

Pass the Poison

A Murder Mystery Scenario

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Customer Taster

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A guest drops dead at Betty Blocker's retirement party! All the guests have motives - motives for murder and motives for pinning the blame onto someone else!

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About this scenario

This is a taster pack, containing extracts from the full pack.

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

This is intended to be used at a “village hall event” - supposedly a birthday party - 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 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.

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**

In addition, it is advisable that the audience’s tables should have notes sheets and pencils provided. (If you want the audience to deliver written “solutions”, then distribute solutions sheets to the tables.)

This murder mystery is a light hearted affair and is intended to be a comic entertainment rather than a serious detective story.

All the characters have been given motives and reasons to commit murder and any of them could have done the deed. As a result, there are no complex clues and no complex deductions needed.

Plot Overview

"I'm going to be 65, I'm retiring, I'll have a birthday party to remember!"

And she did!

Betty Blocker has been running the family farm, ever since her mother died 20 years ago and left her as the sole owner. The farm covers everything; arable, dairy, sheep and pigs. She is always busy, a 24/7 work load, with hardly any time to socialise, so there have been no chances for local young farmers to whisk her up the aisle.

They have all been invited; everyone living in the little Hamlet of Belladonna, surrounding Foxglove Farm.

As Betty had missed out on numerous Farmers' Balls in her past, she has decided to have a really posh "do", so announced that the dress code will be Black Tie (and she will at last get to wear the ball-gown which her mother has left her!).

Special guests include:-

Poppy White

Poppy is 66, a retired dentist and divorced. She's had a character change, from being a bully at school, and is now a dithery writer, completely oblivious to all the trouble she causes.

Heli Bore

Heli is a widow in her 40's. She is a local Vet, who chose a wealthy husband instead of marrying Robin, who is worried a malpractice cover-up may be revealed in Poppy's book, and finds the Inspector extremely embarrassing.

Ignatius Beans

Ignatius is in his late 20's. He's Betty's chauvinistic farm worker, who blames Poppy for putting him in prison some time in his past, and has a hobby of winding up Bryony.

Bryony Black

Bryony is single, and in her early 20's, living on Home Farm with her parents, and 5 brothers. She hates Poppy, who gets the lead parts in their amateur dramatic club, and loathes Ignatius, who keeps leering at her.

Robin Wake

Robin is in his 40's, and is an ex-Civil Servant, who used to work in the Tax Office. He's helped Betty with a tax fraud, received bad dental work from Poppy in the past, and can't forgive Heli for throwing him over to marry a wealthy bore.

All her guests have arrived, the party is just starting to warm up... but comes to an abrupt halt as one of the guests drops dead - leaving everyone with good grounds to suspect that she has been poisoned!

Local **Police Inspector Cyrus Anide** is called-in to investigate.

Cy is in his mid 50's. He's spent most of his years in the force stationed in small villages, and has been in Belladonna for the last 10. A useless detective, who's yet to solve "The Case of the Underwear Nicker", when Heli Bore had her underwear stolen from her washing line. He'll take on the role of Master of Ceremonies, once the crime has been committed.

General Staging Notes

Casting / rehearsal

Your chosen performers should be issued with a copy of the entire scenario.

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 foundations in the appendix, which are open to further development by the cast. 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!

Recommended event format

The suggestions assume a “village hall” with a small stage or raised dais.

The venue should be set up for a birthday party, with buffet table in the hall area for the audience to help themselves, before sitting at tables and chairs, facing the stage area. Ensure there is a centre aisle for the rest of the cast to approach the stage from the hall entrance, as late guests.

A raised area, or stage accessed by steps, at one end of the hall; to have 3 tables with 2 chairs at each. Audience’s tables to have notes sheets/pencils, etc, provided.

As a broad guide your event should run as follows:

30 minutes	Meet and greet (audience picks-up food and settles at tables)
25 minutes	Entrance of remaining cast members and top-table conversations, Victim’s death, inspector’s arrival
10 minutes	Break
15 minutes	Interrogation of suspects
10 minutes	Denouement, prize giving, dragging away of guilty party!

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.

There will normally be opportunity to whisper in corners with the other performers (and when out of the room) to check tactics, prompt actions and arguments.

The actor playing the Police Inspector is offstage initially and can be used as a messenger between the other characters!

Plot Narrative

The Greeting:

Betty Blocker to greet audience, as far as possible, as they come in through the door, welcoming them to her retirement party.

Ignatius Beans and Bryony Black to mingle around the hall and buffet table, talking to the audience.

After half an hour, Betty, Ignatius and Bryony to take to the stage; Ignatius and Bryony to separate tables. Betty to get the audience's attention, asking them to take their seats as several late guests are about to arrive.

The guests arrive, one by one. Each to approach the stage in character. To have 5 minute conversation with Betty, before taking their seat at one of the stage tables.

Discussions before The Death

Betty and Bryony, before Bryony sits down

Points to cover:

- Betty to comment to the audience that she hopes most of them have now met Bryony, explaining what a treasure she is, then in conversation with her:-
- Betty to let Bryony know that she's going to inherit the lion's share of the farm (sour look from Ignatius)
- Bryony to let Betty know she passed her exam last week, on the Superdrug Management Course, which has allowed her access to drugs since then. Betty to give her a "well done" hug!

Bryony should now sit at the table on the opposite side of the stage to Ignatius. As she does so, he should start to rise, as if to join her. She should glare a warning, and he should respond with a laugh and pretend he was just adjusting his seat.

As each new guest arrives, Betty must introduce them to the audience, as they walk towards her, by welcoming them to her party, saying how pleased she is to see them.

[The plot is developed through interactions along the lines of the above.]

The Death

The victim's collapse happens in full view of the audience (but in such a way that, if there is a stage, the victim's privacy can be ensured by closing the curtains at the request of one of the cast members!)

When the death is confirmed, the cast call for Inspector Anide.

He arrives straight away, explaining that he was passing the door, and takes control. He introduces himself, explains that he'll need to see the corpse (reaction from cast to this coarse terminology) and that there will now be a break, after which he hopes the audience will assist him with his enquiries.

As an option, the audience could be asked to complete a "suspect form" saying who did it, and why. (Prizes to be given on the best and worst answers at this stage!)

The Interrogation

After a suitable comfort break for the audience, the Inspector becomes Master of Ceremonies, and begins by giving his own background/brief. He then explains that it has become clear that the victim was poisoned, and that it is clear how it was done, but not by whom.

Each suspect is then interrogated by him, covering the background/briefs of each, so that nothing has been missed.

Dénouement and Prize Giving

There should be a break for the papers to be collected, then the murderer is announced, along with the winner.

The proud Inspector will now state that he's known who did it all along, as he saw the person hand Poppy the stamps. The rest of the cast express their displeasure, but he explains that, as it's probably the only crime he'll ever solve in his career, he wanted to make the most of it.

A suitable way of ending the whole evening would be for the Inspector arrest the culprit, dragging them away, as the rest of the cast lead the 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 family background etc).

Poppy White

Poppy is 66, a retired dentist and divorced.

She has been married 3 times, and each husband left her after a few years, for someone else. She has no idea why, but just accepts that the marriages weren't meant to be.

Poppy is a Fatalist, and is not bitter about the way things have worked out. She is also rather fluffy-headed and dithery, and bumbles along through life, completely unaware of any effect her actions may have on others. Her character has changed considerably since she was at school, when she used to bully Betty by teasing her about her father running off. Poppy has seen the error of her ways, following some unpleasant episodes at college when she was bullied merely for wearing home-knitted cardigans.

Poppy is a well known avid writer, penning at least 4 letters a day, with her current bunch ready to be posted, but yet to have stamps on. She has just finished her memoirs, which all the cast know about, as her publisher has been doing advance promotion. Poppy has mentioned everyone in the Hamlet of Belladonna, as she thinks they're all wonderful people, although she appreciates that they may be shy, so has changed their names. In her usual way, she is unaware that she may have caused upset with this publication.

Poppy is in the local Amateur Dramatics and Operatics Club, The Hemlock Players, with Bryony. One of the original members of the Club's clique, she has always been given the female, juvenile lead, even though no longer looks young enough - nor can she act the parts competently. To be fair on Poppy, she realises that she's not as young as she used to be, but believes that the Director is always right, and never questions the casting. The next production is The Wizard of Oz, Poppy has been given the part of Dorothy, and keeps singing (or humming) snatches of "Somewhere, Over The Rainbow". Bryony is the Scarecrow.