.*

MINISTER: *(off)* Hello? Hello?

*The MINISTER enters.*

MINISTER: Andrew? Sarah? *(pause)* The most important day of the year and they're nowhere to be found. Just great.

*He sees the TMS machine.*

MINISTER: Aha! Just what I need.

*The MINISTER goes over to the machine and looks at the dial.*

MINISTER: Spot on.

*He sits down, puts the cap on his head and turns it on. Instantly there is loud screeching sound. He sits bolt upright, emits some gibberish, then falls back unconscious. The noise stops.*

*After a moment, ANDREW and SARAH hurry back in, but don't immediately notice the MINISTER.*

SARAH: But what if when he wakes up he still remembers what happened?

ANDREW: *(pause)* Then you'll have no choice but to sleep with him.

SARAH: I'm not sleeping with him!

ANDREW: You have to do it for the Minister and for science. He's a bloke so he probably won't write the story if you do.

SARAH: I am not -

ANDREW: Stop thinking about yourself for once, and start thinking about the future of this nation. So go back to your room, get into your sexiest lingerie, and prepare for the worst.

SARAH: Oh my God!

ANDREW: What?

SARAH: *(pointing)* The Minister!

ANDREW: Shit!

*They hurry over to him.*

SARAH: Minister! Minister!

*SARAH takes the cap off him. ANDREW turns off the machine.*

*SARAH checks his pulse.*

SARAH: He's alive.

ANDREW: Thank God.

SARAH: How could this have happened? He's used it plenty of times.

ANDREW: Oh no.

SARAH: What?

ANDREW: I put the dial back on the wrong spot.

SARAH: How?

ANDREW: It came off last night, and I put it back on without checking.

SARAH: You idiot! I have to call an ambulance.

ANDREW: You can't call -

SARAH: It's the Minister! It's non-negotiable.

*She hurries over to her handbag on the table and opens it in a hurry. She digs around in it looking for her mobile phone, throwing things out on the floor.*

*Some tic tacs spill all over the floor. She finds the phone, is about to dial when...*

MINISTER: Forty-eight.

*SARAH and ANDREW turn and look at him.*

SARAH: Minister! Are you okay?

MINISTER: Forty-eight. There's forty-eight.

SARAH: What?

MINISTER: Forty-eight. Forty-eight tic tacs.

*Pause.*

SARAH: Oh my God, you've turned the Minister into an autistic savant!

ANDREW: It's incredible.

SARAH: It's horrific! Minister, can you understand me?

MINISTER: Forty-eight. Forty-eight tic tacs.

SARAH: Oh no! Oh no! Oh no!

*ANDREW gets on his knees and starts counting the tic tacs.*

SARAH: What are you doing?

*ANDREW puts up his hand, signalling her to be quiet. After a few more moments...*

ANDREW: There's only thirty.

MINISTER: (*agitated*) Forty-eight! Forty-eight tic tacs!

ANDREW: There's only thirty.

MINISTER: (*very agitated*) Forty-eight! Forty-eight tic tacs!

SARAH: Andrew, stop it! You're upsetting him.

MINISTER: (*screaming*) Forty-eight! Forty-eight!

SARAH: It's okay, Minister, it's okay. There are forty-eight. You're right. Forty-eight tic tacs.

MINISTER: (*calming*) Yes, forty-eight. Forty-eight tic tacs.

ANDREW: Well, he's autistic, all right, but he's no savant. Damn it.

SARAH: What do you mean "damn it"?

ANDREW: I thought I could take him to the casino to fund my research.

SARAH: For God's sake, he's not Rain Man.

ANDREW: No, unfortunately.

*Suddenly FIONA runs out of the bedroom holding a notebook.*

FIONA: Pencil! I need a pencil.

SARAH: Fiona, are you all right?

FIONA: Pencil! I need a pencil.

*SARAH gets one out of her bag and gives it to her. FIONA sits on the couch and starts drawing frantically.*

ANDREW: What are you doing?

FIONA: A dress design. I've never had so many ideas. I feel like I'm on fire.

*She keeps drawing frantically. ANDREW sits on the couch and puts his head in his hands.*

MINISTER: TV! TV!

SARAH: What now?

MINISTER: TV! TV!

SARAH: You want to watch television?

MINISTER: TV! TV!

*SARAH mimes turning on a television (no TV is actually on stage).*

*The MINISTER starts clapping hysterically.*

SARAH: Minister, it's Australian idol. Surely you don't want to watch this?

MINISTER: Idol! Idol! Favourite! Favourite!

ANDREW: See? I haven't created an autistic savant, only an autistic idiot.

MINISTER: Phillip! Phillip! Favourite! Favourite!

*He claps again. A spot comes up on stage illuminating PHILLIP with his guitar.*

ANDREW: Shit! It's Phillip.

SARAH: I thought he'd given up his musical dream?

ANDREW: So did I.

PHILLIP: I want to dedicate this song to Doctor Andrew Dean for helping me become the musician I am today. I could never have made the top twelve without him giving me Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation.

ANDREW: Oh my God!

SARAH: What great publicity!

PHILLIP *starts to play. He's much better than before.*

PHILLIP: (*sings*)

I couldn't play guitar to save my life  
I tried and I tried  
Even played 'til my fingers bled  
Didn't do any good  
I was in despair  
Then someone changed my life

ANDREW: (*yells*) What have I done?

PHILLIP: (*sings*)

He saw me one day, playing for change  
Said if you want improve  
I got just the thing for you  
It's called TMS  
I said tell me more  
I want to be the best

So he took me back to his lab  
Hooked me up to his machine  
Said this won't hurt a bit  
So try to relax  
Then he flicked the switch

SARAH: I think he's pretty good.

PHILLIP: (*sings*)

I tried to play, but I was worse than before  
I thought, "Oh my God  
My dream is no more  
I'll never play again"  
I was certain then...my life  
Was at an end

Then two months later, I sprang out of bed  
The music was back  
Whirring round and round my head  
So I grabbed my guitar  
I said, "please dear, Lord  
Make me a star"

And Lord how I starred!  
I couldn't believe I could play like that  
Was like I was suddenly someone else  
Felt like...Hendrix himself

So thank you, Doctor Andrew Dean  
For making my dreams come true  
My life would be dull and staid right now  
Without you  
I owe it all to you

*The spot on PHILLIP blacks out.*

SARAH: Fantastic! Maybe we can use him to promote science next year? What do you think?

*But ANDREW is in his own world...*

ANDREW: It doesn't work. It does the opposite.

SARAH: Good. That's a much better thing than destroying people's dreams.

ANDREW: The brain's just...too complex. *(beat)* And what if people want to start using TMS to help them become pop stars? I'll have added to the plague!

*Suddenly CHRIS barges in.*

CHRIS: What the hell happened last night? I just woke up in your room, Sarah.

*SARAH and ANDREW look at each other.*

SARAH: You really don't remember?

CHRIS: No, not a thing.

*She sighs with relief.*

SARAH: You drank a bit too much and couldn't make it back home.

CHRIS: But I don't drink.

SARAH: Well, you sure were making up for your abstinence.

CHRIS: But I don't feel hungover. In fact, I feel great. Full of energy.

*CHRIS starts shadow boxing like the Minister did. SARAH'S mobile phone rings.*

SARAH: Sarah Dawn. *(pause)* That's fantastic news! Thank you.  
*She hangs up.*

SARAH: You won't believe it, but enrolments are up from ten thousand to thirteen thousand.

ANDREW: You're kidding?

SARAH: It's amazing. What percentage increase is that?

MINISTER: Five percent!

ANDREW: (*sighs*) No, Minister, it's thirty percent.

MINISTER: Five percent!

ANDREW: No, it's -

SARAH: Andrew!

ANDREW: All right, Minister, it's five percent.

MINISTER: Yes, five percent.

CHRIS: What's wrong with him?

SARAH: He's concussed. He fell and hit his head.

CHRIS: Oh.

FIONA: Finished! Look everyone. It's the best design I've ever done.

*She gives it to SARAH. FIONA immediately starts drawing another one.*

SARAH: That's beautiful, Fiona, absolutely beautiful.

CHRIS: So, you're still designing clothes? Interesting. The other day I saw Patrick at UTS and he -

SARAH: Chris!

CHRIS: What?

*SARAH takes him aside and whispers.*

SARAH: The thing is...

CHRIS: Yes?

SARAH: Why don't we go back to my room?

CHRIS: What for?

SARAH: So we can re-enact what really happened last night.

CHRIS: What do you mean?

SARAH: Let's just say things got a bit wild and you fell off the bed and hit your head.

CHRIS: *(pause)* You mean - ?

SARAH: Do I really need to spell it out?

*Pause*

CHRIS: Let's go.

CHRIS *hurries out.*

SARAH *gives the drawing to ANDREW.*

SARAH: *(to Minister)* My bonus better be at least twenty percent.

MINISTER: Five percent.

SARAH *shakes her head.*

SARAH: *(to Andrew)* And *you* better not misuse your funding this time. The slightest hint of anything unethical and you're finished. Right?

ANDREW: Funding?

SARAH: You reached your target, remember?

SARAH *exits.*

ANDREW: A decade of funding. Of course.

ANDREW *thinks for a moment then notices the drawing in his hand.*

ANDREW: It really is very good, Fiona. Beautiful, in fact.

*Pause. Suddenly ANDREW races over to the chair, raises it above his head and seemingly is about to smash the TMS machine. He pauses, with the chair above his head. Blackout with him still in that position.*

**SCENE 8**

*Pitch black. Thunder and lightning begin and we see ANDREW in a labcoat, undertaking TMS. Pictures of kids undertaking TMS while playing various instruments are projected onto the back wall. ANDREW is thrashing his head this way and that, and he's saying, "No, No, No!". Suddenly he stops and his head drops forward, seemingly unconscious. The pictures disappear.*

*A caption is projected on the back wall: "Video hits. Number 13: 'The New Nerds', by The Scientists."*

*A guitar starts to play.*

*Andrew lifts his head and begins to sing.*

ANDREW: *(Sings)* They all want to sing and they all want to dance  
They all want to model and they all want to act  
Everything they want screams...look at me!

They want you all to know who they are  
They all want the bling and the big shiny car  
The only thing they want is...to be a star!

*Lights up on PHILLIP playing the guitar in a spotlight.*

Why do these kids....have the same silly dreams?  
Even smart kids....the cream of the cream  
Where are the kids...who want to be like me?

*He whips off the TMS cap, leaps up and then whips off his labcoat, revealing a leather lab coat underneath. He starts rocking.*

Cause I don't want to sing and I don't want to dance  
I don't want to model and I don't want to act  
I got better things to do than...primp and prance!

There are lives to save, experiments to make  
The climate to cool, water to save  
We got a world that's stuffed...we gotta save the day!

So get off the stage...and keep out of the way!

*FIONA enters wearing a lab coat, pushing a trolley carrying numerous flasks filled with Cola. She whips off her labcoat revealing she is wearing a bikini. She then drops a Mentos into each flask and cola erupts out of each one in a fountain, showering her as she dances around in it.*

*The MINISTER appears in a spot, still autistic. He sings autistically.*

MINISTER: (*sings*)

You call us nerds with our white lab coats  
Our Bunsen burners and microscopes  
But we don't need a microscope...to see what you are!

*The MINISTER starts dancing autistically.*

ALL:

You're the new nerds! With your off-the-rack dreams  
You're the new nerds! With your Hollywood scenes  
You're the new nerds! Singing other people's songs  
You're the new nerds! We'd love to experiment on

So shove your Idol, and shove your Big Brother  
Shove your cover single and your proud weeping mother  
We don't give a damn...if you've achieved your dreams

We got lives to save, experiments to make  
The climate to cool, and water to save  
We got a world that's stuffed...we gotta save the day!

So get off the stage...and get out of the way!

So get off the stage....and go away!

*Blackout.*

*The End.*