



“The Thrush!”
or
“Anne Gets Cleaved!”

A Murder Mystery Party Pack

By Steve Clark, David Lovesy and Brian Two



Customer Taster

Published by Lazy Bee Scripts

The Thrush!

or

Anne gets cleaved!

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*As they prepare for the visit of no less than King Henry VIII himself,
join Sir John Veillance and his wife Margaret
in a tale of Tudor politics and grisly murder.
With the threat of a deadly assassin on the loose,
passions get out of hand and someone may well lose their head...*

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The Thrush!

or

Anne gets cleaved!

About this pack

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

The pack 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 pack is intended for an **improvised performance**. There is no script or set lines 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 should have a lot more fun!

The full document includes:

- **A Plot Overview.**
- **General Staging Notes** on how best to plan and stage your Murder Mystery event.
- **Overview of the Characters** [*Customer Taster sample included here*] - including suggested costumes and 'props'.
- **A Plot Narrative** [*Customer Taster sample included here*] to show how plot should flow and how the events should be woven in.
- An **Appendix** containing summary Character Back Stories [*Customer Taster sample included here*] on each character.

In the Full Pack, the 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 (there are two sets provided, the second set include the handwritten additions of the unexpected guests).
- A promotional parchment for Cardinal Syn's religious relics.
- A page from the illustrated manuscript 'Fifty Shades of Lady Jane Grey'.
- The Thrush's calling cards.
- Printable 'whodunnit' Solution Sheets for your guests to complete.

You can feel free to customise the details of the scenario. The names and titles of the characters are more fixed if you choose to use the resources provided.

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 five surviving characters have been given motives and reasons to commit murder. 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!

Plot Overview

The year is 1526 in the reign of King Henry VIII. Tonight Sir John and Lady Margaret Veillance are hosting the royal party for a dinner, as the King is touring the county and visiting their manor. The assembled guests are the great and the good of the local society, all eager to have an audience with his majesty.

Prominent guests include:

Sir John Veillance – Lord of the Manor and hosting the event

Lady Margaret Veillance – Sir John's wife.

Cardinal Syn – An Italian Cardinal from Rome.

Entertainment is provided by Elvis Priestly, a jester from the royal court.

Surprise guests include:

Thomas Easily – Wealthy and respected gentleman with a noble family pedigree who has been forced to stop in the area due to an accident with his carriage.

Anne Easily – Thomas' beautiful young bride.

The talk on everyone's lips is of the deadly assassin, the Thrush, who has been wreaking a bloody trail across the country with a number of high profile hits. The most recent known attack was in a nearby town [*you decide where based on your location*] two days ago, where the local Mayor was found with his throat cut in his own home.

A chance to meet the monarch means that there is a palpable sense of excitement, but as the evening progresses and the King still has not arrived, there are a series of fractious arguments between the guests until, after the main course, one of them collapses and dies – a victim of fast-acting poison. With the discovery of the assassin's trademark calling card on the body, it appears that this is the latest victim of the Thrush!

Can the diners identify whodunit?

General Staging Notes

Casting / rehearsal

Your chosen performers should be issued with a copy of this 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 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.

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 can eat at the same time as the audience or be provided with refreshments in their room. 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 a 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. If guests are scattered across multiple rooms that it becomes harder (but not impossible) for the actors to convey the plot developments to the audience. In these circumstances arguments and key events may have to be repeated so that everyone gets to see them. You can print and distribute the table cards provided in the graphics pack to the tables as part of your 'pre-show' preparation.

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 Sir John's speech, Starters
8.10	Arguments and revelations begin
8.45	The victim is poisoned and dies, Main course
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 event has a historical Tudor theme, you could encourage the audience to come dressed for the occasion in suitable costume to add to the atmosphere! The principal characters should also 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).

Overview of the Characters (*Extract*)

Sir John Veillance

Male - Playing age 40/50s.

The local lord of the manor. A proud man who fought for King and country but is now well past his prime. He puts on a big act at being in control but clearly his wife is the one that holds the purse strings, wears the pantaloons and rules the manor. He has a wandering eye and has tried it on, unsuccessfully, with most of the women in the neighbourhood, but is always thwarted by his wife. He will attempt to flirt with all the female guests and is particularly interested in the attractive Anne Easily.

Lady Margaret

Female - Playing age 40/50s.

Sir John's wife. The love went out of the marriage many years ago (if it was ever there) and she is now a bitter and domineering woman and most disapproving of her husband's wandering eye. Devoutly religious and in awe of the Cardinal and his relics. She simply must have some!

Elvis Priestly

Male - Playing age not important.

Elvis is a royal court jester who has arrived ahead of the royal party to provide light entertainment and song for the evening. He will be providing regular updates on the King's progress throughout the evening. If the actor can play a guitar or wind instrument to provide musical interludes or songs, so much the better!

Historical Setting

The events are set in 1526, in the early part of Henry VIII's reign. King Henry is still married to his first wife, Catherine of Aragon but with no male offspring (Princess Mary, the future Queen Mary, is 10 years old), his eyes are wandering and there are already rumours of his infatuation with a young lady call Anne Boleyn. For the time being, England is still a Catholic country. Cardinal Wolsey is Lord Chancellor and we are several years before the break with Rome, the Act of Supremacy and the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

You could research more on the period in books and on-line and hope that a history professor and specialist on Tudor monarchs is not among the guests!

Plot Narrative

Meet and Greet

All the guests are local gentry invited to the banquet by Sir John and Lady Margaret Veillance. You can encourage your guests to dress in Tudor costume. The key 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:

Elvis Priestly first, providing light entertainment, followed by Sir John and Lady Margaret. Then Cardinal Syn and finally Thomas and Anne Easily who are unexpected guests.

Thomas and Anne Easily will explain that there was an accident with their carriage and they have been stranded here. The coach driver fell ill suddenly and fell off the carriage, being crushed under the wheels and the carriage went off the road and broke a wheel and front axle – they were lucky to escape without injury. Margaret is reluctant to offer hospitality because the King is coming to visit but Anne turns on the flirtatious charm and Sir John agrees to give them board. They are invited to stay and join the party and both are delighted and surprised to hear the King is due to arrive. At this point, the second set of table cards, that include Anne and Thomas' names added to the guest list as handwritten additions, can be put on the tables, replacing the old ones. This can be done by Elvis or by a member of the serving staff if available.

The actors 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!

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

The Speech

Once seated and settled, Sir John stands and welcomes everyone there tonight. The following points should be covered in the speech:

- A welcome to the guests and a reminder that they are expecting King Henry VIII shortly
- An introduction of the other principal characters for anyone who's missed them (and a reminder of the Easily's situation).
- A reminder of the dangerous times we live in – the recent outrages committed by the elusive assassin "the Thrush". He recounts a rhyme that is going around:
 "We seek him here, we seek him there, the Kingdom seeks him everywhere.
 Is he quite distant? – Or behind a bush? That damned, elusive killer Thrush."
- He remarks that "It looked better written down".
- There is reward for the capture of this dangerous miscreant of 500 sovereigns.
- Sir John invites the Cardinal to say a few words during which he promotes his religious relics and he can distribute copies of his promotional leaflet (supplied in the graphics pack).
- Margaret gets very excited by it all!
- Sir John is interrupted by Elvis Priestly, who invite everyone to be upstanding: "Ladies and gentlemen, the King... has sadly been delayed." He goes on to say that he has had word that the King is delayed by the wrong sort of leaves on the road but will be with them shortly.

The Murder

Arguments before the murder

After the introductory speech, the performers should feel free to move about and work the tables and not stay seated at the top table. The characters should mingle and engage in dialogue with the other guests.

While this is going on, the following predefined arguments or 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).

Anne needs to flirt with John, much to the irritation of Thomas and Margaret. John is interested and clearly rather excited by the attention.

Etc.

After this set of arguments, Elvis proposes a toast. "Ladies and Gentlemen... the King... A toast to the King!". Everyone drinks, but (in a suitably protracted and melodramatic way) one character dies from a poison. Everyone clusters around until the assassin's calling card is discovered. (This is provided in the graphics pack.)

All the characters should react with horror and shock at the murder (of course!). Who could have done this? Clearly one of their number must be the assassin! The body is removed from public display by the company.

The further revelations

Even after the death there are further revelations to be made. Whether in argument form or gossip for going around the tables, various pieces of information should be imparted:

An undercover operative of the crown is revealed and insists on taking charge until the local Sherriff arrives....

Motives for the murder

... These are described in the Full pack!

Who Dunit?

Given the events of this evening the King is not going to be joining the party, and has taken a detour elsewhere for the night. The audience are asked to assist with identifying the murderer... to save time and effort for the local Sherriff and his deputies when they finally arrive!

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 winner!

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).

Further details are announced by the acting company

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

The booby prize winner is announced (and the solution they gave read out) and a prize awarded (a silly theme related gift). If there were a number of amusing sleuthing answers you can read out a shortlist of howlers. You can award copies of the Thrush's calling card and the Manuscript.

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

Appendix A - *Sample of a detailed Character back story*

The full pack includes all the characters

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.

Please note: Given the historical setting it is advised that the actors should familiarise themselves with the key characters and events of the time period.

Sir John Veillance

John Veillance was born in 1475. He was not born into the gentry; he was first introduced to the royal family at the age of ten when his father Edward Veillance was killed fighting alongside Henry Tudor in the battle of Bosworth Field (1485). Henry VII, grateful for Edward's heroic contribution to the battle, brought the orphaned boy to court. There, John made friends with six year-old Henry Junior, and together they learned archery and other skills of the battlefield.

At the age of 19, Henry VII knighted John and married him to Lady Margaret Foxcote. This stood John to inherit the local manor in which he settled happily, after serving the King in bringing Perkin Warbeck to justice.

He is not particularly intimate with Lady Margaret - they certainly don't have any offspring - but they get on well enough, and it's certainly easier for John to sit back and tolerate his wife's peculiarities.

He still gets on well with Henry VIII (now King), and although he has no political ambition or dealings with Royal intrigues, he will still occasionally go out to hunt or hawk with the King.