

Finding the Greater Fool

*A One-Act Comedy
by Robert Joseph Ahola*

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Robert Joseph Ahola, CEO
Galahad Films
23852 Pacific Coast Highway #753
Malibu, CA 90265
Tel. 424-644-0611
Fax 310-456-5109
Cell 310-713-0547
e-mail: galahadfilms@aol.com
www.robertahola.com/
www.robertjosephahola.com/

Finding the Greater Fool

Synopsis

The Rogues Roundtable – an annual convention of the world's most renowned con artists, forgers, and swindlers – convenes in Ibiza, Spain every year. In the midst of this, an elite core group of multimillionaire bunko artists are holding a cocktail party to find new ways to spend their ill-gotten gains. Joining them a beautiful new entrepreneur has come with their annual report, and a brilliant new way to invest their money "legitimately."

5 M/1F

Running Time: 30 minutes

Finding the Greater Fool

Cast of Characters

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (“Brinsley”): Proudly, he takes as his namesake the author of *School for Scandal* and his own organization, Rogues’ Roundtable.” “Brinsley” to his friends, he is in his fifties and is very wise in the ways of human nature (all things of darkness and light).

Theodore Gericault (Teddy): An art forger of world renown, Teddy has even taken the name of a famous neo-romantic French master, and laughs about the fact that practically no one even recognizes the *nom de plume*. A surprisingly uncomplicated man with a unique outlook on life, he seems more at peace with himself than the rest.

Elijah Shazam (“Captain Marvel”): Because he can ostensibly do remarkable things with finance—watch out or he’ll make your money disappear. He is New York tough and yet charming, assumptive and somehow likeable. He is also one of those people who is either thirty or fifty— no one can really tell for certain.

Nick (“Nicky”): Thirty-something, very handsome, absurdly rich, young brash and arrogant. He has never been caught and never lost in a “con.” Well...there’s a first time for everything.

Angelica: An apparently seductive savvy businesswoman and CEO of Candy Casinos, she has found the formula to turn men on their heads and out of their fortunes – legitimately. And yet...there is something strangely compelling about the way she handles “her business.”

Finding the Greater Fool

Production Considerations

The setting should be simple but elegant and characteristically Spanish – either Mediterranean or Spanish Colonial Furniture. It should have a large couch, chairs and an ample, elegant bar in the corner.

A balcony is implied and – if fly space is available – existent in fact.

Costumes should be elegant but casual summertime beach wear for the men (as might be found in Cabo or Maui), one very fashionable cocktail or day dress for a woman, and a nun’s habit.

There is also to be a fashionable satchel and five folders that will contain a (purported) financial offering, as well as a [Baccarat] shoe, and several decks of cards.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1. An elegant hotel suite in Ibiza, Spain.

Scene 2. The same elegant hotel suite. The following evening.

Finding the Greater Fool

Scene 1. A Lavish Hotel Suite in

Ibiza. *It is elegantly appointed with either antique or Spanish Colonial Furniture, a terrific view and an ample bar. Richard Brinsley Sheridan, a poised man somewhere in his fifties goes to the bar to mix himself a drink, but addresses the audience as he does.*

BRINSLEY

Ultimately all decisions in life are economic. If it isn't cosmic law, it should be.
(finishes mixing his drink)

I suppose that sounds cynical, and yet the world has proved me right. I, the shattered idealist, have come to grips with that...and have put the need for human greed to work. Ostensibly that's why we formed the Rogues' Roundtable here in Ibiza on the Spanish Riviera ten years ago. And that's why I've come on a very special mission, yet again.

He swirls the glass in his hand and strolls downstage.

I can even tell you who'll be the first to arrive.

SFX. The doorbell to the suite rings softly. He gestures his confirmation.

Voila!!

He goes to the door and swings it open. A short jolly man in the styles of an artist, Theodore Gericault piles into the room.

TEDDY

I hate always being the first one here. And why am I even included?

The two give a warm abrazo.

BRINSLEY

How could you not be? Theodore Gericault. You are the standard by which others are measured!

TEDDY

I am merely a simple draftsman, Brinsley.

BRINSLEY

Ah, but what do you draft?

TEDDY

I'm a weaver of dreams, a purveyor of purloined masterpieces.

BRINSLEY

(corrects himself)

...Which you have rendered yourself—the personal touch.

TEDDY

Caveat Emptor. Perception is reality. The pleasure is genuine.

BRINSLEY

...And the deception perennial.

TEDDY

They think they're purchasing contraband art. And I provide the moral disclaimer to keep them from breaking the law.

BRINSLEY

Compassionate, conscientious...and profitable!

TEDDY

Everybody's happy. And the world has another rediscovered "masterpiece"—as long as I select one that's either lost, stolen or out of circulation.

BRINSLEY

So what was it this year?

He goes to mix Teddy a drink, seeming to know the desired concoction.

TEDDY

A pair of missing "Caravaggios" for a covetous Korean venture capitalist. He thought I was an international art pirate, happily popped for 3 million Euros, and never looked back. Apparently, they've never heard of carbon dating in the Orient.

BRINSLEY*(corrects him)*

Well, I guess he's getting "reoriented."

TEDDY

Well, the Koreans invented the "bait and switch." So, it's a dose of their own medicine.

BRINSLEY

Perhaps he knew but didn't care to investigate too deeply. If he is deceived then he can deceive in return—without a loss of innocence.

Brinsley hands him the drink.

TEDDY

You are the consummate cynic.

BRINSLEY

A realist.

TEDDY

To reality! And alternate realities in whatever form they take.

They hoist glasses and drink.

TEDDY

And you? Still the Robin Hood syndrome—robbing from the rich and giving to...yourself.

BRINSLEY

I never sting people. Only large corporations— computer hiccups and paperless trails, crooked brokerage firms and corrupt pharmaceutical companies—and nobody really gets hurt.

TEDDY

Ah yes, the victimless crime—the ultimate self-deception!

BRINSLEY

Besides, I've retired. I'm living off my considerable ill-gotten gains. I'm devoting myself to SOME, LLC, and the profits to be gained from that.

TEDDY

Candy! An "escort service casino!" Is that your sine qua non. Is that the multiplication of you?

BRINSLEY

Are we gaining a moral compass here?

TEDDY

I've always had one, of sorts. And now I have an annual report.

BRINSLEY

We all do. Not to mention dividend checks, an occasion for which I must momentarily excuse myself..

TEDDY

Only so you can make more of an entrance later on.

BRINSLEY

Guilty, but only in part. I have to attend to the rest of our business, including our guest of honor.

TEDDY(*pumps his gesture*)

Are you sure this is not...you know?

BRINSLEY

Never mix business and romance. Only a fool would do that.

Brinsley issues a salute and exits.

TEDDY

I wonder if he knows. Or if he knows I know...Or if it matters.

(As he finishes his drink the doorbell rings again, and he goes to answer. Elijah Shazam [AKA Captain Marvel], a tough, street-smart New Yorker in his late forties, enters. Noticeably edgy and constantly glancing at his watch, he foregoes the handshake with Teddy who warmly greets him anyway.)

Elijah Shazam, as I live and breathe!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Yeah, I know. And spare me the excuses. Sheridan left just so he could make an entrance later, thereby making us all feel powerless and totally at his disposal.

(Not waiting to be invited, he goes to the bar and makes himself a drink.)

TEDDY

And how was your year, my dear?!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Finding the greater fool is not what it used to be. And now it's gotten downright dangerous! It's the damned Internet! All this access to information is a killer!

TEDDY

But you're Captain Marvel. Information, or the illusion of it, is your métier.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

There's no privacy, anymore. No mystery No magic! What's happened to the world anyway? You used to be able to build all these layers. Now, people just Google you and you're busted!

TEDDY

For every technological advance there'll be a proportionate loss of privacy.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Who said that?!

Through the door a handsome, dapper young man in his late thirties, Nick, enters with the answer...

NICK

Alexander Graham Bell! Besides when you're hit with that kind of challenge you build your own website with as much glowing fiction as you can make up. People believe anything if it's got good graphics.

Nicky!

TEDDY (*toasts*)

Nicky and Teddy share abrazzos while Captain Marvel goes continues to pace like a nervous cat.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

So, how are the young and bulletproof? Good year?

NICK

Best ever!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Oh yeah? How so?

NICK

In a word: Convertible Debentures!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

That's' two words.

NICK

No! It only amounts to one. Billions!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

You mean millions!

NICK

No, billions! I only trade with institutions. They turn loans into stock. The stocks are restricted and don't convert until maturity. And maturity takes forever!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

You need a broker's license.

NICK

Call me Mr. Series Seven.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Oh, of course, and only institutions.

NICK

Large multi-billion dollar megaliths without a heart or soul, and so many intellectual smoke screens that they blind us to behold.

TEDDY

You sound like Brinsley.

NICK

But not Captain Marvel here.

CAPTAIN MARVEL *(effects a Cockney accent)*

I never screwed no one what didn't deserve it. And let's face it! Some of the greedy bastards deserved it!

NICK *(looks around)*

Speaking of "deserve levels..." where is our charming host? As if I didn't know.

Nick goes to the bar and pours himself a glass of wine.

TEDDY

Are we getting predictable?

NICK

Human nature is always predictable! Knowing that is the Secret!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

And Brinsley is the worst!

TEDDY

Or the best...

CAPTAIN MARVEL *(continues)*

...And relies on our underestimation of him to take us where he wants us to go.

NICK

I never go where I go without complete foreknowledge...just as I know Brinsley's out there right now, entirely aware that I've just come in...and waiting – but not to long mind you! – for his moment to return, all full of apologies and promises both of which he will make utterly ingratiating.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

To you maybe! Not to me ...

TEDDY

To all of us, lads. That's why we're the inner circle among the dozens of scoundrels here. And that's why we're invested. Why...we're the easiest of all.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I don't like being referred to as "easy! Even in jest!

TEDDY

Ah, but how could we not be, especially when something is so uncomplicated as this.

NICK

And the return on investment both so visible and so quick to come.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Remains to be seen...

TEDDY

All to make some very nice profit...

Brinsley overhears as he ducks through the door and back into the room.

BRINSLEY

That's why it's called SOME, LLC. Hi, Nicky!

(He gives Nick a hug and shakes Elijah's hand.)

And the Captain himself!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Been out hiding in the hall, Brinsley, so you could make an entrance?

BRINSLEY

That's what I like about you, Captain. You're so...candid.

NICK

The Plain Dealer.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Honest. I'm honest.

As Captain Marvel corrects, Brinsley goes to the bar and pours another drink.

BRINSLEY

Interesting self-description for someone in your line of work.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Our line of work!

BRINSLEY

How ecumenical.

He hoists his glass. The others join him.

Well gentlemen: to the Rogues' Roundtable, Candy, and all the profits therefrom.

TEDDY

To the Inner Circle! And its new Candy store!

They all drink and pause to reflect.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

And we'll be meeting with the CEO as promised?

NICK

And what a lovely CEO she is! Are you sure we can't...

BRINSLEY*(cuts him off)*

The stipulations of this arms-length investment: no mixing business with pleasure.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

She's a madam for God's sake!

TEDDY

We don't know that! She's a businesswoman. That's all we know.

BRINSLEY

Theodore! You are a work of art! And defending a woman's honor at that!

NICK

I'd like to defend her honor. [I'd like to test her honor.] Anyway, what a great name for a Casino: Candy!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

But whose candy?! Anyway, she's too icy for my taste.

NICK

Insecurity doesn't become you, Captain. With a last name like Shazam you're supposed to be able to manifest greatness on the spot.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I just want to know what's happened to my investment.

NICK

Ever notice how fear creeps into the conversation whenever money is involved?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I didn't have as good a year as you did!

NICK *(affects it)*

"Scared money don't win," Captain.

BRINSLEY

Interesting term, "money!" In the Hebrew context, it stems from the word, "manna!" God's own endless supply of nourishment for his "chosen people."

TEDDY

But are we His chosen people?

NICK

They are "chosen" who choose themselves.

As Brinsley explains, a beautiful woman enters the room, tastefully dressed for the weather, carrying a small Versace satchel. The men rise to their feet.

ANGELICA

...It also stems from the Latin, "Moneta," a nickname for Hera, the Goddess of Abundance and Riches.

BRINSLEY

And are you the Goddess of Abundance?

(Brinsley goes to kiss her on the cheek. She takes a chair presented to her. Everyone sits.)

ANGELICA

Well, we're about to find out. Good afternoon, gentlemen. Or should I say buenas tardes?

(The men respond in their own way.)

I have only one request for you—that you not look at the bottom line until we have gone over my review.

BRINSLEY

Sorry Angelica! How rude. May I offer you a drink?

ANGELICA

Perhaps later, thank you.

She passes out a set of folders.

As you know, one year ago, I presented this elite group with a closed angel capital offering to invest in a new chain of [two] offshore casinos called "Candy! In floating locations on leased yachts—under the banner of SOME, LLC.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I still don't get the connection.

BRINSLEY

Not important.

ANGELICA

The concept was simple: Small, closed membership Casinos for multi-millionaire moguls and the rich and famous only—real players who can really afford to play. Women as "arm candy" would accompany the men, none of whom are aware that these women are trained as "coolers" to make sure they lose. No guarantees of course.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

So, we have gambling and prostitution—the world's two oldest professions.

(Starts to peek at the back.)

So how did we do?

NICK

Captain! Savor the moment!

ANGELICA

Correction! Not prostitution. Escorts. Dates!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Whatever!

TEDDY

It's a euphemism. Right?

ANGELICA

Wrong. We actually hire our women with the strict understanding that solicitation is out of the question. If they charge—if they compromise us in any way—they're fired. If they establish a relationship later on, it is up to them.

NICK

Fine! I love rationalization as much as the next man.

ANGELICA

We're not rationalizing, gentlemen! Their main function is to keep us from losing money! And so far they've done very nicely, thank you—as you will see! Now, enough about the women! To the bottom line.

She flips aggressively to the back of the book.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Amen to that!

TEDDY

Are we being spiritual here?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I could be, if the price is right.

ANGELICA

Then prepare to get religion, gentlemen.

(comes to the place in her book)

Because if you'll turn to page thirty-two in your folder you will see that your original investment of 2.5 million Euros.

NICK

...3.5 million dollars.

TEDDY

Does anyone trade in dollars any more?

ANGELICA

Your return on investment is 7.5 million Euros in the first year!

CAPTAIN MARVEL *(pumps his fist)*

Triple!

NICK

Angelica will you marry me?!

Deal killer, Nicky!

ANGELICA

Dinner then.

NICK

No fraternization...

ANGELICA

Believe me, I didn't plan to "fraternize."

NICK

Or "slaternize..."

ANGELICA

Ignoring him, she whips out a stack of envelopes.
Gentlemen! I have your checks here—repayment in full, as promised.

Oh boy! Oh boy!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Captain Marvel reaches out for it, but Angelica flips it back against her chest for a moment.

Or...

ANGELICA

Here it comes...

NICK

ANGELICA
Or...we're opening two more "Candy" casinos—one in Portofino and one in Dubai—in the next two years. You can reinvest the money in this envelope, plus 2.5 million more Euros and get a return on your investment that will easily quadruple in three years, once we complete our sweetheart leases and get under way.

I'll take my check!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

No, let's hear her out...

NICK

Why did I know you were going to say that?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

NICK *(amused, thinks about it)*
Fine! But, if I reinvest, I have a stipulation.

Being?

BRINSLEY

NICK

That we sample the wares? That we go to an opening, that we gamble and that we sample some of this “virtuous:” arm candy that Candy is providing.

ANGELICA

Another “No-go Area,” Nick.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I agree with Nick. Why shouldn’t we? Every investor in any legitimate enterprise gets to see the bricks and mortar, gets perks, gets all the goodies that go with it. Why shouldn’t we for...*(He calculates)* Our 7.5 Million Euro investment?

ANGELICA

Not at first, gentlemen. Later, perhaps. For now, most of you are well known for your sleight of hand with other people’s money. And chances are they will spot you. In fact, my staff has I.D. cross-checks on all of you not to permit you until the appropriate time.

TEDDY

She makes a point.

NICK

You’ve never been caught, have you, Teddy?

TEDDY

Oh no, I’ve done time...Word to the wise: Never duplicate a famous artist while he’s still living! They tend to get very upset.

BRINSLEY *(to Angelica)*

May we have overnight to consider?

Angelica thinks about it and springs to her feet.

ANGELICA

Overnight it is then. Shall we say cocktails tomorrow evening—by which time I expect to have the money electronically transferred into my numbered account in Geneva...

She slips the number and the envelopes into a file folder, and drops a folder down onto the table.

That means no payment in fake art, Teddy. No “Convertible Debentures,” Nick. And no counterfeit dollars, Captain Marvel.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I quit doing that a long time ago. Too many watermarks...

ANGELICA

And no...whatever it is you do, Brinsley.

BRINSLEY

You’re too small for what I do. Besides, I’m retired.

ANGELICA

That's a relief...

She goes to leave and stops herself.

Oh, and a couple of other minor things. First, SOME, LLC tithes! Ten percent of all profits have gone to a foundation for abused women and children.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I don't remember anything about that!

ANGELICA

That's because you don't read the fine print... Anyway, it's been bumped to fifteen percent going forward. So, be aware of that.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Fifteen?!!

ANGELICA

Oh, and one last thing. I've only got slots left for three investors on this pass. Someone else has already ponied up. So, sadly one of you gets left out.

NICK

Left out. That's a bitch!

ANGELICA

That means the first three in get to get rich-er!. And one of you doesn't. Ta-Ta, gentlemen.

Angelica takes her satchel and exits.

TEDDY

Ta-Ta? Is that Spanish?

NICK

I think it's Turkish for, "You're screwed!"

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I'm certain it's Italian, because this reeks of Ponzi scheme.

BRINSLEY

You overreact.

NICK

The Captain could be right.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Of course, I'm right! Bring in a nice return on investment the first time. Then hit the mark for a major bump up on the second pass, after which time "the lady vanishes." I mean, I know the drill. I've done it a few times myself.

BRINSLEY

What can I say? Your check's on the table. Take the money and run. Personally I'm in for the \$7.5 million.

TEDDY

Yeah, me too. What the hell. It's house money anyway.

BRINSLEY

One slot left, gentlemen! Who will it be?

CAPTAIN MARVEL (*visibly balks*)

Now wait a minute! Can't we even open this up for a discussion?

BRINSLEY

First money in.

NICK

I have questions.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Yeah, me too. What about this fifteen percent tithing business? You know as well as I do that most charities are bogus.

TEDDY

God forbid we should involve ourselves in anything bogus!

BRINSLEY

I think tithing is a good thing. Pro Bono—for the good!—haven't you ever done anything for the good?

TEDDY

I did a good thing once. One time they compared my fake Jackson Pollock to a real Jackson Pollock and declared mine to be the real one.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

So...that was your good deed?!

TEDDY

No. I felt so sorry for the real Pollock that I bought it for \$5000 and then sold it to a nice young man who couldn't have afforded it otherwise. He got a bargain, and it helped him build his portfolio.

NICK (*pleased*)

And you made a very nice profit. Teddy, you little humanitarian, you!

TEDDY

One does what one can.

BRINSLEY

What about your good works there, Captain Marvel? Any at all?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Let me get back to you on that.

BRINSLEY

Well now's your chance! And it's already in motion, with you or without you. Just like this money train is already in motion —with you or without you!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Watch it Brinsley! You're selling it!

NICK

What bothers me is that this woman's a ghost.

BRINSLEY

Check her out.

NICK

I have! She checks out perfectly. That's what bothers me! And what about our not being allowed to see the product —even go to the Casinos?! That's so bogus! I want something I can put my arms around.

BRINSLEY

Believe me, it's not that restricted! Look when they open in Dubai in 2012, I'll get us all in the Grand Opening...with all the perks! Okay!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Isn't the world supposed to end in 2012, or something?

TEDDY

We live in an era of doom and gloom. We could all go up at any time. Anyway, if it's true there's no profit in short-selling, because we'll all be toast.

NICK

That's two years away, anyway. I want proof of life! Now!

BRINSLEY

Fine. Check it out next week. For now, we have a decision to make, and one slot open!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Wait a minute! Suddenly, you're awfully anxious to get us out of this.

NICK

We just want a while to think it over!

BRINSLEY

Hesitation is fool's music!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

You sound like a fortune cookie.

BRINSLEY

If you don't like the deal, don't do the deal. It's that simple. In fact, I'll take both remaining units. Done!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Oh no you don't! You don't get your greedy paws on this that easily.

BRINSLEY

Removes any cognitive dissonance! Take the money and run.

NICK

Cognitive dissonance?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Buyer's remorse.

BRINSLEY

Look, just pick up your chips. And we'll see you next year. A profit's a profit!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Wait a minute, Brinsley! You know something!

BRINSLEY

I know a good deal when I see one. And I like the long term potential.

NICK

Am I being worked?! I think I'm being worked!

BRINSLEY

Or as another alternative, why don't you two just split the remaining unit? That way you defray the risk.

NICK

No, no, no! That's too easy.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I agree. Besides, I'm starting to like the action. Let's cut for it. Low card out!

BRINSLEY

With you two card sharps?! I'd be better off taking a knife to a gunfight.

(He thinks about it.)

All right. We'll go with the cards. But we deal a hand of Baccarat, dealt from a shoe. Low hand is dropped. And you get one refusal out of the shoe.

NICK

Baccarat. How classy!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Agreed!

TEDDY

By all means, gentlemen. We're all clay in God's hands anyway.

NICK

Oh Teddy! Too philosophical for me!

TEDDY

It's my advancing age....

Brinsley goes to leave.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Where are you going, Brinsley?!

BRINSLEY

Going to have them send up the shoe! And four decks of Bicycle. Wrapped!

NICK *(Calls after)*

Where's the trust, I ask you?

They wait for Brinsley to leave. He exits. Nick turns to the others.

Okay! Remember, once we put the cards in the shoe, we offer Brinsley the shoe. That way he thinks he's in charge...So we can stack the deck.

TEDDY

I didn't think you could stack the deck in a shoe. Isn't that the point?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Such an innocent! Isn't he cute?

TEDDY

Stacking the deck on Brinsley?! I can't do that!

NICK

Of course you can.

(He sips his drink and strolls around the room.)

Besides, if creates such a moral dilemma, you can always sacrifice yourself. We've set it up so you get two face cards. When you take a card, the next card is a face card, and the one after that is a nine. If you take the first card, you get Baccarat and you're out. If you take the second, you get a Nine. You're Banco!

TEDDY *(goes to refill his drink)*

You two are unbelievable!

NICK

No! Just having a bit of fun! Besides, isn't it a little late to be going moralistic on us?

TEDDY

I've always been a moral man. It's never been the money for me. For me, it's always been the art.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

If that isn't the biggest load of self-serving crap I've ever heard! They're not masterpieces! They're fakes! Frauds! Not worth the canvas you've slapped your chemically antiqued oils on!

TEDDY

And you have no idea how many I have out there...giving joy, filling in the missing pieces of masterworks otherwise lost. That's always a rush!

NICK

I get a rush when I hack into some bullshit pharmaceutical company's bogus pension fund and lay about \$10 million into my Swiss bank account. They pad the books anyway, so they don't dare declare the missing pieces. That way, it never gets personal.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

With me it's always personal. I like being the angel of retribution, looking my mark right in the eye, watching the thin coat of sweat that fear and greed always put on someone in the hunt.

Ignoring them Teddy goes to the balcony and looks out, sipping his drink.

TEDDY

Remarkable place, Ibiza! The scenery here is eternal, the energy almost angelic. And yet it's always been a magnet for corruption: the drugs and orgies of the rich and famous in the seventies and eighties, and now the annual gathering of the intellectual pirates of the world. We're a few among an army you know.

NICK

Teddy's putting us down, aren't you Teddy?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Teddy's going to out us. I can smell it!

TEDDY *(turns back to them)*

Not at all, Gentlemen. Brinsley's a big boy. He can hold his own. But...judgment will come. It always does.

The doorbell rings. Nick goes to answer it, pauses to sign, then returns to the room with the Baccarat shoe and four decks of cards.

NICK

Gentlemen! There are fortunes to be made!

Captain Marvel goes to examine the cards.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Let's just be sure that himself hasn't already tampered with the decks.

NICK

Never! These decks have double unbreakable seals. And all the last shuffling is done in the shoe! It's incorruptible.

Brinsley comes back in through the door.

BRINSLEY *(breaking in)*

Anything can be corrupted. That's why we're all here at the same time. Right Captain?!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Right!

BRINSLEY

One deck for each! Unwrap. Shuffle and insert into the shoe. As you already know. Number cards are their value. Face cards and tens are zero. Nine is the highest hand. Banco! Two face cards the lowest: Baccarat! And you're bust.

(Brinsley tosses one wrapped deck to each man. They in turn unwrap and shuffle, each eyeing the other suspiciously, as they gather around the table.)

And we gather the shuffled decks into the shoe at random. Teddy!

(Teddy inserts.)

Whoever wants to go next?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

You go next.

BRINSLEY

Very well...

(He places his deck into the shoe.) Gentlemen!

(The other two drop theirs into the shoe.)

And the shoe will reshuffle. Who'll reshuffle the shoe?

CAPTAIN MARVEL

I'll reshuffle.

(Captain Marvel reshuffles the shoe, looks up from the process and turns to Teddy.)

Teddy why don't you do the honors? You're probably the only one everyone trusts, entirely.

Teddy shrugs and takes the shoe.

TEDDY

A sad commentary on us all. I think you should do it, Brinsley I trust you, even if no one else does.

BRINSLEY *(shrugs)*

If it's all right with the others.

NICK

Fine with me.

(Brinsley starts dealing left to right, to Captain Marvel, Nick, Teddy, and himself.)

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Make it magic!

(Teddy turns the shoe toward Captain Marvel who shoves the first card aside. The shoe deals the second. Dealing around the table.)

Refuse...next!

(Captain Marvel gets another card from the shoe. He is the first to flip it.)

BRINSLEY

An Eight! A Natural! Can't complain about that.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Blessed by the Gods! This is my night! Nick?

(He flips over a three and a Queen)

NICK

Hmmm. Card!

(Brinsley feeds a card from the shoe.)

BRINSLEY

A Two. That's a six. The rules say you have to stand.

NICK

I know that.

BRINSLEY *(turns to Teddy)*

So, Teddy! Technically the shoe goes last. But if you like, we can change places.

TEDDY

No, no! I think we should follow the protocols of Chemin de Fer. The shoe always goes last.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

What the hell! Take it Teddy!

Yeah, Ted. Go ahead!

NICK

There is a pregnant pause before Teddy finally decides.

Very well.

Ah, zero. Then I need a card...no wait. I have a refusal. I refuse the first and take the second card out.

TEDDY

(He flips his cards over to reveal a Jack and a King.)

(Brinsley feeds from the shoe. It is a Nine.)

A Nine! Banco! You're automatic Teddy. Congratulations.

BRINSLEY

You have to beat a six, Brinsley.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

(Brinsley turns his cards over to reveal a three and a Queen, shows it to the others.)

A three and a Queen. That's a three.

Brinsley is offered the first card. Declines.

What the hell, I refuse the first card. And the second...And the third!

BRINSLEY

You can't do that!!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Why not? A refusal's a refusal, is it not?

BRINSLEY

...Let him.

NICK *(Thinks about it.)*

Slowly sensing the finality of it, Brinsley holds the card face down and waits to let the tension build...Without looking at it, he flips it over.

A King! You're still a three!

NICK

You're out!! You lose!! I love it! I love it!!

CAPTAIN MARVEL *(elated)*

Someone explain to me sometime the dubious art of gloating!

BRINSLEY

I can't help it. You never lose at anything!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

NICK

Apparently he does.

TEDDY

But you brought this deal to us.

NICK

Yeah, come to think of it.

BRINSLEY

I'll happily buy back your shares.

TEDDY

No. But I'll split my half with you...It's only money.

BRINSLEY

Let me think about it.

Obviously disturbed, Brinsley exits.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Sore loser. Never would have thought!

NICK

Nobody likes to lose.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Let's take a look at his next card...Come on! We all want to see it!

(Nick pulls the next card and tosses it on the table)

NICK

I can tell you. It's a Jack. He was doomed from the get go! And the next.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

A seven. Baccarat! Talk about a stacked deck. Nick, how'd you do it?!

NICK

Let's just say I know human nature.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Nick you lowlife sonofabitch! I love you!! But you Teddy! Well... I guess you got a dose of common sense. Why not?

TEDDY

I had to look at the bigger picture, every pun intended.

NICK

You naughty boy! That's why we love you! You're just like us!

(He gives Teddy a big hug and then goes for his I Phone.)

TEDDY

Nobody's just like you, Nicky.

(Not paying attention Nick exits.)

CAPTAIN MARVEL

That was easy. Maybe a little too easy!

TEDDY

Opt out. Nobody's making you do this.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

No. That's quite all right. Sometimes easy is good! Besides, I'm due.

(Captain Marvel pulls out his Blackberry and exits. Teddy watches him leave.)

TEDDY

Due?! You most certainly are...

Blackout.

Scene 2. Same Hotel Suite. The

Next Night. *There is champagne on the table, and Angelica stands in the midst of the men, all apparently feeling buoyant. Only Brinsley stands slightly back away from the others.*

ANGELICA

Congratulations, Gentlemen! The funds have been electronically transferred. You are now all legitimate shareholders in SOME, LLC, and the next level of Candy!

NICK

To Candy! In all its forms.

CAPTAIN MARVEL *(Looks over to Brinsley)*

Come on Brinsley! Can't be all that bad.

NICK

After all, Teddy optioned you half of his unit! So you're still a partner...if you want to be.

CAPTAIN MARVEL

Yeah! I know you're competitive. But lighten up!

ANGELICA *(pulls Brinsley over to the table.)*

Now, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, you of all people should celebrate. You're the one who brought us all together! You're the one who's made everyone so much money. And you're still a part of this. In fact, we wouldn't have it any other way!

(She loops her arm under his and walks him to the table! Teddy pours him a glass of champagne.)

TEDDY

Come lad! It's Dom Perignon!

BRINSLEY

Champagne and good company! How can I resist?

(Teddy hands him the glass, and they toast again.)

ALL

To Candy!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

In every sense of the word.

NICK

And to your Casino's Grand Opening in Dubai! Which we will all attend! Right?!

ANGELICA *(relents)*

Oh... all right!

(Finishing their drinks, the men move about the room.)

NICK

Well...I'm for a little pa-a-ar-tee! Dinner at Café Del Mar. An all-nighter at SPACE! Let's do it! Or are you too old to keep up?!

CAPTAIN MARVEL

You just think. They don't call me Captain Marvel for nothing.

NICK

All right then! Angelica! It's our time!!

ANGELICA

No it's not, Nicky. But enjoy your evening.

NICK

You don't know what you're missing.

ANGELICA

Actually, I do.

(Leaving with Captain Marvel, Nick turns back.)

NICK

Teddy?!!

TEDDY

I'll join you shortly.

BRINSLEY

I'm staying here for a while.

(They look on as the others leave. Angelica picks up her small bag by the table.)

ANGELICA

...And I'm slipping into something more comfortable.

BRINSLEY *(passing his hand toward the bedroom)*

I would hope so.

TEDDY *(observing)*

See, I knew that about you two.

BRINSLEY

Wrong again...but right about everything else. And thanks!

TEDDY

For what?

BRINSLEY

For not blowing my cover last night—the true test of friendship! And you passed with flying colors! And the worst thing you could have done was to do the noble thing and lose. Then they would have smelled a rat.

TEDDY

So you knew.

BRINSLEY

Of course! Nick would stack the deck on his own mother and probably has. Then you topped it all off by cutting me in on your share—a rare and beautiful act, even if I didn't want it.

TEDDY

I wondered about that!

BRINSLEY

Yes, well, trust is a beautiful thing. And as long as we're trusting one another, Angelica's not quite who she seems.

TEDDY

Your wife!?

BRINSLEY

Not exactly.

(As he speaks, Angelica emerges from the bedroom devoid of makeup and in a modern day nun's habit, and carrying a small satchel.)

ANGELICA

Allow me to introduce myself...Angelica Lapiere. Sister Angelica. And yes, I am CEO...of a non-profit shelter for abused women and children...

TEDDY

Quite a package for a nun! And you could have fooled me...

ANGELICA *(anticipates)*

"I once was lost, but now I'm found..." Still I have to admit the retro disguise was fun for a while. Ah, vanity! But it was for SOME thing worthwhile!

BRINSLEY

SOME—S-O-M-E—Sisters Of Mercy, LLC. A non-profit foundation. So 100% of everything goes straight into the shelter.

TEDDY

And I assume you did it because "the boys" had it coming.

ANGELICA

Captain Marvel once sank a small parish in Louisiana with a Ponzi scheme and never looked back. At the time, it was my parish. It broke my heart, but not my spirit. So...tit for tat.

BRINSLEY

And before he got to the Robin Hood level, Nicky once hacked into the financial files of a small environmental company and caused it to go under. As it happened, I was the principal stockholder. He never knew that. But I did.

ANGELICA

Anyway, gentlemen! If you'll excuse me, I have a plane to catch and a \$30 million dollar stipend to pass on to our very worthy foundation. So...

BRINSLEY

Don't get mad. Get even. As for me, I decided that it was time to give back in great measure. So I am. I'm letting you off the hook here, Teddy. You see, I was already the first investor. And yes, I am tithing...as a way to make amends.

TEDDY

You don't need to let me off....One thing about being an artist is that you learn to study your subject for a very long time. I Googled SOME at the very beginning, and eventually hit upon an acronym for The Sisters of Mercy. And I put two and two together.

BRINSLEY

And you didn't blow our cover.

TEDDY

Part of finding the Greater Fool comes first in learning who he is. And we did. Didn't we? Besides, I've made so much over the years, time to give a little back.

ANGELICA

See! I knew it! Brinsley and I had a small wager that you would support us in this...

TEDDY

And you won?

ANGELICA

I always win betting on human nature. I believe all of us reach out to serve a God, even from the darkest part of ourselves. And more often than not, He allows it. So...we've employed a little "ruthless compassion" to help them along in their decision. Mother Teresa would have understood.

(Angelica goes to Teddy and gives him a tender kiss on the cheek, hugs Brinsley warmly, and picks up her bags to leave, turning one last time at the door.)

Thank you from the heart. And God bless you both.

(Angelica exits. The men watch her leave and instantly go for the champagne.)

TEDDY

Too bad! What a woman!

BRINSLEY

No less of one than she was before—the packaging is just a bit different.

TEDDY

So..."partner," I suppose I have you to thank for this upturn in my morals.

BRINSLEY

You were always a moral man, Teddy. You just have different ways of expressing it. Dinner?

TEDDY

Let's do it.

BRINSLEY.

I'm buying.

TEDDY

You certainly are.

(Brinsley puts his arm around Teddy's shoulder, and the two exit.)

Curtain

Robert Joseph Ahola is an author, playwright, producer and director who lives in Malibu, California. As CEO of Galahad Films, he has written and produced over 300 films, commercials and documentaries for television, satellite, and private distribution.

Robert Joseph Ahola has authored a number of published and/or produced plays, including *The Year of the Tiger*, *HIGH TEA/With His Excellency*, *Dr. Max Love*, *Judas Agonistes*, *SCOREKEEPER*, *A Meerkat Christmas*, *The Ghost and Josh Gibson*, *The Last Othello* and *Pavlov's Cats*.

He has scripted five screenplays for films and television that have either been produced or are currently in production. Among them: *WORLD CLASS/The Jerry Quarry Story* (currently in development), *Billingsgate* and *One Hour of Madness and Joy* (a drama based on Walt Whitman's, *The Leaves of Grass*, currently in post-production).

And he has been the editor and publisher of various magazines, including *JAVA*, *Leverage* and *The Invisible Quarterly*.

An environmentalist and animal rights activist, Mr. Ahola is an author/co-author of fourteen published books including *The Silent Healer*, *ALOE VERA/The New Millennium*, *101 Ways to Make a Difference*, *The Return of the Hummingbird Wizard*, *I, Dragon*, and *Delusion is Good*.

A winner of three Clios, he is a Board Member of the Malibu Stage Company, a member of SAG/AFTRA, The Alliance of Los Angeles Playwrights (ALAP) and The Dramatists Guild.

Contact Info:
Robert Joseph Ahola, CEO
Galahad Films
23852 Pacific Coast Highway #753
Malibu, CA 90265
Tel. 424-644-0611
Fax 310-456-5109
Cell 310-713-0547
e-mail: galahadfilms@aol.com
www.robertahola.com/
www.robertjosephahola.com/