



**Oliver...**  
**with a Twist!**

**A Murder Mystery Party Pack**

**By Steve Clark and David Lovesy**  
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*in association with*



***Customer Taster***

# **Oliver with a Twist!**

*An adult Oliver Twist, now a wealthy philanthropist, holds a fund raising dinner inviting a number of associates from his less privileged childhood. But the evening soon descends into mayhem and murder. Who would 'do anything' for revenge?*

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## 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.
- **Sample Overview of two Characters** (including suggested costumes and 'props').
- **A Plot Narrative** to show how plot should flow and how the events should be woven in.
- An Appendix containing an example of a summary **Character Back Story.**

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

These include:

- Printable **Table Cards** to list the key characters to assist the audience.
- Printable **Book cover** for '**Low Expectations**'
- Printable **Voucher for Mr Bumble's All you can eat Gruel Buffet**
- Printable 'who dunnit' **Solution Sheets** for your guests to complete.

You can feel free to customise the details of the scenario. 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 and silly 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. As such there are no complicated or involved clues for the audience to have to try and deduce or follow!

In addition, given the popularity of the musical Oliver! Your performers should aim to get as many puns and references to lyrics and song titles into the dialogue – for example when the food is served, Oliver can comment on "the food, the glorious food!"

## Plot Overview

20 years after the events portrayed in the Dickensian novel, **Oliver Twist** is holding a dinner of invited local dignitaries and respectable pillars of society to explain plans for his latest charitable ventures to support the poor and destitute – a cause with particular interest to him given his childhood experiences. He has devoted his adult life to using his not-inconsiderable wealth to fund homes and education for street kids. The big news is plans to open the latest Twist Foundation home nearby.

He has recently come into an unexpected inheritance from the late Mr Sowerberry – the undertaker to whom he was briefly apprenticed as a child who seems to have had a death bed panic / change of heart and who, out of guilt for the way he mistreated Oliver all those years ago, willed him the majority of his inheritance. This has left his widow rather shocked and embittered, with next to nothing. This large sum of money will be used to fund many local projects.

He is joined by a number of people from his past, all with their own motives / reasons for attending.

- **Inspector Target** is there to provide security / protection for ... since there have recently been a number of written death threats which the Metropolitan Police have taken seriously.
- **Mrs Sowerberry**, the widow of the late generous benefactor (who is desperate to get some of the cash back and has come to ask ... to let her have some!)
- **Jack Dawkins** (The 'Artful Dodger'), one of Oliver's oldest friends, now apparently a reformed character who has recently been doing business with Oliver and the Twist Foundation.
- **Mr Bumble**, the former Workhouse manager, who is now hoping for ... for his political career.
- **Bet Finching**, a former member of the Fagin gang and now Dodger's girl (and prostitute when needs be). She has long harboured a love for ... and tonight she may bare her soul to him!

If all this tension wasn't enough, ... announces over dinner that he has also just penned his memories / autobiography, spilling the beans about his early life and his rise to respectability which is a true warts and all tale pulling no punches in describing the people who shaped his childhood – many of whom are of course here tonight. The horror and brutality of ..., mistreatment (despite the surprise legacy) of the ..., the criminal characters of the ..., Nancy's true nature and of course the whole story of the .... This does not go down well!

Tempers fray as the tension builds and ... is murdered. After the murder it is revealed that Inspector Target is not quite who he claims to be and the killer is finally unmasked as...

... *(you will need to purchase the full pack to find out!)*

## 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 (2 or 3 recommended).

The first rehearsal should concentrate on reading through the 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.

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 victim will also use this room once deceased!

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

### **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 6 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 guests.** 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!).

**As a broad guide your event should run as follows:**

7.30 to 8.00	Meet and greet	Pre-dinner drinks
8.00	Sit down and Oliver's speech	Starters
8.15	... 's book revelations	
8.30	Arguments begin	Main course
8.50	... leaves the room	
9.00	A body is discovered	
9.00 to 9.30	Ongoing revelations	Dessert
9.40 to 9.55	Wrapping up!	
10.00	Solution sheets distributed	Coffee
10.15	Prize giving and denouement	

Since the evening has a Victorian / Dickensian theme, you can encourage your guests to come dressed in appropriate costumes. The principal characters should be dressed for their roles.

**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 is not as 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 guests 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 most common 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). Sometimes 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, 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 often 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).

## ***Sample Overview of two Characters***

### **Oliver Twist**

Male: Playing age mid 30's.

Costume: Respectable Victorian tail coat, white shirt, cravat, waistcoat and hat.

Now an adult, (so about twenty years after the event of the novel). A virtuous, noble if still slightly naïve character who has dedicated his adult years to charity and philanthropic acts.

### **Artful Dodger**

Male: Playing age mid 30's.

Costume: Stylist (slightly over the top!) Victorian tail coat, white shirt, cravat, waistcoat and hat.

Reunited with Oliver only recently (through Urchins Reunited column in the Strand newspaper) and allegedly a reformed and now respectable business man but clearly old habits die hard.

## *Plot Narrative*

### **Meet and Greet**

All the guests are local respectable members of society / dignitaries, invited to a fund raising meal for the Twist Foundation. They have been invited along tonight to hear a about future plans for the Trust. A number of characters from Mr Twist's past have been invited as honoured guests and they 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: Dodger and Bet, Bumble, Mrs Sowerberry, Oliver and Inspector Target).

They should introduce themselves to the guests, and interact with one another. 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, **Oliver** opens with a speech to the assembled guests welcoming them to the event. His speech must include:

- A welcome to the guests.
- An introduction of the other principal characters for anyone who's missed them.
- Explain what his charitable work has been and the background to it.
- A mention of the surprise legacy from Mr Sowerberry.
- Plans for a new Twist foundation home locally.

Before wishing everyone a pleasant meal, he says...

Nothing in this so far causes any concern for the others but the ... is news to all of them and the others start to become edgy. The other characters will make loud comment on all this.

After ten minutes or so, ... then stands up and talks about his... He will show the audience ... will give a second little speech and talk about ... Feel free to make as many Dickensian references 'it was the best of times, it was the worst of times' etc.

### **The Murder**

#### **Arguments before ...'s murder**

After ...'s revelations about the book, the performers should feel free to move about and work the tables and not stay sat at the top table. The characters should mingle and engage in dialogue with the other guests, expressing their outrage and concern at what ... has done by publishing the story and how it will impact on their lives.

While this is going on, the following predefined arguments / heated discussions should take place. This can be done at the top table, in the area in front of the table or anywhere around the room (if the venue is very large then the arguments can be held twice or more at different points around the room if necessary).



### **The further revelations**

Target will leave the challenge to the guests to decide who the murderer is as the local coppers are not coming immediately. As all the characters accuse each other of being the murderer and inevitably get grilled by the guests the following is also revealed...

### **Motives for murder**

... (included in the full pack!)

### **Who Dunit?**

Mr Bumble announces that it is clear that the murderer is in the room and the local police will be arriving soon but of course they'll need the help of the audience / guests to identify the suspect!

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 guests 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).

... is the murderer and explains his motives. He feels betrayed by ... using his real name in his book and feels cheated and angered. He is also jealous of ... and ... together and whatever ... has said to deny it, he has suspicions!

*(more description in the full pack)*

### Appendix A - Detailed Character back stories

Obviously this plot is based on characters from the Dickensian novel – Oliver Twist – concentrating on the more popular characters and themes evident in the musical based on the novel with which more people are familiar.

As such the back stories, such as they are, are covered in the widely known story line. We have filled in possible events of the interceding 20 years...

Your performers can use these as the basis for their stories. Feel free to embellish, modify and personalise!

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.

### **Oliver Twist**

Since his rescue from the clutches of Fagin and the criminal fraternity, Oliver has thrived in his adopted family of the Mr Brownlow. Having received the best education money could buy, including a degree at Oxford University, he has since dedicated his adult life and inherited fortune (Mr Brownlow passed away 10 years ago) to alleviate the plight of the poor and destitute and try and prevent others suffering like he did. Unmarried and too busy with his charity work to have time for a relationship. He is a serious chap and rather naïve and innocent in his opinions and outlook.