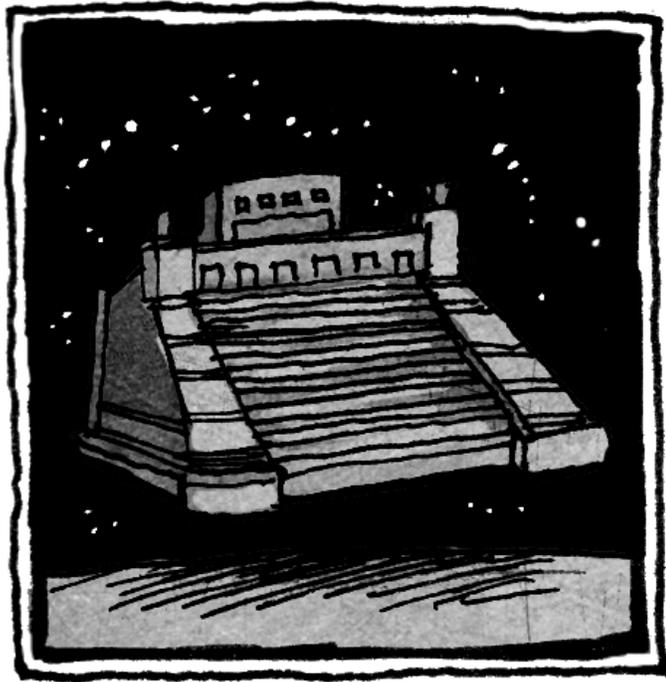


PERUSAL SCRIPT



# BOOK OF MORMON STORY

*by James Goldberg*



Newport, Maine

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## **Book of Mormon Story**

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**ORDER #3304**

“Book of Mormon Story,” by James Goldberg, was first performed in April 2007, at The New Play Project, in Provo, Utah, with the following cast:

Director: Eric Heaps

Sister Griffith: Charlie Little

Sister Nielsen: Jana Lee Stubbs

Carter: C. Adam Stallard

Lindy: Nicole Quist

Tim: Jason Lewis

It was again performed in April 2008, at The New Play Project.

Director: Jana Lee Stubbs

Sister Griffith: Jane Barlow

Sister Nielsen: Christina Phillips

Carter: C. Adam Stallard

Lindy: Asenath Rallison

Tim: Wyatt Felt

### **Cast of Characters — 3f 2m**

Sister GRIFFITH — a senior companion

Sister NIELSEN — a new transfer

CARTER — an unusual investigator, 40-something

LINDY — his daughter, late teens-early 20s

TIM — her boyfriend, late teens-early 20s

**BOOK OF MORMON STORY** by James Goldberg. 3f 2m. Simple setting and contemporary costumes. About 10 minutes. This missionary story is literally about *The Book of Mormon* and how it affects those who read it. There are many different responses inside this phenomenon of seeking truth, but none more surprising and unexpected than the one contained in this short play as a pair of sister missionaries, one a new transfer, visit with one of their ongoing investigators. Premiered in 2007 by The New Play Project of Provo, Utah. **Order #3304**

**James Goldberg** — James was a co-founder of New Play Project, and served as its Artistic Director from 2006-2008. He is also the author of three blogs: [goldbergish.blogspot.com](http://goldbergish.blogspot.com), [mormon-midrashim.blogspot.com](http://mormon-midrashim.blogspot.com), and [caucajewmexdian.blogspot.com](http://caucajewmexdian.blogspot.com). His primary claim to fame is having once written a letter of recommendation for award-winning Bollywood screenwriter Abhijat Joshi.

## **BOOK OF MORMON STORY**

*(The play opens with two Sister missionaries, SISTER GRIFFITH and SISTER NIELSEN, entering from outside of the theater into the audience area. They are out on the street on their way to the next appointment.)*

*(They enter laughing.)*

**GRIFFITH.** Unbelievable. Un-be-lieve-able. That's hands-down the worst pickup line I've ever heard. I mean honestly, you say "No, sir, I don't want to go home with you." And he says

*(Imitating the drunk guy who hit on SISTER NIELSEN.)*

"You sure? I've got some tomatoes in the fridge . . ." What, does he think you're gonna suddenly say, "That's right! Forget me being a missionary . . . it's no use, I can't resist men who have tomatoes in the fridge."

**NIELSEN.** He smelled drunk enough to believe it.

**GRIFFITH.** Yeah . . . but still. Anyway, not everyone in this town is weird, I swear, it's really just this morning. You haven't been transferred to the twilight zone or anything, it's a good area to teach in.

**NIELSEN.** The first day after a transfer is always weird. The day after my first transfer, this guy let us in to teach him a first . . . obviously, we didn't know yet about his narcolepsy . . . anyway, he fell asleep all at once, right in the middle of the First Vision, and my senior comp didn't know what to do, so she just kept going. She made me finish teaching the next principle and leave a Book of Mormon with our phone number on his table before we snuck out.

The weirdest moment was probably when she leaned over to me and whispered, "Commit him to read it!" I mean, this guy is completely unconscious and she's whispering it to me like a death threat because she doesn't want the discussion to seem rocky. Can you believe it? I mean, at least here it's the random drunks who are crazy and not you.

*(Beat.)*

Sorry, that wasn't a very charitable thing to say about my former companion.

**GRIFFITH.** Well . . . there's always repentance.

**NIELSEN.** Thank goodness for that.

*(Beat.)*

What's up next?

**GRIFFITH.** We've got an appointment with Carter . . . so at least you'll get to talk to one normal person today. He's around forty or so, he's got a daughter who lives with him, I think he's got some other kids, too, but they live with their mom. We met him, at the bus stop actually, a couple of weeks ago. He's pretty cool, he's mostly just read in the Book of Mormon . . . we always end up talking more about that than anything else, he just gets really fixated on trying to get it all at once, you know? We've been trying to get him to pray about it, but I don't know how that's going yet.

I don't know . . . he hasn't come to church or anything, he's not really moving forward: He doesn't seem to get out much, and sometimes I think maybe we're just like a book club to him. I hope he prayed this time . . . I don't want to drop him, but we might have to. We'll see what you think.

**NIELSEN.** Okay.

**GRIFFITH.** Okay. You ready?

**NIELSEN.** Let's do this.

*(SISTER GRIFFITH leads as they walk up to the front of the stage, CARTER's door. They mime knocking, and there's a knocking sound effect. CARTER is sitting, Book of Mormon open on the table, deep in thought and doesn't respond. A girl's voice comes from offstage.)*

**LINDY.** Don't you dare get the door! That's probably Tim.

*(CARTER's daughter LINDY comes out. She's a Goth. There should be a slightly comic moment as she looks in a mirror and checks make-up, hair, etc. to make sure she's got the best possible depressed Goth look going. Finally, she crosses to the door and opens it. The SISTERS smile all at once as the door starts to open.)*

**SISTERS.** Hi!

**LINDY.** Oh. It's you.

*(LINDY exits. CARTER looks up from his Book of Mormon, where he's been marking another passage and writing a note in the margin.)*

**CARTER.** Hey, Sister Griffith, Sister . . . not Gonzales.

**GRIFFITH.** This is Sister Nielsen.

**CARTER.** That's okay. New face, same tag. Works for me.

*(Looks back down at his book. The SISTERS are still standing at the open door. After a few seconds of uncertainty, they enter; SISTER NIELSEN closing the door behind her. CARTER picks up his Book of Mormon and addresses SISTER NIELSEN.)*

**CARTER.** You've read this, I assume?

**NIELSEN.** *(Laughs)* Yes. Several times. How's your reading going?

**GRIFFITH.** *(Interjecting)* And your praying? How's the praying?

*(Pause.)*

**CARTER.** You know, Sister Griffith, I've been thinking. I think it's kind of like . . .

*(Pauses, consulting bookmark.)*

verse eight on this card. "We believe the Bible to be the word of God *as far as it is translated correctly.*" Well, that's how I think of the Book of Mormon, and I was kind of surprised it didn't also say "as far as translated correctly" on this card.

**GRIFFITH.** That's because the Book of Mormon was translated by a prophet.

**CARTER.** The Bible was written by prophets.

**GRIFFITH.** Yes, it was, it's just with the whole Dark Ages thing, and of course there was the apostasy . . .

**CARTER.** Prophets make mistakes.

**GRIFFITH.** Well, yes, they do . . . but not while translating the Book of Mormon.

**CARTER.** What did Joseph Smith know about what really happened back in those days? I mean, I know God was helping him and everything, but I doubt he got it all right. I think there were probably some gaps between what the Nephites went through and what a white boy in the 19th Century could understand.

**GRIFFITH.** Things are easier to understand by revelation. Which is why we keep asking you to pray about

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**CARTER.** Did the guy who painted the pictures pray?

**GRIFFITH.** What pictures?

**CARTER.** The ones in here. You ever look at the pictures in these books you give out? They're ridiculous. Honestly, they make the whole story so much harder to believe, take a look:

*(Flipping and pointing to pictures as he describes them.)*

You think God sustained Nephi in the wilderness on protein shakes and steroids? I mean, I know it said he's large of stature, but don't you think someone living mainly off locusts and sagebrush or whatever they had . . . don't you think he would look a little more scrawny and a little less like the Governor of

California? On the other hand, at least the pictures do give us a clue about why Nephi's brothers hated him so much: they obviously listened when Dad said to leave everything, but Nephi smuggled out his razor and has been hogging the emergency supply of hair and leg wax ever since.

**GRIFFITH.** The pictures are just one artist's depiction.

**CARTER.** Of course. And they're also ridiculous.

**NIELSEN.** Well, different people learn in different ways. My little brother, for example, still doesn't get much from his reading in the scriptures, but the pictures show him that it's a sign of strength, not weakness, to do what the Lord says. So, sure, from a historical perspective they're pretty bad, but they're valuable because of the meaning they express to kids who care more about old *He-Man* reruns than talks at church.

*(CARTER thinks about it.)*

**CARTER.** Okay. I can accept that. I mean, I'm not meeting with you two or reading this book for the history in the first place, I just wanted to know what it has to say, what it means.

*(Beat. He starts flipping through the pictures.)*

I guess my biggest problem, though, is with what

*(Finds it.)*

this picture seems to be saying. Here you have, I think, one of the best depictions of a prophet in his drawing of Abinadi.

*(He pronounces both "A"s as in "cat.")*

**NIELSEN.** *(Correcting: not harsh, just like teaching a kid to read)* Abinadi.

**CARTER.** Is that how they pronounced it? Anyway, he's fine, but look at the king. Does that look like a man of great energy and charisma to you? Like the kind of leader you would *want* to follow astray? I don't think so. I mean, let's say you're an ancient Nephite, hanging out in the park, and this guy comes by walking his cheetah. He's gonna be all out of breath, rasping horrifically, and sweating buckets of lard. If he sidles up and tells you that for one-fifth of your ziff, he's gonna transform the kingdom into a paradise on earth, you'd laugh in his face. And then plug your nose and run away.

That's not what they did. Almost everyone backed him. They followed him, they *liked* him. King Noah wasn't some grease-bucket wino. The trouble with the picture is that it makes sin seem so obviously gross and unsavory . . . believe me, that's not how it seems right up front. It takes time to recognize evil. Even your Book of Mormon says loud and clear that Satan isn't stupid.

**GRIFFITH.** Okay . . . so there's a problem with the picture. That has nothing to do with whether the Book

of Mormon is true or not.

**CARTER.** I didn't say the Book of Mormon isn't true, I just found a place where it isn't translated correctly.

**GRIFFITH.** Where?

**CARTER.** The book itself says that Noah planted vineyards and was known as a wine-bibber: it's saying he was an alcoholic, which I think is an error in translation. It also says he was lazy, which doesn't fit either. Lazy alcoholics are many things, but megalomania and massive construction projects aren't really typical for people with those particular problems. I don't know: I just got this feeling while reading the story that something wasn't right, and that feeling kept getting stronger as I went back over and over it. And then: It was actually when I was praying about the book, like you'd told me—I just knew. I knew what was wrong. And that there's no way Joseph Smith in 1830 could have captured the whole truth of it.

**NIELSEN.** So . . . what was it you realized?

**CARTER.** *(He leans in, as if sharing something he's been entrusted with— some holy secret)* Cocaine.  
*(Beat.)*

Those vineyards he built on the hills weren't for grapes. King Noah and his priests were massive cokeheads.

*(Long pause.)*

**GRIFFITH.** What?

**CARTER.** That's the first thing I thought, too, after it came to me, but it fits, it totally fits. The book says he was one of the king's sons, but I don't think that meant he *had* to be king. No, I think his dad picked him because he was creative, charismatic, enterprising. I'll bet people loved him. And I'll bet he was the kind of guy who was always looking for new ways forward. Must've wanted to know about everything. I can almost see him wandering the hills . . . And I can't even imagine how exciting it must have been for the most talented member of that generation to stumble across the effects of that particular South American plant, to feel for the first time how it can make you feel. He must have thought he was kissing God. I'm not surprised he threw out his father's old priests and found friends who felt the same way about the plant as he did instead.

**NIELSEN.** You really think he was . . . I mean, really?

**CARTER.** I used to be an architect. I'm not anymore, I, uh, I had to leave that life, but I used to be really, really good. I've been all over the world creating beautiful things, and let me tell you: If you want to be amazing you can't be bound by what's already been done . . . and you're not going to sleep a lot.

Reading about what they got done, the high towers, the ornate palaces, the elaborate public spaces they

built . . . I give it ten-to-one odds they were on something. And almost everybody else seems to have been picked up by the wave of energy and vision that came out of it.

You've got to put yourself in the place of his people, they could see their world changing, they got to be part of the continent's first Renaissance. I kind of doubt too many women complained when he started preaching free love.

*(He notices their immediate discomfort.)*

**CARTER.** Look, I'm not trying to make you uncomfortable, but the book says he and his priests wasted their time with harlots and that everyone started committing whoredoms, which is not the kind of sexual revolution I'm imagining that the chunkster from the painting could have pulled off.

**GRIFFITH.** Um . . . I just want to make very clear that the Book of Mormon does not advocate King Noah's lifestyle.

**5 AND A HALF MORE PAGES TO THE END OF THE PLAY.**