

Kynges Games

by George Sapio

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Cast Breakdown

Richard Plantagenet.....	Male. 18 in 1471, 32 in 1485; serious, clever, charming
Richard Eastwell.....	Male. 46 in 1515
A/Prince Edward.....	Male. 13 in 1483, 45 in 1515
B.....	Male. 11 in 1483, 43 in 1515
Anthony, Lord Rivers.....	Male, 40-50s
Sir Thomas More	Male. 35, well-mannered, friendly, but slightly full of himself
Haskins.....	Male, 60s; gruff
Hastings.....	Male, 50s
Queen Elizabeth	Female. 40s, older than Edward V
Dorset	Male. 20s
Edward IV.....	Male. Early 40s, decisive, smart, but a reckless playboy
Lovell	Male. 32 in 1483; loyal, practical
Buckingham	Male. 28 in 1483. fop.
Edward V	Male. 13 in 1483; smart for his age and much like his father
Grey.....	Male. 20s
Bishop Morton	Male. 30-40s; wily, humorless
Henry VI	Male. 61; old, beaten, cryptic
Archbishop Bouchier	Male. 50s-60s
Edmund Shaa	Male. 30-50s; comic relief
Cecily	Female. 60s; sharp as a tack, easily angered
Executioner	Either gender. Late teens-50s
Elizabeth of York	Female. 18
Messenger /Guard.....	Either gender. Late teens-50s
Queen Anne	(not quite dead yet, no lines, almost a prop)

Written for 10 actors. Suggested doubling:

Richard Plantagenet/Richard Eastwell (must be doubled)

Haskins/Hastings (recommended doubling)

Elizabeth

Buckingham

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: Intended to be established with minimal set requirements.

Various locations: Pub in Kent, 1515; Tewkesbury field, Tower of London/Council Chamber, Westminster chamber, Bosworth field, St. Paul's Cathedral, Inn at Northampton.

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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.

A

He's on the throne,

B

He's in the dungeon,

A

He's on the throne,

B

Dungeon redux?

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

Act I, Scene iii: May 21, 1471 – The Tower of London

[The sounds of distant revelry. A large, boisterous party. A drunken cry of "Long Live the King!" The noise fades as HENRY VI enters. RICHARD follows, but stays near the door. He never takes his eyes off HENRY. He does not look with menace, but rather with curiosity or amusement. HENRY VI prepares himself for bed and prayer. There is a large crucifix on the wall.]

HENRY VI

This is my second time deposed. And for what? It's a job where you worry all the time about the kingdom—or you should if you are a benevolent man and have a godly conscience. And, on top of that, you worry about making it to bedtime alive or waking up with a sword point at your throat. Hardly worth it, it seems. The lengths that people will go to in order to be king. Battle after battle, hundreds killed and maimed, all so one man can rule.

RICHARD

Better my brother than I, I say.

HENRY VI

Oh, posh.

RICHARD

You doubt me?

HENRY VI

I do. I see it in your eyes.

RICHARD

Then you see something that I myself do not know is there.

HENRY VI

Young man, learn this now: everybody wants to be king. Everybody. But few of them know why. What would you do if you had the chance to be king? Hmm? Tell me, how does my head look?

RICHARD

Lined, withered, sick, old.

HENRY VI

Now think of it with a crown on it! Looks much better, does it not? It is the crown that matters. I was born to be king. Literally. Not due to any natural acumen or lust for the throne, but only because I issued forth from the union of a certain man and woman. Expelled from the womb, covered in blood, into history. A great nuisance for all.

RICHARD

Nuisance?

HENRY VI

Think of it. God, who chooses kings, has caused me to be king twice.

RICHARD

And then by defeating your army, caused my brother Edward, not you, to be king. Twice.

HENRY VI

Exactly. Now answer me this. Why do you think God changed his mind? Did he look at me and say, "Now there is a truly useless man"? Does it make sense for an omnipotent deity to change his mind? Is this not heresy?

RICHARD

You should never have been king.

HENRY VI

I have never really felt like a king. My wife, on the other hand, most definitely has; a more enthusiastic king than I ever was. But, for ill or good...ill, I think, I was put on the throne. God's bad joke. If I still had the crown, I might wish to hand it over to someone with more eagerness to rule. You, perhaps. I might say to you, in your brashness, vigor, and youth, do you want to be king?

RICHARD

It is not my destiny. I was born the eighth male from my mother. It suits me.

HENRY VI

You may have been born the eighth, but unless my mind has wandered off again, I see that five of those eight are now with God. I know very well who you are. But I warn you. Think! You have not traveled your lot. Spirit and bravery fill the place in your brain where wisdom has yet to inhabit. You are a youth of what, eighteen?

RICHARD

Eighteen and a half.

HENRY VI

A major distinction. Respect my words, young sir. You may be a duke, but you are still a young man who needs to see more of the world and hear the thoughts of men. It is the mysterious will of God that things change. Only time itself is the ultimate winner; and it unerringly makes fools of every one of us. You know of the French girl Joan?

RICHARD

It was said she spoke the words of God.

HENRY VI

Then when it no longer suited men's needs to have her speak the words of God, they called her the mouth of Satan and burned her at the stake. I was 10 years old. I watched it.

RICHARD

God has all the answers. We are here only to obey his will.

HENRY VI

Fah! What bloody good is that? He's not here, is he? Oh, I'll have to say an extra month's penance for that one.

RICHARD

Perhaps [Joan was not what she seemed at first.]

HENRY VI

My father shat himself to death. Henry the fifth, the strongest king England has seen in years, brought down by a river of liquid shit. Why would God do that?

RICHARD

Maybe you will find out soon.

HENRY VI

I've always considered a true answer as a symbol of respect. That should be the test of all rulers: Would you rather know the truth or believe a lie that brings you comfort?

RICHARD

You would have been better off as a cleric. I would have liked you as my priest.

HENRY VI

I have had visions, things revealed to me through God's grace. In the battle of St. Albans I sat under a beautiful tree, with the whole magnificent scene spread out before me. A great ruckus of men smashing each other's bodies with swords and maces and halberds...I saw angels dancing among them. Whenever a man fell, several angels would swoop down upon his body and raise his spirit up into the air. And the spirit would look down at where he had been, then begin to laugh, because where there had been pain and sorrow, was now great happiness. The angels floated on the very heat of the spilled blood and sweat of the men fighting below them. And I laughed, too, because I could see God's joy. Do you think I will hear mass every day, as I used to the last time I was a guest here? They would bring me wine, too. It was quite the life. No bother to anyone. Where is my wife? Is she dead?

RICHARD

No.

HENRY VI

[HENRY takes the crucifix from the wall and kisses it. He hands it to Richard]
Too bad. All my life I've tried to be close to God. Maybe now he will grant my wish.

[HENRY kneels at his bedside to pray.]

RICHARD

Well, then maybe I do fit into God's plan, after all.

[RICHARD raises the crucifix and prepares to strike Henry as the lights go down. Lights slowly rise. Stage empty; EXECUTIONER enters, crosses stage, puts a stocking cap the on hat rack, exits.]

Act I, Scene iv: Summer, 1477, Tower of London

Divided stage: ELIZABETH enters, very anxious. With her is her brother, ANTHONY, LORD RIVERS. When EDWARD and RICHARD enter later, there will be two scenes happening simultaneously.]

ELIZABETH

Do you actually expect me to demand that my husband put his own brother to death?

RIVERS

You are the queen, Elizabeth. If anyone can—

ELIZABETH

The queen must choose her battles as any other. The king is not a stupid man, despite his...

RIVERS

Energetic appetite for wayward pleasures? Regardless, he still needs to be spoken to. This lie that George is determined to perpetrate [could be fatal for us]

ELIZABETH

If anyone needs talking to, it is your nephew, Master Grey, who seems to be determined to drown himself in wine and wenching.

RIVERS

My nephew? He is *your* son, Elizabeth. Besides, he has the favor of the king.

ELIZABETH

Favor of the king indeed! It seems like the only one who doesn't hold the king in his hand—in one way or another—is his wife.

RIVERS

Really.

ELIZABETH

Master Grey cavorts with the king while the king, in full spite of his wife, thinks it is his duty to burrow his way through every loose pair of thighs in the court. And I [am forced to stand by!]

RIVERS

You have the queenship. And it seems that his majesty's waywardness has reconciled its serpentine path to the narrow attentions of Mistress Shore.

ELIZABETH

She has usurped my...position. I will not be ignored!

RIVERS

You have the queenship. Use it. Let her have the king's...fancy. It saves you that duty anyway. Edward could have chosen worse, you know. Many regard her with respect. It is said that she is an affable companion, smart, but not boastful. Quite tactful too. Don't give me that look. You know I am chaste.

ELIZABETH

So is she. However, she gets caught. You should take a lesson from the masters in this castle. It fairly swells with them.

[RICHARD and EDWARD enter to DL. EDWARD is sloppily dressed and wears the crown tilted. There is a great tray of eatables which he is never far from and constantly picks from.¹ There is also plenty of wine.]

RICHARD

You are the king. You can do whatever suits you.

EDWARD IV

Oh, don't pout, Richard. You know the situation as well as I. Our dear devoted brother George has attempted to overthrow me not once, but twice. Or have you forgotten your 18th birthday? What a beautiful day that was, getting lost in the fog with a thousand enemies behind us, then scrambling aboard a merchant ship bound for the continent. We were penniless. I was king of all England and all we had to trade with was my cloak, Richard! Thankfully the shipmaster saw fit to take it.

RICHARD

You cannot execute your own brother!

EDWARD IV

I agree. A sensitive matter like this can only be handled by my most trusted liege.

RICHARD

Never.

EDWARD IV

You will.

RICHARD

Never.

EDWARD IV

I'll strip you.

RICHARD

I'll fight you.

EDWARD IV

I'll win.

RICHARD

Not completely.

EDWARD IV

Hah! God must love you, Richard, better than the rest of us. You are so . . . dynamically inflexible. I must question mother one of these days. You can't be one of ours.

RICHARD

I'm sorry?

EDWARD IV

Maybe a foundling. Unless mother has a secret or three.

RICHARD

Mother would *never* [engage in deception!]

¹ Turkey legs. I like turkey legs. A king should always have a turkey leg nearby to munch on.