

# Through the Looking Glass (And What Alice Found There)

A Play for Young Audiences

*By Jim Geisel*

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### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

Before putting *Through the Looking Glass* down on paper in 1860s, Lewis Carroll told a colleague's young daughter, Alice Liddell (the real Alice in the books), the story of talking chess pieces. The novel, of course, was a sequel to his original *Alice in Wonderland*.

This play is set in the early 1920s as a now elderly Alice Liddell reflects on the telling of the original story. Faithful to Carroll's expression of childhood fears of growing up, this adaptation keeps the Victorian charm and merriment by maintaining Carroll's scenes intact. The audience is transported magically with Alice through the looking glass to a land of comic fantasy where logic is nonsense. Alice soon discovers that the landscape is marked out like a giant chessboard with ordinary objects, people and events, jumbled together with talking animals, animated chess pieces and creatures from fairy tale and folklore.

About 1 hour.

### **ORIGINAL PRODUCTION**

*Through the Looking Glass (And What Alice Found There)* had its World Premiere with the Acting Ensemble Stage Company of South Bend, Indiana.

*Through the Looking Glass*

- 3 -

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(2 m, 4 w)*

**ACTOR ONE:** Alice Liddell, a women in her late 60s.

**ACTOR TWO:** Alice, the young girl in the story.

**ACTOR THREE:** Red Queen, Tweedledee.

**ACTOR FOUR:** Engine-Driver, Humpty Dumpty.

**ACTOR FIVE:** White Queen, Tweedledum.

**ACTOR SIX:** Red King, White Knight.

## **SETTING**

A fragment of Alice Liddell's parlor is extreme left surrounded by Looking-Glass Land. The parlor consists of a small table with a chessboard and oversized chess pieces; an old, comfortable stuffed armchair; and a fireplace mantel with a large looking glass.

Looking-Glass Land is a reproduction of the original illustration by Sir John Tenniel of the landscape of Looking-Glass Land found in Chapter II, third illustration. (See Norton Critical Edition, Donald J. Gray, editor.)

Looking-Glass Land is a series of platforms or playing areas styled in the design of a large chessboard. Each of the eight major squares that Alice must pass through in the chess game to become a Queen is divided by a painted brook that Alice must jump over.

Set pieces for the individual scenes are rolled or carried on and off by the actors.

On the whole, the set and production should have a "minimal" feeling to it.

## **Through the Looking Glass**

*(AT RISE: The parlor, a cold November day, early 1920s. ALICE LIDDELL is sleeping in the armchair. Distorted VOICES offstage from her dream fill the theater.)*

**RED QUEEN:** Speak in French when you can't think of the English for a thing.

**WHITE QUEEN:** Bread and butter! Bread and butter!

**TWEEDLEDEE:** It's one of the most serious things that can possibly happen to one in a battle - to get one's head cut off.

**RED QUEEN:** Faster! Faster!

**TWEEDLEDUM:** Contrariwise.

**RED KING:** You're only a sort of thing in my dream. If I were to awake, you'd go out - bang - just like a candle!

**WHITE QUEEN:** Bread and butter! Bread and butter!

**RED QUEEN:** Faster! Faster!

**HUMPTY DUMPTY:** Some people have no more sense than a baby.

**RED QUEEN:** Faster! Faster!

*(The VOICES overlap, and increase in volume. They come to a screeching climax. ALICE LIDDELL wakes up, startled.)*

**ALICE LIDDELL:** Oh my! I must have dozed off waiting for you to arrive. How kind of you to come and visit me. See, I have the chess board all set up ready for our game of chess. My, it's cold. When you came in, you must have let that nasty November wind in behind you. *(SHE rises, crosses to the fire and strokes the embers.)* You know, it was on cold winter afternoons just like this that Mr. Dodgson would visit my sisters and me to play chess. He could tell the most extraordinary stories. Stories about talking chess pieces and little girls falling down rabbit holes. *(SHE catches her reflection in the looking glass.)* Did you know that all sorts of wonderful things happen on the other side of a mirror?

**ALICE LIDDELL:** *(Cont'd.)* There's a whole entire different world called Looking-Glass Land where everything is backwards. Well, enough of that. You shall hear plenty about that later. *(Crosses back to the chair, sits and adjusts a blanket over her lap.)* Now, where were we? Oh, yes. Mr. Dodgson. You would know him better as Lewis Carroll. You've probably have read his books. *Alice In Wonderland? Through The Looking Glass?* Well, he was always Mr. Dodgson to me. You see, I was Alice. I was the little girl in those stories. Of course I was much younger and it was a long time ago. But before anyone else ever read those stories, he told them to me! Oh, we spent many an afternoon with him and his fantasies about this and that. I remember one particular winter's afternoon when Mr. Dodgson was teaching us to play chess. I was sitting where you are now and he was sitting in this chair. I would move the chess pieces any which way. I didn't care. I didn't want to be a pawn. I wanted to be a Queen. *(Imitating his voice.)* "Now, Alice, you must learn the correct rules of chess if you want to become a Queen," he said to me. Knowing that I was having a hard time keeping all the rules straight in my head, Mr. Dodgson, as he generally did, began to make up anecdotes to help me. He showed me a way that the pawn could become a Queen by passing through eight squares, as I'm going to show you today. To make me understand he'd say "What if..." and I knew right away that a wonderful story was going to follow. "What if you were real small and you could play chess right on the board with the other chess pieces?" I thought that would be delightful. "But how can one become small enough?" I asked him. At the moment, Dinah, our cat, had jumped up on the mantel and was pawing at her reflection in the looking glass. "Why, you go through the looking glass," he informed me. I had learned by this time, never to doubt anything Mr. Dodgson would tell me, for he had such a way of making me believe in the impossible. And he said, "Let's pretend there's a way of getting through the looking glass, somehow."

*Through the Looking Glass*

- 7 -

*(ALICE appears in the parlor. She crosses to the mantel and climbs on top.)*

**ALICE:** "Let's pretend the glass has gotten all soft, like gauze, so that we can get through."

*(The looking glass starts to GLIMMER. The LIGHTS start to change.)*

**ALICE:** It's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare, It'll be easy enough to get through.

**ALICE LIDDELL:** And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silver mist.

*(ALICE pushes her way through the glass and appears on the other side in Looking-Glass Land. The LIGHTS rise on the Second Square.)*

**ALICE LIDDELL:** In another moment, Alice was through the glass, and had jumped lightly down into Looking-Glass Land. *(Moving the piece on the chess board into the second square.)* And found herself in the second square.

**ALICE:** *(Looks at her new surroundings in awe.)* I declare, it's marked out just like a large chessboard. It's a great, huge game of chess that's being played, all over the world, if this is the world at all, you know. Oh, what fun it is! There ought to be some chess pieces moving about somewhere. How I *wish* I was one of them! I wouldn't mind being a pawn, if only I might join. Though of course I should *like* to be a Queen best.

*(The RED QUEEN enters SR, rolling on a large cutout of a tree which she places in the second square. She is always sharp and to the point.)*

**RED QUEEN:** That's easily managed.

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