



A Murder Mystery Scenario Pack

By Rosemary Hill, David Lovesy & Steve Clark

Really Horrid Production Company



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Customer Taster

Theatre of Horror!

By Rosemary Hill, David Lovesy & Steve Clark

The Style Theatre - A fading repertory theatre company. In its day it has been famous for fabulous and spectacular shows, but now it's struggling to make ends meet. Internal rivalries, disagreements and weak management have all contributed to its downfall. When business entrepreneur Liam Dwyer offers to turn the company's fortunes around, artistic director, Richard Venables agrees to follow his advice, but he has his own contentious ideas!

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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.

The 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 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.

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

Printable **DVD cover** for Annabelle Dwyer's dodgy 'art' film.

Printable **Poster** for Veloci-rapture

Printable **Tickets** to Veloci-rapture for prizes!

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. The artistic director of the Style Theatre Company, **Richard Venables**, has gathered loyal and valued patrons and local sponsors together to announce plans for the forthcoming season, a season which everyone hopes will mark a turning point in the recent troubled history of the company.

The Style Theatre Company is a fading repertory theatre company. In its day it has been famous for fabulous pantomimes, musicals, farces and serious drama. Its reputation in the region was second to none, but now it is struggling to fill houses and the box office for some shows is under 15%. It has tried to move with the times, but internal rivalries, disagreements and weak management have all contributed to its downfall. It has in recent years attempted more touring and more “funky” shows to attract a younger audience, but it has had to compete with other forms of entertainment which appear to be more popular. The Arts Council has also been reducing its funding each year and this year the management has heard that there will be another devastating cut. It has to survive commercially or it will go under.

Other notable guests at the launch include:

Liam Dwyer: Theatre investor and business man who has put up a large sum of money for the new season.

Margot Arnold: Prima Donna and leading lady of the company.

Lily Turner: PA to Mr Venables.

Brett Brown: Heart-throb actor and leading man of the company.

Susi Brown: Actress and dancer, a rising star of the company.

Annabelle Dwyer: A famous actress of stage and film and Liam’s wife.

This should be an exciting event and the new season is widely anticipated to be a tremendous offering but as Richard announces his plans to stage a romantic musical about dinosaurs in love, *Veloci-rapture*, which promises to make all the performers a laughing stock as well as being a box office disaster, the other guests react in horror and anger. Heated arguments, recriminations and hidden skeletons in the closet, all combine to create a violent and deadly atmosphere leading to two brutal murders! In the end, the killer is revealed to be <snip />

General Staging Notes

Casting / rehearsal

Your chosen performers should be issued with a copy of this 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 guest. 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!).

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 Richard's speech |
| 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

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.

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 most common 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

Richard Venables

Male: Playing age mid 50s.

Costume: Bohemian and flamboyant. Large colourful Bow tie.

Manager and artistic director of the Style Theatre Company. Moved into theatre after an earlier career in making 'artistic' films. His erratic choice of shows has led to the gradual decline of the company's fortunes and many see him as the root of many of the company's problems. He's now becoming increasingly eccentric and irascible, so is a liability. Richard has called in a consultancy firm to advise. He's been impressed by Liam Dwyer's smooth, fast talking and his way with figures. The question is should the theatre become a receiving house and the resident company disbanded? Whatever happens most people think that he should definitely go. Tonight though he plans to unveil the new programme which he thinks will help the business turn the corner. Without consulting anyone he has commissioned a new musical "Veloci-rapture" – where dinosaurs fall in love in a land that time forgot. He really thinks it'll be a hit. The others will not believe what he is proposing...

Liam Dwyer

Male: Playing age early 40s.

Costume: Smart, trendy and sophisticated.

A hard headed businessman who doesn't suffer any sentimentality where money is concerned. He wants the theatre to get "bums on seats" and that's all he's worried about. He has no time for all this wishy-washy chat about encouraging new talent and writers and doing the old classics for the sake of heritage. If they're not popular and people don't buy tickets to see these shows then they are not worth doing as far as he is concerned. He's flash and fast talking and makes no bones about the fact that he thinks the company is finished. The only way to save it would be to do commercial shows and he can see a way of expanding his empire here. The theatre should become a receiving house and the sooner the better. However they are paying him a great deal of money so if they procrastinate for a bit longer it's no skin off his nose! He's also enjoying all the attention he's getting. He's vain and has not been averse to having affairs in the past, in fact he has a reputation here.

Margot Arnold

Female: Playing age early 50s.

Costume: Flamboyant, perhaps revealing a bit more cleavage than it should!

Margot has always found the casting couch to be a most agreeable way of working. She has made a point throughout her career of sleeping with directors and producers. She has some talent but she certainly doesn't merit the wonderful parts she's been given to play and over the years her glamour has faded and she has not been able to attract audiences. In fact she's becoming something of an embarrassment as she still plays lead roles for which she is now far too old. Many would say that she is one of the reasons that the company is now doing so badly. She should retire gracefully but she still continues to have influence where it matters. Richard knows this but, against his better judgement, he still casts her in roles for which she is not suited because he dare not do otherwise. He is terrified of her wrath. She is catty and vicious and hates Susi particularly. She seems impressed by Liam Dwyer, the consultant, as she is by anyone with money, and she turns her attention to him, hoping to save her own skin.

Lily Turner

Female: Playing age mid 40s.

Costume: Dowdy, frumpy and old fashioned.

Lily has worked in the world of film and theatre for many years since she left school, doing admin, backstage and as a dresser. She is part of the furniture and is taken for granted in many ways. However, she knows everything there is to know about everyone. She is not given credit for her knowledge and her wisdom. She knows a great deal about Richard's dealings and his previous work in 'art' films. She has protected him in everything. However Richard increasingly seems to be ignoring her and she's worried that she'll be booted out with nothing. She's determined to make sure she leaves with something.

Brett Brown

Male: Playing age mid 20s.

Costume: Arty, stylish and trendy.

One of the company's leading lights and something of a heart throb. He's a good singer and improviser and he and his wife Susi have been responsible for the highly successful pantomimes and musicals. They still get a very good audience for the Christmas panto. It's pretty much the only thing that does. They have both been loyal to the company even though they could have gone elsewhere. They both feel that Richard doesn't fully appreciate what they've done and that Liam Dwyer is not going to do them any favours. Brett feels particularly that he is being left out of important decisions. He's also always disliked Margot, but this now becoming an all consuming hatred. Brett has been cast as Margot's love interest in the show and he's very upset and deeply embarrassed. Not only has he been passed over for a decent part, it's also going to be a real trial to get through this without losing his temper as he hates Margot so much. He loves his wife dearly and is delighted that she is now pregnant.

Susi Brown

Female: Playing age mid 20s.

Costume: Trendy and stylish.

An ambitious up and coming actress, her forte being comedy and musicals. Married to Brett, they've always made a good team but she does also work on her own. All her shows in the past got a good box office so she's keen to capitalise on this. She's becoming quite hard headed. She could move on as she's in demand, but she signed a contract tying her to the theatre for a fixed period so she has to brave it out. She is very talented and knows her worth to the theatre. She is becoming increasingly vocal though about the theatre's weak management and also her dislike of Margot who she believes is also becoming something of a liability. She and Liam have had a fling only a few months back and she is now 3 months pregnant with his child.

Annabelle Dwyer

Female: Playing age mid 30s.

Costume: Very elegant and sophisticated. Evening gown style. She wears an elegant scarf around her shoulders to cover the tattoo.

The very glamorous wife of Liam and a successful actress in theatre, TV and film. She has worked with all the big names and is becoming increasingly interested in producing shows herself. She has a good business head and has plenty of contacts and connections (Cameron Lightmac etc). She feels that the company is pathetic and old fashioned. She also has some old scores to settle as years ago when she left drama school she was turned down by the company. Everyone in her circle at the time felt that this was a grave error of judgement on the company's part. She left drama school rather shaken by this and made a pornographic movie in order to get some money. It seems that Richard Venables was involved in this too and had always had connections with this shady world. However Annabelle mostly blames Margot who she knows influenced the decision, as she didn't want a bright young thing to threaten her position. She can get rather hysterical about things and is very jealous.

Plot Narrative

Meet and Greet

All the guests are important and valued patrons and sponsors of the Style Theatre Company. They have been invited along tonight to hear plans for the forthcoming new season. There has been much speculation about this since with a large cash injection of capital by theatre businessman Liam Dwyer, the company could stage any number of fabulous, profitable shows. A number of the key performers of the company and some special guests are also invited. These 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: Susi and Brett, Lily, Richard, Margot, Liam & Annabelle).

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! There should be much anticipation about the new season programme. Richard is being very secretive about it all but hopes are high!

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

The speech

Once the guests are seated for the meal, **Richard** opens with a speech to the assembled guests welcoming them to the unveiling of the new season.

His speech must include:

Welcome the guests.

Introduction to the other principal characters.

A brief word on the failing fortunes of the company but that with new backing from Liam and the continued support from the assembled patrons and sponsors, the company can be revived.

A mention of some of the wonderful new shows doing the circuit these days and how they could make the difference.

That he himself has been thinking about what is popular: musicals and... dinosaurs...

He will then reveal *Veloci-rapture*, passing posters to Lily to distribute around the tables. The plan is that this show is the entire next season! And it is bound to be a sell-out!

He can also bring out a shabbily made scale model of the theatre & set – this can be as tacky and poor as possible, done in cardboard and sticky tape, with a volcano backdrop, tar pit and model dinosaurs with which he can then proceed to demonstrate and act out to the growing horror of the other players!

In the show, Margot plays a *Diplodocus* who dies in a tar pit within the first 10 minutes. Brett plays a *Triceratops* who pines for her thereafter. Susi is the *Raptor* of the title who ends up eating Brett as he cannot and will not love her.

Not only that but all the cast are required to wear rubber dinosaur costumes!

(If the performer playing Richard feels suitably inspired he can even invent some silly spoof versions of popular show / pop songs to demonstrate / sing as excerpts from the show!)

These revelations will cause consternation. Everybody says Richard has lost it and that this is a completely mad scheme. It will be a financial disaster for the company and investors and will make the performers into a laughing stock.

[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 Durnit?

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 / detective is used, he will 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 finger 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 motive.

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). We provide printable tickets for the show in the graphics pack, a pair of which can be presented to the winner (The winner of the booby prize can be given two pairs!)

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 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 family background etc.).

Richard Venables

Born North London. Age Mid 50s. Richard Venables received a comprehensive school Secondary education. He was a fairly average student but displayed considerable flair for the expressive arts. At the age of 17, after watching Elaine Page murdering (in his opinion) the role of Eva Peron in *Evita*, Richard realised that he was not going to get the kind of theatrical experiences he craved here in the UK and so went off and joined "La Théâtre des Singes Jolies" in La Rochelle, France. The quiet port town fed him with all the creative and emotive theatre he needed, but family commitments forced him to come back to the UK about 20 years ago

Finding it hard to make money in the arts world, Richard accidentally stumbled on a rather lucrative sideline - directing "artistic" movies. He directed a number of these films over the next 5 years under the name 'Dickey V'. Great successes included "Black Rod on the back bench".

It was during this time he met Lily, a quiet, reserved dresser who seemed to be very discreet. As the bottom had fallen out of dressing for porno movies (there was only so much you could do with a pom-pom) she was on the verge of being made redundant. Richard, spotting she was good at figures, offered her a job as his PA when he landed the job as Director of the Style Theatre Company 10 years ago. As some of the finances for his new found success had been obtained in slightly dodgy circumstances he needed someone who would keep their mouth shut and not ask too many questions. Lily seemed ideal. It would be easy enough to keep her loyalty just out of Lily's own gratitude but Richard just made sure with promises of "seeing her right".

Having made a fair amount of money, and through the many friendly "faces" he met while making these films, he was at last able to start pursuing his dream of legitimate theatre. Actors, directors and producers who had all started within his films and had subsequently made good, suddenly found Richard never forgot a friend (or their habits!). Of course they all helped him and all had nothing but good to say about him.

Richard strenuously avoids what he considers "commercial" theatre - i.e. Anything that is a guaranteed seller and instead focuses on productions that are more daring but he feels will still sell out. He is very often wrong about this, but his opinion is quite frankly the only one worth worrying about. His ten years as Artistic Director has seen a string of bizarre and loss making shows, bringing the Company to the state it is in now! He is however clever with personal finances and for several years has been siphoning off parts of grants and funding from the theatre into his own personal 'retirement fund'. Lily as his PA knows about this but no-one else does.

Richard is heavily dependent on the other members of the theatre to keep the building running, particularly Lily and Brett who often sort out issues while Richard is not around so that he can't mess them up when he comes back.

People have been muttering of late. He noticed people whispering in corners saying he was losing it, that new ideas were needed, that perhaps the Company should be disbanded or at least get a new director. He feared he had lost his "magic touch" (although it is questionable that he ever had one!) He brought in Liam Dwyer as a way of trying to dispel the disquiet; after all, he was an artist not an administrator He has no head for numbers but he is currently negotiating with Liam to give him financial control whilst maintaining full creative control himself.

Brett and Susi had also started complaining that Margot was too old, was responsible for declining audiences and had to go. Margot was a friend, Richard couldn't lose her! He has decided to compromise by giving Margot a smaller part in the next production, surely Margot, as a true friend, would understand.

Richard is quite excited as he is about to announce his new production to the group and Theatre Sponsors (the diners). "Veloci-rapture!" - A searing musical tale of the raw emotions of persecuted dinosaurs, a kind of "Cats" but with lizards, and no Lloyd-Webber consumerist pulp. He has cast Margot in the lead role, as a gentle Diplodocus and with Susi in the supporting role Richard is convinced that this will re-establish the Theatre as a leading light in cutting edge arts. Of course he wouldn't explain the whole thing until he'd got the finance, it might be unlucky to tell them before (and he certainly wouldn't tell Lily that he'd invested all the 'retirement' fund until all the profits were in).

If, of course, it is not successful then quite frankly the Theatre is going to be way out of business. But it could never happen - "Veloci-rapture!" will go on for years and years.

Richard is a very animated character who would not be able to talk if you tied his hands behind his back. Some would consider him eccentric, but then no-one ever truly understands him. If he ever wanted a life partner he would lean towards Lily, who has been there for him for such a long time – but relationships are not something Richard needs. His mistress is the Theatre!

There is no need to list the numerous productions Richard has done over the years - he wouldn't really remember them if you asked him. All he knows is that his artistic judgement has never led him astray yet - it's not his fault if the public don't recognise masterpieces when they see them! Some past 'successes' include "Pretty in Punk", "Savage Monkey" and the "Moosetrap" (which made a huge loss due to the technical difficulties in constructing the moose trap itself (so what if the wall had to come down to get it in – it was essential to the plot!).