Making the most of your Theme

YOU HAVE YOUR MYSTERY, AND YOU HAVE YOUR THEME, SO WHAT NOW?

That's up to you, my friends. You can make as much or as little effort as you like. However, from experience, the more you put in the more everyone will get out. And your guests will surely appreciate any extra help getting in the mood.

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INVITATIONS

Although you have the printed invitations available in your pack, you might want to personalise your own invitations.

You may wish to handwrite them, or make your own with appropriately themed items stuck or drawn on the front. You could email your guests with the invite, or send them a bloodstained letter. You could even create a short film if you are so inclined, or record a tape. Just let your imagination run wild!

For simplicity, why not just use the invitations provided and seal them in the envelope with a blob of sealing wax?

It is these special touches that will make your guests go to the extra effort of dressing up!

A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR MYSTERY IN THE LIFE ARTOIS WOULD BE:

- USING FANCY STATIONERY AND HANDWRITING YOUR INVITATIONS AS IF TO A CELEBRATORY MEAL.
- ADDING CELEBRATION-THEMED CONFETTI TO THE ENVELOPE BEFORE SEALING IT.
- SEND INVITATIONS AS IF THEY'RE COMING FROM THERESA VENTNOR-BERNARD HERSELF.
- FIND A LOW-COST SMALL SCULPTURE OR POSTCARD OF ONE, AND SEND THE INVITATION ALONG WITH IT!
- CREATE A VIDEO E-VITE AS IF COMING FROM THERESA VENTNOR-BERNARD'S MEDIA GROUP.

MENU

From the host's point of view, the easier the menu the better as you will want to enjoy the evening as well. Take some time to find a menu appropriate to your theme. If your guests are happy to help, why not have them bring dessert or a few bottles of Stella Artois? It all helps to reduce stress on the day.

And don't forget, you don't have to conduct the mystery during a meal. Why not run it over drinks and nibbles, or as a game one afternoon over coffee and cake?

Although a sample menu has been provided, the recipes are not mandatory. You may prefer to cook something you are more familiar with, or a meal more to your guests' tastes. Or just get a takeaway!

FIRST COURSE: **BAKED CAMEMBERT, THYME & GARLIC HEDGEHOG BREAD** (SERVES 4)

INGREDIENTS

2 large whole Camembert, packaging removed

1 large round loaf of unsliced bread (any variety) which is larger than the camembert cheese

4 whole garlic cloves, peeled

4 garlic cloves, finely minced

A few sprigs of thyme, roughly chopped

4 tsp dried mixed Italian herbs

100g unsalted butter

4 tbsp olive oil

Sea salt flakes to taste

2-3 tbsp white wine

FIRST COURSE: **BAKED CAMEMBERT, THYME & GARLIC HEDGEHOG BREAD** (SERVES 4)

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 180°C.
2. Cut the bread in half right across the wheel of bread (as if slicing a cake to add filling), so that you have two equal sized halves that are both wider than the Camembert cheese.
3. Using the bottom of the Camembert box as a template, cut a hole into the middle of the loaf.
4. Tear away the bread inside the hole to make the hole as deep as the Camembert cheese.
5. Using this as the centre, carefully cut the loaf to create several segments (like an orange). The cuts should be almost to the crust, but it's important to not cut through the crust itself.
6. Score a cross into the top of the Camembert and cut away the rind of a small centre well.
7. Push the whole garlic cloves and a few thyme sprigs into this well.
8. In a microwave safe bowl, place the butter, minced garlic, mixed Italian herbs and the roughly chopped thyme.
9. Microwave on 20 second bursts until the butter has melted. Add the olive oil to this mixture and stir together.
10. Pour this mixture over the bread, encouraging the mixture into the cuts.
11. Place the Camembert cut side uppermost into the bread hole, pour a tablespoon of white wine into the well of the cheese.
12. Cover the loaf with a liberal sprinkle of sea salt flakes.
13. Bake in the preheated oven for 20 minutes.
14. If the bread looks like it's burning, cover the bread with tin foil.
15. Serve on a large platter, one loaf between two or three people.

MAIN COURSE:
BEEF/MUSHROOM PAPPARDELLE (SERVES 4)

INGREDIENTS

500g high quality steak mince
(omit mince for a vegetarian version)

500g portobello mushroom caps, washed,
pat dried & thinly sliced

400g cherry tomatoes

4 shallots, halved and thinly sliced

300g pappardelle pasta, dried or fresh

2 garlic cloves, finely sliced

2 garlic cloves, finely minced

4 tsps fresh rosemary, finely chopped

1 tsp red chilli flakes

2 tbsp tomato paste

2 tbsp balsamic vinegar

90ml olive oil

4 tbsp Stella Artois (optional)

2 tbsp (30g) unsalted butter

Sea salt flakes and black pepper to taste

Parmigiano reggiano or parmesan cheese to taste

MAIN COURSE:
BEEF/MUSHROOM PAPPARDELLE (SERVES 4)

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 200 °C.
2. In a large bowl, mix the cherry tomatoes, minced garlic, 2 tbsp of olive oil and balsamic vinegar.
3. Spread the tomatoes onto a lined oven tray and roast in the oven for 20-25 minutes.
4. Put the oil, shallots and a pinch of salt & black pepper in a large frying pan and cook over medium heat, stirring regularly, until the shallots are softened, but not browned.
5. (IF VEGETARIAN SKIP THIS STEP) Add the steak mince to the pan at this time and brown until dark, breaking up any clumps. Drain off the fat from the pan before proceeding to the next step.
6. Add the mushrooms to the pan. Cook the mushrooms until they take on some colour, add a pinch of salt and stir.
7. Continue cooking the mushrooms until all their liquid evaporates.
8. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to the boil and add the pasta and salt to taste.
9. Cook the pasta until al dente.
10. Drain the pasta, reserving 60ml of the pasta water.
11. Add the Stella Artois to the mushrooms (and optional beef) in the pan and stir quickly.
12. Add the sliced garlic, rosemary, chilli, tomato paste, roasted cherry tomatoes and butter with 40ml of the pasta water.
13. Heat over medium heat until the mixture becomes saucy.
14. Add more water if mixture seems too dry.
15. Finally, add the pasta to the pan and toss to coat the pasta.
16. Taste for seasoning and add to taste.
17. Shave curls of parmigiano, using a vegetable peeler, over the pasta and serve.

DESSERT: **CHOCOLATE BUTTERSCOTCH LAVA CAKE** (SERVES 4)

INGREDIENTS

120g dark chocolate

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105g unsalted butter

2 large eggs

4 large egg yolks

50g icing sugar, plus extra for dusting

½ tsp vanilla extract

40g plain flour (sifted)

60g butterscotch chocolate, broken into chunks

Cocoa powder

Pinch of salt

Vanilla ice cream & fresh raspberries for serving

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 200°C.
2. Grease 4 large ramekins with butter. Make sure to grease them very well. Dust the insides with a little cocoa powder.
3. Melt the dark chocolate, vanilla and butter in a bowl over a pan of boiling water, stirring regularly.
4. Once completely melted, set aside to cool slightly.
5. Using an electric mixer, whisk the egg, egg yolks and icing sugar until the mixture is thick, pale yellow and doubled in size.
6. Slowly fold the melted chocolate and sifted flour into the egg mixture, taking care to keep as much air in the batter as possible. Make sure to scrape the bottom of the bowl to make sure there are no pockets of flour remaining.
7. Spoon the mixture into the pre-greased ramekins.

8. Place the butterscotch chocolate chunks onto the top of the mixture in centre. Don't push them in too far - they'll sink when baking.
9. Bake for 10-12 minutes. The cakes should be firm but have a bit of jiggle in the middle.
10. Leave to cool on a wire rack for 5 minutes, then gently turn out onto a plate to serve.
11. Serve immediately with vanilla ice cream and fresh raspberries, dusting the cakes with a little icing sugar.

A FEW FURTHER MENU SUGGESTIONS FOR MYSTERY IN THE LIFE ARTOIS WOULD BE:

- HAVE A BUFFET RATHER THAN A SIT DOWN MEAL.
- SERVE PLATTERS OF HORS D'OEUVRES.
- CREATE A MEZZE OR TAPAS STYLE MENU FOR A RELAXED DINING EXPERIENCE.
- USE A RACLETTE OR FONDUE FOR A SHARED DINING EXPERIENCE.
- HIRE AN OUTSIDE CATERER OR ORDER IN A TAKEAWAY!

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Which room? Where you hold the murder mystery sets the stage for the party. Although you could go and hire a country chateau, it is by no means essential! A few minor alterations in your home can add some simple ambience to help get your guests in the mood.

Firstly, think about which room you plan to hold the mystery in. Why not swap your dining room for the night and eat somewhere different in the house, e.g. a spare bedroom or the garden?

If your guests come to your house regularly, even just moving the dining table so that it sits the other way around marks out your event as different.

Think about belongings that are normally in the room you use. Are they right for the theme? You might want to remove things which are out of place and replace them with objects from elsewhere in the house.

You may even want to get inventive and create your own weird and wacky artworks and sculptures from household objects.

Windows – most rooms have windows, but you can either cover them up with curtains or drapes, or create a new view with posters or paintings.

And don't forget, this theming can start before your guests even reach your dining room. You might want to put a sign on your front door, or even have some of your family dress up as butlers!

DECORATION

Some simple additions to the room used for the dinner party could make all the difference to the ambience.

Firstly, look around your own house and try and find things in keeping with the theme which you can arrange around the room. Secondly, ask around your friends. You might find some other items to jazz things up a little. Thirdly, go shopping, but don't buy anything too expensive or that you will never need again.

You may want to buy some themed gifts to give away as prizes at the end of the event and you could arrange these around the room to help with the ambience until the prizegiving takes place.

And don't forget, there has been a murder in the house! You might want to set up the crime scene in one of your rooms (use the inspector speeches in the back of the instructions booklet as a guide), or draw a dead body outline on the floor!

A FEW DECORATIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR MYSTERY IN THE LIFE ARTOIS WOULD BE:

- IF YOU PLAN TO PORTRAY THE MILLIONAIRE LIFESTYLE, TRY CLEARING THE ROOM AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TO GIVE CLEAN LINES AND A FEEL OF WIDE OPEN SPACES.
- USE DRAPES, HAVE POT PLANTS ON STANDS, CRAZY MODERN ARTWORK OR SCULPTURES AROUND THE WALLS, TOWERS OF CHAMPAGNE GLASSES OR PYRAMIDS OF CHOCOLATES.
- YOU MAY WANT A CANDELABRA OR FLOWERS AS A TABLE CENTRE.
- YOU COULD SET THE DINING TABLE AS IF FOR AN INCREDIBLY POSH FUNCTION, WITH PLACE SETTINGS SURROUNDED BY ALL MANNER OF CUTLERY AND SILVERWARE.
- YOU MIGHT WANT TO CREATE SOME FAKE MEDIA AWARDS FOR THERESA VENTNOR-BERNARD'S MEDIA COMPANY.

MUSIC

IN YOUR PACK YOU'LL FIND YOUR
"TAKE A SPIN IN THE LIFE ARTOIS" VINYL ALBUM
– THE PERFECT SOUNDTRACK TO YOUR EVENING.
NO RECORD PLAYER? NO PROBLEM.
ENJOY THE SOUNDTRACK ON SPOTIFY BY
SEARCHING 'TAKE A SPIN IN THE LIFE ARTOIS'.

A HANDFUL OF FURTHER MUSICAL SUGGESTIONS TO PAIR WITH MYSTERY IN THE LIFE ARTOIS:

- TV THEME MUSIC, AS BEFITTING A MEDIA GIANT.
- FRENCH CLASSICAL MUSIC
  (AS CHATEAU D'ESTELLE IS IN FRANCE).
- MODERN POP MUSIC.
- 1930S SMOOTH JAZZ.
- TRY A MIX OF ALL THE ABOVE!

TABLE SETTING

There are no hard and fast rules as to who should sit next to whom at the dinner table. Feel free to order the guests however you like. However, it is always a nice touch to set out place settings.

We have provided place setting cards in your pack. However, you can always embellish these with sequins or jewels, or create your own place settings. Alternatively, put their character name on a small box of chocolates, or stick a name flag into a gingerbread man with a blob of red tomato ketchup or red icing on it to simulate blood!

What about crackers? Crackers are generally thought of as a Christmas thing, but why not make your own and include within them a small themed gift or the additional clues rather than a paper hat and joke?

Some guests might like to keep track of the clues presented and may like access to a notepad and pen. You might want to give each guest a means to record notes as they work through the mystery.

ACTIVITIES

There You may want to make use of a few icebreakers during your party, though from experience, the mystery is usually sufficient to get people talking!

If you decide to do something, then try and find puzzles or icebreakers in keeping with your theme.

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THE END OF THE NIGHT

What about at the end of the party? Everyone has made their guesses and the murder mystery has drawn to a close. Should it stop there? Why not give out prizes for the correct guessers? Not sure what to give out for prizes? How about these ideas?

A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR MYSTERY IN THE LIFE ARTOIS WOULD BE:

- USEFUL ITEMS LIKE FUSES, LIGHT BULBS, BOXES OF MATCHES ETC. ALL GIFT WRAPPED OF COURSE.
- STATIONERY ITEMS, LIKE THE EVER USEFUL POST-IT NOTES.
- SWEETS YOU HAVEN'T EATEN SINCE CHILDHOOD.
- CHEAP TOYS – YOU'LL PROBABLY FIND A YO-YO WILL KEEP YOUR GUESTS AMUSED FOR HOURS!

And don't forget goodie bags! Adults never really grow up and most of your guests, however mature, will probably love a party bag to take home! Why not find something in keeping with your theme and give out a small memento of the evening?

And finally, that's it! Your party's over and it's time to call everyone a cab. Everyone has had a great time! The only question is – what will you do next time?

With Love,

STELLA ARTOIS

NOTES

for the facts **drinkaware.co.uk**

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