Shakespeare
BY
MONKEYS

By Kamron Klitgaard

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# CAST OF CHARACTERS

## Researchers
- **DR. HUBBLE**: committed scientist, 93 lines
- **RILEY**: inept lab assistant, 79 lines
- **TEAGAN**: optimistic intern, 96 lines
- **PROFESSOR PILTDOWN**: desperate benefactor, 67 lines
- **MIRAGE**: fuzzy mathematician, 46 lines

## Monkeys
- **EINSTEIN**: at a desktop computer, 6 lines
- **NEWTON**: at a laptop computer, 8 lines
- **GOTTFRIED**: at a typewriter, 9 lines
- **EM**: has a digital tablet, 7 lines
- **KATHERINE**: has a smartphone, 6 lines
- **PAT**: with pencil and notepad, 7 lines

## Test Subject
- **BILLY SHAKESPEARE**: walk-on for the bard himself, n/a lines
SETTING

Time: The present.
Place: A study room at a research facility.

SET DESCRIPTION

The whole play takes place in a study room at a research facility. Six work stations—either student desks or tables—are angled DOWN RIGHT. Each work station is set up with a sturdy chair and a different writing device: desktop computer, laptop, typewriter, digital tablet, smartphone, and pencil and paper. There’s a stack of paper next to the typewriter. UP LEFT is a rolling chalkboard or whiteboard, with either chalk or a dry erase marker and an eraser. A rope hangs from the corner of the board. On the board is written the following equation (known as the Borel-Cantelli lemma, a probability theorem regarding sequences of events):

$$\sum_{k=1}^{\infty} P(E_k) = \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} p = \infty$$
SHAKESPEARE BY MONKEYS

1 AT RISE: A research facility study room. DR. HUBBLE and EINSTEIN ENTER. EINSTEIN walks and acts like a monkey, as all MONKEYS do throughout. DR. HUBBLE holds EINSTEIN’S hand and leads him to the station with the desktop computer.

5 DR. HUBBLE: All right, Einstein, up you go. (EINSTEIN sits like a monkey, crouched in the chair.) Let me bring up the word processor… (Uses the mouse and keyboard.) …There, now make me famous!

   EINSTEIN: (Monkey sounds. [See PRODUCTION NOTES.]) Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

10 DR. HUBBLE: Go ahead. You know the drill. (EINSTEIN begins to hit the keys randomly.)

   RILEY: (ENTERS with NEWTON and GOTTFRIED, holding their hands and escorting them to their respective stations. NEWTON sits at the laptop computer and GOTTFRIED sits at the typewriter.) Good morning, Dr. Hubble.

15 DR. HUBBLE: Riley! Good morning. Did Newton and Gottfried have a good night’s sleep?

   RILEY: Apparently. They seem anxious and ready to go. Are you ready, Newton?

20 NEWTON: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

   RILEY: How about you Gottfried?

   GOTTFRIED: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

   RILEY: Fantastic!

   DR. HUBBLE: Get them started, will you, while I go get Pat. (EXITS.)

25 RILEY: Okay, you guys know what to do. Newton, you’re on the laptop. (Opens laptop and pushes a couple keys.) There you go.

   NEWTON: (Randomly touches keys on the laptop.) Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

   RILEY: (Feeds paper into the typewriter.) And Gottfried, you’re on the typewriter. (Finishes feeding a page.) All set. Go ahead.

   GOTTFRIED: (Randomly types on the typewriter.) Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

   RILEY: Excellent! We’ll get those results in no time.

   TEAGAN: (ENTERS, distressed.) Uh, Riley? Em got away!

30 RILEY: What?!

   TEAGAN: One minute she was holding my hand, and the next she pulled away and was running down the hall. I’m so, so sorry! (EM runs ON suddenly, making monkey sounds, and then runs around
the room, stops, and laughs like a monkey. Other MONKEYS join in until it’s a cacophony of monkey chatter and laughter.

RILEY: (Waves hands in the air.) All right, all right, quiet down now! (To EM.) Em, are you giving Teagan a hard time on her first day?

EM: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

TEAGAN: I’m really sorry about that.

RILEY: It’s no problem. Come on, Em. Over here. (EM goes to the station with the tablet.)

TEAGAN: She uses a tablet?

RILEY: Yes, she gets the tablet, but we have to keep an eye because if we’re not looking she’ll close the keyboard and start playing Angry Birds, instead. Now get typing, Em.

TEAGAN: So, what are they doing?

RILEY: Well, this is a very important scientific experiment. It’s Dr. Hubble’s lifework.

TEAGAN: I don’t get it. I thought this was a math internship, but it’s about monkeys and technology?

RILEY: It’s not about technology. It’s about chaos and order.

TEAGAN: I still don’t get it.

DR. HUBBLE: (ENTERS holding hands with KATHERINE and PAT.) You will, Teagan, you will.

TEAGAN: Dr. Hubble! It’s so good to see you again. I just want to thank you once more for giving me this opportunity!

DR. HUBBLE: Our experiment is all about opportunity. You see, our job is to find truth. Now, you’ve completed your primate training?

TEAGAN: Yes, of course.

DR. HUBBLE: Good, then I would like you to meet Katherine. (To KATHERINE.) Katherine, this is Teagan, our new intern.

KATHERINE: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

TEAGAN: Where did the name Katherine come from?

DR. HUBBLE: We named them all after our favorite innovators in the fields of science and mathematics.

RILEY: Katherine is named after theoretical astrophysicist Katherine Freese.

DR. HUBBLE: Freese proposed the idea of “dark stars,” which are—

TEAGAN: Stars powered by dark matter instead of nuclear fusion.

DR. HUBBLE: (Impressed.) Very good, Teagan. Now, would you escort Katherine to the smartphone?
1 TEAGAN: (Takes KATHERINE by the hand and walks to the station with the phone.) Right this way, Katherine. (Drops KATHERINE off and returns to DR. HUBBLE.)

DR. HUBBLE: And this one is Pat.

5 TEAGAN: Pat? I don’t remember a scientist or mathematician by the name of Pat.

RILEY: It’s short for Hypatia. (Starts to walk among the MONKEYS, observing their work.)

TEAGAN: The first female mathematician!

10 DR. HUBBLE: That’s right! From Alexandria, Egypt, part of the Roman empire in the fourth century. (Escorts PAT to the station with the pencil and notepad.) And Pat gets the pencil and paper. (To PAT.) Here you go. (Puts the pencil in PAT’S hand.) Take the pencil. Good. Now, start writing.

15 PAT: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

TEAGAN: Interesting. Six monkeys on six different writing devices.

RILEY: (Notices something on NEWTON’S laptop.) Dr. Hubble! Look at this! See what Newton’s done?

DR. HUBBLE: (Rushes over to NEWTON’S station.) Oh, my! This could be the breakthrough we’ve been waiting for. Good job, Newton!

TEAGAN: (Looks at the laptop.) What? I don’t get it.

DR. HUBBLE: Can’t you read what Newton typed?

TEAGAN: (Reads.) N... p... tiffsklo... tojinep... lygle?

DR. HUBBLE: Exactly.

TEAGAN: (Shakes her head.) I still don’t get it.

RILEY: Right in the middle of all that, Newton spelled an actual word!

TEAGAN: Tiffsklo... tojinep... Lygle?


TEAGAN: In the middle of all that gibberish? Yeah, I think that was just random.

DR. HUBBLE: Exactly! “Out of chaos comes order.” Using the scientific method, we are testing a theory.

RILEY: We are conducting an experiment to test the hypothesis.

TEAGAN: And what exactly is the theory?

35 DR. HUBBLE: The “infinite monkey theorem.”

RILEY: It suggests that a monkey hitting keys at random on a keyboard for an infinite amount of time will eventually type the complete works of William Shakespeare. (To MONKEYS.) Right, guys?! (MONKEYS make excited monkey sounds.)
TEAGAN: So, they’re typing, and you’re watching to see if they come up with Hamlet?

RILEY: And Macbeth and Henry the Fifth and Taming of the Shrew, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream—

DR. HUBBLE: And Much Ado About Nothing! Don’t forget Much Ado About Nothing. That’s my favorite.

TEAGAN: I’ve heard of this theory. But in order to prove or disprove it, wouldn’t you have to conduct this experiment for... ever?

DR. HUBBLE: Forever, or until one of them types the complete works of William Shakespeare. Whichever comes first.

RILEY: And we just had our first breakthrough.

DR. HUBBLE: Yes! Newton typed “to.” Way to go, Newton!

NEWTON: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

TEAGAN: But… that’s only one word. I mean, how many words are in the complete works of Shakespeare?

RILEY: Eight-hundred eighty-four thousand, six-hundred forty-seven. That’s including the sonnets.

DR. HUBBLE: And this may only be one word, but it’s a very important word. (Dreamy.) “To.” It could be the start of “To be, or not to be.”

TEAGAN: But it’s not. It’s the start of “tojineplygle.”

GOTTFRIED: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

DR. HUBBLE: Looks like Gottfried needs a new page. (RILEY crosses to GOTTFRIED, takes the paper from the typewriter and studies it.)

TEAGAN: Anything?

RILEY: (Puts the paper down, disappointed.) Nah, it just says “qwerty” over and over again. (RILEY feeds new paper into the typewriter, and GOTTFRIED resumes typing.)

EM: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh! (RILEY and DR. HUBBLE rush over to EM.)

RILEY: What’s up, Em?

EM: (Shows the tablet.) Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

RILEY: Look what she wrote!

TEAGAN: “Neeospek, neriservides, nizeemus... then a winky face emoji.

DR. HUBBLE: Did Shakespeare use emojis?

RILEY: I don’t think so.

TEAGAN: Who’s Em named for?

RILEY: Emmy Noether, whoever that is.
TEAGAN: She’s the greatest female mathematician who ever lived. She completely transformed mathematics with her work in abstract algebra.

DR. HUBBLE: Very good, Teagan. Let’s see how Pat is doing. (They approach PAT.)

TEAGAN: You do realize that the odds of proving this theory are worse than one in a trillion? It’s, like, one in… infinity.

DR. HUBBLE: Ah, that’s where you’re wrong. That’s how likely one of these monkeys will produce the complete works of William Shakespeare. But how many monkeys do you see?

TEAGAN: Six.

DR. HUBBLE: Exactly! Six. The odds are six in infinity.

TEAGAN: With that reasoning, you could increase your odds by using seven monkeys.

RILEY: That’s true. But have you ever tried to control seven monkeys at the same time? It’s impossible. Besides, we only have six writing devices.

DR. HUBBLE: Now, let’s see what you’ve done so far, Pat. (Studies PAT’S notepad.) Hmm. Can you read that?

TEAGAN: (Looks at Pat’s notepad.) It’s just a scribble. I don’t think Pat knows how to write letters.

PAT: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh! (PAT grabs the notepad back and starts to write enthusiastically—with the wrong end of the pencil.)

RILEY: Look! She’s writing again!

TEAGAN: She’s writing with the eraser. So… nothing. She’s actually erasing some of the scribble.

DR. HUBBLE: Oh, that’s not good.

TEAGAN: I’d say the odds are more like five in infinity.

PAT: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh! (PAT grabs the notepad back and starts to write enthusiastically—with the wrong end of the pencil.)

RILEY: (To DR. HUBBLE.) What time is Piltdown coming?

DR. HUBBLE: Oh, I almost forgot. (Looks at watch and starts to panic.) Any second now! Hurry! Let’s get everything ready! Teagan, you make sure the monkeys are sitting nicely. Riley, grab the board and bring it to a prominent position.

TEAGAN: (Checks on monkeys as RILEY pulls the board DOWN LEFT.) What’s a Piltdown?

RILEY: Not what, who. Professor Piltdown is our financier. She pays for all this.
DR. HUBBLE: (To RILEY.) Go get the pointer! Quick! Professor Piltdown likes the pointer! (RILEY dashes OFF and then runs back ON without a pointer.)

RILEY: Piltdown’s in the hallway! What do we do? What do we do?!

DR. HUBBLE: Try to relax! I’ll... use my finger!

RILEY: Your finger? Are you kidding?! We’re going to be out of a job! Why didn’t you just leave the pointer on the— (PILTDOWN ENTERS carrying a briefcase.)

DR. HUBBLE: Professor Piltdown! Wonderful to see you today!

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: Yes, yes. Isn’t it?

DR. HUBBLE: Professor Piltdown, you remember my assistant, Riley.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: Yes, of course. How are you, Riley?

RILEY: Wonderful, Professor Piltdown.

DR. HUBBLE: And this is our new intern, Teagan.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: (Extends a hand.) It’s a pleasure to meet you, Professor. (PILTDOWN just stares at TEAGAN.)

DR. HUBBLE: (Sotto voce to TEAGAN.) She likes to be called Professor Piltdown.

TEAGAN: It’s a pleasure to meet you, Professor Piltdown.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: (Shakes TEAGAN’S hand and puts down the briefcase.) Ah! Teagan, I’m glad you’re on board. (To MONKEYS.) And how are my monkeys today?

MONKEYS: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: (Approaches GOTTFRIED.) And what about Gottfried? (To other RESEARCHERS.) He’s my favorite, you know? (Pats GOTTFRIED on the head.) How about it, Gottfried? Are you having fun on that typewriter of yours? Let’s see what you’ve got. (Picks up a paper and reads it.) An entire page of the letter “s.” Hmm. (Takes the paper out of the typewriter.) Oh, but this looks promising. (RESEARCHERS gather around to read.)

TEAGAN: Tep... zat... lep...birxwoc... dufaj... ghykmunv... haxsq. (Shakes her head.) It doesn’t mean anything.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: Ah! But he’s got all the letters of the alphabet there. Now he just needs to put them in the right order.

TEAGAN: Professor Piltdown? It seems like the odds of these monkeys typing the complete works of Shakespeare is so astronomically huge... I mean, the odds are way bigger than astronomical... I mean, let’s say, in a gazillion years, one of them actually types the complete works of Shakespeare and in the very last play, Winter’s Tale—going alphabetically of course—Leontes says, “Perform’d in this wide gap of time since first we were dissever’d”—hastily lead
“away.” Except, instead of “away,” on the very last word he types, let’s say, “subbadoo.”

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: Subbadoo?

TEAGAN: Whatever. Any nonsense. The point is, we’d then be waiting another trillion years for the monkey to come close again. The odds are infinitely astronomical.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: Yes, that’s right. However, those same astronomical odds were exactly the same for life to spontaneously emerge in the universe. Yet, here we are.

RILEY: (Notices something on EINSTEIN’S computer monitor.) Hey! Look at this! (RESEARCHERS gather around EINSTEIN’S station.)

DR. HUBBLE: What is it?

RILEY: After three pages of the gibberish, and then two pages of just the letter “k,” look at this!

DR. HUBBLE: (Reads.) “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” (Shakes head.) Well, that is really disappointing.

RILEY: Disappointing? What do you mean?! This could be the breakthrough we’ve been looking for!

DR. HUBBLE: Breakthrough? That’s Charles Dickens, you idiot! We need William Shakespeare.

RILEY: Oh, yeah.

TEAGAN: What if we changed our hypothesis to, “A monkey randomly pressing keys on a typewriter for an infinite amount of time will eventually produce the complete works of Charles Dickens?”

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: Hmm, I like the way you think!

TEAGAN: It was sort of a joke.

DR. HUBBLE: Let’s see what he types next. (RESEARCHERS watch.)

RILEY: Go ahead, Einstein. Type something.

EINSTEIN: Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh! (Gets up and walks out into the AUDIENCE.)

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: What’s he doing?

TEAGAN: Not randomly pressing keys, that’s for sure. (EINSTEIN crosses DOWNSTAGE and sits on his haunches. He picks imaginary bugs off the floor and eats them.)

RILEY: (Crosses to EINSTEIN, takes him by the hand, and leads him back to his station.) Come on, Einstein. Come back. We need you to type. (Just as they get back, EINSTEIN starts to wander off again, but RILEY grabs him by the shoulders and sits him down. EINSTEIN examines the keyboard.)
Good, Einstein. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Now, type the rest. (EINSTEIN types two keys.)

RILEY: I-T. “It.” What’s the next line anyway?

TEAGAN: “It was the age of wisdom.” (EINSTEIN types three keys.)

DR. HUBBLE: W-A-S! “Was! It was…!” (EINSTEIN continues randomly typing.)


DR. HUBBLE: O-F. “Of!” “It was the age of…!” (EINSTEIN pauses a moment, scratches his head like a monkey, then types in a flurry. RESEARCHERS stare at the screen.)

TEAGAN: “Glipity-gloop.”

RILEY: “It was the age of glipity-gloop?” What does that mean?

DR. HUBBLE: (Reaching.) Maybe… “glipity-gloop” means “wisdom,” in monkey language.

TEAGAN: That doesn’t sound like anything I’ve heard a monkey say.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: Perhaps it was autocorrect! That’s it! Einstein started to type “wisdom” and the computer probably changed it.

DR. HUBBLE: That has to be it. Definitely autocorrect.

TEAGAN: No. No way would autocorrect change a word that much. Really, it’s just random key strokes that have no meaning.

RILEY: Ah, but we were so close!

TEAGAN: Well, not if we’re looking for the complete works of William Shakespeare. Or are we switching to Charles Dickens?

RILEY: I say we stick with Shakespeare.

DR HUBBLE: We could do both, but we would need six more monkeys.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: That would require too much funding. (Beat.) This is very disappointing.

DR. HUBBLE: Actually, Professor Piltdown, we do have some good news! (Approaches the board.) We have proven our theory mathematically, at least. If you’ll step over here to the board. (RESEARCHERS gather around the board.)

RILEY: (Points with a finger to the equation.) This is the equation that establishes the possibility of our theory being correct.

PROFESSOR PILTDOWN: No, no, no. Where’s the pointer? I like the pointer! (RILEY looks to DR. HUBBLE for a moment, then runs OFF.)

DR. HUBBLE: I like the pointer, too, Professor Piltdown. We were, uh… pointing at something in the other room, uh… earlier. And Riley left it in there. I’m sure he’ll be right back.
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES ONSTAGE
Six work stations (student desks or a long table or tables with six sturdy chairs), desktop computer, laptop, typewriter with a stack of paper, smartphone, digital tablet, pencil, notepad, chalkboard or dry erase board, chalk or dry erase marker, eraser, rope.

PROPERTIES BROUGHT ON
Briefcase containing a large stack of papers (PILTDOWN)
Pointer, piano keyboard (RILEY)

COSTUMES
MONKEY costumes can be as elaborate or as simple as desired, including just having the monkeys dress in all black, brown, or grey to differentiate them from the humans. Most notably, MONKEYS wear tails to distinguish them.

DR. HUBBARD, RILEY, and TEAGAN wear white lab coats. PROFESSOR PILTDOWN and MIRAGE dress in a scholarly manner. DR. HUBBARD and PROFESSOR PILTDOWN each wear a wrist watch or carry a pocket watch or phone to check the time.

BILLY SHAKESPEARE dresses as William Shakespeare, and wears a traditional Tudor “ruff” collar and a goatee with a mustache.

MONKEYING AROUND
The “dialogue” written for MONKEYS (“Ooh! Ooh! Eee! Eee! Ahh! Ahh!”) is merely a suggestion. Actors should add whatever fun primate noises they see fit and feel free to ad-lib other monkey noises as desired. Those playing MONKEYS should also behave as such, including how they walk, use their arms, and gesture. Go ahead, monkey around and have fun with it!

FLEXIBLE CASTING NOTE
Almost all of the roles in this show—MONKEYS and RESEARCHERS—can be played by any gender with only small tweaks to dialogue and pronouns.

THE EQUATIONS
Both the equation on the board to start the show (the Borel-Cantelli lemma, a probability theorem regarding sequences of events), and the “simplified” one written later by DR. HUBBARD (the infinite monkey theorem equation) are real mathematical equations. Don’t worry! You don’t have to prove them in this show!
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