

Boxed

Set

By Andrea Landaker

Host's Guide

Introduction

As the century turns, the world is changing. Clipper ships can cross the oceans much faster than previous ships, bringing trade and news faster than ever. New inventions such as the telegraph, light bulb, and phonograph diminish the influence of time and distance. The steam engine has made trains and factories more and more prevalent, and the divide between the rich businessmen and the poor factory workers is great. Waves of immigrants coming to the United States have brought their own ideas and customs. In China, anti-foreigner sentiment has erupted into the Boxer Rebellion.

This is the world you and seven guests (with an optional eighth) will play in. And it is a "play" – with guests as actors and scriptwriters. It is also a game, of sorts, though there are no winners or losers. Each character has goals – information they wish to gain, or hide, or events they hope to bring about, or objects they wish to acquire. But as each character tries to attain their goals, they will uncover a weave of connections that hides the true story behind past, present, and future.

As the host, your responsibility is threefold:

1. Invite the guests
2. Prepare the setting
3. Host the party!

Inviting the Guests

It's best to send out the invitations at least a week ahead of time, so people have time to prepare a costume (not required, but it makes the game much more fun). Read through the character descriptions on the invitation, and decide who you would like to play each part. You can try and match up personalities, assign based on romantic pairings (see the Spoilers Section), assign randomly, or assign parts based on any other criteria. Mark on each person's invitation the part they should play, and make sure all of your guests can come, and find substitutes if necessary.

Preparing the Setting

This is where you have the most freedom. The setting can be as simple or as elaborate as you like. The mystery takes place on board a ship, in the captain's quarters. You can decorate with a nautical theme (nets, seashells, boats, etc.), or an Asian theme (lanterns, a screen, etc.), or just let your guests use their imaginations. You should have some area where guests can sit and mingle around together.

You can serve a simple meal, a fancy dinner, or just have snacks. Sometimes it is helpful to have someone to help with serving food, clearing dishes, etc., so you can focus on your guests (it can make a fun job for aspiring actors if you have them act the part). If you do serve a meal, you may want to think about some sort of seafood dish, such as paella,

jambalaya, tempura, grilled shrimp or fish, sushi, or whatever else you like (some recipes are included).

Music adds a great deal to the atmosphere. Romantic classical music, ragtime, Irish folk music, opera, or other music from the late 19th century would work. Composers of the day include Debussy, Mahler, Grieg, Sousa, Tchaikovsky, Gilbert & Sullivan, and Joplin. While there were no radios or record players in 1900, phonographs were in use. If you would like a recording of ambient ship noise, e-mail the author, andrea@icecavern.net.

You will also need to print out everyone's character booklets, if you haven't done so already. If you want to be surprised, try and print them out without reading them. To ensure your guests don't accidentally read ahead, you may want to paper clip or seal together with a sticker the pages for Acts 2 and 3 and the Conclusion. There are also some pieces of evidence that need to be handed out at specific times; in each case, the person and time are written at the top. Fold these so that only the person and time are visible (you can tape these closed, too, if you wish).

Integral to the plot is a box, about the size of a cereal box. A cardboard box is fine; you can print out and glue on the Box Labels provided if you wish. This box should be somewhere out of sight but accessible to you during the party.

There are also place cards you can print out if desired.

If you would like to use the extra character (Yaku Puma, Palla's sister), note that although she is not mentioned in any of the other character booklets or invitations, she essentially plays the same role as her sister, and it is helpful for the two of them to be able to talk to each other.

Host the Party

Once all your guests have arrived, you can hand out their character booklets and explain the basic premise of the party. Your guests may read until they see the STOP sign. After answering any questions they may have, remind them that now the mystery begins, and they should try to act as their character as much as possible. There are three acts to this interactive drama, and a conclusion.

As the host, it is up to you to decide when to end an act and start the next one. The first and third acts should be about 30-60 minutes; the second act around 10-20 minutes. Don't rush your guests, but if it seems like everyone has run out of things to talk about, you can end the act. Once you're ready to start the next act, have the guests read the next section, and then start discussion once everyone is finished reading. If you are serving a meal, it's probably best to do that before or during Act 1, with dessert as Act 3. It may help to have some snacks or drinks out in a location slightly away from the main discussion, so characters can have a more private conversation if they wish.

Timeline

As host, here is what you need to do during the party:

Introduction – hand out booklets, answer questions

Act 1 – when you wish to end the act, have the Captain read Evidence #1 out loud, then have everyone read Act 2.

Act 2 – At the end of Act 2, some characters will be going to another part of the ship.

Direct them to a separate area, then give Evidence #2 to the Professor and have everyone read Act 3.

Act 3 – Give Evidence #3 to Mitsuri. When everyone is finished, have everyone read the Conclusion.

Conclusion – Allow everyone some time to discuss the ending in character, then applaud and allow time for discussion of the evening out of character.

More Help

If you need more help, or have questions, suggestions, or comments, feel free to contact the author, Andrea Landaker, at andrea@icecavern.net, or visit the Boxed Set website at <http://qirien.icecavern.net/BoxedSet>.

Characters

Captain Thomas Sibbald - The gruff but respected captain of the Salty Swan, he is bringing equipment and supplies to trade in Shanghai, China, and Shimoda, Japan.

Mitsuri Sagawa – A nimble Japanese woman, she is the cook of the Salty Swan, and has the trust of the captain. She has been translating Japanese and facilitating trade between San Francisco and Japan, in addition to overseeing the preparation of all the food.

Franco Romano - An impeccable, somewhat reserved Italian gentleman going to Shanghai for business. He inherited the family estate in San Francisco when his parents died many years ago.

Lucia Romano – Franco's older sister, she is joining him on his trip to Shanghai. Recently a widow, she has been ill for much of the trip so far, though she covers it well with a ready smile.

Mathilda von Hessel - Lucia's friend is traveling with her to Shanghai. Mathilda is a scientist and inventor who is currently studying various applications of electricity, and hopes to find new information in Shanghai.

Jake Jackson - This impulsive cowboy is Mathilda's research assistant. He's seen everything west of the Mississippi to the great blue yonder, and is looking forward to a new adventure in Shanghai.

Professor Alexander Ignatius - An archaeologist from Harvard University, he, too, is traveling to China for research. He knows more about the history of various cultures than many of the people do themselves, and loves to share his knowledge with those around him.

Palla Puma - This mysterious woman follows Franco around like a shadow. She looks like she is a native of the Americas, and has some skill with medicine and herbs. No one knows anything else about her.

Yaku Puma - This optional character is Palla's younger sister. She stays near her sister, protecting her like a mother jaguar. She also has been asking a few questions about local plants.

Costumes

See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1900s_in_fashion for an overview of period fashions.

Captain Thomas Sibbald - Trousers, jacket, and a seafaring cap. An eye-patch is definitely good, and a belt with sword and/or gun would be appropriate.

Mitsuri Sagawa - A kimono-style shirt with wide trousers, or plain sailor's clothes, or Japanese work clothes (samue).

Franco Romano - A suit, preferably with vest and jacket, top hat or bowler hat optional. A flower in your lapel or a pocket watch would be appropriate accessories.

Lucia Romano - A light, tea gown-style dress, or blouse and long skirt. Black or dark colors are appropriate, as you are still mourning your husband. A parasol or light wrap or large hat adds a nice touch.

Mathilda von Hessel - A white blouse with a long, heavy skirt. A white lab coat and glasses or goggles show off your genius well.

Jake Jackson - White shirt, trousers or chaps or jeans, and a cowboy hat. Suspenders and bandanna would also look nice.

Professor Alexander Ignatius - White shirt and casual trousers, with a fedora-style hat, jacket, and some sort of briefcase.

Palla and Yaku Puma - Ruffled blouse, with a colorful long skirt. Some sort of Andean poncho would help keep you warm at sea, and a necklace or amulet would look nice.

Recipes

Bacon-wrapped Scallops

Appetizer

16 large bay scallops

4 slices of bacon

Lemon juice

Cut the slices of bacon in half lengthwise and widthwise, so you have the same number of slices of bacon as scallops. Encircle each scallop with a bacon slice and hold in place with a toothpick. Squeeze a little lemon over the scallops, and place on a broiler pan. Broil until scallops are just golden brown and bacon is cooked, about 5-8 minutes.

Japanese Rice with Shrimp and Vegetables

main course

5c dashi stock, miso soup, or other stock or broth

6 TBSP soy sauce

4 TBSP mirin (or 2 tsp. sugar with white wine or water)

1 tsp sesame oil

2 TBSP vegetable oil

4 green onions, finely sliced

1 TBSP finely grated ginger

4 cloves garlic

2 c. short grain rice

2 c. vegetables (bell pepper, snow peas, asparagus, or mixed stir-fry vegetables)

1 c. shrimp (as small or large as you like)

Mix together the stock, soy sauce, mirin, and sesame oil in a small bowl, and set aside. In a large saucepan over medium heat, heat the vegetable oil and cook the rice, ginger, garlic, and green onion for about a minute. Add the sauce you mixed earlier, bring to a boil, and then cover with a lid and reduce heat to low. Simmer gently for 15 minutes without lifting the lid. Add the shrimp and vegetables, and cover and cook for five more minutes, or until the shrimp is pink and hot.

Japanese Cucumber Salad

salad

2 cucumbers, peeled and sliced into semicircles

¼ c. rice vinegar

1 TBSP sugar

1 TBSP sesame seeds

1 inch piece of fresh ginger, finely grated

soaked bean threads, shredded carrot, shredded seaweed, or other ingredients to taste

Heat rice vinegar and sugar in saucepan until sugar is dissolved. Pour over cucumbers and refrigerate at least three hours. Before serving, toss with other ingredients.

Spoilers

Here is some information that may be useful to the host of the party, but may spoil some of the surprises. Do not read further if you wish everything to be a surprise.

Romantic Pairings

If you would like to assign parts so people's characters will be romantically involved with a specific other person (for whatever reason), here are the romantic attachments of the game.

- Captain Sibbald and Mitsuri Sagawa – a friendship deepening to romance or turning to mistrust
- Lucia Romano and Professor Ignatius – mutual attraction blossoming into romance
- Jake Jackson and Palla Puma – old flames that can choose whether or not to renew their affection.

GM Advice

There are major spoilers ahead; read on only if you don't want any surprises.

If you are running this more as an LARP than a mystery party, then you as the GM have a lot more freedom with how the players experience certain events. For example, at the end of Act 1, you can act as one of the ship's crew who is delivering the note. At the end of Act 2, instead of the players simply reading about the confrontation with the stowaway, you could act his part and let the players decide how to deal with him. During the Conclusion, you may choose to act as one of the crew of the airship to prod the players along into making their decisions about what happens next.

You also may wish to add other events to make the game more exciting. One possibility is to have some Sanhehui board the ship and attack (maybe they decided they wanted the box after all, or wanted revenge on Franco). You could have Lucia experience an episode of uncontrollable blood hunger, or have Jake do something decidedly dog-like. Perhaps Hugo slips in at the beginning of Act 1 and tries to take Mathilda with him. Perhaps another crew member is found dead in Act 1 (with the note pinned to his shirt?).