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Published by Lazy Bee Scripts

Customer Taster

A Legendary Death

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Professor Rupert Theakston is conceited, ambitious, extremely telegenic and a rising star in the world of television history. Tonight he is in the studios of Archaeology Quest where he will discuss his latest discovery, the legendary sword of Damocles. However he has made a lot of enemies...

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Overview

A Legendary Death is a Murder Mystery designed to be played by 9 actors (the victim, six suspects, the detective and a minor role who can act as master of ceremonies).

The actors perform a formal scene, ending with a murder and the arrival of the detective.

The audience are given additional written clues.

After a brief scene led by the detective, the audience are invited to question the suspects.

After the questioning, the audience members try to solve the mystery before a closing scene in which the detective reveals the guilty party.

Characters

Professor Rupert Theakston - The discoverer of the Sword of Damocles, the greatest archaeological find ever. He is a rather handsome and conceited man who knows he has the world at his feet.

Professor Earnest Checkwell – The leading expert in the field of classical weaponry.

Professor Spaghetti - Italian archaeologist. He represents the Italian Government Archaeological Department and is carrying out his own investigation into what happened in Sicily.

Lady Threadneedle – Financial sponsor of the expedition to Sicily. She is big in the city and acts accordingly. When she wants something she tends to go out and get it.

Deborah Digger - Professor Theakston's assistant. In her personal life, she is a very easygoing girl who seems to have a thing about academics.

Mrs Theakston – Professor Theakston's wife. After years of tolerating herself centred and conceited husband, she is now furious that he is about to leave her for another woman.

Michael Lee-Fone - The Presenter of 'Archaeology Quest', worried about the show's falling ratings.

Inspector Timespast of the Antiquities Squad. Delighted to have a murder to investigate at last!

Director of Archaeology Quest: Minor scripted role (not a suspect) can act as facilitator for the audience parts of the mystery.

Structure

This taster contains:-

- Extracts from the Organiser's Overview including a plot overviews, some character overviews and a rough guide on how to structure your event
- Part of the script: Act One, to be performed by the actors
- A sample piece of written evidence

The full murder mystery pack includes

- A complete set of character descriptions in the Organiser's Overview, plus notes on staging the murder, and a props list.
- The full script for Act One and Act Two, Scene 1
- Six pieces of evidence for the audience to examine
- Accusation sheets for the audience to complete
- The solution (a brief final scene)

Plot Overview

Professor Rupert Theakston is conceited, ambitious, extremely telegenic and a rising star in the world of television history. Tonight he is in the studios of Archaeology Quest where he will discuss his latest discovery, the legendary sword of Damocles. However he has made a lot of enemies - not only that, but members of the assembled company have good reason to hate each other!

During the TV presentation, right before the eyes of the “studio audience”, a murder takes place. Luckily Inspector Timespast of the Antiquities Squad has already been called to investigate some strange goings on at the dig in Sicily where the sword was found and so is at hand to investigate the murder. Since it has happened live on TV, surely that cannot be too difficult. But then again, perhaps he will need the help of the “studio audience”.

Running the script in front of an audience

Note that you need to purchase a performance licence from the Murder Mysteries page of the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.

Preparation

Initial preparation can be done by distributing the opening scene, then running a first rehearsal in which the actors have to guess the identity of the murderer (evaluating the written evidence) before they see the script for the Final Scene. (It’s fun! Why not? It also ensures that the actors become familiar with the logic of the mystery - they will learn more about themselves and their roles from the evidence.) Decide on the format for declaring the winner and if you will be using a tie-breaker question in the event that two or more audience members guess the murderer correctly.

Open the event by acting out the opening scene.

Distribute the written evidence

Announce that since they - the “studio audience” - were witnesses to the event, Inspector Timespast wishes them to consider a selection of the evidence he has gathered. Give the audience a specified time to evaluate the evidence.

Interrogation

Act-out Act 2, Scene 1, then invite the audience to question the suspects. (For a small event, this can be done before the full audience; for a large event it might be more effective for the questioning to be done by small groups - for example by the suspects rotating around the audience tables.)

Accusations

At the end of the interrogation, ask the audience to fill in the accusation sheets. (Make sure you have some spare pens or pencils!)

Solution

Act out the final scene.

Prize giving

This should be managed either by Inspector Timespast or the Director of Archaeology Quest.

There may be an option to read out some of the (more bizarre) audience solutions!

Declare the winner. (In the event of a draw, you can either draw the winner from a hat, or you may wish to include your own tie-breaker question.)

Award a prize to the best solution! (And possibly a prize for the worst.)

As a broad guide your event might run as follows:

7.30 to 8.00	Meet and greet; pre-dinner drinks
8.00	Act One
8:30	Distribute evidence and “accusation sheets” to each member of the audience Serve starters
8:45	Act Two - Scene 1
8:50	Interrogation by the audience
9:00	Collect Accusation sheets.
9:10	Main course (during which the cast/crew evaluate the answers and choose the winning answer)
9.30	The Solution
9:05	Prize-giving.
9:15	Dessert.

Other timings could be accommodated, especially if you want your audience to eat earlier!

The second act interrogation can be as long as the audience and cast would like it to be! (The above is on the short end of the range.)

Character Overviews

There are six suspects plus the victim and the investigating officer. There is also one small role for “the director of archaeology quest” who might also act as the master of ceremonies for the murder mystery. The following profiles are to guide the suspects as they all try to ad-lib themselves out of trouble! Five of them will be telling the truth.

Professor Rupert Theakston: The discoverer of the Sword of Damocles, the greatest archaeological find ever. He is a rather handsome and conceited man who knows he has the world at his feet. He has stopped at nothing in his determination to succeed, not caring whom he might hurt in the process. Unfortunately his home life is not so tranquil, his ambition had already threatened his marriage even before he decided to leave his wife for Lady Threadneedle.

Inspector Timespast of the Antiquities Squad. Delighted to have a murder to investigate at last, he dominates the investigation in a loud and very formal manner

Director of Archaeology Quest: A small part. He or she helps introduce the first act and then helps to bring it to a close. Not on stage long, has no personal involvement and is not a suspect. Can act as master of ceremonies, explaining the proceedings to the audience.

Professor Earnest Checkwell: The leading expert in the field of classical weaponry. Having authenticated the sword as genuine, he believes himself to be intellectually superior to everybody else. However, underneath he is actually an extremely sensitive man, especially when his brief affair with Deborah is revealed.

Under interrogation, says that his non-existent verification of the sword would not harm him. After all...

Act 1: The Murder

(Curtains open on a TV studio with the logo Galaxy TV clearly displayed. There is a pair of curtains each about a yard wide hanging on a curtain rail at the centre of the stage. There is a pull cord at the side of one of the curtains. At the back of the stage, there are six comfortable chairs, three on each side, all facing inwards. Michael Lee-Fone, the presenter enters to pull the cord to reveal a sword pointing downwards suspended from a thin cord. This goes up to the ceiling and then down to the wall at the back where it is secured to a cleat. Michael then steps back to admire the sword.)

Michael: Now isn't it just wonderful? And if it doesn't knock the History Channel into a cocked hat, I don't know what will.

Director: Well it has certainly given us some lovely location shots in sunny Sicily, but is it really the actual sword of Damocles?

Michael: Who knows? But just think of the debate. Letters to all the academic journals, front page spreads in all the dailies and best of all, everyone tuning in for next week's exciting episode

Director: Fair enough. Just as long as it brings in the ratings. We certainly need them.

(Exits.)

(Professor Checkwell enters.)

Checkwell: Did I hear you say debate? There won't be any debate. Because if I, the greatest living expert on classical weaponry, say it is the sword of Damocles, then that is what it is.

Michael: And we are all very grateful Professor Checkwell that you have agreed to appear on the show to say so on air. But a bit of controversy never hurts and a lot of swords were made at the time

Checkwell: Oh yes, but we all know the legend of poor Damocles. One day he says to the king. "You have great wealth, power and live in luxury. How I wish I could be in your place just for one day." The king agrees. And so Damocles finds himself sitting on the throne being served the best food and the best wine by legions of beautiful serving girls. He could not be happier until the king tells him to look up. Above his head, he sees a sword hanging by just the most slender of threads. "Yes," said the king. "I may have everything I can possibly desire. But it also means I cannot trust anyone not to kill me for it all and so every day I have to live with the knowledge that my life hangs as if by that thread."

Michael: And so poor Damocles leapt from the throne and never wanted to be in the king's place again.

Checkwell: You bet he did. (He goes to back of stage to undo the line and so lowers the sword within reach. He balances it in his hand.) You see, it is heavier than and not balanced like any normal sword. If it ever did fall, the weight at this end would ensure it would always be pointing downwards,

Michael: With enough force I presume to skewer any poor soul standing underneath.

Checkwell: Oh absolutely. And if you were also to consider that Rupert himself told me where and how it was found, you will understand why I am prepared to stake my reputation on this sword.

Michael: Quite so. You and Professor Theakston are old friends aren't you?

Checkwell: Oh absolutely we were at university together. (He returns the sword to previous position and then pulls cord to close the curtain.) Speaking of which, if you would excuse me, Rupert has invited me for a drink in his dressing room. (Exits.)

(There is a loud feminine scream from offstage.)

Michael: Good heavens! Sounds as if there has been a murder.

(Mrs Theakston enters.)

Mrs Theakston: Could be worse, he could be staking his marriage on it.

Michael: Oh it's just Mrs Theakston. Now what we want is for you to look all dignified and supportive and to say how you never doubted your husband's ambition. Can you manage that?

Mrs Theakston: Not really because the only way I could get in was by pretending to be the tea lady. (Takes gin bottle from handbag and drinks from it.) For some reason, Rupert did not want me here.

Michael: Do you mean to say Professor Theakston did not invite you?

Mrs Theakston: I am still surprised he invited me to our wedding. The last six months he has thought more of that sword than he has of me. Excuse me while I take a look at what has finally destroyed my marriage. **(Goes behind curtain.)** Isn't it amazing what a piece of metal can do?

Michael: I am sure it wasn't just that

Mrs Theakston: No, I suppose it wasn't just the sword itself, Rupert would never allow anything to take the limelight unless he could share in it. But what it would bring. The fame, the adoration, his very own TV series. And once he has all that, it's goodbye to me.

Michael: But you can't be sure of that. Perhaps if you were to trust your husband?

Mrs Theakston: Oh, but I did trust him until I found this while I was going through his private emails. **(Comes out from behind curtains, produces a printed email and gives it to Michael.)** Go on, read it.

Michael: 'Dear darling. Good grief! **(He takes a long pause as he reads it.)** Good heavens! **(He wipes his brow.)** Good God! **(He takes a long step backwards.)** And soon we will be reliving those wonderful days we spent together for ever and ever. Your darling Rupert **(He looks up.)** Who did he send this to?

Mrs Theakston: **(Staggers backwards behind curtains again.)** I don't know. The email address was just historygirl.com. But that must mean somebody involved with the dig and he was planning to leave me for her just as he was about to become rich and famous.

Michael: I am sorry to hear it, but what do you mean by his own TV series?

Mrs Theakston: Oh ever since he came back, he's been meeting the chairman of the board to discuss terms and contracts.

Michael: Do you mean Barry Bigbucks, the chairman of Galaxy TV by any chance?

Mrs Theakston: Well put it this way. This show's not doing very well is it and got ambitions has Barry. Aims to knock Tony Robinson for six he does and let's face it, Rupert is a damn sight better looking: Especially when he refused to let anybody else near him when he did the screen test. Damn him!

Michael: Did he indeed? Well I'll see about that. But now I think you have better lie down. **(Walks back to look behind curtain.)** Now come on and leave that sword alone!

Mrs Theakston: Ouch!

Michael: Well what did you expect? Miss Digger! For heaven's sake, Deborah Digger! Where are you?

(Deborah Digger enters.)

Deborah: So what is it? I'm busy.

Michael: It's Mrs Theakston. She has cut her hand.

Deborah: So what am I supposed to do about it? I'm not a nurse.

Michael: But you are Rupert Theakston's assistant, aren't you?

Deborah: Well, yes,

Michael: Then you can assist in stopping his wife bleeding all over the set. This is a history programme, not a remake of Holby City.

Deborah: **(Sighs.)** Oh all right, come on, Mrs Theakston. Why don't you have a nice sit down?

(Deborah drags her out into view and sits her down in the chair nearest to the back of the stage. Mrs Theakston's hand is covered in blood. Deborah then sits besides Mrs Theakston, takes out hankie and bandages her hand while Michael goes behind the curtains.)

Michael: I just hope Mrs Theakston has not damaged the most precious artefact that has ever appeared on this show

Deborah: Don't worry. It's a sword. It's meant to cope with a bit of blood.

Michael: But it is over two thousand years old, who knows what condition it's in. Ah that's better.

Mrs Theakston: Of course. Can't spoil his precious sword with my blood

[The full version continues beyond this point...]

Sample of Written Evidence

Extract from Investigative Report

City of London Regulatory Commission
Old Broad Street
London EC2

Our investigations have revealed that Lady Threadneedle obtained her position at Bartlett's Bank by representing herself as someone who actually understood high finance well enough to engage in careful analysis of market trends, accurate research into potential investment opportunities and responsible use of all economic forecasts so as to make the best possible use of the funds entrusted to her.

However we now believe that she has dispensed with all of the above. Instead she has managed Bartlett's Bank's investment portfolio by going to Epsom and investing the money on whatever horse in the two forty-five had the prettiest coat.

In our view, the fact that this method has proved as good as any does not alter the fact that a serious breach of city regulations has been committed.