



A Murder Mystery Party Pack

By Rosemary Hill, David Lovesy & Steve Clark

Really Horrid Production Company



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Customer Taster

Murder at the Manor

By Rosemary Hill, David Lovesy & Steve Clark

Sir Clive and Lady Worthington-Jones, two eccentric English aristocrats, have always lived their lives according to their own rules. When their moral crusader daughter, Dora, becomes engaged to an ambitious MP, who wants to gain votes at the next election by stamping on corruption, drastic action is called for...

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Murder at the Manor

About this pack

This is a taster pack, containing extracts from the full pack.

The full pack should provide everything you need to produce your very own murder mystery event.

It is intended to be used at a sit down meal where the principal characters will act out a set of events and arguments to the assembled guests.

Please remember from the outset that this is intended for an improvised performance. There is no script or set text included for the cast to learn. Instead, your cast is expected to use the information included in this pack, develop their 'back stories' further and, staying completely in character throughout, improvise the action, dialogue and arguments themselves. This means that your performers are less constrained and restricted, can react and interact with the audience and guests at will and have a lot more fun!

This document includes:

- A **Plot Overview**.
- **General Staging Notes** on how best to plan and stage your Murder Mystery event.
- **Overview of the Characters** (including suggested costumes and 'props').
- An extract from the **Plot Narrative** to show how plot should flow and how the events should be woven in.
- An Appendix containing an example of one of the detailed **Character Back Stories**.

The Downloadable Resources pack that accompanies the full pack contains Adobe Acrobat .pdf image files and allows you to produce additional materials and resources that will help bring the event to life and enhance the plot.

These include:

- Printable Letter from the Revd Felch.
- Printable Table Cards to list the key characters to assist the audience.
- Printable 'who dunnit' Solution Sheets for your guests to complete.

You can feel free to customise the details of the scenario (in particular selecting the name of a country house or estate close to you). Names and titles of the characters are more fixed if you choose to use the resources provided but should not cause any problems for you.

This murder mystery is a light hearted affair and is intended to be as daft as possible; a comic entertainment rather than a serious Agatha Christie style detective story.

The plot subject, the secret pasts of the characters and the characters themselves are designed for laughs! All the characters have been given motives and reasons to commit murder and in fact it could have been any of them that did the deed and as such there are no complicated or involved clues for the audience to have to try and deduce or follow!

Plot Overview

The year is 1926. The place is the country estate of **Sir Clive** and **Lady Clarissa**, home to the Worthington-Jones family since the Seventeenth Century. The event is the evening meal to mark the start of a weekend retreat at the estate. The audience are all invited family friends and members of the aristocratic social circle in which Sir Clive and Lady Clarissa move.

In addition to the aristocratic hosts, other notable guests at the soiree include:

Dora Worthington-Jones: Their 21 year old daughter.

Hugo Bottomley MP: A Tory politician and close 'friend' of Dora.

Sandy Greatham: A long standing 'houseguest' and social secretary to Sir Clive.

Madge Thistlethwaite: A close confidant to the family.

Myra Barker-Mowles: A popular socialite.

The dinner should be a pleasant and engaging occasion but as family skeletons are revealed and some very dubious business arrangements come to light, tensions mount and two characters are brutally murdered! In the end, the killer is revealed...

General Staging Notes

Casting / rehearsal

Your chosen performers should be issued with a copy of the entire pack.

You should hold as many rehearsals as required depending on experience of performers (3 to 5 recommended).

The first rehearsal should concentrate on reading through this pack and getting a feel for how the event is structured and the role that each character has to play in the plot.

Before the second rehearsal the performers should further prepare their back stories. We provide example stories in the Appendix and you can use these or write new ones. At the second rehearsal these should be read out by each performer in character.

As it is impossible to rehearse the whole event without that all important audience to react to, you should concentrate on cementing motives and the order and content of the arguments. These can be rehearsed by the performers, more to prove they can improvise and keep up a convincing performance than word for word content!

Facilities required for the performers

The performers need a separate private room for their use. They will use this prior to the event to get changed and prepared and will use the room during the event where they can exchange notes and discuss any change of tactics. The murder victims will also use this room once deceased!

The performers will eat the same as the audience. Food for the deceased victims can be brought to the main table and then sent away (and taken to the private room!) for extra comic effect.

It would be sensible to check the facilities before the event. (For example, having a murder victim found dead at the foot of a staircase has less credibility in a single storey building!)

Recommended event format

The evening works best if structured round a sit down meal. If the event is being staged in hotel this may be a formal served multi-course meal, but if this was being staged in a hall or private venue you could lay on a simpler meal or even a table buffet. However guests should have a table to sit at to watch and enjoy the action.

Pre-dinner drinks

Before moving to the seated area, we recommend pre-dinner drinks. This gives an opportunity for the guests to mingle and more importantly to meet the characters informally before the action begins (see Meet and Greet below)

Dining area:

- Top table: set for 7 places, used by the principal characters. Positioned in a central location so that all the other guests can see the action. Ideally a clear area in front of this table should be provided to give space for the actors to perform freely.
- Tables for the other guest. Depending on facilities and space it is recommended that the tables are spaced to give room for the actors to move around and between them and so be able to interact with the guests.

Although structured around a meal, there is no predefined timing for the action and the courses. If this is a restaurant based event then the serving staff should just be instructed to serve the courses as normal and not wait for any events / action (this saves upsetting the chef!)

Timing Guideline

As a broad guide your event should run as follows:

| | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 7.30 to 8.00 | Meet and great | Pre-dinner drinks |
| 8.00 | Sit down and Sir Clive's welcome | |
| 8.10 | Sandy proposes to Dora | |
| 8.15 to 8.40 | First set of Arguments | Starters |
| 8.40 | First victim leaves | |
| 8.50 | First body discovered | Main course |
| 9.00 to 9.25 | Second set of arguments | |
| 9.25 | Second victim leaves | Dessert |
| 9.35 | Second death announced | |
| 9.40 to 9.55 | Wrapping up! | |
| 10.00 | Solution sheets distributed | Coffee |
| 10.15 | Prize giving and denouement | |

Improvisation and performance

Improvisation

As already explained, there is no set script for this Murder Mystery scenario. Your performers are expected to improvise their dialogue, interactions and behaviour based on their back stories and knowledge of the plot and their interpersonal relationships. This should not be as seem daunting as it sounds! Your performers need to get into character and remain in character throughout. All conversations with guests should be as the character they are playing.

You are bound to get some comments about 'who dies first?', 'are you the murderer?' at the start of the evening. The trick is to act confused and surprised? What are they talking about? This is a special occasion!

If guest start asking you questions that you don't know the answer to then you can simply make excuses and walk away or steer the conversation in a different direction.

You don't have to admit your feelings outright, but can hint at your relationships with the other characters, make passing comments about your reaction to something to trigger a response and a question.

The commonest difficulty is when someone slips up and gives the wrong info from their back story (and guests will sometimes probe into your 'past' in depth). Sometime this is not of consequence but other times it could be important, a date, a place or something that your character should know too. If when quizzed you give the wrong corroborating account of events, this can lead to red herrings as the guests think you are lying deliberately. Therefore, if possible, when if you realise you have let slip something on the spur of the moment that is nonsense, try and draw the other character(s) aside in time and tell them the new story. And if you don't have time to do so, and you get 'caught' out, make light of the situation and play for a laugh; 'Have we really been married for 5 years and not 8, well it seemed like even longer to me...!'

You will find there is plenty of opportunity to whisper in corners with the other performers (and when out of the room) to check tactics, prompt actions and arguments ('right, we need to reinforce our hatred of one another, let's go and have a fight in the middle of the room'). This is often necessary to keep things on track!

The Arguments

The arguments that are used to move on the plot, reveal motives and skeletons in the closet and the complexities of the characters' inter-relationships can be split into two types:

Public: The confrontational / explosive challenge as one character rounds on another to contest something that has been said or announced. These can be very public and devoid of subtlety and a slanging match over the tables and even across the room develops. Once these start the guests will quickly fall silent and pay attention.

Private: These are the type that build from a quiet conversation into a row as things are said that should not be or revelations are made. These can be more subtle. The characters start talking together, beside a table of guests and get louder and more heated as things develop. Gradually the whole room is drawn into the conversation.

In general the arguments only need to be staged once but if the venue is very large or there is a lot of back ground noise from the guests you can stage the argument and then move to another area of the room to continue the quarrel (repeating the salient points once more).

Overview of the Characters

This is set in the 1920's so costumes need to be appropriate to the period as much as possible for maximum effect.

Sir Clive Worthington-Jones

Male: Playing age late 50's.

Costume: Extremely formal. Dinner jacket, Bow tie, medals. Handlebar moustache.

An eccentric character, who has spent much time in India and Burma. He thinks that the British Empire is the best thing to have happened to the world. Completely conservative and has no time for nancy wimpish Liberal types, and as for radicals and anyone vaguely leftist, they should all be flogged and that would be too good for them. In fact he constantly refers back to his time abroad where apparently everyone was flogged every day and it did them good and built up character. Needless to say Sir Clive enjoyed his time at public school and now has a fetish for flogging and bondage, which he sees as perfectly reasonable. However he does recognise that perhaps others don't quite see things as he does, so he keeps quiet about certain things in his life.

Lady Clarissa Worthington-Jones

Female: Playing age late 50's.

Costume: Formal, elegant evening dress. Fan, gloves, costume jewellery, evening bag etc.

Lady Clarissa is quite charming and sophisticated in a very intelligent and dignified way. She's also extremely sensible and knows how upper class life runs and how to survive. She and Clive are fond of one another and she's very pragmatic about his sexual proclivities. He has been kind to her by marrying her when she was pregnant and taking on her child as his own. She recognises that he has provided her with a very comfortable home and life style, but she is in no way a victim and has quite a reputation herself as a charming hostess who quite rightly reins in her husband when necessary. People like her very much. She gets on very well with Madge Thistlethwaite, her constant companion, and it appears Clive's as well.

Dora Worthington-Jones

Female: Playing age 21.

Costume: Formal, evening dress. Fan, gloves, costume jewellery, evening bag etc.

Dora is the very attractive daughter of Lady Clarissa and Sir Clive. However unbeknownst to her until later at the meal, she is not in fact his natural daughter as Clarissa was pregnant by someone else when Clive married her. That someone else was Major Liddington-Smythe a famous traitor to the country in the Great War. Lately it seems Dora has been proving to be something of an embarrassment to Sir Clive as she disapproves of his behaviour and what he does in public and private. To the rest of the world though Clive is her natural and loving father. Dora has had many admirers but she thinks they are all callow youths and turns her attention to a more sophisticated and older man, Sir Hugo Bottomley, an MP who aspires to becoming the Prime Minister one day. He's very intelligent and Dora enjoys the intellectual challenge. Dora is well educated herself, in that she has been to a good school and speaks and conducts herself well but she would have liked a really academic education. Sir Hugo is something of a father figure as well as a lover. She respects and trusts him in a way that she doesn't trust Sir Clive!

Hugo Bottomley MP

Male: Playing age mid 30's.

Costume: Formal. Dinner jacket.

A Tory MP, but not as far to the right wing as Sir Clive's bigoted view of politics prefers so to Sir Clive he is practically the same as a communist! Hugo has recently got engaged to Dora in secret. He is however a man of the world and has had a mistress for years (Myra Barker-Mowles). He is beginning to

find that he wants to marry and although he trusts and admires Myra, she is somewhat cynical and he is attracted to Dora's quest for change and her open and direct approach to life. He may not admit it but somewhere he perhaps also thinks that Dora will make a more fitting wife to an aspiring Prime Minister. Myra is very discreet but everyone knows that she is a society mistress. Nevertheless she could still be useful to him as she knows so much of what is going on, so it would be sensible to alienate her. He also still finds her quite exciting and less taxing than Dora as she doesn't expect so much from him. He would like to be seen as a man of moral fibre, certainly that is his political stance, but the reality is somewhat harder!

Sandy Greatham

Male: Playing age early 20's.

Costume: Formal. Dinner Jacket.

General adviser and social secretary to Sir Clive and Lady Clarissa. Upper class and knows how it all works. Son of a family friend who is currently overseas in Burma. Lives with the family and is therefore close to Dora (he would like to be closer!). Rather a chinless wonder and a not very bright. Thinks everything is "jolly spiffing" and all that. Love to have parties and to socialise and turns a blind eye to anything that he needs to. Just wants to have a good time. Fancies Dora and doesn't understand what she sees in Hugo who he thinks is far too old for her.

Madge Thistlethwaite

Female: Playing age mid 40's.

Costume: Formal, evening dress. Fan, gloves, costume jewellery, evening bag etc.

Madge is the trusted companion of Clarissa and it appears Sir Clive. She comes from a working class background and is keen to do whatever it takes to stay within upper class echelons. Madge satisfies Clive's sexual needs. She is very pragmatic about sadomasochism as she quite enjoys it herself anyway, and it provides her with a very comfortable lifestyle and home. She's also very fond of Clarissa and feels she is providing a real service to her friend who really doesn't want to be bothered with such things! Madge comes from a less privileged background and feels she has worked hard for what she has and she certainly doesn't want her life style spoilt or disrupted. She doesn't have a lot of time for Dora and thinks that Dora should be more grateful to Sir Clive for being such a good father to her. She hasn't yet made up her mind about Hugo, but as he seems to be a bit of a liberal, she has her suspicions...

Myra Barker-Mowles

Female: Playing age mid 40's.

Costume: Formal, evening dress. Fan, gloves, costume jewellery, evening bag etc. More gaudy and extravagant than the others, perhaps a feather boa too?

A cynical society type, Myra has seen it all and has many amusing stories to tell. She often keeps very quiet though and one gets the impression that she knows a great deal and doesn't let on. She's used to getting what she wants and knows how to move in society circles to do just that. She is seen at all the great parties and rumour has it that she has been the mistress to many rich and powerful men. She is quite discreet, but sometimes talks when she has had a few drinks. She still manages to maintain an aloof distance even at outrageous parties. One feels that she never loses control. She isn't quite sure about Dora and is slightly irritated by her. She's not exactly jealous, but she does feel that Hugo is rather wasting his time with her. She knows all about the family and isn't shocked at all. She's seen it all before. However perhaps she knows less than she thinks.

Plot Narrative

Meet and Greet

All the guests are family friends and acquaintances of the Worthington Jones family invited to the weekend soiree, a regular annual event here at the manor. The principal characters need to introduce themselves and each other to the assembled guests before the event really kicks off (see **General Staging notes** above for how best to do this).

The characters should arrive over the space of 15 minutes during this informal section (Recommended order: Sandy, Sir Clive with Lady Clarissa and Madge, Dora, Hugo, Myra).

They should introduce themselves to the guests, and interact with one another. They should pepper the conversation with historical references to the events of the period (the General strike, woman's suffrage etc) to help set the historical scene. Sir Clive and Sandy should drop heavy hints that tonight will be a great occasion for Dora (Sandy's planned proposal to Dora) but they can't possibly say any more. Dora should mutter about the strange relationship triangle here at the manor and so on. They can make throwaway remarks about the other characters, sowing the seeds for any mistrust, dislike and personal conflicts. It is important that during this opening session the characters get to mingle and introduce themselves with all of the guests to ensure that everyone feels involved and gets a feel for what is going on!

Guests should then be invited to take their seats for the meal.

The speech

Once the guests are seated for the meal, Sir Clive opens with a speech to the assembled guests welcoming them to his home and the weekend of socialising.

His speech must include:

Welcome the guests.

Introduction to the other principal characters. He can be openly critical and hostile to Hugo and his politics.

A run through of the weekend's fictional planned activities (some are included on the table card graphic resources).

A few comments on the state of the country, the strikers, the unemployed loafers and how stringing them up would be too good for them, and whose daft idea was it to give thirty-year-old women the vote and other reasonable unbigoted opinions that he holds.

A toast to the King and Empire.

He ends with a comment on Sandy. What a wonderful chap he is and how he is such a familiar and useful face around the house, and that he is almost family and that how, he soon will be part of the family.

With that he hands over to Sandy who has something to say to Dora

Sandy then says how he holds great affection for the family but one member in particular, Dora. He goes down on one knee and proposes to Dora. This has clearly been planned by Sir Clive and Sandy in advance.

Madge and Clarissa will be delighted. Myra will show a pleased interest (this will get Dora out of the way and leave Hugo for her alone) but Dora reacts in shock and surprise. She turns him down flat saying that they are friends, but friends only. She needs real man like Hugo. Shock and horror all round! Sandy is mortified and humiliated. Hugo then stands up and announces that Sandy is too late and that he has already popped the question and that Dora has consented to be his wife.

Sir Clive is outraged at the lack of form and correct behaviour; he has not been asked about this. Hugo explains that Dora is old enough now to make her own decision.

[From this point on, arguments develop, leading to two murders! A large chunk of the plot has been cut here for the purposes of this taster!]

Wrapping it up

Obviously the second murder is met with equal shock and this time the mood is more sombre and subdued.

Now the murders are complete the final section is an opportunity to sum up the events of the evening and reiterate the motives and the issues. The characters can interact with one another and the guests to ensure everyone has followed what is going on. The guests are likely to quiz individuals on their feelings and attitudes and motives.

Who Dunit?

At this point you have a range of options as how to handle the final events. You can introduce a police officer / inspector, use a member of the staff of the venue / organisers or let the characters themselves handle the final section

If a policeman / detective is used, he will announce he is just a trainee and needs some help. He can optionally quiz a few of the guests and the characters and make notes.

If one of the organisers or staff members handles this, they simply have to announce that the police are on their way but will need help. One of the characters is guilty of a double murder.

If the characters do it themselves: A lot of fun can be made of the fact that the local police are a little over-worked tonight and rather than sending an arresting officer they have sent over a crime sheet and would like the assembled guests to finger the murderer for them (Cut-backs etc)!

Solution forms (and pens) are distributed to the guests and the performers retire to their room to give the guests time to complete their forms. After giving the guest 10 minutes or so to make their deductions, the forms are collected and the characters in the privacy of their room select the winner and the booby prize!

Denouement and Prize giving

The surviving characters return to the dining area.

A summary of the events of the night is repeated and the real murderer is invited to step forward from the line up (You can milk this for tension and laughs by all characters twitching and almost stepping forward).

The guilty party will step forward and should deliver a short denouement speech to explain motivation.

The dead are invited to return (they should bring with the prizes).

The chosen winner is announced (and the solution they gave read out) and a prize awarded (A bottle of wine / champagne).

The booby prize is announced (and the solution they gave read out) and a prize awarded (a suitably silly gift (magnifier glass etc). If there were a number of amusing sleuthing answers you can read out a shortlist of howlers.

The audience is thanked for their sleuthing skills. The cast take a bow and a get a rousing round of applause.

Appendix A - Detailed Character back stories

Your performers can use these as the basis for their stories. Feel free to embellish, modify and personalise (use your own birthday to save having to learn a new one etc). Since this is a period setting, your performers can research the period further for topical references and events. You will find many historically accurate references in the back stories below.

Your performers should learn these, both their own and each others. In particular they should be familiar with information that they would know about the other characters (wife's background etc).

Sir Clive Worthington-Jones

Born November 1868 at the Worthington-Jones Manor (which has been the family home since the 17th century) to Lord Cecil and Lady Viola Worthington-Jones, Clive was educated at Eton but rather than pursue a career in business (his father owned several profitable coachworks in the London area) he joined the British Army (Coldstream Guards), as an Officer and attaining the rank of Major at the age of 31 when the Boer War began. During his time in the army Sir Clive made a big impact amongst his troops, showing an extreme resistance to harsh conditions and acquiring notoriety in his skill in hand to hand combat. He also befriended a fellow named Winston Churchill, who went on to use his own war exploits to get elected to Parliament. It was during the war that Clive discovered his deep-seated predilection for discipline, bondage and correction.

After the war ended, he returned home a war hero and soon after married Clarissa in 1904. They spent time in India and Burma where he passed a happy time thrashing his servants (and occasionally being thrashed himself) in his mansion in Rangoon.

He and the family returned to Worthington-Jones Manor in 1912 when his father died, taking over the title.

Sir Clive has a daughter, Dora, for whom he is not biologically responsible. Clarissa was carrying her during their brief courtship, but obviously he didn't want any scandal clouding the family name so took Dora on as his own, in fact, he has a closer bond with her than Clarissa does! Although he cares for her he does not much care for the company she keeps, particularly Hugo Bloody Bottomley, recently arrived on the scene! Sir Clive has no time for this panty waster and is not afraid to say so.

There is not much of a sexual relationship between Clarissa and Clive, so he uses her friend Madge for that. She seems to enjoy the whips and gags as much as Clive and she is game for anything! He is fairly open about his lighter activities, but he goes a whole lot lower behind closed doors. In many ways he is a pioneer for auto-erotic asphyxiation; perhaps he should have been an MP instead!

Recently, an old friend Brigadier Greatham has taken over the Governorship of Burma and his son Sandy had wanted to stay here in England. Sir Clive agreed to take the boy on as a personal secretary and so far has been pleased with the appointment.

Financially, the coachworks still function but have gone down a lot since the introduction of the motorcar. Sir Clive merely takes a cut of the profits and leaves them to run themselves, although he wouldn't admit that they aren't the goldmines they used to be. To supplement his income he uses contacts he has in India and Burma to send out white women as slaves (a quite a profitable little endeavour). He does this through Madge's friend Rev. Felch, a clergyman who runs St Ungulates Hostel for Fallen Women in Whitechapel. This arrangement has been working well for some time now. He sends women who wish to escape their lives of prostitution abroad under the promises of finding new fortunes with wealthy foreign landowners. Of course, it's a different story when they get there but that's no concern of Sir Clive's.