

Organizing

a Murder

Brian Clegg



SAMPLE

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Organising a Murder

By Brian Clegg

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What it's all about

Organising a Murder contains twelve mysteries, each designed to provide absorbing group entertainment. Whether you are having a party, running a youth club, or looking for an exercise to build up teams at work, the format is flexible enough to work in any location, and the subjects will appeal to anyone who likes a challenge. Despite the title, the mysteries do not all involve a murder, but each provides an intriguing plot for the players to solve.

A mystery is made up of a set of clues and background information which will help to solve the crime or puzzle. These snippets of information will be spread around the location of the event: on walls, under furniture, and so forth. This provides a combination of the deductive and the physical, as the players need to hunt for the clues as well as work out what is going on.

Know your audience

Before deciding which mystery to use at a particular event, consider who will be taking part. The mysteries are graded from those which can be handled by children of eight or nine, through to complex puzzles requiring the deductive powers of an older teenager or adult. It is also worth considering the physical environment and how much your audience are likely to concentrate on what's happening. If they are going to throw their all into the event, make the mystery challenging; if they will want to skim through it, it is best to keep it simple. The perfect mystery should be taxing but not frustrating.

A location

Organising a Murder can be used in almost any location. It can be played in the home, or your garden (but be wary of the weather). A village hall or community centre will often make a good larger location, especially if the building has a number of rooms, nooks and crannies. The advantage of a hall is that the environment will be unfamiliar to everyone, heightening the sense of mystery - and there will usually be more space. For a still larger scale event you might be able to use a park or open land, spreading the clues over a wide area. If you do (assuming that you don't own your own park), please ensure that you have the permission of the appropriate authorities, and give some thought as to how the players are going to find your clues. The effort should be non-trivial, but there's nothing more frustrating than being unable to find a single piece of information. It might be an idea if you are working on a large scale to prepare a map showing at least some of the locations, perhaps in a sketchy or cryptic form so that there is still a challenge in finding the clues.

Self running or refereed

As organiser of the event there are a number of ways that you can be involved. If you want to keep effort to a minimum, there are some mysteries where you can simply lay out the clues, give the participants an answer sheet, and leave them to it while you sit with your feet up. You may wish to participate as a player yourself, in which case you will either have to find someone else to distribute the clues, or have them openly displayed so that you don't give yourself an unfair advantage.

Alternatively, you might prefer to have a special role. Some of the mysteries, particularly the more complex ones, have a central figure acting as a source of information. As the players find clues they will need to come to you to exchange

evidence they have gathered for more relevant knowledge. This can be worked on a first come, first served basis, but you will probably find it useful to have set times when a particular team can consult you, enabling fair access for all the players.

Using a computer

All the mystery events can be run without anything more than this set, a location and some way of sticking up clues. However, as will become clear, there are many variations on the theme that can be played. If you are acting as a central source of information and you are familiar with a computer programming language like Visual Basic or Hypercard, you may like to put together a small program which issues the information required in exchange for the players' input. Younger players particularly enjoy interacting with a computer to extract the information, though they will probably need supervising. This is not at all necessary, but will certainly increase the excitement of the event.

The Format

Each of the mysteries in *Organising a Murder* is set out in the same format. In this section the component parts that make up a mystery are described, along with some suggestions on ways of enhancing the event. If you are the sort of person who likes to get down to things, you needn't bother with this section - go straight on to the mysteries themselves - but if you are prepared to spend a few minutes looking through this short chapter you may find some hints which will make the experience more enjoyable for both yourself and your players.

Easiness

All the mysteries can be played by adults, but some are intentionally limited to make them usable with a younger group. Each mystery is given one of three ratings:

- Basic - playable by children from around the age of eight
- Medium - playable by young people from around the age of 12
- Challenging - playable by adults and mature young people

If an easy mystery is being used with adult players, it can be made more challenging by incorporating some of the props and gimmicks described later in this section, or by omitting hints which could be supplied by general knowledge.

Running

This part of each game describes whether the mystery can be left to run itself, or if it needs active involvement from the organiser. Many organisers find that being part of the mystery makes the event much more enjoyable for them.

Props and gimmicks

The mysteries can be run using only what you find in this set, but by providing props and gimmicks you can enhance the sense of adventure. Props reflect aspects of the story, such as a letter from a suspect. Rather than taking the printed letter from the pack, it is much more effective to write one out by hand on appropriate notepaper.

Gimmicks are tools to help the players with their task, such as pair of binoculars - it's surprising how much more challenging it is using binoculars to read a clue that's stuck on the inside of a first floor window, rather than simply coming across it at head height. In each mystery there are suggestions for appropriate props and gimmicks, but you may also like to use your own imagination to increase the enjoyment of your players. A useful approach is to look at what is available - the objects found at your location, anything you have around the house (garages and lofts are often ideal sources of props and gimmicks) - and see what fits with the story.

The answer sheet

As the players go around, hunting for clues and collating evidence, they will almost certainly need a pen and paper. It is helpful to provide an answer sheet for each team, prompting them for the specific answers required. A number of answer sheets are included with each mystery - you are welcome to copy these for your own use. Ideally, the answer sheet should combine the scenario, the suspects and the questions to be answered.

The scenario

The scenario, usually found on the answer sheet, describes the background to the mystery, giving information which may be of use, and explaining what has led up to the players' involvement. The scenario will also describe the mechanics of solving the mystery, and what information or items the players should be collecting. You may simply read out the scenario, but it will be helpful to have the printed version available to the players during the event, either as part of their answer sheet or posted as a notice. It is a good idea to read out the scenario at the start anyway, as well as describing to the players where they can go on their quest. If you are actively involved, you will also need to tell the teams how they gain access to you and if there are specific times when you are available for each team.

The suspects

Many mysteries include a list of suspects - the fictional people who are involved in the crime or puzzle. This is not a role playing game; there is no need for anyone to pretend to be these characters, but finding out as much as possible about them is an essential to solving the mystery. The suspect list should be available to the players during the game, either displayed or given to each team. In a few mysteries there is no suspect list - finding out who is involved is part of the problem.

Statements

In some mysteries there will be a set of statements from the suspects. These will contain valuable information, some of which will be necessary to reach a solution. You should make your players aware that it is quite possible for a suspect to lie - especially if he or she is the murderer.

Clues

Clues form the principal source of information to solve the mystery. They represent intelligence gathered from many different sources, as well as physical evidence found at the scene of the crime. A direct clue will give some immediately useful information. For example, it may identify some of the letters in the perpetrator's name. An indirect clue might use a code or other means to conceal the nature of the information. It may also be necessary to combine information from a number of sources to gain the required knowledge. In some cases, clues will require a specific effort or fact from the players in order to obtain what they need.

Evidence

Physical evidence is a special form of clue. Physical evidence is provided in Organising a Murder with notices, advertisements and other snippets of information. You may wish to build on the evidence by providing actual objects - the props and gimmicks section will give suggestions of ways to provide your own evidence.

Obtaining information

When the event is underway, the players have to gather information. Items like evidence and clues should be placed around the event location, some in open obvious places, other concealed, depending on the abilities of the players. Where there is a

natural site for a clue - for example a piece of evidence in the form of a notice appearing on a noticeboard - try to use it.

How the organiser of the event takes part is a matter of personal taste. Many mysteries can be run with minimal organiser involvement after the clues have been placed, but it can be very rewarding to have some of the crucial evidence managed by the organiser and only available on presentation of the appropriate information or payment.

Setting up

To work effectively, a mystery needs sufficient setting up time. How long this will take depends on how much you intend to elaborate on the basic plot, but you should normally allow a minimum of an hour to prepare. There's nothing worse than the players arriving while you are still distributing your evidence.

Deciding where to put clues is heavily dependent on your location. Try to spread them out, making some obvious, others more tricky to spot. Some pre-preparation will be valuable. Have sticky tape, pins, scissors and a pen for any last-minute changes.

It is possible to run a mystery event with individual players, but it is generally more enjoyable if the players work as a team. I recommend teams of two to four - any more than four and there tend to be individuals who get left out of the process, simply being dragged along by the rest.

Timing

The length of a mystery depends on your available time and the ability of your players to concentrate. For a young audience, aim for around an hour. Older teenagers and adults can happily cope with 90 minutes or two hours. Always allow a little extra time to explain what is going on at the beginning and to wind up at the end.

If you find that the mystery is over-running and you are nearing the end of your event without anyone coming close to a solution, the simplest approach is to call a halt after a set time and decide on a winner by finding the individual or team with the most correct information. Alternatively, you can start dropping strong hints in the form of late breaking information.

If the mystery is proving too easy it is useful to have an extra twist up your sleeve. If there is any danger of this, you can hold back a couple of pieces of key information and only place them around the scene towards the end of the event.

At the end

When the time is up, you will gather together your players and reveal the solution. An older audience will often want quite a lot of detail about how the clues worked, while younger players are often satisfied with the basic facts of the whodunit and a prize. It is not essential to have a prize - taking part in a mystery is an end in itself - but even adults will feel an extra edge if there is a token reward. This need not be much, but should ideally be suited to the particular mystery. With a younger audience it is a good idea to have prizes for all, but giving some distinction to those with the most complete solution.

Mystery 1 – The Case of Mr Pugh

Easiness - Basic

Running - no active involvement required

Introduction

The Case of Mr Pugh is quite a simple proposition, which can be worked out by pre-teen children. As such it is a relatively light entertainment for adults, and is suitable for an after-dinner event or other situation where the players are not liable to give their full attention to the game.

The case of Mr Pugh is a murder mystery - if you wish to play it with children and feel that subject is too unpleasant, bear in mind that any such reluctance is liable to be yours alone - most children revel in a murder.

Props and gimmicks

For an after dinner session with adults you might want to keep things simple. On the other hand everyone, especially children, responds well to having some props to build the atmosphere. For example, a cheap pair of red-framed spectacles (even a toy pair) tucked in a plastic bag would make a good substitute for Evidence 1. The bank statement (Evidence 3), could be put in a bank folder if one is available.

Setting up

As this mystery is self running, you need have no direct involvement beyond putting out the clues, statements and evidence, and keeping a watch on time. Place these items around the location making some easier to find than others. Your teams will find it much easier if you provide them with the answer sheet and a pen to make notes. With younger players, you might need to wander around and drop a few hints if a team is in desperate trouble. At the end, the winning team is the one with the nearest answer to that given below.

Solution

Mr Pugh made a living by selling gold, but his mine ran out years before. To keep going, he melted down stolen gold and passed it off as his own. As he neared retirement, Mr Pugh decided to save a little money for his old age, and was keeping back increasingly large amounts of the money he made from the gangsters who supplied him with the gold.

Arnie Walters, his principal supplier, became suspicious. When he received proof of Pugh's double dealing, Arnie persuaded his girlfriend, Fiona Campbell, to visit Pugh in his hotel room and shoot him. Campbell disguised herself by wearing a blonde wig and spectacles.

Answer Sheet - The Case of Mr Pugh

Mr Pugh was a gold miner. Not in a very big way; a one man outfit, earning a comfortable living out of his small hill mine. Each year he indulged in a single luxury - a two week holiday in Miami. The same hotel, same time of year; he was a creature of habit. Then one day, Mr Pugh was found shot dead in his hotel room.

You have to find out who killed Mr Pugh and why.

Who killed Mr Pugh	
Why	

Process

Scattered around the location are clues, statements and evidence which the police have discovered. Watch out - the murderer will not have told the truth! Search around and find as many of these as you can. Try to fit the different bits of information together as you go.

Suspects

All these people were in the neighbourhood prior to Mr Pugh's death.

Fiona Campbell

Pete Davidov

Jane Gladsome

Trudy McDonald

Malcolm McPherson

Joe Roach

Lorna Veltz

Arnie Walters

Will Young

Clues - place these round the location

Clue 1

Fiona Campbell has dark red hair.

Clue 2

Jane Gladsome and Trudy McDonald have blonde hair.

Clue 3

Lorna Veltz has black hair.

Clue 4

Mr Pugh's mine ran out of gold twenty years ago.

Clue 5

Arnie Walters robs jewellery stores for a living.

More clues follow in the actual mystery...

Evidence - place these round the location

Evidence 1

A pair of red framed glasses were found in a trash can near the hotel.

Evidence 2

Receipt found on the street two blocks from the hotel.

The Elite Wig Company Inc.

To supply of one human hair wig,
ash blonde, eleven inch pageboy

\$150.49

(incl. tax)

Elite - the wig that says you're hair to stay.

Evidence 3

From Mr Pugh's Bank Statement

The Granville Bank

A. X. Pugh - Savings Account 3872398234/D

May

4 May	CREDIT	\$3000.00
11 May	CREDIT	\$5000.00
18 May	CREDIT	\$4200.00
25 May	CREDIT	\$7000.00

More evidence follows in the actual mystery...

Statements - place these round the location

Fiona Campbell

I'm on holiday with my boyfriend Arnie, staying in the same hotel as that poor Mr Pugh. I never actually met him, though Arnie said he'd spoken to him, and he was a nice guy.

Pete Davidov

I come from the same town as Pugh. Just happened to be in Miami at the same time. He's not popular back home, but not unpopular either. Keeps himself to himself. Wish more other people were like that - you for instance. I will tell you one thing, though. He keeps strange company - sort of folk you wouldn't like to meet on a dark night.

Jane Gladsome

I'm the maid covering room 1227 where Mr Pugh was found. He was very quiet - never around when I cleaned. The only time I ever saw anyone else go into his room was the morning he was killed - it was a woman. Average height, I suppose. She had a long coat on with the collar up, so I couldn't see much. She had shoulder length blonde hair, I can tell you that, and glasses with bright red frames. That's all I saw.

More statements follow in the actual mystery...

That's the end of the sample but there are many more mysteries with different formats in the full ebook.