

# DAS BOX

## By Craig J. Clark

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## CHARACTERS

**MAN** — Mid-20s. Dressed in a nice but comfortable suit. A nervous kind of fellow who unexpectedly has a box dropped into his life.

**OTHER** — Early 20s. Dressed in a sports jacket and tie. Fresh out of college and looking for a job. Talks to himself when he gets anxious.

**LADY** — 20s. Could be played older.

**PROFESSIONAL** — Early 30s. A lawyer. Wears a business suit and carries a briefcase. Generally a decent person, with an obsessive streak.

**GUY** — Early 20s. Dressed extremely casually and carries a backpack. Most likely a college student on summer break.

**BOOKSNATCHER** — 20s. A voracious reader. She is dressed all in black, with a beret. She also has a pair of handcuffs on one of her belt loops. She is easily distracted.

**OLD MAN** — 60s. He wears a pair of overalls and a bowler hat, walks a bit hunched over, and uses a cane. You could say he's a little grumpy.

**WIFE** (of PROFESSIONAL) — Early 30s. Pregnant. Played by same actress as LADY.

**DANCER** — Optional (see Production Notes).

## SET/PROP LIST

Box — Should be cardboard, but must be sturdy enough to withstand the action of the play.

Trash can — This is the only set dressing that should be required.

Wristwatch (for OTHER)

Newspaper with dummy headline (for LADY)

Pocket watch (for PROFESSIONAL)

Handkerchief (for PROFESSIONAL)

Briefcase (for PROFESSIONAL), which contains:

- Wire cutter
- Brace and bit
- Flashlight
- Portable phone

Juggling balls (for GUY)

Backpack (for GUY), which contains:  
Rubik's Cube  
A copy of Death of a Salesman  
A copy of The Old Man and the Sea  
A copy of A Streetcar Named Desire  
A copy of Nineteen Eighty-Four  
The script for Das Box  
A well-worn copy of Dianetics

Cane (for OLD MAN)

New copy of Dianetics, in a Borders—or other chain store—bag (for GUY)

Hospital gown and mask (for PROFESSIONAL)

### **PRODUCTION NOTES**

DAS BOX was first performed by the Sterling Drama Workshop at Sterling Regional High School in Somerdale, New Jersey, October 31-November 2, 1991. It played to sell-out audiences and was directed by Dan Patrick. The cast included Bill Blaylock, Rich Greco, Heather Humphries, Jim Morgan, Mark Neill, Michelle Broomell, and Tim Miller.

The play was reprised on May 27, 1992 with the same cast at the Surfflight Theatre in Beach Haven, New Jersey as part of its annual Drama Festival. There it received awards for Best Play, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Director, Best Writing, and Excellence in Acting.

#### **ALTERNATE ENDING:**

The ending of the script calls for—namely, the box opening up and the dancer emerging from it—was not used in the initial production. Substituted in its place was a sign being raised out of the box with the word "RESPONSIBILITY" written on it, which stayed up for the rest of the play. This is a suitable change if the original ending is not feasible.

## DAS BOX

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**TIME:** Modern

**PLACE:** Downtown in any city

*(Lights go up on a MAN trying to push a big, heavy box down a near-empty sidewalk. The box is obviously very bulky and cumbersome, as the MAN can only move it a few inches before it cannot be budged anymore. HE stops and leans against it, panting. HE is wearing a nice but comfortable suit. Anyway, HE looks around and gives the box a good once-over.)*

MAN: Whew! I wish I knew what was in this thing. It's so heavy! And why did that delivery guy give it to me? I certainly haven't bought anything this big recently. And why did he have to give it to me now? I have things to do.

*(HE sighs and goes to push it again when HE glances at his watch.)*

MAN: Good Lord! Is that the time? I've got to be going.

*(HE starts to dash off when HE remembers the box.)*

MAN: Oh, no! What am I going to do with this box? I can't just leave it here. *(tries to lift it, failing)* And I can't take it with me.

*(At this point, OTHER—dressed in a sports jacket and tie—passes by. HE is looking at his watch and seems to be anxious to get somewhere. MAN decides to stop him.)*

MAN: Er, excuse me. Excuse me!

OTHER: *(stopping and turning to him)* Yes?

MAN: Er, are you in a hurry?

OTHER: *(glancing at his watch)* Uh, well, a bit.

MAN: Well, would you mind watching this box for me for a couple of minutes?

OTHER: *(checking his watch again)* Oh, I don't know. I do have to be somewhere in a little-

MAN: Oh, please, please say you can! If I miss my appointment, my doctor'll kill me!

OTHER: Your doctor is going to kill you?

MAN: Well, psychiatrist actually.

OTHER: **(checking his watch yet again)** All right, will it be a long appointment?

MAN: Oh, no. It should only be ten, fifteen minutes tops.

OTHER: Well, then I suppose I can watch your box for you...

MAN: Oh, thank you.

OTHER: For a *couple* of minutes. But I do have to be somewhere in a little while.

MAN: That's all right. I'll try to be back by then.

**(They shake hands.)**

MAN: Thanks again. You're a lifesaver. I'll be back soon!

**(And HE leaves, relieved to be on his way. OTHER is left alone on stage with the box and looks it over. After a few seconds, HE looks up and calls after the MAN.)**

OTHER: Hey, wait a minute. What's in the box? **(no answer, HE calls louder)** What's in the box??

**(There is still no response. The MAN is obviously out of earshot. OTHER shrugs his shoulders and turns back to the box. HE looks at it scrutinizingly and approaches it, tapping it in places and humming rather tunelessly. HE tries to lift it, but finds that it is pretty much still connected to the ground.)**

OTHER: Well, whatever it is, it is heavy... **(tries to open the lid)** ...and sealed tight.

**(HE paces around it, perhaps a little nervously.)**

OTHER: And it is rather big...I got it. Maybe it's a washing machine! Nah, it couldn't be. If it was, it would have "Sears" written all over it...and this has nothing written all over it. Not a scratch. Not even "Fragile" or "This Way Up."

**(HE thinks, looks at the box, and then turns right to the audience.)**

OTHER: Oh, I don't like this. Things like this should be properly identified. I mean, what if whatever's in there is dangerous? What if it's a missile of some sort? Nah, if it was, it would have "Property of the U.S. Government" written all over it. Or maybe it's some sort of

secret weapon? **(nervously glances over at the box)** Nah, then it would have “Secret Weapon of the U.S. Government” written all over it. **(pause as this sinks in)** Oh, I wish that man had told me what’s in this thing, because now I’m going to be in suspense until he comes back. And I hate suspense!

**(HE goes over and sits down in front of the box, getting comfortable and then launching into his next tirade.)**

OTHER: Now, I’m the kind of person that likes to know everything about something right away, right up front—no guesswork involved. If this had been my box, I would have had it all labeled and marked and properly identified right away, so that everyone in the world would know exactly what it is, right off the bat....But this isn’t my box. Uh—it’s his. Wait a minute. He never gave me his name, did he? Oh, great. Now, how will I be able to identify him when he comes back? **(starts to get up)** I mean, I didn’t really get a good look at his face.

**(HE pauses as HE fully rights himself, and—once HE is standing erect again—HE launches into another one of his tirades.)**

OTHER: You know, if you ask me, people should always carry around packets of cards with their names on them. That way, when they ask people to watch their personal property for them, they can easily be identified when they come back to get it. **(starting to pace)** And will he ever come back? I mean, he may have just abandoned this box for me to look after... Look after? Oh, what if there’s an animal of some sort in there? What if it can’t breathe??

**(HE dashes over and frantically starts hitting and shaking the box.)**

OTHER: Hello, hello? Is there anything in there? Hello? Can you hear me? What’s in there??

**(HE stops shaking the box and nervously backs away from it.)**

OTHER: Well, whatever it is, it isn’t alive. At least I hope it isn’t... **(nervously glances over and then turns back to the audience)** Oh, this is creepy. I mean, for all I know, there could be somebody in there, writing down everything I’m saying...as some sort of college psychology experiment! And filming me! I feel like I’m on Candid Camera. Where’s Allan Funt?

***(HE desperately tries to control himself, but instead paces back and forth nervously.)***

OTHER: Oh, when did all this start happening to me? I mean, when did I become so paranoid? And when did I start talking to myself? Oh, I've got to get a hold of myself.

***(HE stops and gets a hold of himself.)***

OTHER: I'm having delusions of insignificance!

***(Suddenly, just as quickly as HE started tensing up, HE relaxes, takes a few deep breaths, and then gathers his confidence back together again. HE straightens up and lets his arms hang loose.)***

OTHER: I'm all right. There's nothing in this box. Nothing at all! Then why is nothing so heavy? Ok, this is perplexing! What I need now is a good syllogism!

***(HE glances at his watch and taps it repeatedly. Apparently, it has stopped.)***

OTHER: What I need now is a watch that actually works. It's been 12:15 forever.

***(At this point, a LADY passes through. SHE is busy reading a newspaper which has as its headline (in huge letters): ATTACKS ON WOMEN ARE ON THE RISE!" and in smaller letters at the bottom: "WATCH OUT FOR STRANGE MEN, LADIES". As the LADY passes by, OTHER tries to get her attention.)***

OTHER: Excuse me, do you know what time it is?

***(The LADY pauses and half-turns to him.)***

OTHER: Do you think you could tell me the time?

***(The LADY looks at her newspaper and then back at him. Then, SHE takes a closer look at the article. OTHER, thinking SHE isn't paying attention, takes one of her hands from the newspaper and pats it as SHE looks at him in horror.)***

OTHER: Er, my watch has stopped. Could you tell me-?

***(Suddenly SHE screams and runs off, leaving him standing there, dumbfounded. After SHE is gone, HE breaks out of his pose and mutters.)***

OTHER: Jerk! ***(looks up)*** Oh Great! I don't even know what time it is!  
And now I'm going to be late.

***(HE turns menacingly to the box, pointing an accusing finger.)***

OTHER: This is your entire fault! If I hadn't stopped to look after you, I would still be on my way. In fact, I would probably already be there!  
***(repeatedly kicking the box)*** Why, you stupid, ugly, bulky-  
***(suddenly stops and holds his foot)*** -Hard! Ah—!

***(HE hops on his one good foot over to the other side of the box and, once HE gets his balance, takes a swipe at it.)***

OTHER: Injurious box!

***(HE misses the box and instead falls flat on his face. Pause as HE just lies there, taking in all that has just happened And after much deliberation, HE can only come out with one response:)***

OTHER: Ow...

***(HE turns over slowly and sits up, rubbing his foot.)***

OTHER: Well, now I've hurt my foot. Oh, why does this sort of thing always happen to me?

***(HE stands up again and is careful about putting weight on his foot, but once HE does, HE is surprised to find that it isn't as bad as he thought)***

OTHER: Well, I'll survive. I mean, I don't think it'll fall off quite yet.

***(HE tries to walk on it and has a slight limp.)***

OTHER: Oh, yeah. That's *fine*. Now, if only I could find out the time from somebody.

***(HE looks out into the audience, as if looking across the street, and yells.)***

OTHER: Hey, you! Sir! Can you tell me what time it is? (**holding his arm up and pointing to it**) My watch has stopped. Can you tell me- (**giving up**) Oh, I'm never going to find out the time!

**(At this point, a PROFESSIONAL enters. HE is wearing a business suit and carrying a briefcase. HE passes right in front of OTHER...)**

OTHER: Hold that thought. (**turning to him**) Excuse me, sir. Might I trouble you for the time?

PROFESSIONAL: (**stopping and pulling out a pocket watch on a chain**) Oh, it's no trouble. It's 12:35.

OTHER: (**fiddling with his watch**) 12:35—thanks. Great.

**(The PROFESSIONAL puts his pocket watch away and starts on his way again when OTHER reacts.)**

OTHER: 12:35? Oh, no. I *am* late!

PROFESSIONAL: (**pausing, a bit interested**) Late for what?

OTHER: My job interview. I was supposed to be there five minutes ago.

PROFESSIONAL: Well, you'd better be off then.

OTHER: Oh, I would, but I have to watch this box for somebody.

PROFESSIONAL: Who?

OTHER: I don't know.

PROFESSIONAL: Well, that helps. (**short pause**) Tell you what, I'm on my lunch hour and I'm not in that much of a hurry to get back to the office, so I'll watch this box for you.

OTHER: You mean you will? You really will?

PROFESSIONAL: Of course.

OTHER: (**falling to his knees and kissing the PROFESSIONAL's hand**) Oh, bless you, bless you, bless you, bless you-

**(The PROFESSIONAL, disgusted, quickly rips his hand away and wipes it with a handkerchief.)**

OTHER: Oh, sorry.

PROFESSIONAL: That's all right. Now, you'd better be running along before you're even more late than you already are.

OTHER: (**getting up**) Thanks, I'll try to be back as fast as I can.

**(HE runs off. The PROFESSIONAL watches him go condescendingly.)**

PROFESSIONAL: Hmm, all that emotion...over a box. And just a bit unjustified, if you ask me. I mean, after all, it is only a box...

***(HE looks over at it and an idea starts forming in his head.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Or maybe it's more than just a box. Maybe there's something valuable inside of it!

***(HE practically leaps over to it, sets his briefcase down, and tries to open the lid, but—as you might have guessed—it's not budging.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Well, that's no use—it's sealed tight. I have just the thing for that.

***(HE turns around, bends down and opens his suitcase. Inside of it is an enormous amount of stuff. HE roots through it and eventually comes up with what HE is looking for—an industrial strength wire cutter. HE uses it to break all of the seals on the top and sides of the box and then replaces it in his briefcase. HE closes the briefcase—with some difficulty—and then turns back to the box.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Now we'll see what's in this box.

***(HE tries the lid again, but it still won't budge.)***

PROFESSIONAL: ... Maybe not.

***(HE opens his briefcase again and roots through it as before. This time HE comes up with a brace and bit, which HE uses to drill two good-sized holes in the side of the box.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Ah, this should do it.

***(HE puts the brace and bit back in the briefcase and then tries to look in the holes HE made.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Nope, no good. It's too dark to see in there.

***(HE thinks for a bit, and then snaps his finger. HE goes through the briefcase yet again and comes up with a flashlight this time.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Now I'll get to the bottom of this.

***(HE looks in one eyehole and tries to shine the light in the other, but the batteries are dead. HE hits the flashlight a few times to try to get it to work, but it just won't, so HE tosses it back into his briefcase, disappointed.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Blast these cheap American batteries. I knew I should have bought Japanese.

***(HE leans against the box despondently and sighs.)***

PROFESSIONAL: If only there was some way to see in there...

***(Suddenly there is the sound of a phone ringing rather loudly. The PROFESSIONAL perks up and looks around for the source.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Hey, what's that? I don't remember seeing a pay phone around here.

***(His eyes go to his open briefcase and then realizes where the ringing is coming from.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Oh, that's right—it's my briefcase phone. I'll never get used to having a cell phone.

***(HE roots around in it and comes up with a cordless phone which HE then answers.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Hello? Yes, this is him. Well, who else would be answering on this line? I mean, unless my briefcase was stolen or something—and then, the robber wouldn't even bother... To answer! What else? Oh, never mind. What do you want? ***(his face falls)*** What?? You're kidding! When did this happen? Well, why didn't you call me earlier? There was no time?? You mean to tell me that my wife went into labor and there was no time to call me? Her husband??? Oh, I see. Yes, that's better. That's much better. You just plain forgot!! ***(hand on receiver, aside)*** It's so nice to be remembered. ***(into phone)*** All right, forget the apologies. Maybe I can still make it there in time. What hospital? Oh, that's not too far from here. Tell Marcy I'll be there as fast as I can. All right, goodbye. ***(forcefully)*** Goodbye!

***(HE hangs up and pushes the antenna back in.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Heh, I knew her mother wasn't that fond of me, but this? Sheesh.

***(HE turns, puts the phone back in the briefcase, then closes it.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Well, I guess I'm going to have to find out what's in this box later on.

***(HE picks up the briefcase and leaves. After a second, HE returns again.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Wait a minute. I can't just leave this box sitting here all by itself. I have an obligation to the man who asked me to watch it for him. Oh, decisions, decisions. Should I stay or should I go? I mean, I want to go see my wife give birth, but I can't leave this box unattended...

***(HE leans on it, despairing for a few seconds, and then snaps back out of it.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Oh, who am I kidding? Nobody's going to take this box while I'm gone. It'll be just fine.

***(HE takes his briefcase and leaves again, confident of what HE's decided. Then, after HE's completely offstage, we hear a scream of aggravation, like "Arrrrrrgh!" and then HE comes stomping back in.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Oh, when did I develop a sense of ethics? Because of this stupid box, I'm going to miss witnessing the birth of my first child! Oh...

***(HE sits down in front of the box, puts his head in his hands and moans. Then, a sort of happy-go-lucky kind of GUY comes in, juggling. HE is dressed extremely casually—bordering on the semi-avant garde—and wearing a large backpack. Anyway, HE is really intent on his juggling, but a few feet in he drops one of his balls and it rolls over where the PROFESSIONAL is sulking.)***

GUY: Oh no! Dropped it again.

***(HE walks over and bends down to pick it up when he notices the PROFESSIONAL. HE gathers his balls, takes his backpack off and puts them into it. Then HE gets down to the PROFESSIONAL's level and watches him with great interest. The PROFESSIONAL feels that somebody is watching him and looks up at the GUY, suddenly angered.)***

PROFESSIONAL: Oh, what do you want??

GUY: Are you okay?

PROFESSIONAL: (***gathering himself together emotionally***) Yes, I'm fine. Just fine.

GUY: Are you sure? You seem a little down.

PROFESSIONAL: Well, that's because I am.

GUY: (***sitting down next to him, Indian-style***) Do you want to talk about it?

PROFESSIONAL: Who are you? My mother?

GUY: No, not at all. It's just better to talk your problems out as opposed to keeping them all bottled up inside.

***(Short pause.)***

PROFESSIONAL: You *are* my mother.

GUY: I am not! I just want to help.

PROFESSIONAL: (***perking up at the word***) Help? Help? I know how you can help.

GUY: How?

PROFESSIONAL: (***motioning to the box***) Watch this box for me.

GUY: What, is that all? I thought something horrible had happened.

PROFESSIONAL: Well, something horrible will if I don't get to a hospital real soon.

GUY: How serious? Internal bleeding? Organ malfunction? What?

PROFESSIONAL: No, no. Nothing like that. You see, my wife's giving birth.

GUY: Oh... Is it your ... ?

***(A few painful seconds go by as HE waits for the PROFESSIONAL to pick it up. Finally HE does.)***

PROFESSIONAL: First child, yes.

GUY: Ah. So why don't you just get up and go?

PROFESSIONAL: Well, you see, that's the problem. I offered to watch this box for some guy, and then I got a phone call from my mother-in-law saying that my wife had gone into labor.

GUY: Oh, I see. And now you feel that you have an...Uh...

PROFESSIONAL: (***picking it up quicker this time***) An obligation to the guy—yes.

GUY: Stupid ethics.....how frustrating!

***(Feeling that no more good is coming out of his being on the ground, the PROFESSIONAL stands up, brushing himself off and looking at his pocket watch)***

PROFESSIONAL: Er...do you have to be anywhere soon?

GUY: What do you mean?

PROFESSIONAL: I mean, like a job or something.

GUY: **(standing up)** Oh, no. I'm not tied down at all. I'm just a happy-go-lucky sort of guy.

PROFESSIONAL: Then do you think you could watch this box for me while I run along to the hospital and see how my wife is doing?

GUY: Oh, that would be no problem. You wouldn't be long, would you?

PROFESSIONAL: Well, I might be. First children always take the longest time.

GUY: Sometimes hours, I hear.

PROFESSIONAL: Ooh, I hadn't thought of that. Tell you what, I'll give you my business card. That way, you can call me if I'm taking too long.

GUY: Call you? How?

PROFESSIONAL: **(tapping his briefcase)** I have one of those portable phones. You know...a cell phone.

GUY: Oh...

**(The PROFESSIONAL starts searching through his pockets for his card.)**

GUY: Oh, no. I wouldn't dream of interrupting something like the birth of your first child with-

PROFESSIONAL: **(handing his card over)** Oh, posh. Take it anyway. If you're ever in need of a good lawyer, look me up.

GUY: **(taking the card)** All right.

**(The PROFESSIONAL starts to leave.)**

GUY: Hey, I bet you two bucks it's a boy.

PROFESSIONAL: **(pausing and turning back to him)** You're on.

GUY: **(checking out the box)** Oh, by the way, what's in this box that's so important?

PROFESSIONAL: I don't know. I was trying to figure that out myself.

GUY: Ah...

**(HE watches the PROFESSIONAL leave and then is left alone with the box. HE walks around it, examining it closely, and then notices the two eyeholes that the PROFESSIONAL put in on the side.)**

GUY: Oh! It must be an animal of some sort—it's got two little breathing holes in the side over here.

***(HE starts absurdly knocking on it and going all over the entire thing, knocking and talking to it the way grown people talk to infants and animals.)***

GUY: Hello? Hello? Is there anything in there? I won't hurt you. Hello?

***(HE tries the lid. I won't open, so HE tries to lift it and then to simply move it.)***

GUY: Ooh, heavy little bugger... ***(backs away and looks at it)*** Or maybe it's a big bugger. Who knows? I don't.

***(There is short pause as the GUY considers this line of thought, then...)***

GUY: Well, whatever it is, it's none of my business. I'll just sit here and watch this box.

***(HE sits down in front of the box, takes his backpack off, and takes a Rubik's cube out of it, trying to figure out what his next move should be. HE has almost all of one color on one side, which HE is trying to get all together.)***

GUY: That's it—I'm just sitting here keeping an eye on this box...

***(HE starts peeling off a few of the stickers of the color he's working on and putting them on the side where HE wants them—something just about any owner of a Rubik's cube has done at least once in their lives.)***

GUY: This is hip. This is cool...

***(Having gotten all of the color on one side, HE annoyingly tosses the cube back into his backpack and stands up.)***

GUY: Man, this is boring! Why did I agree to watch this box? I mean, I know I have plenty of time to waste, but I'd rather be wasting it more constructively...like at a mall or something. Well, I do have a bit of reading to catch up on. Let's see what I have.

***(HE bends down to his backpack and pulls out the following books, reading their titles with great respect and admiration...and then rejecting them outright.)***

GUY: Death of a Salesman...Nah.

***(HE tosses it to the ground in front of him.)***

GUY: The Old Man and the Sea....Nah.

***(HE tosses it as well.)***

GUY: A Streetcar Named Desire? ***(thinks, possibly going for it)*** Nah.

***(The same.)***

GUY: Nineteen Eighty-Four... No...

***(HE puts it down right next to his backpack and then pulls out the next item, reading its title off rather incredulously.)***

GUY: Das Box?

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