

OFF THE WALL

A peripatetic play by
Peter Mortimer
For Cloud Nine Troubadours

© Peter Mortimer 2004 (this draft post-production Sept.2004)

This play was first produced in August 2004, opening on August 19 at Lindow Hall, Bowness-on-Solway, and touring the Roman Wall on foot. The final production was at Arbeia Roman Fort, South Shields, on Tuesday August 31

Characters (in order of appearance)

Modern Day

Drysdale	(A small businessman)	Dylan Mortimer
Loot	(A large businessman)	Dave Hollingworth
Cogno	(Loot's adviser)	Bill E. Meeks
Dolores	(Loot's wife)	Janine Birkett
Minister	(Govt. Minister for the North)	Alex Kinsey
Starlet	(An hedonistic young female)	Susie Burton

Roman Britain

Guard/Jailer	(Roman Guard)	Bill E. Meeks
Briginus	(Caledonian rebel leader)	Dave Hollingworth
Prisoner	(A Caledonian prisoner)	Dylan Mortimer
Ulpus Marcellus	Roman Governor of Britain	Alex Kinsey
Cingetissa	(Briginus' wife)	Janine Birkett

Several small parts are played by members of the cast

OFF THE WALL

Location: The play is set both in modern and Roman Britain

Time: 21st and 2nd century AD

(the play can be preceded by actors' entry & music as befits)

(ENTER LOOT FOLLOWED BY DRYSDALE)

Drysdale Mr Loot, I implore you

Loot Look at him. There's something — well, pathetic about him

Drysdale You are a reasonable businessman, I'm sure of that

Loot Kicking a man when he's down — it's rather exhilarating really

Drysdale You can see how disastrous this decision would be for the workforce

Loot I once took a big juicy bone off a bull terrier. I swear the stupid mutt had the same expression as this creature

Drysdale We are talking here about 800 jobs, and behind each job, a family

Loot He's talking, yap, yap, yap. Me? I'm drinking a lightly chilled Martini

Drysdale 800 people on the scrapheap — just like that

Loot A green olive or a black olive? These are the decisions men have to make

Drysdale And virtually no redundancy pay

Loot I do believe those new razor blades are little better than a lawn mower on y delicate skin. What do you think Drysdale?

Drysdale I think Mr Loot that your intention all along was to buy up my company, then close it down

Loot How boring most people are. Even my wife Dolores, who by any natural laws of the universe should worship me

Drysdale I thought I had your word. As a gentleman

Loot Drysdale. How long can you hold your breath for?

Drysdale What?

Loot Thirty seconds? One minute? Let's see

Drysdale I really don't understand —

Loot Oh come on, don't be a spoilsport. Breathe in. That's it. And hold it. Long as you can. Good boy. Keep going. Good. Good. Excellent Drysdale. especially for someone in your condition. Try it every day, eh? Lots of oxygen to the blood. Here, have my olive, Well, I mustn't detain you. (PAUSE) Still here Drysdale?

Drysdale There was the small matter of my —

Loot Small matter?

Drysdale That is, my own compensation — as managing director

Loot Of course! Forgive me! Here's your cheque (HANDS OVER)

Drysdale One quarter of a million pounds! I don't know what to say

Loot When holding a quarter of a million pounds in your hand, my advice is to say nothing

Drysdale It's a lot of money Mr Loot

Loot Managing directors deserve a lot of money, Drysdale. Now, should you wish this to go to those poor unfortunate 800 unemployed souls, it will come to around £300 apiece. Just say the word. (PAUSE) I see. I assume that the matter is now closed. For good. Off you go then, with your cheque (EXIT DRYSDALE) Cogno! (ENTER COGNO) Large cheques concentrate the mind wonderfully against matters of human conscience, don't you find Cogno? Possibly that's why poets are never millionaires

Cogno Do you remember a single line of poetry sir?

Loot I'm proud to say I don't. Not any more. There's no money in poetry?

Cogno And no poetry in money, some might say

Loot Don't come the smart-arse. Where is that wife of mine?

Cogno I believe she's reading

Loot Reading? Reading what?

Cogno A book

Loot A book? A wife's place is by her husband. Not with some piddling book. Why does she treat me like this? It's intolerable!

Cogno I have the latest letters from your consultants

Loot Give them here (STARTS OPENING THEM. FIRST ENVELOPE) Nicaraguan copper to rise moderately Spiffing (SECOND) Australian rail network about to reinvest. Earth-shattering (VIEWS MORE.) Rubbish. Rubbish. I've never seen so much -(STOPS TO READ ONE)

Cogno You failed to complete your sentence sir. Is it something serious?

Loot Fetch my wife

Cogno As I said sir, she's reading

Loot Fetch my wife, insubordinate one! (EXIT COGNO. LOOT HOLDS UP LETTER. ENTER DOLORES)

Dolores Sending for your wife? You must be ill husband. You'll be kissing me next

Loot I would kiss you. If you didn't make it feel like kissing a dead fish

Dolores That's the feeling exactly isn't it? Your lips were once as hot as fiery coals

Loot I still have the same lips Dolores

Dolores Me too

Loot What do you know about the Roman Wall?

Dolores Come again?

Loot The Roman Wall woman! Surely those dreary books teach you something? Give me some information

Dolores The Roman Wall, also known as Hadrian's Wall began construction in AD122 on the orders of the Emperor Hadrian. The wall was originally built over eight or ten years across what is reputed to be (though this is disputed in some quarters), the narrowest strip of Northern England, from Bowness in Solway in the West to Wallsend, or Segedunum in the East. In the wall's construction more than 25m facing stones were used

Loot Yes, I get the picture

Dolores In truth the Emperor Hadrian was only partly responsible for the wall as we are familiar with it. The Romans later attempted to build another wall further North in Scotland, the less ambitious, and much less successful Antonine Wall. When this was abandoned, and the empire retreated back South, Hadrian's Wall was greatly reinforced by the Emperor Severus, for whom much of the credit should belong.

Loot I think that will do, wife

Dolores Despite this, it is known in common parlance as Hadrian's Wall, and not Severus's Wall. The wall's original length was 80 Roman miles, though at each extremity now only sparse evidence remains. The central part of the wall, situated in the least populated areas, is still, nearly two thousand years on, very spectacular

Loot Put a sock in it, right?

Dolores Common belief had it the wall was built as a protection from the heathen hordes to the north. Some historians and academics dispute this, claiming DOL(con) the wall was as much an offensive as a defensive weapon

Loot You're driving me mad woman! (TRIES TO STOP HER. SHE PERSISTS IN THE STRUGGLE).

Dolores — and was used by the Romans to launch many raids into the North. During Roman times there was only one written reference which affords us any clue

Loot Damn you!

Dolores This was the writer Spartianus, who penned Hadrian's biography, including the following: 'having restored the army's morale, he (Hadrian) crossed to Britain where he set many things to rights and built a wall 80 miles long to separate the Romans from the barbarians'. (COGNO ENTERS. HAS TO SEPARATE THE TWO OF THEM FROM FIGHTING)

Loot All I ask is some respect!

Dolores Respect?

Loot I give you everything. You spit in my face

Dolores Where is the man I married? The real man?

Loot The little man. The man of no consequence

Cogno Let me clean you up a bit sir (STARTS)

Loot Clean her up! Make her see sense!

Dolores Was there anything else?

Loot There was something else Dolores, yes. Who owns the Roman Wall, now?

Dolores What is all this about the Roman Wall?

Loot I repeat, who owns the wall now?

Dolores Very well, various farmers, and landowners. It is under the protection of English Heritage and is managed on behalf of the people

Loot Ah, the people. Does it make money?

Dolores Thousands flock to see it every year of course, but -

Loot (TO AUDIENCE) Is that what I asked her Whether thousands flocked to see it every year? Well? Course not. I asked her what — yes, that's right. Does it make money? Maybe Cogno knows the answer to this simple question

Cogno Income generation is not the Roman Wall's forte, as far as I know sir

Loot So. By most definitions, the wall is a failure. I want to buy it

Cogno Buy it sir?

Dolores Did you say — buy it?

Loot No, I said there's a walrus eating the inside of my bottom. Yes, buy it, damn you!

Cogno You want to buy the Roman Wall?

Loot I'm in the nation of the deaf, the land of the failed hearing aid. I am among people whose ears contain more wax than a 20ft long candle. Yes — buy it!!

Cogno But why would you want to buy the Roman Wall?

Loot Why?

Dolores You hate old things. You hate anything that has a history

Loot History is irrelevant

Dolores So why buy the wall?

Loot Why? Why? Why? Because — because....(PAUSE) I'll tell you why because. Then you'll see. Imagine this. An 80 mile long —

Dolores That's Roman miles by the way. By our measurements it is only 73 miles

Loot I repeat, an 80 Roman miles long theme park. Customers get to travel the entire original length of the Roman Wall via mono-rail which is sealed in a transparent, weather-proof plastic tunnel

Cogno Inspired thinking sir

Loot There are video screens, holograms, actors dressed as Roman soldiers and barbarians.

Cogno see it even as you speak!

Loot There are mock battles — an entire full day's travel and adventure without the need to leave your seat.

Cogno Perfection almost

Loot I picture it now! Lionel Loot's Roman Wall Experience. Well?

Dolores It stinks

Loot What?

Dolores Worse than a rotting ferret

Loot You devil

Dolores Why not walk the wall instead of buying it?

Loot Walk the wall?

Dolores I might even come with you. Remember, you once walked six miles. Just to bring me an orange

Loot That orange was a long time ago. A time of deep foolishness.

Dolores I can still taste it

Loot It has gone sour. And I suggest you get out (SHE DOESN'T))
What have I done to deserve this?

Cogno One question sir on this innovative scheme of yours. Will the
farmers sell the land?

Loot Farmers are on hard times. Crying into their Range Rovers. Foot
and mouth, C.A.P, Set-A-Side. Can't wait to sell up, most of
them. So here's some easy loot. From Loot.

Cogno What about possible government resistance?

Loot The government want ventures that produce income How, why,
where, and by whom are minor considerations. When I tell them
what income — the Roman Wall Experience will bring in — well,
game set and match to Loot. Did she say walking? For what? To
see a few stones? Grass? Sky? Mud? To be butted by imbecile
sheep? Rogered by rampant bulls? Cogno, I want a Feasibility
Study done on that wall without delay. And I want its conclusions
to mirror my own way of thinking. Oh, and Cogno?

Cogno Yes sir?

Loot I would like it sung

Cogno I understand (PAUSE)

Loot Is it done?

Cogno Naturally (ENTER SINGER)

Singer A FEASIBILITY STUDY ON THE ROMAN WALL
It's only an old wall
80 miles of ancient stone
Grass rocks and sheep that's all
Can't get a signal for the 'phone
You can't eat it ride it play it or invest it
Listen to it, make love to it or text it
It doesn't walk it doesn't dance, it doesn't sing
It doesn't do much of anything

Chorus It's only an old wall

Dolores Not only an old wall!

Loot I've heard worse. Keep going

Singer Dead Roman empererors — tell me what is so fantastic?
it needs reinventing with a retail outlet to flash the plastic
Where's the PS2 game, where's the happy meal?

Where's the TV spin-off, just what's the deal?
And why isn't it more like Alton Towers?
There's nothing you can do here
except walk about for hours and hours and hours?
Is it cost-effective? I want to know the rate of your return.
In the end of the day, how much will the damned thing earn?
It's only an old wall

Chorus It's only an old wall!

Loot Not bad Cogno. Award yourself a bonus.

Cogno already have sir

Loot Now halve it. Dismiss the singer (COGNO DOES SO). I am
resolved. I will buy the wall. Impressed Dolores?

Dolores Mountains impress me. Storm clouds. Wind in the trees. A
proper lover. A much travelled orange

Loot I once swept you off your feet. I made you breathless

Dolores Yes, you did

Loot I am twice the man I was. Why can't you see that?

Dolores More is often less

Loot That's the kind of idiotic thing your books tell you

Dolores You think you can buy everything. Me, the Roman Wall

Loot Let me educate you my dear. Bring that singer back! (ENTER
SINGER) Do you know the For Sale song?

Singer It is said to be your anthem Mr Loot

Loot And why not? Sing it for my dear wife

Singer Everything is for sale
There's nothing can't be bought
Not just cakes and ale
Not just bread or port

Everything's for sale
You just need to know
The sum that will persuade
The seller to let go

Loot Simple really isn't it?

Chorus People loyalties land
 And the air we breathe
 All for sale, you understand
 Find the price, then do the deed

Loot There's not much more to say

Singer Everything is for sale
 Just a matter of purchase
 The thing that can't be bought
 Is the thing that's worthless

Dolores Purchase and worthless? You once wrote much better rhymes

Loot Me?

Dolores Yes, you Loot.

Loot Do you have any idea how many factories I own world-wide?

Dolores Happily, I'm clueless

Loot Not to mention shipping lines

Dolores But you have mentioned them

Loot I have newspapers in four continents

Dolores Why?

Loot I own tobacco firms

Dolores Smoking improves your wealth?

Loot Electricity companies

Dolores How shocking

Loot Insurance companies, drug companies, construction works —

Cogno If I might suggest sir, this line of reasoning doesn't appear —

Loot Doesn't appear? It appears you are getting beyond yourself
 Cogno, in matters to do with me and my beloved wife. It appears
 I deserve an apology

Cogno My apologies sir

Dolores I have some useless books to read (EXIT DOL)

Loot (TO COGNO) I will show her Cogno. Be sure of that. Anyway, do you think I give a toss if she doesn't respect me?

Cogno As you say sir. And you have bigger fish to fry

Loot A very long fish. A fish that you can see from the moon. A brilliant, imaginary, visionary fish Cogno. Another manifestation of my unique skills and talents, skills and talents which my wife singularly fail to acknowledge

Cogno Not that you give a toss about that of course sir

Loot Now listen to me Cogno, We need the government on our side. A £1m donation is to be made to party funds. Donate it via one of our less obviously connected organisations

Cogno Might I suggest Melrose International Textiles? (OR INSERT HERE SOME INVENTED NAME TO DO WITH THE VENUE'S LOCALITY)

Loot You may. I want the party to be fully aware of the source of the donation. Less so the public

Cogno £1m is not an inconsiderable amount

Loot It is only considerable for people who themselves are inconsiderable. All wall landowners are to be wined & dined and made unrefusable offers; shall we say at twice the expected price? There will be conditions re: our use of the wall of course. We shall agree to them. For the moment

Cogno And when that moment is passed?

Loot What do you mean?

Cogno Nothing. (TO AUDIENCE)

Loot This Roman Wall. Was it much respected, acclaimed?

Cogno One of the country's most valued historic monuments

Loot That's what this country likes, isn't it? Historic monuments. The old, the clapped out, the ruined piles of rubble. Pay the £1m. Let us see the politicians!

(SCENE IS HOUSE OF COMMONS. ENTER MINISTER)

Minister As minister with special responsibility for the North I have been looking at ways of bringing increasing prosperity to this often

impoverished region. I have been studying statistics on the North's tourist attractions. Some, such as Tyneside's Metro Centre are highly income generating, others, such as the Roman Wall, though it does attract thousands of visitors annually, less so. Thus Hadrian's Wall makes only a minimal contribution to the region's economy. You could say visitors came, they saw, but they did not spend. Thus our govt is moved to look at a radical new departure for the future of the wall, which spans the country from Bowness to Wallsend

- MP Where?
- Minister To enlighten the Hon. member for Virginia Waters, Bowness is in the county of Cumbria, in the North-West of England, Wallsend is in the conurbation of Tyneside, which is in the North-East (STILL CONFUSION) Just think of it as left and right, and up there. (STARLET ENTERS SAME SIDE AS LOOT)
- Starlet You're so clever Mr Loot. Owning all those things
- Loot You recognise my genius then?
- Starlet Such a clever clever boy. Did you mention a present?
- Loot I may have
- Starlet You did. I know you did. You're not like all the rest Mr Loot
- Loot That's right. I'm not like all the rest (GIVES HER A DIAMOND NECKLACE.)
- Starlet Have you always been rich, Mr Loot?
- Loot For as long as it matters. Though I began with nothing. I crawled up over the vast seething mass of humanity, who were content to wallow in the pit of the mediocre
- Star I could fall in love with you Mr Loot
- Loot Most women could. But not all. What did I promise you?
- Star 2 You promised me, Mr Loot a brand new coat
- Loot And I am a man of my word (HANDS OVER COAT). I've been dreaming of you Mr Loot
- Loot You have
- Star And I've been dreaming of that expensive perfume you said you'd buy me

Loot My wife won't wear it

Star 3 I'll wear it

Loot Do you think it's obscenely expensive?

Star 3 Oh yes! (HE GIVES HER PERFUME. SHE SPRAYS IT ON AND EXITS. LOOT CONTINUES TO OBSERVE THE MINISTER)

Minister Our objective is to bring in the vigour of private capital in order that the Roman Wall may realise its full commercial potential, while we retain some measure of public control. We have drawn up proposals with the various landowners and invited one of our most respected entrepreneurs, Lionel Loot, to create an entirely new concept, both educational and recreational, and of course grounded in the wall's unique history (OPPOSITION MP INTERRUPTS)

Opp MP Might I ask the Minister, is the plan actually to sell the Roman Wall to Lionel Loot?

Minister Within certain restrictions, yes. Mr Loot hopes to create along the wall length, an exciting and dynamic new opportunity (GOV MP INTERRUPTS)

Gov MP Would the minister inform us if this exciting new project will create new jobs in a region traditionally short of employment?

Minister Statistics forecast 500 new jobs along the Wall's length, annual visitors rising to 5m within three years, and injection into the local economy of £120m (OPP. MP. INTERRUPTS)

Opp MP Mr Speaker, In my opinion these proposals will drastically alter the character of this unique monument, turning it into little more than a glorified Disneyland

Minister The member opposite is trapped both by the past and by prejudice. If our country is to be at the forefront of global development, we cannot afford to stay still (LOOT IS STILL WATCHING. ENTER DOLORES)

Dolores What is that smell?

Loot Smell?

Dolores Perfume. And not mine

Loot What are you suggesting?

Dolores (SINGS)
It's not Chanel or Givenchy
And you can't convince me
That it's L'Air du Temps
Or even Yardley
In fact I can hardly
Tell what it is at all (END OF SONG)
Am I being a fool, Loot?

Loot You are my wife, Mother of our two sons. You have everything you need.

Dolores We both have then. Everything we need

Loot Exactly (EXIT DOLORES, WE RETURN TO THE CHAMBER)

Speaker We move to the vote. All those in favour of the Roman Wall Experience Bill. (SOUNDS OFF OF "AYE!"). All those against? (LESS NOISE FOR "NO!") The ayes to the right have it. The ayes to the right have it. (EXIT MPS ET AL. ENTER COGNO)

Loot I give them what they want Cogno, even before they know they want it. That is why I am me, and they are they. Let the construction of the Roman Wall Experience begin! Build the Perspex weather proof tunnel! (ALL THE FOLLOWING ARE ANIMATED)

Loot Assemble and secure the 80 mile long mono-rail system
Install the one dozen giant touch button information screens!
Activate the Roman centurion holograms!
Complete conversion of 12 mile castles to pizza and burger bars!
Choreograph and synchronise the warring picts and scots armies!
The small details Cogno, I leave to you. Have I missed anything?

Cogno I believe the Lionel Loot Roman Wall Experience awaits the official opening

Loot The guest list?

Cogno All in order. The PM will be there, Elton John, Charlie Boy, Posh and Becks, Jonathan Ross. The latest Big Brother winner

Loot Is the hospitality tent stocked with the finest smoked salmon and strawberries?

Cogno It is

Loot The champagne?

Cogno The Moet is ready to pop

Loot Hot air balloons?

Cogno 122 of them, to mark the year that construction of the wall began, will rise at the given signal along the length of the wall

Loot The Red Arrows?

Cogno Flying in a direct line from Segedunum to Bowness, leaving a vapour trail of purple. The colour of Imperial Rome

Loot The Italian ambassador?

Cogno Already in the hospitality tent and slightly drunk

Loot Where is Dolores?

Cogno Resting sir

Loot Resting — for my moment of glory? She deliberately taunts me. I want my wife here. Now

Cogno Very well (EXITS. LOOT GREETES VARIOUS INVISIBLE GUESTS. ENTER DOLORES. DRUNK) How nice of you to put in an appearance

Dolores All this has nothing to do with me Loot

Cogno Of course not. I did it. Nevertheless, smile for the Environment Minister. Are you not impressed?

Dolores Impressed?

Cogno Look at them. They're all impressed. And I'm not even married to them

Dolores (SINGS)
They're sycophants, they're hangers-on
Free-loaders each and every one
They'll scoff your food, they'll down your liquor
A rotting rat couldn't make me sicker
They sniff round fame, money and power
I'd boot them out, the whole bloody shower

Cogno Ah — Secretary of State! Charmed you could make it! (TO DOLORES). What do I need to do for you? Do you realise just

how many women with lives of poverty and misery would die to be in your shoes right now?

- Dolores You know nothing about such women. And they can have my DOL (con) shoes! (REMOVES SHOES)
- Loot Dolores. The PM is watching. Please replace those shoes
- Dolores That's what you care about. That your rich and influential friends might see your wife without her shoes. The utter total shame of it. Look, the shoeless wife of Lionel Loot!
- Loot Am I to be humiliated at my moment of triumph? By my own wife?
- Dolores (SHOUTS) I hope you all drop dead! (THEY GRAPPLE. ENTER COGNO TO SEPARATE THEM)
- Cogno Sir, the official opening ceremony
- Loot Of course (STEPS UP) Friends, honoured guests. How delighted I am you could attend this historic occasion that both celebrates the past, acknowledges the present and anticipates the future. The Lionel LOOT Roman Wall Experience bridges the culture gap, allowing the public to enjoy this historic monument in a unique way.
- Dolores Bollocks!
- Loot In one moment I will ask the honoured guests to step into the mono-rail cars. This is a photo-opportunity, so members of press and media please be ready. In closing I would just like to say that in modern Britain it is the energy drive and vision of private enterprise that propels these projects forward.
- Dolores Loot — where have you gone?
- Loot I am delighted that this government recognises the need to encourage that same energy, drive and vision. Thank you. (STEPS DOWN, SHAKES VARIOUS INVISIBLE HANDS ETC. DOLORES IS ON THE SIDELINES, HE TALKS ACROSS TO HER AS HE SHAKES HANDS ETC). You see? I am valued, and respected. But not by you, Never by you. (EXIT DOLORES. ENTER STARLET)
- Starlet You're a real man Mr Loot
- Loot I know one who doesn't think so
- Starlet How does it feel, to be a man like you?

Loot Why not you, Dolores?

Starlet And all this is yours?

Loot What?

Starlet All this is yours

Loot Yes, mine. Everything I see. Everything I touch (LOOKS HER UP AND DOWN) is mine

Starlet And you can do whatever you like with it?

Loot Who could stop me?

Starlet Gee! I've never met a man like you Mr Loot

Loot That's right. You've never met a man like me (EXIT STARLET. ENTER COGNO)

Loot You have the first six months report, Cogno?

Cogno Safely stored in my head sir

Loot Tell me

Cogno The first six months of the Lionel LOOT Roman Wall Experience have been a runaway commercial success

Loot As I knew they would be

Cogno Tickets and commodity sales are 15 per cent higher than projections, and the profitability rate is 22 per cent

Loot They'll buy anything Cogno. I despise them all. Little people. 22 per cent? The kind of figure I like. Do you know what women admire in men?

Cogno It is a secret alas, to which I am not privy sir

Loot Of course not. It's the brilliance of success that dazzles women Cogno. How fortunate not everyone can be successful

Cogno Some of us are born merely to serve sir

Loot I never know when you're taking the piss

Cogno Surely by now sir...

Loot She was my heartbeat Cogno. The blood that flowed in my veins. I can have any woman I please

Cogno Of course. You asked for an audience with the Minister. The Minister is here

Loot Is he a reptile? A slug? Something found under a rock?

CognoI believe his name is Jeremy

Loot An underling. Let him slither in (EXIT COGNO. TO AUDIENCE.) What do I care for such grey functionaries, persons with the imaginations of potato peel, (COGNORE — ENTERS WITH MINISTER. EXIT COGNO)

Minister Mr Loot. Delighted. The government is exceedingly pleased with the figures thus far for the Roman Wall Experience.

Loot I think you'll find the correct title is The Lionel LOOT Roman Wall Experience.

Minister Of course

Loot Say it then!

Minister The government is exceedingly pleased with The Lionel LOOT Roman Wall Experience.

Loot I'm sure Especially as the theme park passes through two marginal constituencies

Minister All factors are relevant. At the end of the day, given a level playing field, we have rebuffed critics claiming we neglect the rural Northern economy. The Wall's success enables us to ringfence certain priorities, and assures a customer satisfaction level commensurate with expectations

Loot Customer?

Minister Yes, customer

Loot You mean, the voters?

Minister The party has found the use of consumerist terminology is in tune with market trends. You requested an audience Mr Loot?

Loot In non-consumerist terminology, I would now like this government to remove all the restrictions as to how I make use of the wall and surrounding land

Minister Lift all restrictions?

Loot At least your hearing is — what? — commensurate with expectations

Minister But I don't understand

Loot Life is so complex, I agree. But listen, it's simple enough. The wall is now mine. I should be allowed to do what I like with it

Minister We are talking here about an important historic monument

Loot And I have made this historic monument highly lucrative.

Minister Agreed

Loot And can make it even more so

Minister More so? Perhaps you could elucidate

Loot Perhaps I could. Lift the restrictions and I guarantee, the financial benefit to the government will be many many times what it is now. Your customers will be delighted. You could even cut taxes

Minister Cut taxes?

Loot Quite a shock isn't it? Tax cuts for the better-off, of course

Minister I see

Loot Imagine. The PM need never again face the nightmare prospect of taxing the rich more than the poor

Minister Give me the main bullet points of your proposal

Loot Bullet points?

Minister Points one, two, three etc

Loot Tax cuts, tax cuts, and tax cuts

Minister The Wall has always had special protection. What you are asking is highly unusual

Loot Imagine the beneficial headlines in the Daily Mail. The praise from The Sun. I am talking the greatest tax cuts in living memory

Minister But to lift all restrictions on the Roman Wall

Loot What do restrictions do — except restrict?

Minister Yes. I see

Loot Restricted use of old stones, or £20 a month more in take-home pay

Minister £20 a month?

Loot Like I say, tax cuts, tax cuts, and tax cuts

Minister Why not simply tell me these — expansion plans?

Loot I am a businessman. Businessmen reveal their full plans only at the most opportune moment.

Minister I can assure you of this government's full confidentiality

Loot I've seen their full confidentiality on the front of the tabloids. Well? I'm a busy man

Minister I shall see what I can do

Loot Good boy. Report well to your master. And be quick about it. Have a pleasant journey (ENTER COGNO AND LEADS MINISTER. OFF). Exit one fool. Enter one very important lady .And who in this decaying country deserves it more than Lionel Loot? Eh, Cogno? (ENTER THE QUEEN WITH CEREMONIAL SWORD)

Queen Well?

Loot I'm ready (KNEELS ETC IN PREPARATION)

Queen One is disinclined (EXIT QUEEN)

Loot Bugger

Cogno She's smaller than I imagined

Loot You think it's funny?

Cogno Moderately

Loot Maybe you'll find this funny? (PRODUCES LETTER)

Cogno I was wondering when that would put in another appearance

Loot Have you the remotest idea what it contains?

Cogno Would that I did, sir

Loot And my wife, do you think she has the remotest ideas what's in it?(ENTER DOLORES)

Dolores And how could I?

Loot How could you? Of course. Who needs the Queen? Who needs the rest of the cretins? What was the one really important group I couldn't join? The high power global club that controls the world's economy? The place where a man such as I should belong. But it's a bit exclusive you might say. .Until now. Now they can't keep me out.

Cogno They, sir?

Dolores You're talking in riddles

Loot Let me spell it out then. To both of you. O — I — L

Cogno O -I -L?

Dolores Oil?

Dolores And what about it?

Loot What about it? What about it? (HANDS LETTER OVER) That's what about it (THEY BOTH READ IT)

Dolores So this was your plan all along?

Loot Of course it was!

Cogno And the Lionel LOOT Roman Wall Experience?

Loot A trashy means to an end.

Cogno So your actual interest in the Roman Wall is minimal?

Loot Lumps of old stone? What on earth do I want with lumps of old stone. Unless of course —

Dolores Beneath that old stone is oil

Loot Billions and billions of barrels of premium grade oil. (TAKES LETTER) Vital and exclusive information from my contact. A top man in the geological field

Cogno So you were just softening up the government for the real prize?

Loot The Prix d'Honneur, The Blue Ribbon, the gold medal you might say.

Dolores And how many miles of the Roman Wall do you intend to demolish to gain access to these oil supplies ?

Loot Oh, not more than 12 or 15. The Steel Rigg area.

Cogno The wall's most spectacular stretch

Loot Let the wall earn real money Cogno. It was built for a purpose, not just for gawping at. Let's give it back a purpose. What can old stones earn? Look at this (PRODUCES LOOT OIL SIGN). My product will run through the arteries of the entire planet. Every day millions of thirsty vehicles seeking out this sign

Cogno And what of public reactions to your Roman Wall demolition plans?

Loot There will be some voices in opposition. The balance sheet will win the day. LOOT (con) It always does. My finest moment. I am basking in my triumph. Nothing can stand in my way. Be proud to be called Lionel Loot's wife

Dolores All this for oil Lionel?

Loot What?

Dolores For oil?

Loot Yes oil! Oil that fuels the world economy. Oil keeps that keeps things moving, oil that keeps you warm. Oil that... oh, tell her Cogno!

Cogno Your husband madame was hoping this piece of entrepreneurial skill might endear you to him (DOL LAUGHS)

Loot What the hell is she laughing at?

Cogno Part laughter sir. Part tears

Loot Now listen to me. All these years I have fought my way up. I have battled against dysfunctional governments, crooks, idiots, plum-faced buffoons in old school ties, civil servants who have been brain-dead for years, clapped out institutions and regulations, the whole turgid treacle you wade through to make good in this country. .And now finally I have broken through , I have achieved what no single individual ever achieved, and what is the reaction of my wife? All this is for oil?

Dolores Well?

Loot (SONG)I'll suck it from the earth
I'll pump it near and far
That silent hidden lake
Black blood of motor car

Dolores You've got luxury homes on four continents
Accountants agree your finances make a lot of sense
You've got servants to cut off your bacon rind
But if you look deep then you'll find
No respect

Loot Though half the world is starving
Motors' bellies must be filled
Gurgling from the pumps
With a heartbeat never stilled

Loot Oil is my black blood
Oil will cleanse my soul
Oil will spread its stain
Oil will make me whole

Dolores You've got companies in textiles chemicals and computer ware
Theme parks, insurance, even LOOT Air
Stock markets tremble when your shares fluctuate
But what you ain't got, you'll find too late
My respect

Loot Every time they press the pedal
Every time they turn the key
Oil runs through their engines
Oil is me

Dolores In the Rich List you make the Top Ten
Five billion you earn, then five billion again
But someday in the back of your Bentley
A voice will whisper gently
No respect

Loot Oil is my black blood
Oil will cleanse my soul
Oil will spread its stain
Oil will make me whole

Loot I cannot speak to her Cogno. Damn her to hell!

Dolores And damn him to hell as well Cogno. Got that have you?

CognoI believe I have, yes

Loot Fetch me a real woman, Cogno

Cogno What?

Loot Someone who admires and respects me.

Cogno I'm not sure that is a good idea sir, I —

Loot I don't give a parrot's toenail what you're sure about. Just do it!

Dolores Yes Cogno! Give him one of his floozies,

Cogno Madame, I think —

Loot Do it!

Dolores Do it!

Cogno This is bad business (COGNO EXITS.RETURNS WITH
STARLET)

Star Lionel!

Loot Say you respect me

Starlet Course I respect you. Anything you like

Loot Show me you respect me (SHE KISSES HIM)

Loot My wife doesn't respect me

Star Wives don't know everything (THEY KISS AGAIN)

Cogno Come away madame (SHE WON'T) End it sir, now (HE WON'T)
Then let it pursue its own fate(LOOT GETS AMOROUS WITH
STARLET IN FRONT OF DOLORES)

Loot All your fault Dolores. All your fault

Dolores Be it on your own head (LOOT GOES THROUGH A
TRANSFORMATION . EMERGES ON THE FLOOR A ROMAN
PRISON AT VINDOL ANDA, A FORT NEAR THE ROMAN
WALL IN ANCIENT BRITAIN. another male prisoner is
SHAKING HIM)

Prisoner Briginus — wake up!

Loot What?

Prisoner The jailer will be here for you soon Briginus

Loot What?

Prisoner You mustn't weaken, leader (ENTER JAILER)

Jailer Alright you snivelling pieces of dung, you fetid waste products

Prisoner You can't talk to him like that

Jailer Oh begging your pardon, I'm sure, you steaming cow pat

Prisoner Have you any idea who he is?

Jailer Let me think now. He's a turd, he's an insect. he's a piece of Caledonian puke, who along with several others, including you, breached one of our mile castles and is soon to be nailed up on a crucifix where he'll very slowly, and very agonisingly die. Same as you. Now, did I miss anything?

Prisoner He is Briginus, Caledonian Chieftain

Jailer Yeah, and I'm the Emperor of Rome

Prisoner See for yourself. Show him Briginus!

Loot Show him what?

Prisoner Show him the tattoo! (REVEALS A TATTOO ON LOOT)

Jailer Let me see that. (CHECKS) Blimey!

Loot What the —?

Prisoner I suggest you treat him with some respect

Loot A tattoo?

Jailer What's a Caledonian chieftain doing, vandalising one of our mile castles?

Prisoner Like all true Caledonians, whatever rank, he wants the Romans out of Britain

Loot Now listen —

Jailer The prat. Hasn't he heard? Most of the chieftains enjoy Roman hospitality, women, banquets, wine. I've seen them at it, hobnobbing with the governor. Nice work if you can get it, eh?

Prisoner Briginus is not like the others

Loot What the hell are you two talking about?

Jailer You're honoured, mate. Ulpus Marcellus is right here at Vindolanda

Prisoner How about that Briginus! The Roman Governor of Britain. Polluting our Northern air

Jailer Ambitious bloke Ulpus. Plans to go far. And he's well and truly choked. Some of you heathens murdered a Roman general. Now you're breaking through the wall. Rome doesn't like it. It's got to stop. And he's the man sent by Rome to stop it. Nothing like a few crucifixion to quieten the mob

Loot Who the devil are you people?

Prisoner Briginus, demand to see this Ulpus Marcellus. Tell him resistance will never cease, until the last Roman has left Britain.

Jailer Oh, I'm sure the governor will see him. Now he knows who he is. These fat cats stick together in my experience. Probably get off scot-free, your great chieftain. Unlike you, poor sod. Ever seen a crucifixion? If it wasn't for the pain of the nails through your wrists your arms would ache something terrible. Course, you might get strangulation. Eyes-a-popping and all that

Prisoner Do you think for one minute Briginus would collude with the Roman empire? His heart is with his people.

Jailer Course it is, sunshine.

Loot Now listen you two , put an end to this nonsense now, and I'll ensure leniency. Continue, and it will go very very bad for you. This I guarantee

Jailer You wait here, chieftain or no chieftain. I'll get word to our governor just who he's got locked up,. He'll be very interested I'm sure. Now don't go away, there's good boys (EXIT JAILER)

Prisoner He will try to buy you off Briginus. He doesn't realise who he's dealing with

Loot Have you heard nothing I've said?

Prisoner The Romans rule by terror. But also persuasion, He will offer you the good life. For your subservience. And our slavery. The Romans believe everyone is for sale

Loot You are clearly suffering total delusion

Prisoner If you give a lead, your people will follow (ENTER JAILER)

Jailer You, Chieftain, follow me. The governor wants to see you. And you? You can rot a bit longer

Prisoner What about some food?

Jailer Just eaten thank you. Nice leg of rabbit (EXIT PRISONER WITH BRIGINUS. TO MEET WITH ULPUS MAXIMUS. THE TWO SPEAK IN LATIN. ENGLISH IN ITALICS) Adest, legate (he is here Governor)

Ulpus Quis adeste? (Who is here?)

Jailer Briginus (Briginus)

Ulpus Quis vero Briginus?(And who exactly is Briginus?)

Jailer Duc Caledonius, qui nuper per vallum irrupit (The Caledonian chieftain, who recently breached the wall)

Ulpus Esto; veniat (let's see him then)

Loot But you're talking gibberish

Jailer Are you insulting the language of Imperial Rome?

Loot What?

Jailer You don't think we'd converse in all this Celtic crap? (BRINGS LOOT FORWARD. ULPUS DISMISSES JAILER)

Ulpus You've been a naughty boy, chieftain or no chieftain

Loot Do you have any idea who I am?

Ulpus Of course. Naughty boy. Now, I have been known to forgive naughty boys. Have some wine. Bulgaria's finest. Causing criminal damage? A chieftain? Oh dear.

Loot My name is Lionel Loot. I am among the richest men in Britain. I am about to become an oil magnate.

Ulpus Let's face it, Hadrian's Wall. A fiasco. It takes 20,000 troops to man the damned thing. Out of 50,000 for these entire islands. If it was left to me dear boy, I'd up sticks and leave the heathens to their own business — no offence of course. Strictly entre nous, what is Rome doing in this godforsaken hole? There is a

limit, especially a northern limit. A long way from Rome, you might say.. Placate the north Ulpius, that's what they said. Placate the north? You might as well try to placate a hurricane. Can't just keep pouring in more troops. The senate's getting restless. Anyway, I do understand the Caledonian frustrations dear boy. I mean, you were born in the damned place. But vandalising the wall — A chieftain? Not really on now, is it?

Loot My patience is about exhausted

Ulpius They respect you Briginus. If you tell them it is in their best interests to end this resistance, they will end it. And you of course will be a free man. And a good ally to Rome. Rome looks after its allies. The others must die of course

Loot Others?

Ulpius Your fellow terrorists. Rome has to set an example. But you Briginus —

Loot Now listen one last time. I am Lionel Loot, entrepreneur, businessman. Whoever this damned fellow is, it is not me. .I am not Briginus

Ulpius What?

Loot You have no idea little man. The LOOT empire is global. Whoever you are, I could have you swotted away like a fly

Ulpius You say you are not Briginus? Is this some kind of game?

Loot Lionel Loot does not play games.

Ulpius Guard (ENTER GUARD) Beat him (GUARD DOES SO) Well? Speak, fool

Loot What, I —

Ulpius Beat him again. (DOES SO.). Now crucify him. With the rest of them. Do it now! (GUARD STARTS TAKING LOOT OFF)Leave him 48 hours on the cross. Let him suffer

Loot Wait!

Ulpius No mercy to impostors. Get him out!

Loot No, wait — the tattoo! (SHOWS IT). See! (ULPIUS CHECKS) Proof! I am Briginus! Spare me!

Ulpius What kind of fool game are you playing with the Governor of Britain?

Loot No, no game. no, I swear. A misunderstanding

Ulpius Bring him here guard (IS DRAGGED THERE) You swear on the life of all you hold dear, you are Briginus, Caledonian chieftain?

Loot I swear. I am Briginus

Ulpius The Romans show no mercy to fool or tricksters

Loot But I have the tattoo. That proves I am Briginus!

Ulpius What did the terrorists call him in the cells, Guard?

Guard Oh, they called him Briginus alright. Quite the favourite he was! They looked up to the little turd. A sort of saviour

Ulpius We shall see. Now listen. A document will be drawn stating that you accept Roman rule unconditionally, and urge all other Caledonians to do likewise. You will make your sign on this acceptance which will then be made public in your. presence

Loot And if I agree, I go free?

Ulpius Yes

Loot I'll sign it

Ulpius Of course, acceptance would confer certain personal privileges on yourself and —

Loot I said I'll sign the damned thing

Ulpius And though you may on one level see it as betraying your countrymen, on another — what did you say?

Loot I said I'll sign it

Ulpius You, Briginus, rebel chieftain of the Caledonians, will readily agree to sign this document?

Loot Didn't I just say so?

Ulpius To accept the power and superiority of Rome, its legal right to rule over Britain?

Loot As long as it gets me out of this damned place

Ulpius No torture? No coercion? Emperor Severus will be delighted. Guard, have the document prepared! And I warn you, if this is some kind of trick —

Loot Just do it!

Ulpius Call a public meeting for tomorrow. An important announcement. Oh, and Briginus?

Loot What?

Ulpius We have now captured your wife, Cingetissa.

Loot My wife?

Ulpius You remember your wife of course. A wild one alright. Put up a struggle when we caught her. Our soldiers have got three split heads to prove it. You look surprised

Loot No, it's just that I

Ulpius She's not playing ball. But I'm sure you'll talk her round. Make her see sense. Just like you, eh? This story has not finished yet. (EXIT ULPIUS. PRISONER AND DOLORES ENTER)

Guard Here he is — your great leader

Dolores Briginus!

Loot Dolores!

Prisoner Cingetissa

Loot Cingetissa?

Dolores You are alive! (EMBRACES HIM) My noble husband

Prisoner Briginus — how exactly did you tell that Ulpius Marcellus he could stuff it?

Guard (HITS HIM) Show some respect to the governor, Caledonian cur!

Dolores Your speech to the tribe was magnificent, your bravery and selflessness in leading the wall raid. I am proud of you Briginus. Our two sons are proud of you

Guard Just shut it lady, alright? (MANHANDLES HER. SHE SPITS AT HIM). You are not fit to lick my husband's boots

Guard (SLAPS HER) Caledonian bitch! (LOOT RESTRAINS HIM)
Here, don't you go and spoil it sunshine. Don't forget whose side you're on, otherwise — (EXITS AND RETURNS RAPIDLY WITH DOCUMENT) Seen this, have you?

Loot (LOOKS AT IT) But that's ridiculous — I can't read this?

Guard Since when could any Caledonian read, chieftain or no Chieftain? Ready for this, are you, Mrs Chieftain?(Dolores SPITS AT HIM) Go on then. Have your fun. Now it's my turn. (READS) 'I Briginus, Chieftain of the Caledonian Tribe do hereby renounce my destructive struggle against Imperial Rome and do urge all my fellow tribes people to do likewise; to cease their terrorist resistance against the Imperial Roman Army and I hereby pledge my undying loyalty to both Ulpus Marcellus, governor of Britain, and to Septimus Severus, Emperor of Rome.' This to be pro claimed publicly at Vindolanda at sunrise tomorrow, and Briginus's mark to be attached here (BOTH DOLORES & PRISONER LAUGH)

Dolores What is this nonsense? Have you any idea the kind of man you're dealing with?

Guard More than you, darling

Dolores Tell him Briginus

Guard Yeah, why don't you just tell me Briginus?

Prisoner Tell him what it means to lead the Caledonian tribe

Dolores To risk everything for what you believe in. To be — a man

Guard Your mark right there at the bottom if you will, great leader (HANDS DOCUMENT TO HIM)

Dolores Tell him how you once rode three days and nights to fetch medicine for a sick elder of the village

Prisoner Tell him how you didn't sleep for a week searching for a missing child

Dolores Or maybe we'll tell him. Do not insult this man with your — document. He would lay down his own life for his tribespeople

Guard Oh dear. Oh dear, oh dear.

Dolores Shall I trample it, or will you Briginus?

Prisoner Let us both trample it. Together

Guard The mark, if you please

Loot You don't understand — either of you. I have to sign

Guard What's that saying? The thing that can't be bought is the thing that's worthless. Sorry about all this lady. Fat cats do tend to stick together though, whatever side they're on. And Ulpus will also spare you, being a chieftain's wife and all. Course, this one (INDICATES PRIS.) is for it. We've already made an example of his eldest son. To encourage the others you might say Here's a little keepsake. Your son's right hand.(HANDS OVER TO PRISONER) I'll take that document, great leader.

Dolores From this day, nothing is true.

Prisoner My son is dead. Now we are all truly dead. And you, our murderer

Dolores The man I loved! The man I respected above all men!

Loot But — you don't understand. You don't know who I am

Dolores Then who are you?

Loot What?

Dolores Who are you?

Guard The document if you don't mind, great leader

Dolores Decide now. Who are you?

Guard Let's get on with it.

Loot Who am I?

Dolores A simple question

Loot This document will save both our lives!

Dolores It will condemn us. And our people. Decide who you are

Loot So you just want to die?

Dolores Your last chance. Decide who you are

Guard Enough messing about —

Loot I am —

Guard "I am — I am." You are a thick Caledonian out to save his skin.
Your mark!

Dolores Briginus. By all the love I have for you

Loot I am —

Prisoner Briginus.. You are not like other men-

Guard Just stick your mark on, you ignorant pig. Sign it — pig! (LOOT
EVENTUALLY CASTS DOCUMENT AWAY)

Guard Oh, very clever. Fine. Now, I wonder what the governor would
say about that (ENTER GOVERNOR)

Ulpus The governor would say, crucify all three at sunset. High treason
against Imperial Rome. At sunset! (EXIT GOVERNOR)

Loot What have I done?

Dolores The only thing my husband ever could do

Prisoner Our chieftain could act no other way. Hail Briginus!

Dolores Our love can never die Briginus. We face only mortal death.
(THEY KISS.THIS KISS TRANSPORTS HIM BACK TO THE
21st CENTURY. LOOT IS WITH THE STARLET RATHER
THAN CINGETISSA)

Starlet You're not like other men Mr Loot

Loot What?

Starlet And like I say, wives don't know everything. Have a bit of fun
eh?

Loot Get out!

Star But what about my present and —

Loot Now!

Starlet Charming, I'm sure (EXITS. ENTER COGNO)

Cogno Sir, the Minister for the North is here

Loot What?

Cogno Some good news I imagine

Loot News?

Cogno Possibly soon you will be a member of the most exclusive club in the industrial world. LOOT Oil will be born.

Loot Where is Cingetissa?

Cogno Cingetissa?

Loot Dolores — my wife

Cogno She is about to leave. For good

Loot Bring her to me! Now!

Cogno Yes sir. Meantime, the Minister! (EXIT COGNO. ENTER MINISTER. SAME ACTOR AS ULPIUS)

Minister Mr Loot

Loot You! Ulpus!

Minister Sir?

Loot You wish to placate the North, yes?

Minister Excuse me?

Loot You have a document?

Minister Yes. Mr Loot, this document gives you total rights over the wall and adjacent property; rights which we are confident you will develop in line with (ENTER DOLORES)

Dolores Well?

Loot Dolores!

Dolores How long does it take?

Loot Take?

Dolores For a man to know who he is

Minister Your signature sir?

Loot You — him...? How much do you know — either of you?

Cogno Know sir?

Dolores About what?

Loot About Ulpus Marcellus, for one

Dolores The Roman Governor of Britain brought in to suppress the Caledonians

Loot And what about Septimus Severus?

Cogno Wasn't he the Roman Emperor at roughly the same period

Dolores I believe so

Loot Or Briginus, Caledonian chieftain

Cogno Well, I'm not sure, I —

Loot His wife Cingetissa

Dolores Cingetissa? A lovely name

Loot Crucified, both of them. For resisting the mighty power of Rome. They died together. As they had lived together

Minister If you wouldn't mind Mr Loot. The signature

Cogno Sunset soon sir

Loot What?

Cogno I just thought you'd like to know. Sunset soon

Dolores Always the saddest time of the day. A time something dies

Loot Sunset? Wait! (LOOKS AT TATTOO) The tattoo! But that's impossible —

Dolores I'm sure you've always had that tattoo Lionel

Cognols it not a part of you sir, that tattoo

Minister If I could just hurry your signature along sir

Loot (TO MINISTER) Get out!

Minister But sir, the signature and —

Loot Are you deaf? (EXIT MINISTER. LOOT TEARS UP DOCUMENT

Cogno The empire crumbles
Dolores As all empires must
Loot I don't understand
Cogno Course you do
Loot It's over, isn't it?
Dolores It's just beginning
Loot All that stuff. The journey's over
Dolores What journey would you travel for me Lionel?
Loot To get what?
Dolores A single orange
Loot I would journey — the length of the Roman Wall. On foot
Dolores Lead on (THEY KISS. MUSIC, DANCING)

END OF PLAY