

**Arch Obler's Plays September 20, 1945 Arch Obler's Plays
Rocket From Manhattan**

By Arch Obler

Originally broadcast: September 20, 1945

CAST
ARCH OBLER
DOCTOR
CHAMBERLAIN
RUSSELL
REYNOLDS

OBLER: Prophecy is an easy thing, for rarely is the prophet brought to judgement. Tonight I bring you a false prophecy. The place of our story is a great rocket speeding away from the moon. Yes, away! - for the first trip to the moon has finally taken place, and the triumphant airship is now rapidly returning to the mother earth. Here then, is a story about a tomorrow fifty-five years hence. September twentieth in the year of our Lord, two thousand. On board a rocket ship, a play that is - I sincerely hope - a very FALSE prophecy.

MUSIC

(MEN SINGING)

We're havin' lots of fun
The sky's sure the limit, a new century's begun.
We're floating on our plastic boats
We're flying through the air.
The world is all our playground, we haven't got a care.
Oh, I'm glad to be alive, boys, I'm glad to be alive.
I'm ridin' on a rugged train
And soon I will arrive.
Oh, I'm glad to be alive, boys, I'm glad to be alive.
I'm ridin' on a rugged train
And soon I will arrive.

RUSSELL: Hey doc, how 'bout joining us?

REYNOLDS: Yes, doctor, don't you think it's about time we had a little celebration?

DOCTOR: There's a great deal of work to be done.

RUSSELL: Work's over, doctor! Twenty-four hours more and we're back!

REYNOLDS: Yes, doctor! We'll be back! We've done it! Completed it!

DOCTOR: In twenty-four hours.

RUSSELL: If you're worried about our landing, I'm not. You worried, Reynolds?

REYNOLDS: No sir. Everything's in perfect order.

RUSSELL: Sure, doc, this is goin' to be a round trip! Anyway, there's twenty four hours before we have to worry about that!

REYNOLDS: Yes, doctor, it's a time for celebration. (BEGINS SINGING, RUSSELL JOINS IN) Oh, I'm glad to be alive, boys, I'm glad to be alive. I'm riding on a rocket train, And soon I will arrive.

DOCTOR: Reynolds! Major Reynolds! Are you men out of your minds? You, Major Russell! Reynolds is still a boy, but you're a mature man! Please act maturely!

RUSSELL: Oh, but doctor!

DOCTOR: I'll grant you that our adventure has gone well.

REYNOLDS: Well is right! We've been to the moon!

RUSSELL: My congratulations, Reynolds.

REYNOLDS: Thank you, Major, thank you. Put the medal on my other chest.

DOCTOR: Would you men please listen to me? We're forty-eight thousand miles from the earth...

RUSSELL: And headed right for it.

DOCTOR: We're not there yet!

RUSSELL: Doc, pardon the expression, but you're a gloomy Joe.

DOCTOR: I am a realist.

REYNOLDS: But doctor, the possibility of anything going wrong are remote! Surely we're entitled to relax a little and relish in what we've done.

RUSSELL: We've done it, doc! Even if we never get back we've done it! We've been to the moon and it'll always be there on the books.

DOCTOR: I'm not interested in becoming a historical fact, Major Russell. The data we've collected, that's my only interest. May I ask you and Reynolds to get back to your posts?

RUSSELL: Oh, but everything's going like clockwork - look at the gauges.

DOCTOR: But we are out of radio contact with the earth.

REYNOLDS: Yes sir, but we are on course. Doc, what is wrong?

DOCTOR: Wrong? What should be wrong? I...

RUSSELL: No, the kid's right, doc. Ever since we made the circle and started back, you've been acting as if we DIDN'T make it. We've got two-hundred and forty-three thousand miles, and we're three quarters of the way back, and we're in, doc-we're in! So what's the matter with you?

DOCTOR: How old were you, Major, when the Second World War ended?

RUSSELL: Oh, about five. What's that got to do with it?

DOCTOR: And you, Reynolds? You weren't even born.

REYNOLDS: No sir.

DOCTOR: I was twenty-one on that day in New Mexico when they set off that first chain reaction. Twenty one.

RUSSELL: Doc, you mean to say you were at the beginning of it?

REYNOLDS: Of course he was. Doctor Chamberlain was one of the original research men on the atomic bomb project. Back in forty-five. The only one of them alive today.

RUSSELL: Well, what do you know? So THAT'S why you wanted to make this trip, doc, I mean you...

DOCTOR: Yes, Major. You wanted it as a substitution for what you missed as a boy, the excitement and glory of war.

RUSSELL: Oh, now, doc...

DOCTOR: It's true. And Reynolds, here, is young and idealistic. The scientific wonder of it is what HE wanted. And I, I was there at the birth of an era. Now atomic power is driving me into space, and back to the earth where it all began. And I'm thinking...

RUSSELL: Yeah, doc?

DOCTOR: Well...it's not pertinent to any of this. We have no time to discuss our

emotions. There's work to be done.

MUSIC

RUSSELL: Air speed, twenty-three, four, eighty-six.

DOCTOR: Air speed, twenty-three, four, eighty-six

RUSSELL: Interior temperature, uh, sixty-eight point two.

DOCTOR: Interior temperature sixty-eight point two.

RUSSELL: Well, that's it.

DOCTOR: Yes.

RUSSELL: Any radio contact, Reynolds?

REYNOLDS: No sir.

RUSSELL: How 'bout that, doc? Huh?

DOCTOR: Unfortunate, but not very vital. We're definitely on course.

REYNOLDS: How much longer will it be, doc?

DOCTOR: Ten hours. At the most, ten hours.

RUSSELL: In the middle of LaGuardia Field, that's where I'd like to land.

DOCTOR: I hope not.

REYNOLDS: Texas, isn't that it?

RUSSELL: Sure, sure. We'll hit the flats right on the nose.

DOCTOR: If the auxiliary jets work...

RUSSELL: They worked on the moon, they'll work on the landing. We're the good luck boys, doc. We can't miss!

DOCTOR: You have the optimism of a sixteen-year-old. Reynolds, you'd better get back to your radio, try phone contact.

REYNOLDS: Yes, sir.

DOCTOR: Major, check the jet temperatures.

RUSSELL: Uh, right jet, fifteen eighty.

DOCTOR: Right jet, fifteen eighty.

RUSSELL: Left jet, fifteen eighty three.

DOCTOR: Left jet, fifteen eighty three.

RUSSELL: Speed: twenty-four, eight, thirty-two.

DOCTOR: Speed: twenty-four, eight, thirty-two.

REYNOLDS: X-R-1 calling C-Q, X-R-1 calling C-Q. Hello? Hello? Hello? X-R-1 calling C-Q, X-R-1 calling C-Q, hello? Hello? Hello?

RUSSELL: Any luck?

REYNOLDS: No sir.

DOCTOR: Put your transmitter back on automatic.

REYNOLDS: Yes sir.

RUSSELL: (LAUGHS)

DOCTOR: Why do you laugh, Major?

RUSSELL: I was just thinking about how many millions of telescopes are turned in our direction.

DOCTOR: Yes?

RUSSELL: What you said a few hours ago...I mean about my wanting excitement and adventure, that's true, you know. I'm sixty years old, and I guess I've just lived for this chance. The army hadn't OKed my going, but...well, here I am. And once we land, I'll admit frankly, I'm going to cash in on every bit of it and have myself a time. You know something? I get to feeling kind of depressed when I think it'll soon be over. Well, there's no reason for depression, is there...

DOCTOR: I couldn't answer that.

RUSSELL: Why not?

DOCTOR: You've been wondering, undoubtedly, why since we left the moon I've been

acting strangely.

RUSSELL: That's right.

DOCTOR: I've never believed in predestination, and yet there's been sort of a motivation of fate in my life. At twenty-one I was part of that research team trying to adapt atomic power to military purposes. When our first bomb went off over the New Mexico desert, a newspaper man repeated the words, "What hath God wrought?" and no one quite knew it. I've been waiting fifty-five years for the answer. I think I found it a few hours ago on the moon. And it's an answer full of horror.

MUSIC

REYNOLDS: Well, the Major's sure sleeping.

DOCTOR: Yes.

REYNOLDS: It's only a few more hours, isn't it?

DOCTOR: Yes.

REYNOLDS: Will we have to put on our compression suits the way we did on the take-off?

DOCTOR: Yes, of course.

REYNOLDS: Doctor, may...may I ask you something?

DOCTOR: Yes.

REYNOLDS: Before, you spoke of finding an answer on the moon. And...and then you didn't say any more. Well, I've been thinking about it. I was wondering if it was something the Major couldn't understand and that's why you didn't speak of it further.

DOCTOR: And now you want to know.

REYNOLDS: Yes sir. I haven't lived anywhere as long as you two have, but my life has been built around atomic power. My dad, he was one of your men. Why, ever since I was a child, becoming a physicist like dad was and you are; Dr. Oppenheimer and all the rest - why that was IT. But now, all of a sudden, the way you spoke before, as if all our research has been criminal. Do...do you mean that? Do you?

F/X: beeping

REYNOLDS: Collision radar.

DOCTOR: Get at it!

RUSSELL: What's the matter?

REYNOLDS: Object approaching. Fifteen degrees west. There it is. Meteorite! It's a meteorite!

RUSSELL: That was the closest.

REYNOLDS: It was indeed.

DOCTOR: It'd be sardonic indeed to collide with a meteorite in this point in our journey.

REYNOLDS: I...I'd use a stronger word than sardonic, doctor.

RUSSELL: Yeah, like fatal.

DOCTOR: It's all clear.

REYNOLDS: Well I'd better get back to my...

DOCTOR: No, Reynolds. Reynolds, you asked me a question before and I want to answer it. You too, Major Russell. I want you to hear this.

RUSSELL: Sure.

DOCTOR: Reynolds overheard what I said to you, that I'd found the answer to a very old question on the moon. He said that he felt somehow that I felt all the research on atomic power had been criminal. No, young man, I don't believe that, not at all. Criminal to know more about a way of nature? No. The answer I found was something else. I haven't even an answer, perhaps only a theory. When we came within a hundred miles of the moon and then began to decelerate to turn back, what did we see through the observation ports?

RUSSELL: Well, doc... DOCTOR: No, please, let me tell you what I saw. The craters of the moon. Great, gigantic craters. And as we came closer and closer the look of them was so familiar. Not because I'd seen them through telescopes and photographs, but for some reason that I couldn't quite understand. Craters of the moon. And suddenly, when we'd come as close as we'd dare and our ship swung in an orbit to return, suddenly, I knew. It was a memory of another crater I'd seen fifty-five years before in New Mexico from an observation plane high above the ground, a few hours after the first atomic bomb had lit the sky with a new sun. Yes. The crater in the crust of the earth that bomb had left was the

same as the craters of the moon. You understand? The crater our bomb had left on the earth was the same as the craters on the moon.

RUSSELL: So what? I don't get it.

REYNOLDS: Yes, doctor, what are you getting at? Ah, the crater in that desert was a thousandth of the size of the one's you're talking about.

DOCTOR: I suddenly began to think, was it not possible that the moon had gone through the same evolutionary processes as our earth, before our earth? Yes, wasn't it possible that men had come into being on the moon developed their own civilization, had known scientific progress as we have, but long before we earth-men had known it?

RUSSELL: Say, doc...

DOCTOR: You DO understand. These men of the moon had discovered the secret of atomic power long before we did. And then had used it to blast and to tear each other. Yes. And the craters on the moon, that terrible devastation was the record of the destruction of their civilization. A final war which had burned up the atmosphere and left the moon a dead planet circling endlessly in an airless sky.

REYNOLDS: Alright, doctor...presuming your theory is correct, that the moon men had started through a war a chain atomic reaction that they couldn't stop...well...it indicates that they were fools.

RUSSELL: Yeah, that's it. Fools.

DOCTOR: Are WE any wiser?

MUSIC

RUSSELL: Air speed, two, four, eighty-two.

DOCTOR: You'd better cut it down.

RUSSELL: Right. How much?

DOCTOR: About fifteen percent.

RUSSELL: Right.

DOCTOR: You get anything, Reynolds?

REYNOLDS: No sir.

DOCTOR: Would you come here a moment?

REYNOLDS: Yes sir.

DOCTOR: Will you help me with this port covering?

REYNOLDS: Yes sir.

RUSSELL: Going to take a look, huh?

DOCTOR: Yes, that's it.

REYNOLDS: There she is.

RUSSELL: Mama Earth.

DOCTOR: Reynolds, the cameras.

REYNOLDS: Yes sir. How much should I run, doctor?

DOCTOR: Put it on automatic exposure.

REYNOLDS: Yes sir.

RUSSELL: Six more hours, eh, doctor?

DOCTOR: Or less.

RUSSELL: Sure we haven't made a mistake and headed for Venus?
(ONLY RUSSELL LAUGHS)

RUSSELL: Just a bad joke, doc. No, there's no two ways about it. The outline of the continents, we can't make any mistake about that being our home address. I wonder how much they can see of us. What are we - six, seven thousand miles out? You know, this reminds me of a time about twenty-five years ago. The army sent me up to a thousand miles to take observation photographs. Well you remember how the atomic reaction motors were then, we got up about five hundred feet...

DOCTOR: Major! Look down!

RUSSELL: What?

DOCTOR: Look!

RUSSELL: What? I don't see anything.

DOCTOR: Look, I tell you. Reynolds, come here.

REYNOLDS: What's the matter? Something wrong?

RUSSELL: Well the doctor says there's something...

DOCTOR: Reynolds, look! Do you see?

REYNOLDS: Yes. What is it?

RUSSELL: I see it too. Bright lights going on and off. What's going on down there?

REYNOLDS: Doctor, are they signaling us? Are they signaling?

RUSSELL: At six-thousand miles? Why? Why should they?

REYNOLDS: That's right, there's no such plan.

RUSSELL: Look at it. It IS lights going on and off!

REYNOLDS: But they're all from one area!

DOCTOR: Can you make out where?

REYNOLDS: North America.

RUSSELL: Then they ARE signals. The candle in the window.

DOCTOR: Your own question: at six-thousand miles?

RUSSELL: Wait a minute.

REYNOLDS: Are they explosions? Explosions? Major, Doctor, is that it? Are they explosions?

DOCTOR: I don't know.

MUSIC

REYNOLDS: C-Q, C-Q, hello, hello, hello? I'm sorry, doctor, I can't raise anything.

RUSSELL: Doc, Doc, come here!

DOCTOR: Yes?

RUSSELL: Doc, look! The closer we get-they ARE explosions.

DOCTOR: Three more hours, we'll know.

RUSSELL: I want to know NOW. Reynolds, what's the matter with you? Why can't you make radio contact?

REYNOLDS: I'm doing everything I can.

DOCTOR: Major, look! Craters! Look, craters!

RUSSELL: Craters? At this altitude, you couldn't possibly...

DOCTOR: At each flash, I DO see them.

RUSSELL: Okay, okay, what does it mean? What are you looking at me like that for? What does it mean?

REYNOLDS: Doctor, Major, something's coming through.

RUSSELL: It's about time.

REYNOLDS: I...I can only hear it faintly.

RUSSELL: What? What!

REYNOLDS: Please, let me listen. United...States...bombed...

RUSSELL: Reynolds what is it?

DOCTOR: Tell us.

REYNOLDS: Well, I couldn't quite make out. Well, he said...

RUSSELL: Said what!

DOCTOR: Tell us.

REYNOLDS: War, he said war. Blasting the United States off the face of the earth. Blasting...it's a joke isn't it? Isn't it?

MUSIC

RUSSELL: What are they sending now? What now?

REYNOLDS: It began...an hour ago. No...warning. Projectiles, radio control...

Point of origin...unknown. Oh, it stopped again, the transmission...

RUSSELL: That's enough. Where's the international police force? What's being done about it? Doctor, doctor, did you hear? It was an attack without warning. Who could it be? What's the idea?

DOCTOR: The explosions are increasing in frequency.

RUSSELL: Reynolds! Reynolds, is there anything more coming through?

REYNOLDS: No, nothing. Yes, yes! They've started transmission again!

RUSSELL: Alright, let's have it, quick.

REYNOLDS: Some station in the midwest, I can't get the call letters.

RUSSELL: Who cares?

REYNOLDS: He says...it's hell...ground shaking...No bombs landed near...but air reconnaissance. It's so garbled I can hardly make out.

RUSSELL: Well? Well?!

REYNOLDS: It started an hour ago...everything burning...Oh, it's stopped again, there's nothing.

RUSSELL: Doctor...doctor! In heaven's name, what do you think it's all about? Stop staring out of the window and talk to me!

DOCTOR: (to himself) What are they doing?

RUSSELL: What do you mean, what are they doing? They're bombing us, blasting us, it's war! But who? We've got to find out! Reynolds, find out who!

REYNOLDS: Well, it's no use! There's no transmission!

RUSSELL: Doctor, those bombs, where are they coming from? Can't you tell by the trajectory?

DOCTOR: At this distance? And what distance does the face of the enemy make? It's happening, that's all.

RUSSELL: Smashed them! I always said we should've smashed 'em. Exterminated them fifty years ago!

REYNOLDS: Well they were so peaceful for so many years, it...

DOCTOR: The flashes are increasing in frequency.

RUSSELL: Reynolds! Get on that radio.

REYNOLDS: I'll try again.

RUSSELL: I've got to know who! Who the devil -- we had agreements with everyone, the international...devils! All of them! I call them devils...I don't even know who they are! Reynolds - get anything?

REYNOLDS: No. No, I don't.

RUSSELL: Doctor! Faster - let's get down there faster, let's open it up!
Let's...

DOCTOR: Well you know better than that. We're entering atmosphere. We increase speed and we'll burn up like a meteorite.

RUSSELL: But I'm an army man, all my life I've been trained...

REYNOLDS: It's coming through, sir...

RUSSELL: What. What!

REYNOLDS: The bombs...nothing can... I can hardly make it out...

RUSSELL: Keep at it.

REYNOLDS: Panic...paratroopers...

RUSSELL: Who? Who?!

REYNOLDS: Last message...from...United States...of... it's ended. There is no more.

MUSIC

RUSSELL: If we'd only get down there faster!

REYNOLDS: Only five hundred more miles.

RUSSELL: Look at it down there. Our air force, protective measures...what happened to them?

REYNOLDS: What happened?

RUSSELL: Doctor! You, why don't you say something! You just sit there for hours, watching! This isn't a scientific experiment going on down there, they're blasting us to pieces. Us, us! Our atomic bomb, the great secret! Hold it over the world and have peace forever! You said that, you! I was a kid then, I heard you say it on the radio when they gave you a medal. Hold it over the world and have peace forever! Well, what do you got to say now?

DOCTOR: We had a wonderful fifty-five years.

RUSSELL: What!?!

DOCTOR: Everybody had a wonderful time.

RUSSELL: Reynolds, what's the matter with him, he's gone...

REYNOLDS: No, no, let him finish.

DOCTOR: First we hung the criminals. Fifty-five years ago, and as soon as their bodies stopped swinging, we left the crowd and each went back to his own house and shut the door.

RUSSELL: You said the peace would hold forever.

DOCTOR: I...I said it because...I thought that when the secret was put away, the people of the world would remember the terror. I said to myself, "now, certainly now that they've seen the possibility of the disintegration of they're earth they'll be drawn together once again into the, the family of men as it must have been in the beginning." I...I forgot what years could do, I forgot how quickly forgetfulness comes, I forgot that in only a few years Hiroshima and Nagasaki would be only yesterday's sensations for a nation eager for sensations for today. You keep asking me who's sending those bombs against us - who? I tell you we're sending them against ourselves! Because had we made our way of life something more than a confused dream of shiny machines and happy endings, those bombs would not be flying at us. I said the peace would hold forever because I thought, out of that war, at last man had learned that there was no defense against hatred and revenge but the defense of education for the unity of people. It was a race, gentlemen, against time! And we wasted our last fifty-five years running on a track of chromium and plastics! And so we've lost. Forever.

RUSSELL: We've never lost.

DOCTOR: Look, the blasts are increasing in...

REYNOLDS: Doctor, look! The color of the blasts.

DOCTOR: Oh, dear God.

RUSSELL: What, what?

REYNOLDS: Doctor, it's nitrogen, isn't it?

RUSSELL: Nitrogen? What...

DOCTOR: The fools, the everlasting fools, I warned them.

REYNOLDS: The blasts, more and more.

DOCTOR: They've started something they couldn't end. The color of the blasts. They've set off hydrogen atoms.

RUSSELL: I...I don't know what...

DOCTOR: We used uranium, plutonium and when the initial blast was over that was all, but, hydrogen, that's part of life. One reaction sets off another like setting of an endless chain until...look down there.

REYNOLDS: The blasts, faster and faster.

RUSSELL: They're spreading.

DOCTOR: The fools...God help the fools...

RUSSELL: A shade of flame, around the earth. Doctor, tell me -- what is it?

DOCTOR: Its burned up all the atmosphere.

RUSSELL: Burned up...Reynolds, what does he mean?

REYNOLDS: The chain reaction...burned up...all the air.

F/X: loud retro rocket noise

REYNOLDS: Major, major, the left jet.

RUSSELL: It's all right, it's all right. All right, where are we going?

DOCTOR: There's no air, no life. The moon, the earth, the same.

REYNOLDS: How much fuel?

DOCTOR: There's the gauge.

REYNOLDS: Two, three hours?

DOCTOR: Yes, yes I think that's right, isn't it, Major?

RUSSELL: Yes.

REYNOLDS: What, what'll we do?

DOCTOR: YOU ask that question now? The Major no longer asks it. Do you know the answer, Major?

RUSSELL: Sure. We'll circle around. And we'll crash.

REYNOLDS GASPS

DOCTOR: No, it'll be alright, my boy. My words again. We'll have peace...forever.

MUSIC