

FREE HOST PREVIEW EDITION · ZERO SPOILERS

Murder at Hearthstone Manor

A Yuletide Estate Mystery

PLAYERS	DURATION	PREP TIME	RATING
6–16 GUESTS	**2 TO 3 HOURS**	**~25 MIN**	**PG-13**

SPOILER-FREE BRIEFING · 25-MINUTE SETUP

Host Quick-Start & Prep Checklist

Snowbound Country Estate · Vermont, Christmas Eve 1936

FREE HOST PREVIEW — 100% SPOILER-FREE: Nothing in this preview reveals the killer, Round 2/3 twists, or the final solution. You may share this preview freely with co-hosts.

THE PREMISE (SAFE TO SHARE WITH GUESTS)

Christmas Eve, 1936. A howling Green Mountain blizzard has sealed the roads to Hearthstone Manor and snapped the telephone lines, trapping sixteen glittering guests inside the stone country estate of publishing magnate Alistair Vance. Minutes before his promised midnight announcement, Alistair is discovered lifeless in the frost-rimmed Glass Conservatory beside a shattered crystal wassail cup. With no footprints in the fresh snow outside, one of the guests gathered around the hearth is a calculating killer, and you have until the storm breaks to unmask them.

The Victim: Alistair Vance (Founder & Chairman, Vance & Sons Publishing) — At sixty-eight, Alistair Vance ruled New York and Boston literary society with a silver fountain pen and an iron will. Every Christmas Eve he gathered family, rivals, authors, and confidants at his snowbound Vermont estate for a midnight wassail toast. This year, he promised a surprise announcement that would reshape Vance & Sons Publishing forever, a speech he never lived to deliver.

DISCOVERED IN: THE GLASS CONSERVATORY · TIME OF DEATH: 11:48 PM

1 · PRINTING GUIDE

- **Character Dossiers (PDF 02):** Print *only* the suspects matching your headcount (see Casting Matrix on next page). Each suspect is an exact 2-page dossier — print double-sided (flip on long edge) or staple 2 sheets per guest.
- **Evidence Packet (PDF 03):** Print 2–3 sets of Pages 1–4 for the table so guests can pass around the Floor Plan, Broadsheet, Coroner's Memo & Documentary Prop. Cut Page 5 Exhibit Cards along dashed lines.
- **Invitations & Ballots (PDF 04):** Print 1 Detective Notebook per guest, name badges for your cast, and 1 Accusation Ballot per guest.
- **Paperless Option (PDF 05):** AirDrop or email the Tablet & Phone Edition to guests who prefer reading clues on their screen.

2 · GENDER-FLEXIBLE CASTING

Every role in Parlor Mysteries is written to be warmly playable by any guest regardless of gender. Adjust pronouns or first names freely on the invitations and name badges — the logical proof chain never relies on a suspect's gender.

3 · 25-MINUTE ENVELOPE PREP

- **[00–10 min] Fold & Stuff Suspect Envelopes:** Fold Page 2 of each Character Dossier along the dashed Act II and Act III lines. Slip into a standard letter envelope labeled with the character's name & suspect number.
- **[10–15 min] Seal Act II & III Evidence:** Place cut *Exhibits B-1, B-2, B-3* in an envelope marked **ACT II**, and *Exhibits C-1, C-2* in an envelope marked **ACT III**.
- **[15–20 min] Set the Table:** Place pens, Detective Notebooks, and Act I Evidence (Floor Plan, Newspaper, Coroner's Memo, Prop Document) in the center of the table.
- **[20–25 min] Test Audio:** Pair your phone to a Bluetooth speaker and queue the 3 studio MP3 tracks.

4 · BLUETOOTH AUDIO CUE SHEET

TRACK 01 **Act I — Opening Crime Briefing**
Play after cocktails & intros to launch Round 1.

TRACK 02 **Act II — Breaking Discovery**
Play before main course; reveal Exhibits B-1 to B-3.

TRACK 03 **Act III — The Inspector's Summation & Confession**
Play ONLY after all Final Accusation Ballots are collected!

SCALES EFFORTLESSLY FROM 6 TO 16 PLAYERS

Complete 6–16 Player Casting Matrix

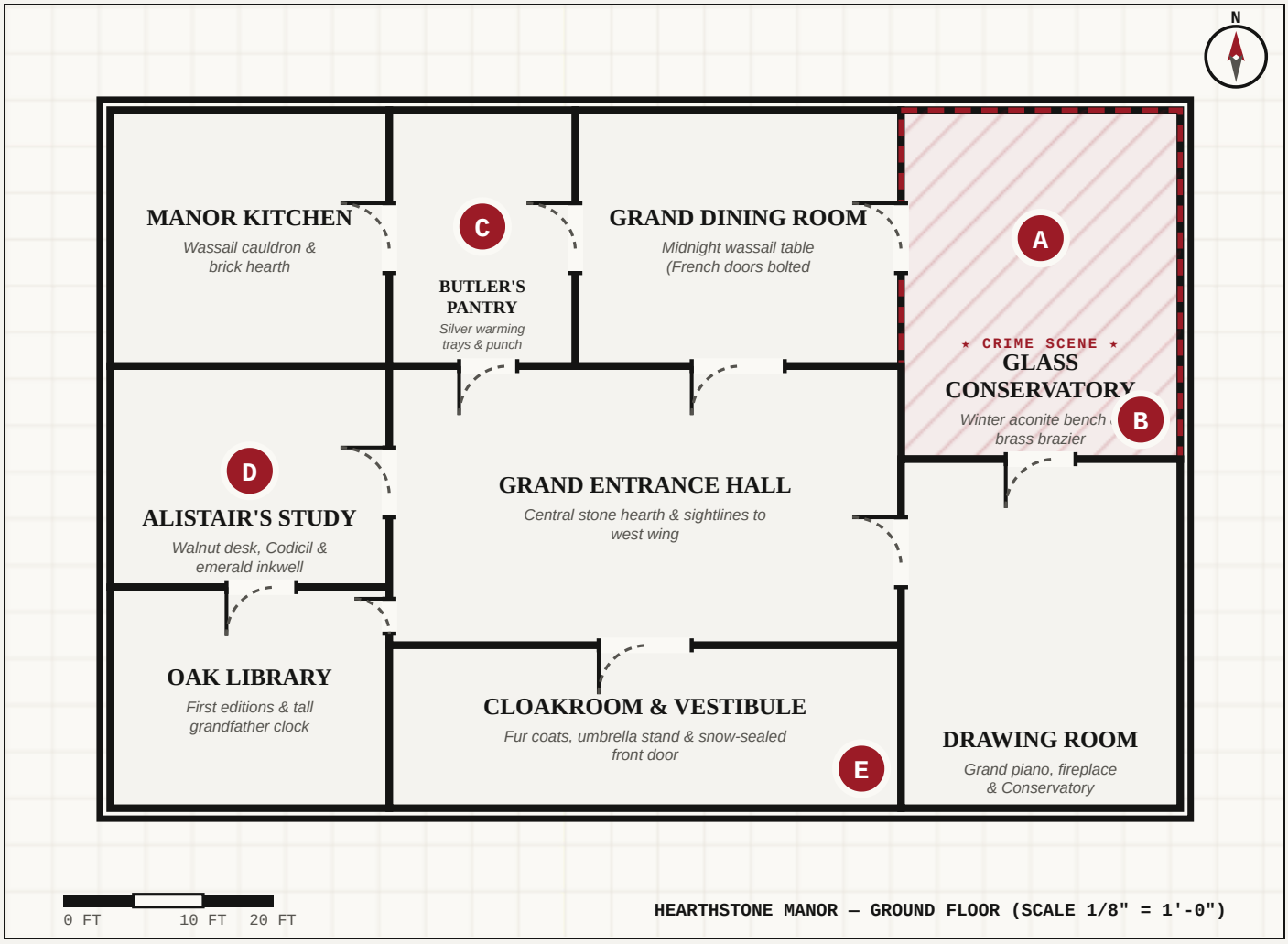
Always assign all 6 **Tier 1 Core** suspects first — the mystery is 100% solvable with just those 6 guests. Add Tier 2, Tier 3, and Tier 4 suspects in order to match your exact party size (zero adjustments needed).

NO.	SUSPECT NAME & CASTING	ROLE / RELATION	EASY COSTUME HINT
TIER 1 · CORE — 1–6 · REQUIRED			
#01	**Julian Vance** Flexible (Julian / Juliana Vance)	Alistair's Nephew & Heir Apparent	Dinner jacket or dark velvet blazer, slightly loosened bow tie, and a silver flask or pocket square.
#02	**Beatrice Vance** Flexible (Beatrice / Bennett Vance)	Alistair's Niece & Managing Editor, Vance & Sons	Midnight-blue evening dress or tailored dark suit, a subtle botanical brooch, and crisp poise.
#03	**Clara Sterling** Flexible (Clara / Clarence Sterling)	Bestselling Author of 'Winter Glass'	Jewel-toned silk scarf or tweed cape, fountain pen tucked in a pocket, and dramatic literary flair.
#04	**Victor Crane** Flexible (Victor / Victoria Crane)	Rival Publisher & Owner of Crane Press	Sharp pinstripe suit or tailored coat, silk cravat, leather driving gloves tucked in a pocket.
#05	**Dr. Evelyn Holloway** Flexible (Dr. Evelyn / Evan Holloway)	Alistair's Personal Physician	Classic dark evening attire with vintage spectacles and a small notebook or lapel watch.
#06	**Miles Ashford** Flexible (Miles / Millicent Ashford)	Estate Attorney & Legal Executor	Three-piece wool suit or tailored blazer, wire-rim glasses, and a folded legal brief.
TIER 2 · EXPANDED — 7–8 PLAYERS			
#07	**Lady Margaret Penhallow** Flexible (Lady Margaret / Lord Malcolm Penhallow)	Alistair's Former Fiancée & Boston Socialite	Faux-fur stole, long pearl necklace, and an aristocratic air of amused superiority.
#08	**Henri Moreau** Flexible (Chef Henri / Henriette Moreau)	Temperamental Head Chef of Hearthstone Manor	Crisp white apron or neckerchief over black attire, carrying a wooden tasting spoon.
TIER 3 · EXPANDED — 9–12 PLAYERS			
#09	**Professor Cedric Alcott** Flexible (Professor Cedric / Celia Alcott)	Rare Book Appraiser, Harvard University	Tweed jacket, bow tie or cardigan, and a pocket magnifying glass.
#10	**Rosalind Mercer** Flexible (Rosalind / Roland Mercer)	Society Columnist, The Hearthstone Chronicle	Press-inspired vintage fedora or beret, smart belted dress or trench vest, and a tiny reporter's notepad.
#11	**Colonel Barnaby Whitmore** Flexible (Colonel Barnaby / Bernice Whitmore)	Retired Explorer & Alistair's Old Rival	Velvet smoking jacket or tweed blazer, silk ascot, and booming theatrical posture.
#12	**Delphine Laurent** Flexible (Delphine / Dorian Laurent)	Alistair's Private Secretary & Archivist	Crisp tailored blouse or cardigan, tortoiseshell glasses, and a ribbon-tied ledger.
TIER 4 · EXPANDED — 13–16 PLAYERS			
#13	**Reginald Thorne** Flexible (Reginald / Regina Thorne)	Julian's Fast-Talking Theatrical Agent & Friend	Flashy silk pocket square, bold lapel pin or velvet bow tie, and breezy Broadway energy.
#14	**Sister Constance Bell** Flexible (Sister Constance / Brother Constantine Bell)	Headmistress of St. Jude's Orphanage & Charity Trustee	Simple dark wool dress or coat, understated silver cross or pendant, and serene composure.
#15	**Otto Lindqvist** Flexible (Otto / Olga Lindqvist)	Master Clockmaker & Conservatory Caretaker	Wool vest or cardigan, jeweler's loupe or pocket watch on a chain, and practical charm.
#16	**Vivienne Delacroix** Flexible (Vivienne / Vincent Delacroix)	Broadway Actress & Muse of 'Winter Glass'	Glamorous 1930s satin scarf or sequined shawl, dramatic gloves or cigarette holder prop.

ACT I · OFFICIAL ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

Hearthstone Manor — Ground Floor (Scale 1/8" = 1'-0")

ACT I · TABLE PROP



INVESTIGATOR'S MARKER LEGEND

SHADED HATCH = PRIMARY CRIME SCENE

- **A** Alistair Vance found in wicker chair at 11:52 PM beside shattered wassail cup & stopped watch (11:48 PM)
- **B** Brass side-latch door to Drawing Room; pale cedar-ash footprint pointing south into Drawing Room
- **C** Butler's Pantry silver wassail bowl & warming ladle (communal punch tested clean)
- **D** Alistair's walnut desk; unsigned Codicil & uncapped emerald-green Waterman inkwell
- **E** Brass umbrella stand in Cloakroom; hidden velvet evening glove stained with emerald ink & yellow pollen

THE HEARTHSTONE CHRONICLE

DECEMBER 24, 1936 · VERMONT COUNTY EDITION · PRICE TWO CENTS

BLIZZARD SEALS GREEN MOUNTAIN PASSES AS VANCE EMPIRE FACES YULETIDE RECKONING

Publishing Magnate Alistair Vance Promises Midnight Announcement at Hearthstone Manor Amid Rumors of Boston Manuscript Piracy

STOWE, VT. — A fierce Christmas Eve noreaster has buried the mountain approaches to Hearthstone Manor under four feet of drifting snow, severing telephone lines and isolating publishing titan Alistair Vance and his holiday houseparty from the outside world until at least Christmas afternoon.

Before the wires went dead at 10:30 PM, literary circles in New York and Boston were abuzz over Vance's promised midnight wassail announcement. Rumors persist that the sixty-eight-year-old chairman intends to restructure Vance & Sons Publishing, and settle scores over a brazen piracy scandal involving bootleg galley proofs of the house's bestselling novel, Winter Glass, which surfaced at a Beacon Hill printer earlier this week.

Among the prominent figures braving the Vermont storm are Vance's estranged nephew Julian Vance, Managing Editor Beatrice Vance, novelist Clara Sterling, estate attorney Miles Ashford, physician Dr. Evelyn Holloway, and, in a surprise holiday twist, Boston competitor Victor Crane of Crane Press.

VERMONT HORTICULTURAL PRIZE AWARDED

Warm congratulations to Managing Editor Beatrice Vance, whose rare winter-blooming winter aconite (Eranthis hyemalis) cultivated in the Hearthstone Manor Conservatory captured the Vermont Horticultural Society's December ribbon. Society judges praised the golden blossoms while reminding amateur gardeners that the plant's crushed tubers contain potent aconitine.

Miss Vance returned to Vermont on December 20 following a four-day editorial business stay on Beacon Hill in Boston, arriving just ahead of tonight's blizzard.

PUBLIC & CLASSIFIED NOTICE

SEASON'S GREETINGS: Barrow & Sons Fine Garment Cleaners, Charles Street, Beacon Hill, Boston, wishes its New England patrons a Merry Christmas. — ALSO: Found in the Hearthstone Study, one custom bottle of Waterman Patrician Emerald-Green ink, reserved exclusively for Mr. A. Vance.

TIER 1 · CORE (1–6 · REQUIRED)

Julian Vance

Alistair's Nephew & Heir Apparent

COSTUME SUGGESTION

Dinner jacket or dark velvet blazer, slightly loosened bow tie, and a silver flask or pocket square.

PUBLIC INTRODUCTION (SAFE TO READ ALOUD AT ARRIVAL)

Charming, reckless, and perpetually short of ready cash, Julian Vance grew up expecting to inherit Vance & Sons Publishing without ever reading a balance sheet. Guests overheard a thunderous argument between Julian and Uncle Alistair earlier this evening, leaving everyone wondering whether the heir's luck has finally run out.

PRIVATE BACKGROUND & SECRET MOTIVATION (FOR YOUR EYES ONLY)

You owe forty thousand dollars to a ruthless Boston gambling syndicate, and the promissory note falls due the morning of December 26. At 11:15 PM you stormed into Alistair's Study to beg for an advance on your inheritance, only to discover the draft Codicil on his desk disinheriting you completely in favor of a charitable foundation. Alistair threw you out, furious. You are terrified of financial ruin, and you panicked and tore up a copy of your promissory note behind the Dining Room sideboard. Still, you loved the stubborn old man in your own way, you did NOT kill him, and you suspect your cool, calculating cousin Beatrice Vance had far darker secrets in Boston than you ever did.

ACT I · ROUND 1 BRIEFING

OPEN IMMEDIATELY

YOUR EXACT WHEREABOUTS (11:30 – 11:55 PM)

Grand Dining Room (11:30–11:55 PM), nursing a brandy alone until Clara Sterling joined you at 11:43 PM.

ROUND 1 GOALS & QUESTIONS TO RAISE

- Deflect suspicion away from your 11:15 PM shouting match with Alistair in the Study.
- Tell the table that at 11:42 PM you walked to the Conservatory French doors to apologize to Alistair and found them firmly bolted from the inside.
- Press Miles Ashford about why he drafted a Codicil without telling the family.

SECRETS TO GUARD (HIDE UNTIL PRESSED)

Your $40,000 Boston gambling debt and the fact that you hid a torn promissory note behind the Dining Room sideboard.

WHAT YOU PERSONALLY OBSERVED

At 11:42 PM, the glass French doors between the Grand Dining Room and the Conservatory were definitely bolted from the Conservatory side, you rattled the brass handle twice before Clara Sterling walked into the Dining Room at 11:43 PM and saw you step away.

TIER 1 · CORE (1–6 · REQUIRED)

Clara Sterling

Bestselling Author of 'Winter Glass'

COSTUME SUGGESTION

Jewel-toned silk scarf or tweed cape, fountain pen tucked in a pocket, and dramatic literary flair.

PUBLIC INTRODUCTION (SAFE TO READ ALOUD AT ARRIVAL)

The toast of New York literary circles, Clara Sterling penned Vance & Sons' runaway bestseller Winter Glass. Beneath her witty charm, however, everyone knows she has been locked in a frosty battle with Alistair Vance over royalties and a punishing five-book contract.

PRIVATE BACKGROUND & SECRET MOTIVATION (FOR YOUR EYES ONLY)

Six months ago you discovered that bootleg editions of your novel Winter Glass were circulating in Boston before Vance & Sons even released the second printing, costing you thousands in royalties. Tonight you slipped into the Oak Library from 11:30 to 11:42 PM hoping to find your original signed contract in Alistair's reference cabinet so you could prove he breached exclusivity. You failed to find it, walked through the Hall into the Grand Dining Room at 11:43 PM, and stayed there with Julian Vance until the alarm sounded. You resented Alistair's stinginess, but you did not kill him, in fact, you are furious that someone inside Vance & Sons stole your book.

ACT I · ROUND 1 BRIEFING

OPEN IMMEDIATELY

YOUR EXACT WHEREABOUTS (11:30 – 11:55 PM)

Oak Library (11:30–11:42 PM), then Grand Dining Room with Julian Vance (11:43–11:55 PM).

ROUND 1 GOALS & QUESTIONS TO RAISE

- Confirm that when you entered the Grand Dining Room at 11:43 PM, you saw Julian Vance stepping away from the bolted Conservatory French doors.
- Question Victor Crane sharply about how bootleg copies of your novel Winter Glass appeared in Boston.
- Keep your midnight search of the Library quiet unless someone challenges your whereabouts.

SECRETS TO GUARD (HIDE UNTIL PRESSED)

You were rummaging through Alistair's Library files from 11:30 to 11:42 PM looking for your five-book contract.

WHAT YOU PERSONALLY OBSERVED

When you walked past the Grand Entrance Hall at 11:42 PM on your way from the Library to the Dining Room, you clearly saw both Dr. Evelyn Holloway and Victor Crane standing by the central hearth talking about the blizzard.