

# Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

*Dramatic Publishing*



# Screwtape

a play by James Forsyth  
based on the book by C.S. Lewis  
*The Screwtape Letters*

# Screwtape

**By James Forsyth. From C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*.**

*Cast: 7m., 5w.* Screwtape, a senior devil from hell, has delegated some authority to a junior fiend, Wormwood, whose assignment is to seize the soul of a very human and lovable young man. This might be called a devilish dramatic contest with high-level meaning thrashed out in terms of brilliant low-level comedy. The rather charming Wormwood is being critically supervised in this, his first case, by that extraordinary devil, Screwtape. Advice from this old hand from hell is devastatingly perceptive of human foibles and, despite the love of a wonderful young girl, our young man is in terrible danger. It's really a close decision and, in a dazzling resolution, we all learn something important about hell, heaven, religion and humanity. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 2 hours, 35 minutes. Code: S18.*

ISBN: 978-0-87129-754-9



9 780871 297549 >

[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)



**Dramatic Publishing**

Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street

Woodstock, IL 60098

800-448-7469

© Dramatic Publishing Company

# **SCREWTAPE**

a play  
by

**JAMES FORSYTH**

based on the book by C.S. Lewis  
“The Screwtape Letters”



**THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY**

\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING

P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

*COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.* This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

"Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois"

©MCMLXI by  
C.S. LEWIS and JAMES FORSYTH  
New Matter ©MCMLXXII by  
C.S. LEWIS and JAMES FORSYTH  
Renewed ©MCMLXXXIX

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(SCREWTAPE)

ISBN 0-87129-754-X

---

---

## SCREWTAPE

For Seven Men and Five Women

---

### CHARACTERS

- WORMWOOD** - A junior fiend, on his first assignment.
- SCREWTAPE** - A senior devil, in danger of it being his last.
- MIKE** - A young architectural draftsman; Wormwood's "assignment".
- SLUMTRIMPET** - Female fiend; a sexpert.
- JUDY** - Macadam's daughter; Slum-trimpet's "assignment".
- MR. MACADAM** - Judy's father; and Mike's boss.
- MIKE'S MOTHER** - A widow.
- JOHN MORTAR** - An older draftsman in Macadam's office.
- MILLY** - Young Secretary to Mr. Macadam.
- REX SKINNER** - A car salesman, and 'speed-fiend".
- QUEENIE** - Landlady of Rex and Milly.
- MR. SPIKE** - Vicar of a local church.

**PLACE:** A provincial town.

**TIME:** The very recent past.

**THE SETTING** is a simple composite setting used as the following locations of a provincial town: -

Mike's Mother's house; The  
Street; The Office; The  
Church; The Macadams'  
Garden.

The basic setting would best be a central rostrum with a ramp leading down and off stage left and some steps leading up and off to stage right; also some clear playing area in front of where the rostrum sits.

Apart from Screwtape's inescapable tail, any technical tricks are out of place in this play. It is a very human, and devilishly tragic, comedy.

---

---

# ACT ONE

---

## Scene One

( SCENE: The sound of dissonant music. [Solo Fiddle.] MIKE's MOTHER's apartment in an old house - before first light on a dreary Monday morning.

The sound of an exceptionally heavy tanker truck passing the house is repeated several times. The spill of the trucks' headlights swings across the scene as they thunder by.

All that can be seen of the room is a divan bed. On the bed is a young man. It is MIKE - asleep. He has not bothered to take off his clothes, but has a blanket pulled over him.

An alarm clock rings. MIKE's hand comes out, and automatically puts off the alarm. MIKE turns over to sleep again.

The sound of another truck passing.

MIKE's MOTHER comes on to the rostrum where the bed is. MOTHER is in her dressing gown, and only half awake.)

MOTHER. Mike -

MIKE. Mother.

MOTHER. Time.



MIKE. Yes, Mother.

(MOTHER proceeds off, and down. Another truck thunders by. MIKE groans and turns over again. A door slams. MOTHER comes back up with two milk bottles in her hands.)

MOTHER. Mike!

MIKE. Mother.

MOTHER. Time!

MIKE. Yes, Mother.

(MOTHER continues off and up. MIKE continues sleeping. A red light glows towards stage left and upstage. From that region SCREW-TAPE appears, cautiously coming up on hands and knees. SCREWTAPE straightens up and looks around. He is an Old Devil. He looks like a senior business executive gone to seed. His tail coat has been worn to a high polish in the Service. And, so far as can be seen at this juncture, there is nothing very extraordinary about him except for the pallor of any creature from the Nether Regions; and the rather grasping, clawlike hands.)

SCREWTAPE (calling). Wormwood? (Pause.)  
WORMWOOD!!

(WORMWOOD appears, coming from off R, downstage. SCREWTAPE. WORM--!! Oh. (Stopping short as he sees him. WORMWOOD is a very uncertain young fiend who, apart from an inhumanly bloodless pallor, and a certain artificiality of face, looks like any other fiendish youngster of our day and age. His clothes are so extravagantly "with it" that they are almost ahead of "it." He looks miserable.)

- Well? Had a good look round, Nephew?  
WORMWOOD (miserably). Yes, Uncle.  
SCREWTAPE. Got the shivers, Nephew?  
WORMWOOD. Yes, Uncle.  
SCREWTAPE. Ah, well - walking the face of the Earth for the first time can be a frightening experience - even for a fiend. But if you're not up to it by now, what in the name of Our Father Below has all your Infernal Education been for? Don't mutter, boy! What did you say?  
WORMWOOD (very unconvincingly). Up to it, Uncle.  
SCREWTAPE. Then stand up! Oh, those clothes - (Makes WORMWOOD more and more self-conscious.) Tailoring in my time never stooped to following fashions up here. When I was your age, my boy, it was skin-tights and ability. No disguise for me. Skin-tights and -- Are you paying attention, boy?  
WORMWOOD. I was just looking at your tail, Uncle Screwtape. It's long, isn't it?  
SCREWTAPE. Long enough for the job.  
WORMWOOD. Does that mean you're coming out on the job with me?  
SCREWTAPE. I am your Instructor, boy -- not your nursemaid. Now--listen to me... (Takes out a large red envelope and extracts from it a black document.)  
WORMWOOD. Can I sit, Uncle Screwtape?  
SCREWTAPE. You may not - sit, relax, squat or lie down. You will - at all times of the Enemy's night and day - be on the devilish alert. And by the Enemy who do we mean, boy?

(WORMWOOD points a finger to heaven, his attention again on SCREWTAPE's unseen tail.)

SCREWTAPE. Then for Lucifer's sake, stand up!!!  
- and look alert. (Unfolds the black document and clears his throat. Reading.) "First Assignment. . . ."

WORMWOOD. I just thought it was a terrific tail.

SCREWTAPE (finding both this interruption and the question unsettling). Terrific? (Falling for the flattery.) You think so?

WORMWOOD. Don't you? (Sits down.)

SCREWTAPE. Well--as a matter of fact, Nephew --if you must know--(telling a big lie) it was specially awarded to me for being brilliant at the very point in my career at which you now stand. (Repeats it to the sitting WORMWOOD.) --now stand. Yes - I was a mere fledgeling fiend - when I - was Nero's Nemesis.

WORMWOOD. Were you around when Nero--

SCREWTAPE. Age is a matter of Time and we are not tied to Time. Are we, Wormwood?

WORMWOOD. Evidently not. (He realizes he is going to have to listen to the whole tale.)

SCREWTAPE (telling the big lie with full Thespian delivery). Stealing forth on that historic night, I saw the sun sink down upon Rome; and a thousand tongues of flame lick up. So - dashing forward into the fire--(Carried away by his own rhetoric.) like a colt careered into Tiber's tide - I sped to the heart of the holocaust where I had heard the fiddle falter, and then and there, I - Screwtape Minor - as I then was - snatched the soul of great Nero himself - and - popped him in the Pit! - fiddle and all. Though I have lived to regret that fiddle.

WORMWOOD. Haven't we all? But-- (Suspiciously.) that's funny, though. I could have sworn that in class down below, old Slubgob told us all hellish success was measured up here - (Taps his forehead.) in horns. I thought he said degrees of failure were "measured by - length of tail"?

SCREWTAPE (blustering his way out of it). Well - as usual! Nephew couldn't have been listening! So, this time, he'd better listen - hadn't he!! (WORMWOOD thinks better of further dissent and nods. SCREWTAPE hurriedly proceeds to read, loudly and clearly, from the black document. Rattling off the preamble.) "First Assignment: Apprentice-Tempter Grade D" - Not even Grade C! "000013 Wormwood. Instructor-in-charge, P. Screwtape, Master of Devilish Arts; D. D. Illit., T. E., B. S. etc. etc. You will - (Slowly and clearly.) attach yourself to one, Michael Green, of this town. . ." That miserable human lying on the bed over there. "Your goal--"

WORMWOOD. Wondered about him, Uncle. What's his name?

SCREWTAPE. Do you ever listen? His name-- for the second time--is Michael Green. And-- (Has returned to reading.) "you will win his eternal soul for Hell. . ." He doesn't think that he has one to lose. But he has; and we need that nourishment. So, it is up to you in the end to see that there is no earthly impediment at all to scoring the final fiendish goal of popping him into The Pit.

WORMWOOD. Uncle - when he's popped into the Pit - ?

SCREWTAPE. Nephew - if he is popped into the Pit.

WORMWOOD. 'See the point, Uncle.

SCREWTAPE. If you succeed - and I quote "If" - then you will be awarded your Master's Degree of Accredited Tempter, Faculty of Fiends, all fully signed up by Our Father Below. Crawling may then be permitted to you. Stand up!! But - if you fail - there will appear one night upon the menu of the devils' dining hall attached to my department below, "Wormwood Fritters", followed by "Wormwood Stew", followed by "Coupe Wormwood". And, for the rest of you - (With relish.) you'll be in the soup, Wormwood. Anything to say?

WORMWOOD (as he stands staring at him). Yes. I do hate you.

SCREWTAPE. That's my fiend! Here is your Tempter's Handbook, dear boy. (Hands a little black book to WORMWOOD.) And, through all your trials and tribulations up here, never forget the motto which hangs above the high table down below, and declares in letters of flame to all, the precept by which we stand or fall -

WORMWOOD (nodding wearily as he beats SCREWTAPE to it). "BRING US FOOD OR BE EATEN".

SCREWTAPE. Yes. And don't forget, dear Wormwood, when Uncle says he's so fond of you that he could eat you up - it's a devilishly accurate statement. Now - stop biting your nails and jump to it, boy. For the day's work begins!

(There is a loud cacophony of factory whistles.)

MIKE stirs in bed and slowly sits up.  
WORMWOOD ducks for cover.)

SCREWTAPE. Stand up!

WORMWOOD. He'll see me!

SCREWTAPE. He cannot see you! Did Slub-gob teach you anything? Today the average mind does not admit that we even exist. They are all realists. All settle for the Hard Facts of Life; and leave us all the rest which happens to be nine-tenths of the total. Look at him. (As MIKE seizes the clock.) He believes in the Real Thing. He even believes that Time may depend on the behaviour of timepieces.

MIKE. Eight o'clock! Hell! She might at least have given me a call - damn and blast her.

SCREWTAPE. Well - even in a casual way to damn one's mother before breakfast can be an excellent beginning. Take a good look at the patient. Go on.

(But WORMWOOD jumps back as MIKE leaps out of bed, checks, and holds his head.)

MIKE. Oh -- (Groaning.) --old Mortar and his mixed drinks! The Devil take him.

SCREWTAPE. Oh, he will, he will -- but you first, my morsel.

WORMWOOD. Who's Mortar, Uncle?

SCREWTAPE. Senior draftsman in his office; former drinking pal of your man's defunct Dad.

WORMWOOD. So Dad's dead, is he?

SCREWTAPE. Dead and gone. Here comes John Mortar now.

(MORTAR comes in at a lower level.)

SCREWTAPE. Once ardent Communist, now cynical Socialist. And, in both capacities-- (MORTAR looks up to where MIKE is and, putting his fingers to his mouth, sends out a screeching whistle.)--incurably vulgar.

MIKE (as the piercing whistle hits his throbbing head). Oh!----

(MORTAR, square built, clad in an old raincoat, with newspaper under his arm, moves on and out on his way to work, leaving MIKE holding his head.)

SCREWTAPE. Ah, Michael Green, this is Life-- so we tell him. This is LIFE--because----

MIKE. I feel like death.

SCREWTAPE. Exactly. (To WORMWOOD.)

Despair, remember, is a sin of sins.

WORMWOOD. And he looks desperate. But he doesn't hear you, does he?

SCREWTAPE. He neither sees you nor hears you --not so long as you avoid the fiendish frequencies. Try it. Go on, shout at him.

Go on! We've all got to begin.

WORMWOOD (scared). Mister Green?

(MIKE continues getting socks on.)

SCREWTAPE. Mister? Oh, Worm. And I said shout!

WORMWOOD (shouting violently). Hi!!! You!!!

SCREWTAPE. That's it.

WORMWOOD (continuing shouting to MIKE). We're talking to you! Yob! - Sod! - (This "freedom of speech" has gone to WORMWOOD's head.) I like this. Hey! You horrible human, you! (Bellowing.) On your feet! You Mother's little darling!

MIKE. Oh, no! Not that. Never that.

WORMWOOD (taken aback). What? (As MIKE, muttering to himself, grabs a towel and goes out, WORMWOOD turns on SCREW-TAPE.) He heard me! And you said----

SCREWTAPE. I said "so long as you avoid the fiendish frequencies". Where his Mother is concerned, your Michael Green is positively fiendish.

MOTHER. Mike!

SCREWTAPE. And according to her record, she's going to be a great help to us.

(MIKE's MOTHER comes in; finds the bed empty; sees that MIKE is not in the room; sees his jacket on the floor; picks it up and looks at it.)

SCREWTAPE (while this is going on). Rosalie Green -- middle-class social climber whom we have successfully infected with what we call Insatiable Self-Denial. She is the sort of woman who goes out to a tea party, and says: "Oh, I never eat anything, my dear - Oh, well, just half a slice of toast - just cut so thin - just toasted golden, from a brown loaf -- and, oh, wholemeal only--" And, before they know it, every member of that party has been martyred to that woman's one half slice of toast! (MOTHER starts furtively to search through MIKE's pockets.) Having lost a husband through her own possessive love of the man, she has thereafter striven so hard to keep her clutches on her only son that she has practically turned that virile young man into a substitute husband. This is opportunity



for us, hope for you, and Hell for him.  
Watch this.

(MIKE, wandering back silently in his stockinged feet, sees his MOTHER finishing her search of his pockets. MOTHER turns.)

MOTHER. Oh, Mike! (She nervously and guiltily lays the jacket on the bed.) Mike, I called you. It's gone half past seven. It's all these late nights, darling. You'll have to rush your breakfast again. Surely you heard the alarm go off, darling?

MIKE (grimly). It didn't go off--darling.

(MIKE sits on the bed to put his shoes on.)

MOTHER. It did, dearest. That's why I called you.

MIKE. It was here -- by my ear. If it had rung----

MOTHER. I tell you----

MIKE. Fine! You tell me. Fine. It went off.

MOTHER. You don't believe me, do you?

MIKE. Oh-- (Rising.) Who cares? (Grabbing his jacket.) And getting out of this house is becoming as bad as going through Customs. Find anything?

MOTHER. Mike! You were drinking again last night. And with that awful John Mortar.

MIKE (turning his back on her as he puts on his jacket.) Oh, for God's sake!

MOTHER. Don't keep turning your back on me. I can't bear it. You're getting to be just like your father.

MIKE. You flatter me.

(MOTHER looks at him, uncertain of what is

coming. WORMWOOD stands watching, and biting his nails.)

MOTHER. What do you mean?

MIKE. My father at least had the guts to walk out.

MOTHER (frightened). What has John Mortar been telling you?

MIKE (facing her). He didn't have to tell me anything. I knew in my bones why my father left you. You just can't leave anybody alone. So -- we walk out.

MOTHER (scared). "We" walk out, Mike?

MIKE. Yes. Everybody except your very Reverend Mr. Spike--who you call Father Spike. And I bet he'd walk too if it wasn't his business to "save" you - body and soul.

MOTHER (in panic). Mike, you're not going to leave me? Not you too? (She takes out her handkerchief.)

SCREWTAPE. Here it comes! That most disgusting of all human excretions--tears.

MIKE. Oh, look, Mother, I can't spend my life fighting you. At least my father went out to fight for something. Me--I haven't even got the guts to fight Mortar --or Macadam.

MOTHER (looking up). Fight? Mr. Macadam? Why should you fight Mr. Macadam?

SCREWTAPE (to WORMWOOD). His boss. A tycoon Contractor.

MIKE. Oh, don't worry. I tell you, I haven't got the guts. Because maybe, Mother, you've gutted me.

MOTHER. Gutted? What a word to use----

MIKE (without bitterness now). Well, it's true. I am a gutless fish.