



THE MURDER PARTIES

FAQ & REVIEW

Please, Just the FAQ's!
Revision 1.2 - March 18, 1994
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!!!! THANK !!!!

Way back when, Alexander Walsh's Murder Mystery FAQ site was a mainstay of valuable information for those interested in this major form of Interactive Drama. Unfortunately the site has long since been closed. In the interest of archival completeness, I will keep version 1.2 here until someone decides to come up with a more up-to-date version.

This months contributors: Gail Peck, Janet A. Rudolph -
Thanx!

New to this revision: A *fantastic* collection of Host-Your-Own-Murder style game reviews. These were submitted by Gail Peck of Suspicious Characters, author of some of these games. THANK YOU VERY MUCH GAIL for a job well done!



Formally the Interactive Murder Mystery List (the name was a little confusing).

As you may have noticed, the FAQ has been broken into three parts ... it was getting a little large. Additionally, the mystery puzzle games and spoilers sections were removed.

Sorry this edition is a *little* late getting out (X-Mas and a massive deadline in my real life), but due to quality of the additions I'm positive it was worth the wait!

-----++++ QUESTIONS - TABLE OF CONTENTS +++++-----

All answers are listed below the table of contents and have the question numbers prefixed with %% so that you can "Search" for it specifically.

+--- Question key: + New Question (and answer)
| * Needs an answer!
| # Please offer additional input
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** FAQ BACKGROUND **

- 0.0 # What is the purpose of this list?
- 0.1 # I have a comment on/for the FAQ, where do I send it?
- 0.2 # Where will this FAQ appear and how often?
- 0.3 # Are there FTP or WWW sites available for this list?

** INTRODUCTION **

- 1.0 # What is an Interactive Murder Mystery (IMM)?
 - 1.1 # What types of IMM's are there?
- (End of Part 1 of FAQ)

** SOURCES OF IMM'S & NON-SPOILER REVIEWS **

- (Part 2 of FAQ)
- 2.0 # Are [insert company name here] IMM's any good?
 - 2.1 # Where can I purchase a Murder Mystery Party game?
 - 2.2 # Where can I attend a Murder Mystery Dinner near [my town]?
 - 2.3 # Are there any Murder Mystery Board Games out there?
 - 2.4 # How can I find a IMM near my hometown?
- (End of Part 2 of FAQ)

** FOR WRITERS AND DEVELOPERS **

- (Part 3 of FAQ)
- 3.0 # I would like to write an IMM. How do I do it?
 - 3.1 # I have written an IMM Party, how do I market it?
 - 3.2 # I have an idea for a new type of IMM game, who do I contact?
 - 3.3 # Is there any good utility software for assisting me in



creating IMM's?
3.4 # Can you suggest any good books on writing IMM's or
Mysteries in general?
(End of Part 3 of FAQ)

+-----+
| ANSWERS |
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%% 0.0 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS LIST?

The purpose of this list is to increase the amount of information available on, and hopefully interest in, Interactive Murder Mysteries (or IMM's). I loosely define an IMM as a murder mystery story which can support or requires more than one player to solve. These include Dinner Theatre Murders and the "host your own" type of games such as Murder A La Carte or How To Host A Murder. See Question 1.0 for more on this.

By creating a standard list of IMM vendors and publishers as well as reviews of existing material and aids to aspiring developers I think this is possible.

The list will only succeed with your help. Please send me any information you have on existing IMM's in any form they may appear. I promise to mention them in this list.

This list is **not** a review of Murder Mystery novels or books or a review of these types of works. It is only for **interactive** mysteries, that is, mysteries which require or supports more than one person participating in its solution.

%% 0.1 I HAVE A COMMENT ON/FOR THE FAQ, WHERE DO I SEND IT?

Send any and all comments related to the IMM FAQ to me, Alexander Walsh at sandy@cs.mun.ca

If you have played a IMM, let me know. Tell me who produced it and where you played it. Is it a regular event? How many people participated with you? Did you enjoy it (why or why not)? Was the plot complicated enough (or too complicated)? Would you recommend it? How much was it? Was it worth the money? Would you do it again?

Spoilers may be included at your own discretion, I will place them in at the end of each FAQ release.

Reviews of existing IMM venues and products are greatly needed as well as comments how you write your IMM's. Please



feel free to contribute this information for all to enjoy!

%% 0.2 WHERE WILL THIS FAQ APPEAR AND HOW OFTEN?

I will post this list to rec.games.frp.announce at the start of each month if there have been significant additions made since the last revision. A short-notice posting will also be sent to rec.arts.mystery and rec.games.frp.live-action, as opposed to the full FAQ (due to it's size).

If you do not get these groups email me and I will send you the most recent revision.

%% 0.3 ARE THERE FTP OR WWW SITES AVAILABLE FOR THIS LIST?

YES! Thanx to Tony Blews (A.J.Blews@soc.staffs.ac.uk) for putting it on his WWW site at:

<http://tartis.soc.staffs.ac.uk/larp/>

as well as the Suspicious Characters Home Page:

<http://www.prairienet.org/~gpeck>

Additional sites are still welcome!

%% 1.0 WHAT IS AN INTERACTIVE MURDER MYSTERY (IMM)?

Without seeing any sort of formal definition, I loosely define an Interactive Murder Mystery (or IMM) as a murder mystery story which can support or requires more than one player to solve.

Players may be active or passive participants in the action. By an active participant the player may have committed or been involved in the murder. By a passive participant the player may have observed the murder occur and is required to assist in the solving of the crime, however it is clear that the player could not have committed the crime.

%% 1.1 WHAT TYPES OF IMM'S ARE THERE?

THE DINNER PARTY/WEEKEND (w/ACTORS)

The most common form of IMM is the Murder Mystery Dinner Theater or Weekend Gathering. These events are generally put off by a professional production company and held a resort, restaurant or theater. Generally, guests arrive and meet several "key" guests in the crowd. These special guests are usually professional actors or comedians rehearsed in the



mystery being presented. By listening and asking questions of the actors the players learn the information related to the plot.

There may be some initial action to get things rolling along. For example, after the introduction we might get an initial attempt on a suspects life. This attempt could fail but it would set the tone for who the final victim will be.

If is a dinner theater sort of IMM (a single evening), then a main course meal is usually served around this time. Some events may occur during the meal, but typically after the meal is finished a murder occurs. Following dinner, refreshments are served for the rest of the evening, and more of the motives and methods of the suspects are revealed. Finally, each table present at the dinner is asked to offer a solution to the murder and then the solution is explained and optionally, prizes awarded to the team with the correct solution.

NOTE: Some production companies organize the meals, location and everything, while most will accommodate you by simply showing up at a function arranged by your group. You should really contact each troupe for details on what they can provide.

The weekend IMM is very much the same as the dinner theater type but over a longer time span. One that I had the pleasure of watching started on a Friday evening (Halloween) with the guests gathering for drinks and being introduced to the characters. This was followed by the meal and murder. The following day introduced some new suspects and had a funeral service for the deceased. Sunday had the detective drill everyone for solutions and then the proper answer was revealed. It was really a lot of fun and a good troop of actors really made it quite enjoyable.

One nice touch for these types of IMM's is to have a very obnoxious detective arrive to drill the guests and really throw them into the action. I found this really cuts through any shyness which may be felt initially by some players.

Pro's
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One of the major benefits of these events is that it does not take a lot of planning for the guests. The only difficulty is locating an event and getting reservations.

Good for not out-going types that would rather sit back and be entertained rather than get involved in the action. This



really depends on the personality of the participants. With sufficient notice the guests may dress up in a theme related to the story. While it is not possible for these guests to become killers or suspects, it is possible for them to outshine the actors in scope and quality of appearance.

Can be an economical for very small groups. A dinner evening may cost from \$35 to \$60 per person including the meal. A weekend may range from \$100 to \$500 per person (depending on the location) including food and board (some are held on trains, boats, ski lodges, etc).

Con's

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The players cannot get absorbed into the action; There is no real escape. There are no opportunities to be "someone else" for an evening and act out a fantasy. The exception to this rule, of course, is the mystery with sufficient setup time. This may allow the guests to dress-up and set the mood themselves (as mentioned in Pro's).

There is no chance of trying to fool your friends.

Very expensive for custom events (typically from \$600-\$4000) depending on the level of customization and the size of group. Ten to twenty dollars per player (usually > 30 players minimum) is a good costing metric.

THE HOST-YOUR-OWN MURDER MYSTERY GAME

This second type is usually for small groups that wish to host their own invitation-only party. These are generally organized by one or two people and can cater for 6 or 8 guests total. Additional guests are welcome to question the players but generally do not participate (that is, their presence is not relevant to the plot).

To start the host of the event will purchase a prepackaged Murder Mystery game from a department/hobby store. Some popular names are "Murder a la Carte" by bePuzzled and "How to Host a Murder" by Decipher Inc (in Canada sold marketed by Canada Games). Average price \$40 (Canadian).

Some details for US readers: Murder a la Carte is generally found in department or specialty stores, retail price \$19.95. How To Host A Murder retails for \$28-30, but can generally be found at Toys 'R Us or Child World for about \$22 or so.



These packages generally include the following items:

- Game rules and ideas for the host (recipe ideas, ways to decorate the house on game night, etc.). This is read and implemented by the host before the party. These suggestions really should be done to create the proper atmosphere for the evening. Some hosts will skip the dinner, costumes and the invitations out of convenience (read: Lazy), but this can ruin the overall fun of the game and the temptation should be avoided.
- Invitations (with envelopes) to send to the guests. The invitations usually have costume suggestions and a one or two line summary of all of the characters involved in the murder. There is also usually a summary of the setting of the story.
- A cassette tape to play on game night (to set the mood). This tape may introduce each of the characters or talk a little about the deceased.
- A character script to be given to each player on game night. This booklet contains information about your character that only you know. It also has questions about other characters for you to ask. There are usually 3-4 male characters and 3-4 female characters.
- Optionally, additional information like floorplans of the location of the murder, extra clues, name tags for the players, etc.

The invitations are usually mailed out in advance to inform each guest of when and where the party will take place.

On game night the guests arrive and the rules are explained by the host. The character booklets are handed out and the cassette is played.

The game is usually played in a series of "scenes". At the start of each scene each players reads a section of his/her booklet which describes information that only they know. This is followed by a collection of facts that they can pose to the other suspects. This is repeated for three to four scenes. There is usually a break after each scene, and after the second scene players may break for dinner. A game may run from an hour and a half to four hours depending on the interaction between players and the number/length of breaks between scenes.

All players must tell the truth, only the murderer can lie. The key is to be able to successfully identify the murderer, his/her motive and method and *not* to get accused yourself. You have to give a valid reason why you didn't do it.

Pro's



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These games are really a lot of fun (with a good group of people), quick and easy to purchase and prepare, and very inexpensive.

Con's

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Play it once and throw it away. You *could* give it away to a friend

Hard coded to six or eight players. Always three guys/three girls (or 4/4 in the eight player versions). This can make it a little difficult to customize to different groups, or to gather a group which fits the configuration.

No telling what the skill level required is of the players or how much "additional" information they may be required to add impromptu.

Not much fun for non-player guests.

LIVE-ACTION MURDER MYSTERIES (EVENINGS/WEEKENDS)

JEFF DIEWALD'S LIVE ACTION MYSTERIES

Jeff's games are organized by a host (usually Jeff) and held at someone's house, or at an appropriate location. Everyone in the scenario has a full-fledged role to play. Detailed biographies are given out at a kit party two to three weeks advance, so you have time to study your part. Everyone comes together, in costume and in character to the event. Sometime during the evening, someone murders someone else. The victim comes back as a new character, often the detective. In the remainder of the game, people will try to investigate, others will try to cover-up, and still others will continue with their business as if nothing had happened!

This sounds like an amazing system. I have not participated in any of these games, so I can't comment on their playability. However, looking at the information available, I know I hope to try one *soon*. Jeff has a mini-faq available for interested persons, which can be obtained contacting him directly (see below). The following is an extraction of some of the key points from that list:

You play a role, like the Russian ambassador or the drummer from Toxic Waste. For the duration, you dress, speak, act and live the part. You've got an agenda for the evening of things that you must accomplish. Some tasks are easy, some



things are hard; others may be working against you. You may discover that something has completely changed your priorities.

A game may run from six to eight hours. You will be kept plenty busy during that time!

Each scenario comes with detailed packets for each character. These packets contain detailed (6-10 page) biographies for each character, a list of what the character must accomplish (or try to accomplish) at the party, a list of needed props, and general background material. In addition, there are detailed instructions on how to set up, cast, and run the party for the hosts.

There is usually a kit party two to three weeks before the actual running of the scenario. We hand out the character information then. That gives people plenty of time to learn their parts, to gather any needed costumes and props, and to resolve any questions that might come up.

For more detailed information (pricing, availability, etc.) contact Jeff at:

diewald@virrus.zko.dec.com

Or by normal snail mail at:

Jeff Diewald
10 Partridge Road,
Billerica, Massachusetts 01821
United States of America

Currently available scripts:

"Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll" is set in 1986, and is a Christmas Party hosted by Danny "Madman" Maxwell, lead singer for the rock group "Toxic Waste". This scenario has band members, band managers, old friends of the band, and a number of others. It is a simple scenario that is easy to play. (This scenario is referred to as "SDaR&R" for brevity.)

SDaR&R takes 18 players: 10 men and 8 women.

"The Treaty of Berlin" is set in 1989, and is a diplomatic "black tie" party hosted by the American ambassador in Berlin. This scenario has ambassadors, diplomats, movie stars, spies, and all sorts of intrigue. It is a more complex scenario than SDaR&R, but still easy to play. (This scenario is referred to as "ToB" for brevity.)



ToB takes 20 players: 12 men and 8 women. (Some of the roles are easily swapped to make 10 male and 10 female parts.)

"The Idol Hands of Death" is set in 1921 in Cairo, Egypt and is a party at the home of a high-ranking British Army officer. He's invited the members of the Enfield archaeological expedition over to share their latest discovery. Have they unearthed Tutankhamen's tomb? There are several other mysterious foreigners here. This scenario is more complex than SDaR&R, but still easy to play. (This scenario is referred to as "TIHoD" for brevity.)

TIHoD has several options:

20 players: 10 men and 10 women.

22 players: 12 men and 10 women.

25 players: 13 men and 12 women.

Pros (from Jeff)

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These games are far more involved and richer in detail than the other games I've played. You really get to role play. There's a lot of spontaneity and deviousness that is encouraged. You'll have tales to tell for years to come.

There are stronger and weaker roles designed into the game, allowing a range of participants.

A player can also set his or her own goals; you can choose to try and solve the murder, you can choose how to accomplish that long list of difficult tasks you've been given.

There are always surprises, planned and unplanned.

Cons (from Jeff)

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This relies on getting a good group of players, including some strong role-players and some real hams. You need a good mix and right people for the right parts. So far, that hasn't been a problem for us. (The material for the organizer discusses this.)

This takes a significant amount of preparation time in advance, for the organizer and the players. This takes a commitment from all involved.

You can't do these kinds of games just anywhere. You need a place where people can mingle and where people can go to talk in private. Setting up the murder may place other demands on the location. We've done SDaR&R in a small

apartment - but we couldn't do TIHoD there. (Of course, a good location can add wonders to the scenario.)

THE INTERACTIVE LITERATURE FOUNDATION

The Interactive Literature Foundation is an organization dedicated to spread the gospel of live action gaming. As one of its services, the ILF maintains a Gamebank of LARPs that are free to ILF members. Two ILF Gamebank games are now available via Internet. There are some Murder Mystery type games available through the ILF.

Contact Joseph Dzikiewicz [dzik@access.digex.net] for more information.

For more information on the ILF, write to:

ILF
PO Box 196
Merrifield, VA 22116

Or e-mail to Arthur Adams, the ILF President. Arthur can be reached at:

arthur@clark.net

For more information on the Gamebank on Internet, contact Joseph at:

dzik@access.digex.net

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|           PART 2           |
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|           sandy@cs.mun.ca           |
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%% 2.0 ARE [INSERT COMPANY NAME HERE] IMM'S ANY GOOD?

MURDER MYSTERY DINNER/THEATER EVENTS

I haven't attended a lot of these so I can't really comment on them. Please feel free to offer reviews for inclusion in this list.

Denver/Boulder area, Colorado:

Till Death Do Us Party Productions
Usual venue: The Bluebird Lounge in Gold Hill Colorado
Average cost: \$175 U.S./couple for mystery, dinner and overnight lodging.
Private parties available
Phone: Bluebird Lodge (303) 443-6475
Till Death Do Us Party, (303) 451-6748
Contact: Jeff Berry, nexus@isis.cgd.ucar.EDU

California:

Tom and Penny Warner
Speciality: Fund-raising Murder Mystery plays for libraries, recreation centers and related public groups.
Usual venue: Your local library or recreation center
Contact: Tom or Penny Warner, tpwarner@netcom.com
710 Sinnet Court
Danville, CA 94526
(510) 837-7089

Janet A. Rudolph's
MURDER ON THE MENU
166 Beau Forest Dr.
Oakland, CA 94611
(510) 339-2800
Fax: (510) 339-8309
"Parties of Murder, Mystery and Mayhem/Corporate Theatre"

Titles: Murder On The Menu does not give you a laundry list of of scripts from which to choose, instead they consult you to create a mystery that will best compliment your group.

Janet Rudolph was an invited guest, one of five from the



United States, at Semana Negra, an international mystery symposium and festival, held in Gijon, Spain. Janet was on a panel focusing on Women's Crime Fiction with writers from Great Britain, Norway, Germany and the U.S. She also edits the Mystery Readers Journal and writes columns in The Armchair Detective, Mystery Scene and Deadly Pleasures.

New York:

Bogies Mystery Tours
328 West 86 Street, Suite 4A
New York, New York 10024

Usual Venues: Contact Bogies for up to date listings

Titles:

"Deadline For Murder"
"Magic Can Be Murder"
"The Reunion Murder Case"
"The Case Of The Caribbean Blues"
"As Crime Goes By"
"Murder By The Letter"
"The Minor Murder"
"The Corporate Corpse"
"The Case Of The Murdered Victim"

Canada:

Brian Caws Mysteriously Yours
1927 Yonge Street
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M4S 1Z3

(416) 486-7469, 1-800-NOT-DEAD (668-3323)
(and in Milwaukee and Singapore)

Speciality: Custom Mysteries

Usual Venues: Wednesdays at the Old Mill, Toronto
Matinee, 11:15 am (\$36.95 for lunch and show, \$20 for show only, Groups: \$31.95/person for 10+ people, \$15 show only)
Also available at Royal York Hotel, Toronto (Thursday, Friday & Saturday evenings 6:30pm).

Custom mysteries pricing: starting at \$1500 + \$10/person

Titles:

"The Trial Of Sherlock Holmes"
"Nana Nina's Birthday"
"Murder Takes A Vacation"
"Death Enters The Firm"
"Marriage Can Be Murder"
"Reform School Reunion"
"Reggies Will"
"Long Live The King"
"Murder At The Grand Hotel"
"Casablanca"

"Boom... Your Dead"
"Merger, He Wrote"
"Old Man Murder"
"Dying For A Clue"
"Welcome Home Billy Ray (or Achy Breaky Murder)"
"The Mystery Of The Maltese Blue Jay"

Armstrong Entertainment
914-165 Ontario Street
St. Catherines, Ontario
L2R 5K4, (905) 684-2654
Contact: Bob Armstrong
Specialities: Use an outside cast or your own actors

Eddie May Mysteries
1018 Merivale Road - Suite 200
Ottawa, Ontario K1Z 6A5
(613) 729-8832, fax: 729-4328
The Marble Works Restaurant
14 Waller St, Ottawa, Ont K1N 9C4
(613) 235-6764
Usual Venues: The Marble Works Resturant, every Friday and
Saturday Evening @ 7-10pm
Price: Dinner and Show: \$35.00/person (soup, salad, main
course, dessert, and coffee; beverages, taxes, tips extra)

Whodunnit, Inc.
Murder Mystery Weekends and Evenings
173 Camden Road
Napanee, Ontario, Canada
K7R 1E1
Contact: Ada Woods
1-613-354-6353
1-800-487-5340 (1-800-692-CLUE)
Usual Venues: Country Squire (contact for latest schedule)
715 King St E, Gananoque, Ont
K7G 1H4, 1-800-267-9415
Titles:
"Murder For Millions"
"Double Death"
"The Headmaster Dies"
"The Surprise Party"

HOST-YOUR-OWN MURDER MYSTERY GAMES

I've played a fair number of the "How To Host A Murder" and
"Murder a la Carte" games (can't really remember which
titles) and found them to be of a reasonably high quality.
The writing is good and the production quality is excellent



(especially with "a la Carte").

Please offer any of your opinions on these titles which you have tried.

The majority of the following reviews are by Gail Peck (gpeck@prairienet.org) for the Suspicious Characters. (A WARNING FROM GAIL ...) I welcome any questions/ comments/ additions to any of these opinionated blurbs on the games we have played. As you can see, however, we are starting to run short of new titles to play--so if you send me any spoiler comments on a game not listed here, I will have to come after you with a chainsaw.

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a. How to Host a Murder (Decipher Inc/Canada Games)

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How To Host A Murder (HTHAM) is an 8-player game. Its outstanding feature is humor: characters' names are puns (actually, look for lots of puns throughout), and some of the murder attempts and plots are wild and unrealistic, but pretty humorous. (Means of death can be pretty inventive but generally logical within the twisted framework of the game, i.e., no vampires.) Because of the humor, groups that aren't necessarily trying to imitate Sherlock Holmes can still have lots of fun with one of these.

The General Premise:

You and seven other upper-crust-types have been invited to a gathering. However, your host turns out to have been killed before the party got going, and the official-personage who told you of his death expects you to hang around and dump on each other for the rest of the evening. Guess what? no-one's the upstanding citizen they pretend to be ... (And the host/victim is quite the dirt-bag.)

Format:

At the start of the game, players learn about themselves from the Personal Dossiers in their manuals, which includes the Facade they wish to project and the Sordid Facts they want to conceal. They then introduce themselves in character. The cassette tape is played: someone official announces the victim's death and outlines the circumstances and details of how the body was found. The salient facts are also listed in one of the Secret Clues--the Report of Investigation. The tape generally is five to seven minutes long. (In one or two games, the tape also includes a



segment played as a clue during the game, or for an epilogue, but for most games it's only used at the start.)

There are 4 Rounds, and each works the same way: read facts about yourself and the other characters in your manual, and then in discussion reveal everything you know about the other characters and conceal as much about yourself as possible. Each player has an average of 3 clues about the others to reveal each Round.

The murderer does not know that they are the guilty party until the 4th Round--*if then*. In some episodes they're told, in others they're not (and we've seen one or two games where the murderer was surprised to learn of their guilt when the solution was read).

During the Rounds, players will be directed to reveal the contents of specific Secret Clues--copies of purloined letters or important documents. There are between 6 and 9 Secret Clues per episode, so each character usually has one to reveal.

After the 4th Round, everyone makes accusations, and then the Solution is read. Each manual contains part of the story, so players turn to the last page of their manuals and see which number they are. The player numbered 1 reads first, and then 2, etc. Number 8 is the guilty party. (Often, 7 and 8 will give a little impromptu "What's My Line" "it's-me"- "no-it's-me" routine here.) The Solutions really fill in the details of each character's motives and actions, so your group can see what they figured out, and what they missed.

Host Helps:

The invitations are just black-and-white, but graphically very nice. The front has the "period invitation" your character's received from the host/soon-to-be-victim, with a section underneath that says "You're really invited to.." with room for place and date, etc. Inside, there's more detail on your host, or the circumstances of the gathering, etc. There is also a paragraph about each of the characters.

The costume suggestions are not in the invitation, but in the Host Guide, for the host to include or not, at their discretion.

The Host Guide (in the more recent printings?) also includes a few, very minor, suggestions for scenery and atmosphere. There is a large 12"x24" or so map or floorplan of the house



and/or general setting (boat, train, whatever).

Menu and Recipes:

Some of the menu suggestions are more complete than others, but there is typically only one recipe or two included (i.e., the main dish and perhaps a side dish). The recipes are generally pretty good--but the best feature for neophyte hosts is the timetable. This tells you when to start the entree and any mentioned side dishes, and gives you some idea of how long it's going to take you to finish the game. Although I must say, I've seen more than 30 How To Host A Murder parties, and I've **never** seen a game-with-dinner take only 3 and a half hours, as their timetable suggests.

In-Jokes:

Every game contains a reference to at least one other HTHAM episode--sometimes it's a person or a name, sometimes it's a place. Sometimes (such as China, Rome, or Star Trek) the connections can be rather contrived. After you've played a few, though, it adds some fun to see someone turn up from another episode.

"Roman Ruins - Rome Wasn't Bilked In A Day"

"Grand Prix de Monte Carlo"

"Hot Times At Hollywood High" - for teenagers

"It's the decade of the 90's, and a group of students at Hollywood High in California must solve a very hip mystery that threatens to destroy their school, their friends and their lives. Designed especially for players 13-18, this episode has characters, setting and a plot guaranteed to delight teens."

Well, it may have been designed for teens, but a group of over-30 adults had a good time pretending to be teenagers. Between Spence DeMonet (the "rich kid"), Tanya Bunsoff (the swimsuit model), Duncan Flushwater (the nerd), Cam Kordier (the aspiring director), Cantella Solle (the airhead cheerleader), Fletcher Bysepps (the dumb jock), Bernadette Down (the artist-with-an-attitude), and Juanita Greecarde (the Latino princess), we chewed the scenery.

After the adults played it, our kids threw the party with their friends (age range 9 to 13). They had a great time accusing each other of things, and though they didn't really



try to piece together the clues, they still made reasonable accusations.

We'd describe the game as Very Good, mostly for the characters and roleplaying possibilities rather than the mystery. The mystery (theft and arson, not murder) itself is OK, and the solution is pretty obscure (IOurHO). *Not* noticeably less intricate than the regular HTHAMs.

"All My Children" - special edition

"It is April 1990 at the Pine Valley Inn. Following one of Pine Valley's most glamorous and successful charity events, the noted benefactor and plastic surgeon Phil N. Thrope has invited several prominent business and social leaders to a meeting at the exclusive Inn. But he does not appear for dinner, and soon the guests are involved in solving a mysterious murder!"

Well, unless you are a big fan of AllMyKids, or are a HTHAM completist, ignore this one. The male characters are all suit-types [Adam Chandler, Palmer Cortland, Jackson Montgomery, Jeremy Hunter], without much personality, and only two of the women are interesting [Erica Kane and Opal Cortland; the others are Brooke English and Phoebe Wallingford].

We'd rate this Skip It, because we were so disgusted with the solution we booed as it was read. For the most part, we got the murderer right--but missed a lot of the details because vital information was missing, and some of this information was non-deduce-able, because it was physically impossible.

"Star Trek - The Next Generation" - special edition

"Eight of the starship's most trustworthy crew members become suspects when the mythical Orb of Knowledge is actually discovered by a Federation mapping team. When the Orb disappears, containing all of the knowledge known to exist in the Universe, crew members become prime suspects in a mystery that is out-of-this-world!"

If you've always had a secret hankering to wear one of those cool Star Fleet uniforms, here's your excuse. (Try pinning strategically-shaped black felt to a mock turtleneck the right color.) The Away Team consists of Riker, Worf, Data, Geordi, Crusher, Troi, Ro, Guinan--and Dr. Rhom Eulan (gee, wonder what his secret is). Eulan's been phasered, and the Orb stolen, and Captain Picard suspects *you*.



(Unfortunately, the tape doesn't have Patrick Stewart, but a strangely-processed voice actress.)

Obviously, this game falls out of the HTHAM pattern. There's not much humor. The roleplay is a lot different, because a) these are characters your players have seen portrayed already (and some players can be intimidated trying to recreate the performances of highly-paid actors), and b) these characters are heroes and not sleazebags. So there aren't scads of secrets to reveal about each other, meaning that the majority of clues are about who was where when. This is one incredibly timetable-driven story. If you want to solve this, don't attempt it without writing out a timeline as facts are revealed.

We say play this only if your main goal is playing TNG crewmembers (and you don't mind emulating a The-Crewmembers-Are-Acting-Out-of-Character episode); just for the mystery aspects, Skip It. We had lots of fun with food, costumes, and scenery, but the game's really confusing and not very interesting. And all those "X was doing y at 0700" clues, combined with technobabble, make for a long evening.

"The Wall Street Scandal"

"It is October 20, 1987, in the New York penthouse apartment of mega-rich Wall Street financier Jon K. Bonds. Jon K. has called a special meeting of the Argonaut Fund Partners to discuss the impact of yesterday's stock market plunge. The partners arrive at 6:30pm to begin their meeting but discover murder instead!"

Characters: Corey Pratt Bonds (vice-president at his father's investments firm), Stock Ann Bonds (victim's daughter, an art agent), Wirth Les Bonds (victim's adopted son, New York senator), Portia F. Olio (one of the world's best-dressed women), Lolita X. Posure (Portia's daughter, a photographer), Arby Trage (the victim's partner), Cass Antell (gossip columnist), Rob Ubylynd (entertainment lawyer).

Yes, it's a bunch of lawyers, politicians, and wheeler-dealers carping over money, and yes, it's as boring as that sounds. It's business attire for all (except perhaps the fun gossip columnist), and the plot is particularly convoluted. There's nothing really bad about the game, but there isn't anything exciting about it either. We rate it OK.

"The Duke's Descent"



"It is September 1931 at an English country estate. The 13th Duke of Airesborne has invited his eight possible heirs to announce just who among them will be the successor to his title. Before he can do that, however, the Duke is murdered in a hot air balloon accident. The potential heirs must figure out who among them killed the Duke and the other unfortunate victims!"

This is a fun one. It's a Golden Age of Mystery setting: England in the 30's, in a castle, no less. The characters are good: British nobility (accents put almost anyone into character quickly) including Spinner Propwash (WWI ace pilot), Misty C. Loudbanks (internationally respected aviatrix), Lance Sallot (future eighth Duke of Sallot), Dameselyne D. Istresse (Misty's older sister, the victim's niece), Rogan S. Coundrell (successful businessman), Gwen O. Veere (the victim's widow), Lon Glost Aires (avid sportsman), and Evonne B. N. Aires (Lon's wife). With a husband and wife, and a pair of sisters, there's lots of good interaction possibilities, too. The names aren't quite as good as usual, but there's lots of funny stuff. Wild Boar Airesborne, the main dish recipe supplied, is really good.

It's hard for us to judge the quality of the mystery--we caught an incorrect name that slipped past the playtesters and built an elaborate (but completely incorrect) accusation around it, and then were baffled by the real solution. (Don't worry about seeing this error unless you've got a box from 1990; it was corrected in the next print run.) I guess it says something about the quality of the rest of the game elements that we really had a great time and enjoyed the game, even though a clue misled us.

This game gets a Very Good. If you're into scenery at all, there's lots of possibilities for atmospheric stuff. Good show, what?

"The Hollywood Premiere Of Powar and Greede"

"It is 1936 at the famous Powar Gardens Theater in Hollywood. The guests are gathered for the gala premiere of the film, "Powar and Greede." As guests arrive at a small private party for the cast, hosted by W. Anton Powar himself, Hollywood's elite mill about in anticipation. Excitement turns to horror as murder is discovered!"

Well, darlings, the perfect opportunity to indulge your fantasies of being a movie star or director. The names are



good: Denise N. Dayer (actress, and producer's assistant), Hi Voltaje (the victim's protegee), Ivonde B. Alohne (Swedish actress), Hack Ryder (screenwriter), Savoy R. Fayre (British actor), Sel U. Lloyd (director), Stu Dyron (actor), and Tat Eltale (former actress, now gossip columnist). The roles are juicy (lots of material for catty backbiting); the tape is really atmospheric. The mystery is involving but not insanely complicated, though making up a timeline will help you quite a bit.

The game gets a Very Good. We've seen five groups play this one, and each group has really gotten into the characters and plot. This game is also generally solved by the group, and I've never heard anyone say it was too obvious; it really adds a lot of enjoyment when a group feels like they've met and overcome a challenge in solving the game.

"The Class of '54 - The return of Rock N Roley"

"It is 1959 in a small town in the U.S.A. The local high school class of 1954 has scheduled its 5th year reunion to coincide with the return to town of Rockford "Rock" N. Roley, the famous rock'n'roll star. Excitement is running high until the recollection of a high school prank leads to the discovery of murder!"

Get out your poodle skirts (or your brylcreem). Eight 23-year-olds (and if you've left 23 far behind, you'll have an especially good time pretending) have gotten together for a private party after Rock's concert: Cal Q. Layer (the class nerd), Del Toydes (the jock), Rick Alcitrent (the tough-guy-greaser), Joe K. Awledge (the preppy college-boy), E.C. Leigh (the cheerleader), Dee Deucer (the girl-from-the-wrong-side-of-the-tracks), Pris E. Teene (the honor student), and Penny Lofer (the hometown-girl-who-married-her-high-school-sweetheart). These are all fun characters to play. With the plethora of 50's decorations available at most party supply stores, this is an easy game to add atmosphere to.

This game is lots of fun, although one group I know of were disappointed by the solution because they didn't understand how it could have happened. (I've seen two other groups have no problem with it.) The menu oddly enough doesn't suggest hamburgers and fries, but a roast (!)--this takes place in a malt shop, for crying out loud. So you'll probably be on your own for this menu, but it's a simple one to improvise.

We'll give it a Very Good, Dick--atmospheric, with fun characters that are easy even for neophytes to jump into, a fun cassette tape, and a murder plot (fairly tough, but not



prohibitively so) with a lot of very humorous elements.

"Hoo Hung Woo"

"It is 8th century China at the Autumn Moon. Guests of the Hoo family have been invited to gather in the Grand Hall at Hoo House on Hoo-Hung-Woo Islands. Hoo House is an elegant Chinese mansion and the summer home of the Hoo family. As guests gather for an evening of reflection, poetry and feasting, the celebration gives way to deadly dismay about hoo dunnit!"

Oh, this is a fun one! If you don't have any oriental-type robes, just any bathrobe will do, and if you don't enjoy cooking Chinese, there's always takeout. Remember pale makeup, and long mustaches for the guys, and rotten accents (if you don't consider that to be politically incorrect), and you will have a great time with Hoo Li-gan (wealthy landowner), General Shang Hai-shek (fearsome warrior), Hao Dee-doo (respected magistrate), Pen Ta-gon (renowned scholar), Wee Ping (widow of eldest Woo son), Woo Pi (eldest Woo daughter, twin sister to Woo Too), Hoo Ting (second wife of Hoo Li-gan), Ding Ling (poetess).

The mystery is good, although some plot points seem to show up and then disappear. One group did complain about being confused by the names "because they all sound alike." If you watch out for "Hao" and "Hoo," most groups don't have any problems with this.

Another Very Good. Skip their menu, though--it's as authentic as Hamburger Helper(tm).

"The Chicago Caper"

"It is September 1928 in Chicago. Notorious gangster Harold "Hal" Coppone's return is expected to trigger a wave of violence. Instead, Coppone has disappeared, mystifying police and the criminal underworld alike. To the small group gathered in a speakeasy near Coppone's headquarters, the crimelord's whereabouts become only part of the mystery when murder is discovered."

HTHAM's formula of "eight upscale-types in a snazzy setting" works against them here: Who is really going to expect a bunch of characters in a Chicago speakeasy in the Roaring 20's to be anything other than gangsters, bootleggers, and other disreputable types? Especially with these names: Molly M. Awbsterr (society dame), Earnest G. Ambler (millionaire), Silky M. Adam (owner of the exclusive Everlay



Club), Socks R. Gyle (owner of the Green Tables gaming club and avid golfer), Malissa F. Orrthot (reporter), S. Treighton Harrow (district attorney), Annie Sassine (torch singer), and Billy "The Kid" Thrower (star pitcher). There are a number of "establishing the villainy of the characters" type clues in the first two rounds that will get a "Well, duh!" response from players. This weakens the roleplaying--it's hard to imagine Al Capone or Bonnie and Clyde trying to coyly pass themselves off as law-abiding citizens.

The mystery itself is really, really involved and intricate. This game has the dubious distinction of having taken the longest to play of any game we've ever done. And we didn't even come **close** to solving it. The only other group that I know has played it was a neophyte bunch, and they were completely baffled. This game also uses to excess one of my least favorite plot devices, conspiracies, expanded to such a degree that it is frustrating in its unbelievability.

All in all, we'll call it an OK. This game started with a setting and a general plot outline that both had a lot of promise, but they got sidetracked and wound up being a lot less interesting than they could have been.

"Archaeologically Speaking, It's The Pits"

"It is June 1895. Arthur 'Art' E. Faxe, the eccentric Englishman, has invited eight guests to participate in an archaeological 'dig' at a site in Mesopotamia. Almost immediately, rumors circulate of an important 'find,' but excitement gives way to dismay when murder is committed."

As far as we're concerned, this is a **wonderful** game, but then, maybe we're biased. A little personal Suspicious Characters history: We got this game for Christmas six years ago, and got some friends together to play it a couple weeks later. Everyone thought they would have a good time-- and we all had an absolutely **terrific** time. The next day, every guest grabbed me and asked, "When are we going to play another one?" So, it is this game that is directly responsible for our social life being structured around How To Host A Murder for several years, which then eventually led to a career in mystery writing and game development. Talk about a life-changing experience. Perhaps **your** playing of it may not have such far-reaching effects, but I have yet to hear any negative comments about this episode from any person who's played it.



The setting didn't sound particularly atmospheric to me--1895 Middle East. (I hadn't read any of Elizabeth Peters' Amelia Peabody books at that time.) The characters did grab me, though--Listen to these names: Lady Missy N. Lynke (daughter of a rival archaeologist), Terra Sunder (a lingerie designer, the victim's daughter, separated from her husband, Castor Sunder), Ashley R. Sonnyste (young Englishwoman whose family estates tragically burned down), Anne T. Ickwitee (only woman on the archaeological team), Ham MacTorr (Shakspearean actor of Scots descent), Con Iver (the victim's right hand man at the dig), Major General E.B. Sawtedd (just returned from the Punjab), and Les A. Fayre (American railroad baron). The cassette tape is particularly well done, and really sets the stage nicely. Pretty much everything about this game is top-notch: lots of humorous stuff, intricate plotting, but reasonably easy to follow.

What more can I say? This rates an Excellent.

"The Last Train From Paris"

"It is June 1940 aboard a train leaving Paris. The German troops are about to enter the city. Roads are a hopeless snarl; the trains are full with little space aboard them. Yet, to remain in the city will not be pleasant. Aboard a government train heading for the safety of southern France, a murder is discovered. Passengers must decide who committed the deed."

Doesn't that sound like a wonderful setting--kind of like Casablanca, but with the click-clack of a train (if you have a proper soundtrack, that is). Well, that's the general idea, but with fewer tragic characters and more comedic occurrences. This is an easy one for costumes, too--everyone's got something 40's-ish in their closets (and it might even be from the 40's).

Here's the character list: Khover T. Ageante (British businessman), Mal Conntint (American 'soldier of fortune'), RAF Group Captain Wey Awfcorce (British pilot, obviously), Duke Schwazhe B.U. Klare (ruler of a small country fighting against the Nazis); and Princess Idelle Chattré (ruler of another small country), Mary K. Trairie (American journalist), Barbra Z. Enhussie (Parisian party girl), and Belinda Screeete (American fashion designer based in Paris). As you can see, some of the characters are less intrinsically interesting than others, but the plot and setting is involving and well-done.



The main dish recipe, Coq Au Vin Rouge, is *wonderful*, and if you can afford a bottle of Chambertin to go with it as they suggest, by all means do so. A tip for keeping some plot details straight: seat your characters so that they are in the same order as their rooms on the train (as shown on the map).

This game definitely deserves an Excellent. I've watched 5 groups play this game and lent the box to at least 3 other groups, and I have yet to hear any negative comments at all about the game. In fact, numerous players rate this as their favorite episode. This has also proven to be a solvable game as well--of the 8 groups above, only one group had no guest figure out the solution, and most groups came to the correct answer by consensus. Highly recommended--good characters, and a strong story that is solvable.

"Grapes of Frath"

"It is June 1925 aboard a yacht in the Mediterrean. An internationally famous distributor of champagne and owner of a multi-national corporation has invited several close 'friends' for a cruise aboard his luxury yacht. In a secluded bay in the Mediterrean, murder is discovered and it is left to the surviving guests to unravel the crime."

Alas, a strong setting and interesting characters with great potential that are blown by a clever plot twist that just doesn't work in a mystery game. This is one of the original HTHAMs, and the failure of this game probably comes from the writers not being aware that murder games are a genre onto themselves: Some things that work in a novel or movie disappoint game players. I've developed a long-winded explanation for this, but I'll spare you. Murder games live and die (excuse the expression) by their endings--if the solution isn't satisfying or the players feel cheated by it, guests walk away with a negative impression of the whole game, even though they may have really enjoyed the characters and the plot up to that point. Since we've played this episode, I've met players from several other playings of it--and every single player has dissed the game either mildly or vehemently. I find this especially interesting because I know that our group was having a really good time with the game until we got to the solution. And now, five years later, they all trash the game.

The characters really are good: Lucie Guacie (Parisian heiress), Countess Nadya Forilaska (Russian refugee from the Revolution, now a Paris nightclub owner), Bella Donna Maria



Cossa (Italian opera singer), Desiree Flambeau (owner of a rival winery); Captain Mal D. Meirre (the yacht's captain), Miles F. Latout (racecar driver), W.C. Waterloo (British businessman), and Jules T. Hieffe (French -- well, you guess what he does for a living...). Actually, "Jules" here is another indication of where Decipher was on the learning curve with this one. You hardly need several clues during each of the first three rounds linking a character to recent thefts of jewelry when his name is Jules T. Hieffe...

So, regrettfully, I say Skip It for this episode. Although I must confess, looking again at the characters and general plot, if I had access to a boat, I'd do some editing of this one (mostly the solution) and play it again anyway...

"The Watersdown Affair"

"It is January 1936 at an English country mansion. Sir Roger Watersdown, the wealthy owner of Watersdown Beverages, Ltd., has invited several 'friends' to a weekend party in the English countryside at Watersdown Mansion. but soon murder is discovered, and the guests must decide who amongst them committed the crime."

The original HTHAM episode. It's not as strong as later games, where the writers had found their stride, but still a very good game. The setting is classic Golden Age of Mystery--an English country mansion in the 30's. Lots of British accents, which almost anyone can manage, and lots of upper-crust characters with nasty secrets hidden in their heirloom linen, using civil tones to express nasty backbiting. *Lots* of fun.

The characters are: Roger S.B. Astird (the victim's illegitimate son), Pro Bates (the victim's lawyer and golfing companion), Dr. Mal Praktiss (Harley Street physician who tended to Sir Roger), Donny Brooks (city banker); and Randy Shetes (American actress), Eiagulle R. Amminmund (Sir Roger's confidential secretary, also known as E.R.A.), Dame Ali Bigh (mystery novelist), and Flo Wing Brooks (Donny's wife, a former fashion model). The menu includes roast beef and Yorkshire Pudding, of course. Don't forget the brandy and cigars!

A Very Good for this game. The HTHAM trademarks of humorous approaches to murder and rampant puns are all over this episode.

++++
b. Murder a la Carte (bePuzzled)



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Murder a la Carte (MalC) is a six-player game. If you've seen one in a store, you'll remember it--the production values are *outstanding.* The boxes are gorgeous, and this extends to the game pieces as well: The invitations are four-color, as are the secret clues (although having a four-color suicide note hardly adds verisimilitude). There is some humor: the names are puns, but not as clever as HTHAM's. With fewer suspects as well as fewer rounds than HTHAM, though, MalC should be simpler to cast and faster to play.

Format:

At the start of the game, the players silently read their Introductions, which include "What the World Sees" and "The Truth." After they introduce themselves in character, the cassette tape is played and the narrator describes the circumstances of the victim's demise. Next is the First Dialogue--a scripted skit. Then comes the First Round: players' manuals give them Facts You Want To Share and Information You Want To Keep Concealed Until Challenged. Players bring out these facts in conversation, and each player has 2 or 3 facts about the others per round. (Each player has a Clue--a note or document--which they reveal during one of the rounds, when directed to do so.) After the round is finished, another segment of the cassette tape is played to summarize what you should have learned from the information revealed.

The process is repeated with a Second Dialogue, Second Round, more cassette tape, Third Dialogue, and Third Round. Manuals include optional statements for the characters to make at this point, asserting their innocence. Guests now make their accusations, and the solution is revealed by playing the final section of the cassette.

Host Helps:

The invitations have a four-color picture of the place setting featured on the boxcover, a simple sentence saying what the character is invited to, and then room for the details of where and when the player is expected to show up. Inside is a paragraph about the victim and his unexpected death, and then a paragraph each about the characters. Suggested Clothing is included for each character.

The Party Planner has lots of good suggestions--from background music to place settings. It comes with three



complete menus: a Dinner Menu, an Instant Meal Menu, and a Snack Menu--with a shopping list, which includes things like candles and specific flowers, given for each menu. Most recipes are included, five to nine for each game. Each menu also has a timetable, listing what food preparation you can do the day before or that morning, etc. This brings up one of my two quibbles with the Party Planners. The first is that the timetable isn't integrated with the game play at all--it ends "Begin the game and serve dinner." Considering that most menus clearly start with appetizers and include a hot main dish, what does this mean? Much better would be something like "When ready to start Round One, place main dish in oven to reheat. Serve Appetizers. After Second Dialogue, serve main dish, noodles," etc. MalC's menu guide is better for getting ready for the party, but HTHAM's helps you deal with the food while playing the game. I have no idea why bePuzzled stopped where they did. (The second quibble is that I personally don't consider "instant rice" an ingredient suitable for a "lavish dinner." :))

Although I own all these games, as yet we haven't had a chance to play them all (our regular group consists of eight players, and no one wants anyone to be left out). Remember what I said above about chainsaws and people who send me spoilers for games I haven't played yet...

"Bullets 'n' Barbeque"

"Your shindig's set in the Paradise Saloon. It's 1872. And the town of Drygulch is all a-twitter 'cause someone done shot the Sheriff. Who among the town's leadin' ladies and driftin' desperadoes could have committed this dastardly deed? And why?"

Characters: Juan Bandito (Mexican bandit), Sally Forth (English mail-order bride), Rowdy Azell (fast-dealing gambler), Miss Patience (town school marm), Doc Mallard (town doctor), and Bibi Gunn (entertainer at the Paradise Saloon).

"Chinese Takeout"

"The time is today. Mrs. Emily Boggs, lover of all things Chinese, is hosting a dinner to celebrate the return of her long lost daughter. The party ends, and the mystery begins, when Emily bites into a poisoned fortune cookie."

Characters: Chew Chow (victim's cook), Penny Sytan (live-in nurse), Axel Dent (victim's chauffeur), Lai Low (Chinese

maiden, guest of victim), Him Wong (retired detective from Hong Kong), and Anita Mumm (victim's "missing daughter").

"A Deadly Design"

"Your evening takes place in the 1960's. The location is England. Your hostess, the Queen of High Fashion, is found laying in a pool of her own blood, her latest collection slashed to ribbons. Who stitched this deadly designer creation and why?"

Characters: Doll Chevita (victim's younger sister), Ron Dewing (victim's wealthy backer), Minnie Kashfloe (American client), Mike Ruffone (victim's boyfriend), Gloria Spoddy (model), and Cameron Tripod (photographer).

"A Vintage Murder"

"Your evening takes place at a chateau in France's wine country in 1937. Your host is aged to perfection in his own wine. No one knows how he died or who offered his final toast and why?"

Characters: Desiree De Bouze (victim's wife), Yves Le Concoction (Desiree's older brother), Seymour Hunter-Cover (British wine merchant), Lotte Brenzenbraun (German wine merchant), Henri L'Able (estate manager), and Rose Chintsey-Curten (interior decorator).

A Cajun Killing

"It's a moonlit night in 1905. The riverboat Magnolia Queen is wneding its way upriver. Cotton magnate, Benton Thorne IV, has just been found stabbed to death in his first class cabin. His vacation...and his life...cut short. But why? By whom?"

Characters: Captain Jaques LeBad (the skipper of the Magnolia Queen), Candy Barr (burlesque queen), Marty Graw (smooth-talking river gambler), Rose Thorne (the grieving young widow), Ragtime Joe (Bourbon Street piano player), and Allie Gator (young lady disguised as a dock boy).

You know, I really want to like bePuzzled's games. Their production is outstanding; their Party Planner is well-done and makes the host's job considerably easier; their line of jigsaw puzzles is full of good mysteries. (Not to mention the fact that Decipher's not producing HTHAMs fast enough for our group. :) And Sandy's played and liked Bullets and



Barbecue. So why haven't I (or anyone who's played one with us) liked them?

I think that the problem may be that bePuzzled hasn't figured out the two reasons (IMHO) people are interested in playing murder mystery games: a) for the chance to "exercise the little grey cells" and solve a crime and b) for the opportunity (rare for an adult not in the performing arts) to dress-up and play-act. Unless I've hit the dogs of the lot, they're not managing either one of these areas competently.

You may ask "Uh, Gail, if they're selling *murder mystery games,* how do you figure they don't see the importance of point a): solving a crime?" Because there's a difference between *watching* a crime's solution and *participating in its deduction.* In A Cajun Killing, there is darn little deduction. Characters reveal information about each other (and themselves, but that's another issue)--the tape repeats the most important points in case you missed them--but seldom (maybe never, but I'm giving them the benefit of the doubt) do you need to put together two clues to determine what someone was doing, where they were, or what they had to gain (or lose). You'll probably "exercise the little grey cells" as much here as you would watching "Mystery!" on PBS. (And less than with any of bePuzzled's jigsaw puzzles.)

As far as point b) above goes--the potential for dress-up in this one is very good. Our whole group had great costumes. But role-playing in this game is difficult, because of how much the game depends on you revealing information about yourself. The dialogues are much better than in A Taste of His Own Medicine; they really do get the characters going nicely. The characters say things that you would expect them to say under the circumstances: "Please show a little respect for my husband, sir. He's not been dead for one day and you are making jokes." Or: "Hey, I'm just the piano player. I don't know nothin' about no murder." But in the rounds you are expected to say things that real-life suspects in a murder would never admit to. The rounds are divided into "Facts you will reveal" and "Facts you will conceal until challenged." The first section consists of two clues, each labeled "Accuse [name]." (Some of these even say "Accuse [name] only after [blank] challenges her in this round.") The second section consists of two or three paragraphs labeled "Answer to [other name]'s challenge." So, once someone has jumped on you, you simply read the appropriate paragraph--and some of the things you're supposed to reveal are very incriminating. And if you waffle around (as any self-serving suspect would), the



information doesn't come out--until the cassette tape brings it up. By the end of the second round, we had the weirdest dynamic going: Players were explaining that they hated the victim, and giving out all sorts of incriminating details, because they knew that the tape was going to say that "So now we've heard that..." Players didn't want to look like they weren't "playing by the rules" and concealing anything once they'd been challenged. A new and different approach to the question of how to keep players from lying about what their character's done: shame them into telling the truth. Ick. Pretty darn hard to effectively role-play when you're busy ratting on yourself.

The rules say, "When questioned, you cannot lie, though you may be evasive. If challenged directly, however, you must tell the whole truth. At some point in the game, the murderer will be informed in their Booklet that he or she has committed the crime, and given information to help them avoid detection." What is actually the case in this game, however, is that the murderer lies about their actions from Round 1. Except they don't know they've been lying until they're informed of their guilt late in the game. But, since the murderer is never told explicitly that they can lie, how do they answer if they get asked again about one of their earlier responses? This game isn't designed to work with zealous investigators.

Another evidence of that is the number of Pink Herrings (thanks to Jonathan Jerney for the term): events that appear to be connected with the murder but have *no* explanation. Such as some potentially significant items whose disappearance is mentioned in one round in an ominous manner, and then are never mentioned again.

Lest you think this is the result of playing with a bunch of overexperienced HTHAM-fanatics--we did not play this with our usual suspects. Our cast consisted of ourselves (admittedly overexperienced), one couple who had never played any murder game whatsoever before, and a second couple who were part of a "newby-player playtest group" for Roman Ruins (and have since played Last Train from Paris with another mostly neophyte group). The completely inexperienced couple complained about the tape and the content of the clues before any of the rest of us.

The suggestions from the Party Planner were terrific: the ideas for the table and music were good (and it didn't hurt that I was able to borrow some brass lamps, ships' wheels, and portholes (!!)) from a friend whose office has a nautical theme). Two tips for the menu: Unless you have Pernod or



another anise liqueur on hand, it doesn't add enough to the excellent Cajun Chicken that you need to spend \$18 for 2 tablespoons of it in the sauce. And that sauce, with or without the Pernod, is too good to waste--skip the Paddleboat Pasta, and serve rice with it instead. The wheel-shaped pasta on a paddlewheeler is a cute idea, but rice (plain or Cajun-ed in some way) is more authentic anyway. And cook more than 4 lbs. of chicken. (Oops, that's three tips.)

This isn't so much a murder mystery game as it is a strangely formatted script with a great menu. If you can play it expecting that much and nothing more, I could see calling this game even a Very Good, because the setting is so fun, the costume possibilities are good, and, Ah kinfess, Ah jest _luuv_ a gayme with ak-sints.

"A Taste Of His Own Medicine"

Your evening takes place in England at Headline Hall and the year is 1947. Your host meets his final deadline when he's found murdered in his own bed. Who wielded the poison pen and why?"

Characters: Leonora Lacey-Drawers (Monty's mistress), May B. Gudasgold (Monty's late wife's half-sister), Hurry Montague (Monty's adopted son), Marie Mee (Hurry's girlfriend), Cloum Inches (Monty's chief editor), and Luc Du Mifor-Elp (herbalist).

We didn't like this one at all. The dialogues didn't help get players into character, but revealed important information (without giving suspects any opportunity for minimizing or misdirecting). Occasionally there were hints to a particular character's secret that none of the other characters had further details about, and for the secret to be revealed, the character had to give the incriminating facts themselves. (I guess that's the point behind the odd wording "Information you want to keep concealed until challenged." Having seen players lie about inconsequential points while playtesting other games, though, I personally believe a writer shouldn't rely on players to even *confirm* nasty facts about themselves--much less actively reveal anything.)

The purpose of the cassette between rounds seems to be to summarize the deductions the players should have made during the previous round before going on to more information. Our band of seasoned (if not hardened) suspects felt insulted by this theory-- and weren't convinced by the execution. After

the first round, the narrator commented on two notes talked about during the round, saying of the first, "We'll have to see who wrote this one" when that had been almost stated straight out. Of the second he said, "Of course this was written by [Blank]" at which we all yelled "WHAT!!!" stopped the tape, and pawed through our manuals looking for how we were supposed to have known this. Eventually, we concluded that we had all failed to make the necessary illogical inference.

Despite having six suspects and three rounds, we spent more time playing this game and less time on accusations than almost any other game. We usually take a lot of time on accusations, because we thoroughly discuss what every suspect was up to, etc. Through watching lots of players doing these games, I've come to see that players only spend a lot of time trying to piece everything together at the end when they're involved in the puzzle and feel like it's logical enough that if they keep turning the details around they'll see how everything fits together. In the case of this game, however, during the third round we realized that there just simply was not enough evidence available to conclusively say which of the suspects' attempts actually caused the victim's death. Very disappointing.

The invitation neglects to mention what year this takes place, so several guests came in present day garb, and were chagrined to be see everyone else in period attire. Actually, the thing we had the most fun with in playing this game was accents--and that really had nothing to do with the game itself. (You see, "May" decided she was Irish, and her terrific accent kept throwing the rest of us off. And "Leonora" kept falling into a Southern accent, and "Luc," who had no accent to start with, gradually learned how to do a French accent...and, well, never mind...)

I really don't want to trash this game, because bePuzzled's done a lot of things right. I'm willing to chalk up the problems with this episode to insufficient playtest, but I'm still not going to recommend it. Skip It.

++++
c. (Max Haines) An Evening of Murder (Canada Games)
++++

"Love and Marriage"

"Beyond the Grave"

"Resort to Murder"



"Winner Take All"

"Last Kiss"

++++
d. Murder Mystery Party (University Games)
++++

Murder Mystery Party (MMP) was the first of the published murder-parties- in-a-box, and has sold a half-million copies worldwide since its first release in the early 80's. This is the "straightest" game of this type to hit the market--no humorous names like MalC or HTHAM, no characters-who-turn-out-to-be-aliens like Milton Bradley's now-defunct Life of the Party. MMP is Dragnet to HTHAM's Naked Gun. It's also a lot simpler--the game is four "chapters" long, and each character only has one clue per chapter. However, I do know one person who prefers MMP's format to any other "because you don't have to concentrate as hard--it's not so much like work." So if you've played some of the other games, liked the concept, but felt overwhelmed by the quantity of detail presented, try a MMP.

Format:

At the start of the game, the players silently read their Background sheets, which consists of two sections, labeled "Use this information to introduce yourself to the group" and "Keep this information secret unless you are asked." *Note: although the Party Instructions don't point this out at all, this is the only information characters receive about themselves and their actions for the entire game. So the murderer knows they are the guilty party from the start. This places more of a burden on the murderer's acting ability than either HTHAM or MalC.* A cassette outlining the circumstances of the murder is played--the salient details are also included in the Group Evidence Sheet. The players introduce themselves in character, and then players read their information for Chapter 1. This consists of a clue about one or more of the other characters. These facts are revealed in conversation. There are four chapters, and each chapter has a descriptive title. After the fourth chapter, guests make their accusations, and the solution (a separate sheet) is read, explaining who did it, how, and why.

Host Helps:

The invitations are very simple and small. Just a sentence or two inviting the character to clear his name in this



murder, and leaving room for the details of where and when the characters plan to meet. Inside is a short clipping listing a few facts about the murder and the suspects.

The Party Suggestions consist of menu suggestions, costume suggestions, and a few creative but easy ideas for recreating the feeling of the setting. All recipes for the menu are included--even for the drink suggestions.

I've only played one of these--my writing partner has played another game from this line that is now discontinued.

Regular Murder Mystery Party Games (retail \$20)

Revenge in Rome (6 players)

Murder on Misty Island (8 players)

When an Angel Dies (8 players)

Murder Mystery Party Deluxe (retail \$25)

The Icicle Twist (8 players)

"Boris Ivanovitch was anticipating an exciting evening attending a party at Michael Maitland's Cottonwood condominium. Three hours later he was found stabbed to death on the condo deck. The guests at the party all appeared very uncomfortable. They are the only suspects:"

Michael Maitland (the victim's friend and host), Laura Maitland (Denver police surgeon, Michael's sister), Madison Weston (private investigator), Samantha Weston (Madison's daughter), Alicia Tomasini (international jetsetter), Buzzy Reinhart (ski shop proprietor), Roberto Martine (Michael's bodyguard), and Tiffany Enderly (stewardess).

Nothing earth-shaking here, but still very enjoyable. Our group, used to long and intense evenings with HTHAM, liked the idea of a shorter game with more of a chance to socialize. The solution was actually a little too straightforward for most of us--several players came up with more creative plot ideas than the game had. The characters are good, the menu is simple but appropriate (chili with cornbread, stuffed mushrooms, hot spiked cider and Irish mocha coffee).

A Very Good, judging it as a MMP and not a HTHAM.

Revenge of Konan Castle (6 players)



Death in St. James Park (6 players)

THE INTERACTIVE LITERATURE FOUNDATION

THE FINAL VOYAGE OF THE MARY CELESTE by Jim MacDougall:

In 1872, the brigantine "Mary Celeste" was found drifting in the North Atlantic. There was no one on board, and no indication of what had happened to her crew.

"The Final Voyage of the Mary Celeste" is an IL style game that puts you on the Mary Celeste for that final voyage. Find out what strange events could have caused the mysterious disappearance of the entire crew, or come up with a new cause of your own.

"The Final Voyage of the Mary Celeste" is a 3-4 hour game for 8 men, 4 women, and a cat. (The ship's cat is a player character and can be played by either man or woman.) The package comes with 13 full character sheets, 5 back-up characters (in case someone gets killed), rules, GM notes, and item cards. It is available in either Word Perfect 5.1 or ASCII format.

NOTE from Joseph Dzikiewicz: I have played this game. It is one of the best mini-games (i.e., evening game) that I have ever played.

THE MARIN COUNTY NEW AGE SOCIETY COCKTAIL PARTY by Jim MacDougall:

Once a month, for the last four years, noted psychic Dorotea Schreckenghast has been having a few friends over to her secluded beach house, north of San Francisco. The New Age Society is an informal gathering of the fairly wealthy and the mostly bored, all with a common interest in the unexplained.

But things have not been going well for the New Age Society. Several Marin County residents, including most of the Society members, have suffered at the hands of a notorious cat burglar. Even worse than this are the murders. Four members of the society have been murdered or have disappeared in as many months.

This should be no concern this evening. This is, after all, a party. And you never know what's going to happen at one of Dori Schrenkenghat's parties...



"The Marin Country New Age Society Cocktail Party" is an IL style game for 5-6 men and 5-6 women. Several characters can have their gender changed with little trouble. The package comes with 12 full character sheets, 3 back-up characters, rules, item cards, and GM notes. It is available in either Word Perfect 5.1 or ASCII format.

HOST YOUR OWN THEATRICAL MURDER

This section is really a combination of the previous groups. Here, you purchase the script and act it out for a group of friends or associates.

California:

Tom and Penny Warner

Contact: Tom or Penny Warner, tpwarner@netcom.com
710 Sinnet Court
Danville, CA 94526
(510) 837-7089

Available Scripts:

"Murder At The Library" - This unique whodunnit, set in a library, features a librarian, a mystery writer, and six other related suspects. The tongue-in-cheek play begins with a book signing party, where the suspects are introduced:

Agatha Mystry (the celebrated author)
Lotta Books (the hosting librarian)
Dell Doubleday (the writers publisher)
Dalton. B. Walden (the local bookseller)
Page Turner (the cynical book critic)
Alexa Dynasty (the trashy mini-series star)
Ron Bonzo (the local politician)
and Sam Slayed (the chief of police)

"Murder Of The Loaded Librarian"

"Murder Of The Mystery Writer"

Canada:

Armstrong Entertainment
914-165 Ontario Street
St. Catherines, Ontario
L2R 5K4, (905) 684-2654

Contact: Bob Armstrong

Specialities: Use an outside cast or your own actors

%% 2.1 Where can I purchase a Murder Mystery Party game?



Most of these games can be purchased at any hobby store or department store with a reasonable toy section. However here is the addresses to the main manufacturers:

Decipher Inc
PO Box 56
Norfolk, VA
23501
(804) 623-3600
fax: (804) 623-3630

bePuzzled
Lombard Marketing, Inc.
22 East Newberry Road
Bloomfield, CT
06002
1-800-874-6556
OrderLine 1-800-231-1699

% 2.2 Where can I attend a Murder Mystery Dinner near [my town]?

Good question! Look in your yellow pages under Entertainment and see what you find. If you discover anything, email me and I'll include it in this list!

% 2.3 ARE THERE ANY MURDER MYSTERY BOARD GAMES OUT THERE?

Yes, the obvious one is Clue, but it's a little trivial for most players. Another is "Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective" This game has received lots of favorable comments from rec.games.board readers and is also available in a computer version. It does **not** require dice, or luck ... it is all deductive reasoning skills and is very detailed in its presentation. For group play, everyone works together to obtain clues, etc but makes accusations individually.

It is created by:

Chessex West
2990 San Pablo Ave., Berkley, CA 94702
(510) 843-1194 fax: (510) 843-9257

Chessex Mountain
826 South Lincoln, Longmont, CO 80501
(303) 776-9255 fax:(303) 776-5103

Chessex Midwest
5109 Executive Blvd., Ft.Wayne, IN 46808



(800) 444-3552 fax: (219) 482-5296

Chessex East
The Byrne Building, Lincoln & Morgan Sts.
Phoenixville, PA 19460
(800) 876-2193 fax: (215) 935-4933

Another is "221B Baker Street". From most of the comments on rec.games.board this is a step up from Clue and down from Consulting Detective. I haven't played either so can't really comment. Anyone???

% 2.4 HOW CAN I FIND A IMM NEAR MY HOMETOWN?

Good question! Look in your yellow pages under Entertainment and see what you find. If you discover anything, email me and I'll include it in this list!

Gold Hill Colorado
The Bluebird Lounge
Average cost: \$175 U.S./couple for mystery, dinner and overnight lodging.
Private parties available
Phone: Bluebird Lodge (303) 443-6475
Till Death Do Us Party, (303) 451-6748

Gananoque, Ontario
Country Squire (contact for latest schedule)
715 King St E, Gananoque, Ont
K7G 1H4, 1-800-267-9415

Ottawa, Ontario
The Marble Works Resturant
14 Waller St, Ottawa, Ont K1N 9C4
(613) 235-6764
Every Friday and Saturday Evening @ 7-10pm
Price: Dinner and Show: \$35.00/person (soup, salad, main course, dessert, and coffee; beverages, taxes, tips extra)

Toronto
The Old Mill
Matinee, Wednesdays at 11:15 am (\$36.95 for lunch and show, \$20 for show only, Groups: \$31.95/person for 10+ people, \$15 show only)

Royal York Hotel
Thursday, Friday & Saturday evenings 6:30pm



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| THE MURDER PARTIES FAQ & REVIEW |
+-----+
|           Please, Just the FAQ's!           |
+-----+
| Revision 1.2 - March 18, 1994 |
|                   PART 3                   |
+-----+
| Created and Managed by: |
| |
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| Kingston, Ontario |
| Canada, K7L 5P5 |
| |
| Email: |
| sandy@cs.mun.ca |
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%% 3.0 I WOULD LIKE TO WRITE AN IMM. HOW DO I DO IT?

This space for rent! Please offer comments and more detailed questions as you see fit!

%% 3.1 I HAVE WRITTEN AN IMM PARTY, HOW DO I MARKET IT?

This space for rent! Please offer comments and more detailed questions as you see fit!

%% 3.2 I HAVE AN IDEA FOR A NEW TYPE OF IMM GAME, WHO DO I CONTACT?

This space for rent! Please offer comments and more detailed questions as you see fit!

%% 3.3 IS THERE ANY GOOD UTILITY SOFTWARE FOR ASSISTING ME IN CREATING IMM'S?

There are some screen play and story board utility programs available (I have the names and addresses, but have to hunt them down ... will have for version 1.0). The story board program allows you to manage 5x7 index cards on a computer "corkboard" you can zoom up or down on the cards to see more of your play or more detail on particular parts. Haven't used it, but it looks interesting.

%% 3.4 CAN YOU SUGGEST ANY GOOD BOOKS ON WRITING IMM'S OR



MYSTERIES IN GENERAL?

One book I have found to be particularly useful in this area is:

Writing The Modern Mystery
Barbara Norville
Writers Digest Books
ISBN 0-89879052309
PN3377.5.D4N67 1986 808'.02 86-15795

Mrs. Norville was the editor of Inner Sanctum Mysteries at Simon & Schuster for ten years. She then went on to create her own mystery line. She has worked with more than 150 writers. Lots of great tips here!

THE HOWDUNIT SERIES

There is also a good series of books from Writers Digest Books, called their Howdunit Series. These titles are specifically for mystery writers and cover a wide range of interesting topics (as listed below). They can be ordered from:

Writers Digest Books
1507 Dana Avenue
Cincinnati, OH 45207
1-800-289-0923

The titles are:

"Private Eyes: A writers guide to Private Investigators" - A detailed examination of exactly how private investigators work. #10373/208 pgs, \$15.95

"Police Procedural: A writers guide to the Police and how they work" - Takes you into the day-to-day world of policework and police investigations. #10374/304 pgs/\$16.95

"Cause Of Death: A writers guide to Death, Murder & Forensic Medicine" - Details what happens to a body from trauma to burial, including how police determine the type of crime. #10318/240 pgs, \$15.95

"Scene Of The Crime: A writers guide to Crime Scene Investigations" - This factual, time saving guide provides step-by-step details on the investigatory process at the crime scene. #10319/240 pgs, \$15.95

"Deadly Doses: A writers guide to Poisons" - Answers all the



questions you have when "poisoning off" a character.
Includes symptoms, reaction time and antidotes. #10177/320
pgs, \$16.95

"Armed & Dangerous: A writers guide to Weapons" - Explains
firearms in an accessible and easy-to-understand manner,
including hundreds of examples. #10176/186 pgs, \$14.95

USBORNE WHODUNNITS

Another interesting series is the Usborne Whodunnits. There
are only three books in this series of kids mystery stories,
but they are very well done and scream interactive! I really
enjoyed these books even if they are aimed at kids (then
again, why else would you be reading this FAQ)?!

The three titles are:

The Deckchair Detectives
Murder Unlimited
The Missing Clue

The books have cartoon pages with textual passages. The
reader searches the text and pictures for clues and must form
an accusation at the end of the book. Interesting reference
material.

1992 - Usborne Publishing Ltd
Usborne House, 83-85 Saffron Hill, London
EC1N 8RT, England

This space for rent! Please offer comments and more detailed
questions as you see fit!

<< END OF FAQ >>

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Mr. Sandy Walsh| I wish that I die peacefully in my sleep like
my Dad ...
sandy@cs.mun.ca| and not screaming hysterically like his
passengers.

