

ALEX MASTERS

Character Booklet

Hello and welcome to Mistletoe Manor – and to the murder mystery set to unfold under its ancient roof. I am author Ruth Ware, and I will be guiding you through the events of the night.

Your host is the bestselling writer Aubrey St Clair, author of more than forty books starring his celebrated sleuth Eric Argent, and founder of the Detective Club, whose members comprise the crème de la crème of crime writers. Tonight is the fiftieth annual meeting of the club, and you are one of the honoured guests.

First of all, an explanation about this character booklet. Anything written in italics is for your eyes only, so please don't read it aloud. It may contain secret information or clues to your motive, if you are guilty. However, you may choose to share this information as part of the discussions at the end of the evening.

The night begins with a draw determining who is the murderer and who is an innocent bystander. Whatever your status, keep this information to yourself! But when you come to the paragraph in the character booklet marked 'if you are innocent' or 'if you are the murderer', then you must read the appropriate section.

If you are innocent, you win by collaborating with your fellow bystanders to correctly figure out the murderer. If you are guilty, you win by tricking the other participants into accusing the wrong person.

You are rough, tough Alex Masters – the author of a series of bestselling thrillers starring former marine turned vigilante Rock Roaming. Your reputation, however, rests on more than the quality of your novels – you are known as the enfant terrible of the crime-writing world, sleeping and drinking your way around London's literati. Unfortunately all this philandering and partying doesn't leave much time to get the words on the page, and of late you have been suffering from crippling writer's block.

INTRODUCTION

Read the paragraph below to your fellow guests when you are invited to introduce yourself.

Alex Masters, reporting for duty! No need to tell you who I am, my name's been on the bestseller lists for long enough, but just in case you've been living under a rock, if you haven't heard of me, you'll definitely have heard of the Rock Roaming books. Rock is buff, chiselled and a lone wolf who hunts in the night, but we've got more in common than that. Like him I work hard, and I also play hard. Unlike him I also write hard. Woof! Now, if you'll excuse me, I've lost the whiskey decanter. Where did I put the damn thing?

CHAPTER 1

REVENGE IS A DISH BEST SERVED COLD

Read the paragraphs below when the narrator instructs you to do so.

Good grief. Aubrey – *dead*? Doesn't seem possible! First of all, let me say I'm extremely offended by that young woman's wild accusations. I haven't even seen Aubrey since our last encounter at one of my writing retreats, let alone had a chance to stab the blighter. If you must know I caught the 17.20 train from London and arrived at Mistletoe Station at 17.55. Took me ten minutes to walk here, and I came up the drive at 18.05. That snooty butler Stebbings let me in and took my coat. Then he fixed me a whiskey and soda – he went decidedly too heavy on the soda for my money, but there you go.

After that he left me alone in the hall – I was the first to arrive, so I amused myself by flicking through the newspapers on the coffee table, then Sir Aubrey's secretary came down a few minutes after that. She can confirm I was there for the rest of the evening. I was probably alone in the hall for all of about three minutes – I certainly didn't have any chance of slipping upstairs to stab our precious host!

CHAPTER 2

A QUESTION OF MOTIVE

After the narrator has finished, it's time for you to ask some questions – and answer them!

Below are the questions you might wish to ask your fellow guests. Each guest can ask TWO questions, so choose wisely. They don't have to be directed at the same person. At the end are the questions you may be asked yourself. The answers may be different according to whether you are the murderer or an innocent bystander, so take a moment to read through all the questions and answers, and familiarise yourself with what you should say in the event that you are questioned.

If you are innocent, then your job is simple: to figure out the murderer. You need to get other people on your side, so don't be afraid to point out holes in the stories of your fellow guests! If you are the murderer, then remember you cannot lie – you must read out the 'if you are the murderer' answer if you are asked that question. However, your job is to deflect suspicion onto your fellow guests, by rousing suspicions against them. Be ready with some red herring theories!

Questions for Valerie Chime

- 1) You said you're something of a 'scribbler' – can you tell us a bit more about your literary ambitions?
- 2) Sir Aubrey always gave his speeches off the cuff. Why would he be writing out notes this time? Was that really what he was writing?
- 3) Can you tell us anything about the murder weapon? The maid said it was a letter opener. Do you know the one she meant?

Questions for Dolores de l'Amour

- 1) You told us that you gave Aubrey's forthcoming novel Eric Argent and the Secretary's Revenge a glowing quote. Other guests have told us that this book wasn't finished yet. How did you manage to give a quote for it?
- 2) What was Aubrey's forthcoming novel about?
- 3) How did your late husband die?

Questions for A. N. Andrews

- 1) What did you say in your letter to Sir Aubrey? It seems a big leap from writing one fan letter to being invited to join the Detective Club.
- 2) You told us that your train from London was late. Other guests who were on the same train arrived ten minutes before you. What were you doing in the interim?
- 3) What is your novel about?

Questions for Tuffy Farqueson

- 1) You seem awfully eager to make hay out of Aubrey's death with special editions and so on. Isn't that a little macabre?
- 2) You told us that you went up to see Aubrey before dinner but that he was dressing. Other people have told us he was in his study. Can you explain the discrepancy?
- 3) You mentioned Aubrey wrote to you about his forthcoming novel, *Eric Argent and the Secretary's Revenge*. What was the novel about?

Questions for Kick Carmichael

- 1) You mentioned that you drove down from London. Did anyone actually see your car arrive?
- 2) You don't seem very sure of the plot of your own books. Why is that?
- 3) How long have you been a member of the Detective Club?

Questions for Rowan McTaggart

- 1) You seemed very reluctant to look at Sir Aubrey's body. As a doctor, didn't you want to see if there was anything you could do?
- 2) You told us that your train from London was late, and you were one of the last to

arrive at the party, but other guests who were on the same train arrived considerably before you. How do you explain the difference?

- 3) In your opinion, as a medical examiner, would it have taken much strength to stab Aubrey?

Questions for Clive Barking

- 1) You said in your statement that you usually stay with Aubrey but you didn't this time – why was that?
- 2) You said that you co-founded the Detective Club alongside Sir Aubrey – I never knew that. It's very generous of you to let Aubrey take all the credit.
- 3) You mentioned that Sir Aubrey was stabbed with a letter opener you gave him – can you tell us a bit more about that?

Questions for YOU!

- 1) You said that you had last seen Aubrey at a writing retreat. Did anything happen there that we should know about?

If you are innocent, say: Yes, it's my annual crime-writing course – twelve hand-picked, ripe, talented young writers, and yours truly. I select the participants myself, and we spend the week exchanging ideas, reading each other's work, and partying. Aubrey came last year as a guest lecturer, but he wasn't much of a hit to tell the truth. Spent far too long boring on about his own novel, and then he had the cheek to lecture me on maintaining professional boundaries with students. Apparently he'd had some trouble on that score himself, which makes it all the more hypocritical. I won't be asking him back. Well, I mean, I suppose I can't now anyway.

If you are the murderer, say: Yes, it's my annual crime-writing course – twelve hand-picked, ripe, talented young writers, and yours truly. We spend the week exchanging ideas, reading each other's work, and partying. Aubrey came last year as a guest lecturer, but he wasn't much of a hit to tell the truth. Spent far too long boring on about own novel, and then he had the cheek to lecture me about plagiarism and professional ethics. I won't be asking him back. Well, I mean, I suppose I can't now anyway.

2) What is your next book about?

Answer: God, you sound like my bloody agent! Look, I've been busy recently, all right? You try being an internationally bestselling author and London's hottest party guest and writing a book a year. It's not easy having ideas constantly on tap, you know? So I've had a bit of a dry spell. So what?

3) You told us that you arrived on the 5.20 train from London, but other guests said the London train was late. Did you really take that train? How is it that you arrived ten minutes before them?

If you are innocent, say: Dammit, if you must know I caught the 17.00 train and stopped off at the Blue Boar for a quick one on the way here. That snooty Stebbings has got a nasty habit of going decidedly too heavy on the mixers for my taste. You can ring up the landlord of the Blue Boar if you don't believe me. He'll remember me because I paid with a fifty-pound note and he made a huge to-do about not having change.

If you are the murderer, say: Dammit, are you calling me a liar? I tell you, I took that train. No, I can't prove it, but why the hell should I have to? Look, I was probably mistaken when I said I arrived at the Manor at 18.05. It was probably nearer quarter past. Happy? I don't see what difference five minutes here or there makes anyway.

CHAPTER 3

I'ACCUSE!

After the narrator has finished, it's time for you to share your theories with the other guests – and vote. The accused is decided by majority vote.

If suspicion has fallen on you, then read out the appropriate passage below.

If you are innocent:

Dammit, I've never heard of anything so preposterous. Yes, it's true I like a drink or two – but that's not a crime, is it? And maybe I do enjoy the odd dalliance with my writing students, but that's a pretty far cry from murdering someone.

No, you're barking up the wrong tree, I'm afraid. Look for your precious murderer elsewhere!

If you are the murderer:

Yes, dammit, it was me, and I'm not sorry. The only thing I regret is inviting that snooping do-gooder Aubrey to my writers' retreat. First he started boring on about professional ethics, and when I asked him to spit it out, he accused me of plagiarism, if you please! Said there were 'uncomfortable similarities' between my latest novel and some of the work he'd read at the retreat.

Well, maybe that was true, though I'm damned if it was any of his business. So the old well of inspiration has run a little dry, and maybe I did borrow some scenes from my students. I admitted as much. But then he not only threatened to go to my publishers, he said he'd be chucking me out of the Detective Club as well! I asked him to give me a week before he went public so I could fess up to my editor – and he agreed. More fool him, he believed me.

Instead I took an earlier train, and shimmied up the drainpipe to his study. It was maybe nearly ten years since I left the marines but the old training still comes in handy. He never even heard me come in, he was bent over his pad of paper, writing something. When I got closer I saw it was a letter to my editor.

Well, that was that. I saw red. I picked up that precious letter opener he was so proud of, and stuck it up under his ribs. Then I climbed back down the drainpipe and rolled up at the front door at 18.05, just as planned. And if the damned train hadn't been late, I'd have got away with it too!