



A Dinner Theatre Murder Mystery

by

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Customer Taster

Raising the Dead

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About This Pack

Raising the Dead is an unscripted murder mystery set at a séance, with a cast of 6 (3M, 3F). After a murder takes place, the audience must observe the cast's interactions and ask them questions in order to work out whodunnit.

Structure

This murder mystery pack contains:

- **The Organiser's Overview** (*Extract Here*)
- **Table Pack** (documents provided to the audience)
- **Physical Clues** (given to cast to reveal at appropriate points)

Organiser's Overview Contents

- Plot Overview
- Preparation Guide
- Recommended Format and Approximate Timings
- Character Briefs
- Tips on Improvisation/Rehearsal

Table Pack Contents

- Introduction to the characters (VIPs at the séance)
- Two clues for the audience to digest early in the event
- Accusation Sheets for the audience to complete

Plot Overview

Your guests are gathered together in anticipation of meeting local celebrity and world-renowned psychic, Claire Voyant. She's been booked to try to raise the spirit of a landlady from the 1800s, Megan Bacon, who was rumoured to know the whereabouts of some priceless treasure, missing since 1786. Several local VIPS have been invited to witness the occasion, all of whom happen to have an interest in finding the treasure....

The local VIPS meeting Claire are:

- Laura Norder – Off-duty police sergeant, Claire's twin sister (played by the same actor in different costume)
- Anne Teek – Museum curator
- Manny Festo – Member of Parliament, married to Anne
- Doug Upstuff – Archaeologist
- Ellie Mentry – Teacher
- Bill Dersyard – Property Developer, married to Ellie

Claire has recently been making headlines under a cloud of accusations that she's a fraud, and not only that, but she's about to publish a book which threatens to reveal lots of juicy secrets about the other characters. Will she manage to hold her séance in this turbulent atmosphere?

Preparation

This improvised murder mystery is designed to be performed over the course of an evening meal, with each table of guests working together to solve the mystery and come up with the closest explanation as to the motives of the murderer in order to win a prize.

The meal does not need to be a formal affair – a buffet will work just as well, so long as there are tables for each team to be seated at. Ideally, this needs to take place in just one room and, depending on the number of guests, you may like to use a PA system for some elements of the performance (perhaps the dénouement), but provided your actors can ‘project’, then it’s not essential.

The actors do not sit with the guests, but rather mingle amongst them and periodically leave the room to regroup. They will need a separate room to get ready in, and to go back to periodically throughout the event to regroup or pick up required props.

Before the arrival of the guests, an investigation pack (provided) should be placed on each table, within an envelope marked ‘DO NOT OPEN!’ You can also provide your guests with paper and pencils for taking notes.

While the plot makes sense, it is far-fetched, and the whole atmosphere of the evening should be fun, tongue-in-cheek and slightly silly! For example, going to call the police but deciding to launch your own investigation in the meantime is ridiculous in reality, so it is best to make a point of this, joking about how long the police are taking to arrive but sure that they won’t mind at all if we just trample all over the crime scene in the meantime!

Depending on your audience, you might even like to joke that you’ve popped the body in a back room and packed it with ice to keep it fresh until they arrive!

Recommended Format and Approximate Timings

Mingling – 7.00-7.30

At the beginning of the evening, while guests are enjoying pre-dinner drinks, the characters will gradually enter the room one by one or in pairs and introduce themselves to the guests. At this point they will simply reveal the following:

- Their name and occupation,
- That Claire’s sister, Laura, should be here but is late,
- That Anne and Manny are married,
- That Ellie and Bill are married,
- That they are all here to witness Claire’s séance,
- They are all hopeful that she will be able to contact Megan Bacon from the 1800s,
- Allude to the fact that they are all very interested in the whereabouts of the treasure,
- That Claire has recently written a tell-all book called ‘Raising the Dead’ which is due to be published soon, and they are all slightly concerned about what she may have written about them.

Murder – 7.30-7.40

[Described in the full murder mystery pack.]

Amongst much confusion, the rest of the characters leave the room, dragging the body with them, but not before letting the guests know that they should just carry on as normal and start their meal while they go and contact the police. One of the characters suggests that the guests now open the envelopes on their tables, in case they may be of some use in finding out what happened.

Envelopes contain:

- A list of the attendees, with a few background details,
- A newspaper article about the missing treasure,
- A press release about Claire’s forthcoming book launch,
- Accusation Sheets, to be filled in when interrogations are complete.

Initial Investigations – 8.00-8.30

Having given the guests a chance to be served/collect food, the characters, now suspects, return to the room. They mingle amongst the tables, confirming that they have contacted the police and that they are absolutely certain that a murder has taken place. They accuse each other of acting suspiciously in the run-up to the murder. They now start to reveal a bit more about themselves (explained in the Character Details and Tips on Improvisation).

It is at this point that Laura appears, apologising for being late as her car broke down. The rest of the suspects explain what has happened. After a little more mingling around the tables to make sure everyone is aware of who Laura is, the suspects leave again under the premise of chasing up the police now that Laura is here, leaving the guests to take in what they’ve learned so far.

Interrogations – 8.45-9.15

When the suspects return, some will have a physical clue on them (provided) which they will gradually reveal to each team, and everyone will have one or two verbal clues to gradually reveal when questioned (see Character Briefs). Laura has by now taken charge of the ‘investigation’ and makes sure everything runs smoothly. More mingling amongst the guests happens now; the suspects rotate around the room ensuring that they have revealed their hints to everyone. This will then bring on more questions as the guests begin to connect the dots, and the suspects will gradually admit to what they are being accused of (apart from “are you the murderer?”).

[The full pack summarises what should have been revealed by the end of this section.]

Conclusions – 9.15-9.30

Laura tells each team that they must now come up with a solution. It is quite likely that more than one table will guess correctly, so encourage them to write as many details about their theories and motives as possible, as in the event of a tie, the closest to the actual solution, or perhaps the most ridiculous, will win! Allow them 10 or 15 minutes to write their solutions on their Accusation Sheet, along with their team name (and/or table number), and collect them in.

Dénouement – 9.45

Laura calls for silence and says that she and the others have had an idea – why don’t they try and contact Megan Bacon and see if they can find out not only the location of the treasure but also the identity of the murderer.

A séance ensues, and indeed the murderer is revealed!

Prizes

The actors will then read through all the answers and come up with a winner, coming back into the room out of character and perhaps reading through some of the funnier answers before revealing the winner and handing out the prize. A suggested prize for the winning team could be a bottle of bubbly, box of chocolates, or really anything appropriate of your choice!

Character Briefs

[The full pack includes a character brief for each character, including their back-story and information that they should reveal to the audience under interrogation.]

Tips on Improvisation/Rehearsal

Rehearsal

You should need minimal rehearsal time for this event, as the joy of it is in the improvisation and the interaction with your guests. At the very least, though, you should get together and establish all of your character details, working out which bits of information you should or shouldn't know about each other.

The only set piece which requires rehearsal is the dénouement – there is nothing worse than an anticlimactic ending, so make it as dramatic as possible! Ensure that each character knows the order in which they speak up, ending with the confession. This works best if the actors all leave the room in character at the end, and then come back in after a brief pause where they can now break character, take a bow to rapturous applause, and reveal the winner.

Ages/Backstories

The ages of each character can be flexible so long as all relationships are plausible. Once the actors are cast, it will be useful to come up with dates of birth, marriage, affairs, etc. which fit in with the actors' ages, so that each character will be able to answer immediately if asked "how long have you been married?" or "when were you born?"

Each character can also add to their own backstory so long as it doesn't interfere with the plot. Examples include place of birth or marriage, honeymoon destinations, school or university attendance, or even pets. Feel free to fill out your character with personal details; they will enhance your performance, but make sure they are easy to remember so that you don't trip up and make a mistake.

Guests will also comment on the silly names – for example, the fact that Manny and Anne are married with different surnames, or indeed that Manny and Hugh have different surnames. A good excuse is usually that they decided to keep maiden name or change surname for professional reasons.

Communication

If you do make a mistake, make sure you let your fellow actors know so that they can change what they say if necessary. One of the main tricks of successful improvisation is being able to roll with the punches and think quickly, and it's also vital to stay in character for the whole time (even when someone inevitably asks you "when is the murder going to happen?" or something similar).

If in doubt, when someone points out a mistake or asks you a question that you struggle to answer, the best reaction is to become deliberately evasive and deflect to another character – this will simply make you look even more suspicious, which is ideal!

Revealing information – what and when?

A general rule of thumb is to start the evening very vague, and gradually build up until, by the end of it, you are eventually admitting to certain things when asked; the whole trick is to gradually allow the guests to find out everything they need in order to solve the murder. It's not fair on them to hold off vital information until right at the end (unless it's the fact that you are the murderer!), but equally, they don't want to guess within the first five minutes.

Start by being evasive when asked something difficult, for example: "Me? Why on earth would I have an affair with ... ? I'm a happily married woman! I'm very fond of him, of course, but I would never betray my husband" or "I don't care to discuss my financial affairs with strangers, thank you very much!" progressing later to "Yes alright! Yes, I am in love with him, and I don't care who knows it! I've had enough of that philandering husband of mine!"

In terms of character and reaction, remember, murder mystery improvisation does not need to be subtle.

Costumes and Props

Most physical clues are provided for you to print copies of; however, two will need to be created by you (***described in the full murder mystery pack; they are not difficult!***) You will also need to provide envelopes for the table information, and pens and pencils for writing notes and solutions. The table information can be placed in envelopes before the guests arrive, marked 'DO NOT OPEN', or if you prefer, they can be handed out by the actors after the murder has happened.

You can add images of the actors to the attendee list; it helps the guests remember who's who once the murder has happened. As this is set in the present day, any costume suitable for the character will be fine. Remember that this is a fun, tongue-in-cheek event, so go overboard! It is better for the characters to stand out from the guests, not only in their performance but also in how they look. Any other personal props to enhance your character would be great – for example, a Ouija board for the séance adds a little something.