

Bruno Hauptmann
was accused of
kidnapping and murder.
Could he get a fair trial
when he was . . .

'The Most Hated Man in the World'

Characters

(In order of appearance;
main parts in boldface)

Narrators 1, 2, 3

Graham Thurman, newspaper editor

Joe Dobbins, rookie reporter

Lew Resnick, veteran reporter

Vendors 1, 2, 3

Thomas Trenchard, judge at trial

Anne Lindbergh

David Wilentz, chief prosecutor

Edward Reilly, head defense lawyer

Charles Lindbergh

Witnesses 1, 2, 3

John F. Condon, retired principal

Bruno Hauptmann

Crowd

Jury Foreman

Messenger

Teacher

Anna Hauptmann,

wife of Bruno Hauptmann

Harold Hoffman,

governor of New Jersey

Lloyd Fisher,

Hauptmann's later lawyer

Scene 1

Narrator 1: The time is just before Christmas, 1934. The place is the newspaper office of the *Trenton Herald*. Editor Graham Thurman faces two men, one middle-aged and one in his early 20s.

Graham Thurman: The trial starts next Wednesday. This is going to be the biggest thing since Noah landed the Ark, and we're going to cover every inch of it. Lew, you'll be calling the shots for the *Herald* team. Joe, this is the best break a cub reporter ever had. You stick with Lew, and you'll learn something about this business.

Joe Dobbins: Yes, sir. This will be a great experience.

Lew Resnick: I'm gonna play nursemaid to the kid?

Thurman: Not nursemaid, Lew, mentor. He'll be there to help you any way he can. I know his family. He's smart and he'll work hard. Give him some of that ace reporter stuff, and let him run.

Resnick: (sighs) OK, kid. Just make sure you're around when I need you.

Scene 2

Narrator 2: January 2, 1935. The white-columned courthouse in Flemington, N.J., is a madhouse. More than 600 reporters, photographers, telegraphers, and radio broadcasters from every continent have taken over the town. From the top of the courthouse, 120 telegraph lines stretch out toward the waiting world.

Narrator 3: Despite the winter weather, the courtroom swelters from the heat of 300 bodies packed into it.

Resnick: Kid, I've been at this racket for 26 years, and I've never seen anything like it. Look at this mob—New York society dames, ex-fighters, Broadway producers, and half the politicians in Jersey.

Joe: Packed in here like prunes in a box.

Resnick: Good line, kid. I think I'll use it.

Narr 1: Meanwhile, hundreds more people mill around outside.

Vendor 1: Step right up and get your picture taken on the bench Lindbergh sat on. Only one thin dime, and you're part of history. (waves small, 8-inch wooden ladder) For an extra dime, you can buy a kidnap ladder to give to your kids.



January 1935. The "Trial of the Century" has started, and radio, movie, and newspaper reporters have swarmed into Flemington like an army of ants.



Judge Trenchard

Vendor 2: Right here, folks, right here. Hauptmann hot dogs, the kidnapper's favorite brand. A little taste of Germany right in your own backyard.

Vendor 3: Get 'em while they last! Genuine blond locks from the Lindbergh baby's last haircut! (*whispering to light-haired son*) Quick, Ned, go cut some more off that head of yours.

Narr 2: Back inside, Judge Trenchard is trying to get things under way.

Judge Trenchard: I want all this noise stopped. This is not a heavy-weight fight or a Broadway production. An innocent baby has been murdered, and a man is on trial for his life.

Narr 3: Joe points to a big man sitting next to Bruno Hauptmann.

Joe: Who's he?

Resnick: Edward Reilly, the famous criminal lawyer.

The Hearst newspapers are paying his fee—25,000 bucks—in return for exclusive rights to Hauptmann's story.

Joe: Is he good?

Resnick: Used to be. Saved lots of people from murder raps. But he drinks too much, and he's lost some big cases lately. Now they call him "Death House Reilly."

Joe: What about the prosecutor?

Resnick: Name is David Wilentz. He wants the death penalty, and he'll be tough. (*points to man in stylish suit*) He's Jewish, and Reilly's spreading



Hauptmann confers with Edward Reilly during the trial. Later, experts would put some of the blame for Hauptmann's fate on the flamboyant defense counsel. Reilly's fancy clothes and superior air offended members of the jury. He drank too much. He thought Lindbergh was a great hero and was quoted as believing that Hauptmann really was the kidnapper. Reilly avoided conferring with Hauptmann and spent only 38 minutes with him in preparation for the trial. At one point Reilly showed up at prison clearly drunk and left Hauptmann weeping in his bunk.

the word that he's a Jew going after a German. That won't stop Wilentz.

Scene 3

Narr 1: As the trial gets under way, the defense and the prosecution begin their verbal duel. The first witness is Anne Lindbergh, who keeps spectators spellbound as she quietly



Atty. Wilentz

answers questions about the night of the kidnapping.

Anne Lindbergh: Yes, that sleeping suit belonged to my baby.

David Wilentz: Thank you, Mrs. Lindbergh.

Judge: The counsel for the defense may now question the witness.

Edward Reilly: The defense feels that the grief of Mrs. Lindbergh needs no cross-examination.

Joe: (*whispering to Resnick*) No questions at all?

Resnick: (*whispering back*) Of course not. The people love her. Appearing to pick on her would be the worst thing Reilly could do.

Narr 2: Charles Lindbergh is the next witness. He listens closely while Wilentz reads the kidnap note with a strong German accent.

Wilentz: All right, Mr. Lindbergh. Now I ask you to identify the man who called out "Hey, Doctor, over here!" in the cemetery, the man who spoke to Dr. Condon and called himself John.

Charles Lindbergh: The voice was that of Bruno Hauptmann.

Narr 3: The courtroom explodes with noise, and Judge Trenchard raps for order.

Judge: (*firmly*) Once again, I remind everyone in this room that we are not at a circus but in a court of law.

Narr 1: Then cross-examination time comes, and defense lawyer Reilly goes after Lindbergh.

Reilly: Now you have told us, sir, that a response to Dr. Condon's ad in the *Bronx Home News* appeared within one day. I put it to you that such a quick response hardly



seems believable.

Charles L: (*calmly*) None of the events connected with this kidnapping have followed the ordinary logic of life.

Narr 2: As Lindbergh leans forward, Joe's eyes pop.

Joe: Hey, he's wearing a gun in a shoulder holster under his jacket.

Resnick: So you finally noticed. If I'd had as many death threats as he's had, I'd wear one too. This case has pulled out every crazy in the country.

Joe: Hauptmann's only 15 feet away. Suppose Lindbergh decided to drill him on the spot.

Resnick: I wouldn't blame him, kid. It's what I'd do if he murdered my baby.

Scene 4

Narr 3: As the trial progresses, prosecutor Wilentz slowly builds his case.

Witness 1: On the morning of the

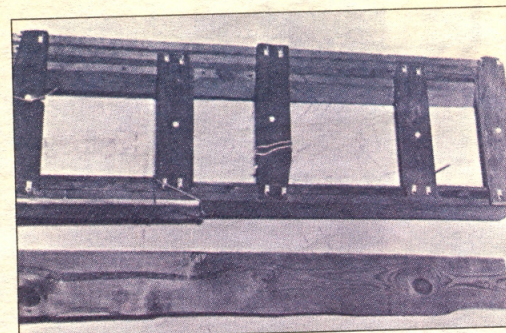
Charles Lindbergh testifies during the trial. Spectators were both fascinated and horrified by glimpses of the revolver he carried.

kidnapping, I saw the accused with a ladder in his car, driving toward the Lindbergh estate.

Witness 2: While cutting trees near the Lindbergh estate, I saw Hauptmann walking in the woods. Twice I saw him.

Witness 3: I am the timekeeper on the apartment project where Mr. Hauptmann was working. The records show that he was not at work on the day of the kidnapping nor on the day the ransom was paid.

Narr 1: The evidence seems overwhelming. A wood expert testifies that part of a floorboard from Hauptmann's attic was used to make rail 16 of the kidnap ladder. Handwriting experts say that Hauptmann wrote the ransom notes. Notebooks kept by Hauptmann show that he sometimes spelled *boat* as *boad*.



At bottom is the plank from Hauptmann's attic supposedly used for a rung of the kidnap ladder. Some historians believe the police faked this evidence.

Narr 2: A cabdriver says that Hauptmann was the man who handed him a note to deliver to Dr. Condon's house. The gas station manager tells about writing Hauptmann's license plate number on a ransom bill. Acquaintances testify that the Hauptmanns both stopped working right after the ransom money was paid.

Narr 3: Then Dr. Condon himself takes the stand.

Wilentz: Dr. Condon, can you identify the man who told you his name was John?

Condon: (*very dramatically*) John is Bru-no Rich-ard Haupt-mann!

Scene 5

Joe: It looks to me like he's been nailed right to the wall.

Narr 1: Several days have passed, and Joe Dobbins and Lew Resnick are standing outside the courthouse amid the constant flow of sightseers and souvenir hunters.

Resnick: Yeah, I've looked at a lot of juries in my day, kid. Started out as

a police reporter. I can usually tell what they're thinkin'. Right now they're thinkin' guilty.

Joe: Well, Hauptmann's up next. Think Ed Reilly can turn things around?

Resnick: He'd better, kid—or they'll be callin' him Death House till the day he dies.

Narr 2: Later that day, Reilly begins leading his key witness through important points.

Reilly: All right, Mr. Hauptmann, did you build the ladder?

Bruno Hauptmann: No, I did not.

Reilly: Did you use wood from your attic to make a ladder rail?

Haupt: I did not.

Reilly: Did you write the ransom notes?

Haupt: No.

Reilly: Receive the ransom money?

Haupt: No. The money in the box



belonged to my associate Isidor Fisch.
Reilly: So you say, under an oath you made to this court and to God, that you did not kidnap young Charles Lindbergh?

Haupt: I swear that I did not.

Joe: OK, so what's the jury thinking now?

Resnick: Let's wait and see what happens when Wilentz goes to work on Bruno during cross-examination.

Narr 3: Wilentz doesn't take long.

Wilentz: Mr. Hauptmann. I understand that you entered this country without a legal passport?

Haupt: (uneasily) Yes.

Wilentz: Let's explore your life during that period. You were a machine gunner in the German Army during World War I, were you not?

Haupt: Yes.

Wilentz: Firing at American boys in the trenches?

Reilly: Objection, your honor. Mr. Hauptmann was fighting for his

homeland as American soldiers fought for theirs. His war record has no relevance to this trial.

Trenchard: Objection sustained.

Wilentz: All right then. But there are events in your past, Mr. Hauptmann, that *are* relevant to this trial, are there not?

Haupt: What do you mean?

Wilentz: I mean, sir, your criminal acts. German records show that you mugged two women at gunpoint; that you robbed the house of your mayor by using a *ladder* to reach a second-story window; that after being released on probation, you were arrested again for factory burglaries.

Haupt: Germany was in a terrible condition after the war. My mother was starving. I had fought for my country, but I could get no jobs. I was desperate.

Wilentz: But you don't deny that those things happened?

Haupt: No.

Wilentz: All right, let us move to more recent events. You lied to the police, did you not, when you said you had no ransom money?

Haupt: Well . . . I—

Wilentz: You *lied*, didn't you?

Haupt: The money in the garage was given to me by Isidor Fisch. I had no more idea it was the Lindbergh ransom money than the man in the moon.

Wilentz: But you knew that nearly \$14,000 was in the garage, and you said there was no more money. Is that right?

The Lindbergh kidnapping jury had eight men and four women. Ethel Stockton—front row, second from left—is still living today.



This photo pictures all four of the trial's main players. Circled from left to right are Charles Lindbergh, defense lawyer Reilly, prosecutor Wilentz, and Bruno Hauptmann.

Haupt: (softly) Yes.

Wilentz: Yes. And here I have sketches of a window and of a ladder that looks like the kidnap ladder. You made these sketches, did you not?

Haupt: Yes. But they had nothing to do with—

Wilentz: Thank you, Mr. Hauptmann. And now I have something else I would like to introduce as state's evidence. This is a piece of molding from a closet in the accused's apartment. Notice the telephone number and address. They happen to be those of Dr. John F. Condon.

Haupt: I did not write those numbers.
Wilentz: (sarcastically) They wrote themselves?

Haupt: I did not write them. I don't know how they appear there.

Wilentz: And I suppose you didn't make the ladder used in the kidnapping?

Haupt: To me, it hardly looks like a ladder at all. So far between rungs. I don't know how a man can step up.

Wilentz: Are you lying once more?

Haupt: (smiling, quietly) I am not a liar, but I *am* a carpenter.

Haupt: The courtroom bursts into laughter. Wilentz is furious.

Wilentz: You think you're a big shot, don't you? You think this is funny.

Haupt: No. Should I cry?

Wilentz: You think you're bigger



than anybody!

Haupt: No, but I know I am innocent. *(pauses)* I feel innocent and I am innocent and that keeps me the power to stand up.

Joe: *(to Resnick)* He sounds pretty convincing to me.

Resnick: Yeah, well, people can see him in two ways. One way, he's an innocent man trying to control his emotions and defend that innocence. The other way, he's an arrogant, sneering German like that guy Hitler and his Nazis.

Scene 6

Narr 1: On February 11, Reilly gives a four-hour summation speech for the defense.

Reilly: The facts of the case support only one conclusion. This terrible crime was the work of the Lindberghs' servants—so well planned by disloyal people. I believe that Richard Hauptmann is absolutely innocent of murder. *(holding up Bible)* Judge not, lest ye be judged.

Narr 2: The next day, prosecutor Wilentz hammers the accused for five hours.

Wilentz: This man took no chances on the child awakening. He crushed that child right in the room. He smothered and choked that child right in the room. He is the public enemy number one of the world! I call upon you, the jury, to find him guilty of murder in the first degree!

Scene 7

Narr 3: It is evening on February 13. Joe and Resnick are standing outside the Flemington courthouse along with 5,000 people.

Resnick: This is always the toughest part, kid. Waiting around for the verdict.

Joe: Do you think it will be quick?

Resnick: You can never tell. One or two stubborn jurors can hold up things for days. *(looks at crowd and laughs cynically)* I guess there's no doubt how these good folks feel.

Crowd: Kill Hauptmann!

Joe: What do you think, Mr. Resnick?

Resnick: Doesn't matter what I think. The papers all say he's guilty and call him "the most hated man in the world." Walter Winchell* says he's guilty. The poor guy's already been tried by the press, and the public thinks he's guilty as sin. Killed the

*A very popular radio commentator of the era



Governor Harold Hoffmann (left) worked out a deal with prosecutor Wilentz under which Hauptmann would be spared the death sentence if he confessed to the kidnapping and named any others involved. Insisting he was innocent, Hauptmann rejected the deal.

not guilty?

Foreman: We find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree.

Narr 1: A kind of a sigh passes over the courtroom.

Resnick: Let's go, kid.

Narr 2: A messenger opens a window and yells to the crowd outside.

Messenger: Guilty—death!

Narr 3: There is the sound of cheering as a stunned Hauptmann is manacled and led away.

Scene 8

Narr 1: With Bruno

Hauptmann in the death house in Trenton, N.J., life settles down for the Lindberghs. Anne starts writing again, and the couple is delighted by the birth of a new son, Jon.

Narr 2: But then Harold Hoffman, the new governor of New Jersey, enters the picture. He has talked to Lloyd Fisher, the lawyer who replaced Reilly, and is very troubled about the trial and the way the evidence was handled.

Resnick: OK, that's it. They've got a verdict. Be ready to run for a phone, kid.

Narr 2: At 10:30, the jury files in, its members looking grim and unhappy. Hauptmann scans the faces, looking for a hopeful sign. There is none. He slumps in his chair, face lowered.

Narr 3: Everyone waits for Judge Trenchard. He doesn't come. Ten minutes of unbearable tension go by. Finally, Wilentz asks the sheriff to bring the judge. He enters and the stage is set.

Judge: Members of the jury, have you reached a verdict?

Jury Foreman: We have.

Judge: Do you find the defendant, Bruno Richard Hauptmann, guilty or

not guilty?

Charles L: Do you know how many ransom letters we received today? More than 50. Now they're threatening Jon.

Charles L: Do you know how many ransom letters we received today? More than 50. Now they're threatening Jon.

Charles L: Do you know how many ransom letters we received today? More than 50. Now they're threatening Jon.

Anne L: *(burying her head in her hands)* How much longer must we endure all this? I—

Narr 1: At that moment, Jon's private teacher rushes into the room in tears. Anne sees her and turns white.

Charles L: What's happened?

Teacher: We were driving home when a car forced us off the road and made us stop. Jon was terrified, and so was I. (*pauses, in disgust*) It was a car full of reporters and photographers. They rushed up to the car and flashed their cameras right in our faces. They're like wolves!

Anne L: (*before hurrying off to comfort Jon*) I really can't stand much more of this.

Charles L: (*angrily*) They'll never give us peace. There's only one answer.

Narr 2: On December 21, 1935, the Lindberghs leave by ship for England. Four years will pass before they return home.

Scene 9

Narr 3: Although the Lindberghs are gone, Bruno Hauptmann still faces the death penalty. And Governor Hoffman still hopes to get at the truth of the Lindbergh kidnapping.

Narr 1: Early in 1936, he moves the execution date back and tries to enlist the help of Anna Hauptmann.

Hoffman: Mrs. Hauptmann, my staff people say I was crazy to postpone the execution and talk about a new trial. They say it will destroy my career.* I took the risk because I believe in justice—but your husband has to help.

Anna H: He will help if he can, sir.

Hoffman: Well, I don't believe he told the whole truth at the trial.

Anna H: (*angrily*) No, no, no! That isn't so. Richard *did* tell the truth. He is telling the truth. He would never kill a baby. He has been such a good

father to our little Manfred. He is *not* a killer.

Hoffman: But maybe he was involved. If he tells us everything and names the others in the kidnapping, I guarantee that his sentence will be reduced to life imprisonment. Not only that, the Hearst papers have promised to support you for the rest of your life in exchange for the rights to a full confession.

Anna H: (*furious*) Newspapers! They know nothing but lies!

Hoffman: (*pleading*) Your husband can save his life, Mrs. Hauptmann. You must convince him.

Anna H: (*even more upset*) No, no, no! My husband has only a short



Anna Hauptmann leaves the courthouse with Edward Reilly. She always believed that a better lawyer could have won a not-guilty verdict for her husband.

*A few weeks later, Hoffman was stripped of his party's leadership by the New Jersey Republican State Committee. He finished his term and never again ran for public office.

time to live. Could I do that to him—make him think that I too believe he would help kidnap a baby? That I believe those lying witnesses who have sent a good man to die? *No!* Never would I do that. Not even to save my Richard's life would I do that! The truth he *has* told. What more can he say?

Scene 10

Narr 2: It is the evening of Friday, April 3, 1936. A group of reporters approaches the New Jersey State Prison in Trenton.

Joe: Chilly tonight. You wouldn't know it was spring.

Resnick: Not like three nights ago, when it was so warm and that huge mob showed up. Looks like only about 500 this time.

Joe: I guess the Hauptmann haters don't like cold weather.

Resnick: Yeah, and maybe they think the execution will be postponed once more. Well, it won't. There's nothing more Hoffman can do.

Narr 3: In Bruno Hauptmann's cell, Lloyd Fisher looks into the prisoner's eyes and speaks quietly.

Lloyd Fisher: Richard, tell me something that will save your life.

Haupt: Lloyd, there isn't anything I can say.

Narr 1: At 8:25, 55 witnesses cross the prison yard and enter the brick building that houses death row. Quietly they take their places in chairs set up in the execution chamber.

Narr 2: Before them, surrounded by glaring lights, sits the heavy wooden electric chair.

Joe: I'm not sure I want to be here.

Resnick: This part is never easy, kid.

Come on, we'll sit in the back row.

Narr 3: At 8:42, Bruno Richard Hauptmann enters the death chamber while two ministers read from the Bible in German. His face is pale, but he appears composed.

Narr 1: Scarcely glancing at the witnesses, he walks quickly to the electric chair and sits down. The guards apply the electrodes and fit him with a mask that covers his upper face. As they tighten the straps, he appears to be in some kind of trance.

Joe: Boy, he's a cool one!

Resnick: Maybe. But the guards told me there were a couple of times when he really broke down in his cell.

Narr 2: At 8:44, Hauptmann is hit with 2,000 volts. His body goes rigid and strains against the straps, then drops back as a wisp of smoke hangs in the air above his head. The process is repeated twice more.

Narr 3: After four minutes, the prison doctor pronounces him dead.

Narr 1: Almost 2 miles away, in a hotel room, Anna Hauptmann hears the news from Lloyd Fisher's secretary. She locks herself in the bathroom, sobbing uncontrollably.

Narr 2: At the prison, Joe and the others file out in silence.

Joe: I can't make up my mind about this case. It's really got me stumped.

Resnick: I say he was involved somehow. But that's the good thing about being reporters. We don't have to decide about his guilt; all we have to do is tell the world how he died.

Joe: Yes, but did he do it?

Resnick: Kid, that's a question they'll be asking a long time after we're both dead. ■