

Kynges Games

by George Sapio

Cast Breakdown (24)

Richard PlantagenetMale. 18 in 1471, 32 in 1485; not tall, dark, serious, clever
Richard EastwellMale. 46 in 1515
A/Prince EdwardMale. 13 in 1483, 45 in 1515
B/Prince RichardMale. 11 in 1483, 43 in 1515
Anthony, Lord RiversMale, 40-50s
Sir Thomas MoreMale. 35, well-mannered, friendly, but full of himself
HaskinsMale, 60s; gruff
HastingsMale, 50s
Queen ElizabethFemale. 40s, older than Edward V
DorsetMale. 20s
Edward IVMale. Early 40s, decisive, smart, but a reckless playboy
LovellMale. 32 in 1483; loyal, practical
BuckinghamMale. 28 in 1483. fop.
Edward VMale. 13 in 1483; smart for his age and much like his father
GreyMale. 20s
Bishop MortonMale. 30-40s; wily, humorless
Henry VIMale. 61; old, beaten, cryptic
Archbishop BouchierMale. 50s-60s
Edmund ShaaMale. 30-50s; comic relief
CecilyFemale. 60s; sharp as a tack, easily angered
ExecutionerEither gender. Late teens-50s
Elizabeth of YorkFemale. 18
Messenger /GuardEither gender. Late teens-50s
Queen Anne(not quite dead yet, no lines, almost a prop)

Written for 10 actors. For workshop, we had a female in her 20s play A/Cecily/Prince Edward.
Females also played: both Richards; Lovell/Executioner.

Doubling:

Richard Plantagenet/Richard Eastwell (must be doubled)
Haskins/Hastings (recommended doubling)
A/Grey/Elizabeth of York/Cecily
B/Edward V/Dorset
More/Rivers/Messenger/Queen Anne
Henry VI/Bouchier/Shaa
Edward IV/Morton/Guard
Lovell/Executioner

Settings: Various. (Best accomplished with two small tables, several chairs.)

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Act I, Scene I: Sometime in 1515, Eastwell, Kent

A tavern. It is early evening, just after dark. Three patrons scattered about the tables; two talking, one man seated in the corner, writing carefully. An innkeeper, HASKINS, hobbles in, having sustained an injury in one leg at some time past. THOMAS MORE enters. He is dressed well.]

MORE

A good evening to you sir. Do you have room for a traveler this night?

HASKINS

How long will you be staying?

MORE

Just the night.

HASKINS

As you wish, sir. On such a cold night I could allow you a room at minimum cost—

A

At only twice the normal price.

B

One of Haskins better bargains, I warrant.

HASKINS

Enough out of you! This is business here! My apologies, sir, but one should be counseled to interview one's potential in-laws before a marriage.

MORE

A principle that many would agree with. I'm sure your offer is quite generous. What fare do you offer?

HASKINS

Cold vegetables and mutton. Cooked this very same day.

B

'Twas cooked yesterday also.

A

And the day before!

HASKINS

We are not the king's kitchen, sir, but whatever failure in quality there may be, I assure you, it is redeemed by quantity.

MORE

Then do not bless me with the magnitude of your table that my meager appetite makes it seem everlasting.

[HASKINS disappears into the kitchen trying to figure that out]

MORE

A good evening to you sirs. I take it by the innkeeper's remark that one of you is legally related to him?

A

Both of us, sir.

B

Being honored to be each other's brother.

A

And one of us—

B

We can never remember which—

A

Being married to Haskins' daughter.

B

We're a tight family.

MORE

Indeed, he seems almost loving.

A

Well sir, being a man of business, he is naturally a thief and a liar, and no good is ever likely to come of him.

B

But he is family, and that does count for something.

A

Some days it seems to count for everything. What brings you through Eastwell, good sir?

MORE

I am on my way home to London, having had some business in Canterbury.

B

A man of some note then.

A

What is your profession, sir?

MORE

I am a lawyer.

A&B

Ahhh...a lawyer...

[They turn their attention away from the "lawyer"]

MORE

Have I offended?

EASTWELL

Most folks here are satisfied with the distance they keep from London. From the stories one hears, it seems that once one is...noticed, one is never entirely forgotten.

MORE

An apt observation. And having been noticed myself, I may not recommend it wholeheartedly. I am learning the art of not noticing many things these days. Including those whom I might buy a round of ale some late night.

A

A worthy fellow!

B

May fortune grin at you, sir.

MORE

I see you are engaged in some writing.

EASTWELL

A trifle. Nothing but some casual remembrances of a life most un-noteworthy.

MORE

Surely not your own then.

EASTWELL

Most assuredly my own. To belittle someone else's would be ungentlemanly.

MORE

An interesting outlook. I happen to be engaged in an exercise of biography myself.

EASTWELL

For a generous patron I hope?

MORE

For no one. Like yours, it is merely an exercise, a personal distraction.

EASTWELL

There are only two reasons for writing a biography: glory or example. which is yours?

MORE

Most assuredly not glory. There is little to recommend my subject for praise.

EASTWELL

Then you seek to elucidate by example. It's a moralization. Like a preacher in a pulpit.

MORE

Indeed, that is a path I nearly trod once. You are perceptive, sir. You glimpse a man's soul readily.

EASTWELL

That, sir, is why I drink. I wonder whose life you use as a tool for illustrating your own convictions. You must have been quite moved by your subject.

MORE

The subject has already passed through the worms' road to his bed in Lucifer's hip pocket, and my trivial study will more than likely meet judgment day residing forgotten in some dark closet.

EASTWELL

Writing is not an easy task. To speak of it as trivial and nothing more...

MORE

Oh, it is most definitely more. Thomas More, at your service.

EASTWELL

Richard of Eastwell. I am honored to make your acquaintance, my lawyer friend, who is more than the eye sees. It is not often one meets a peripatetic prosecutor with a penchant for prose.

A

Here he goes again.

B

Good sir, you best watch yourself. Our Richard could do this for hours.

MORE

And it is almost as uncommon to meet a country courtier composing so concentratedly at this curious o'clock.

A

Ye've got true competition now, Richard!

B

Yea, ye've taken on a lawyer, a right smithy of words!

EASTWELL

Please, join me at table.

MORE

[*To EASTWELL*] What is your profession?

EASTWELL

I am a simple bricklayer.

MORE

Simple I much doubt. Some been heard to remark that good masonry is the secret of a king's long tenure.

EASTWELL

Are you suggesting that the secret to a long kingship is in a—forgive me—builder of bulwarks?

MORE

A planner of parapets.

EASTWELL

A manufacturer of moats.

MORE

A creator of crenellations.

EASTWELL

Truly sir, it is a pleasure to meet you. One rarely encounters educated men in this part of the country. Aside from myself and Haskins, who has been known to decipher a bill of fare with truly remarkable results, there are but few who read, much less write.

A

Ahem.

B

Cough.

EASTWELL

Who is your subject, sir?

MORE

The late usurper and child-murderer, Richard Plantagenet.

[The pub quiets; EASTWELL grins. B exits]

EASTWELL

A worthy subject, sir. His story has much to teach others.

MORE

Indeed, a lesson in tyranny.

EASTWELL

And the cruel vicissitudes of fate.

MORE

Ambition's example.

EASTWELL

And haste's victim. What, sir, has caused you to record the sad tale of the last York?

MORE

It is a tale of cruelty and naked ambition; a fine exercise for a writer.

EASTWELL

And certainly, one that the present monarch would surely applaud.

MORE

It is neither destined nor designed for the eyes of our good and righteous king, Henry the eighth. I am sure my trifling effort would not be of interest to one so...

EASTWELL

I would think, sir, that the son of he who brought down Richard's destruction would appreciate such a piece of useful propaganda.

MORE

Do you know the king?

EASTWELL

I have no great skill and less ambition. Any knowledge, therefore, of me to him would be of a kind almost guaranteed to be of some ill consequence.

MORE

You would rather be not worthy than noteworthy?

EASTWELL

Not noticed, sir. Are you a friend of the king?

MORE

I consider myself his friend and loyal subject. But despite my best efforts, I seem to periodically prove a thorn in the sides of the Tudors. My intent is true, but my execution seems to be lacking. No, I do not think I am so well ranked.

EASTWELL

Having so well rankled?

[HASKINS & B enter]

MORE

In any event, my poor scribbling will gain the obscurity it so richly deserves. Others after me will no doubt resurrect Richard for myriad purposes, probably hacking out a sensational noise to titillate groundlings out for an afternoon's distraction. One could tire of such. . . boar-baiting.

HASKINS

Bless me! It is time for our poor establishment to retire for the night. May I show you to your room?

MORE

Surely it is not that late, good sir. I've not even eaten yet.

HASKINS

We always close early on Tuesdays. It is a custom of the house.

EASTWELL

I think we may have a little more time, may we not? If you like, I would be happy to lock the door and see to our guest's comfort.

HASKINS

Well, err, umm...

EASTWELL

[*To MORE*] Please do me the honor of an ale or two's conversation. I have become quite starved for good intellectual pursuit, you see. Haskins, fetch a pint for lawyer More, who is no great friend of the king, and one for myself.

HASKINS

By your own request it is then. And I'll not have any of it later.

MORE

Sir, I have no wish to—

A

It is no use, sir.

B

Our Richard is quite the hardheaded man.

EASTWELL

What source material do you use? Poor Richard's time was surely before your own.

MORE

I have the very testimony of Cardinal John Morton. He was there, sir, then only a bishop at the councils of King Richard. He is an honest man, indeed he served Henry Tudor and now his son. It is his words I depend upon. I was but a lad of seven at the time of Bosworth.

EASTWELL

Then I should be most interested to know More. You seem a man of deep integrity, sir, and I am right about most folk. What strikes me is that a privy councilor of that "wretched usurper and child murderer" should survive to thrive under the house of Tudor.

MORE

It is the simple nature of politics.

EASTWELL

But politics is a nest of simples, and therefore a complexity. Let us know of your work, sir...

[Lights darken to illuminate only MORE.]

MORE

You will remember that Richard's father, the Duke of York, was slain by Queen Margaret's army at Wakefield leaving three sons, Edward, George, and Richard. All three were greedy and ambitious of authority. Edward, revenging his father's death, overthrew King Henry VI, and attained the crown. But Margaret, the strong-willed and ambitious wife of said Henry, did not give up so easily, and it wasn't until several years later when their forces met at Tewkesbury...

Act I, Scene ii: May 4, 1471 – Tewkesbury, England

[Immediately two spots come up, one on each side of the stage, illuminating A & B]

A

It is a typical gloomy English day here in Tewkesbury

B

And things do not look good for Queen Margaret's army...

A

I'd watch that "queen" talk if I were you. It may not be true in half an hour.

B

All right then. Margaret of Anjou, the Lancastrian claimant to the queenship of England.

A

And Edward—the Yorkist claimant to the kingship of England—...d's army is clearly winning the day from Margaret's forces, which are going down like pints in a public house.

B

Fill me up, barkeep.

A

Already Richard of Gloucester's forces have routed the Lancastrian right flank and, along with his brother Edward, the Yorkist claimant to the kingship of England, are now bent on destroying Margaret's central force.

B

It's a grudge match.

A

Indeed. Margaret's forces, as you will recall, slew Edward and Richard's father, the duke of York, way back in 1460

B

The result of an extraordinarily ill-timed sudden charge by York against Margaret's army.

A

Got his hair cut that day.

B

A man not known for good decisions in critical situations.

A

And now back to the action today. There's a push by Margaret's forces. I can see her son, the Prince of Wales, advancing... advancing...now retreating... retreating...hastily retreating...

B

Margaret's forces have been routed and cannot get to him. The queen's son is rapidly being overtaken by another of King Edward's brothers, and that will be George, the politically... umm... ambiguous Duke of Clarence...

A

Ooh, good word.

B

Who seems to be fighting on his brothers' side today.

A

At least for the moment. The day is young.

B

He's already tried usurping the throne from his brother the king once. Today he's fighting against the forces he so recently backed himself.

A

That George does keep one guessing.

B

And it looks like—yes! The Duke of Clarence's forces are overtaking the Prince of Wales!

A

The Prince has dismounted and has dropped to his knees.

B

He's signaling for fair quarter.

A

The Duke of Clarence has dismounted and is now approaching...

B

Long shot. A fiver says mercy.

A

Hah! You're on.

B

The Prince of Wales is begging for succor.

A

But Clarence is . . . having none of it! The sword goes up...

B

The sword comes down...

A & B

OUCH!

[A takes B's fiver]

B

Bloody hell.

A

And that looks very much like it for young Edward.

B

It's clearly over here at Tewkesbury.

A

The Lancastrians seem to be quite finished. The Prince of Wales is clearly dead, Margaret has been taken, and that leaves only—

B

Henry the sixth, the once-Lancastrian king

A

Who is at present lodged in the Tower of London.

B

Where the grade of his accommodations seems to change frequently.

He's on the throne, **A**

He's in the dungeon, **B**

He's on the throne, **A**

Dungeon redux? **B**

[A & B wave their hands mid-air: "I don't think so gesture"]