

An illustration in a stylized, flat-art style. In the foreground, a man in a dark suit, light blue shirt, dark tie, and a dark fedora hat is looking down at a woman. The woman has blonde hair, is wearing a purple top and a green jacket, and is looking towards the right. They are on the deck of a ship, with a wooden railing in front of them. In the background, there's a large ship with a red and white striped funnel, and a person in a purple top is visible on the deck. The sky is blue with some white clouds.

Transatlantic Tragedy

Dressed to Kill # 1

Brian Clegg

SAMPLE

[Items omitted from the sample to avoid giving away too much of the plot are explained with comments like this]

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What it's all about

Dressed to Kill's predecessor, *Organizing a Murder* was designed to be different from a conventional "murder mystery party". There was no role play, with all players hunting for the truth using clues, witness statements and evidence. This meant the mysteries could be played by any number of players, and made the events more flexible. But sometimes the role play aspect is what's required. In the *Dressed to Kill* mysteries, each player takes on one of the characters in traditional mystery party form. Prepare to live through an evening of mystery.

Know your audience

This *Dressed to Kill* mystery is for 8 players. The mystery is graded basic, which means that it is suitable from teenagers and above, provided you think that the subject matter is appropriate.

A location

Dressed to Kill can be used in almost any location. It can be played in the home, or your garden (but be wary of the weather), or in a public space. Traditionally, role play games are played around a dinner table, which makes it easy for the players to converse in character – essential if the mystery is to be worked out. But you could just as easily be in a sitting room or a jacuzzi (provided you don't get the clues wet). The important thing is that the players have to be able to hear each other. No point trying to do this in a noisy bar or club.

Bring a sandwich

It is common, but not essential for murder mysteries to be fitted around a dinner party. Some murder mystery kits you can buy present you with a menu, but I won't insult you by suggesting that you can't choose your own party food. However, I will suggest where relevant how to fit the mystery around a meal.

If you are going for a larger scale location, you might prefer to make it a murder mystery picnic – don't be constrained by the traditional idea of a sit-down dinner.

The Format

Each mystery in the *Dressed to Kill* series is set out in the same format. In this section we run through the component parts that make up a mystery, and add some suggestions on ways of enhancing the event. If you are the sort of person who likes to get down to things, you needn't bother with this section - go straight on to the mysteries themselves - but if you are prepared to spend a few minutes looking through this short chapter you may find some hints which will make the experience more enjoyable for both yourself and your players.

Easiness

All the mysteries can be played by adults, but some are intentionally limited to make them usable with a younger group. Each mystery is given one of three ratings:

- ✦ Basic - playable by teenagers and above (may be suitable down to around 10, depending on the players)
- ✦ Medium - playable by adults with no experience of murder mystery games
- ✦ Challenging - playable by murder mystery enthusiasts

Before the mystery

With a role play murder there has to be much more interaction with the players beforehand than there is with the mysteries in *Organizing a Murder*. You will need to invite the right number of players. Each will need to know what is happening – this is not usually something to drop on someone as a surprise. Apart from anything else, they will need to sort out their costume, unless you intend to have an on-hand costumier to get everyone dressed. In each mystery, after the introductory pages for you, you will find a series of pages labelled “Character Introduction”. Send the appropriate page to the person you intend to play this character along with their invitation. It will give them a little background on their character, tell them what they will be doing initially, and gives some suggestions on their wardrobe.

The character introduction may also indicate whether or not this person is the killer. For this reason, if you are going to take part as a character, it is very important that you don't read the detail yourself. As well as sending a copy out, make sure you have another copy available on the day, as many people will forget to bring them.

Get your invitations out early, and ask for a prompt reply. If some people can't make it you will need substitute guests. Role play mysteries can't be played without the full cast.

Running

It is common with role play games like this one for the host to take part as one of the characters. If you do, you must be scrupulously careful not to read anything that is for one of the other characters, and particularly not to read the solution until the end of the game.

It may be, however, that you personally will not be taking part, either because you have more guests than there are characters in the mystery, or because you are running it for a group of younger players who may need some help along the way. In that case, familiarize yourself with all the details first. If this is the case, take on the persona of a detective or police officer, trying to solve the crime.

Round introductions and host instructions

Before each round you will find a round introduction and host instructions page. It will tell you what to hand out as the host, and will give a small summary of what has been learned that you can read out to make sure everyone is up to speed.

Evidence

After the introduction to the round will come any evidence to be given out. Evidence may be letters, cuttings from newspapers, or physical objects that will act as clues. Usually evidence is given to one of the characters. They will be given instructions on what to do with the evidence in their round briefing.

Round briefings

After any evidence for the round, come the round briefings. These are usually printed two to the page, so will need cutting up. Hand these out to the characters at the start of the round. The round briefing tells the characters who have evidence what to do with it, and gives a series of pieces of information (or responses to questions) to throw into the conversation in the next round. There is suggested phrasing for comments, but your characters should be encouraged to ad-lib, as long as they stick to the plot.

Props and gimmicks

Dressed to Kill mysteries can be run using only what you find in the book, but they can be made more interesting by swapping the evidence, where appropriate, for physical items. These props are specified in the introduction and who to give them to. This should be possible without giving too much away if you are taking part in the mystery as a character.

Timing

The length of a mystery depends on your available time and the ability of your players to concentrate. Most are designed to fit around a meal, though the meal is optional. Typically there may be five sessions, each taking up around 15 minutes – though the exact timing is very flexible and depends on your guests' ability to play act.

At the end

When the time is up, the final session involves each character giving a statement, then accusing the murderer. Finally, as host, it is your job to read out the solution.

Dressed to Kill # 1 - Transatlantic Tragedy

Easiness - Basic

Players - 8

Introduction

It is 1922. You are aboard the luxury liner Olympia on a voyage from England to New York. A passenger, Bill Tyzak, fell overboard at around 4pm today. Sadly, he drowned before he recovered, but the remains of a package in his pocket tell you that was a detective who had discovered a plan to destroy the Olympia. There is a bomb on board that will detonate after dinner tonight. There is no way off, no way to call help. If you cannot discover who the killer is, and where he or she has hidden the bomb, you will all die. Enjoy your meal. It might be your last.

Props and gimmicks

The following props will help make the mystery more effective:

- ✦ A woman's bracelet – for Caterena Vslavia. She is asked to bring one in her costume details, but have one ready just in case
- ✦ A simple white shirt button – give to Doctor Campion at the start of round 3
- ✦ A small amount of cigar(ette) ash in a plastic bag – give to Grace at the start of round 4

Before the mystery

Send the character introduction to each player along with their invitation. This will tell them about their character and what to wear. (Have spare copies for players who don't bring them along.) It's important to make sure you have enough players – be prepared to substitute if someone can't make it.

Characters

- ✦ Miss Lottie Lawson - young American heiress
- ⊖ Mrs Grace Lawson - Lottie's widowed mother
- ✦ Lord Peter Callendar - young impoverished man about town and suitor for Lottie
- ✦ [Ernest] Farthing - Malling's manservant
- ✦ Caterena Vaslavia - Russian palmist, employed by the shipping company
- ✦ Captain Abel Baker – American elderly ship's captain
- ✦ Jim Doyle – an Irish lad-about-town and gambling enthusiast
- ✦ Doctor Petunia Campion - British academic historian and eccentric

Round 1 introduction and host instructions

When guests arrive, provide them with a copy of their Character Introduction, if they haven't brought it with them. Encourage them to have a read through, and to slip into character. They should try to speak to the others in character at all times. Remind the characters of the basic plot:

It is 1922. You are aboard the luxury liner Olympia on a voyage from England to New York. A passenger, Bill Tyzak, fell overboard at around 4pm today. Sadly, he drowned before he recovered, but the remains of a package in his pocket tell you that was a detective who had discovered a plan to destroy the Olympia. There is a bomb on-board that will detonate after dinner tonight. There is no way off, no way to call help. If you cannot discover who the killer is, and where he or she has hidden the bomb, you will all die. Enjoy your meal. It might be your last.

Introduce each character by name, with the brief introduction from the previous page. It would help to make a little name label for everyone (or you can use larger name tags on the table, turned so everyone else can see them).

Explain that in this initial section they should get to know a little about each other, and follow the instructions on their *Character Introduction* sheets in terms of any topics that have to be covered. Feel free to talk about anything else, but make sure you keep in character and period.

Finally explain that this is the first round – there will be a total of four rounds, plus a summary and accusations round at the end. At the start of each round they will be provided with extra information, and may have evidence that will help them discover who killed Bill Tyzak and intends to blow up everyone else.

Character Introduction – Miss Lottie Lawson

It is 1922. You are aboard the luxury liner Olympia on a voyage from England to New York. A passenger, Bill Tyzak, fell overboard at around 4pm today. Sadly, he drowned before he recovered, but the remains of a package in his pocket tell you that was a detective who had discovered a plan to destroy the Olympia. There is a bomb on-board that will detonate after dinner tonight. There is no way off, no way to call help. If you cannot discover who the killer is, and where he or she has hidden the bomb, you will all die. Enjoy your meal. It might be your last.

You are a young, fashionable American heiress, crossing the Atlantic back home in the company of your widowed mother, Grace Lawson. ***[Says here whether or not you are the killer]***

[Goes on to tell you more about yourself and your attitude to the others.]

During the first session

Take part in the conversation. If it hasn't already been done, ask someone nearby what they thought of Tyzak, and someone else where they were when Tyzak was killed.

Costume Suggestions

1920s “flapper” style clothes. Opulent. Plenty of jewellery.

[Other character introductions follow for the rest of the characters]

Round 2 introduction and host instructions

Once the general discussion has died down (and perhaps you've had your first course), move on to round two. Provide each player with their Round 2 briefing. Give the captain Evidence sheet 1 – he should read it, then either read it out or pass it round the other players. Give Caterena Evidence sheet 2 – she should read it, and use it when she feels the time is right. Please do not read either of these yourself, unless you are the character in question.

You can read this out to the guests (or paraphrase):

By now we've got a feeling for where everyone was when the murder took place. Or at least, where they say they were. And let's be clear, the important thing is to find the murderer, because it's the only way we are going to have a chance of saving the ship. We need to find out more.

Evidence 1 – give to Captain Baker at the start of round 2

Medical Report

Initial Examination of the remains of William Tyzak

We have very limited facilities onboard the ship, and all findings are preliminary, prior to confirmation after docking.

William Tyzak appears to have drowned, some time between 2pm and 4pm, ship's time. He has significant head trauma - this may indicate he was hit over the head before being thrown overboard, or that he hit his head on the ship as he fell. There is bruising on his wrists that suggests he may have been forced off the ship.

[Goes on to give more details]

Doctor Arnold Koolin, Ship's Surgeon

Captain Baker – after reading this through yourself, either read it out or pass it round the suspects. The evidence should be available for consultation throughout the game.

[More evidence follows.]

Round 2 briefing – Lottie Lawson

[Details of what to say in a number of interactions with other players]

Round 2 briefing – Grace Lawson

[round briefings for all characters follow. The same pattern continues for the remaining rounds, including evidence which has pictures of physical objects: it's better if you can substitute props for these.]

Round 5 introduction and host instructions

Once the general discussion has died down, move on to the final statements and accusations round. Hand out the final statements, and give Lottie evidence 7.

You can read this out to the guests (or paraphrase):

We have discovered all we are going to discover. The evidence is all there to see. We need to know who killed Bill Tyzak, and soon, if we are to save the ship from destruction. It's up to you.

Ask each guest to give a summary of their position. Then ask each to accuse the murderer. Finally, read out the solution sheet.

[Final statements by each of the characters follows]

Transatlantic Tragedy – Solution Sheet

**DO NOT READ THIS UNTIL THE END OF THE
MYSTERY**

Read out at the end, after each of the guests has made an accusation.

[Of course, you don't want to know the solution in a sample!]