

***MURDER ON THE BACK LOT, THE FINAL  
SCENE***

***A MURDER MYSTERY PLAY***

***By***

**Robert G. Borelli**

**Introduction & Procedures  
(Director's Copy)**

## ***Suggested number of actors & guests (12 - 40)***

***Allow 60-90 minutes for Play***

### ***KIT Edition***

What's included with this Kit:

- 1.Synopsis of the play.
- 2.Suggestions on how to proceed.
- 3.Profiles of the Characters.
- 4.Sample invitations.
- 5.Suggested appetizers to be served.
- 6.Guessing & Scoring Methods.
- 7.Possible rewards for selecting the killer.
- 8.Notes for Director and cast members.
9. The Murderer, Motives, and Method.
10. Copies of Play.
11. Name Tags. (Make sure they are worn)

### ***1. Synopsis of the play***

Murray Burnett is just a little different than most everyone else in New York these days, as war dominates all aspects of citizen's lives from newspapers and billboards to radio. With a nation facing extreme sacrifices, Murray knows that he will feel a sense of guilt spending the \$50,000.00 received from selling his book "everybody goes to Rick's" to Warner Brother's Studio. He wonders if he should attend the party. In Murray's mind, some may characterize him as a "war profiteer" for writing an anti-war book and selling the movie rights for significant pieces of silver.

"War profiteer? A dreaded term in a "patriots" vocabulary. Murray hopes that the movie version of the play, which the producers at Warner Brothers named "Casablanca", will reinforce the absurdity of war and portray it for what it really is; an opportunity for powerful men to obtain more power.

He waited for an invitation to do the re-write for the movie since he was the natural choice. When the cast was announced, he was thrilled for he knew; they were the exact types of actors he envisioned when he wrote the book, especially Humphrey Bogart as Rick. Bogie has an unconstrained arrogance for authority and would certainly be in character to utter "I stick my neck out for nobody".

Murray also knew of the volatile reputation of the Director Michael Curtiz. A declining set director coupled with a volatile director, a very sensitive leading lady, and a no nonsense leading man, will make Casablanca a brilliant film or a hellish nightmare. But Murray will not be a major player in this brilliant film or hellish nightmare. No! He will only be a spectator.

Ah Yes! Rewrite would have been nice, but alas! No invitation ever came, until now, an invitation to be only a witness, at the closing curtain of “Everybody goes to Rick’s”.

## *2. Suggestions on how to proceed*

This is a murder mystery play to be performed by guests at a party or function. It is not meant to be a professionally produced product. The play is designed for your guests to read from a script. There is no need for memorization. Much comedy is generated through the spontaneous interpretation of the characters by the readers. Ad-libbing and using accents does help to add flavor to the performance but the Director must insist the players cover all the clues. The Director for the play can be the host or someone designated by the host. The Director picks the persons he or she thinks could play a part. This could be done ahead of time (see enclosed invitation sample) or at the function itself. The most important character in the play is the NARRATOR. This person must be someone who speaks with clarity and volume. The Narrator carries the play from scene to scene and also helps lead the audience through the murderer guessing process. This play could be performed spontaneously at a function by a very small number of people.

There is a minor ADULT content to the play. It is the responsibility of the person(s) putting on this play to consider the ADULT content in selecting the environment the play is to be performed. Above all this should be fun and absolutely no pressure should be put on anyone to play a part. There are a number of venues in which this play can be performed. The following are suggestions; Dinner party, cocktail party, picnic, office party, organization party, family gathering. The play could be by formal invitation (see sample inside). It could be a costume event (1940’s). One could even host a cocktail party in a (Rick’s) café setting.

### *3. Profiles of the Characters*

Characters are rated as major or minor. This is not to mean a minor character cannot be the murderer. It just indicates the amount of speaking lines the character has. One could use minor speaking parts to attract reluctant new actors. The following 9 characters have speaking parts:

**Narrator, Joan Alison, Murray Burnett, Mike Cummins, Michael Curtiz, George James Hopkins, Ingrid Bergman, Claire Kelly, Humphrey Bogart**

#### **NARRATOR: (Major Distinct Role)**

The Narrator has the most lines in the play and should be the one that can articulate and speak with volume. There are parts in the play where the Narrator will carry some comedy. There are also parts in the play where comedy will come out on its own. It is in these moments the Narrator has to be at his/her best. The play must still go on and the Narrator above everyone else is responsible to get some laughs and still stay on schedule.

The Narrator must aid the Director in guiding the audience through the guessing segment of the play. Additionally, working with the Director, the Narrator sets the timing and the pace of the play. One cannot emphasize the care that must be taken in selecting a person for this role.

#### ***Joan Alison: (Minor Character)***

**Playwright**

Joan is a serious writer of fiction and has co-written the book "Everyone goes to Ricks" with Murray Bennett. Joan is very different than Murray in that she just wants to write for entertainment. She has worked in Hollywood before and is known and liked by most of her contemporaries. She is also dating George James Hopkins, the set director.

#### ***Murray Burnett: (Major Character)***

**Playwright.**

Murray is a very serious writer and has written several books concerning World War One. Having served in the army during that great conflict, he is very much anti-war. Murray has written a number of books very critical of war.

He was somewhat surprised when the pro war Hollywood crowd chose his book to make an anti-war movie. Murray does not have many friends and is not known in Hollywood.

***Mike Cummins:*** (Minor Character)

Vice President Publicity, Warner Bother's Studio.

Mike is just a company man. His involvement in this project is limited to oversight. His character is professional with just a little bit of salesmanship.

***Michael Curtiz:*** (Major Character)

Director: Casablanca.

Michael Curtiz is a German immigrant is the tyrannical director. He is arrogant and despises Americans. However he is a great Director and he will probably win an Academy award for this World War Two epic. As you can guess, he is not well liked in Hollywood, especially with the United States ready to go to war with Germany. His thick German accent only fuels further distain from his detractors.

***George James Hopkins:*** (Major Character)

Set Designer

George was once a great set designer who is getting work through his past reputation and friendships. He is in need of a great movie and an Academy Award to prove his genius. He knows Michael Curtiz and the difficulties working with him. But he must have an upshot to his dying career and Casablanca could power him back into demand. He has sacrificed his normal fees to gain this opportunity. He is also dating Joan Alison and has input into script rewriting.

***Ingrid Bergman:*** (Major Character)

Actress

Ingrid Bergman is most likely the best actress of the 1930s & 1940s. With her ability to speak five languages, she is truly an international artist. Her fans around the globe know and love her. She is also very sensitive and very vulnerable.

***Claire Kelly:* (Minor Character)  
Costume Designer**

Clair Kelly can be considered a Bimbo. Yes there were bimbos in the early 1940s. She has an affair with the director and a hint that she dumps Bogey. Maybe she's not such a bimbo. It's a juicy part, although minor, for one of your guests to sink their teeth into.

***Humphrey Bogart:* (Major Character)  
Actor**

Bogie, what could one say. Tough guy, lovable guy, quiet guy, really a man's man. Loves to smoke Lucky Strikes and drink scotch when he is not looking for some beauty to take home or to his dressing room. But he does take his acting serious and is easy to direct.

#### ***4. Sample Invitations***

Invitations are purely optional. There is a sample invitation enclosed. Copy the master on paper of one's choice. Include the dates; the time; the place and directions; the expected participation of the invitee (player or guesser; and the name and telephone number for RSVP. These folded invitations should fit in standard off the shelf envelopes. In a larger package, one could optionally include a copy of the play to the designated players. Costumes are mentioned in the narrative of the invitation. Appropriate dress for the play would be the early 1940's. Costumes should be optional.

## ***5. Suggested appetizers to be served***

*Your murder mystery play can be performed in many settings. It can be an indoor casual party, a relaxed outdoor barbecue, or an elaborate dinner party. Your party cuisine can be as simple or as elaborate as you wish it to be. A nice touch is to co-ordinate appetizers & wines to compliment the theme of the play. The following recipes for appetizers would be a good starting point. These provide for a simple appetizer accompaniment to wines and other beverages you may be serving your guest. One could also include a snacking tray consisting of French and Moroccan cheeses and fresh grapes.*

### ***Blue Cheese Tortas with Apricots, Figs & Olives***

*1 pound frozen puff pastry, thawed according to package directions*

*Flour, for dusting board*

*½ pound crumbled bleu cheese*

*Freshly ground black pepper*

*12 ripe apricots ,preferably fresh-may substitute dried apricots*

*12 fresh figs if available-may substitute dried figs*

*12 paper-thin slices Serrano ham or Prosciutto*

*½ pound mixed gourmet olives, including dry-cured Moroccan olives*

*Preheat oven to 350 degrees*

*Remove puff pastry from package and cut in ½ crosswise. Working with ½ at a time (refrigerate other ½ until ready to use), slightly roll out pastry on lightly floured board just until about 1/8 inch thick. Scatter half the bleu cheese over the top of the pastry and sprinkle surface with pepper. Drape a piece of plastic wrap over the pastry and gently roll over plastic wrap with rolling pin to press cheese into pastry. Cheese will not cover entire surface, just be sure it is evenly distributed.*

*Remove plastic wrap, cut pastry into 1- inch squares or diamonds with a sharp knife and transfer to ungreased baking sheets, placing each about ½ inch apart. Bake until puffed and golden, 20-25 minutes. Transfer to racks to cool, then continues with remaining half of pastry.*

*To serve:*

*Cut apricots in half and discard pits. Cut ham slices in half lengthwise. Wrap each apricot half with a piece of ham, winding the meat around the fruit and pressing the ends together so it holds; if desired, secure with a toothpick. You will have two dozen wrapped apricots. Transfer apricots to a serving plate. Serve with a bowl of figs. If you wish, you may wrap figs with ham, but will require extra quantity of ham. Olives may be served in another bowl. Pass bleu cheese tortas. Sherry may be offered alongside, if desired.*

## ***Moroccan Lentils with Chicken***

*8 cups water*

*3 teaspoons salt, divided*

*1 pound dried brown lentils, rinsed, drained*

*2/3 cup olive oil*

*1/2 cup red wine vinegar*

*3 Tbls. ground cumin, divided*

*2 Tbl. plus 2 tsp. chili powder*

*3 garlic cloves, minced*

*1/4 cup red wine*

*Seasonings may be adjusted if you prefer a spicier flavor*

*1 large onion, chopped*

*1 1/2 pounds skinless, boneless chicken breasts, thinly sliced*

*1/2 tsp. cinnamon*

*1 cup chopped fresh parsley*

*Combine 8 cups water and 1 tsp. salt in large saucepot over high heat. Add lentils; bring to boil. Cover, reduce heat to medium and simmer until lentils are tender about 20 minutes. Drain well; rinse with cold water and drain again. Place in large bowl.*

*Whisk 2/3 cup olive oil, vinegar, 2 Tbls. cumin, 2 Tbls. chili powder, garlic and 1 tsp. salt in large measuring cup. Pour over warm lentils and toss gently. Cool.*

*Heat 2 Tbls. olive oil in large skillet over high heat. Add onion; sauté until dark brown and soft, about 5 min. Add chicken; sauté 2 min. Add 1 tsp. salt, 1 Tbl. Cumin, 2 tsp. chili powder and cinnamon. Saute until chicken is cooked through, about 3 min. longer.*

*Arrange lentils on large platter. Placed sliced chicken atop lentils. Drizzle with olive oil and a bit more vinegar. Sprinkle parsley overall. Can be made 2 hours ahead. Let stand at room temperature. 12 servings.*

## ***Spiced Moroccan-Style Shrimp***

***Begin preparing this a day ahead.***

***4 tsp. ground coriander and 1 Tbl. ground cumin***

***1/3 tsp. turmeric***

***2 7.25-ounce jars roasted red peppers, well drained***

***1/3 cup chopped onion***

***5 tsp. minced seeded Serrano chilies (a must)***

***3 garlic cloves***

***1/4 cup honey***

***1/4 cup fresh lime juice***

***1 Tbls. grated lime peel***

***1/4 cup plus 3 Tbls. olive oil***

***48 large uncooked shrimp (about 2 pounds), peeled, deveined***

***48 3/4 inch cubes peeled cored pineapple***

***48 6 inch bamboo skewers, soaked in water 30 min, drained***

***1/2 cup chopped green onions***

***3 Tbls. toasted sesame seeds***

***2 limes, cut into wedges***

***Stir coriander, cumin, and turmeric in small skillet over medium heat until lightly toasted, about 3 min. Transfer to processor. Add red peppers, onion, chilies and garlic. Blend to form smooth paste. Mix in honey, lime juice and peel. With machine running, gradually blend in 1/4 cup oil. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer to bowl. Cover; chill overnight.***

***Thread 1 shrimp and 1 pineapple cube onto each skewer. Brush skewers with 3 Tbls. oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Can be made 8 hours ahead. Cover; chill. Preheat broiler or grill. For broiler, arrange skewers in single layer on 3 baking sheets. Working in batches, broil until shrimp are almost cooked through, turning once, about 2 min. per side. Brush skewers with some red pepper sauce. Broil or grill 1 min. longer.***

***Arrange skewers on platter. Sprinkle with green onions and sesame seeds. Serve with lime and remaining sauce. Makes 48. You may want to add more than one shrimp and pineapple on each skewer, depending on the number of people you'll be serving.***

## *6. Guessing & Scoring Methods*

There is always a cumbersome point in the play when the Narrator stops and asks the guests to render their judgment on who the murderer is and what was the motive. Suggestions on what format these opinions should take are strictly up to the Director. A great deal depends on how the play has been perceived, good or bad? The play ran too short or too long? There may be other considerations on extending or limiting the time for guessing that cannot be covered here. Again the Director has to be fluid about this. This is true, especially if an award is given to the person(s) getting the correct answer(s). Since in this particular play the Players will simply act out the murder scene, the correct guesser(s) will have to wait to be told. Remember there are two parts of the plot, the murderer and the motive and both should be guessed before the play resumes. The murderer will be easier to guess than the motive. Consequently there should be a higher score for guessing the motive (Career Jeopardy) than for guessing the murderer. If picking the highest individual score is not that important, you may want to have groups guess. This could be done by having the Narrator asking for a show of hands on who the audience thinks the murderer is. This of course takes place after the play pauses and after the audience gets a chance to ask the players questions. Reminder: **MAKE SURE PLAYERS WEAR THEIR NAME TAG.** When it becomes obvious that several guests are picking a particular player or another, the Director or the Narrator should put them in groups. The groups then can discuss possible motives and render their opinions as a group. In this way a group can win rather than an individual. Remember that unless you have instructed the cast to unseal their copy of the play, they too will have a chance to guess.

## *7. Possible rewards for selecting the killer & the motive:*

A DVD or VCR of the Movie Casablanca, or a Book on the Movie.

## ***8. Notes for Director and cast members:***

- 1. There are clues in the play that lead to the solving of the murder and the motive. Make sure that they get read.**
- 2. If you are going to ad-lib, these clues must still get read**
- 3. Remember to bring your reading glasses if you need them.**
- 4. There may be a number of people at the performance, so speak your lines clearly**
- 5. Highlighted lines need extra direction. They have comic dialogue.**
- 6. Stop before the last three pages. Don't read the last two pages of the play until the audience has a chance to guess**
- 7. Give time for the audience to guess. Remember they should guess the murderer and the motive.**
- 8. Answer truthfully any questions the audience may ask. That is except the murderer, he/she is exempt from telling the truth.**
- 9. after the audience has rendered their judgment, do not reveal to them who the murderer is, just acts out the last three pages of the play.**
- 10. The director picks the parts starts and stops the play (He/She could yell "ACTION!" to start and "CUT!" to stop)**
- 11. The Director welcomes everyone and makes certain that the actors are ready.**
- 12. Make sure everyone wears their character's Name Tag.**
- 13. Characters should high light their names on the play to make it easier to follow their lines.**

## ***9. The Murderer, Motives, and Method***

*Director: Before reading this section, read the play first.*

***Murderer: George James Hopkins***

***Motive: To prevent Michael Curtiz from ruining his career***

***Biggest Clue: George had access to all the props. The biggest one was the blank bullets***

*10. copies of plays, (see enclosed)*

*11. Name tags, (see enclosed)*

Now you are ready to Direct. Get in your Director's Chair, silence your audience, gather your cast, and declare,

**ACTION!**