

# *Casablanca*

## Willing Suspension of Disbelief

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The ability of script writers to bamboozle the public is close to unlimited. The speed of the story on screen is so great, and the viewers' emotional involvement is so great, that viewers pay are oblivious to obvious inconsistencies and improbabilities. *Casablanca* is a classic example. Almost nothing in the script holds up to scrutiny, yet it won the Oscar for best screenplay. Few viewers ever notice any of these incongruities. How many of these did you recognize?

1. Most refugees would starve within weeks – no jobs in Casablanca. The Bulgarian wife tells Rick they have no money, yet her husband is gambling. This makes no sense.
2. The radio warning regarding the two murdered German couriers does not say what kinds of documents were stolen. What are the police to look for when rounding up “suspicious characters”?
3. “Letters of transit” signed by DeGaulle would have been invalid. DeGaulle was in exile in England, organizing the French resistance movement against Germany. He had no official authority in “unoccupied France” or anywhere else on the continent in 1941.
4. There was no reason for German couriers to have had such letters.
5. How did Renault and the local German officer know that Ugarte was responsible, which they brag to Strasser?
6. Why didn't Renault arrest him immediately? He had arrested twice as many suspects as normal.
7. How did he know that Ugarte would come to Rick's? “Everyone comes to Rick's,” he says – which was the title of the play that was never produced, which Warner Brothers bought for the movie. But why would a murderer with stolen documents come to a place where there would be lots of police? He asked Rick to hide the documents. He knew the huge risk involved.

8. Possessing these stolen documents makes person an accessory to murder. Why would Ugarte brag to Rick that he possessed these documents?
9. Why would Rick risk becoming an accessory to murder for holding these documents for any period of time? He would be putting his neck out for a man he despised.
10. Renault tells Rick that he knows that exit visas sold in his café, but he also knows that Rick does not sell them, which is why he lets the establishment remain open. But exit visas are official documents, not private. Renault must sign all of them, which is why he can get sexual favors from terrified young wives. He is in charge. He controls the market. Why would he share it?
11. Renault is a sexual predator – the only beloved sexual predator in the Hays Code era, 1934-66. The viewers – male and female – have always mentally winked their eyes.
12. Renault knows that Laszlo is coming to “Rick’s” to buy these letters of transit. Is the resistance movement that obvious?
13. Renault tells Rick he has seen Laszlo’s lady. How? When?
14. He later tells her that he had been told that she is the most beautiful woman ever to visit Casablanca – an understatement. But supposedly he had seen her already.
15. Why did Ugarte run? He did not have the documents.
16. Why was he murdered by Renault? Why wasn’t he tortured instead to extract information about the whereabouts of the documents?
17. How did Ugarte know he would be selling these documents that night, almost to the hour?
18. How did the information about the documents get to Laszlo? The murder/theft had only just happened.
19. How did Laszlo get word to Ugarte that he would be at “Rick’s” to buy the documents?
20. How did Laszlo know Ugarte’s name?
21. How did Laszlo know what Ugarte would look like?

22. Why would walking out of “Rick’s” draw attention to Laszlo and Ilsa? He is recognized by Berger, Renault, and Strasser. Sitting there drew all the attention needed.

23. There was no reason for Laszlo to go to the United States in December 1941. Britain, yes. Or he could have stayed in North Africa to be a free French leader – the Germans’ fear. But America? Why? This was before Pearl Harbor. Rick tells Sam: “I’ll bet they’re asleep all over America.” Not after December 7.

24. Flashback: the Gestapo warns Parisians that the German army is coming. What is the Gestapo doing in Paris before the fall of Paris?

25. Ilsa says in Paris, “Kiss me for the last time” the night before their proposed escape. Why not leave immediately? Or hide until the train left? Why separate?

26. Why are there any available seats on the last train out . . . just ahead of the Germans?

27. How could Laszlo give Strasser the names of all the underground leaders in every nation and their locations? This is what Strasser asks in exchange for an exit out of occupied France. Laszlo does not respond: “How should I know? Things change from day to day.” Instead, he refers back to his captivity, which had to be prior to the fall of Paris in May 1940 – 19 months earlier. He and Ilsa have been in hiding ever since.

28. Rick says to Laszlo, “I was never a businessman.” Then how did he pay for “Rick’s” after Marseille? He was just another fugitive, one train ahead of the Germans.

29. Laszlo walks to a meeting of the underground. He is not followed by the man monitoring him outside the hotel. Why not?

30. Ilsa tells Rick they can pay anything. How?

31. Rick sells “Rick’s.” Yet he cannot return to America. Why sell?

32. Rick was never paid for “Rick’s.”

33. Rick’s plan – for Renault’s consumption – is to have him arrest Laszlo for trying to buy the transit letters. Why is this illegal, but selling them lets Rick and Ilsa fly to Lisbon?

34. Renault knows that Rick cannot return to America. Why would he believe Rick’s plan to get Laszlo arrested?

35. Rick has Renault call the airport to “call his dogs off,” which he had already told Renault to do before. Why take the chance?
36. Strasser comes to the airport alone. Why?
37. Renault tells Rick he cannot stay in Casablanca. Why not? No one else saw him shoot Strasser.
38. The airport is shrouded in fog. Why is there fog in Casablanca, North Africa?
39. Renault is a corrupt local official, always neutral, as he freely admits. What will be the basis of a future beautiful friendship with a man in the free French forces?

The supreme improbability is revealed in one of the most famous lines in the history of the movies. “Of all the gin joints, in all the towns, in all the world, she walks into mine.” Statistically, this is highly improbable, but not nearly so improbable as the entire screenplay.