

Sample

Make Your Own

Mystery

A guide to producing your own
mystery party games

Brian Clegg

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Creativity Unleashed Limited
31 Eastbury Way
Swindon
SN25 2EL

info@cul.co.uk

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Make Your Own Mystery

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0. Welcome

From writer, Brian Clegg



Mystery parties and murder mystery games are great fun, but there are a couple of problems with them. The kits are expensive to buy, and when you've used them once, they are useless. You are often constrained to a particular number of players, and you may not be able to find a game to match the theme you have in mind.

Make Your Own Mystery is a solution to this problem. It guides you through the process of designing and making your own mystery party from scratch.

Note that this will take some time. It's no use picking up this ebook the same day as your party. You are, after all, about to write an adventure. If you need something immediately, I suggest you visit the www.organizingamurder.com website and buy or download a kit. But it needn't take a huge amount of your time, and I hope you will get great satisfaction from having an original mystery no one else has ever played.

Occasionally, through the guide you will find suggestions to jump to a different section, highlighted like this.

Brian is an author with a wide range of books in print. He has written the Organizing a Murder collection of mystery games, plus Transatlantic Tragedy, a conventional role play murder mystery. Brian's most recent book is Before the Big Bang, published by St Martin's Press in August 2009. He has written eight other science titles, including Ecologic, winner of the 2009 IVCA Clarion Award (Eden Project Books), and A Brief History of Infinity (Constable).

Born in Rochdale, Lancashire, UK, Brian read Natural Sciences at Cambridge University. After graduating, he spent a year at Lancaster University where he gained an MA in Operational Research. From Lancaster, he joined British Airways, where he formed a new department tasked with developing hi-tech solutions. His emphasis on innovation led to working with creativity guru Dr. Edward de Bono, and in 1994 he left BA to set up his own creativity consultancy.

Brian has also written regularly for numerous magazines, including Personal Computer World, BBC History, Good Housekeeping and House Beautiful. His books have been translated into many languages, including German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Japanese, and Polish.

Brian has given sell-out lectures at the Royal Institution in London and has spoken at venues from Oxford and Cambridge Universities to Cheltenham Festival of Science. He has also contributed to radio and TV programs, and is a popular speaker at schools. Brian is also editor of the successful www.popularscience.co.uk book review site, blogs at www.brianclegg.blogspot.com, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Brian lives in Wiltshire with his wife and twin children. When not writing, he spends time on music, having a passion for Tudor and Elizabethan church music.

1. What's it to be?

Before you leap in to produce your mystery party, you need to make a few decisions. Get yourself a pen and paper (you can do this on a computer, but most people think better away from the screen). Jot down answers to these key questions (I'll leave you some space in case you want to print this off and scribble on it).

- **Who is it for?** Who are your players going to be? Are they children or adults? Are they casual players, who want a little lightweight entertainment, or are they enthusiasts who need a really good puzzle to solve?

- **How many players?** It's useful to know how many will be playing. If you can't specify an exact number, consider going for the 'open style' games which don't have a fixed number of players, rather than a formal role play game.

- **What's the occasion?** Is there a special event like a birthday? Is the game to take place around a meal? What time of day are you likely to play?

- **Where will the game take place?** Because you are writing the game, you can make it fit the location, whether it's a suburban house, a village hall or a country park.

- **What kind of game do you want?** This is a crucial decision. There are broadly two types. In an open style game, as featured in the [Organizing a Murder](#) ebook, you can have any number of players, each trying to solve the mystery either individually or in teams in competition with each other. There is no role play involved. This is a much more flexible approach. In a formal role play game, as featured in a traditional mystery party kit, each player takes on the role of one of the characters in a mystery. Here you've the fun of the role play, but less flexibility. There is no right answer – choose which suits you best.

You may well find as a beginner that it is easier to write an open style game. For the role play game to work you have to have a well-constructed plot, where the information is carefully revealed over the different stages of the game to keep the players in suspense. Open style games are less dependent on the structure, so easier for the beginner.



Once you have made a decision on these points, go to the appropriate next section.

- For an open style game, [go to section 2, page 8](#).
- For a traditional role play game, [go to section 6, page 24](#).

2. The Open Style game

You've made your first decision. There are a number of options for designing an open style game. Now you need to choose which kind to write. Select the type that appeals the most:

- **Treasure hunt** – in a treasure hunt game, the aim of the players is to find a key piece of information or object. There is no murder or even a direct mystery, but instead a series of more or less cryptic clues that will lead the players to the treasure.
- **Murder mystery** – the most conventional format. A murder has been committed and the players have to solve the murder from the clues and evidence available.
- **Location based quiz** – rather like a treasure hunt, a location based quiz does not involve a mystery scenario, but rather a series of questions to be solved, but here, rather than aiming to discover a final treasure, the point of the game is to collect answers to the various questions.



As well as deciding which open style of game you would like to produce, you also need to consider how much involvement you want to have yourself. Broadly you can produce a game that runs itself once you have set it up, or one where you (or someone else) plays an active role during the game as a source of information.

- For a treasure hunt, [go to section 3, page 9](#)
- For a murder mystery, [go to section 4, page 15](#)
- For a location based quiz, [go to section 5, page 23](#)

3. Open style – Treasure Hunt

So you've decided on a treasure hunt – but it's still not time to get down the detail. A few more points to sort out.

Your treasure hunt can have one of several formats:

- **Basic clue following** – here you will have a series of clues leading the players from place to place, with the final clue taking them to the treasure. This is a simple format but has a big problem that everyone is trying to follow the same clues at the same time, so there's a tendency for people to follow each other. Once it is set up, this one runs itself.
- **Multiple routes** – this is an advanced version of basic clue following, where each individual or team has a different route with its own clues to follow. It's a lot more work, but it does mean you won't get overlaps. The final clue in each case will lead to the same location. Once it is set up this one runs itself.
- **Single route, multiple entry points** – this is a compromise between the two, where you have a single route from clue to clue, but each team or individual starts at a different point on the course. This means they will also each end at a different point, so you need a mechanism to then point someone who has completed their course to the prize. This approach has the disadvantage over multiple routes that a quick team or individual could overtake a slower one, but at least they don't start at the same place. This is a game that will need your involvement (or a computer) to check their results and provide the final clue.
- **No route, location based** – here there is no set route, but clues are hidden around the playing environment. Each player or team starts at a different point. When they have collected all the necessary information there needs to be a mechanism to point them towards their final destination. This is a game that will need your involvement (or a computer) to provide that final mechanism.



While completing a treasure hunt is an end in itself, it is always much more satisfying if there is actual 'treasure' at the end, even if it only consists of chocolate coins or cracker novelties. Ideally, you should put the actual treasure at the final location, but if you do, it must be very well concealed to avoid accidental discovery. A treasure hunt mystery is an ideal event to have some clues difficult to reach or see. Try putting one high up and providing binoculars, or putting a clue