

RED HERRING

AN ATYPICAL WHODUNIT IN ONE ACT

By **Russell D. Jones**

Copyright © MMVIII by Russell D. Jones
All Rights Reserved
Heuer Publishing LLC, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this work is subject to a royalty. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All rights to this work of any kind including but not limited to professional and amateur stage performing rights are controlled exclusively by Heuer Publishing LLC. Inquiries concerning rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC.

This work is fully protected by copyright. No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission of the publisher. Copying (by any means) or performing a copyrighted work without permission constitutes an infringement of copyright.

All organizations receiving permission to produce this work agree to give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production. The author(s) billing must appear below the title and be at least 50% as large as the title of the Work. All programs, advertisements, and other printed material distributed or published in connection with production of the work must include the following notice: **“Produced by special arrangement with Heuer Publishing LLC of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.”**

There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the work, including the changing of character gender, the cutting of dialogue, or the alteration of objectionable language unless directly authorized by the publisher or otherwise allowed in the work’s “Production Notes.” The title of the play shall not be altered.

The right of performance is not transferable and is strictly forbidden in cases where scripts are borrowed or purchased second-hand from a third party. All rights, including but not limited to professional and amateur stage performing, recitation, lecturing, public reading, television, radio, motion picture, video or sound taping, internet streaming or other forms of broadcast as technology progresses, and the rights of translation into foreign languages, are strictly reserved.

COPYING OR REPRODUCING ALL OR ANY PART OF THIS BOOK IN ANY MANNER IS STRICTLY FORBIDDEN BY LAW. One copy for each speaking role must be purchased for production purposes. Single copies of scripts are sold for personal reading or production consideration only.

PUBLISHED BY

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC

**P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011**

RED HERRING
By Russell D. Jones

SYNOPSIS: The actors of this odd little play within an odd little play are dreadfully tired of performing in cliché British murder mystery farces set in perfect little drawing rooms so they decide to take the drawing room out of the mystery and set it somewhere entirely different, the lavatory. Just when things are looking shamefully hopeless, one of the actors turns up dead - in the drawing room. Find out who's playing dead and who's really pushing up daisies in this semi-farcical one act of murder, mystery and revenge.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(FOUR MEN, THREE WOMEN)

- Writer (m or f).....Any type of generic writer. Written as male, but could be played by either. *(16 lines)*
- Inspector Haredital (m).....A stereotypical British Inspector and a bumbling incompetent. *(30 lines)*
- Mr. Reginald D. Westwood (m).....The sarcastic and unimpressed owner of the house. *(80 lines)*
- Mrs. Ellen Westwood (f).....Reginald's wife. She always likes having dinner parties. *(55 lines)*
- Dr. Winston Hamilton-kynes (m) ..A dashing, old fighter pilot of WWI. *(29 lines)*
- Edna Perkly (f).....An excitable lady who loves to chat; not the brightest star in the sky. *(56 lines)*
- Rupert Skefington (m)A somewhat bitter, strong-willed and scheming WWI pilot. *(41 lines)*

SETTING

It's the early 1920s in England for the characters at the beginning of the play. When they come out of character, it is modern day. The scene opens in a typical British living room. There is a door up right leading outside. A door up left to the kitchen, and a window up center. There is a couch in the middle of the room, a chair on stage left, a mini bar on stage right, a coffee table down stage of the couch, a small bookshelf on the edge of stage left and a tall cabinet up left.

LIST OF PROPERTIES

- Any number of books
- Smoking coat
- 3 glasses
- 2 bottles of liquor
- Writer's notes
- 6 prop guns

ACT ONE

Lights up. REGINALD is sitting in the chair reading a book. ELLEN enters.

ELLEN: Reginald, our guests will be here any minute. Put the book down . . . and take off that dreadful coat.

REGINALD: This is my smoking coat, and I'm quite comfortable where I am.

ELLEN: Make sure the bar is stocked. I'm going to finish up in the kitchen.

REGINALD: I stocked it earli . . .

Knocking on the door.

ELLEN: They're here! Get the door! . . . and take off that coat.

ELLEN exits.

REGINALD: Now wait just one . . .

Knocking at the door.

ELLEN: *(From offstage.)* The door, Reginald.

REGINALD slowly gets up and goes to the door. RUPERT and EDNA enter.

EDNA: I simply don't agree. The whole premise just seems so silly. And I could have cast better actors.

EDNA and RUPERT continue arguing as they enter and sit on the couch.

RUPERT: I agree about the acting. It was rather deplorable . . . oh, hello, Reginald . . . but I think you are missing the subtlety of the writing. It was written over forty years ago, but the principles, the journey of the characters, and the problems they face are quite contemporary.

REGINALD: (*Grudgingly.*) Won't you come in and have a seat? Can I get you something to drink?

RUPERT: I'll take a Manhattan.

REGINALD moves to the bar.

EDNA: Tonic water with a squeeze of lime . . . oh, and light on the ice. Now the problem isn't the contemporary nature of the play; it was about love and jealousy, there simply isn't anything more contemporary than that. I just felt that the writing and the plot as a whole was . . . well, it was full of holes.

REGINALD: We're out of ice.

RUPERT: Plot holes aside. It was so dramatically played.

REGINALD: And limes.

EDNA: It was supposed to be a comedy.

REGINALD: And tonic water, it seems . . .

RUPERT: That's what makes it so brilliant. The director completely took it in a different direction.

EDNA: But the playbill said it was the "original timeless comedy in three acts." Besides, there were only two acts.

RUPERT: Don't you think that's funny?

REGINALD brings over two drinks plus one for himself.

REGINALD: Cheers . . .

The three take a drink. EDNA eyes her drink strangely.

EDNA: What's this?

REGINALD: Warm ginger ale.

There's a knock at the door.

EDNA: I like it.

REGINALD: Indeed . . . if you'll excuse me.

REGINALD answers the door. WINSTON enters.

WINSTON: Greetings, chaps.

REGINALD: (*Sarcastic and unimpressed.*) Oh, you made it. How ever did you find the place?

WINSTON: It was no small feat, I tell you!

WINSTON moves in and sits in the chair.

RUPERT: Winston Hamilton-kynes, you old dog, you. I haven't seen you since the war.

WINSTON: Rupert! Why, it's been years. What ever happened to you?

RUPERT: I was shot down on our last mission together. Remember?

WINSTON: Ah yes, quite right, quite right.

EDNA: I didn't know you were in the war.

WINSTON: Ah yes, I was Rupert's wingman, don't you know. It was in our last mission together that Rupert was shot down and captured by the enemy. I successfully completed the mission and returned home with quite the welcome.

RUPERT: Oh really, I hadn't heard.

REGINALD: Well, this is all terribly interesting; I'm going to go out for a smoke.

EDNA: I need to visit the ladies room.

EDNA and REGINALD exit.

WINSTON: So Rupert, how did you ever escape the enemy's interrogation chamber?

RUPERT: I didn't escape. I was freed when we won the war. I was a prisoner for almost a year.

WINSTON: Oh, terribly sorry to hear that. I do hope there are no hard feelings.

RUPERT: Of course not, let bygones be bygones I always say.

Sudden BLACKOUT.

WINSTON: What the devil?

There's a gunshot and the sound of several doors opening and closing. Then the lights come back on. WINSTON is lying on the ground dead. EDNA has come in from the kitchen, and REGINALD has come in from outside and is no longer wearing his coat.

REGINALD: What in the blazes is going on in here!?

ELLEN: I heard a gunshot.

RUPERT: It's Winston! Someone shot him!

ELLEN: Oh my god.

EDNA enters.

EDNA: Oh my god, Winston's been shot.

REGINALD: Yes, we've been over that.

ELLEN: What are we going to do, Reginald?

REGINALD: Well . . . we . . . we should . . .

RUPERT: We should find out who shot him, that's what!

EDNA: No one here could have done it. I mean, none of us are . . .
mur . . . we're not . . . mur . . . mur . . .

REGINALD: Murderers!

EDNA: Heavens, no!

ELLEN: But Reginald . . .

Enter HAREDITAL.

HAREDITAL: Nobody move. I'm Haredital from the Yard.

RUPERT: Heard what from the yard?

HAREDITAL: Chief Inspector Haredital.

ELLEN: There's a Chief Inspector in the yard! What did he hear?

HAREDITAL: I heard it all.

REGINALD: Inspector Hear-di-tal?

HAREDITAL: Hare-di-tal.

EDNA: I'm confused. Who is this, and what's going on out in the yard?

HAREDITAL: I'm Haredital from the Yard, and I heard everything!

RUPERT: We understand that you heard us. That's just redundant!

REGINALD's voice changes somewhat as he comes out of character.

REGINALD: This is just stupid.

ELLEN: What?

REGINALD: This is just crap.

RUPERT: What are you doing?

REGINALD: This is the most ridiculous murder I've ever seen.
There's no point.

WINSTON: What do you mean, no point?

RUPERT: (*To WINSTON.*) Hey, you're still dead.

WINSTON: Oh, I just thought . . . I mean we're off-script.

RUPERT: We're not stopping. Reginald is just a little confused.

REGINALD: No, I'm not. This is too cliché, and you all know it!
Where's the writer? Hey you, come here, we need to fix this.

Enter WRITER.

WRITER: What seems to be the problem this time?

RUPERT: Reginald is having an unnecessary issue with the script.

ELLEN: No, he's right. This is just like every murder mystery I've ever seen. It even has the same set.

EDNA: Yes, it's definitely the set. I knew it looked familiar.

WINSTON: What are we going to do about it?

RUPERT: Quiet, you're supposed to be dead.

WRITER: So what are you proposing this time? I've already let you use your own names in place of the original ones.

REGINALD: We all agreed that was a good thing. John, Paul, George, Ringo, Lucy and Eleanor just somehow don't seem like the strongest choices for a murder mystery.

WRITER: Yes, yes, we all agreed. Now what exactly do you want to change?

REGINALD: I don't know, something, anything. We need to make some kind of change. Or this is going to appear as the same old crap.

ELLEN: Well, we always see these sorts of things in the living room. What if we changed locations? Like put the murder in the bathroom or something.

RUPERT: The bathroom? Why in the world would we all be socializing in the bathroom?

ELLEN: It was just an idea.

WINSTON: Can I get up now?

EVERYONE: No!

EDNA: Well, what about a bedroom or the kitchen?

WRITER: If that's what you guys want. I mean, we could chan . . .

RUPERT: That's no better than the stupid bathroom idea. There's no motivation for any of us to be in those rooms together.

ELLEN: How about we move some of the furniture around in this room? That way we can still be in the living room, but it won't look so much the same.

REGINALD: Fine, anything.

RED HERRING

Everyone begins moving the furniture around. The WRITER starts giving orders and suggestions, but basically everyone is doing their own thing and should in fact not be doing anything the WRITER says.

WRITER: Okay, why don't you move the couch over there, and the bar can come over this way. There, yes. And adjust that chair a bit. Okay, I think that'll work. Right, let's take it from the beginning.

Thank you for reading this free excerpt from RED HERRING by Russell D. Jones. For performance rights and/or a complete copy of the script, please contact us at:

Heuer Publishing LLC

P.O. Box 248 • Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406

Toll Free: 1-800-950-7529 • Fax (319) 368-8011

HITPLAYS.COM