An Audience Interaction
Murder Mystery/Comedy

By Billy St. John

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**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DR. JOHANN VANDERVEER</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>a museum curator, forceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELENA NEWMAN</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>an archeologist, attractive, outgoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LURENDA WESTBROOK</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>museum patron, wealthy, angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELVIRA GRAY</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Lurenda’s lawyer, haughty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JANE TRICE</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>works at the museum, nervous, excitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUSS PALMER</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>a newspaper reporter, energetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETTY LANGE</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>a newspaper photographer, pleasant, pretty</td>
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<tr>
<td>PROFESSOR DIRK CARLTON</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>an Egyptologist, befuddled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCES CARLTON</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Dirk Carlton’s wife, jealous, cynical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAHIJI AMUN</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>Egyptian, suave, aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISIS AMUN</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Egyptian, Gahiji’s sister, mysterious, exotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TONY</td>
<td>any age</td>
<td>main guard, can be played by a female as “TONI”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT. DAN MORROW</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>a police detective, businesslike, smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFFICER VAL HOLLOWAY</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>Dan’s assistant, eager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROFESSOR KIRK CARLTON</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>Dirk’s twin, also an archeologist, sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUARD</td>
<td>of the museum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTRAS</td>
<td>male and female, to serve as museum guards and exhibit workers; an unlimited number can be used</td>
<td></td>
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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

PLACE: The exhibition room and lecture hall of the Hamilton Museum.

TIME: Today. Actually, this evening, about 7:00 p.m.
Murder in the House of Horrors - Set Design

For preview only
MURDER IN THE HOUSE OF HORRORS

ACT ONE

The audience’s involvement with the play begins the moment they enter your theatre’s lobby, for it is decorated to represent the exhibition room of the Hamilton Museum. On display are items depicting a House of Horrors as befits their current program, “Monsters, Murderers and Madmen.” EXTRAS serve as museum GUARDS to answer questions and direct the audience to the auditorium. See the PRODUCTION NOTES at the end of the play for instructions on how to create a chamber of horrors suggestive of the famous display at Madame Tussauds Wax Museum in London.

The auditorium itself represents the lecture hall of the museum. A curtain spans the UPSTAGE area of the stage; there are two sets of curtains (legs) that hang at the sides of the stage, providing entrances from the wings LEFT and RIGHT. A set of steps is at the DOWN CENTER edge of the stage leading into the audience. Various Egyptian artifacts are placed about the stage; these can include a few simple pieces or an elaborate display. The necessary items ONSTAGE include a lectern on wheels DOWN RIGHT, a screen for a slide presentation, a sarcophagus UP LEFT, three folding chairs DOWN LEFT and several pedestals and/or display cases along the UPSTAGE curtain. One of these cases contains a rare jewel, The Eye of Uadjit; this case is locked and is watched over by the head museum guard, TONY, a role that can be played by a female as TONI. TONY wears a gun in a holster at the belt. Other cases/pedestals can sit at the edges of the curtains RIGHT and LEFT. Photos depicting Egyptian scenes might be hung against all the curtains. The sarcophagus supposedly once held the remains of a pharaoh, Menkaura. His image should be painted and/or molded on its cover in dazzling shades of gold, turquoise and ruby red. The sarcophagus is placed to stand upright; its cover is hinged to swing open toward STAGE RIGHT.

AT RISE: The main curtain is open when the audience enters the auditorium. The stage is set for a lecture. Ushers and EXTRAS are dressed as museum GUARDS, allowing a few AUDIENCE MEMBERS at a time ONSTAGE to look at the exhibits there. A few seconds before the show starts, they will suggest that these patrons take their seats, as it is almost time for the lecture to begin. If they wish to familiarize themselves with Egyptian lore and legends, the actors playing DR. JOHANN VANDERVEER and ELENA NEWMAN can be ONSTAGE with the AUDIENCE MEMBERS, improvising discussions with the visitors, in character. Or, they can wait and ENTER once the AUDIENCE is seated.

When the show begins, JOHANN and ELENA ENTER DOWN RIGHT if
they are not already ONSTAGE. JOHANN has a forceful personality and wears a tuxedo. ELENA is a very capable archeologist and is sure of herself. She wears a dressy pantsuit and carries a purse, which she puts on her chair when it is not needed. They speak with the GUARDS.

The GUARDS, except for the one guarding the jewel, LEAVE THE STAGE and take positions at the sides of the auditorium. The GUARDS from the exhibition room will join them, ENTERING through the auditorium doors. While this action takes place, other characters will ENTER the auditorium doors and go to seats that have been reserved for them in the front row—FRANCES CARLTON will sit near the STAGE LEFT edge of the stage, as will GAHIJI AMUN and ISIS AMUN. FRANCES CARLTON is the wife of tonight’s guest lecturer, Egyptologist Professor Dirk Carlton. Her dress looks very expensive. She is jealous of him and has a suspicious nature and a quick temper. GAHIJI AMUN (“gah-HEE-gee Ah-MUN”) and his sister, ISIS (“EYE-sis”) AMUN, are Egyptian. There is a mysterious air about them, perhaps even dangerous. He wears a tuxedo and a turban. She wears a brightly colored dress of Egyptian design along with bright red lipstick and elaborate eye make-up.

JOHANN: (Looks out into the auditorium, calling the GUARD in charge of the lights by name.) (Name), we’re about ready to begin. You can turn out the house lights, please. (GUARD TURNS OUT THE HOUSE LIGHTS, leaving only the STAGE LIGHTS ON. This light will spill below the stage to light the actors who will sometimes stand there to play scenes.) Thank you. (LURENDA WESTBROOK and ELVIRA GRAY ENTER, ad-libbing quietly as they take their seats near the STAGE RIGHT edge of the stage. In her 50s, LURENDA is a wealthy, well-dressed woman and is a patron of the museum; at the moment she is very angry. ELVIRA, in her 60s, is her lawyer. She has on a tailored outfit and projects an air of self-importance. They don’t overhear the next couple of lines. ELENA notices them. She takes JOHANN’S arm, nods her head in their direction to point them out to him.)

ELENA: Dr. Vanderveer… Lurenda Westbrook just came in.

JOHANN: I see, and she’s brought her lawyer, Elvira Gray, with her. I hope Lurenda’s not planning to make any trouble.

ELENA: Surely not. She wouldn’t cause a scene, not in front of all these people, would she?

JOHANN: I don’t know, Elena. If she does, we’ll just have to deal with it. We’d better get started. Dirk is late, as usual. Will you see if you can find him?

ELENA: Of course. (EXITS RIGHT into the wings. JANE TRICE ENTERS the auditorium with RUSS PALMER and BETTY LANGE. JANE’S clothes are nice, but simple. She is nervous and excitable. RUSS PALMER has on a suit and tie and carries a notebook and pencil. BETTY
LANGE wears a dressy blouse and slacks and carries a camera. She's pleasant and very good at her job. JANE shows BETTY and RUSS to their reserved seats in the front row near the STAGE RIGHT edge of the stage. Then she climbs the steps ONTO THE STAGE and goes to JOHANN.}

JANE: Dr. Vanderveer, the reporter and photographer for “The Sentinel” have arrived. I showed them to their seats. Is there anything else you need me to do? (LURENDA and ELVIRA remove their coats and don’t overhear JOHANN’S comments.)

JOHANN: (Glancing at LURENDA; quietly.) Not unless you’d like to lock one of our visitors in the torture chamber.

JANE: What? (Follows his gaze and spots LURENDA.) Oh. Mrs. Westbrook.

JOHANN: I didn’t mean that. Forget I said it, Jane. After all, Lurenda’s money made Dirk’s expedition to Egypt possible. If you’ll check your laptop, we’re about to ready to begin. I’ve sent Elena to get Dirk.

JANE: Yes, sir. (Descends the steps and goes to where a laptop has been set up. She checks it. [NOTE: The digital slide show is controlled from OFFSTAGE. JANE’S laptop is simply a prop with the monitor dimmed so as not to interfere with the blackouts. Depending on your technical set-up, the remote control she holds may actually control the presentation or may just be another prop.])

JOHANN: (Stands DOWN LEFT, addressing the AUDIENCE.) Ladies and gentlemen, I am Dr. Johann Vanderveer. I am the curator of the Hamilton Museum, and I’d like to welcome you to tonight’s lecture. We’re running a little behind schedule, so we ask you to bear with us. Our guest speaker, Professor Dirk Carlton, will be here momentarily. As you no doubt know, Professor Carlton is one of the world’s leading Egyptologists, and... (ELENA ENTERS RIGHT with DIRK CARLTON. He is a nice looking man in his 30s, but has a befuddled air about him; a typical absent-minded professor. He wears wire-rimmed glasses, a rumpled suit and a bow tie. His hair is slightly disheveled. He carries several note cards and a new, freshly sharpened pencil. He is preoccupied with sorting his cards. ELENA clears her throat to get JOHANN’S attention.) Oh, you’re here. (To the AUDIENCE.) As I was about to say, tonight Professor Carlton will tell us all about his marvelous discovery of the Tomb of Menkaura (“Men-KA-rah”).

DIRK: Menkaura? Oh, yes, the pharaoh. (Absently lays his notes on the lectern.) Strange man, apparently. Worshipped Uadjit (“YOU-ad-JEET”), the cobra goddess, had this life-size statue of her in his tomb, a human body with the head of a snake, HUGE fangs.
(Holds his hands in fists at his mouth with his forefingers extended down.) UGLY woman! (Makes a circle with his arms, his fingers laced together behind his head.) Hood all swelled up—

ELENA: (Cuts in.) Yes, Dirk, I’m sure that’s all in your notes.

DIRK: My notes? (Pats pockets.) I seem to have misplaced them. (ELENA points them out to him on the lectern.) Oh. (Spreads them out with one hand and absently digs in his right ear with the eraser of the pencil. ELENA touches his arm to stop him.)

ELENA: (Quietly.) Dirk...

DIRK: (Removing the pencil.) Hum? Sorry. Pesky infection. Fungus. Got it swimming in the Nile. I was swimming—it was already there.

FRANCES: (Standing; angry.) That’s not the only “fungus” you brought back from Egypt! That “devoted” assistant of yours— (ELENA clutches her fists angrily.)

DIRK: (Cuts in.) Frances! What are you doing here?! My lawyer said—

ELENA: (Cuts in.) Mrs. Carlton, what you’re implying is ridiculous! Dirk and I are merely friendly co-workers, that’s all!

FRANCES: Tell it to the judge in divorce court!

JOHANN: Mrs. Carlton, please! This is most inappropriate. I must insist that you sit down and not interrupt again. I would hate to have to ask a guard to escort you out.

FRANCES: Very well, (To DIRK.) but I’m not through with you yet! (Sits.)

ELENA: (To DIRK.) Can we please get going?

DIRK: Are we going somewhere? Oh, you mean the lecture. Yes.

JOHANN: Elena? (Crosses to him. During the following, DIRK sorts his notes.) Ladies and gentlemen, this is Elena Newman, Professor Carlton’s able assistant and an archeologist in her own right. (ELENA nods to the AUDIENCE and sits on the DOWN LEFT chair.) As you... um... have probably already surmised, Elena accompanied Professor Carlton to Egypt on his latest expedition and was there when he discovered Menkaura’s tomb. They worked together to complete a major portion of the excavation. Tomorrow they will fly back to Egypt to finish this important project.

RUSS: (Rises and crosses to the edge of the stage DOWN RIGHT.) Excuse me, Dr. Vanderveer. Russ Palmer with “The Sentinel.” Professor Carlton’s findings are of world-wide importance. “The Sentinel” wants to run a cover story on him Sunday, and several major publications—“Time,” “Life,” “National Geographic”—have asked us to submit photographs of tonight’s event. I brought the paper’s best photographer, Betty Lange, with me. (BETTY rises and joins him.) Would it be all right if Betty takes a few shots before
Professor Carlton begins his speech, while the audience is still here?

**BETTY:** It won’t take but a couple of minutes, Dr. Vanderveer.

**JOHANN:** “Time”? “National Geographic”? The publicity would be invaluable for the museum. It’s very irregular, but... yes, by all means, if Dirk agrees. Professor?

**DIRK:** *(Looking up.)* Hum?

**JOHANN:** May we take some pictures?

**DIRK:** Pictures? *(Not understanding.)* Certainly. Take as many as you like. *(Goes back to his notes.)* Just don’t forget to return them.

**JOHANN:** *(Straightening his necktie.)* Where would you like me to stand?

**BETTY:** I prefer to take candid shots. Let me get some snaps of the audience first. *(Holds up the camera and fires off some STROBE FLASH pictures of the AUDIENCE. [NOTE: Make sure the camera batteries are fresh to allow her to take pictures in rapid succession without pausing for the flash to recharge. This feature will play an important part in the show later.] As she takes pictures, RUSS scribbles notes on a pad he carries in his pocket. DIRK looks up from his notes, holds out a hand palm up and looks upward at the ceiling, mistaking the flashes for lightning.)*

**DIRK:** *(Mutters aloud.)* Is there a storm coming?

**JOHANN:** *(Crosses to DIRK.)* No, Dirk. The young lady is taking photographs for the newspaper.

**RUSS:** Betty, how about a shot of Dr. Vanderveer with the professor? *(BETTY aims the camera at the MEN. JOHANN puts his arm around DIRK’S shoulder and gives a big, phony looking smile. DIRK looks puzzled. BETTY shoots their picture.)* Great, Doc. A couple more shots in here, then we’ll wait until after the lecture to photograph the stuff up there on the stage and the House of Horrors displays in the exhibition hall.

**LURENDA:** *(Rises and crosses to the DOWN RIGHT edge of the stage. To JOHANN.)* Johann, I must protest!

**RUSS:** Who are you, lady?

**LURENDA:** I am Lurenda Westbrook, and I financed Professor Carlton’s expedition. *(BETTY snaps her picture. She holds her hands in front of her face.)* Stop that! And don’t you dare mention my name in your newspaper! *(Turning to the AUDIENCE.)* Ladies and gentlemen, I must apologize to you for the shocking way my money has been misspent by the museum. House of Horrors, indeed! I thought I was making a generous donation to the arts, not financing some circus sideshow. *(Turning to JOHANN.)* How could the Hamilton Museum
sponsor such a licentious display of bad taste? And in conjunction with a ghoulish series of lectures on “Monsters, Murderers and Madmen”! You ought to be ashamed!

RUSS:  (A whisper to BETTY as they sit on the top step.) How do you spell “licentious”? (She spells it for him quietly. He writes on his pad.)

JOHANN:  I’m sorry you’re displeased, Mrs. Westbrook, but the fact is, even with donations from wealthy patrons such as yourself, the museum also depends on support from the community to survive. Last month we featured an exhibit of fossilized plants from the Paleozoic Era. Do you know how many people showed up to see them? Sixteen! And they were five year olds! A pre-school teacher brought her kids on a field trip! They thought they were going to see dinosaur bones!

ELENA:  (Rises.) Mrs. Westbrook, like it or not, the public is fascinated with “Monsters, Murderers and Madmen.” They’ve attended the exhibition in droves. They are coming here for the same reason thousands of tourists go to Madame Tussauds Wax Museum in London, and have since 1802—to see the figures of the most famous people who ever lived, of course, but mainly to get a good, safe scare by walking through her Chamber of Horrors. Our current exhibit is giving the public what it wants.

LURENDA:  I don’t remember asking you for your opinion, Miss Newman! If you throw slop into a trough, pigs will run to it! (Realizes the implications of that statement and turns to the AUDIENCE. Flustered.) I wasn’t talking about you, of course. I just meant… oh, dear… (ELVIRA rises and crosses to LURENDA. ELENA sits.)

ELVIRA:  Let me speak for you, Lurenda. After all, that is what you pay me for. (To the AUDIENCE.) I am Elvira Gray, Mrs. Westbrook’s attorney. (BETTY rises and flashes a photo of her.) That’s not my good side! (Turns her other profile to BETTY and strikes a dignified pose. BETTY flashes another picture.)

BETTY:  Gotcha! (Sits back down onto the step.)

LURENDA:  Really, Elvira!

RUSS:  Do you spell “Gray” with an “a” or an “e”?


BETTY:  (Quietly, to RUSS.) It sounds like the colors of the Mongolian national flag.

ELVIRA:  Gray, Green, Black and White is the most prestigious law firm in the city.

RUSS:  (Quietly, to BETTY.) How do you spell “prestigious”? (She spells it quietly for him.)
ELENA: (To the AUDIENCE.) The Egyptians used to worship Nekhbet (“NECK-bet”), the vulture goddess. Rumor has it that she was a lawyer. (DIRK has been busily writing on his cards at the lectern, oblivious to the others. The comment catches his attention, and he looks up.)

DIRK: (Absorbed in thought.) Nekhbet, a vulture’s head on a woman’s body. She made the cobra goddess look like Miss America by comparison.

ELVIRA: (Turns to the AUDIENCE.) You heard that! (To an AUDIENCE MEMBER.) What’s your name? (The person gives his or her name. ELVIRA turns to another AUDIENCE MEMBER.) And yours? (The person gives his or her name.) I’m going to subpoena you to appear as witnesses in a slander suit I plan to file against the museum.

JOHANN: Ms. Gray, please! Dirk and Elena weren’t comparing you to Nekhbet!

ELENA: Of course not. (Eyes ELVIRA with a steady gaze.) When it comes to horrible creatures, there is really no comparison.

GAHIJI: (Rises and steps forward. He speaks with an accent.) Blasphemers! Infidels! (To ELENA.) You call Nekhbet a “horrible creature”! (Turning to DIRK.) And you refer to her and Uadjit as “ugly” beings! How dare you insult our goddesses in such a vile manner?! They are powerful deities, and vengeful! Beware, lest they strike you down for your disrespect! (For a moment, everyone looks at GAHIJI, stunned by his outburst.)

RUSS: (To BETTY.) Do you spell “blasphemers” with one “M” or two?

LURENDA: Surely you can’t believe, my good man, that these… these… mythical creatures actually exist?

GAHIJI: (Crosses to her; in a threatening tone.) I have seen the results of their anger. Their revenge is swift and terrible. You say it was your money that funded this expedition which has brought about the desecration of Menkaura’s tomb? Then you are as accursed as they, (Indicating DIRK, ELENA and JOHANN.) and you, too, are doomed to die an excruciating death!

ELENA: (Mocks.) Oh, not “excruciating.” I hate the word “excruciating.” (JOHANN crosses and sits beside her, motioning for her to be quiet.)

BETTY: (To RUSS, before he can ask; spells.) E-x-c—

ELVIRA: (Cuts in; turns to the AUDIENCE.) You heard that! (To an AUDIENCE MEMBER.) What’s your name? (Hopefully, the person answers.) Well, (Mr. or Miss and the person’s last name), I’ll arrange for you to appear in court as a witness when this man is charged with making death threats against my client.
GAHIJI: It is not I who will rain destruction down upon her head. It will be the gods of Egypt themselves!

ELVIRA: Until I hear a threat from them directly, I'll hold you responsible. Just who are you, anyway?

GAHIJI: I am Gahiji Amun, and I have come to reclaim that which rightly belongs to my country.

ISIS: (Rises and steps to GAHIJI, taking his arm. Speaks with an accent like his.) Nothing can be accomplished here, my brother. We must deal with the infidels when the time is right.

GAHIJI: Perhaps you are correct, Isis, my sister. When the time is right.

DIRK: (Again looks up from his cards; absorbed in thought.) “Amun,” god of mystery. Interesting names. “Gahiji,” hunter, and “Isis,” the goddess of magic. Their elementary school teachers must have felt odd. “Mrs. Amun, your daughter Isis, the goddess of magic, has been caught chewing gum in class again.” Um…

ELVIRA: I don’t care who you are, you can’t come over here and threaten our citizens. It’s against the law.

ISIS: Pah! Your laws cannot touch us. We are aides at our country’s embassy here and are not subject to your government’s dictates.

LURENDA: (To ELVIRA.) Is… is that true?

ELVIRA: If they really are aides, I’m afraid it is, Lurenda. We’ll find another way to handle these… these… foreigners. (Takes her arm.) Come, sit down. You look a little pale. (Leads her to their chairs where they sit.)

RUSS: (Rises.) Embassy, huh? Betty, better get their picture. (BETTY rises and shoots their picture. They frown as if annoyed. To GAHIJI.) You said you want to reclaim something that belongs to your country. Just what is that, Mr. Amun?

GAHIJI: (Indicates the objects ONSTAGE.) The artifacts that were taken from the mighty pharaoh’s tomb, most especially the jewel.

DIRK: Jewel? Oh, yes, the jewel… (As the scene continues, he crosses to TONY and speaks to him. TONY takes out a key and unlocks the display case containing the Eye of Uadjit. DIRK removes the jewel. It is a large, magnificent looking gem. It can be any color, but a brilliant red would be best.)

RUSS: (Takes notes.) And what jewel is that?

ISIS: (With quiet awe.) The Eye of Uadjit.

BETTY: Uadjit? The one the professor called the cobra goddess?

GAHIJI: The gem served as the goddess’s eye in a priceless gold statue of Uadjit discovered in Menkaura’s tomb. The jewel was removed and taken from the Land of the Pharaohs.

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JOHANN: (Rises.) Look, sir, your state department gave us permission to bring to the United States the relics which you see displayed here.

GAHIJI: The irresponsible act of corrupt bureaucrats!

ELENA: (Rises.) Mr. Amun, since it was our expedition that discovered the tomb, the Egyptian government generously allowed us to borrow a few of the items we found inside. In due course, they will be returned to Cairo as good as new... uh... you know what I mean.

ISIS: Woe be unto you if you fail!

ELVIRA: (Jumps up.) Again with the threats! You could file suit, Miss Newman.

GAHIJI: Not threats, madam. Warnings.

ELVIRA: Humph! (Sits.)

DIRK: (Returns to the lectern and holds up the jewel to the light.) A perfect stone. No flaws.

ISIS: (Gasps.) Look, my brother! It is The Eye. Magnificent! (BETTY snaps a photo of DIRK with the jewel. He blinks and looks upward as if checking the weather.)

JOHANN: As you can see, the Eye of Uadjit is well guarded. Look about the lecture hall. My museum guards have sworn they will die to protect it.

GUARD 1: (Turns to another GUARD beside him or her.) I didn’t swear that! Did you swear that?

GUARD 2: Yeah, but I had my fingers crossed.

RUSS: Mr. Vanderveer, what is your reaction to Mr. Amun’s warnings?

JOHANN: It’s all superstitious nonsense! Now, young man, I must ask you and your companion to be seated so we can begin. (RUSS and BETTY return to their seats. JOHANN turns to GAHIJI.) And as for you, sir, you and your sister must restrain yourselves or leave the museum.

GAHIJI: Very well. We will stay and hear from his own lips how this man (Indicating DIRK.) has defiled the resting place of Menkaura. (Takes ISIS’S arm and they sit. ELENA also sits.)

JOHANN: Jane, are you ready with the presentation?

JANE: (Remote control in hand.) Oh, yes, sir. I’m so nervous. It upsets me when people argue.

JOHANN: We’ll have no more disruptions, I promise you that. (Turns to DIRK.) Professor Carlton?

DIRK: (Looks up from his scrutiny of the jewel.) Hum?

JOHANN: We’re ready to begin.
DIRK: Go right ahead.

JOHANN: The lecture. You can start the lecture.

DIRK: The lecture? (Adjusts his glasses and squints at the AUDIENCE.) Oh. Quite. (JOHANN sits beside ELENA.) Good evening. I am... (Looks down at a note card.) Professor Dirk Carlton. First of all, I would like to thank Dr... (Gestures toward JOHANN, unable to remember his name.)

JOHANN: (A loud whisper.) Vanderveer.

DIRK: ...Vanderveer and the museum’s board of trustees for sponsoring my most recent expedition to Egypt, where I was fortunate to discover the tomb of the powerful pharaoh, Menkaura. He was a proud and handsome man, as you can tell by the ruler’s image on the cover of his sarcophagus. According to hieroglyphics found on ancient papyrus scrolls, Menkaura was a tyrant who had anyone who displeased him thrown to the crocodiles in the Nile River. (Digs the pencil eraser into his right ear.) Some said he was a madman. Hence his inclusion in the museum’s lecture series on “Monsters, Murderers and Madmen.”

GAHIJI: (Rises.) Blasphemy!

DIRK: Gesundheit. (GAHIJI sits.) Anyway, Elena took some breathtaking photographs of the priceless objects that were entombed with the pharaoh. You see, the Egyptians believed you could take your belongings with you on your journey through the underworld. Wrong! (Chuckles.) We found all sorts of treasures left behind, so to speak, in the tomb. The Eye of Uadjit (Holds up the jewel.) is the most valuable treasure I discovered, of course, but here are some of the other objects of art that lay beneath the desert sands for thousands of years. Jean?

JANE: Jane... Jane Trice, Professor Carlton. (Calls GUARD in charge of lights by name), will you turn off the stage lights? (The STAGE LIGHTS GO OUT, plunging the auditorium into DARKNESS.) Let’s see... well, I can’t see, but I think the button is right... here. (PROJECTOR COMES ON. The first slide, the door to Menkaura’s burial tomb on which the goddess Isis is engraved in gold, is projected onto the screen.)

DIRK: My first major discovery was this image of Isis engraved in gold on the door that leads to Menkaura’s burial chamber.

ISIS: (In awe.) My namesake.

DIRK: Breathtaking. When we deciphered the hieroglyphics, we found that they are magic spells to insure the pharaoh eternal life. Next slide, June.

JANE: Jane. (Forwards to the next slide, which depicts a statue of the goddess Selket [“SELL-ket”] guarding a golden shrine.)
DIRK: Ah, yes. Among the artifacts inside the tomb was this elaborate shrine which was protected by the statue of the goddess Selket. Selket wears the image of a scorpion on her head because the ancient Egyptians believed she had the power to cure their sting. Legend has it that an evil heir next in line for the Pharaoh Menotep’s (“MEN-oh-TEP”) throne killed the ruler by dropping a live scorpion into the pharaoh’s ear as he slept. But that’s another story. Next slide, Joan. (JANE forwards to the next slide, an awesome image of the pharaoh’s head, and immediately the room GOES TOTALLY DARK. JANE drops the remote. In the darkness, the actors playing LURENDA, ELVIRA, FRANCES, GAHIJI and ISIS will rise and step forward a few steps. JOHANN will rise and take three steps STAGE RIGHT. ELENA will rise and take a step or two STAGE RIGHT.)

JANE: Oh, dear. I must’ve pushed the wrong button. (DIRK groans.)

I’m sorry, Professor, I dropped the remote. I’ll find it in just a moment.

GUARD: Would you like me to turn on the lights?

JANE: (On the floor.) No, that’s okay. If I can just feel where... ah... here it is. (When she says this, the actors in the AUDIENCE will sit back down. In the dark, GAHIJI will take a gun from his pocket and lay it on the floor under his seat. JANE pushes the remote, and the PROJECTOR COMES BACK ON. The new slide, the pharaoh, is projected onto the screen, but DIRK is standing in front of it, so part of the slide is projected onto him. He stands facing RIGHT with a surprised expression on his face. His right hand is pressed against the side of his face. He turns slowly toward the AUDIENCE and will continue the turn until he’s facing LEFT. As the right side of his face becomes visible, we see that half the length of the eraser end of the pencil is sticking out between two fingers at his ear—blood is seeping between his fingers there. [See PRODUCTION NOTES.] When she sees this, JANE screams loudly. The actors in the AUDIENCE and hopefully the real members of the AUDIENCE will gasp and perhaps also cry out. When DIRK completes his turn, he wavers, then falls DOWN CENTER to crumple onto the floor, his head facing RIGHT, his back to the AUDIENCE. His hand still holds the pencil in place.)

JOHANN: The lights! Somebody turn on the lights! (GUARD TURNS ON THE STAGE LIGHTS. JOHANN is standing about three steps ONSTAGE from his chair DOWN LEFT. ELENA is also standing DOWN LEFT, a step or so from her chair. JANE TURNS THE PROJECTOR OFF.)

ELENA: What... what happened?

JOHANN: (Takes another step closer to the body.) This is tragic! It looks as if someone has stabbed Professor Carlton in the ear with his pencil! I think he’s dead! (ELENA gasps; her hand flies to her mouth.)
1 LURENDA half-rises from her seat, groans, then falls back onto her chair in a faint. ELVIRA fans her and tries to revive her. FRANCES bursts out laughing. GAHIJI and ISIS watch, their expressions wary. TONY crosses to DOWN RIGHT CENTER.

5 RUSS: (Jumping up.) Holy cow! What a story! Come on, Betty! BETTY: (Jumps up.) I’m right behind you! (They both rush onto the stage. He starts taking notes, and she starts flashing pictures of the body. JOHANN hurries to them, trying to stop them.)

JOHANN: No… wait… this will be terrible for the museum.

10 ELENA: Oh, Dirk. (Takes a handkerchief from her purse and begins to sob into it.) JANE: Oh, my gosh! Shouldn’t somebody see if he’s really… you know… not alive?

RUSS: In my line of work, I’ve seen lots of stiffness. Take my word for it, he’s a goner. (ELENA screams “Noooo!” and rushes to DIRK. She falls to her knees upstage of the body and buries her head on his chest, sobbing hysterically.)

FRANCES: (Sarcastically.) So you were just “friends,” huh?

BETTY: Someone ought to call the police. (ELVIRA rises. LURENDA regains consciousness.)

ELVIRA: I will. I’m acquainted with Lieutenant Morrow, the head of the homicide division.

JOHANN: Thank you, Ms. Gray. You’ll have to step into my office. The reception in the auditorium is horrible. (ELVIRA exits.)

TONY: Dr. Vanderveer, what about the jewel the professor was holding? You told me to keep an eye on it, and—

JOHANN: (Cuts in.) The jewel! I had forgotten about that. (To RUSS and BETTY.) Get back! Everybody, get back from the body! (RUSS and BETTY clear to stage right. ELENA rises, clutching her handkerchief and dabbing her eyes with it, and backs to stage left. TONY kneels upstage of the body and searches it.)

ELENA: Johann, I don’t feel at all well. I’m going to lie down on the sofa in your office, if that’s all right.

JOHANN: I suppose—

35 RUSS: (Cuts in.) Miss Newman, you really should stay here.

ELENA: I beg your pardon?

RUSS: I’ve covered the police beat before, and I know that the cops would prefer that all of the suspects remain at the crime scene.

LURENDA: (Rises.) Suspects?

40 RUSS: Sure. The professor is dead, and someone in this room is a murderer.
TONY: (Rises.) And a thief. The jewel is nowhere near the body.

JOHANN: The reporter is right. No one can leave.

ELENA: You let Elvira Gray go.

JOHANN: I wasn’t thinking. Anyway, how could she have committed a crime? She’s a lawyer. (To TONY.) Tony, station your people at the exits.

TONY: Yes, sir. (Goes DOWN THE STEPS into the AUDIENCE and will cross to the GUARDS along the walls, giving them instructions. They will move to cover all the exits in the room.)

RUSS: You’re right. The jewel might even be under one of the seats.

LURENDA: I’m financially responsible for this exhibit. We have to find that jewel! (Turns to the AUDIENCE.) Please, would you look under your chairs, and the chairs around you? (The AUDIENCE looks under their seats. GAHIJI and ISIS do not participate.)

JOHANN: If anyone finds the jewel, or anything out of the ordinary, please tell us now. (Hopefully a member of the AUDIENCE sitting near GAHIJI will report finding the gun under his chair. If not, FRANCES, who is seated on the same row near him, should be prepared to discover it.)

GAHIJI: (Rises, after the gun is reported, pats his pocket.) The weapon is mine. It must have fallen from my pocket during the excitement.

TONY: (Crosses to the person with the gun.) I’ll take charge of that. (Takes the gun.)

GAHIJI: That is not necessary. The professor was stabbed, not shot. Besides, I have a permit to carry the gun.

TONY: Can I see it?

GAHIJI: Unfortunately, I have left it in another jacket at my abode.

TONY: In that case, I’ll hold onto this until the police get here. You can explain to them why you think you need to carry a gun to a lecture.

GAHIJI: For protection. I carry the revolver wherever I go. I have many enemies.

TONY: I don’t doubt it in the least. (RETURNS TO THE STAGE, sticking the gun into his waistband. GAHIJI sits. LURENDA sits. ELVIRA ENTERS through an auditorium door and crosses to DOWN RIGHT below the stage.)

ELVIRA: I spoke with Lt. Morrow. He’s nearby and should be here any minute. He said he’ll arrange for the medical examiner to remove the body. (Sits.)

ELENA: The body? (Bursts into sobs again, and, still clutching her handkerchief, rushes to the body and drops to her knees UPSTAGE of it. She clasps him to her, crying wildly again.)
FRANCES: (Rises. To ELENA.) I’ll thank you to take your hands off of Dirk! He IS still my husband, even if he is dead! (Climbs the stairs.)

ELENA: (Rises and comes below the body and meets FRANCES DOWN CENTER. She puts her handkerchief into her pocket, her hysteria turning to anger.) Why do you care? You never loved him!

FRANCES: How do you love someone who’s never around? Dirk was always flying off to some godforsaken corner of the world. You ought to know, you were always right there beside him.

ELENA: You knew Dirk was an archeologist when you married him. He made a good living for you, and you never minded spending his money. Dirk told me how you drained his bank account with your frivolous shopping excursions.

FRANCES: That’s none of your business!

JOHANN: (Approaches them.) Elena... Frances... this is hardly the time or place—

ELENA: (Cuts in; ignoring him.) Actually, you’re better off with Dirk dead, aren’t you?

FRANCES: What do you mean?

ELENA: If the divorce had gone through, your shopping sprees left little to be divided between you. I know Dirk had a very large life insurance policy with you named as beneficiary. He was planning to change that, but he was killed before he could meet with his lawyer. As it stands, you’ll still collect on the policy.

FRANCES: Are you calling me a fortune hunter?

ELENA: Not just a fortune hunter, Frances. I’m calling you a murderer!

FRANCES: Why, you... (With a cry, she lunge at ELENA’S face with her fingernails. ELENA grabs her wrists, and they struggle.)

RUSS: (To BETTY.) Get them! (BETTY snaps some pictures of them. JOHANN grabs ELENA and pulls her LEFT as TONY grabs FRANCES and pulls her RIGHT, separating them. To BETTY.) The way things are going, I might get a whole book out of this.

BETTY: I’m getting you plenty of illustrations for it.

ELVIRA: (Rises.) Mrs. Carlton, if you wish to bring a slander suit—

FRANCES: (Cuts in, ignoring ELVIRA and jerking loose from TONY.) Oh, leave me alone. (Goes DOWN THE STEPS and back to her seat. ELVIRA sits. JOHANN releases ELENA. There is the SOUND OF A POLICE SIREN in the distance. It will grow louder and appear to stop outside the building.)

RUSS: It sounds like Lt. Morrow is coming.

JOHANN: Good. Things are about to get out of hand here.

End of script sample.
PRODUCTION NOTES

PROPERTIES

ONSTAGE: Lectern, screen, sarcophagus, two folding chairs, pedestals/display cases, locked display case containing jewel, other exhibits as desired. In auditorium: projector (possibly ceiling mounted), laptop computer (NOTE: The digital slide show is controlled from offstage. The laptop JANE uses in the auditorium is simply a prop with the monitor dimmed so as not to disrupt the darkness of the theatre during blackouts.)

BROUGHT ON, ACT ONE:
- Remote control (JANE)
- Gun in holster (TONY)
- Auto wind camera with flash (BETTY)
- Notebook, pencil (RUSS)
- Purse containing large handkerchief and compact (ELENA)
- Note cards, sharp pencil, pencil top half, sponge soaked with stage blood (DIRK)
- Pad, pen (DAN, VAL)
- Gun (GAHIJI)
- Stretcher (GUARDS)
- Fedora (KIRK)
- Seven folding chairs (JOHANN, JANE)

BROUGHT ON, ACT TWO:
- Camera, pad, pencil (BETTY)
- Notebook, pencil (RUSS)
- Gun in shoulder holster (DAN)
- Purse (ELENA)
- Handcuffs (VAL)

HOUSE OF HORRORS EXHIBIT

The theatregoers’ involvement should begin the moment they enter the theatre. Set up the lobby as a horror museum. The lights should be low to create a spooky mood, with the exhibits lighted to stand out. Somber music can be playing.

The main exhibits should be replicas of famous monsters, madmen and murderers in history and fiction. Mannequins can be dressed to represent these figures, but the most effective way to portray them would be to have extras, costumed appropriately, to enact life-sized, mechanical figures.

For example, a Dracula could be crouched over a female victim reclining on a sofa, bleeding puncture marks on her neck.

Periodically, as the audience files by, the figures can “activate”: Dracula will swing around at the waist, bare his fangs and hiss at an
audience member. Then he will bend back over the victim and lower his mouth to her neck. She will let out a blood-curdling scream. After a beat, they will return to their original positions and hold them until it’s time to repeat the business as new people approach. Since they are supposedly mechanical, standing actors will be careful not to move their feet where, theoretically, their wiring enters the floor and is fed to a computer. A suggested list of possible choices for the exhibits follows.

In addition to involving as few or as many extras as you wish to portray the exhibits, you can also enlist other extras, male and female, to play museum GUARDS. They can stand beside the exhibits (which can be roped off as in a real museum) and welcome visitors, warn them not to touch the exhibits, and even give them mini-biographies of the characters depicted. If the audience is lingering at curtain time, the GUARDS can prompt them to enter the theatre by saying, “If you’ll move into the auditorium, the lecture is about to begin.” After the murder in the play, during intermission, the GUARDS will question the witnesses (audience members) about what they observed. The GUARDS’ costumes can be uniforms, if practical, or black pants and white shirts with name tags on the shoulder that read “Museum Guard.”

The actors playing the exhibits should resume their positions during intermission and following the play as the audience leaves.

In a school situation, a number of different departments can become involved in the production of the play. For example, the Art Department can make simulated knives, axes, Egyptian artifacts and such to be exhibited; the Home Economics Department can make costumes for the historical figures exhibited such as Lucretia Borgia, Attila the Hun, Nero, and such; History classes can research these figures and write the narrations for the GUARDS’ mini-lectures, as can the English Department provide information about fictional characters such as Dracula and Frankenstein.

The House of Horrors exhibit can provide a virtual reality ambiance, and a memorable part of the theatregoers’ experience.

**SUGGESTED FIGURES TO EXHIBIT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hangman/Headsman</th>
<th>Lady Macbeth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucretia Borgia</td>
<td>Dracula/his bride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolfman</td>
<td>Mummy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zombie</td>
<td>Alien</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack the Ripper</td>
<td>Mad scientist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankenstein/bride</td>
<td>Al Capone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lizzie Borden    Attila the Hun
Nero        Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde
Gorgon     Henry VIII

SUGGESTED DISPLAYS TO EXHIBIT

- guillotine
- scaffold
- iron maiden
- rack
- scientist’s lab
- dungeon
- electric chair
- weapons

If elaborate displays are not practical, a gallery of photos of some of the characters and items listed above will serve to set the mood.

DIRK’S MURDER

It is simple to create the illusion of Dirk’s murder. Have the eraser half of a pencil like the one Dirk carries onstage placed on the lectern before the play, if you don’t allow the audience onstage before the show, or on a shelf under it if you do. This short pencil should be about four inches long. With it, place a small, flat sponge soaked with stage blood on a container by the pencil. Cover both with a cloth to hide them if you let the audience onstage. When the projector goes out, Dirk will hold the cut-off end of the pencil between two fingers of his right hand, sticking out, put the sponge on the inside of his right hand, and put his hand at the side of his face with the pencil at his ear. As he turns toward the audience, he’ll press the sponge against his cheek, causing the blood to seep out between his fingers.

PROGRAM NOTE

In your program list the role of “Professor Carlton” without using his first name with the name of the actor who plays both professors (unless you use real twins, of course). This way, the entrance of the second Professor Carlton will be a surprise for your audience.

BLOCKING ADJUSTMENTS

An auditorium was imagined with doors STAGE RIGHT in the auditorium and doors offstage STAGE RIGHT leading to the theatre’s lobby. You will need to adjust your blocking to suit the exits in your particular theatre, of course.

SIGHT LINES

By having part of the action take place on the floor level in front of the stage, the actors will be working on what is essentially a two-level set. If feasible, you might consider placing a low platform between
the edge of the stage and the front row of seats in the auditorium. That would elevate the actors in the audience somewhat if they are not clearly visible without one. As noted in the script, this playing area should be well lighted also. The actors in the audience who speak to one another will be in profile to the viewers at the time, of course. When the actors in the audience speak to someone on the stage, they are usually blocked at opposite sides of the playing areas so that the actors on the floor level can cheat open somewhat in order to be in near-profile to the audience; these actors should feel free to move within their designated areas as needed to keep open. It will not hurt if an occasional line is delivered with the actors facing upstage, or if an actor turns away from the onstage actor he’s speaking to and toward the audience. We don’t always stand face to face with the people we’re talking to in real life. There are a few short, funny lines delivered by the front row actors when they’re seated. By this time, the audience will recognize the speakers’ voices, so they don’t have to rise to deliver their gag lines.

**ADDITIONAL AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION ACTIVITIES**

During intermission, you might have two actors (male and/or female) play a TV newscaster and a TV cameraperson. Videotape the newscaster interviewing audience members (as if the tape will be shown on a TV newscast that night), asking them for their observations concerning the murder. No doubt the cast would enjoy watching the tapes later, perhaps at a cast party.

As an extra money maker, you might have Dan and Val available in the lobby after the play to pose for instant photos handcuffed to patrons who will pay for a picture as a keepsake of the show. Patrons might also pay to be photographed with some of the figures in the House of Horrors exhibit.

**ABOUT THE DIGITAL SLIDE SHOW**

You can download the lecture slides for this play either as individual photographs or as a PowerPoint presentation at:

www.PioneerDrama.com/MuseumLectureSlides.asp

If you are unable to download the files, Pioneer Drama Service can provide you with a CD-ROM with the needed files at no extra cost.
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