

Who Sleighed
Santa?

A Murder Mystery Party Pack
By Matthew Taylor, Steve Clark & David Lovesy

Really Horrid Production Company



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Customer Taster

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An especially Festive Murder Mystery! When Santa Claus announces that he is going to “sell out” and join the financially lucrative commercial world, other members of his staff are more than a little put out! But would any of them stoop so low as to commit murder most foul on one of the jolliest chaps in the entire world? In a word, yes!

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About this pack

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

The full 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 should 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 **Promotional brochure for SantaCorp**®.

Printable **Leaflet for GNOME**.

Printable **Name badges** for the characters.

Printable **Business cards** for some of the key characters.

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. As such there are no complicated or involved clues for the audience to have to try and deduce or follow!

Plot Overview

Santa Claus, who has spent hundreds of years giving presents away for free, has started to grow disillusioned with his lot. The magic is disappearing from Christmas, and as the world becomes more and more greedy and commercial, he's been starting to wonder if it's really worth carrying on as he has. He has therefore elected to "go commercial", and has been making plans for the launch of SantaCorp® - wherein he plans to start making a profit finally by selling toys for eleven months of the year, and only giving them away at Christmas. The main reason for his public appearance at a press conference and dinner tonight is to announce the formation of SantaCorp® to the world.

However, there are plenty of people also at the event not so full of Christmas cheer... Other notable guests include:

Betty Claus: The real brains of the outfit – Santa's battleaxe of a wife.

Mavis The Elf: Factory Manager of Santa's workshop, a disillusioned worker.

Mary Christmas: A glamorous tabloid kiss-and-tell lovely.

Ralph Dollop: Santa's filthy old reindeer handler.

Richard Brimstone: Bearded billionaire and air-travel mogul.

Doris Hanker: Brimstone's frustrated Personal Assistant.

Lord Lancelot Ffarquarsson-Smythe: CEO of Santa's main toy manufacturing rivals, CheeryToys Inc.

Richard Brimstone is also especially keen to hear Santa announce that his Maiden Airlines have landed the lucrative contract to distribute the billions of SantaCorp® presents – so it comes as quite a shock to him to learn he's been snubbed! However, this is nothing compared to the shock Santa's current staff have in hearing about his plans for the very first time at this press conference!

Squabbling and bickering leads to threats, anger and revelations of dramatic secrets, which in turn spill over into murder! Unthinkable though it may be, **Santa** is found murdered, followed by another member of the gathering!

Eventually, the killer is finally revealed to be... *[someone who can be revealed by buying the full pack or attending a performance!]*

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 8 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 guests. 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 Santa'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

Santa Claus

Male: Playing age any really, due to costume!

Costume: Father Christmas outfit.

Father Christmas. A cheerful white-bearded chap. He has spent hundreds of years giving out presents, but is starting to get drawn more and more into the modern world – models, stardom, commercialization etc. “If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em”, etc. Always seems jolly, but does that hide a darker and more despondent side?

Betty Claus

Female: Playing age 50's.

Costume: Dowdy, frumpy and old fashioned.

Santa's wife. Loyal, solid and dependable. Betty is seen by many as the real brains of the whole operation. However, she has a fiery temper – you certainly wouldn't want to cross her! Betty is starting to worry more and more about Santa's dissatisfaction with his lot – would he really jeopardize their business just through his boredom? Maybe it's time she pulled him in line...

Mavis the Elf

Female: Playing age early 40's.

Costume: Pointy hat, pointy ears, stripy leggings, waistcoat etc.

Factory Manager at the Grotto for many centuries now. Mavis is very bitter at the lack of progression in her job and gutted that she isn't being considered as an eventual successor to Mr. Claus, who, let's face it, seems to be going on and on and on in the position. As a result, she has become an embittered, resentful, often drunken, mess. Is murder the only way she can see herself sitting in the top chair? She is also a left-wing elf, a real old school trade unionist. Mavis is constantly moaning about the employment rights of the elves (and 'elf and safety regs) and she hands out leaflets on the subject and hints darkly that if working conditions don't improve soon drastic action will have to be taken. She has recently been selling secrets to Lord Lancelot.

Mary Christmas

Female: Playing age late 20's.

Costume: Flamboyant, maybe revealing a bit more cleavage than it should! A festive themed outfit with bauble earrings and plenty of tinsel!

A serial tabloid-kiss-and-teller dressed extremely glamorously! There is much speculation as to why she's there, but all is revealed when she admits she has been having a passionate affair with Santa for the last five years. Naturally there is consternation! Her threatened exposé of Santa's private life also reveals terrible conditions in the grotto and the whole business, which cast Mavis and Ralph in a very bad light indeed (Mavis selling secrets to Lord Lancelot – true, and Ralph mistreating the reindeers – not true!) In fact, although the affair was originally set up by Lord Lancelot himself, Mary has fallen in love with Santa, and is devastated when he rejects her.

Ralph Dollop

Male: Playing age late 40's.

Costume: Filthy grime-encrusted clothes, flat cap. Wellington boots

Santa's chief reindeer-handler and a revolting individual. Foul-mouthed, coarse and dirty, Ralph is in no way suited to polite company. The only things he truly loves are his reindeer. However, he learns tonight that Santa is about to sign a lucrative deal with Richard Brimstone and distribute presents via means of Maiden Airlines from 2005 onwards. This means the dole for Ralph and the knackers' yard for Donner, Blitzen, Rudolph and co – could this drive him over the edge into homicidal rage?

Richard Brimstone

Male: Playing age 40s.

Costume: Colourful jumper, snazzy designer gear.

Multi-multi billionaire owner of Maiden Airlines (and a whole host of other industries – Maiden Megastores, Maiden Finance, Maiden TV, even a very unpopular soft drink called Maiden Cola!). Richard is at the event expecting to be named as the supplier of all SantaCorp ® delivery needs – a huge financial success. But how would he react if Santa were to renege on the deal?

Doris Hanker

Female: Playing age mid 30's.

Costume: Uptight power suit, glasses.

Brimstone's personal assistant at Maiden Industries, Doris is a repressed, bespectacled, clipboard-carrying nerd who harbours a secret fiery passion for her boss. She dotes on his every word, and it's obvious to everyone except him that she yearns for him with a surprisingly violent fervour. But are her hidden depths sufficiently fiery for her to commit murder to try and gain his love?

Lord Lancelot Ffarquarsson-Smythe

Male: Playing age 40's.

Costume: Smart dinner jacket. A monocle, even!

CEO of CheeryToys Incorporated, the largest toy manufacturers in Europe. Lord Lancelot has long harboured a grudge against Santa, but is even more panicked now he has learned of Santa's plans to enter the toy market between January and November. He has had Mavis the Elf spying for him in recent years. He is well known for removing his rivals using dirty tricks in the past, and indeed he himself has paid Mary Christmas to fool around with Mr. Claus, but would he stoop as low as murder?

Plot Narrative

Meet and Greet

All the guests are important media types and/or potential shareholders in SantaCorp ®. They have been invited along tonight to hear plans for the forthcoming venture. A number of the key members of Santa's staff and some other interested parties 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: Ralph and Mavis, Sir Lancelot, Betty, Richard and Doris, Mary, Santa).

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 nervous anticipation about the new venture, whatever it may be – and some tantalising hints from those characters who think they know what's up those big red sleeves! Santa is being very secretive about it all!

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

The speech

Once the guests are seated for the meal, **Santa** opens with a speech to the assembled guests welcoming them to the unveiling of the new season. His speech must include:

A welcome to the guests.

An introduction of the other principal characters for anyone who's missed them.

A brief word on the frustration he's felt with the increasing commercialisation of Christmas and the feeling he's had of being left behind by modern market forces.

His astonishing new plans for SantaCorp ®, which will allow him to finally start turning a profit and competing in the global market place. He distributes promotional flyers from his sack for all to read.

Details of the present delivery contract – it turns out that SimpleJet will do it for far less than Maiden Airlines, so he's already signed a deal with them. This of course means he can also make a further bit of money on the side by selling off his reindeers for glue.

These revelations will cause consternation. Everybody says Santa has lost it and that this is a completely mad scheme. His current staff are appalled at the complete change in their ethos, the Maiden Airlines pair are staggered not to be offered the contract after all, and Lord Lancelot is simply stricken to envisage such a hefty business competitor emerging onto his company's radar!

[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 Dunit?

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. It's possible in this scenario that the person who played Santa can return as a police officer, as he should be unrecognisable without his beard...

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 identify 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).

Eventually the murderer steps forward and explains the motive.

The dead are invited to return (they should bring with them the prizes).

The chosen winner is announced (and the solution they gave read out) and a prize awarded (A bottle of wine / champagne).

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).

Santa Claus

Santa's life has always run on belief, and so hundreds of years ago he was stronger than most other deities – nowadays with the more cynical populace, Santa doesn't have very much more power than the Easter Bunny. That said, at least he doesn't have to explain away being a six foot rabbit with an egg fixation so he's probably more mentally balanced.

Christmas used to be so much fun – toys for those that behave, lumps of coal for those that didn't. You knew where you stood then.

Nowadays, with all the litigation and the advent of “compensation society” Santa finds himself wide open to court cases if he makes behavioural judgements on groups of young people. It all has to be a level playing field – as a result Santa has to make more and more toys for distribution (with less development resources than at the height of his power days) and there has been a huge decline in the coal industry.

Santa doesn't think he would have made it through as a belief concept without the love and support of his wife, Betty. They met at a reindeer market in Lapland in 540AD, and the relationship is still quite strong even though it gets harder and harder to find good anniversary presents (they reached their Platinum anniversary shortly after 610AD – where do you go from there?).

Here comes the frank admission – there are things in the bottom of Santa's stocking that others may not know about. Santa has been having an affair with Mary Christmas for some time now.

In addition, Christmas has just lost the sparkle for Santa. Since the deer and elves became unionised and all the issue with gifts, the job has become more of a chore than a pleasure. To that end, Santa is going to embrace consumerism big time in a bid to maintain his market position.

Santa's only previous dealing with the corporate market was a much criticised sponsorship deal with Coca Cola at the turn of the last century where they kitted him out in his current stylish red outfit – He hasn't touched business deals since but he is going to have to from now on in. Tonight's the night when his new plans are revealed! Ho! Ho! Ho!