Jack Pachuta's

Super-Secret

Murder Mystery

Writing System

The layout of this workbook

Because this workbook was designed for use in murder mystery party writing seminars, it has left-hand and right-hand pages. Keep this in mind as you are running it off.

If you want to, you can three-hole punch the pages and store them in a binder so that you can record your work and have an easy-to-use bookshelf reference.

Questions? Call (262)377-7230.

Greetings, Prospective Mystery Party Writer!

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Jack Pachuta and in the guise of my alter ego, **The Chief Inspector**, I've been authoring murder mystery parties for fun and profit since 1982.

You may have been to my websites:

- *www.mysteries-on-the-net.com,*
- *www.kids-mysteries.com* and
- *www.murdermysteryatsea.com.*

On them, you'll find a variety of scenarios and events to please even the most discriminating sleuths.

Everyday, I find myself fielding questions from colleagues like you - all of whom want to develop and write their own murder mystery party events. SO . . . I've designed this workbook to lead prospective whodunit writers through the same process that I use to design my challenging plots.

By following this step-by-step process, you'll be able to finalize your own six-suspect murder mystery party. That's right - these simple, easy steps will lead you through my Super-Secret Murder Mystery Writing System. Just complete them in sequence and you'll have a murder mystery party scenario to wow your friends and make them want to jump up and cheer. Here's what to do . . .
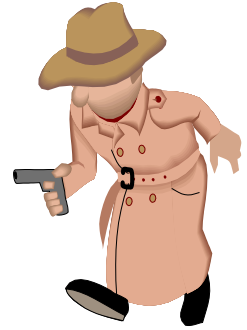
How to use this workbook

The steps in my murder mystery writing process are mapped out with magnifying glasses similar to the one on the right. Each step is described and fully explained. The steps are part of "chapters" that divide the entire system into bitesize chunks that can be digested before moving on to the next chapter. Record your nefarious thoughts in my logical sequence - it's quite elementary - and you'll have mastered a technique that will lead to fun, adventure, and hours of thoughtful repartee with your investigative associates.

Enjoy your journey through my mystery writing system and happy sleuthing.

Regards,

Jack Pachuta

The Chief Inspector

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Contents

7 Secrets for Writing a Successful Murder Mystery Party

Murder mystery parties are unique in their plots and in their logistics. While all of the intrigues of a well-drafted mystery novel must be present, the entire event must be effectively organized as an evening's entertainment. Over the past two decades, I've used the following Seven Secrets to create popular, cohesive murder mystery events.
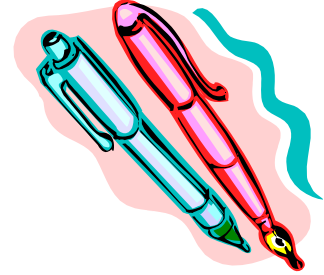
These secrets will be reinforced as you complete each step of my system. They form the basis for finalizing a plot that will be both challenging and memorable for your guests.

This workbook covers the development of the plot, leading to as logical "denouement." (That's a French word that means we'll be tying up all loose ends and reachig a logical conclusion to the mystery.) Remember . . . my step-by-step approach is geared toward organizing and conducting a Murder Mystery Party. It enables you to organize and facilitate an event that will be coordinated as an evening or weekend event.

Some of the techniques could also be used to write a mystery novel. A novel allows you to have more intense character development and more details than does a mystery event. When you complete all pages of this workbook, you'll have a cohesive murder mystery party plot that can will be memorable and challenging.

In my second workbook, "Jack Pachuta's Super-Secret Mystery Party Development System," you'll be able to take this plot and structure it into an evening's entertainment that will be recalled and talked about for years.

Here are my Seven Secrets:

SECRET #1: Give all suspects a motive.
Most people start investigating the "crime" by attempting to find the reason for the evil deed. Every suspect in the plot line must have a good reason for wanting to do away with the victim. You'll find that your investigators will spend the initial part of the event delving into motives. Reveal enough information to whet their appetites about why each of the suspects had a reason to commit murder.

SECRET #2: Use lots of red herrings.
Intentionally do what magicians do - use "misdirection" to take people down investigative paths that prove to be fruitless. Each suspect should have at least two false leads, or "red herrings" built into his or her background information. The nature and timing of these red herrings is determined during your plot development. They could be revealed in a variety to ways during the event. Part of the challenge for your investigators will be to analyze all of the facts about the red herrings before moving on with the investigation.

SECRET #3: Develop a least three storylines.
Within the total mystery plot, put together three storylines – separate stories about why and how smaller groupings of suspects know each other and could have wanted to have murdered the victim. The storylines should expand on the suspects' motives and make logical cases for being the correct lines of investigation.

SECRET #4: Provide information about only motive at the start of the investigation.
In the preliminary information that is given to the investigators, allude to the reasons "why" the suspects would want to murder the victim. Save the "how" and "when" until later.

SECRET #5: Use "means" and "opportunity" to identify the killer.
Since all suspects have motives for committing the crime, the specifics of the murder scene and the actions of the suspects will focus in on the guilty party.

SECRET #6: Be theatrical.
In writing style and in the information provided to investigators, be melodramatic. Have fun with the plot and make tongue-in-cheek comments.

SECRET #7: Drop the "smoking gun" clue when the party is 75% over.
Too much information too soon will mean that the crime can be solved too quickly. Hold back the last piece of critical information until the three-quarters point of the party. This keeps the excitement going until the last sleuthing minute.

Chapter 1

It was a dark and stormy plot!

In this chapter, you'll lay the foundation for the plot and the suspect development

STEP 1: Scenario Synopsis - Develop your basic plot idea to set the stage for your investigation.

STEP 2: Suspect Synopsis - Determine the individuals who would have wanted to murder the victim.

STEP 3: Suspect Relationships - Figure out the contact and interaction among the suspects.

1 Scenario Synopsis

The first step in writing a murder mystery is to create a synopsis of the scenario. The worksheet on the next two pages will help you set the stage for your plot and your character development. Here's what to complete under each heading:

Mood/Theme of the Mystery - The mood or theme is the historical reference or specific content of the mystery. Referring to examples from my website, *Mysteries on the Net*, you could have a Wild West mystery, or a winery mystery, or an all-woman mystery. The mood or theme determines all subsequent work.

Setting - The setting is the location where the mystery is taking place. This could be, for example, in a winery, on a boat, in a mansion, or even at a specific location in a particular city. (Although this is very tricky if members of your audience are very familiar with the location.)

Location of the Body - This refers to the exact spot where the body of the victim was found. It could be, for instance, floating in the river, under an oak tree, at the bottom of a staircase, or on a beach.

Cause of Death - This describes how the victim died. Only a brief overview should be revealed at the start of the mystery. Later, additional details should be added in the form of, say, a newscast, a coroner's report, a police report, or other similar methods of notification. Examples of cause of death are a stab wound to the heart, strangulation, or a blow to the head. If *too much* about the cause of death is revealed up front, the murder could be solved *too soon*. Facts must be built upon other facts to achieve a satisfactory resolution to the case.

Clues found on the Body - What facts about the body can be used by the investigators when solving the case? Some of the information can be "red herrings," facts that might seem important but that lead the investigators down a false path. The clues can refer to physical objects found on the body, or even to the positioning of the body. For instance, objects could be found in pockets, markings could be left in the sand, or jewelry can be worn by the victim.

Clues found in the Vicinity of the Body - What other objects or details in the immediate area around the body should the investigators be aware of? For example, it could be an open window with unique scrapings on the window sill, or marks left on a wall from a stolen painting.

Name of the Victim - While you may want to name the victim as soon as you start writing, I've found it easier to think of a name after the above details of the scenario are finalized. I like names will illiteration such as Myron Mason, Peter Petulant, Bertha Brothert, etc., etc.

Important Facts about the Victim - What should be known up front to help the investigators develop theories about why someone would have wanted to kill this person? The victim, for instance, could have been a greedy industrialist, a fortune teller to the rich and famous, or a wealthy casino owner. **THIS IS IMPORTANT:** *Make the victim someone with a shaky past that few, if any people, feel any affection for. It's easier to investigate the death of someone who deserved to meet an untimely end than someone whom many people liked and respected.*

Scenario Synopsis

Mood/Theme of the Mystery:

Setting:

Location of the Body:

Cause of Death:

Clues found on the Body:

Clues found in the Vicinity of the Body:

Name of the Victim:

Important Facts about the Victim: