



Skullduggery

January 2010

The Official Newsletter of the Susquehanna Mysteries Alliance

Mystery Books
UFOs & Aliens
Cryptozoology
Preserving History
Psychic Abilities
Unsolved Murders
Vampires
Mystical Locations
Angels
Interesting Crimes
Werewolves
Ghosts & Hauntings
Time Slips
Mythical Creatures
Telepathy
ESP
Life After Death
Legends
Haunted Places
Magic
Miracles
Premonitions
Telepathy
Halloween
Lost Treasures
Time Travel
Necromancy
Folklore
Zombies
Anomalous Zones
And More ...

Get a Clue

What is the Susquehanna Mysteries Alliance?

The Susquehanna Mysteries Alliance (SMA) is a society comprised of dedicated, open-minded professionals and members who are committed to researching, investigating and studying a myriad of mysterious subjects.

The Susquehanna Mysteries Alliance resolves to be engaged in continually educating members about the processes of perpetuating historical facts, legends & lore, as well as, historical preservation and other relevant subjects.

The Susquehanna Mysteries Alliance is obligated to educate its members and the general public regarding the mysterious, paranormal and/or historical events and promoting historical and mystical sites, locations, persons, artifacts and documents.

The purpose of this newsletter is keep members (and non-members) up to date on news, area and SMA events, ideas, oddities, curiosities, articles of interest and general membership information with the result of informing and entertaining. Ideas, articles and photos are always welcome and appreciated.

We hope you enjoy the material included in our first newsletter!

Winter is the Perfect Time for Mysteries

When the weather outside is frightful, make yourself a cup of hot cocoa, light a candle, get cozy on the couch with a fluffy blanket and a good mystery book! Or gather some good friends, put out some munchies and play a mystery game. If you're feeling really energetic, host a mystery dinner! Check out page 2 for more information on how to host a murder mystery dinner party!

Don't let the cold stop you from having an exciting adventure!

Hosting a Murder Mystery Dinner Party

What's in the Kit and What You'll Do

By Donna Pilato

From About.com Guide



I had the pleasure to attend a murder mystery dinner party several weeks ago hosted at the home of friends. My only previous experience with murder mystery theater was in a large restaurant where actors played all the parts and diners tried to solve the mystery. The problem was that it was impossible to hear much of the dialogue, let alone many of the clues, amidst the restaurant confusion. I can say, without any hesitation, that I enjoyed the "home" variety much better.

The Kit

The way most murder mystery dinners usually work is that the host of the party purchases a kit. The kit includes a story about a murder that occurs either during the course of the dinner or before the party even begins. There are a specific number of characters in the story to match the size of your group, with background information, costume instructions and a package of clues for each one. The more outrageously your guests dress up, the greater the potential for an entertaining evening.

Also included in the kit may be invitations to the party, a guide to running the mystery (with party tips) for the host, and even prizes for the person who guesses the murderer. You must insist that your guests RSVP for this party, since all characters must be played. You wouldn't want the murderer to be a "no show."

Murder mystery kits can be purchased "off-the-shelf" or custom designed for your group. Since our dinner was held on Cinco de Mayo, our hosts selected a plot that was set at a Mexican resort hotel. The characters in this story could be played with enough quirkiness to be amusing with parts such as a bar dancer, gardener, bartender and assorted wait staff. The murder of the hotel owner had taken place prior to the party so our mission was to share information in order to deduce which of us was the murderer. The menu consisted of Mexican food and drinks, with lots of sangria, margaritas, tequila and Corona.

The Activities

When you send out your invitations to the party, you will include the character description, costume suggestions and background for the story to your guests. Over the course of the evening everyone will receive additional clues to their own character and the murder which they will need to reveal to the rest of the guests. With some kits the host knows who the murderer is. In others, such as the one we played, no one knows a thing until it is revealed during the dinner.

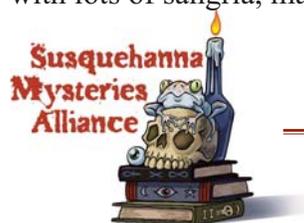
At our party we received the clues in between each course and spent about fifteen minutes per scene revealing the necessary information to one another with each person attempting to act in character. I would estimate that the typical murder mystery could be completed within 2 1/2 hours, although if you linger over cocktails and appetizers or dessert and coffee the night can go on as long as you wish.

The Keys to a Successful Murder Mystery

Our group knows one another well enough that any deviation from normal character was potentially amusing. Several members of the group went full tilt with their costumes and really got into their parts. Costumes were not difficult or expensive, drawing on everyday items to complete our ensembles. I think we all agreed that it was a fun evening, and a different experience.

In order for a dinner party like this to be successful, your guests need to be willing to be "on stage" a bit. Anyone who is shy in front of groups might feel that participating is difficult, especially if you're hosting it for a large group. I think our comfort with one another may have also assisted the quieter members of the group in feeling relaxed enough to play a part.

Continued on Page 3.



Planning the Menu and Decorations

I recommend basing the number of courses for your meal on the number of scenes in your murder mystery. You'll have that information when you receive your kit. That way the mystery can be played out in between each of your courses as we did, and discussed while you eat each course. However, some of these kits are designed for cocktail parties and the guests are expected to walk around and interact throughout the evening. You'll need to see what the specific requirements are for your kit when

you purchase it. If you have a definite idea of how you would like your dinner to run, I recommend asking around to find the mystery that suits your plan.

Many of these plots take place in a specific country or time period. That makes decorating and menu planning for the dinner fairly simple if you stick to the theme. For example, some of the plots I've seen are set in Paris, the Old West and Rome.

If your mystery does not come with a built-in theme, use a "deadly" menu to add a little extra excitement.



Serve these appropriate dishes for your mystery dinner party!

DEATH BY CHOCOLATE

Ingredients:

- 1 (19.8 ounce) package brownie mix
- 2 (3.9 ounce) packages instant chocolate pudding mix
- 1 (16 ounce) package frozen whipped topping, thawed
- 3 (1.4 ounce) bars chocolate covered English toffee

Directions:

Prepare brownies according to package directions. Let cool.

Mix pudding according to package directions.

In a glass punch bowl, layer in the following order:
1/2 of the brownie, crumbled; 1/2 of the pudding;
1 toffee bar, crushed; 1/2 of the whipped topping.

Repeat layers in the same order. Save the last toffee bar to crumble and sprinkle on top before serving.

Refrigerate. Best if made the day before you serve it.

KILLER POTATO CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

- 1 (32 ounce) package frozen potatoes au gratin
- 1 (16 ounce) container sour cream
- 4 cups shredded Cheddar cheese
- 2 (10.75 ounce) cans condensed cream of chicken soup
- 4 cups crushed cornflakes cereal

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

In a large bowl combine the potatoes, sour cream, cheese and soup and mix well.

Spread mixture into a 9x13 inch baking dish and top with crushed corn flakes.

Bake for 75 minutes, or until cooked through and golden .



Become a Member of the SKELETON CREW

SMA's "Skeleton Crew" is a committee that occasionally volunteers for area community projects, including cemetery/graveyard and historical location clean up days among other community and charity efforts. If you want to be a member of the "Skeleton Crew," just let us know at meetings or send an e-mail to: SusquehannaMysteriesAlliance@live.com



Stephen King Writing Follow Up to *The Shining*

Horror author Stephen King announced in late November that he's started writing a sequel to *The Shining*!

King revealed at an appearance in Toronto, Canada, that the new novel, with a working title of *Doctor Sleep*, will jump ahead 40 years from where the last novel left off and follow the story of Danny Torrance, son of *The Shining*'s lead character, Jack.

The author joked with the crowd, telling them he's a bit nervous to write the novel, but said, "Maybe if I keep talking about it I won't have to write it."



Mystery Genres-Which do you Prefer?

If there's a dead body in the story, it's a mystery!
But did you know there are different genres of mysteries?



◆ Locked Room/Puzzle

A murder victim is discovered in a room or enclosure with no apparent exit, leaving the detective to ascertain the killer's means of escape

◆ Cozy

Usually focuses on a small group of people in a small village or town, generally bloodless murder, non-professional investigator as main character

◆ Hard-Boiled

Tough guy private eye as main character, violent crime, usually urban environments

◆ Soft-Boiled

Lighter tone than the hard-boiled genre

◆ Police Procedural

Usually center on a single police force or precinct, often showcasing more than one crime, generally bloody murders, realism

◆ Chick Lit

Generally written by females for females. Woman main character who has an amazingly active lifestyle and romantic entanglements who is not a professional investigator

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