

# **NO THANKS, MR. SHAKESPEARE**

**TEN MINUTE PLAY**

**By E.R. Schultz**

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**HEUER PUBLISHING LLC**

**P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406**

**TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011**

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**SYNOPSIS:** A Hollywood executive is faced with the seemingly common task of reviewing a writer's story for production. However, the tiny quirk is that the writer in question is none other than William Shakespeare and the story in question is none other than *Hamlet*. Comedy ensues as the great writer is forced to come face to face with the entertainment standards of the movie business.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(1 MAN, 2 EITHER)*

RECEPTIONIST (m/f) ..... A receptionist who has worked in Zane's office for a number of years and has grown accustomed to the mannerisms of both her employer and Hollywood

ZANE (m/f)..... A major Hollywood executive who is a business person in a creative person's field. Zane tolerates the creative aspects of the business while his true interest is in all the superficial perks that come with being a Hollywood executive at a major studio.

SHAKESPEARE (m)..... A young up-and-coming writer with a classical writing style and old-fashioned ideas about the sanctity of storytelling.

### **PROPS**

- ☐ Script (optional)

**SET DESIGN**

The stage consists of a desk with a chair behind it and another chair facing it from the front. A door should be placed on the opposite side of the stage from the desk. The entire set should mirror the simple environment of an executive's office.

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**AT RISE:**

*The scene consists of an office with a door on one end of the stage and a desk on the other end. In front of the desk is a chair. Sitting behind the desk is ZANE, who is reclined in his chair and dressed in a nice business suit. ZANE is currently talking on the phone.*

**ZANE:** *(On the phone.)* So I'm like, "Look, Officer, I don't know one way or the other, but I've got 50 dollars in my pocket that says these horses were dead when I got here." And then, you know what he says? Not only does he refuse, but now the studio's getting sued by like eight different animal rights groups. I know, right? It's like we're making movies in Communist China.

*RECEPTIONIST enters.*

**RECEPTIONIST:** Mr. Zane, there's a writer here to see you.

**ZANE:** *(On the phone.)* Look, George, I've got to go. There's some writer I'm supposed to meet with. Yeah, it's been good talking to you. We've got to do lunch sometime. We can hit up that Mexican restaurant on 5<sup>th</sup>. We'll order everything, eat nothing, and tip even less. It'll be great. Have your people call my people and let's make it happen. Alright, talk to you later, Clooney.

*ZANE hangs up phone.*

**ZANE:** Okay, so who am I meeting with?

**RECEPTIONIST:** He's a writer. He wrote that script about the guy with the thing.

**ZANE:** Oh, that one. Well, alright, let's get this over with. Send him in.

**RECEPTIONIST:** You can come in now, Mr. Shakespeare.

*SHAKESPEARE enters. RECEPTIONIST exits.*

**ZANE:** Mr. Shakespeare, it is so nice to finally meet you face to face.

**SHAKESPEARE:** I assure you, the weight of this honorable meeting falls not only on your shoulders but upon mine as well in equal if not greater measure. Indeed, the magic dust of fate's mystical plan has been sprinkled upon both our lives to lead us to this moment. May the same serendipitous power soon usher the seeds of creation into an orchard of brightly-hued trees and allow us to feast on the many fruits they shall bear.

**ZANE:** I was literally thinking the exact same thing. How awesome is that? Anyway, I loved the script.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Truly?

**ZANE:** Truly. The story, the characters, it all really registered with me on an emotional level. I kid you not when I say that when I got to the scene at the end, where the primary battle robot is mortally wounded by the evil ninja's exploding throwing stars, my eyes got a little bit misty. I would have just let loose the tears right there if it hadn't been for the fact that my spray tan wasn't done drying. So basically what I'm saying is I'm ready to commit. I'm thinking we just green light it right here and now. I can give it a bottomless budget, top-flight director, and Eddie Murphy can play all the parts.

**SHAKESPEARE:** There must be some mistake...

**ZANE:** No, don't worry. I too was a little skeptical at first, but once you see him in action, he's like a chameleon. You slap a fat suit on the guy, and it's like, "Whoa, where'd Eddie go?"

**SHAKESPEARE:** No, the presumptive mistake resided not within the talents of Edward Murphy but rather within the synopsis of my story.

**ZANE:** I'm going to be 100% honest with you...I have no idea what that means.

**SHAKESPEARE:** My story consisted not of "battle robots" or "exploded throwing stars" but rather with the disruption of a son losing his father and the political and emotional chaos that ensued.

**ZANE:** So let me get this straight. Are you telling me that you did not write the script for "Revenge of the Battle-Bots from Hell: Attack of the Ninjas"?

**SHAKESPEARE:** I must confess I did not.

**ZANE:** Okay, well, what script did you write?

**SHAKESPEARE:** "Hamlet."

**ZANE:** Oh...and were there any exploding throwing stars in “Hamlet”?

**SHAKESPEARE:** No.

**ZANE:** Okay, okay, it’s all coming back to me now, “Hamlet.” That isn’t the one about the whiny prince in Denmark, is it?

**SHAKESPEARE:** The story does indeed focus on Hamlet, prince of Denmark, and son of a king whose throne and whose wife have both been cruelly snatched from his grasp.

**ZANE:** And just to be clear, you’re absolutely certain that there were no exploding throwing stars of any kind?

**SHAKESPEARE:** None whatsoever.

**ZANE:** Okay, okay, fair enough. So I actually did have one little note: something that stuck out at me as I was reading it.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Yes?

**ZANE:** It could have used a few more exploding throwing stars.

**SHAKESPEARE:** More? But the tale contained none to begin with.

**ZANE:** Exactly. I was consistently struck by the noticeable absence of throwing stars, particularly of the exploding variety.

**SHAKESPEARE:** If you would be so good as to indulge one humble question: just where in “Hamlet” did you envision the introduction of exploding throwing stars?

**ZANE:** Well, mostly in the beginning and also the end...and a few times in the middle.

**SHAKESPEARE:** I must confess myself confused.

**ZANE:** Join the club! Because—I’m going to be honest here— every line of dialogue may as well have been written in Portuguese.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Pentameter, I wrote it in iambic pentameter.

**ZANE:** Yes, well, my high school did not offer iambic pentameter. I barely got through third-period French as it was. If you go around throwing iambic pentameter this way and that, I’m liable to just give up entirely.

**SHAKESPEARE:** It is the tool with which I constructed the dialogue.

**ZANE:** Look, I feel for you, man. I really do. And hey, I love iambic-pentameter as an idea. But I mean, a lot of things sound great as ideas, but then once you thrust them into practice...you know? Like a buddy of mine thought it would be cool to create a gaming preserve where he could hunt homeless people. Sounds great as an idea, but in reality, you know what you get?

**SHAKESPEARE:** What?

**ZANE:** A butt-load of dead homeless people. You know?

**SHAKESPEARE:** I suppose.

**ZANE:** Now look, Bill—

**SHAKESPEARE:** Will.

**ZANE:** Of course. Now look, Will, it's not like the dialogue's totally hopeless. It's just all over the place. It is utterly baffling. Take this part, for example:

"To be, or not to be, that is the question:  
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles  
And by opposing end them. To die—to sleep,  
No more"

*Pause.*

**ZANE:** I mean, what!?!

**SHAKESPEARE:** That soliloquy is Hamlet finally verbalizing the turmoil which has been raging inside him ever since the revelation of his uncle's involvement in his father's murder.

**ZANE:** Yeah, that's cute and all, but how about instead we try having him say something like:

"I'm a big bad piece of royalty with an explosive case of being pissed off, and the only question I'm worried about is: how am I gonna deliver this can of whup-ass to my uncle's front door?"

**SHAKESPEARE:** That's not quite what I had in mind...

**ZANE:** I get that a lot. Look, think of it this way, you've run the script around half the track. Now it's time to hand off the baton and take this thing to the finish line.

**SHAKESPEARE:** It's simply that...I don't believe that dialogue is consistent with Hamlet's character.

**ZANE:** You're exactly right. Hamlet would never say that.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Thank you.

**ZANE:** But you know who would say that? Chazz McRifle.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Pardon me?

**ZANE:** Chazz McRifle: world-class warrior trained by Japanese monks in the Alps.

**SHAKESPEARE:** I foresee several problems.

**ZANE:** Like what?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Well, for one thing, the Alps are not in Japan.

**ZANE:** Well, that's the magic of motion pictures. People do all kinds of crazy stuff to get things onto the screen. Did you know E.T. was a Muppet? Yeah, that's right, a Muppet. Middle America cried their eyes out over Kermit the Frog dipped in brown paint.

**SHAKESPEARE:** What—? I don't even— What is your point?

**ZANE:** My point is I can put the Alps in the Florida Keys if I want to. My point is that Chazz McRifle knows 55 different ways to kill a man, and he's out for revenge.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Given the way this conversation has gone thus far, this question is practically superfluous, but are you actually suggesting we change the name of "Hamlet" to "Chazz McRifle"?

**ZANE:** Not suggesting, stating, stating a fact. The fact that's gonna make us millionaires...or make me a millionaire and make you...you know...above the poverty line. I'm excited for it. I'm talking big money: Chazz McRifle money. You know what I'm talking about? You smell what I'm cooking?

**SHAKESPEARE:** I do not. I most emphatically do not "smell what you are cooking." The play I wrote was entitled "Hamlet," not "Chazz McRifle." In fact, "McRifle" isn't even the name of a person, it's just the name of a weapon with some verbal flair.

**ZANE:** Well that's a fine dose of irony Mr. "Shake-Spear."

**SHAKESPEARE:** What Prince of Denmark would be named "McRifle"?

**ZANE:** None whatsoever, which is why we're gonna set it in Vegas.

**SHAKESPEARE:** I'm sorry, what!?!

**ZANE:** Las Vegas, it's in Nevada, Elvis played there during his fat later years. Long Live the King: the poor chubby slob. It's actually—

**SHAKESPEARE:** Not “what” as in “what is Las Vegas,” “what” as in “what are you doing moving the story from Denmark?”

**ZANE:** Oh, that? Well, I'm gonna level with you, dude. I have no idea where Denmark is.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Well, it's probably in Japan...with the Alps.

**ZANE:** Okay, I'm just going to look past the condescension and focus on the fact that you're starting to show signs of a sense of humor, which, I'm not gonna lie, I'm kind of loving.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Tell me, Mr. Zane, did you even read my script?

**ZANE:** Yes. I read it from the beginning to the end.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Really?

**ZANE:** Well, I read the beginning, and then I read the end. I skipped the middle stuff. Sorry to throw that on you, buddy. That must be a surprise.

**SHAKESPEARE:** That you skipped the middle? Hardly. I'm just shocked to learn you can read.

**ZANE:** Again with the sense of humor. The novelty is starting to wear off, but the love's still there.

**SHAKESPEARE:** I will divulge what does come as a surprise.

**ZANE:** And what is that?

**SHAKESPEARE:** That in your cavalcade of critiques—

**ZANE:** Suggestions.

**SHAKESPEARE:** —the ending has not come up. I would think that the way the story ends for Hamlet might be somewhat incongruous with your vision for the odyssey of Mr. McRifle.

**ZANE:** I actually loved the ending.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Really?

**ZANE:** ...as an idea. Naturally, some minor edits will have to be made.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Such as?

**ZANE:** Well, for one thing, in the edited script, his uncle is a cyborg, and his girlfriend—

**SHAKESPEARE:** —is dead.

**ZANE:** Dead? When did that happen?

**SHAKESPEARE:** In the middle stuff.

**ZANE:** Well, in the new version, she's going to be far more alive and far more of a stripper.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Anything else?

**ZANE:** Well, the guy he fights at the end?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Laertes.

**ZANE:** Yes, him. Well, he's going to be far less of a guy and far more of a three-headed winged rhino summoned from the depths of Hell.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Summoned by whom?

**ZANE:** The uncle.

**SHAKESPEARE:** I thought the uncle was a cyborg.

**ZANE:** He's also a wizard.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Of course he is.

**ZANE:** So Mr. Shakespeare, what do you say? Do we have a deal?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Well, Mr. Zane, though fate would seem to have brought us together to form a compact of creation, I see now that it was destruction that has plagued your mind from this meeting's conception. And so, like a bird from the northern coast as winter approaches, I must flee from the salacious reach of your grasp.

*Pause.*

**ZANE:** So is that a "yes"?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Not unless you have something to offer me beyond cyborgs, wizards, and the Japanese Alps. Good day to you, sir, may our paths never cross again.

*SHAKESPEARE begins to exit.*

**ZANE:** Wait!

*SHAKESPEARE stops and turns to face ZANE.*

**SHAKESPEARE:** What?

**ZANE:** Lions.

**SHAKESPEARE:** Excuse me?

**ZANE:** Lions. We do the whole thing but with lions. Instead of a royal family, it's a big pride of lions. Instead of Las Vegas—

**SHAKESPEARE:** Denmark!

**ZANE:** Denmark, sure. Instead of Denmark, we have a rock in the middle of the jungle plain. We have his dad be the big king lion and then his uncle can be the mean lion and then we can have the Chazz McRifle—or Hamlet—lion be like the heroic but kind of uncertain type lion cub who goes off after big-daddy lion dies to grow up and mature. And then at the end, Little Hamlet Lion comes back and fights it out with the Uncle Lion and then feeds the Uncle Lion to the hyenas—oh, by the way, there are hyenas—and then he can take back the big Pride Rock, and it'll be a great moment. Hamlet-Lion roaring in the wind with the rain coming down, having reclaimed his father's empire, how great does that sound?

*Pause.*

**SHAKESPEARE:** That may be the most ridiculous idea I've ever heard.

**ZANE:** So that's a "maybe"?

**SHAKESPEARE:** Good morrow to you, Mr. Zane.

*SHAKESPEARE turns to exit.*

**ZANE:** Alright, hey buddy, I'm sorry this one didn't work out, but if you ever have a script about a bunch of young, rich, beautiful people getting together in the woods, you give me a call! Maybe taking a little fairy dust, you know what I'm talking about? You smell what I'm cooking?

*SHAKESPEARE exits.*

**ZANE:** Well, he's gone.

*RECEPTIONIST enters.*

**RECEPTIONIST:** How did it go?

**ZANE:** About as bad as my last two marriages.

**RECEPTIONIST:** Was it as bad as the belly-dancer?

**ZANE:** Not quite, but we were moving into that territory.

**RECEPTIONIST:** You tried the lion thing, didn't you?

**ZANE:** I'm telling you that's a billion-dollar idea.

**RECEPTIONIST:** Sure it is.

**ZANE:** Alright, what's next on the schedule?

**RECEPTIONIST:** There's actually someone waiting just outside.

**ZANE:** Oh, is this the guy who wrote that thing about the redneck homeless boys looking for treasure?

**RECEPTIONIST:** Yes.

**ZANE:** Alright, send him in.

**RECEPTIONIST:** *(To someone outside the door.)* Mr. Twain, you can come on in now.

**THE END**