

Murder on the Menu



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

By Jane Morris



Morris Murder Mysteries



Published by Lazy Bee Scripts

Customer Taster

Murder on the Menu

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Murder on the Menu is a Murder Mystery designed to be played by 10 actors. The actors perform a formal scene, then the audience receive additional written clues from which they try to solve the mystery before a final set of declarations from the actors reveals the guilty party.

*Welcome to McMurdo Manor, the home of fine cuisine, enjoy your meal.
On the menu tonight, the special dish is murder...*

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Customer Taster - Overview

Structure

The full murder mystery pack contains:-

- The Organiser's Overview (this document!)
- The "Main Scene" to be performed by the actors
- Seven pieces of evidence for the audience to examine
- "Accusation sheets" for the audience to enter their solutions (including a "tie break" question *).
- "Scene 2" - a series of declarations by the actors, in which the murderer is revealed.
- The solution (and the answer to the "tie break" question *).

* Note that the tie break question refers to infamous English gangsters. If you are outside the UK, then either use this question (which may provoke amusing wild guesses) or substitute your own tie breaker!

Setting

As implied by the title, the setting for this mystery is a restaurant. This gives the options of playing the scenes on stage - a restaurant set - or on the floor, more-or-less integrated with the dining audience.

Props

Tables and chairs set for each of the seven diners (including cutlery and wine glasses)

Table decorations

Reservation book

Menus for each of the seven diners

Ice bucket

Handkerchief (Tatiana)

Order pads and pencils (Becca and Ricardo)

Mobile phone (Alfie)

Food and drinks

Note that the script may be altered to change the food brought to the tables, bearing in mind the tone of the orders!

Drinks (either set offstage or set around an on-stage bar)

Bottle of champagne

Two glasses of Gin and Tonic

Bottle of mineral water

Starters (set offstage)

Plates of soup

Pate

Sea-food starter

Two unspecified starters

Main courses (set offstage):

Salmon in a prawn sauce with a salad

Sirloin steak with chips

Running the script in front of an audience

Note that you need to purchase a performance licence from the Murder Mysteries page of the Lazy Bee Scripts web site.

Preparation

Initial preparation can be done by distributing the opening scene, then running a first rehearsal in which the actors have to guess the identity of the murderer (evaluating the written evidence) before they seen the script for the Final Scene. (It's fun! Why not? It also ensures that the actors become familiar with the logic of the mystery - they will learn more about themselves and their roles from the evidence.)

Decide on the format for declaring the winner and using the tie-breaker question.

Open the event by acting out the scripted dialogue.

Distribute the written evidence

Announce that you wish them to evaluate a selection of the evidence gather by the police.
Give the audience a specified time to evaluate the evidence.

Accusations

At the end of the evaluation period, ask the audience to fill in the accusation sheets, including the tie-breaker question. (Make sure you have some spare pens or pencils!)

Solution

Act out the final scene.

Prize giving

There may be an option to read out some of the (more bizarre) audience solutions!
Declare the winner, if necessary by reference to the tie-break question.
Award a prize to the best solution! (And possibly a prize for the worst.)

As a broad guide your event might run as follows:

7.30 to 8.00	Meet and greet; pre-dinner drinks
8.00 to 8.30	First Scene [this runs for a minimum of 20 minutes, but there is potential for a lot of stage business with the serving of drinks and food. Sort out the timing beforehand so that your kitchen staff know!]
8.30	Serve starters
8.45	Distribute evidence and "accusation sheets" to each member of the audience
8.55	Collect Accusation sheets
9.00	Main course (during which the cast/crew evaluate the audience answers and choose the winning answer - by reference to the tie breaker and drawing from a hat if necessary)
9.30	Final Scene
9.40	Desert
9.55	Prize giving

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Characters

Ricardo Poitier - Head Waiter at McMurdo Manor
Alexander Ustinov - Owner of the Restaurant
Anton Warmington - MP for Ashton North (twin brother of Alexander)
Catherine Warmington - His wife
Rachel Stamford - Anton's secretary
Nick Stamford - Rachel's husband
Rebecca Dray - Waitress
Alfie Dray - Rebecca's uncle
Tatiana Smirnov - Russian beauty
Mrs Grey - A mystery diner

Customer Taster - script excerpt

Murder on the Menu

Alexander: (Entering the dining area from kitchen.) Good evening Ricky, everything ready for our guests this evening?

Ricardo: (In a bit of a huff, is mincing around the tables and fussing with the table decorations.) I'd be grateful if in future you would call me by my correct name, if you don't mind. It's Ricardo just in case you've forgotten.

Alexander: Of course I haven't forgotten. You used to like me calling you Ricky... when we were...

Ricardo: Well I don't any more, not since ... Well, you know why. Anyway, everything's fine out here but I seem to be expected to cope on my own here tonight. I see that new waitress Becca's on the rota tonight, I don't know why you employ that girl. She's useless, she's always late and when she is here, she upsets the customers and it's always down to me to sort out their complaints. I don't care who her father is – she's not cut out to be a waitress – if I were you I'd give her her P45.

Alexander: Calm down Ricky, give the poor girl a chance. You know I agreed with her father to give her a job to keep her out of trouble. I'm sure she'll be here soon.

Ricardo: Well I jolly hope she will be as we're almost fully booked tonight and my new friend John from the Bell heard that the Gourmet Guide people were in this area. Let's hope they don't turn up tonight – it's going to be a nightmare if I'm expected to cope out here with just that useless girl.

Alexander: And I'm on my own in the kitchen tonight. You make sure you let me know when the Gourmet Guide reporter arrives. I need a good write up to attract more clients from the Bell. (Looks in the reservation book.) So who have we dining with us tonight? Mmm, Mr and Mrs Warmington – I wonder who he'll be with tonight? My long lost brother is a bit of a jack the lad, heh Ricky?

Ricardo: (In a big huff.) Well it must run in the family then. But I think it will be the *real* Mrs Warmington tonight as he said something about their anniversary. I remember taking the booking as he specifically asked if the lobster would be on the menu tonight.

Alexander: Oh yes I remember now. The lobster is his favourite isn't it and I have only one left in the fridge from last night and I knew I had to keep it for someone tonight. And a table for two for Rachel Stamford, that's Anton's secretary isn't it? She normally makes all this bookings for him. I wonder who she'll be with tonight?

(Ricardo shrugs his shoulders.)

Alexander: Oh dear, I see a Mr Dray has reserved a table for two – I wonder which one of the Dray brothers that will be, not Rebecca’s Dad I hope, he’s the worst of the lot. Make sure whoever it is gets our best treatment as we wouldn’t want to upset him would we? Now I must get back to check everything’s under control in the kitchen. I know I can always rely on you out here.

Ricardo: (After Alexander has left – in a huff.) Take me for granted you mean.

(Rachel arrives first followed by a reluctant Nick.)

Nick: I’m not going in there. It’s far too posh.

Rachel: Oh come on Nick. Don’t be silly.

Ricardo: (Piling on the charm.) Good evening sir, good evening madam, do you have a reservation?

Rachel: Yes, in the name of Stamford, a table for two.

Ricardo: Certainly, may I take your coats? Let me show you to your table.

(He takes their coats and pulls out the chair for Rachel.)

Ricardo: Let me bring you the menu.

(Ricardo leaves to pick up the menu.)

Nick: (Looks around the restaurant.) Why have you brought us here? Is the Bell not good enough for you now?

Rachel: It’s your birthday Nick, and I thought you’d enjoy a treat. Help you forget things, you know.

(Ricardo hands her a menu.)

Rachel: Thank you

(And Ricardo then hands one to Nick who just snatches it from him. Ricardo leaves.)

Nick: What am I supposed to be forgetting? That I’ve lost my job or that my wife’s been having an affair?

Rachel: Shhh Nick, the waiter will hear you. Please don’t keep on about that. You know I just work for the man and there is nothing in it. It’s just silly nonsense your daft mates have made up. It’s just a wind up, please believe me. Now look at the menu and see what you fancy to eat.

Nick: We can’t afford anything on this menu. Not on my Jobseekers Allowance anyway.

Rachel: (Looking uncomfortable.) I told you, it’s my treat for your birthday. Now just relax and enjoy our evening.

(Nick and Rachel study the menu and talk silently between themselves. Becca rushes in and speaks to Ricardo.)

Becca: Hi mate, looks like it’s just you and me tonight. I hope we’re not going to be busy. It does my head in some nights – all these moaning customers.

Ricardo: Well seeing as it’s Saturday I doubt very much that we won’t be busy. Now you’re late so you’d better go and explain yourself to the boss.

(Becca makes a face and leaves.)

(Ricardo goes over the Stamford’s to take their order.)

Ricardo: Are you ready to order?

Rachel: Yes, I think I’ll have the broccoli and stilton soup please and the salmon in a prawn sauce with a salad.

Nick: I’ll have the pate and a sirloin steak with chips, but please make sure the steak is well done, I can’t stand the sight of blood.

Ricardo: Certainly sir. Can I get you a drink?

Rachel: We’ll just have a bottle of mineral water please.

Nick: (Butting in.) Water?! Forget that! Bring us a bottle of champagne. She’s paying tonight!

Becca: (Comes back on set and speaks to Ricardo who has left the Stamford’s table.)

Becca: What’s put the boss in a foul mood tonight? He shouted at me just cos I’m a few minutes late. Miserable old sod.

Ricardo: (With a sarcastic tone.) Well perhaps he wants to maintain the reputation of McMurdo Manor especially as we think the Gourmet Guide will be paying us a visit some time.

Becca: Yeh I know. My mate works at the Bell and she served the Gourmet Guide reporter last night – guess what – it was a women not a bloke – my mate saw this place on her list for tonight. It would serve the miserable old sod right if his place got a lousy write up wouldn’t it.

Ricardo: And who else do you think is going to give you a job? Or would Daddy fix something up for you again? Now make yourself useful and take this order through to the kitchen will you. I need to take the champagne to table two.

(Ricardo picks up a bottle, puts it in an ice bucket, takes it to the Stamford's table and pours it for Nick to taste.)

Nick: Yeh that'll do just fine.

(Ricardo finishes pouring the champagne as Mr and Mrs Warmington arrive.)

Rachel: Nick, don't drink too much tonight. The doctor said you should go easy especially when you're taking those tablets.

Nick: Stop making out I'm paranoid! I'm just a bit stressed out that's all. You would be too if you couldn't find another job and your wife spends her time gallivanting round town with another man.

Rachel: He's my boss, I need to gallivant round town with him as you so nicely put it!

...continues...

Customer Taster

Evidence Part 1

Email from Rachel Stamford to Anton Warmington dated 01.10.04

Diary Reminders 02.10.04

Constituency surgery at the Drill Hall
appointments as follows

10.00am Mr Brown re Local Authority Housing Waiting List
procedure
10.15am Mrs Smith re neighbour's anti social behaviour
10.30am Miss White re policing at weekends
10.45am Mrs Black re disputed boundary
11.00am Ms Patel re nationality decision
11.30am Open Forum
14.00 Video conference with PM re. recent press coverage of
events at the Immigration Department

My diary confirms it is your 24th wedding anniversary. Might I suggest you take Catherine out to dinner. What about McMurdo Manor as we have always been looked after well there when you have hosted dinners and I understand you are related to the head chef. His speciality is lobster which I know is your favourite. Shall I book a table for 2? Please let me know by 5pm as I need to get away on time.

Rachel Stamford