

RENEWAL

A Play in One Act

by

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Cast of Characters

DALTON: 10-year-old boy who's very "plugged in."

PAUL: An introverted librarian in his 40s.

QUINN: A twenty-something librarian (any gender).

A gruff librarian tries to find common ground with a tech-savvy boy as they debate the importance of true-life adventures versus fictional ones.

Scene

A suburban public library in Anytown, USA.

Time

The present.

ACT I

SCENE 1

SETTING: Young Readers section of a modern suburban library. Shelves with books, graphic novels, and a few toys. A presentation pointer and a globe collect dust. A book cart full of returns waits patiently at stage left. A table and chairs complete the room at center stage.

AT RISE: ONE OVERHEAD LIGHT illuminates DALTON, who sits at the table and reads a "Notable Man" comic graphic novel, while a few "Notable Man" volumes clutter the table around him. DALTON reads aloud...

DALTON

Fear not, citizens! I would sooner die than allow Dr. Stabbins to conquer Triangle City. And, perhaps I must. You see, my friends, sometimes saving lives comes at the ultimate price, and if that is the case, then today --

(PAUL enters and pushes the book cart to a shelf. He stops near DALTON.)

DALTON

-- I gladly pay it, for a life lived without risks is one lived in regret! So let the devil come for his due, for today his fee is paid with interest by one ultra mega-powered hero called NOTABLE MAN!

(DALTON stands and raises his fist to the sky, as though flying straight up. The rest of the LIGHTS COME UP, and DALTON sees PAUL.)

DALTON

... Uh... can I help you?

PAUL

Oh -- sorry. I didn't mean to... interrupt your... *whatever* that was. I just wanted to remind you that the library will be closing in ten minutes. Please make your final selection and find your way to the checkout kiosk at your soonest convenience.

(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)

(PAUL returns books to their shelves.
He turns back to face DALTON.)

No pressure.

DALTON

Ugh. How can I be expected to make a decision like this in ten minutes?

(He presents two "NOTABLE MAN"
Trade Paperbacks. His eyes dart between
them in contemplation.)

I... I don't know which one to choose!

PAUL

So get both of them. You can have up to ten books checked out at once.

DALTON

Are you listening to yourself, man? This is the twenty-first century. Nobody has time for ten books at once.

PAUL

So then check them both out, and renew them if necessary.

DALTON

With my attention span? I won't be able to find them in two weeks, let alone remember to renew them. Besides, I'm online gaming this weekend, so even one book is a stretch!

PAUL

Online gaming? What does online gaming have that books don't?

DALTON

Duh. It's fun!

PAUL

But... how?

DALTON

I dunno. It's, like, an adventure or something.

PAUL

Adventure?! Are you listening to yourself, man? True adventure isn't discovered with your thumbs. It's discovered with this.

(He taps his temple.)

Let me ask you something. What will you do if your Playstation dies over the weekend?

DALTON

X-box.

PAUL

And if your X-box dies?

DALTON

Playstation.

PAUL

What I mean is, what if it all goes kaput? Game systems, computers, TVs -- then what?

DALTON

Cell phone.

PAUL

Suppose your WiFi's down!

DALTON

I've got a killer data plan.

PAUL

Well, what if your parents realize you're too *plugged in*, cut you off from all electronic devices, and push you outside to get some fresh air? Then what will you do?

DALTON

I dunno... I guess... I guess I'll come *here*.

PAUL

Yes! And then what?

DALTON

I'll use the library's computers.

PAUL

No -- okay, what I'm getting at is, this is just wires and circuitry.
(He shows his cell phone to DALTON.)
Adventure is not meant to be found on a phone app.

DALTON

(pointing)

Then why do you have *Tinder*?

PAUL

How do you know what --

(PAUL blushes, pockets his phone...)

-- You're missing the -- okay, let me ask you this. What do you get out of these games? What benefits do they provide for you and your friends.

DALTON

Well... It gives us something to do together. We have to team up in order to reach our goals and defeat our enemies.

PAUL

I see. An activity that promotes camaraderie and cooperation... Ah! I've got it.

(PAUL selects a book from the shelf.)

The Three Musketeers. A story about history, treachery --

(He snatches the presentation pointer and spins through the room, fencing an invisible enemy with it.)

-- heroism, romance, and of course, teamwork. You don't experience those with your little blue hedgehog game, do you?

DALTON

It's been a while since you've played a video game, hasn't it?

PAUL

Hey, you're looking at the *Galaga State Tournament* Champion, nineteen-eighty-eight and nineteen-eighty-nine, so my point should not be so frivolously dismissed.

DALTON

Oh...kay. So, did reading about *Musketeers* inspire any adventures for you and *your* friends?

PAUL

Well... not exactly. But my mind was filled with wonder. A special wonder that seems to be missing from the world these days.

DALTON

Hmmm. Do you ever *wonder* if you missed out on real adventure because you wasted so much time reading about the adventures of others?

PAUL

Never. When I was your age, I couldn't wait to pick up a book. It was an escape...

(PAUL returns *The Three Musketeers*.)

... Though I suppose there wasn't nearly as much to escape from back then.

DALTON

All right. So, what do you get out of books?

PAUL

Pardon?

DALTON

You asked what I got out of video games. So, what's so great about your dusty old books?

PAUL

It's called literature. And, well... like all fictional books, they are passageways to other places and times. Some real, some fantasy, but all have the ability to grant you a perspective outside of your own that you wouldn't otherwise experience.

(He points at an island on the globe.)

I can fend off pirates while seeking fortune on *Treasure Island*. Or I can become young Wart, as an old wizard named Merlyn grooms me to become *The Once and Future King*...

(He pulls the pointer from an invisible stone before him, raises it to the sky.)

... *King Arthur!*

DALTON

There are video games for all of those, just so you know. I bet I could find a geezer and a wart on my phone just as easily as I could in any book.

PAUL

(under his breath)

Maybe on Tinder.

DALTON

Huh?

PAUL

Nothing. The point is, if you can't experience these adventures in your own life, how will you ever experience them at all?

DALTON

I can. I have. I've seen them. And their sequels, and remakes, and their sequels' remakes...

PAUL

No, no -- not the movies. The best way to experience them -- the only way to truly connect with them -- is by enjoying them in their original form, as composed by some of the greatest authors who ever lived. Ernest Hemingway. Mark Twain. Jane Austen. Charles Dickens...

DALTON

(laughing)
Dickens.

PAUL

Oh, grow up.

DALTON

Never!

(DALTON runs throughout the room
 with a villainous laugh, arms outstretched
 like an airplane.)

PAUL

Never, you say?

(DALTON stops.)

DALTON

Nope.

PAUL

Well, then...

(He searches the shelf and pulls one
 more book -- he hands it to DALTON.)

... Perhaps you'd be able to relate to this fellow.

DALTON

(reading the title)

Peter and Wendy... like, *Peter Pan*? But, I saw --

PAUL

-- It doesn't matter if you saw the movie, or its sequels, or its remakes. That book is a classic and right up your alley. Magic, fairies, pirates -- and *the boy who wouldn't grow up*.

DALTON

I dunno...

(He examines the book, shakes his head,
 hands it back, and returns to the table.)

Nah. I have enough to do this week.

PAUL

Suit yourself, but -- what is it you're choosing between here anyway?

DALTON

Only the two greatest *Notable Man* stories ever told!

PAUL

Notable Man?

DALTON

Yeah, he's an ultra mega-hero from the future who has the ability to --

PAUL

-- Yes, I'm familiar with *Notable Man*. But what makes these particular volumes so special?

DALTON

(presenting the first)

Well, this is the one where *Notable Man* dies trying to save the city from his evil arch-nemesis, *Dr. Stabbins*.

(PAUL gasps -- *he dies???*)

DALTON

(presenting the second comic)

And this is the one where *Notable Man* sacrificed his powers to reignite the sun after *Captain Snow Blower* froze it.

(PAUL snatches the comic for a glance.)

PAUL

Wait a minute -- I read *Notable Man* comics in my youth, and he never had the power to reignite the sun. He could barely generate enough energy to re-power Triangle City when *Dr. Stabbins* decimated the nuclear power plant.

DALTON

Gotta keep up, man.

PAUL

(snatching the other comic for a glance)

And, also, *Notable Man* can't die. He was gifted the ability to redo the last thirty seconds of his life at any given time. It's what makes him so *notable*. How could he possibly --

DALTON

-- Time disruptor.

(PAUL returns the comics to Dalton.)

PAUL

... *Time disruptor*. That doesn't make any sense. *Foresight Girl* would warn him in advance.

DALTON

Foresight Woman.

PAUL

Woman?

DALTON

Yeah. She's divorced now, and has ultra mega-powered kids, too. And a dog.

PAUL

Interesting. When I read *Notable Man* comics, all of the characters were much older than me. But now, though they've all grown and evolved in some way, they're still so youthful and alive. Meanwhile, here I am, also fully grown, and yet, I myself have become so...

DALTON

... Old? Boring? Grumpy? Lonely?

PAUL

I was going to say *set in my ways*. I guess I've never really thought about it before, but perhaps I haven't evolved nearly as much as I'd thought. Strange. It all went by so fast... but where did it go?

DALTON

Where did *what* go?

(QUINN pops into the room and taps the face of his/her/their watch. PAUL nods at QUINN, who then exits.)

PAUL

It doesn't matter. Time's almost up, and you've only a few minutes left, so choose wisely.

DALTON

Yeah. Like you said, *no pressure*.

(He notices PAUL's frown, then glances at his comics again.)

Okay, so -- I guess -- maybe I'll get two books.

PAUL

Well, I suppose it's better than none. And I think that you've made a fine choice.

DALTON

Hey, mister. Would you say that King Arthur's story was anything like *Game of Thrones*?

PAUL

I would wager not. *The Once and Future King* speaks more about chivalry and justice, while *A Song of Ice and Fire* is more about... that is to say, it's written for a more mature audience. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid you're not quite ready for those just yet.

DALTON

But, we have H-B-O. I watch it all the time! I could be watching it right now!

(He flashes his cell phone and taps a button; a *Game of Thrones*-like theme song plays. He stops it and puts it away.)

PAUL

In that case, perhaps you can handle *The Once and Future King*. After all, there would be no *Game of Thrones* without *King Arthur*.

DALTON

Do you know that for a fact? What are your sources?

PAUL

Pish posh. *Sources*. The tale of *King Arthur* exemplifies the genre -- it's a classic model of brave knights battling enemies and witches to reform their country from --

DALTON

-- But no dragons, or icy armies of the dead?

PAUL

No *what* now?

DALTON

You've never actually seen the show, have you?

PAUL

No. My mother abhors violence.

DALTON

You live with your *mother*?

PAUL

She lives with me. Do you want the book or not?

DALTON

(pause)

Yeah, all right. Give me *King Arthur* and *Peter Pan*.

PAUL

Very good.

(PAUL presents them to DALTON.)

PAUL

Now, run along and enjoy your new adventures.

DALTON

Thanks, mister. You, too!

(DALTON scampers away with books.)

PAUL

Ha. *New adventures*.

(He picks up the comic books.)

Like what? *The Death of Notable Man*?

(PAUL approaches the shelf and pauses.

He shelves both comics.)

(QUINN enters.)

QUINN

That's everybody. Shall I lock up?

PAUL

Yes, thank you... Hey, Quinn?

QUINN

Sir?

PAUL

What do you do for adventure?

QUINN

Adventure? I don't know. I spend a lot of time outdoors. Rock climbing, rafting... that kind of stuff. I'm actually going camping with some friends this weekend. ... Want to go?

PAUL

Oh -- no, thank you.

(He subtly pats *The Three Musketeers*.)

I'm thinking about getting reacquainted with some old friends this weekend.

QUINN

Tinder again?

PAUL

Not Tinder.

QUINN

Okay, suit yourself, but the offer stands. It never hurts to make some new friends, too, right?

PAUL

Another time perhaps. Go home, Quinn. Enjoy the weekend, and have some adventures for me, too, huh?

QUINN

Will do. See you Monday.

(QUINN exits.)

PAUL

I have to know.

(PAUL snatches the *Notable Man* comics
and takes a seat at the table.)

To new friends.

(He flips to a splash page...)

(All LIGHTS FADE EXCEPT FOR
PAUL'S OVERHEAD LIGHT.)

PAUL

For a life lived without risks is one lived in regret! So let the devil come for his due, for today his fee is paid with interest by one ultra mega-powered hero called NOTABLE MAN!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF PLAY)