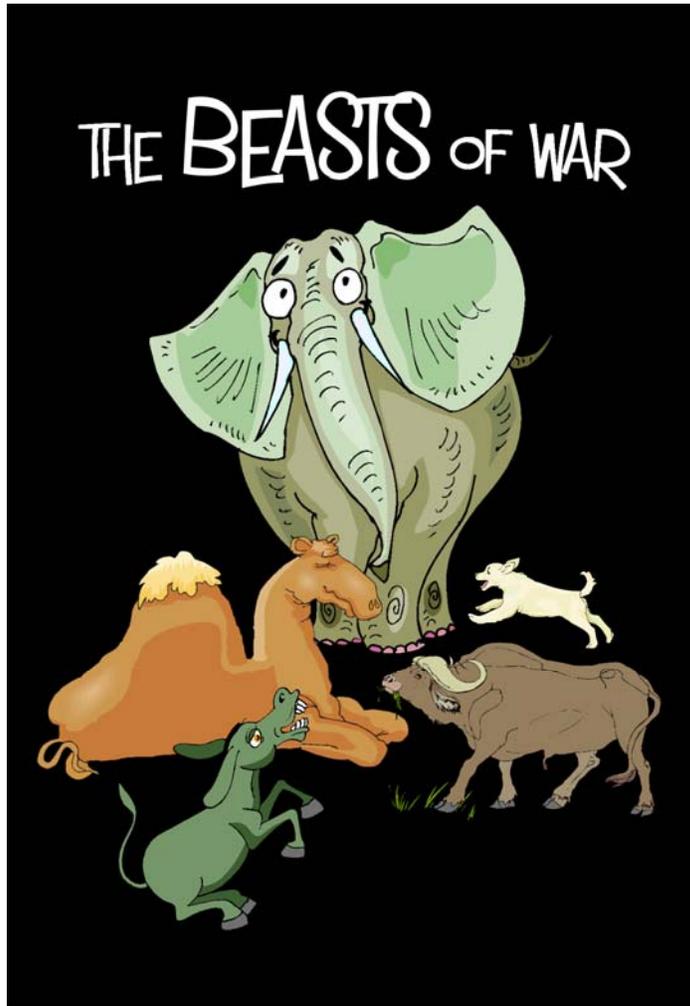


THE BEASTS OF WAR



Heather Lynn

Adapted from *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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THE BEASTS OF WAR

CLASSIC. Adapted from *The Jungle Book's* "Her Majesty's Servants" by Rudyard Kipling. At a crowded military camp in northern India, a fearful baggage camel runs through the camp at night, knocking over soldiers' tents and waking everyone up—men and beasts alike. During the stampede, the baggage camel runs into two mules, a troop horse, two oxen, and Two Tails the elephant. These beasts of war describe their jobs with pride: Camels carry baggage, elephants and oxen drag canons, mules transport heavy guns, and cavalry horses carry their masters into battle. When the young mule asks, "Why do we have to fight at all?" the troop horse replies, "All you have to do is obey the man at your head and ask no questions." "But who gives the men orders?" the mule wonders. In this humorous, witty Kipling classic, these war animals come to realize that though they may be beasts of burden, their biggest burden is war itself.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

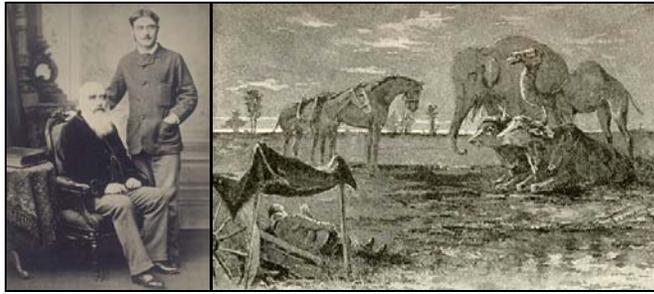


Photo of John Lockwood Kipling (Kipling's father) and Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), circa 1890. Illustration by John Lockwood Kipling for "Her Majesty's Subjects."



Left: Abdur Rahman Khan, Amir of Afghanistan (1880-1901). Lord Dufferin, Viceroy of England (1884-1888)

ABOUT THE STORY

In 1885, Rudyard Kipling was sent to Rawalpindi, a military station in northern India, as a reporter to cover the visit of Viceroy Lord Dufferin of India and the Amir of Afghanistan, Abdur Rahman, for the *Civil and Military Gazette*. The meeting was arranged by the British to impress the Afghans and improve relations between the two countries. Kipling wrote 17 articles depicting the formal meeting between the Viceroy and Amir. All of Kipling's articles were reprinted in the book, *Kipling in Afghanistan* by Neil K. Moran. Kipling's short story "Her Majesty's Servants" depicts this historical meeting from the perspective of the beasts of war and was included in *The Jungle Book*. *The Jungle Book* was published in 1894 and remains one of Kipling's most famous works.

CHARACTERS

(12 flexible, extras)

CAMEL: Fearful, nervous, baggage camel of the 39th Infantry that suffers from horrible nightmares and has a tendency to stampede; explains how camels must sit down and form a square so that the soldiers can fire across their backs; flexible.

BILLY/BILLIE: Experienced mule that serves in the First Screw Battery; believes in the need to keep one's head and do one's duty on the highest, steepest mountain passes; wears a harness that jingles when he laughs and a saddle pad; flexible.

YOUNG MULE: Inexperienced mule that serves in the First Screw Battery; flexible.

TROOP HORSE: Australian cavalry horse that is very loyal to his master; hates the sound of Two Tails's voice; struts about like he is in a parade; flexible.

OX 1, 2: Twin bulls from India that serve in the Big Gun Battery and drag heavy siege guns when the elephants refuse to go nearer to the firing; love to graze on grass even during battles; father was a sacred bull; wear a heavy yoke with a broken chain attached; flexible.

TWO TALES: Elephant that serves on the Gun Team and whose job is to pull heavy siege guns/cannons; even though he is the most intelligent and powerful of all the beasts he explains that he gets to a point on the battlefield when he can go no farther because he can "see inside his head" what might happen; terrified of dogs; has an iron ring around his foot with a chain attached that jingles; flexible.

DOG: Soldier 2's dog who loves to bark at Twin Tales; flexible.

AMIR: Elderly Amir who has arrived at a foreign military camp with his soldiers and beasts of war; grizzled looking; male.

VICEROY: Viceroy who hosts a military parade for the visiting Amir; wears a uniform and has a mustache; male.

SOLDIER 1: Soldier for the Viceroy who runs off when his tent is trampled by the Camel; wears a military uniform; flexible.

SOLDIER 2: Dog's owner; wears a military uniform; flexible.

EXTRAS: As Camels, Cavalry Horses, Oxen, Mules, and Elephants.

SETTING

1885, a crowded military camp in northern India.

SET

Military camp. There is small canvas tent made of white canvas. A backdrop may be used but is not necessary.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Prologue: In front of the curtain.

Scene 1: Military camp, evening.

Scene 2: Military camp, the next day.

PROPS

Simple small white canvas tent with a tent pole (may be handmade)

Small cannon on wheels, opt.

Appropriate military parade adornment, for Beasts

SOUND EFFECTS

Sound of rain, thunder

Roaring, grunting, bubbling sound (for Camel)

Harness jingle

Grunt

Hoof beats

Horse snorting

Chain dragging on the ground

Elephant trumpeting

Dog whimper

Dog whistle

Sound of earth shaking

Infantry band

Hissing snorts and grunts (for Oxen)

"BUT ARE THE BEASTS
AS WISE AS THE MEN?"

—VICEROY

PROLOGUE

(Before the curtain. Soldier 1 enters.)

SOLDIER 1: It had been raining heavily for one whole month...raining on a camp of 30,000 soldiers, thousands of camels, elephants, horses, oxen, and mules. We were gathered together to be visited by the Viceroy. He was receiving a visit from the Amir, and the Amir had brought with him 800 soldiers and horses that had never seen a camp or a locomotive before in their lives. Every night, a mob of these horses would be sure to break their heel ropes and stampede up and down the camp through the mud in the dark, or the camels would break loose and run about and fall over the ropes of the tents, and you can imagine how pleasant that was for soldiers trying to sleep...

SCENE I

(AT RISE: 1885, military camp, evening. Sound of rain and thunder. There is a soldier's tent CS. Frantic, Soldier 1 runs across the stage.)

SOLDIER 1: (Running, shouts.) Get out, quick! They're coming! My tent's gone!

(Soldier 1 exits. Terrified, Soldier 2 emerges from his tent and runs off. A Dog exits from the tent. A roaring, grunting, bubbling sound is heard as a Camel blunders into the tent, snapping the tent pole and causing the tent to cave in. The jingle of a harness, the rattle of straps, and a grunt is heard. Billy, a mule, enters, shaking his ears. Terrified, the Camel slips about and his neck bobs to and fro humorously. Mule laughs.)

CAMEL: (To Billy, terrified.) What are you?!

BILLY: (Proudly.) I belong to a screw-gun artillery unit.

CAMEL: (More terrified.) What is that?

BILLY: (Matter-of-factly.) Screw guns are tidy little cannons made in two pieces that are screwed together when the time comes to use them. They are taken up mountains—anywhere that a mule can find a road—and they are very useful for fighting in rocky country.

CAMEL: (Terrified.) What shall I do?! Where shall I go?! (Indicating collapsed tent.) I have fought with a white thing...and it took a stick... (Indicating broken tent pole.) ...and hit me on the neck!

BILLY: (Realizes.) Oh, it was you...you and your friends who have been disturbing the camp! (Harness jingles as he laughs heartily.) You should know better than to run through a tent at night. Sit down and keep your silly mouth quiet.

(Whimpering, the Camel sits in a camel-like fashion. Hoof beats are heard and a grand Troop Horse enters, strutting as if he were in a parade.)

TROOP HORSE: *(Loud snort.)* It's disgraceful! Those camels have racketed through our lines again! The third time this week! How's a horse to keep in fine battle condition if he isn't allowed to sleep? *(To Mule.)* Who are you?

BILLY: *(Proudly.)* I'm the breech piece mule of number two gun of the First Screw Battery. And the other one here... *(Indicating Camel.)* ...is one of your friends. He woke me up, too. Who are you?

TROOP HORSE: Number Fifteen, E Troop, Ninth Lancers, Dick Cunliffe's horse. *(To Billy, motioning.)* Could you stand over there a little? It's too dark to see you.

BILLY: Oh, beg your pardon. *(Moves over. To Troop Horse, aside.)* Aren't these camels annoying? I came over here to get a little peace and quiet.

CAMEL: *(Overhears.)* We camels have horrible nightmares in the night, and we get very much afraid. I am only a baggage camel of the 39th Infantry, and I am not so brave as you are.

BILLY: Then why the dickens didn't you stay and carry baggage for the 39th Infantry instead of running all round the camp?

CAMEL: I'm sorry! They were such very bad nightmares! *(Hears something off.)* Listen! *(Terrified.)* What is that?! Should we run off?!

BILLY: Sit down or you'll run into a cannon in the dark and snap one of your long legs in half. *(Cocks an ear and listens.)* Oxen! Gun Oxen! On my word, you and your friends have awoken the camp very thoroughly. It takes a good deal of prodding to wake up an ox!

(The sound of a chain dragging along the ground is heard. Ox 1, 2 enter, wearing a heavy yoke. Following the Oxen and almost stepping on their chain is a Young Mule.)

[End of Freeview]