

*A very funny fast-moving and innovative comedy, a no-holds-barred parody of the machinations of big business. An excellent, entertaining, evening - great credit to all concerned. **Roderick Chappel***

*A clever comedy with many smiles on the faces of people as they left. What more do you need from a comedy? **Veronica Hannebery***

DEATH by *Eating*

by Cenarth Fox

Playwright of *Agatha Crispie*, *The Real Sherlock Holmes*, *Saucy Pat*, *Stage Mothers* and
Shakespeare in Saigon

A play about Big Food, big money and more money

*“Dr. Francine Kaufman coined the term diabesity (diabetes + obesity) to describe these conditions. It’s almost impossible to overstate how serious and far-reaching a problem diabesity is. It affects more than **one billion** people worldwide. Recent statistics suggest that diabesity may already be the leading cause of chronic disease and death in the world, and its impact is expected to rise dramatically in the next 25 years.”*

Chris Kresser

The analysis by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development (OECD) shows obesity levels in the UK have risen by 92 per cent in just over two decades - by far the steepest rise among countries with an obesity problem.

The Telegraph 10 November 2017

The heavier you are in middle age the more likely you are to have difficulty taking care of yourself in older age, a major analysis shows, with problems bathing and dressing increasing as people become more overweight.

Sydney Morning Herald 6 July 2014

Companies are manipulating children into wanting food and drinks that are high in salt, sugar and fat. New evidence suggests that children are being regularly targeted by advertisers on the internet. Coca-Cola, which developed games with McDonald’s, said they were aimed at children aged 13 or over.” **The Telegraph 5 September 2014**

DEATH by *Eating*

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Background

Death by Eating is about Big Food, those companies with massive budgets who produce vast amounts of packaged food and/or drink. These products dominate our supermarket shelves. We consume these products in huge quantities. But are these products good for us? Experts say many are not or argue that a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables in our diet impacts our health. Experts issue loud warnings that millions of people suffer health issues and will continue to suffer in the future as a result of bad diets and overeating.

Synopsis

Many oppose the nanny state and want the government banned from their kitchen. But if people consume legal products and get sick, who pays for their treatment? If tobacco was invented in the 21st century, would it be legal? If kids today are obese, how healthy will they be in a decade or two? Don't worry. We discover the answers when four characters in search of a buck, buckle down to sell you your soul. *Death by Eating* is a comical exposure of how we swallow the palaver about pavlova, and the baloney about baloney. So eat, drink and be merry because the play may be total codswallop ... although with fries. Cheers.

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Cast of Characters

Death by Eating has four roles for characters aged between 25 and 60, M or F.

JB—the oldest, bombastic, hard-nosed, successful CEO, bully, solely interested in profit

HEEP—younger version of JB but clever, a narcissist and schemer

Tix—a bright young thing, marketing guru, wise-guy, gag-cracker, clever

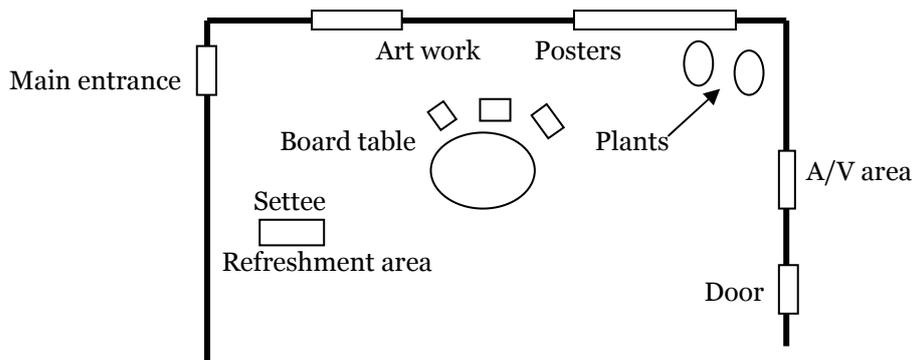
Shadow—a bright young thing, political lobbyist, smooth, super salesperson, a chameleon

Costumes

JB is an executive and traditionalist. **HEEP** is a narcissist and fussy. **Tix** is a rebel and dresses casually hoping to create some sort of fashion trend. **Shadow** is formal but cool and doesn't stand out in a crowd.

Suggested Stage Setting

It's an upmarket boardroom. Display/demo/AV area LC, coffee/relaxation area RC. Board table and chairs C/UC. There is art work upstage which could be interchangeable posters - tobacco then food/drink. The posters simply spin around.



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Act 1 Scene 1

(Curtain rises on an open-plan office of a successful international company. It's Big Tobacco with a trendy table C/UC with chairs. There's a telephone on the table. The AV area is where new marketing ideas are explained. RC is a relaxation area where coffee is available. The walls, particularly upstage, have pictures of modern art and/or trendy people, celebrities all smoking)

FX *Phone rings as curtain rises*
(HEEP enters UR and goes to phone on table, fixing his appearance as he does so)

HEEP *(Answering phone)* HO BT, JB's PA. *(Head Office, Big Tobacco, JB's Personal Assistant)*

Caller *(Unheard)* Is JB there?

HEEP I'm sorry, the CEO's not in.
(JB enters UR and heads to coffee)

HEEP No wait, you're in luck.

JB *(Angry)* I'm not in.

HEEP *(Without missing a beat)* But you've reached the ideal person. How may I help?

Caller *(Unheard)* I want JB. *(Slams down phone)*

HEEP *(Holds phone away from ear)* Oh and up you, pal. *(Replacing phone)*

JB *(Snaps)* What did you call me?

HEEP Not you, JB—the creep on the phone.

JB And speaking of creeps, look at this. *(Throws or hits HEEP with newspaper. HEEP examines paper. JB angry)* And it's on the front friggin' page!

HEEP *(Discards paper, shrugs)* So what? Today's news, tomorrow's trash.

JB Why haven't we discovered this stuff?

HEEP We have.

JB God knows we pay our scientists enough. *(Stops)* Wadda ya mean 'we have'?

HEEP We've known about the harm caused by passive smoking fyears.

JB *(Threatens)* Don't say that. I never wanna hear that word again—ever!

HEEP Passive?

JB No.

HEEP Oh, sorry, smoking.

JB *(Loud)* Harmful!

HEEP *(Explains as he has many times)* JB, nobody knows the damage and dangers of smoking better than Big Tobacco.

JB What? Like those damn scientists in the paper?

HEEP Exactly, so we'll get our scientists to do the usual.

JB Not the usual. This time I wanna see our guys challenge their argument—*directly*.

HEEP *(Exasperated)* JB, we never directly challenge. Every time some do-gooder sounds off and ...

JB *(Realises)* Yes, yes, all right. We just ...

Both ... muddy the waters.

HEEP We raise doubt, give our political mates ammunition, and slow any government proposal. Delay is our middle name. They're proven tactics, JB so let's not change a winning way.

JB *(Day dreaming)* God I miss the old days.

HEEP *(Aside, he's heard it all before)* Here we go.

JB We could advertise anywhere, say anything. You know we used to tell people smoking was cool.

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- HEEP** You mean, as in sophisticated?
- JB** No, literally cool. Can you believe that?
- HEEP** Surely not literally?
- JB** Smokers would put a burning cigarette in their mouth and believe it was actually cool. Now that took marketing genius.
- HEEP** The bigger the lie.
- JB** *(Stops. Has no idea)* What?
- HEEP** *(Stops)* Sorry?
- JB** What do you mean, “The bigger the lie”?
- HEEP** Oh that was Goebbels.
- JB** *(Still has no idea)* Who?
- HEEP** *(Quoting Goebbels)* If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.
- JB** I like it. So who’s this Goebbels? Is he some modern marketing guru?
- HEEP** *(Doesn’t want to embarrass the boss)* Ahhh, yeah, in a way.
- JB** *(Excited, back reminiscing)* And then there were filters. Smoking risks became known so we went mad on filters.
- HEEP** Brilliant marketing.
- JB** No more cough, forget that sore throat, and puff away knowing any possible nasties were stopped by your friendly filter.
- HEEP** *(Wants to crack on)* We should get on, JB.
- JB** *(No way is he finished)* The irony being the filter stopped the sore throat but meant smokers took longer drags sending smoke deeper into their lungs. Cancers started in new places, and the super irony was that filters were made with asbestos.
- HEEP** *(Ironic)* I didn’t know you did irony.
- JB** *(Comment straight over his head as he is lost in reminiscing)* But the product placement caper, now *that* was the best. Movie stars, sporting stars, royalty, politicians, celebrities, even bloody criminals were all photographed smoking. We sent VIPs cartons of free smokes and they’d puff away for the entire world to see. It was wall-to-wall human advertising—and free. *(Suddenly wants to cry)* Now you can’t advertise nowhere.
- HEEP** *(Correcting him)* Anywhere.
- JB** *(Miles away)* What?
- HEEP** You can still advertise in some countries.
- JB** *(Ignores HEEP, still maudlin)* Smoking’s become a social disease. *(Mimics a boss telling off an imaginary worker who smokes)* ‘Hey you, get outside. You can’t smoke in here.’ *(Back at HEEP)* We’re drowning in political correctness. Smokers have become pariahs.
- HEEP** That’s a big word for you, JB.
- JB** *(Is fuming, pauses)* What? What did you just say?
- HEEP** That’s a big *world* for you, JB—billions of new customers for you to entice.
- JB** *(Grumbling)* Sometimes I hate this industry. I spend ages defending my right to produce a legal product. *(Gets idea)* We need a good-news story. Where’s Tix?
- HEEP** *(Looking at watch)* Ah, he’s due at 10.
- JB** 10! What is it with these marketing people? They don’t get out of bed till lunchtime.
- HEEP** *(Matter of fact)* Haven’t you heard? Marketing people are the new brides.

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- JB** *(Angry again)* Wadda y’mean, new brides?
- HEEP** It’s fashionable to be late. *(JB unimpressed. HEEP hands document to JB)* Now JB, you need to approve these donations.
- JB** *(Reading, sarcastic)* Oh goody, Big Tobacco is Santa Claus. Free cash anyone?
- HEEP** Nothing’s free, JB.
- JB** Yeah, yeah and the real reason we give to reputable institutions is to develop innocence through association. So, *(Reading list)* donations to sport, science, charities, medical causes, cultural groups, not-for-profits oh, and bloody politicians.
- HEEP** JB, I’ve got good and bad news.
- JB** *(Still unhappy)* Meaning?
- HEEP** Our advertising costs are about to fall—dramatically.
- JB** *(Suspicious)* And what’s the bad news?
- HEEP** We don’t have a choice. The government’s banning *all* tobacco advertising.
- JB** *(Sarcastic)* Great. We donate squillions to both sides of politics and they shaft us. How much are we paying that pathetic lobbyist? And where is he?
- HEEP** We need to work smarter.
- JB** We live in a free country, our product is legal, and the money the government takes in tobacco tax is *outrageous*.
- HEEP** Old news, JB.
- JB** We should move to one of those third-world countries where some dictator lets us do what we like.
- HEEP** We have.
- JB** We have what?
- HEEP** Moved to those third-world countries where some dictator lets us do what we like.
- JB** Good. About time, and what are profits like?
- HEEP** Not bad.
- JB** Lots of corruption of course.
- HEEP** True, but in the Third World, a bribed politician keeps their word. Not here. We donate big bucks to our local pollies who tip us the wink then stab us in the back.
- JB** Bastards—do-gooders and politicians—I hate ‘em all.
- HEEP** But at least in the Third World we can set up cigarette stalls outside schools.
- JB** *(Surprised)* Really?
- HEEP** Yeah and we get the best response from 8 to 10 year olds.
(They look at one another and then speak as one)
- Both** “The tobacco industry never markets its products to children.” *(They laugh)*
- SHADOW** *(Enters with briefcase/shoulder bag)* Laughter on a Monday morning?
- JB** I’m surprised you show your face in here.
- SHADOW** *(Placing briefcase on table)* Now, now JB, don’t be like that.
- JB** Front page story attacking Big Tobacco, and the pollies take our cash then give us the bird. *(Gives the bird salute)*
- HEEP** We knew it was coming.
- JB** Oh and that makes it all right? There was a time when there was honour in corruption.
- SHADOW** *(Frustrated with the boss)* How many times, JB? Lose the battle—win the war.
- JB** Perhaps it’s time we had a good hard look at your contract *(Looks at HEEP)* — and the organ-grinder’s monkey.

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(Pause. *HEEP* and *SHADOW* exchange glances)

HEEP (Exiting) I'll chase up Tix. (Exits *UR*)
(*SHADOW* takes out papers and *JB* joins him)

SHADOW You know our advertising budget is about to crash.

JB Along with sales. The government's banned our ads.

SHADOW But *JB*, in our hugely successful industry, one door closes and another three burst open.

JB (Looks at *SHADOW*) You really are full of it.

SHADOW Trust me. I work with politicians.

JB So what's the latest?

SHADOW They're talking about health warnings on all packs.

JB Oh f'cryin' out loud. It's a legal product.

SHADOW And there's even a whisper about plain packaging.

JB (Furious) That's restraint of trade. Our lawyers'll tie 'em up in court for decades.

SHADOW Which is what we want.

JB Bloody lawyers; they're worse than you lobbyists. It'll cost an arm and a leg.

SHADOW And it'll cost them too which is why we make this a restraint of trade issue. The more the media cover the court case, the less time they devote to the one issue we never want to discuss.

JB (Threatens) Don't you dare say those words.

SHADOW (Pause, whispers) Smoking kills.

JB I told you not to say that.

SHADOW We'll only win the war if we fight it on our terms.

JB Speak English.

SHADOW If we argue against cancer, strokes and amputations we lose. So we fight on grounds we can win like ... restraint of trade.

JB (Gets the message) Ah, free speech.

SHADOW Element of doubt.

JB (On a roll) Freedom of choice.

SHADOW Exactly and if we don't win, at least we break even.

JB Meaning the media ignores the health issues.

SHADOW (Tapping nose) You're not just a pretty face, *JB*.

JB Yeah, well I need to powder m'nose. (Exiting *DL*) And we need to talk.
(Good timing as *JB* exits and *TIX* enters with *HEEP* *UR*)

TIX All rise, the King (Queen if *TIX* is female) is in the building.

HEEP Where's *JB*? (*SHADOW* points. *HEEPS* and *TIX* to table *UC*) Good, we need to talk.

SHADOW That's what *JB* said.

TIX God I hate these early starts.

HEEP Over here. (*HEEP* and *TIX* sit. *SHADOW* joins them) If *JB* comes in it'll look like we're having a proper meeting.

SHADOW As opposed to what?

TIX Did you know 87% of conspiracy meetings take place beside a water cooler.

HEEP If *JB* comes in we switch to discussing plain packaging. Agreed?

SHADOW Switch from what?

TIX (To *SHADOW*) Just do it.

HEEP Okay, here's the latest. (They're hooked. Pause) I'm quitting.

TIX What?

SHADOW (Shrugs) Smart move. When a better offer comes along, you take it.

HEEP I haven't had a better offer.

SHADOW Well, a similar offer.

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- HEEP** I haven't had any offer. (*OTHERS shocked*)
- SHADOW** You're kidding.
- TIX** Are you mad? You only leave when you get a better offer.
- HEEP** Or before you're boned.
- OTHERS** (*In shock*) What!?
- HEEP** If any of us stays in Big Tobacco, we're dead.
- TIX** Dead?
- SHADOW** What's happened?
- HEEP** What planet are you living on? The war on tobacco's about to go feral. Public opinion, anti-smoking zealots, tough new laws, and holier-than-thou politicians are conspiring to bring us down.
- SHADOW** (*Mock surprise*) Newsflash—HEEP's a quitter.
- HEEP** How can I fight when I'm working for a lunatic?
- TIX** JB's all right.
- HEEP** He's insane.
- TIX** (*OTHERS stir HEEP*) You're right. He must be insane. He's a CEO.
- HEEP** (*Warns them*) I'd take this seriously if I were you. (*Pause. This is serious*) We're all about to get shafted.
- TIX** Rubbish.
- SHADOW** So what's he done this time?
- HEEP** He's living in the past, can't handle pressure and with this massive firestorm about to hit Big Tobacco, I have to quit. If I stay, no-one'll touch me. I'll be used goods.
(*Pause. OTHERS see HEEP'S POV*)
- SHADOW** Fair enough. If you feel that way, leave.
- TIX** Yeah, resign; walk away.
- HEEP** And if I go, you go.
- SHADOW** What?
- TIX** Whoa, whoa, whoa. I've got a contract—watertight.
- SHADOW** Ditto.
- HEEP** The day I quit (*To TIX*) you'll be flogging loo paper (*To SHADOW*) and you'll be lobbying to save the whales.
- TIX** Not gunna happen. JB *knows* I'm the best.
- SHADOW** Exactly. (*Indicating TIX*) What he said.
- HEEP** JB likes you because I tell him to like you. You were hired on my say so and *stay* hired on my say so. Every time you stuff up, turn up late, blow your budget or get rolled, I cover your arse. You're here thanks to me.
- TIX** (*Defensive but worried*) I can get other clients.
- HEEP** Who pay peanuts. Big Tobacco *pays* big. You won't find another job like this.
(*Pause*)
- TIX** (*Gives ground*) Maybe.
- SHADOW** And the point of this conversation?
- HEEP** It's reciprocity time. It's *my* back that needs a scratch.
- TIX** (*Shrugs*) No probs. I'll put the word out.
- SHADOW** And I'll write you an incredible reference.
- HEEP** (*Angry*) Put the word out! Write a reference. (*Threatens them*) Listen, *friends*, I want a rock-solid guarantee, a top job in one of your industries—anywhere but Big Tobacco.
- SHADOW** (*Panicking*) Oh mate, oh no, you do not want to become a lobbyist?
- HEEP** Why? You saying I'm not up to it?

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- SHADOW** No, no, it's just that ...
- HEEP** Listen Chummy, I can do anything—even marketing.
- TIX** (*Sucks in breath*) Dunno about that. People in marketing are born not made.
- SHADOW** And lobbyists need credibility.
- HEEP** I'm a successful executive with a multi-national corporation.
- SHADOW** You work for Big Tobacco.
- HEEP** So?
- SHADOW** Big Tobacco and credibility ... (*Waves hand/s*) bit dodgy, mate, not even on the same planet.
- TIX** Not even in the same universe.
- HEEP** (*Looks at them*) So that's my reward for looking after you two. You do know that what goes around, comes around? (*Angry starts to exit*) I might even stay long enough to oversee your contract renewals. And I reckon *renewal* and *contract* are (*Mimics*) not even on the same planet. (*Stops at DL door. Mimics*) Not even in the same universe. (*Exits*)
- TIX** (*Meaning HEEP*) Idiot.
- SHADOW** HEEP's right. He did get us these jobs.
- TIX** We keep these jobs because we're the best.
- SHADOW** And we'll never get this kinda dough elsewhere.
- TIX** True. (*Pause*) Pity about the crap product.
- SHADOW** (*Thinking*) You don't really think he'd shaft us?
- TIX** Who cares? I can work anywhere.
- SHADOW** Me too—tobacco today, coal or renewable energy tomorrow.
(*Pause. They're thinking*)
- TIX** I can't recommend him for a marketing job. I mean what can he do?
- SHADOW** He's really good at lying and making money.
- TIX** (*Thinks*) True, and that's perfect for marketing. What about you?
- SHADOW** Nah, lobbyists are a special breed. We need principles and as Groucho once said, (*Imitating Groucho Marx*) 'Those are my principles and if you don't like them, well
- BOTH** (*TIX joins the gag*) 'I have others'. (*They laugh but stop suddenly when JB enters*)
- JB** (*Enters DL*) What are you two laughing at? (*OTHERS stop laughing*) You think having to justify a legal product is funny.
- SHADOW** No JB.
- JB** You think spending mega-bucks fighting Nanny-state morons is fair?
- TIX** No JB.
- JB** So stop laughing. (*Looking around*) And where's my overpaid lapdog?
- SHADOW** He went looking for you.
- JB** (*Roars*) HEEP!
- TIX** You do know he's the most loyal PA you could ever find.
- SHADOW** You do know he's got principles to burn.
- HEEP** (*Enters DL*) JB.
- JB** (*Sarcastic*) Ah, it's my most loyal employee with principles to burn.
- HEEP** Sorry?
- JB** Sit. (*TRIO sit, JB uptight. HEEP angry with OTHERS*) I've just spoken with the Board and been told the war on tobacco's about to go feral. Public opinion, anti-smoking zealots, tough new laws and holier-than-thou politicians are all conspiring to bring us down.
- HEEP** (*JB is repeating HEEP's lines*) I wonder where you heard all that?

- JB** (At *HEEP*) God I wish you'd keep up. (To all) We're at war and I need to know if you lot are ready for one hell of a fight.
- SHADOW** I'm right behind you, JB.
- TIX** One hundred per cent JB.
- JB** (Looks at *HEEP*) I don't need to ask you. Apparently you've got a *loyalty* tattoo.
- HEEP** I have?
- JB** We need fantastic marketing and brilliant lobbying to fight fire with fire.
- SHADOW** You've got it, JB.
- TIX** One hundred and *ten* per cent, JB.
- JB** (Pause. Looks at the silent *HEEP*) Well?
- HEEP** Oh absolutely JB. I've never been so enthusiastic.
- JB** I wanna smash those bastards who threaten our legal, mega-tax-paying business. (At *HEEP*) You, co-ordinate.
- HEEP** Of course, JB.
- JB** So come on, how are we gunna win. Who's first?
- SHADOW** (Surprised) Just like that?
- JB** Exactly.
- TIX** But JB, marketing can't be rushed. We need to research, review, profile and brainstorm.
- JB** What am I paying you for?
- TIX** To set goals, test ideas, check cycles and forecasts.
- JB** If I want a bloody forecast I'll look out the window.
- SHADOW** We need to be on the same page, JB. Great campaigns take time.
- JB** We haven't got time. The world knows smoking sucks so unless we invent new strategies and fast, our profits will disappear down the pan and certain people—(Looking at them) will join them. Comprendi?
- SHADOW** Well I'm sorry, JB but I can't lobby unless I know the company spin. You must give directions.
- JB** Here's a direction. Get off your arse and start creating.
- HEEP** I have a suggestion JB.
- JB** (Sarcastic) Oh, you're still here.
- HEEP** You're the one with all the experience. You've worked for Big Tobacco forever.
- JB** So?
- HEEP** If you told us about your old tactics, we might get inspired.
- JB** Nah, the old tactics are dead. The smoking goalposts have been moved.
- SHADOW** I think it's a good idea.
- JB** What's a good idea?
- SHADOW** You telling us the old tricks of the trade.
- JB** Listen, you get paid to tell *me* stuff.
- TIX** But JB, new ideas come from old ideas. It's basic brainstorming. Your ancient tactics could be tweaked to suit the new world order.
- JB** You're gunna have to do way better than that. Big Tobacco pays big bucks and for that I expect mind-boggling ideas. If any of you can't deliver, you can walk.
- HEEP** What we're trying to say, JB is that we should never dismiss a good idea just because it's old. (*TIX and SHADOW agree*) And as you're a veteran, we'll benefit from someone who was in the thick of things way back when. (*Soft-soaping at its best*) It'd be great to hear why you were so successful. (*Pause. JB settles a little. He's being charmed*)
- SHADOW** He's right, JB. We'd love to be inspired by the warrior, the hero, the highly-decorated soldier.

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- TIX** C'mon General, tell us how you won the war.
(JB relents and moves to A/V area LC. OTHERS move chairs and become audience as JB stands in front of whiteboard. Lighting might concentrate on this area)
- JB** This had better work.
(They settle as JB remembers)
- SHADOW** Go get 'em, JB.
- JB** In the 50s, Big Tobacco made safety statements, donated funds, and promised to cooperate.
(The OTHERS are hooked)
- TIX** Clever.
- SHADOW** And did that work?
- JB** Absolutely.
- HEEP** How?
- JB** *(Snaps at HEEP)* Stop interrupting. *(Back to storytelling)* We grabbed the moral high ground with safety statements. *(Quotes)* 'If we in the tobacco business ever believed that smoking was harmful we would stop production tomorrow.'
- HEEP** *(Amazed)* You actually said that?
- JB** Proudly—and more. *(Quotes)* 'As good corporate citizens we believe it's our duty to make public health our top priority.'
- SHADOW** Surely you didn't believe that?
- JB** Oh course we didn't believe it. But nobody lies better than Big Tobacco. We portrayed Big Tobacco as caring and responsible.
- TIX** *(Sceptical)* I'm not sure that'd work today.
- JB** *(Decides this is a waste of time)* Right, this is a waste of time. You lot get creating.
(OTHERS stand to persuade JB to continue)
- SHADOW** No JB. Please, I need to know how you tackled politicians.
- HEEP** And what about those funds and promises?
- JB** *(Pause. Reluctant)* This had better be worth it. *(OTHERS settle again. He tells them)* We funded health experts to investigate tobacco and health.
- HEEP** You mean you paid scientists to tell you what you wanted to hear?
- JB** Exactly.
- TIX** How specific were the aims?
- JB** Very—cancer and heart disease.
- SHADOW** Wow. Politicians never back something until they know the result.
- JB** Exactly. So we hired researchers who were sympathetic to Big Tobacco and we never investigated cigarette smoke because there was no proof it was carcinogenic.
- TIX** So it was just one big smoke screen?
(Pause. Will JB laugh? He accepts the wisecrack allowing the OTHERS to laugh)
- JB** Very funny. And the findings were plastered worldwide years before social media. We announced, *(Imitates spruiker)* 'Big Tobacco researches smoking and health and then announces our findings in full.'
- SHADOW** Impressive.
- JB** And of course we used blatant fraud.
- TIX** That's beautiful.
- JB** We tested new 'light' cigarettes but machines didn't replicate humans thus making the results misleading and false.
- SHADOW** But perfect for your aim of promoting safer cigarettes.
- JB** Give that man a cigar. So here was Big Tobacco being *seen* to be doing the right thing.
- HEEP** When you were doing the exact opposite.

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- FX** *(You might use special lighting for this speech. Dim lighting but spot JB)*
- JB** I was so proud of our lies. *(Big speech with crescendo)* ‘We care about public health. We care about smokers. Our highly qualified scientists constantly examine smoking and your health. Now, here are the results and it’s all great news. *(Knockout line, exclaims)* We are the good guys.’
(Lighting crossfades to normal. TRIO enthusiastically applaud, are inspired, and convinced)
- HEEP** With you leading us JB, Big Tobacco’s gunna thrive.
(OTHERS agree)
- JB** If any of our boffins discovered anything suggesting smoking was harmful, we buried their findings.
- TIX** *(Ever the comedian)* Y’mean the results went up in smoke.
(JB doesn’t laugh and silence reigns. HEEP rescues the situation)
- HEEP** What about that third strategy, JB, promises.
- JB** Ah, now that was the killer. The government set up public health bodies to check on the dangers of smoking. We went over the top in promising to help. ‘We will cooperate closely with anyone working in the interests of public health.’
- SHADOW** Great wording.
- JB** We did the opposite. We coached executives on how to look and sound sincere. We told the world how honest we were, and nobody could lie and fake sincerity like Big Tobacco.
- TIX** JB, there’s always gunna be a job for you in marketing.
- JB** *(Lapping up the adulation)* We promised to support public health bodies as we secretly undermined everything they did.
- SHADOW** Lies and broken promises, JB; you should have been a politician.
- JB** We had two secret rules. Never deny the public health but always cast doubt. And never urge people to smoke but go gangbusters over the right of the individual to choose.
- HEEP** Brilliant.
- JB** And that’s how Big Tobacco once made squillions. Today the war on smoking needs new frauds, lies and dirty tricks to keep people addicted.
- TIX** You make me proud to come to work, JB.
- SHADOW** What he said, JB.
- JB** *(Pause. At HEEP)* Well? What about you?
- HEEP** *(Unsure)* Me, JB?
- JB** Everyone else is pissing in my pocket.*
*(*To say flattering or fawning things to a person in the hope of gaining favour with them)*
- HEEP** *(Twigs)* Oh, yes, JB. I adore this glorious industry and never wanna leave.
- JB** *(Sincere)* Good, you’re getting better at faking sincerity. *(Preparing to exit)* I’ll tell the Board you’re creating a truckload of new strategies. *(Heading DL)* And when I come back, *(At door—threatening)* I don’t wanna be disappointed. *(Exits)*
(OTHERS let off steam. That was difficult but now the pressure is really on)
- TIX** What a loser. And they called that marketing.
- HEEP** Yes but you heard JB, we need new strategies.
- SHADOW** You’ve changed. Ten minutes ago you were outa here.
- HEEP** I’m still leaving when I get a decent offer. And unless you two come up with something sensational, guess who’ll be joining me? So c’mon—ideas.
- TIX** We can’t use any of JB’s dinosaur strategies.
- SHADOW** Not necessarily.
- TIX** What?

- SHADOW** C'mon, death, taxes and bribing politicians will always be with us.
- HEEP** We could distract JB by launching in the third-world with no smoking bans and full-on advertising.
- TIX** Nah, he'll want to know about the propaganda war right here. *(Pause. Silence)*
- HEEP** Maybe we *are* stuffed.
- SHADOW** We could push the anti-smoking-laws-reduce-government-income line.
- TIX** Nah, we've long claimed smokers pay billions in tax.
- HEEP** Okay, crunch time. Smokers will never again light up on public transport or inside public buildings.
- TIX** Or in sporting arenas.
- HEEP** Yeah, yeah, we get the picture. The goalposts haven't shifted, they've gone, and with no new strategies, all we can do is keep tobacco legal and taxes as low as possible.
- SHADOW** I dare you to say that to JB.
- TIX** I reckon there's a tiny glimmer of hope. *(OTHERS look at TIX)* E-cigarettes. *(OTHERS scoff)*
- HEEP** JB hates e-cigarettes. Big Tobacco hates e-cigarettes. And if they survive, the government'll tax them to death. *(Pause. Again they realise their situation may be hopeless)*
- TIX** We're dead. JB's gunna fire us the minute he walks through that door. *(Pause. Silence. It's still tough)*
- SHADOW** How about we push jobs? Big Tobacco employs hordes directly and indirectly. Kill the industry and you kill jobs.
- HEEP** That's not new.
- TIX** We could leak details of politicians who've taken money from Big Tobacco.
- SHADOW** If we snitch on pollies, they won't take our bribes.
- TIX** But the media will cover the squabbling pollies and steer clear of health issues.
- HEEP** *(Not convinced)* This is going nowhere.
- SHADOW** Well you suggest something.
- HEEP** How? We can't advertise or sponsor. Product placement's dead. The evidence against even secondary smoking is overwhelming. All we've got left is the 'it's legal' line. Face it, JB's set us an impossible task. *(Pause. Silence. They see this as an impossible task)*
- TIX** I should join the opposition.
- HEEP** What?
- TIX** If packs need health warnings and gruesome pics, I'll design the artwork.
- HEEP** And you called me a turncoat.
- SHADOW** I could work for the anti-smoking lobby.
- HEEP** *(Amused)* Oh dear, the rats are deserting the smoking ship.
- TIX** It's worse for me. If they bring in plain packaging, I'll have no work. How can I design a cigarette box with nothing on it?
- SHADOW** Haven't you heard of modern art? *(Pause. What can they do?)*
- HEEP** *(Fetching paper and pen)* Well I'm not gunna wait for JB to fire me. I don't want the dreaded words 'sacked', or 'let go' anywhere near my CV. *(Writes)* Dear JB.
- SHADOW** He won't sack me. I've got too many secrets.
- TIX** I'm too valuable, I've won five marketing awards.
- HEEP** *(Writing his resignation letter speaking as he writes. TIX and SHADOW progressively more worried)* I hereby tender my resignation effective immediately. Yours faithfully
... *(Big flourish of signature)*

Death by Eating 15

(TIX and SHADOW look at one another then as one suddenly scamper to copy HEEP. They grab paper and pen, sit and write their resignation letters)

SHADOW *(Preparing to write)* What's his official title? *(Writes in a flurry)*

TIX *(Preparing to write)* How do you spell his surname? *(Writes in a flurry)*

SHADOW What is his surname?

(Actually his given name initials stand for Jefferson Bartholomew)

HEEP Welcome to the club—we who escaped Big Tobacco. *(Goes to collect his coat or bag)*
I'm not waiting for JB. He can find my resignation letter with me long gone.
(Places letter on table)

SHADOW *(Writing faster)* Don't go yet, HEEPy old pal. Wait for me.

TIX *(Writing faster)* Don't leave me alone with JB—please.

HEEP But aren't you the two best buddies who *(Nasty)* refused to find me a job?

SHADOW *(Panicking—writing and apologising)* You're in, champ, definitely, anything.

TIX *(Panicking—writing and apologising)* Two jobs, HEEPie, *three* jobs, I swear.

(HEEP enjoying their distress. Both finish their letters and place them on table with HEEP's)

HEEP Well that oughta boost JB's blood pressure. C'mon, let's go.

(TRIO mutter, grab their belongings and head to the door UR. They open door and start to exit when door DL opens and JB enters. He is animated and carries a box)

JB Hold y'mother's horses! *(TRIO freeze, worried)* Where the hell are you going?

HEEP *(Trying to be defiant)* Sorry, JB but we're off—permanently.

(OTHERS agree but JB ignores them and moves to table and puts down basket/box)

JB Get back in here before I sack the lot of you.

(TRIO doubly worried. He hasn't seen, let alone accepted their resignation letters so if they don't return they might be sacked rather than resign. They creep back into the boardroom)

HEEP Something up, JB?

JB I've got unbelievable news.

SHADOW You're leaving?

JB What?

TIX You're leaving us to do the work?

JB *(Sees letters)* Ah, your brilliant new ideas.

(TRIO panic. HEEP moves to table to rescue letters but JB picks them up a split second beforehand)

HEEP They're not ready yet, JB. *(Holds out hand)* Please, let me finish mine properly.

TIX *(Begging)* Yes JB, they're only sketches.

SHADOW *(Desperate)* Preliminary ideas, JB.

JB *(Brandishing letters)* I don't care if they're the best strategies in the history of capitalism. *(OTHERS shocked)* This is what I think of your ideas.

(Pause. What will he do? Suddenly he rips them in half or quarters and tosses them onto table) You can forget about winning the war for Big Tobacco—all of you.

HEEP *(Almost begging)* Oh please JB, don't sack me. There's no more room on my CV.

TIX *(Almost begging)* Have mercy, JB. I've got a family and a cocaine habit.

SHADOW *(Almost begging)* JB, I get sick if I can't lie for a living.

JB You're finished—the lot of you. You and Big Tobacco are no more.

(TRIO despairing)

HEEP *(Annoyed his resignation letter was destroyed—sotto voce)* You bastard.

JB *(Grinning)* It's change career time, folks. Say bye bye to Big Tobacco.

HEEP *(Angry he didn't quit)* Damn.

JB And say hello ... to Big Food.

TRIO *(TRIO stunned)* What?

SHADOW Big Food?

TIX You mean we're not sacked?

HEEP 'Say hello to Big Food'?

Death by Eating 16

- JB** This wonderful tobacco multinational has just bought a huge Big Food multinational and we are now into food!
(TRIO hugely relieved and now excited)
- FX** *Music begins with snazzy lighting changes*
(Major technical event takes place. It lasts 20-30 seconds. Music plays - suggest a Sousa march - and JB produces party hats, whistles, flags on sticks from box. Everyone dresses up and they march around in time to the music blowing party whistles and waving flags.
- They celebrate doubly because not only are they not sacked but they're into a brand new industry without the restrictions of their previous one. The artwork or posters upstage are turned around revealing food and beverage pictures or people eating and drinking. The actors can walk upstage and turn the posters. If you can afford it, a scrolling digital message flows across the upstage wall or proscenium arch with message 'Big Food!' or similar. It's a hoot. Is there a ticker tape parade upstage? Once their brief celebration is over the QUARTET settles, the music fades, the lighting returns to normal and the dialogue resumes as if the 'event' never took place. The party props are returned to the box along with the torn up resignation letters. The TRIO members are buzzing and JB too is on a high)*
- HEEP** Oh JB, this is fantastic news.
- JB** It's better than fantastic. Big Food can advertise anywhere, sponsor anything and market openly to kids. *(TRIO thrilled)*
- TRIO** "The food industry proudly markets its products to children." *(They laugh)*
- SHADOW** We can lobby food.
- TIX** Market food.
- HEEP** Flog food. *(Laughter as their excitement bubbles over)*
- JB** I'm the Big Food CEO and you measly minions are on the new payroll.
- HEEP** *(TRIO gush)* Oh thank you, JB. What an honour, hey guys?
- TIX** Absolutely.
- SHADOW** JB, you're a credit to humankind.
- JB** But the more we change, the more we stay the same. So I want you lot to research, review, profile and brainstorm.
- TIX** JB, I think I love you.
- JB** I want you to set goals, test ideas, check cycles and forecasts.
- HEEP** *(Cheeky, mimics the boss)* If I want a bloody forecast, I'll look out the window.
(Laughter and JB jokingly shapes to whack HEEP)
- SHADOW** It's a privilege to lie for you, JB. *(OTHERS agree)*
- JB** And because there's a war on Big Food, we need new frauds, lies and dirty tricks to keep people eating and eating more.
- TIX** You make me proud to come to work, JB.
- SHADOW** What he said, JB.
- JB** *(At HEEP)* Well? What about you?
- HEEP** *(Unsure)* Me JB?
- JB** Everyone else is pissing in my pocket.
- HEEP** *(Twigs)* Oh, yes, JB. You've inspired me to work in this glorious industry.
- JB** Good, you're getting better at faking sincerity. *(Preparing to exit)* I'll tell the board you three are creating new strategies to destroy this healthy eating crap.
(Heading DL) And when I come back, *(At door—threatening)* I don't wanna be disappointed. *(Exits)* *(OTHERS hugely relieved)*
- HEEP** Did we just dodge a bullet?
- SHADOW** He tore up our resignation letters.

Death by Eating 17

TIX We've landed the dream career. Legally, only adults can smoke. With Big Food, everyone's a customer, even kids!

HEEP *Especially kids. (Enthusiasm all round)*

SHADOW I can now bribe politicians without shame or guilt?

HEEP So what do we know about Big Food?

TIX There are billboards all over town. The world is awash with Big Food.

HEEP But what about products, competition, the laws?
(SHADOW and TIX are enthusiastic)

SHADOW Pollies will bend over backwards for Big Food. Talk about snouts in the trough.

TIX Everybody eats. It's a marketing smorgasbord.

HEEP *(Serious)* Yeah, okay but what about these new strategies? If we can't give JB earth-shattering ideas, we're finished with Big Food.
(Pause. Silence. It's still tough)

SHADOW Sure but I can't rush this. I need time.

HEEP We haven't got time.
(Another pause. They're stuck)

TIX How about this for an idea? *(Pause. They look at TIX)* We copy Big Tobacco!
BLACKOUT

Act 1 Scene 2

(Music begins—it could be the same music used for the recent 'event'—and all actors exit. Fifteen seconds later lights come up and we have moved forward a few years. Subtle lighting changes can give the Big Food office a slightly different look. HEEP has next to no time to change appearance whereas the other three do have time. Something basic and simple for HEEP perhaps even new headwear, he could remove jacket, lose tie, etc.)

FX *Phone rings as lights come up
(HEEP enters UR and goes to phone on table, checking his appearance as he does so)*

HEEP *(Answering phone)* HO BF, JB's PA.

Caller *(Unheard)* Is JB there?

HEEP I'm sorry, the CEO's not in.
(JB enters and heads to coffee)

HEEP No wait, you're in luck.

JB *(Angry)* I'm not in.

HEEP *(Without missing a beat)* But you've reached the ideal person. How may I help?

Caller *(Unheard)* I want JB. *(Slams down phone)*

HEEP *(Holds phone away from ear)* Oh and up you, pal. *(Replacing phone)*

JB *(Snaps)* What did you call me?

HEEP Not you, JB—the creep on the phone.

JB And speaking of creeps, look at this? *(Throws or hits HEEP with newspaper. HEEP reads front page. JB still angry)* And it's on the front friggin' page!
(Discards paper, shrugs) So what? Today's news, tomorrow's trash.

HEEP Why haven't we discovered this stuff?

HEEP We have.

JB God knows we pay our scientists enough. *(Stops)* Wadda ya mean 'we have'?

HEEP We've known about saturated fat and obesity for years.

JB *(Threatens)* Don't say that. I never wanna hear that word in this office again—ever!

HEEP Obesity?

JB No.

Death by Eating 18

- HEEP** Oh, sorry, saturated.
- JB** *(Loud)* Fat!
- HEEP** Okay. But JB, nobody knows the facts about obesity better than Big Food. We know the dangers, costs and consequences and we're all over diabetes.
- JB** Like those damn scientists in the paper.
- HEEP** So, we'll get our scientists to do the usual.
- JB** Not the usual. This time I wanna see our guys challenge their argument—*directly*.
- HEEP** *(Exasperated)* JB, we never directly challenge claims about a lousy diet. Every do-gooder sounds off and
- JB** *(Realises)* Yes, yes, all right. We just ...
- BOTH** ... muddy the waters.
- HEEP** We raise doubt, give our political mates ammunition and slow any government proposal. Delay is our middle name. They're proven tactics, JB so let's not change a winning way.
- JB** *(Day dreaming)* God I miss the old days.
- HEEP** *(Aside)* Here we go.
- JB** Once we could put anything in food and never declare the contents. Now we're regulation mad. How many calories? How much salt and sugar? Is it free-range or organic? What size gumboots does the bloody farmer wear on a Wednesday? I mean it's just food for god's sake. Buy the snazziest package or the cHEEPest price tag.
- HEEP** *(HEEP hands document to JB)* Sorry, JB but you need to approve these latest donations.
- JB** Later. Where are those damn gurus? The meeting started ten minutes ago.
(SHADOW and TIX enter with materials) And about time.
- TIX** Sorry JB. Had to drop the offspring at crèche.
- SHADOW** Usual barista off work, JB.
- JB** Listen losers, I've need some seriously good data. So c'mon, talk to me.
- TIX** My turn, JB. *(Setting up LC at display area. OTHERS pull chairs across/around)* We've got a new angle on breakfast cereals aimed unashamedly at kids.
- JB** I like it.
- TIX** *(Holding up poster or showing items on a screen if that is used)* We're going for colour, cartoons and cuddly critters. Kids love 'em and the colour, light and movement draws them straight to the product.
- JB** Beautiful.
- TIX** To win the parents we throw in healthy ingredients such as whole grains.
- JB** *(Upset)* Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold everything—whole grains—that sounds expensive.
- HEEP** It's cool, JB, we only use a tiny amount which allows us to bung on a label of "healthy ingredients".
- SHADOW** Busy parents see the label and think, 'Whole grains - I want that for my family'.
- TIX** The parents haven't got time to read the miniscule label.
- HEEP** And they don't know or care that we flood the cereal with sugar.
- SHADOW** Kids beg for those wonderful whole grains not knowing it's the massive sugar hit which has them hooked.

Death by Eating 19

- JB** God I love sugar. It's white gold. I thought tobacco was beautiful but sugar is something else. It's cHEEP, accessible and goes with everything. I love it. (*OTHERS look at him. Is he insane?*) Okay, I'm liking all this but don't forget Big Food's mantra of position, ...
- OTHERS** (*They join JB*) ... position, position.
- TIX** Now the cereal is smack-bang at the kids' eye level. (*He bobs down to become a six year-old*) They pester the parent to buy. (*Mimics little child, pointing*) "There, there, that's what I want. Please, Mummy, please".
- SHADOW** Kids control the parents.
- JB** God bless the kids. And that shelf position is guaranteed?
- HEEP** It better be, we paid top dollar to gazump our greedy competitors.
- JB** Just get those prime positions.
- HEEP** Will do, JB.
- JB** Now the nut cases screaming about unhealthy foods?
- HEEP** (*Swapping places with TIX*) Too easy, JB. Our nutritionists preach there's no such thing as good or bad food just food. Their mantra is 'Everything in moderation'. We fund their research which shows no link between Big Food and the small increase in people's weight.
- SHADOW** (*Can't believe their use of the word*) Do they really use the word 'small'?
- JB** Shut up. If we could say smoking was literally cool then we can say "small weight gains". (*OTHERS nod, fair enough*)
- HEEP** We've set up Big Food groups with names like *Good Food Association* and *Feed Your Family*. We pay these groups to write about freedom of choice and the dangers of governments telling us what to eat.
- JB** I like it.
- HEEP** And these groups recommend delicious family recipes naturally using our wonderful products.
- JB** Naturally.
- HEEP** And because we fund these groups, we control what they say and do.
- SHADOW** Just like the good old days, JB.
- JB** (*Reminiscing*) Ah, Big Tobacco where smoking is your choice and there's doubt about the evidence produced by whacky anti-tobacco scientists. (*He glories in the past baloney*) Nothing proved. (*He definitely has a screw loose*)
- TIX** You told 'em, JB.
- HEEP** But you didn't have today's social media mercenaries.
- JB** (*No idea what they mean*) What's that in English?
- HEEP** We employ individuals who work from home and scan the Net for articles and blogs which are critical of Big Food. These individuals use a pseudonym and post comments on the so-called healthy sites.
- JB** What sort of comments?
- HEEP** Always measured and polite but they question the food police. So-called healthy blogs get reminders that Big Food is misunderstood and moderation is the key to healthy living.
- SHADOW** Every little comment counts.
- TIX** We've got different ways to spread the word.
- JB** I like it.
- HEEP** And we even operate a fifth column.
- JB** (*Shocked*) A what?
- HEEP** Our spies infiltrate health groups.
- JB** You're kidding? We're the CIA?

Death by Eating 20

- SHADOW** We're more sophisticated than government and have hacking and fake news down to a tee.
- HEEP** We hire brilliant actors who pretend to be pro-organic, anti-pesticide, save-the-whale vegans when really they like nothing more than a steak 'n soda.
- TIX** Once out of work actors waited on tables or drove cabs. Today they work on the sly for Big Food.
- JB** *(Reminiscing again)* We used to call 'em snitches.
- SHADOW** They wear plastic shoes and cotton clothes made after the weevils have been spoon fed and given an organic massage by the cotton pickin' cotton pickers.
- JB** I haven't got a bloody clue what you're talkin' about but I like it.
- HEEP** Our spies get wind of reports claiming Big Food is making people fatter and more prone to illness and premature death.
- JB** *(Threatens)* Wash your mouth out.
- TIX** To be forewarned, JB.
- HEEP** The spies report back, keeping us one step ahead of the opposition.
- JB** It sounds great but I can't tell the board about this illegal stuff.
- HEEP** It's not illegal, JB.
- JB** What?
- HEEP** We're using everyday business practices. Phoney associations, misleading research, fake news, and spying on your competitors is the norm today.
- JB** *(Genuinely surprised)* No?
- TIX** It's how you run a business.
- SHADOW** You must know that coming from Big Tobacco.
- JB** *(Reminiscing, goes all misty eyed)* Ah, the good old days—misinformation, sabotage and lies.
- HEEP** You taught us well, JB.
- JB** *(Snaps out it)* Right, who's next?
- SHADOW** *(Replaces HEEP)* My turn, JB. I've got a deep throat contact in the Health Department. The government is under attack from the do-gooders.
- JB** *(Furious)* I told you to find the weak politicians and bribe them.
- SHADOW** Already done, JB.
- JB** And if that doesn't work, threaten them with losing pre-selection. Tell 'em we'll stack branches and fund their rivals.
- HEEP** Already on it, JB.
- SHADOW** Now I don't want you to take this the wrong way, JB.
- JB** Why am I worried?
- SHADOW** It's only a rumour, but some pollies are pushing for new food labels.
- JB** No problem. Bribe or threaten them and push for weaker alternatives.
- SHADOW** *(Is nervous)* But one of the new codes has traffic lights.
- JB** *(Explodes)* Traffic lights! *(Enraged)* No way! They come in over my dead body.
- TIX** It's not definite JB.
- JB** That's one labelling system we can never have. It's simple. People understand simple, and worse, it features the colour red. People see red and stop buying.
- SHADOW** It's not definite.
- JB** We kill anything that threatens our profit. D'you understand?
- SHADOW** Yes JB.
- HEEP** But if it does come in, JB, there's a simple way to avoid getting a red label.
- JB** Meaning?
- HEEP** We change our products.
- JB** *(Explodes)* Are you insane? That costs money. We exist to make it, not spend it.

Death by Eating 21

- HEEP** Relax, JB. We make our products a *tiny* bit healthy, and kill the red label.
- JB** Make them healthy! What are we, a gymnasium, a friggin' health farm?
- SHADOW** Of course not, JB, but ...
- JB** The sole purpose of Big Tobacco and Big Food is to make money. We don't force people to buy our products. And we don't care what happens to them.
(Pause. *Tad softer*) Well, obviously we don't *want* them to die.
- TIX** Obviously.
- SHADOW** We care about people.
- HEEP** Very noble, JB.
- JB** I mean, we don't want them to die prematurely. (*TRIO agree, Of course*) We want them to keep living so they keep spending. (Pause. *TRIO not sure what to say*) Look healthy foods don't appeal. The masses are hooked on sugar and salt. So how do we kill the traffic lights?
(Pause. *TRIO look at one another*)
- SHADOW** We push a labelling system crammed with tiny print data. People find it time-consuming and confusing.
- JB** (*A little calmer*) Not bad. What else?
- HEEP** We push for a government enquiry into food labelling; like the delay tactics from Big Tobacco.
- JB** Good. What else?
- TIX** We sponsor research that finds simplistic judgements are bad for families.
- JB** You've got the Goebbels' touch. I like it.
- HEEP** (*Nervous*) But there's something else, JB.
- JB** Trust you to spoil the party.
- HEEP** There's a documentary about the massive increase in chronic disease linked to obesity linked to Big Food.
(*TRIO expecting fury JB but he remains calm. TRIO look at one another - 'What's going on'*)
- JB** I've been expecting this.
- SHADOW** (Pause. *More looking at one another. Speaks for OTHERS*) JB?
- JB** So what lies are they peddling now?
- TIX** We're not sure they *are* lies, JB.
- JB** Oh yeah, and how would you know?
- TIX** I'm in marketing, JB. Lying is my *raison d'etre*.
- HEEP** It's the medical data. One Western country had a 92% increase in hospital admissions due to obesity. Hospitals spend squillions treating people with preventable diseases caused by eating processed food.
- JB** (*Thinking*) Haven't some hospital foyers got a fast food restaurant?
- SHADOW** They have JB but the problem's the data. It's pretty damning.
- JB** Okay punk, go ahead, ruin my day.
- HEEP** The biggest change to the human diet started around the end of the 20th century.
- JB** (*Thinks he knows*) I know. Genetically-modified food. (*TRIO shake heads or remain still*) Of course, junk food. (*No response from TRIO*) Okay, cut-price, deep-fried Mars Bars. (*No response from TRIO*) All right. I give up. Tell me.
- TIX** Sugar consumption.
- JB** No way.
- TIX** It's true.
- JB** The biggest dietary change involves a massive increase in sugar consumption?

Death by Eating 22

SHADOW Either side of the new millennium, our average daily sugar consumption quadrupled.

JB Garbage.

HEEP It's the biggest dietary change since Eve switched to Granny Smiths.

TIX Some countries went from having 1 person in 40 diagnosed with type 2 diabetes to one in 10.

JB Garbage.

HEEP Today our lonely planet has more obese people than starving people.

JB It's propaganda.

SHADOW It's a fact and all on a YouTube channel near you. *(Pause. How will JB react)* Millions of hits. *(Still no response from JB. Will he explode?)*

HEEP We can make a counter-argument film, JB. We're ready to roll.
(JB silent)

TIX I've got a campaign linking food and drink with happiness and good-looking young people. We're ready to roll.
(When will JB respond?)

SHADOW We could donate more to hospitals and have polities announce our generosity.

JB *(Pause. He looks at them then finally JB speaks)* Do nothing. *(TRIO shocked)*

HEEP JB?

JB The best response is no response.

SHADOW Not even a denial?

JB Especially not a denial. If there's one thing I've learnt from Big Tobacco it's to never sink to the level of our opponents.

HEEP It's hard to sink when you're already on the bottom.

JB *(Ignores HEEP's remark)* Don't give them oxygen. Ignore them. It's business as usual. *(Pause)* Well, go on, get back to work.
(TRIO look at one another. They shrug, sit at table or work on devices. HEEP looks at JB)

HEEP You okay, JB?

JB Of course I'm okay. *(He's not. TRIO return)*

HEEP Can I get you something? Coffee? Scotch? *(Pause)* Sugar hit?

JB I'm not worried. I survived Big Tobacco so surviving Big Food's a soda.

TIX Perhaps not an apt choice of words, JB.

JB *(Ignores them and is on a roll)* If people get fat or o/d on sugar that's their fault. Nobody's forcing them to consume sugar-saturated cereal or fruit drinks, or gorge on burgers and fries. It's *their* choice.

HEEP *(Pause)* I admire your courage, JB. *(OTHERS agree)*

SHADOW You would've made a great politician, JB. You stand up for what you believe in. You fight to the last. You're cunning and have turned lying into an art form.

JB *(Pause. Looks at them)* You think I'm a heartless bastard.

TIX No, JB.

SHADOW Not at all; never.

JB *(Pause. At HEEP)* And you? What do you think?

HEEP I don't think you're a heartless bastard, JB. *(Pause)* I *know* you are.
(Tension. Will JB explode)

JB Let me tell you a true story.

FX *Emotional music begins softly*
(Lights slowly dim but concentrate on JB)

JB I was once a young executive in Big Tobacco. I was in the audience at our AGM. A female shareholder stood and spoke.
(Slowly music volume rises)

Death by Eating 23

‘Mr Chairman, would you let your young grandchildren remain in a room full of people smoking?’ You could hear a cigarette paper drop. At the time, Big Tobacco was starting to cop scientific criticism which was easy to ignore. But this was different. This was criticism from a member of the family. The Chairman paused and spoke calmly.

‘Madam, my young grandchildren have legs and the ability to make decisions. They can walk.’

(Lights continue to dim but a spot remains on JB. Long music crescendo continues)

God I was impressed. A tough question batted away with dignity. But the woman wasn’t finished. She continued.

‘Mr Chairman, what if your grandchild was a babe in arms?’

Wow. An electric atmosphere. How the hell could he answer without saying smoking was dangerous? But he did. *(Shaking head as JB remembers)* It was brilliant. The chairman’s reply made me the courageous, cunning, lying, heartless bastard I am today.

(Lighting now just a spot on JB. Music nearing its climax)

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘I would put that infant on the floor, flip them onto their belly and let them *(Fiery)* damn well crawl.’

BLACKOUT

(Music swells and plays to its end. House lights up. INTERVAL)

Death by Eating 24

Act 2 Scene 1

(Curtain rises on dark set. JB is seated at the table with a desk lamp the only lighting. There is little or no spill of light. An EXIT sign above a door could give the room an eerie glow. JB is working late. It's hard to know it's him. He groans or moans. We hear quiet footsteps or door key sounds offstage UR. JB hears them and panics. He hits an unseen light switch on the table and the desk lamp dies. The room is almost in total darkness. JB ducks down behind/beneath the table. The UR door opens and HEEP enters quietly. It's hard to know who it is. HEEP moves to table and searches. JB creeps/crawls out and to one side, stands and points weapon at the unsuspecting HEEP)

JB Freeze.
(HEEP hits the imaginary light switch and desk lamp comes back on. HEEP nearly dies)

HEEP *(Screams in fright)* Don't shoot, please don't shoot.

JB Hands! Let me see your hands.

HEEP *(Raising hands)* All right, all right, but don't shoot. *(Realises)* JB? Is that you?

JB *(He knows it's HEEP)* What are you doing here at this time of night?

HEEP *(Hugely relieved)* Oh JB, thank god. You scared the big food out of me.

JB *(Still pointing banana)* Answer the question.

HEEP JB? *(Pointing)*

JB Tell me. *(The finger pointing registers)* What?

HEEP You're holding a banana.

JB *(Snaps)* I know that.

HEEP It's not loaded is it?

JB *(Lowers fruit)* What are you doing here?

HEEP Are you okay?

JB Of course I'm okay. I'm always okay. Why shouldn't I be?

HEEP Well I'm finding it hard to believe the CEO of Big Food is holding a piece of fresh fruit.

JB *(Tosses fruit on table)* Bloody quacks.

HEEP Quacks?

JB Some zealot in a white coat told me I have inner fat. Can you believe that?

HEEP I'm sorry.

JB What the hell is inner fat?

HEEP *(Shrugs)* No idea. Inside fat? Invisible fat?

JB I'm good on the outside, but oh no, they have to come up with something new. Bloody medicos. Half the time they make up stuff just to take your money.

HEEP Hence the banana?

JB What? Oh yeah. Apparently I have to *(Makes quotation marks sign)* 'improve my diet'.

HEEP That's not good, JB.

JB *(Contradicts him)* Yes it is. Fresh fruit and vegetables are good for you.

HEEP No, I mean eating real food and not processed food is bad for Big Food's bottom line.

JB Shut up. *(Back to his original demand)* And answer my question. What are you doing sneaking around here at night?

HEEP I wasn't sneaking. I've lost my phone.

JB You're lying?

HEEP Lying?

JB And spying.

HEEP Well make up your mind. Am I lying or spying?

Death by Eating 25

JB You're definitely spying on me.
HEEP Why on earth would I do that?
JB Back in the Big Tobacco days you spied on me, you white-anted me.
HEEP Oh and you treated me with the utmost respect and kindness.
JB I treated you the way my CEO treated me. And being bullied made me a ruthless bastard. You should thank me for giving you a hard time.
HEEP Oh silly me. All those years of humiliation have made me a better executive.
JB Exactly.
HEEP Have you been drinking?
JB And now you go behind my back saying I'm past it.
HEEP Well if you point bananas at people you *are* past it.
JB I should have sacked you years ago.
HEEP I should have resigned years ago.
JB And you didn't because you're gutless.
HEEP *(Admits the sad truth)* More like friendless.
JB Listen matey, Big Tobacco and Big Food are successful because of ball-busting CEOs like me. My middle name's Ruthless while yours is Wimp. I've carried you for years.
HEEP You don't really believe that.
JB Look at me. Despite the crap I cop from scientists and do-gooders, I'm a survivor.
(HEEP speaks the truth)
HEEP JB, the sadistic survivor, who wouldn't know an original idea if he fell over it.
JB Have you any idea how hard it is to lie for a living; every day denying the bleeding obvious; every day promoting products that make people sick and die? Do you know how hard that is?
HEEP *(Softer)* Keep it down, JB. Around here that kinda talk attracts the death penalty.
JB *(He doesn't care)* Board members with their fancy lunches have no idea. You with your coke in a wrapper, no idea. It's only me, the heart and soul of Big Food. I'm the reason we make pots of money regardless of the crap we sell. I'm the ...
(He stops suddenly and appears vulnerable)
HEEP JB?
JB *(Recovers momentarily)* I'm the one person ...
(He can't speak. Leans on table)
HEEP *(Pause)* JB? What's the matter? *(Moves to help)*
JB Stay away! Don't come near me. *(Points at HEEP)* You're a coward. You wait till I'm vulnerable, till I can't return fire and then you stab me in the back.
HEEP Well you'll have to turn around.
JB What?
HEEP You're facing me. I can't stab you in the back till you turn around.
JB Smart arse. *(Shakes head, furious)* You ... *(He looks ill and again leans on table)*
HEEP C'mon, sit down. *(Crosses to cooler)* I'll get you some water.
(JB is not well. He moves to RC area and collapses. HEEP offers glass of water which JB takes and drinks. Long pause)
JB He's not even three.
HEEP Breathe slowly.
JB Three.
HEEP *(Has no idea)* Who?
JB *(Suddenly angry)* He's not even three!

Death by Eating 26

HEEP JB, I don't know who or what you're talking about.

JB My grandson, my beautiful, gorgeous little man. (*Produces photo*) Here, I've got a picture. (*Shows photo to HEEP*)

HEEP Lovely (*Photo returned, put away. Pause*) So something's wrong.

JB (*Regains composure. Pause*) My son is the kid's father. He and the mother are divorced. My son gets limited access; me, almost none. And that bitch has let it come to this. (*Screams in frustration*) Ahhhh!

HEEP Do you want an ambulance, a doctor?

JB He's not dying. And neither am I.

HEEP Well can I help? Do you want to talk about it?

JB (*Needs to let it all out*) How can this happen to a kid? To my grandson!

HEEP I gather he's not well.

JB His mother doesn't care; too busy shopping and screwing her latest toy-boy. It's neglect. How the hell did she get custody? Bloody lawyers.

HEEP What's wrong with your grandson?

JB (*Sarcastic*) Nothing, minor matter, absolutely trivial—(*Angry*) he's only got to have all his friggin' teeth pulled. And he's not even three!

HEEP God that seems young.

JB It's outrageously young! His grandfather has all his own teeth. (*Indicates mouth*) Look, not an implant in sight.

HEEP Can you get another opinion, see another specialist?

JB He's got the best. It's the least I could do. And I've instructed my solicitor to start custody proceedings. Poor little kid.

HEEP (*Pause*) So how did it happen?

JB His mother filled his bottle with fruit juice and fizzy drinks. Can you believe that? He'd lie in his cot and guzzle poison. That's child abuse. The poor little mite's teeth just rotted away.

HEEP I'm really sorry, JB.

JB My son reckons the dentist scraped the gums and there's almost nothing there. Nothing! (*He buries his face in his hands. HEEP tentatively offers some sympathy*) How's that going to affect his speech? How can he chew properly? What'll it do to his self-confidence?

HEEP I guess the right diet begins when we're very young.

JB (*Suddenly angry*) Don't you dare start that crap about sugar. It's a clear case of parental neglect, human error—end of story.

HEEP (*Sotto voce*) Some error.

JB This should never have happened to my family.

HEEP It should never happen to any family.

JB (*He's not listening to HEEP*) I'm rich. My son's rich. His ex-wife's got money. It's only the poor who make crap decisions about raising their kids.

HEEP Obviously not.

JB You hear about one-parent families on benefits who bung a frozen pizza in the microwave and call it cooking. Fresh food—what's that? The kids eat garbage. Put 'em in front of the telly with crisps and a soda. They're fat, unhealthy with teeth turning to mush! But why my grandson? (*Plaintive cry*) My family's not poor! (*He silently cries again*)

HEEP (*Waits for JB to settle*) JB, is your car here? (*Pause*) JB?

JB (*Is not listening*) What?

HEEP Is your car here?

JB No.

Death by Eating 27

HEEP I'll call you a cab. *(Pause. JB needs help)* Come on. *(Takes his arm and helps him to stand)* Let's get you home.

FX *Scene change music begins softly, the dim lights dim slowly (HEEP leads JB out via UR door)*

JB *(Muttering)* He turns three next month. Three.

HEEP I know, I know.

JB My family's not poor.

HEEP Come on, JB. Homeski. *(They exit, music swells. TIX and SHADOW enter in Blackout)*
BLACKOUT

Act 2 Scene 2

(After a few seconds MUSIC fades and lights come up. It's the next morning. We're back in the office in daylight. TIX is showing SHADOW a new marketing document)

TIX I've gone for the mouth-watering pics. Wotcha reckon?

SHADOW I'm hungry just looking at them.

TIX Technology allows us to doctor photos and turn food into art so no wonder we shift a ton of this stuff.

SHADOW Pity the contents rarely match the cover.

TIX Well this picture shows what you can make if you know the basics of cooking.

SHADOW You're good. You know that.

TIX *(Doesn't understand)* What?

SHADOW I can't tell if you believe your own lies.

TIX My job is to hook the client.

SHADOW You've hooked me.

TIX *(Shocked)* You're not serious?

SHADOW Of course I'm serious. Would I lie to a professional liar?

TIX You mean you'd actually eat this stuff?

SHADOW *(Shocked)* Good god, no. Do I *look* insane?

TIX You just said you were hooked.

SHADOW On the picture, the packaging, not on the bloody contents. What do you take me for? I know what's inside. There's enough salt and sugar in there to give my arteries nightmares. People who eat this junk on a regular basis have livers that run away from home.

TIX True—but I'm still proud of my artwork.

SHADOW And I'm still proud of persuading politicians to support Big Food but none of that changes the fact that our processed food is making millions of our deluded customers fat or fatter.

TIX Sorry?

SHADOW You heard.

TIX Are you mad? *(Intimate)* Have you found religion?

SHADOW Relax, we're alone. Look it's not all bad news. Big Food has created some of the world's happiest people.

TIX Yes—our shareholders.

SHADOW Big Fat and Big Pharma.

TIX *(Confused)* Big what?

SHADOW Two of today's top growth industries are gastric band surgery and slimming pills. The more people consume Big Food products, the more hospital procedures and weight-loss formulas are sold. The government loves Big Food—we create new jobs.

Death by Eating 28

TIX (*Is chuffed*) So we're doing something for the economy.

SHADOW (*Unhappy*) But I've got a public relations nightmare.

TIX Sorry, don't follow.

SHADOW I'm pushing for a ban on tough food labels, while at the same time promoting junk food advertising to kids, telling the world sugar is not the great Satan.

TIX But don't forget your squillion dollar salary.

SHADOW Even a professional fixer like me is finding it hard to bury the truth.

TIX What truth?

SHADOW Aw come on. Hospital beds are groaning with obese patients.

TIX (*Shrugs*) So, shove in a few more beds.

SHADOW The floors aren't strong enough. Do you know how expensive one kidney dialysis is?

TIX No but I could promote the best one in town.

SHADOW (*Looks at TIX*) Does it ever occur to you we might be *beyond* cynical?

TIX Never; in advertising, too much cynicism is never enough.
(*UR door opens and HEEP enters*)

SHADOW I think we're eating ourselves to death.

HEEP I don't like the sound of that. (*He joins them*)

TIX Here's a first. You're late.

HEEP And with good reason. I have news.

SHADOW You murdered JB.

HEEP Wait for it. (*Shocking news*) JB's got feelings.
(*Huge shock from OTHERS*)

TIX Never.

SHADOW Impossible.

HEEP His grandson has serious health problems and tough old Grandpa was crying.

TIX Crying? JB?

SHADOW Yeah but they were fake tears.

HEEP *Real* tears.

TIX (*Scoffing*) He can't cry, he's a CEO.

SHADOW Did you say his grandson was crook?

HEEP Yeah, the little mite's in a bad way. JB was angry, upset and even depressed.
(*The mood is sombre. OTHERS genuinely shocked*)

TIX Wow.

SHADOW Scary.

HEEP So when JB comes in, don't ask about his health or that of his grandson.

SHADOW *His* health? Is he crook too?

HEEP Apparently he's got too much inner fat. He's on a diet and, wait for it, he's eating fresh fruit.
(*OTHERS even more shocked*)

SHADOW Never!

TIX I feel faint.

SHADOW The CEO of Big Food cries and eats fresh fruit.

TIX I need some coke.

HEEP Be prepared for a man with serious depression. If he wants to talk, fine but otherwise ignore his misery. Understood?

TIX Sure.

SHADOW Gotcha. (*Pause*) So what's wrong with the grandson?

HEEP Would you believe rotten teeth due to sugary drinks.

TIX (*Shocked*) Jeez he'll wanna keep that quiet.

Death by Eating 29

- HEEP** And naturally he's really cut up about it.
- SHADOW** Who wouldn't be?
- HEEP** *(Warning them)* Just don't mention the war.
(They hear sounds coming from the lift)
- TIX** Here he is.
- HEEP** Remember, no fuss. The guy is depressed. Okay?
- OTHERS** Yes, yes, okay. *(They huddle over TIX's photos)*
(DL door flies open and spotlight hits JB. He is wearing a funny hat, wearing Groucho nose and glasses and blowing a novelty whistle. JB has never been so energetic)
- JB** *(Imitating Robyn Williams)* Good morning, Vietnam. Hey, this is not a test, this is rock 'n roll! *(OTHERS stunned)*
- FX** *(Lighting flashes and sparkles. Brief burst of same lively music used before as JB enters. It's Professor Harold Hill on speed. After a lap of the room, music fades and JB confronts the frozen and gobsmacked TRIO)*
- JB** Am I hot to trot or what? *(TRIO unfreeze but have no idea what to say)*
- HEEP** *(Trying to be normal)* JB, good morning.
- JB** And isn't it just a beautiful mornin'!
- HEEP** *(Tentative)* Is something up, JB?
- JB** You could say that. I've just been told the most unbelievable news.
(He removes hat, mask and stores them safely)
- SHADOW** *(To HEEP sotto voce)* Don't ever audition for CSI.
- TIX** *(Sotto voce)* So that's what depression looks like.
- JB** *(Delighted back at TRIO)* Great news, guys. *(Pause)* I've joined the Board.
(TRIO relieved, excited, now understand his unusual behaviour)
- TIX** Oh well done, JB *(Shakes his hand)*
- SHADOW** Congratulations, JB, well deserved.
- JB** Yes, all right, I'm not the bloody President—yet.
- SHADOW** And may I say it's not before time, JB.
- TIX** Big Food will never have a finer board member.
- JB** *(Pause. At HEEP)* Well? What about you?
- HEEP** *(Unsure)* Me JB?
- JB** Everyone else is pissin' in me pocket.
- HEEP** Well I'm torn between celebrating the fact I'll never have to work for a pompous prick again, while wondering what pathetic excuse you'll use to prevent me becoming the new CEO.
(Pause. Will JB explode at HEEP's crude and rude comments?)
- JB** *(Suddenly pleased and almost embracing HEEP)* Now that is beautiful. Finally you're a *genuine* cynical bastard. Finally you're ready to lie about our products and bully and abuse the workers.
- HEEP** *(Thinks he's been promoted)* You're not serious?
- JB** I've trained you well.
- HEEP** You're offering me the CEO job?
- TIX** *(Anxious)* Hang on, hang on. I've been here almost as long as Heep.
- SHADOW** *(Agitated)* Exactly, what he said.
- JB** Not so fast. The new CEO will be the one who creates the best Big Food marketing strategy. Okay?
(TRIO look at one another. Pause. Then they speak at once)
- TRIO** *(Speaking over the top of each other)* Great JB ... Sounds absolutely fair ... couldn't be happier, JB ... excellent test, JB ... terrific idea ... more than fair, JB *etc.*

Death by Eating 30

JB *(Clapping)* Enough already! *(They settle)* I'm looking for outrageous manipulation of the truth, fantastic frauds, and phoney schemes to make truckloads of cash for Big Food. *(a la officer)* Is that clear?

TRIO *(a la the military)* Clear, sir, clear.

JB Right, who's first?

(TRIO immediately raise a hand. They're like eager school kids wanting desperately to be chosen by their teacher. JB ponders the three applicants then points to TIX who beams with delight as the other two groan and look miserable. TIX moves to presentation area and the OTHERS to the viewing area. Lights change accordingly and TIX is highlighted. The next scene becomes a knock-out final. It's a selling shoot-out. Each member of the trio tries to out-sell their competitor. Technically speaking you can make this a special scene. Each 'contestant' could add a boater or bowler hat. It's show time, folks. Each 'applicant' is like a spruiker, a barker at a fair ground wanting passers-by to buy a ticket. Each applicant desperately wants to be the next CEO of Big Food and directs their spiel at JB)

Act 2 Scene 3

FX *Short dramatic music to prepare the scene*

(Major LIGHTING change. The spruiker is lit and the others in the 'audience' can be seen but dimly. Once TIX is lit he lets rip)

TIX Roll up, roll up and welcome to the wonderful world of Big Food where we love our products, and you, our dearest customers. Our message is the greatest message the world has ever heard. Big Food loves you.

For millennia love has thrilled humankind. Now Big Food has taken that timeless emotion and made it even sweeter. Greater love hath no company than this. Big Food has converted that famous expression, 'I love you' to a far, far greater saying.

'I love you' is not enough; never enough. Now we express our love with Big Food's three little words—'No added sugar!'

We are bursting with pride and shout our message of love from the rooftops. *(Proudly declares undying love)* 'No added sugar!'

(Suddenly switches to sneaky. Now addressing Big Food. No longer spruiking, almost whispering)

But see the beauty of the sting, the con of the century. Our 'no added sugar' products have something special inside—*(Intimate)* more sugar.

(Rubbing hands with delight) Suckers! There's actually more sugar in some products with the three little words than comparable products without them. It's a con, dummies, a con that keeps on conning.

It's deception, duplicity and dirty deeds. *(Big finish)* And so herewith my pledge to Big Food is the con of ... 'No added sugar!'

(Lighting returns to normal. Applause from the OTHERS although SHADOW and HEEP are rivals so will not be so enthusiastic. TIX removes his props and JB addresses the other two candidates)

JB Excellent, deception is delicious. You've set the bar very high, young Tix. Now, who's next?

Death by Eating 31

(SHADOW and HEEP are sitting ever so straight with a 'Pick me, pick me' look on their faces. HEEP strokes his chin then points to SHADOW. He is delighted and moves to prepare. HEEP annoyed. TIX sits with HEEP as lighting changes again. SHADOW is lit)

SHADOW *(As academic perhaps with gown)* Our lecture topic today is the history of food.
(Groans from dimly-lit audience)

Once we were hunter/gatherers. If our supper ran, swam or flew faster, we went hungry. But when we ate, what we ate was good; fibre with no preservatives or added sugar. The Heart Foundation gave us a big red tick.

But then came the tsunami—agriculture. No longer did we have to fish, shoot and trap. Now farmers, we *grew* our food.

The grains were natural and full of fibre. We did little to them. We had natural sugar, good for the body and especially the waistline.

But then, greet the fun food revolution—sugar! Easy to grow, cHEEP to produce and great to taste. It went with everything. Taste ruled. We called it *palatability*. And Big Food attacked the palate. Forget good health; taste rules.

Then came protests. What about nutrition? Ah, the Big Food propaganda.

(Imitates gullible human) 'Look! The word *fruit* is on the label—it just has to be healthy.'

(Big finish) O Big Food, how crafty are thy cheesy thoughts. Taste equates to nutrition and goodness. It's ... *palatability!*

(Lighting returns to normal. Applause from the OTHERS although TIX and HEEP are not so enthusiastic. SHADOW removes his props and returns to the group. JB addresses them)

JB We at Big Food proudly lead the masses by their tongue. If it tastes good it is okay. God it does my heart proud to see such devious behaviour. Is sneaky, is good. Now, lucky last; *(Indicating HEEP)* the man who would be king.
(HEEP rises and moves to prepare. Lights crossfade and OTHERS dimly lit as HEEP is lit. He is a budding CEO fronting the world. He raises his hand as if stating an oath of allegiance and giving evidence before Congress or Head of State)

HEEP I believe that nicotine is not addictive.
I believe the moon is made of green cheese.
I believe in Santa Claus and the tooth fairy.
I believe politicians always keep their word.
I believe in the right to bear arms ... and bare legs.
I believe saying 'Rabbits' on the first day of the month brings good luck.
I believe there is no connection between sugar and obesity.
(Switches to enthusiastic salesperson)

Yes folks, if we in the food business ever believed sugar was harmful we would stop production tomorrow.

Death by Eating 32

As good corporate citizens, we believe public health is our top priority.
Big Food cooperates with anyone working in the interests of public health.
(Pause. No expression or movement. Suddenly he doubles up with laughter for brief time)
(Returns to being serious addressing Big Food executives)

Big Food is famous for inventing slogans—*No added sugar and taste equals nutritious*. But our real slogan is simple. *(Pause)* Delay, delay, delay.

The do-gooders scream for regulation and we at Big Food support their demands—with a twist. We support *self*-regulation. Who knows how to make food taste great, look great and cost peanuts? We do. Big Food is the perfect choice to regulate the food and beverage industry.

Some claim this is putting the fox in charge of the hen house.
(Pause. No expression or movement. Suddenly he doubles up with laughter for brief time)
(Returns to being serious addressing Big Food executives)

(Mock anger) How dare they! They're only saying that because it's true.

(All smiles again) Of course we support surveys. Let's track 2,000 young people and their sugar intake. Let's study the results and respond—in fifty years' time!

Let's give games to kids. Let's make massive profits as diabetes makes massive misery. C'mon Big Food, let's delay, delay, delay!

FX *Triumphant music used at beginning of Act 2 Scene 3 is repeated. Lights flash. TRIO rise and applaud. Lighting flashes.*
(After this brief celebration everything winds down. Lighting returns to normal and JB addresses the trio. They are tense waiting for his verdict. Who will be the new CEO?)

Act 2 Scene 4

JB Fantastic. I love you all, and especially your cynicism, lies, and dedication to making money. We boost waistlines to boost bottom lines.

HEEP Are you auditioning for your own job or choosing your replacement?

JB *(Gives warning)* Ah, giving cheek to a member of the board; whatever happened to Mister Obsequious?

SHADOW Just put us out of our misery. *(JB looks at SHADOW who suddenly weakens)* Please.

JB There are three things I need to do here.

TIX Delay, delay, delay.

JB *(He likes it)* Nice. *(Preparing to exit)* I'm sending you all on a weekend retreat.

TRIO *(Objecting as one)* No! ... I'm busy. ... I've got the kids. ... Why? ... etc.

JB Make it a time to steal one another's ideas.

HEEP *(Whingeing)* Do we have to go? *(OTHERS agree)*

JB *(TRIO unhappy)* Whoever gazumps the others the best gets the job. *(Exiting but stops at door DL, grinning)* Happy backstabbing. *(Exits)*

FX *Lights dim slowly*

(TRIO get ready to go to the bush. Each collects a folding camp stool and places it downstage. They make simple costume change as they talk. Add beanie, scarf, hat with corks, whatever. Keep it simple and keep the action moving. They sit around imaginary camp fire. They're frustrated and on edge. Each wants the promotion. They are not in a hurry to speak. There is often a pause between lines. They're on the weekend retreat.)

Death by Eating 33

TIX Once a bastard, always a bastard.
SHADOW He's chosen the winner already. He just wants to see us suffer.
HEEP I liked your three-word slogans.
TIX Mine?
HEEP Both of you.
SHADOW Thanks.
TIX Yours was good too.
(The pausing continues. It contrasts with the helter-skelter delivery of the previous scene)
TIX *(To HEEP)* You'll get the job. He likes you.
HEEP Likes me? Are you mad? He's hated me for years.
SHADOW You've been here the longest; seniority rules.
HEEP Y'know he could choose an outsider. *(OTHERS shocked)* Oh come on. JB would love to headhunt and watch our faces when we all miss out.
(Silence. The other two hadn't considered that. They could all miss out. The mood darkens. All believe they will miss out on the promotion each would love to win)
TIX I should have gone harder, pushed a bigger lie.
SHADOW Me too. I squibbed it.
HEEP We all blew it. And now, we've got this weekend retreat before we're shafted.
BLACKOUT
FX *Harmonica music a la cowboys is heard which then slowly fades
Soft night sounds - frogs, cicadas, are heard which then slowly fade
(It's now a scene where the three are around an imaginary campfire in the bush. They are on their weekend retreat. Their tough games are over and they're relaxing. The speed and shouting has faded. An overhead shaft of light becomes the fire and the three sit around it. It's a time for honest talking and confessions. The dialogue is slow with pauses. Because of the overhead lighting, we can't see their faces clearly and so recognize them as much by voice than appearance)*
TIX Bloody bonding weekends. I hate 'em.
SHADOW Waste of time. *(Pause. Looks at HEEP)* Hey, what's with the silent routine?
HEEP *(Pause. He looks at them)* Do you guys ever have scary ideas?
TIX Never.
SHADOW About what?
HEEP About working for Big Tobacco and Big Food.
TIX If you're scared, you'll never make CEO.
HEEP I reckon I can impress JB with fear. I know something really scary about Big Food, and when I tell JB, he'll panic and make me CEO just to keep me quiet.
SHADOW *(Laughing)* Bad luck, Sunshine. I know something twice as scary.
HEEP You don't know my scary fact.
SHADOW Trust me. What I know will scare the crap out of JB and he'll beg me to become CEO.
HEEP So does your so-called scary fact threaten the existence of humankind?
SHADOW *(Surprised)* What?
TIX Hey. *(OTHERS look at TIX)* Remember me?
OTHERS No.
TIX People call me Stephen Bradbury?
HEEP Who?
TIX Currently I'm coming last in the CEO race, but as you two pricks argue then crash, I skate through and win.
SHADOW Do you know something scary?
TIX Scary? Once you hear my scary fact, you will never, repeat never, get to sleep.
HEEP You can't scare me.

Death by Eating 34

SHADOW Or me.

TIX Okay, let's each tell our scary Big Food fact with the winner sleeping inside.

SHADOW It's bloody cold out here.

TIX (*Pointing, accusing*) Ah squibbing it already.

HEEP All right, let's do it. Who goes first?

SHADOW You started it. You go first.

HEEP (*Hesitates then starts*) Okay, how's this for scary? Humankind is doomed.

TIX That's not scary.

SHADOW Prove it.

HEEP Ever since we've run surveys, every generation has outlived their folks? Our parents outlived our grandparents and we'll outlive *our* parents. But here's the kicker. Our kids may be the first generation to die younger than us.

TIX Baloney.

HEEP Life expectancy will drop.

SHADOW Not mine.

HEEP I call it *Death by Eating*.

TIX Are you on drugs?

HEEP By allowing today's kids to get and remain fat, we markedly increase their risk of cardio, diabetes, cancer, strokes and dementia.

SHADOW (*Bored*) Don't tell me—it's sugar.

HEEP The massive increase in overweight kids equates exactly to the increase in sugar consumption. And here's the scary fact. Big Food and governments know this but both say nothing, deny it or spread misinformation.

TIX (*Quoting Big Food*) "Food is neither good nor bad. We can enjoy everything in moderation."

HEEP The lie is that obesity is a lifestyle choice and has nothing to do with Big Food. The way we're going, our kids will die younger than us. (*Heavy mood continues*) How about I tell JB that to convince him to pick me as CEO?

TIX He'll murder you first.

HEEP And because Big Food is helping people die younger, that means less money for Big Food and that, my friends, is *really* scary.

SHADOW (*Scoffing*) Not even mildly scary. My fact will shatter JB.

HEEP Extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence. (*Pause*) Well, get on with it.

SHADOW The biggest lie supported by Big Food is, 'Calories in, calories out'. And it's unbelievably scary because (a) it's bullshit and (b) squillions of people believe it's true.

TIX What's scary about that?

SHADOW Big Food suggests if you consume X amount of calories, all you need do is burn off those calories.

TIX That's true.

SHADOW But all calories are not the same.

HEEP Meaning?

SHADOW You can't compare a thousand calories from a can of soda with a thousand calories from a plate of salad. Calories from a sugar overdose give your organs a panic attack. They can't deal with the sugar hit and you get fat or fatter.

TIX I'm not scared.

SHADOW If you devour a block of chocolate, you'll need to run a marathon to burn those calories. The calories in, calories out message from Big Food is misleading and adds fuel to the obesity fire. That lie is dynamite.

(*Silence as the TRIO reflect on what's been said*)

Death by Eating 35

TIX Mmmm, moderately scary.

SHADOW Moderate? It's dynamite.

HEEP *(To TIX)* So come on, Stephen Bradbury, skate on by.

TIX Strap yourselves in and be ye warned.

SHADOW Get on with it.

TIX Sugar never warns you. It attacks your organs like a thief in the night.

SHADOW *(Sarcastic)* Oh god, I'm trembling.

TIX You don't discover your insides are wrecked *until* they're wrecked. Every day thousands are diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes, and for everyone diagnosed more than twice as many have the disease and don't know it. It's a pandemic and the scariest Big Food secret is that too much sugar is a sneaky, silent killer. *(Pause. Silence except for the sounds of the bush at night. TRIO deflated. They've each told a tale which, if true, genuinely is frightening. It's doubly so because they are all intimately involved in the industry. They are reflective and again there are pauses)*

HEEP I've changed me mind. I don't wanna be the new CEO.

SHADOW I wish I'd stayed working for Big Tobacco.

TIX What's the difference between Big Food and Big Tobacco?

HEEP Nothing. Same tactics, same damage. *(Pause)* I need a career change. *(OTHERS amused)* What?

TIX Talk about Groundhog Day.

SHADOW *(Mimics HEEP)* "I've decided to pull the pin. I'm a successful executive with a multi-national corporation."

HEEP Yeah, all right.

TIX If JB promotes you, you'll be all over Big Food like the rest of us. *(HEEP nods)*

SHADOW We're all in it for the money. If tobacco and sugar are legal, let people consume them. If they make people sick, it's their choice. *(Looks at them)* Agreed?

OTHERS *(Soft)* Agreed.
(LIGHTING crossfades. Single overhead light fades as original office lighting returns - slowly. They pack up removing outdoor gear, perhaps put back on office clothing—jacket, etc talking as they go. The scenes merge seamlessly into one another)

HEEP I'm too old to get a conscience. *(Frustrated)* What's keeping JB?

TIX I've done everything in tobacco and food. What else is there?

SHADOW Nobody pays like them.

HEEP *(Gets an idea)* Of course, consultancy. Governments engage consultants who charge the earth. *(Sits at table and starts to write a resignation letter)* Dear JB. I hereby tender my resignation *(OTHERS scoff)* ... effective immediately. Yours faithfully, ...

TIX *(Plays a game)* Look out, it's JB.
(HEEP panics and hides letter. OTHERS laugh at HEEP's discomfort. Just as the laughter reaches its peak, JB enters DL. TRIO freeze)

JB What's going on? *(Silence)* Wow, laughter then silence; now that's smells.

HEEP Have you made a decision?

JB I have.

SHADOW And?

JB It's good news and bad news.

TIX *(Loses it)* Damn you, JB, just tell us who got the job. *(Pause. Everyone looks at TIX who is embarrassed)* Sorry. *(Pause)* Sorry.

JB *(Looks at them. They're hooked)* The news is, you're all finished.

TRIO What?

JB You and Big Food are no more.
(TRIO despairing)

Death by Eating 36

- HEEP** *(Furious)* You bastard. You've appointed an outsider.
- JB** That's the bad news. The good news is it's change career time, *again*.
- TRIO** *(As one)* What?!
- HEEP** Change career?
- JB** Yep. It's bye bye to Big Food.
- SHADOW** All of us?
- JB** And hello to Big Weight Loss.
(TRIO stunned)
- SHADOW** Big Weight Loss?
- TIX** You mean we're not sacked?
- HEEP** What's happened?
- JB** This wonderful Big Food multinational has just bought one of the world's largest slimming companies and we are now into Big Weight Loss.
(TRIO confused)
- SHADOW** Hang on, hang on. None of us got the CEO gig and the consolation prize is flogging 'healthy' meals and hunger suppression pills?
- JB** It's a booming business.
- TIX** *(Pleased)* I like it.
- HEEP** *(Angry)* You like it?
- TIX** We get 'em both ways. They buy our high-calorie food and pile on the pounds then buy our low-calorie food when they join our weight loss program.
- HEEP** So Tobacco buys Food buys Weight Loss.
- SHADOW** And what's next? Big medicine?
- JB** *(Excited)* Hey! Now that I like. Tell me more.
- SHADOW** We should be buying Big Pharma. With smoking and sugar causing massive health problems, we need drugs to pretend to fix the problems.
- HEEP** *(Catching the enthusiasm)* Yeah and I like the word 'pretend'.
- TIX** We never wanna cure the problems we've made in the first place.
- HEEP** And Big Pharma can jack up the price of their drugs overnight.
- JB** That's no big deal. Big Food can do that.
- HEEP** By 2000%.
(OTHERS stunned. Finale music begins softly. Is it the music we've heard previously? Slow crescendo)
- JB** I'm loving this. C'mon, gimme y'best shot.
- SHADOW** Politicians will back drugs designed to fight self-inflicted health problems.
- HEEP** We can tell them our drugs will cut their health budget.
- TIX** We can promise anything.
(JB steps to one side grinning as the TRIO get excited and bounce ideas of one another. They ad lib their ideas as lights dim on trio and spot picks out JB who addresses the audience)
- JB** And promise anything we will. Big Tobacco announced it wants to stop producing cigarettes. True. Vaping is the new way to get your hit and die - suckers. And Big Food offers zero sugar - suckers again. Ah yes, on and on and on and on it goes. Ain't life beautiful?
BLACKOUT
(Music rises, lights come up and the performers take their bows)

