

ALTERNATE DEATHS

by Michael Soetaert

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ALTERNATE DEATHS

A Dark Comedy

by **Michael Soetaert**

SYNOPSIS: Burt and Glenn are two scientists testing what they believe is a time machine. Only it's not. It's a portal to absolutely terrifying alternate realities. Now the only question is how will they survive their *Alternate Deaths*.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 either)

GLENN/GLENDA (m/f) A scientist. (67 lines)

BURT/BRI (m/f) Also a scientist; Glenn/Glenda's partner. (63 lines)

TIME: Right now, but it's subject to change.

SETTING: Laboratory, State Prison, and Saturday Night Sacrifices studio.

CAST NOTE: The play was written for two males, but it could just as easily be two females, or one each, with very minor changes.

SET

There are three sets that will need to be switched to and from rather quickly: The laboratory, the prison, and the TV show. All the sets are basically the same—a chair, a large "machine", and a sign on the wall (which is not necessary, depending on your staging requirements). The machine can be as simple as a large box, such as a refrigerator might come in. Prominent in the center of the box is an overly large switch—one of those toggle switches that has the two prongs attached to the wooden handle. There is a label on the switch similar to an "on/off" label (see production notes below.) Wires are coming off of the machine and are attached to the chair.

COSTUMING

Glenn is wearing a white lab coat at open. Under his lab coat he needs to have a severe black suit on with a minister's collar, though it should not be obvious until he takes off his lab coat. He will have a name badge that says "Warden Glenn" that he will put on (and then take back off) between scenes.

Burt is wearing a white lab coat at open. Under his lab coat he should have on a really garish suit—brightly checked pants and suit jacket and a bowtie.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The idea is to switch from one scene to another very quickly—and quietly—with only the cover of darkness.

SWITCHING THE MACHINES: The easiest way to switch the time machine to an electric chair and back again, and then to a catapult trigger and back to the time machine again, is to just replace the switch labels. Have the "Here" and "There" labels for the time machine painted on the box. Then have two cards with the center cut out that will fit over the switch, one with "Alive" and "Dead" on it (for the electric chair), and the other with "Cold" and "Hot" on it (for Saturday Night Sacrifices). Small tabs of Velcro could easily hold the cards in place. They could be hidden behind the machine when not in use.

Velcro could also be used to strap Burt and Glenn to the chair. You don't need to worry about the legs not being strapped down, but it wouldn't be that hard to do. If you want to use ropes for Glenn, they can be fastened with Velcro, too, making for an extremely quick set change. When not in use, they also can be stored behind the time machine.

The "beany" for the electric chair could easily be hidden on the back of the chair.

SWITCHING THE WALL SIGNS: Optional. There are two large signs on the back wall, one for the prison that says: "It's not too late to repent, but it's getting awfully close." And one that says: "Saturday Night Sacrifices." The easiest way to change them is to have one sign painted on the back of the other. It would be really easy to take them up and down when necessary.

SPARKS: Optional. If unable to make the sparks effect, you can rig up a strobe or choose to have no strobe effect at all.

MAKING THE CHAIR SMOKE: Optional. A puff from a fog machine would be the easiest.

SOUND EFFECTS

Though sound effects are truly not necessary, they do add to the fun, and they are an excellent way to cover the sounds that are inevitable when switching sets. Simply search "Electrical Sound Effects" online, and you will find a plethora to pick from.

PROPS:

- a stopwatch (Burt)
- microphone (Burt)
- Glenn's notarized contract (Burt)
- a stopwatch (Glenn)
- wristwatch (Glenn)
- Burt's notarized confession (Glenn)
- an executioner's hood (Glenn)

AT START: *BURT is sitting in the chair next to the time machine. The large switch on the time machine is labeled "Here" and "There." The toggle is in the up position, "Here." GLENN is standing next to BURT.*

GLENN: OK, Burt, when I throw the switch, make sure you close your eyes to protect them from the flash.

BURT: OK.

GLENN: I know we've covered this before, but we need to be absolutely clear. OK?

BURT: It's OK, Glenn. We agreed to stick to protocol.

GLENN: OK. I'm sending you back in time exactly one hour. You will be in this exact room one hour ago. Nobody will be here. We've already made sure of that. So there's no chance of seeing me or yourself. You will stay back in time for three minutes... maybe a few seconds more than that. Only long enough for the time machine to recharge so I can bring you back. Do you have your watch?

BURT: *(Reaching into his shirt pocket and taking out a stopwatch.)* Right here.

GLENN: Good. *(Takes out an identical stopwatch.)* OK. On my count, start your timer. Ready? Three... two... one... mark.

BURT and GLENN hit the start buttons on their stopwatches, then compare them.

GLENN: Close enough. OK. If this works, when you get back, your watch should be three minutes slower than mine. *(Beat.)* Are you ready?

BURT: I'm ready.

GLENN: Godspeed, my friend.

GLENN takes hold of the switch.

GLENN: Five... four... three... two... one!

GLENN throws the switch down to "There," and in a shower of sparks, the room is dropped into total darkness. *SFX: loud electrical sounds in the darkness. Then, just as suddenly, the lights come back up and the sounds stop. The switch on the large box has changed to the "Alive" and "Dead" switch label. The switch is in the up position: "Alive."* *BURT* is securely strapped to the chair, and he is now wearing a "beany" such as you might see on an electric chair. *GLENN* is still wearing his lab coat, but he is now wearing a name badge that says, "Warden Glenn." On the rear wall is a sign that says, "It's not too late to repent, but it's getting awfully close."

GLENN: *(With his hand on the lever, as BURT is opening his eyes.)*

And so, by order of the governor, you, Burt, are to be executed at the stroke of midnight for your heinous crimes. May God have mercy on your soul.

BURT: What the blazes? What's going on here?! Glenn? Is that you?

GLENN: Of course it's me.

BURT: What are you doing here?

GLENN: Why, my job, of course.

BURT: Your job? You're a scientist!

GLENN: I appreciate that. I always said that running a prison was more of a science than anything else.

BURT: Running a prison?

GLENN: Certainly. I usually insist that the prisoners call me Warden, but since you're about to be executed and all, well... I thought I'd just let it slide.

BURT: You're the warden?

GLENN: I thought we'd already covered that, Burt.

BURT: Listen, Glenn. Get me out of this thing!

GLENN: Oh, you know I can't do that.

BURT: Glenn, it's me. Burt. What's going on here?

GLENN: Well, Burt, sorry to say, but the governor isn't going to call, so here in just about... *(Checks his watch.)* three minutes I'm gonna hafta throw this switch, and I'm sorry to say that just won't be compatible with life.

BURT: What?

GLENN: By order of the governor, you're to be executed in... *(Checks watch.)* two minutes.

BURT: For what?!

GLENN: Awful. Just awful. All those people. I like to think what we're about to do will give all those widows and orphans some sort of comfort. Maybe that will give you some comfort, too.

BURT: I didn't kill anybody!

GLENN: Well, that's sure going to be news to all those dead people.

BURT: Glenn! You've got to help me.

GLENN: Well, now. I know just the thing.

BURT: What? Tell me!

GLENN: *(With an ever so slight southern accent.)* At times like these, the comforting words of a minister can bring solace to a troubled soul.

BURT: A minister?!

GLENN pulls off his lab coat, and he's in a rather somber, dark suit with a minister's collar on.

BURT: You're the minister?!

GLENN: *(Without the accent.)* If I need to be.

BURT: I don't want a minister.

GLENN: *(Quickly removing his collar and putting it in his pocket.)* Fine by me. I always find those last minute confessions to be a bit tedious. Besides, you already confessed. What more are you going to say?

BURT: I confessed?

GLENN: *(Holding up a piece of paper.)* Notarized and everything.

BURT: Glenn! You know it's me! We were testing our time machine. *Your* time machine. It was your design. You invented it. Just now, not more than three minutes ago, you sent me back in time. We were in this same room, only it was your lab. You pulled the switch, Glenn. I was only supposed to be gone long enough to prove it worked. You were supposed to bring me back. Glenn, it's me!

GLENN: Oh, now. You know better than that. You've already had half a dozen psych evals, and they all found you perfectly sane. Well, sane enough to be executed, that is. *(Looking at his watch.)* And now look at that. Mickey says we're behind schedule. Can't have that. *(Pulls on an executioner's hood and steps over to the switch.)*

BURT: Glenn! Glenn! Don't do it!

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