

DK MEDIA CONSULTING

Title: JUST PLAY DEAD

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Form/Pages: SP/107

Date Received: 1/16/25

Genre: Drama Thriller

Read by: Guy Phillippi

Circa: Present

Locale: Caribbean, Fiji, Las Vegas

C: Samuel L Jackson (*Pulp Fiction*), Eva Green (*Dumbo*), Chase Stokes (*Uglies*)

D: Gary Fleder (*Runaway Jury*)

S: Dan Gordon (*The Hurricane*), based on a book by Dan Gordon

P: Moshe Diamant (*The Hurricane Heist*), Phil Hunt (*The Apprentice*),
Sagiv Diamant (*We Die Young*), Gary Fleder (*Runaway Jury*)

B: \$30M

Status: SPP April 2025

LOG LINE: Tired of her husband, who is wealthy from criminal activity, a woman enlists her lover to murder her spouse, only for the husband to find out and craft a web of deceit designed to end with some of the participants dead.

COMMENT SUMMARY: The tale has some interesting turns in the plot, but fails to keep the logic of the situation steady and wants the audience to root for the most completely evil character. Seeing his plan succeed is not very satisfying.

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Originality of Premise				X						
Execution of Premise					X					
Story Structure				X						
Dialogue					X					
Characters				X						
Pacing					X					
Commercial Appeal				X						

(Rated 1-10, 10 being Excellent.)

Suggested Rating: I-G-----PG-----PG-13-----R-----NC-17-I

(Based on the script)

For violence, sexuality, drinking, language, adult themes and situations

Uniqueness: A very strong cast.

Positioning/Market Appeal: Definitely aimed at fans of the thriller genre, but their involvement in this will be minor. The cast is biggest draw here. Prospects are on the low side.

Similar Movies: *Sleeping Dogs*, *Force Of Nature: Dry 2*, *The Accountant*

With an ELDERLY GENTLEMAN at the helm of his boat, JACK WOLFE, 60s, enjoys a drink with his accountant, MITCH WILLIAMS, who warns Jack of the looming danger for them both from an investigation into Jack's financial crimes. Jack's way of dealing with this is to poison Mitch and dump his body into the ocean. Three months earlier, a RICH GRINGA, 40s, is eaten by SHARKS while taking a swim in the Caribbean waters. Three months later, NORA WOLFE, 40, is out having a good time as narration by local policeman DANI CHRISTIANSON, 40, talks of the allure of a woman in her 40s. Nora is having an affair with "surfer dude" CHAD, 23. She's unaware that the Elderly Gentleman is taking photos of them. Dani is also watching the couple, without realizing that the Elderly Gentleman is also photographing him.

Soon after, Jack has a talk with his wife Nora, whom he calls "Lovey." They have no children, just a dog, GUSTIE. The discussion is about the company they own. Nora has control of 51% of the shares, thus both could be indicted. So Jack proposes that Nora kill him. He's insured for \$30 million, which she could tell her lover she'll split with him, only to frame him for the murder and keep it all herself. Of course, there will be no murder. Jack and Nora can set it up as a fake murder. In this particular place, San Miguel, a body isn't needed to convict for murder, just evidence that one has taken place. If they can pull it off, Jack and Nora can split the insurance money. He's recorded this conversation to prove she was in on the plot.

Three months earlier, Dani and Nora are finishing making love when she claims that Jack beats her. She tells him the story (in 1957) of Jack's father, WOLFE, SR., who ran a brothel where he'd have young Jack take photos of the prominent men who came by. Dani gets a call from his partner BIANCA ORTIZ, who outranks him so he has to leave Nora to investigate the discovery of a body. Their boss, the COLONEL, is at the scene, as is nun SISTER RACHEL, who consoles a distraught HUSBAND. The deceased is the Rich Gringa. Bianca tells Dani that the Gringa was quite disliked in the area and ponders if a witch might have conjured a spell to draw out the Sharks which killed her. It's possible the Husband "chummed" the waters where he knew his wife swam. Dani discovers that the island gossip network has already spread news of him and Nora.

Six months later, Dani talks to an INSURANCE EXECUTIVE about Bianca, who has told Dani that Nora was a hooker whom Jack saved from a rough GULF STATE SHIEK client when both Jack and Nora worked in Vegas. Jack kills the Shiek, which becomes an unsolved murder. Jack and Nora marry soon after. Bianca warns Dani that she won't let him get away with murdering Jack if Jack turns up dead. Dani tries, and fails, to convince Nora to just leave Jack. Calling this relationship "unproductive," Nora tells Dani it's over, only for Dani to begin surveilling Nora, who brings Chad into her plot to "kill" Jack. The Elderly Gentleman keeps tabs on them. Nora warns Chad that Jack wants to frame him, so they might as well kill him and cover it up. Chad tries to flee to Miami, only to find his accounts have been frozen.

Right after he learns this, Chad is arrested by Dani, who beats him up. Bianca doesn't back her partner when he faces the Colonel over what happened. He's also chastised by Sister Rachel for beating up his "romantic rival." Nora convinces Chad to join her plan while Jack talks to the Elderly Gentleman about where will be best to dispose of a body. While talking to Sister Rachel, Dani insists he's trying to prevent a murder. His plan is to find incriminating evidence against Jack before anything else goes down. Then Jack and Nora get together to plot his fake murder. This will take place on the boat, as an explosion will get rid of most of the evidence. Pointing out that they need a "body part" to be convincing, Nora suggests cutting off Jack's ring finger. He's not enthused by this idea. Now Jack pays a visit to Chad and outlines how he, a very long time ago, set up evidence of a son. He will use this paper trail to allow Chad to be that son, Jean.

This will allow Chad to inherit Jack's money. Or at least half. Nora is waiting for Chad when Jack drops him off at his home. She wants to know all Jack told him. Dani and Sister Rachel realize Jack has to have a cohort who takes the photos and, since the photos are printed, they might find this person by checking local photography shops. This leads them to Martinez Photo and Camera. Nora gets into Jack's safe with the cooperation of some WORKMEN. Inside is the insurance policy, with Jean as a beneficiary, but with a note to her from Jack revealing that he expected her to check this out. She decides that she's fine with Jean/Chad getting half. MR. MARTINEZ is no help to Sister Rachel and Dani. (Mr. Martinez is described as "an elderly gentleman," with no indication here that he is the previous character.)

PETE comes to the camera shops, secretly recording his visit, to sell some stolen equipment. When Dani and Sister Rachel return with the footage, Mr. Martinez suddenly remembers who they might be looking for, a man named ANNIBAL. A wedding soon takes place at the Rich Gringa's estate, as her Husband remarries. Chad works the bar at the reception, while Nora and Jack are among the guests. Sister Rachel, Dani, and Bianca also attend. Taking aside Nora, Dani warns her that he will arrest her if Jack turns up dead. She tells him to arrest Chad so that she and Dani can go off together. While Nora would be willing, Dani needs to take care of the details that will leave Jack dead. Chad sees the two together and tells Jack that he worries about being set up. Presenting Chad with a Nigerian passport that identifies Chad as Jean, Chad realizes he has to "kill Chad" to have a new life. Jack tells Nora that he truly loves her, then they go over the bomb on the boat idea that will kill Chad.

Nora's part in this is to use the drugs Jack used to kill Mitch to convince Chad to use them on Jack. The idea is for Chad to think he's killed Jack and die on the boat while Nora and Jack escape. But Jack tells Chad about the bomb. LOCALS at a bar discuss the situation between Nora, Jack, and the others, figuring someone will die. Nora finds Jack's photographer, Annibal Perez, through financial records that show Jack's been paying Perez as a "handyman." She also warns Chad that the bomb is meant for him, but she has an alternate plan that will give him time to escape. Dani's voice-over returns, admitting that no one truly knows what happened on the day of the explosion. But what they do know is that Chad and Jack were seen together in the morning, heading to Jack's boat. The boat explodes and neither have been seen alive since. Nora visits Perez (the Elderly Gentleman who worked for Jack), only for her to be arrested by Dani and Bianca, who is Perez's granddaughter.

At Nora's trial, prosecutor VASQUEZ has DNA expert CASTRO testify to identifying the remains of Chad. There is also a tooth that can be proved to be Jack's. Then Detective FUENTES talks of there being three bombs on the boat. Nora realizes Jack is still alive, but the court sentences her to life in prison. Thirty days later, posing as Jean, Bianca shows up at a bank in Liechtenstein to retrieve Jack's money. Banker TESSLER is very familiar with the family accounts. Dani talks of how Tessler sees Bianca/Jean meet Jack afterwards. The plane taking Bianca/Jean to the Seychelles crashes, killing her, Annibal, and JACOMO LUPO, which translates from Italian to "Jack Wolf." Dani tells the Insurance Executive (the conversation that makes up the voice-over) that he's sure Jack is still alive and killed Bianca and Perez, even though his ring finger was found in the wreckage. On an island in Fiji, a man missing his ring finger (face unseen) relaxes on the beach.

COMMENTS:

Structurally, this has the feel of a heist film, with the main character focusing on a goal, then gathering a team to pull it off. The twist is that he's plotting to have some of the others killed or sent to jail. With an opening that shows him ruthlessly killing a cohort just to stay out of trouble, the mood is set and it reflects poorly on Jack, as the audience doesn't have any rooting interest in what he's doing. In a typical heist story, they may be criminals, but there are always balancing interests of revenge, trying to achieve something for family, or some other backstory to what puts the characters in the position to execute the heist. Here, Jack is just a criminal who plots killings just to cover up his misdeeds. There is no aspect to his life or character that could help the audience want to side with him.

It's easy to turn against Jack from the opening scene, where the killing of Mitch doesn't make real sense, as Mitch tells Jack that Jack is in trouble even if Mitch is dead. Ignoring this, Jack kills him anyways. All Jack has to do is tell Mitch a variation on, "don't worry, I'll figure out something" and the audience would at least have a glimmer of opportunity to pull for Jack. The story just becomes building toward different scenarios where various characters might die to help Jack get away with what he's done, with the very end, where he's the only one who gets away, not the least bit satisfying. Since the ending makes the point that he has killed most everyone, even the two most loyal partners (Bianca and Perez), what gets underlined is that Jack is just a self-involved scumbag, which is never an audience-pleasing notion. The inner workings of the plot have some nice intricacy, but so many people know at least a part of what is going on that the plot defies logic at times. The fact that the others involved pull off their part of the scam well makes it even more disappointing that Jack can't find it in himself to reward them or so completely fool the authorities by saving everyone. The idea that Jack has created a background for a "son" for him to use when it's necessary is a great twist, but feels wasted if it just means he's going to kill the person (actually, the two people) he awards it to. Movies like this need a rooting interest and there just isn't one here.

Jack certainly enjoys himself, but the audience will never trust him for a moment and his constantly referring to Nora as "Lovey" becomes annoying, as it's clear he doesn't really have such feelings for her. Nora plays her part well, scrambling to set up Jack's plan, but always with a sense of what she needs to do to save herself. If Jack had found a way to save her and the ending emphasized that they were doing all this to stay together - even the affairs - it would be more pleasing. Chad and Dani are clearly pawns and expendable, but each establish solid personalities, while Bianca and Perez play their parts here well. The dialogue for all falls flat a bit too often.

Overall, this really needs a rooting interest to be a success.