



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery
by
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Customer Taster

Murder at Dragon's Nest

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Murder at Dragon's Nest

About The Pack

The full Murder Mystery pack should provide all the information you need to produce your very own murder mystery event. Murder at Dragon's Nest is intended to be performed from a stage, to an audience seated around tables. In the interval, a meal is provided and the audience has the opportunity to compete (one team per table) to figure out whodunnit.

This murder mystery is a scripted performance (without interrogation of the cast by the audience); the cast have set lines to learn, which contain the information the audience will need to work out who the murderer is.

The Pack Contains

- The Organiser's Overview [*Excerpt here*]
- The Script [*Excerpt here*]
- An Accusation Sheet - for the audience to fill in with their suppositions about whodunnit
- A Crime Quiz for the audience

Organiser's Overview Contents

- Introduction to Dragon's Nest
 - Plot Summary
 - "Action" (time and place notes)
 - Character Descriptions
- Putting On Your Murder Mystery Evening
 - General Guidance
 - Staging Notes
 - Duties of Compere
 - Suggested Timetable
- Production Notes
 - Set Description
 - Props List
- Clue Identification List
- Quiz Answers

Introduction to Dragon's Nest

Plot Summary

Peter Ellis Marshall, Company Secretary and Finance Director of Richmond Chemicals, has just returned home after eight months in hospital and a rehabilitation facility, following a car crash in South Africa in which his wife Edith was killed. He is now paralysed from the waist down and is wheelchair-bound. During Peter's time in rehabilitation, his solicitor brother Michael has overseen expensive alterations to the house *Nydd y Ddraig*, or Dragon's Nest. These will enable Peter to live more comfortably and work from home.

Much to Peter's annoyance, however, his daughter Eva, his Sicilian secretary Elena Callejas, Toby Richmond, who owns Richmond Chemicals, and business associate Charlene Van Zyl are assembling at the house to greet him on his first evening at home. They have agreed on a plan about which Peter knows nothing, and which causes much new information to emerge about the circumstances of Edith's death and Peter's secret plans for the future.

In the early hours of the following morning, Peter is found drowned at the bottom of the hydrotherapy pool, still in his wheelchair but bound and gagged with duct tape. It is then the job of the CID and local community police officer WPC Jemima Lightning to find out who is responsible.

Action

The action takes place in the living room/office of Dragon's Nest, Peter's large house in an affluent city suburb. The house has recently been extensively adapted to cater for Peter's disability and to enable him to work from home.

As scripted, the action takes place in early summer 2004, though if you wish, you may update the referenced dates to fit the date of your production.

Act One:

Scene One – A Monday morning in June 2004

Scene Two – That evening, after dinner

Scene Three – An hour later

Scene Four – Twelve noon the following day

Act Two:

Scene One – Three days later

Character Descriptions

Peter Ellis Marshall: 50s. Company Secretary and Finance Director of Richmond Chemicals. Peter is paralysed from the waist down following a car accident eight months earlier in South Africa, in which his wife Edith was killed. He is now wheelchair-bound.

Michael Ellis Marshall: 50s. Solicitor specialising in the management of wills and trust funds, and brother of Peter. He has been overseeing major alterations to the house to enable Peter to live and work from home without problems caused by his disability.

Eva Ellis Marshall: 20s/30s. Daughter of Peter.

Toby Richmond: 30s. Owner of Richmond Chemicals and has been running the company since Peter's accident after nearly ten years spent abroad living it up. He is a qualified barrister but has never practised.

Elena Callejas: 30s. Sicilian secretary of Peter who, prior to the accident, was in a relationship with him.

Charlene Van Zyl: 40s. Owner of a PR company with interests in South Africa that has undertaken work in that country for Richmond Chemicals via another company, the South African Growth Organisation.

WPC Jemima Lightning: 40s. Community police officer who lives locally and knows the Ellis Marshall family.

Newsreader: Any age. Voice-only, so can be pre-recorded. A local radio newsreader.

A **Compere** (any age) is also required to guide the audience through the programme for the evening.

Duties of the Compere

At the start of the event:

- Greets guests and explains how the evening will run, then introduces Act One (the suggested text for this explanation is included at the beginning of the script)

At the start of the interval:

- Announces the interval
- Reminds guests to fill in the Accusation Sheet
- Reminds guests to complete the crime quiz, which will be marked towards the end of the interval
- Encourages guests to get drinks from the bar and tells them that food will be served shortly (if applicable)

10 Minutes before the end of the interval:

- Reads out answers to crime quiz, which teams mark themselves
- Collects and checks winning quiz team's marks
- Presents prizes to members of winning quiz team
- Collects in Accusation Sheets

At the end of the interval:

- Announces start of Act Two

At the end of the play:

- Announces the name of the winning team and presents the prizes
- Says goodnight to everyone present

Putting on Your Murder Mystery Evening

General Guidance

The auditorium should be arranged cabaret-style, with tables seating up to eight guests. Each table constitutes a team, and each should be numbered to aid with marking.

As the guests may not all know each other, the crime quiz should be placed on each table beforehand to act as an icebreaker. This should be worked on by each table team before the performance begins and during the interval, and guests must be warned that using their mobile phones or any electronic devices to aid its completion will cause their team to be disqualified. The quiz will be marked at the end of the interval, with the Compere announcing the correct answers. Small individual prizes should then be awarded to each member of the winning team. (It would also be possible to use the quiz results as a tiebreaker in the event of multiple teams getting the correct solution to the murder mystery. Choose and approach that suits your temperament!)

During the interval, the teams should work out *whodunnit*, recording their accusation, and the clues that led them to that conclusion, on the Accusation Sheet which can be given to them either beforehand or at the start of the interval). These completed sheets are collected from each table at the end of the interval by the Compere and marked during the performance of Act Two by the director, using the Clue Identification List. Small individual prizes should then be awarded to each member of the team that has correctly identified the murderer and has listed the largest number of correct clues.

If a bar is available to serve drinks, this should be open before Act One begins and during the interval, but should be closed during the performance of Act One and Act Two. If food is being provided, this should be served to the teams at their tables during the 45-minute interval.

There are options in the script where local references can be inserted and it is recommended that this is done. Local references are popular with audiences and make them feel involved.

Staging Notes

Murder at Dragon's Nest should be performed as an end-stage production, not in-the-round, as members of the audience must not see the removal of key items from the stage between Act One Scene Two and Act One Scene Three, and between Act One Scene Three and Act One Scene Four.

Suggested Timetable

7.00 pm – Doors open, drinks available from bar, audience seated.

7.30 pm – Compere's welcome

7.35 pm – Act One

8.35 pm – Interval begins, food provided

9:10 pm – Quiz answers announced, Accusation Sheets collected

9.20 pm – Act Two

9.40 pm – Compere presents prizes

Production Notes

Set Description

The action of the play takes place in the living room at *Nydd-y-Ddraig* (Dragon's Nest), a large house located in an affluent city suburb, and the home of businessman Peter Ellis Marshall. There is a door at stage left, which is the only entrance and exit. This room has recently been adapted to double as an office for Peter so that he can work from home, since he has become permanently paralysed.

It is a very masculine room - a hymn to Peter's ego. Against the wall beside the door stands a bookcase containing box files, and on top of it are a sturdy-looking golf trophy and several photographs of Peter, in evening dress with celebrities and golfing friends, before his accident. There are no family photographs, not even of his deceased wife or his daughter. The door leads to a hallway (unseen) from which there are doors to the outside and to the rest of the house.

As well as a leather sofa, three hardback chairs, an armchair, and the bookcase, the room contains a desk, on which are: a cordless phone/answering machine/intercom, a laptop computer, an empty out-tray, an overflowing in-tray full of papers and spreadsheets, and a desk-tidy with pens, pencils, a paper knife and a pair of scissors. A large golf trophy, rugby/football memorabilia, including a Welsh dragon flag and mementos of Peter's many trips to South Africa, are displayed on the walls of the room.

When the play begins, Peter is sitting in his wheelchair at his desk, studying the paperwork that has accumulated over the last eight months since his accident. Immediately in front of him on the desk are a pile of loose invoices, two ring-binder files containing more invoices, and some unopened business envelopes.

Murder at Dragon's Nest

[Script Extract]

Compere: Welcome, everyone, to our murder mystery evening! I bet the estate agent who sold you your houses didn't tell you about the high murder rate when you came to buy a house in this peaceful, crime-free area!

Shortly, *[name of drama group]* will perform the first half of our murder mystery play, and your task as a table-team is to work out who committed the crime that occurs. There will then be an interval during which you should work out, from what you've seen, who the murderer is. The finale of the play, which will reveal whodunnit, will be performed after the interval.

On your table, you will find an Accusation Sheet, on which you should record as a team who you think committed the crime, and list all the clues that led you to think that. These sheets will be collected at the end of the interval and marked backstage while the final part of the play is being performed. Don't forget to put the number of your table on the sheet.

You will also find on your table a crime quiz. This will be marked during the last part of the meal interval, with me reading out the answers, so if you haven't started work on that already, please do so! You don't want to miss out, because individual prizes will be presented to all members of the winning teams for both the whodunnit and the crime quiz. Think of the glory if your team wins either competition!

Please don't cheat by using your mobile phones or other electronic devices to find the answers to the quiz. Cheating spoils the fun and, if you do, then I'm afraid your whole team will be disqualified.

Now, make yourselves comfortable, and get ready to note what happens when wealthy businessman Peter Ellis Marshall, Finance Director and Company Secretary of a company called Richmond Chemicals, returns home after a stay in hospital and a rehabilitation facility. Eight months ago, in a remote part of South Africa, Peter was injured in a high speed car crash in which his wife Edith was killed. He was driving.

I wonder if all his nearest and dearest are going to be pleased to see him, and whether they'll be at Dragon's Nest to welcome him home.

Act One

Scene One

(The living room of Dragon's Nest, rearranged to double as an office. Peter is sitting in his wheelchair at his desk, studying a large accumulation of paperwork. He has an invoice in his hand, one of a number taken from the pile in front of him. Michael is sitting in the armchair opposite Peter's desk.)

Peter: Look, Michael, I suppose I should be grateful for your overseeing all the adaptations to the house – the lift installation, the hydrotherapy pool, widening the doors, the orthopaedic bed, the bath hoist, all that stuff, because I couldn't leave rehab until it was done, but come off it! A fifteen thousand pound legal fee to you just for negotiating the contract for the through-floor lift?

Michael: Look at the detail, Peter, before you start complaining. Our legal fees are worked out on a standard formula, a percentage of the total value of the contract, and that company didn't just do the lift.

Peter: Oh, really? I grant you it's the same company, but another nine thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds for overseeing the contract to adapt the kitchen so I can cook myself a meal? I never cook, I never have, and I never will. I employ people to do all that stuff.

(Michael gets up, looks among the invoices, and brings one out of the pile, which he hands to Peter.)

Michael: Look at this, will you? The pool was put in for a much lower cost because the same company installed the kitchen, and an associate company did the lift. They were able to reduce the prices overall because of economies of scale.

Peter: Rubbish. Don't forget I know you, Michael. You're my brother and I know you. How much of a backhander did they give you? Bigger than the others offered, I suppose.

Michael: I'll pretend I didn't hear you say that, you ungrateful bastard. And the kitchen adaptations are essential. Staff don't stay working for you for long because you're too mean to pay them the going rate and you treat them in the appalling way you used to treat your black servants in South Africa in the eighties.

Peter: I may have a smashed spine and useless legs, but there's nothing wrong with my brain, Michael. I repeat, none of the kitchen work was necessary and I'm not paying legal charges or the bills for any of it.

Michael: Never having cooked a meal in your life is nothing to be proud of, and one day soon, even a control freak like you is going to have to find out how. You don't have your dotting wife Edith to take care of you any longer, and I can't see your daughter putting up with you for more than a week the way you speak to her.

(Peter ignores this as he is continuing to scan the invoices, adding up totals in his head as he does so.)

Peter: I can still add up, you know. These invoices from your law practice come to around forty thousand pounds, and that's just these. I haven't gone through those in the ring-binders yet.

Michael: The charges are totally fair and, for the record, all the time I was staying here looking after your affairs, I wasn't in the office. I've lost thousands of pounds by not being at the practice to deal with the trusts and estates I'd normally have been handling.

Peter: Do you think I came down in the last shower? I'm not one of those dear little old ladies who find you so charming that they never ask what it is you're really doing with the money their husbands left them. It's too bloody easy to blind them with figures and technical jargon, isn't it? They don't want to admit they don't know what you're talking about.

Michael: You're lucky you're my brother, or I'd have you in court for making statements like that.

Peter: You wouldn't dare, for fear of what else might come to light! Come on, Michael, admit it. You've had a grand time living here rent-free and all expenses paid for two months, and if you missed out on your usual sources of income, how come you went on flashing the cash? Trips to the casino, hospitality boxes at the *[local cricket club]*, the members' enclosure on race days all over the country. And then there's all the money you spend financing, shall we say, the darker side of your leisure hours – the side we all know about but never mention. It wouldn't do for the authorities to look too closely at what's stored on your laptop, would it, or for the press to publish pictures of you in some of those lowlife bars you frequent?

Michael: It's none of your business how I spend my money or my time.

Peter: Fine if you can afford it, but not fine if you're using my money to pay for it. I'm telling you now, I'm not paying for all this. I'll work out what I consider a fair amount and I'll pay you that, but it won't amount to forty thousand pounds or anything like it.

Michael: I warn you, Peter, don't try to cheat me, or you'll regret it. We're not kids anymore, and you're not my big brother who got away for years with making my life hell.

Peter: Maybe I should do my duty as a good British citizen and drop the Court of Protection a line. I think they ought to go looking for the real accounts for some of those estates and trust funds you manage, rather than the versions you send them every year.

Michael: Don't threaten me, Peter, or you'll be sorry. Two can play at that game. It could well be in the public interest for the police to take another look at the car crash that killed your wife. In the light of what happened before.

Peter: What do you mean *in the light of what happened before*? Nothing happened before. Edith's death was an accident and I was damn near killed myself when the car rolled. The inquest verdict was accidental death and that's what it was, an accident.

Michael: Oh, I don't deny that you staged it very skilfully, but what the South African authorities don't know is that you'd rehearsed it previously in this country. And they still don't.

Peter: What are you talking about?

Michael: I didn't know about this until a few weeks ago, when Eva mentioned the previous accident. She hadn't put two and two together, of course. She's too much of an innocent. But straight away I knew what it meant.

Peter: What previous accident? I haven't a clue what you're talking about.

Michael: Okay, I'll spell it out. You rehearsed it. You went too fast around a corner of the drive to this house one evening not long before you went on that trip to South Africa, and the passenger door of your very expensive car flew open, throwing Edith out. Fortunately for her, some bushes broke her fall and she just missed the drystone wall on that bend in the drive, so she was only bruised and shocked. I suppose it was then that you realised you'd have to drive a bit faster and a bit more dangerously if the next attempt was to succeed. You also realised you'd need to stage the next accident somewhere where there would be minimal forensic investigation compared with this country. Hence a high-speed rollover on a remote gravel back road in South Africa.

Peter: You've taken leave of your senses.

Michael: What you didn't expect was that you'd be injured and would end up in a wheelchair. You must be wondering now whether it was worth it to get rid of a wife who was older than you, no longer attractive, and boringly devoted.

Peter: How can you say such appalling things? How can you even think I'm capable of killing someone, let alone Edith? I loved her. We'd been married thirty-six years and I miss her terribly. I'd never have tried to harm her.

Michael: Peter, it's me you're talking to, not your hands-off company boss Toby or your celebrity golfing friends. I know what went on here behind closed doors. Why Edith put up with the abuse and still went on loving you, I'll never know. And in the end, you killed her. I think you'd better pay those bills, don't you? Someone might talk.

Peter: And I think you'd better watch your mouth before someone shuts it for good. And now, get out of here. I've got work to do.

Michael: Suits me. I've got a talk to prepare. I'm speaking at a conference at the *[hotel some distance away]* first thing tomorrow morning and I'm staying there tonight. A lot of people will be hearing me give them advice on how to avoid paying inheritance tax. But I meant what I said. I'll be here for dinner tonight before I leave and we'll continue this discussion later.

(Exit Michael.)

(Peter sits thinking for a moment, then comes to a decision and reaches across to pick up the phone. In the process, he knocks some of the spreadsheets on to the floor.)

Peter: Bloody hell! **(He reaches out automatically to pick them up, and is frustrated when he can't reach.)** Elena! Elena! **(He tries the intercom.)** Elena! Elena! Where the bloody hell are you?

(Eva appears at the door, holding a bunch of business envelopes, with an airmail letter from South Africa on top. She looks at her father anxiously.)

Eva: Dad, I heard you shouting. Are you alright?

Peter: Of course I'm alright. Don't start fussing.

Eva: Don't you think you ought to be resting? You only came home yesterday.

Peter: For God's sake, Eva, go away. GO AWAY! Can't you see I'm trying to work? It's my secretary I want, not you. Where the hell's Elena?

Eva: She went out straight after breakfast. She borrowed my car so she could drive to the station to pick up Toby Richmond. I told you he was coming today, remember? Oh, and here's the post. It's just arrived. **(Eva hands over the envelopes. She looks at the top one curiously.)** A personal letter for you from South Africa. I wonder who that's from.

Peter: None of your business and, more to the point, I specifically said that on no account was Toby to come here until I've had time to catch up on some work.

Eva: I told him that, Dad, but he insisted. He said it was urgent. And he couldn't come next week as you asked because he's flying to Johannesburg on Saturday.

Peter: Johannesburg? What's he going there for?

[Continued in the full script...]