

Media Murders!

A Murder Mystery Party Pack

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Customer Taster

Media Murders

Television moguls Max and Maggie Burdock host the launch of a new channel, but will their plans be scuppered by their avenging daughter, a rebel celebrity or the intellectual powerhouse that is Channel Elite?

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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.

This 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 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 the 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 performers 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 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 **Business cards** for some of the key characters.

Printable **Table Cards** to list the key characters to assist the audience.

Printable **DVD cover** for 'Rear Admirals'.

Printable **Concept logos** for Dicky's new shows

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 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 the present. Media giant, **Max Burdock** of Sun TV is has invited the great and the good of the media industry to a reception to launch his new channel, MBC, the Max Burdock channel. The audience are all movers and shakers in the media and TV industry.

Other notable guests at the launch party include:

Maggie Burdock: Max's wife and a celebrity and presenter in her own right.

Angie Burdock: Max's daughter. A producer of cutting edge documentaries.

Oliver Jackson: Marketing guru and Angie's partner.

Dicky Forsyth: Presenter and celebrity and a bit of a has-been!

Nigel Lush: Media whizz kid and assistant to the head of Channel Elite.

Lorraine Bannister: Head of rival Channel Elite.

The launch should be a pleasant and engaging occasion but as Max reveals the content of the new channel and announces a hostile takeover of rival Channel Elite, a number of personal, family and professional differences come to light, tensions mount and two people 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.

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 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!).

Timing guidelines:

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 Max’s welcome | |
| 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 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 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). 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 background 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

Max Burdock

Male: Playing age late 50's.

Costume: A cross between formal and very casual. Jacket with t-shirt underneath. Baseball cap. Speaks with fake Australian accent.

Guess who he's based on! Max is an obnoxious and ruthless man. He's from a poor background and he's worked all his life to make money so that his working class roots will be far behind him. All Max wants is to stitch up his rivals. He wants complete power and he's used to getting it. He's a billionaire and yet he still wants more. He knows that his wife is part of his success and they see things in the same way. He doesn't know what love means, but if people are very useful to him he rewards them. This is the closest he comes to any emotion. He and Maggie Burdock get on well because they are a partnership. He would never expect anything less than complete loyalty from her and she gives it to him or so he thinks! The opening of the new TV channel (MBC) is just another part of his vast empire. It's glitzy and loud. It has all the big American films and all the main sport. The BBC just can't compete and as for Channel 4 forget it! However Channel Elite is a little worrying. It's more successful than it should be! However Sun TV has also just acquired near controlling shares in Channel Elite and are close to mounting a hostile take over. He is not actually the biological father of Angie, something he knows but Angie doesn't. This will come out in the course of the evening.

Maggie Burdock

Female: Playing age 50's.

Costume: Smart, sophisticated and a bit OTT. Australian.

Glamorous presenter and producer in the Esther Rantzen, Vanessa Feltz mould. Loud and brash and over confident. She's very successful and a celebrity. No way is she the wife in the background. She's totally with Max on how he sees TV. She wants the same things. They are both disappointed that their daughter works for Channel Elite making these thoughtful documentaries. They don't get the ratings. However, if it's ever useful to be associated with something more intellectual they'll use the opportunity. They don't want to be accused of "dumbing down"!

Angie Burdock

Female: Playing age mid 20's.

Costume: Smart and trendy.

Attractive, young and talented. Angie is the up and coming documentary maker of her generation. She's already won a BAFTA award for her stunning series "Our Times" which looks at contemporary Britain through fresh eyes. She's well known as a very intelligent programme maker and Lorraine is keen that she carries on working for Channel Elite. She is currently working on a fly on the wall documentary about the National Health Service, which she hopes will have a radical effect on the government. She also just had transmitted a very radical series called "The Power of Nightmares" about international terrorism. Critics have gone wild about, hailing it as a turning point in media and politics. She a right thinking liberal and hates the way her parents behave. She does attend most of their parties but has today as she knows that other intelligent broadcasters are going to be present. She's also planning a major series travelling around the world depicting the lifestyles of many different peoples.

Oliver Jackson

Male: Playing age early 30's.

Costume: Smart suit.

Attractive bachelor in the mould of Matthew Freud PR man, not so tacky as Max Clifford, he has far more style and sophistication. Women love him and as well as going out with Angie, whom he adores, he's also seen at all the most fashionable places with film stars, actresses and presenters. He's good at his job and he's managing Angie's career very successfully. He thinks that it's terrible her parents don't recognise her talent. He's very friendly with Nigel and thinks he's forward thinking so he works a lot

with him. He's also sure he can do something for Dicky but only if he changes her image to a more avuncular and listening type figure, like Michael Parkinson for instance. He's trying to stop him from being so brash but it's a bit of a struggle and he does find him a bit trying. He runs Juice Marketing. His past indiscretion was to star in some gay porn films in his student days. Max knows of this and will threaten to show them on air soon on Sun TV. He has also been in an even dodgier film that, unbeknown to him, Dicky knows about.

Dicky Forsyth

Male: Playing age mid 50's.

Costume: Trying to be trendy but clearly past it. Fake wig, medallion etc. Birmingham accent if possible!

A cross between David Dickenson and Bruce Forsyth. The master of the show catch phrase "What do you all love? A bit of Dicky!" and full of stories about his time in the business. Dicky has had a great TV career until now. He's now reached his sell by date, but refuses to go quietly. Max and Maggie are planning to fire him but have actually not been as brutal as they might have been. They have found him less high profile jobs in the hope that he will accept them gratefully and then go. However he is now proving to be awkward and so a more brutal approach will soon be necessary. Max and Maggie want someone sexier and younger and make no bones about it. Dicky is beginning to be seen as sleazy. He knows a lot of secrets about them and has been responsible in no small part for their success. He knows he could make things nasty for them but he also knows that they will stop at nothing to get rid of him. He's employing PR specialist Oliver Jackson to re-invent him, but he can't seem to accept that he's no longer young and handsome. He is for ever coming up with wonderful new programme ideas which he will happily explain to anyone who will listen. However all his ideas have been rejected by Max who will only do them if fronted by the right young trendy star and not Dicky. He has also revealed a brilliant concept to Nigel who wants to steal it for his own. He is also the true father of Angie. He is also about to publish a book about his life in the business 'A little bit of Dicky' which is likely to blow the lid on a lot of media secrets.

Nigel Lush

Male: Playing age mid 20's.

Costume: Smart and trendy.

A whizz kid in the media world and Lorraine's latest protégé. He's being groomed to take over as controller when she retires which she plans to do in the next few years taking a fabulous handshake with her. He's very ambitious but he knows he owes a lot to Lorraine so he plays her game totally. Lorraine often sends him off to have affairs with people so that he can spy for her. He's had quite an effect on Maggie who has been besotted with him and has probably told him more than she should about Max and the plans for Sun TV. Maggie though has pulled back slightly of late so he's keen to impress her and carry on the affair as he knows this is useful. He's thus very attentive to Maggie.

Lorraine Bannister

Female: Playing age early 40's.

Costume: Smart, bohemian and arty.

Controller of the intelligent Channel Elite. She's proved that intelligent programmes can be successful and that there is a market for them. She's very contemptuous of the type of programmes Max and Maggie produce. Their new Channel means too that her Channel will probably no longer be able to show any sport and that's worrying. She's also worried that some films that have a cult following and then become commercial may also be difficult to get hold of now. Dicky Forsyth is keen to work with her and she's keen to get to know him as he may well have some useful information. She likes to think she has integrity but the success of her own smaller empire has rather gone to her head. She is also a bit of a moral crusader and feels Sun TV represents all that is bad with society today and hates Max and his empire. She did a documentary programme in Cuba which was secretly financed by the CIA and involved clandestine spying on Castro and the Cuban Military.

Plot Narrative

Meet and Greet

All the guests are important figures in the world of TV and media and have been invited to this launch party to hear about Sun TV's latest channel. 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: Angie and Oliver, Max and Maggie, Lorraine, Nigel, Dicky).

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! Being a media event, the actors should try to get the guests into the mood: 'Don't you work for BBC1? 'I loved you documentary on squirrels' etc. With a bit of luck your guests will enter into the spirit too.

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

The speech

Once the guests are seated for the meal, Max Burdock opens with a speech to the assembled guests welcoming them to the grand launch.

His speech must include:

- Welcome the guests.
- Introduction to the other principal characters. He can be openly critical and hostile to those he dislikes.
- Announcement of the new channel. MBC – the Max Burdock Channel.
- This new channel will wipe out all the others. It will have all the new films and all major sporting events. The ratings will be all theirs.
- It'll also lead the way with interactive TV and internet access through the TV.
- It'll also have soft porn (erotic art) from all over the world.
- Market research has shown that this is what people want.

Lorraine will interject to say that this is just another pointless, unintelligent channel which dumbs down television and that discerning people will continue to watch Channel Elite. Max then drops his bombshell; through one of his many holding companies, he has secretly bought up controlling shares in Channel Elite. He is now the boss of Channel Elite and some changes are on the cards to the management and scheduling!

This causes consternation from Lorraine and Angie and Oliver and mocked surprise from Nigel (he is in on it). Dicky is excited as he hopes for more fronting opportunities. This is news too to Maggie but she is delighted and expects to be the new boss of the channel!

[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/inspector is used, he can 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 expose 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 murderer will step forward and should deliver a short denouement speech to explain the motives.

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

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 (magnifying 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).

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).

Max Burdock

Max was born in Hackney in 1956. The eldest of 12, his father was a market trader, selling seafood in markets and outside pubs, his mother helped. Max started life doing the same, with a bit of wheeling and dealing along the way. He was soon fed up handing out pints of winkles and pots of jellied eels! He was well known throughout the East End for running a gambling racket, a protection racket and a chain of illegal 'bookies' in pubs. Max never bothered with 'skool'. Regularly got caned, regularly skived and regularly threatened teachers and head teachers alike. He was last seen in a 'skool' at the age of 14 and never again. Skool was for poofs and weak kneed lefties!

Spending 10 years making a packet, dodging the 'old bill' and massing shed loads of enemies at the grand old age of 24, Max buys out a financial rival operating in North London and takes over a chain of legitimate betting shops, four petrol stations and a parking lot in Soho, and a hard porn film making business. Max knew nothing about the film industry, but fascinated by the girls, always one for big knockers, he starts to get involved. He grows and grows the business, opening studios all over Western Europe, and gradually making 'Hot XXX' the leading porn producer and distributor around the globe. Such interests ensure Max's global empire starts spilling over into legitimate TV and Film and he very quickly bought up TV channels in the American mid-west, Australia, Canada and some parts of Europe. Sometimes it was TV stations, others were part of larger media groups and Max found himself the proprietor of numerous national and regional newspapers the world over. Knowing 'nuffing' about 'bloody print' he was delighted to hitch up with Maggie when he bought out Melbourne Daily News TV in 'bloody Aussieland'. They met while she was representing the staff at the newly purchased company, fighting for decent redundancy packages, she found Max irresistible and ended up selling her colleagues down the river with a duff pay-off and miserable pension, but she got into Max's pants and she ended up hosting Australia's biggest game show for 10 years, made hundreds of 'That's Rife' programmes (a number one Saturday night peak time show that led Australian consumer viewing for years) and then hosted Sunday Chatter on the newly opened Sun TV in Aussieland in the early 80s. Maggie had a journalist background and Max let her run the newspaper side editorially NOT financially! So long as her editorial colleagues supported Thatcher and Regan, Max was happy.

Max's life is money, women and 'doing a bloody big deal', all three at once and he's made up. He's as tight as a wombat's wotsit and never ever discloses anything financial to anyone, certainly not Maggie! However he is grateful to her, she had the idea to make Sun TV global and she's fronted much of that expansion, and has hosted many of the programmes to great success. Max just about managed to pay for Angie's education near Leeds, Maggie wanted a Swiss finishing skool and the finer end of things – Max would have none of it and even went insane with rage every year over the simple Leeds boarding skool's fees, a miserly 8 grand a year!

Max, Maggie and Angie know very little about each other. They all have secrets, they all have hidden depths and they all secretly love and hate each other to extremes.

Max is fired up over the launch of MBC; he wants to drive the BBC and pathetic ITV into the ground. This new station is what the world wants "the finking man's bums and tits programming". Unbelievably this was the title of the Annual Edinburgh Festival TV Lecture Max gave back in the summer. Yes, he actually lectured the industry on what it needs and the industry was not amused!

Max though as East End as jellied eels and Pearly Queens affects a very strong and dubious Australian accent since he has spent a long time in Australia and owes a great deal to that country for his success.