

Cold-Blooded Murder:

Game Master Information

THESE ARE THE GAME MASTER NOTES. THEY CONTAIN TOP SECRET INFORMATION RELATING TO THE STORY. IF YOU ARE NOT THE GAME MASTER, DO NOT READ THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

First, and most importantly: **this is not a standard murder mystery game.** It is designed to seem like a standard murder mystery game, except it is a ruse and all-but-one of the players are “in on it”. This murder mystery is best for a birthday party, retirement party, or other similar event where you are targeting a specific honoree (who will play Murphy in the game). For best results, the person playing Murphy should ideally enjoy murder mystery parties and be comfortable being the centre of attention. It is very important that neither the Game Master nor the players reveal that Murphy is playing a different game than the rest of the players.

Your Role

Much of your role as Game Master will take place before the event, coordinating the other players and assisting them in developing their characters. You will also manage the timeline of events during the game. This role is suitable for a somewhat beginner Game Master, as you will have support from the players during planning and the game itself. You do not play a character during the event.

Setting

The game is set in the present day at an Antarctic research station during the “Spring Thaw Festival”. The hundreds of summer researchers, soldiers and military support, cooks, caterers, logistics folks, etc., departed in February and the winter skeleton crew have been hunkered down enduring the long dark winter. The entire crew is at a party to celebrate the long winter drawing to a close.

Notably absent from the party is the research station’s Director, who would normally be the Master of Ceremony for the festival...

In terms of physical setting, the main part of the game can be played either indoors or outdoors, but the final scene will require an indoor space that can be put into total darkness (e.g., thick curtains or covered windows). You can also decorate the final room to emphasize Murphy’s descent into insanity.

The Characters

In this game, all the players except Murphy will construct their own characters. As Game Master, you will need to make sure that the player roles are balanced and interconnected.

- **Number of players:** this game can play with any number of characters. One player is the featured player, but they do not know this.
- **Age and experience level:** this game is adjustable to various ages, although it does involve a lot of murder. Players do not need to be experienced with murder mysteries, but they need to be competent enough actors to not reveal any secret information.

Murphy

Murphy is the police/investigator character in the story, which is a standard murder mystery character trope. The investigator character usually has the straightforward objective of discovering who the murderer is before the end of the game and arresting them. This should keep Murphy busy throughout the party, as they will need to examine any available evidence and determine who had the motive and opportunity to murder. In this story, the surprise twist is that Murphy is the murderer, but they don't know it (yet). They had a dissociative fugue where they murdered the Director, but they are being prompted to think that another player knocked them out (presumably to cover up murdering the Director), which is why they don't remember anything. This will come to a climax at the end of the game when Murphy murders the rest of the players.

You can modify Murphy's character brief to tie it in with the other characters. For example, Murphy currently starts the game with a bag of mysterious white powder, which is intended to tie into a drug-dealing character (either investigating or assisting them), but this can be modified if it suits the side-stories better.

Other Characters

The PLAYERS know that Murphy is the murderer, but the CHARACTERS do not.

In preparation for the game, each player will need to design their own character (see the "Player Information" document). We have provided a few example characters as a guide, but strongly recommend that players design their own character. It may be especially fun for players to do together or in small groups, so they can come up with inter-connected backstories, intrigues, and secrets for their characters. The process of designing their own character will make it easier for players to think on their feet during the event and be comfortable adding and amending character details in response to Murphy's ideas, assumptions, and accusations.

The characters will each have a motive for wanting the Director dead, plus plenty of other drama and intrigue: affairs, drugs, blackmail, embezzling money, you name it. The other characters will need enough to talk about amongst themselves so that they're not overly focussed on Murphy during the game. When developing characters, players should consider:

- *Why might their character want the Director dead?* The Director wasn't very popular amongst research station staff. How might your character benefit from their death? Did your character have the opportunity to murder them, or do they have an alibi leading up to the party? The evidence shouldn't point too strongly towards one specific character.
- *What are their relationships with the other characters?* The characters don't all need to have relationships with each other, as that can get unwieldy with a large number of players, but each character should have a couple of allies and a couple of enemies. It may help to have a flow chart of relationships between the characters to keep track.
- *What are their secrets?* The characters should all have secrets that they don't want revealed.
- *What motivation does their character have to talk to Murphy?* In most cases, this could simply be to report other character's secrets, but you can also drag Murphy into some of the affairs, drug dealing, etc. going on in the game.

- Players should not let Murphy know that they are developing their own characters. The characters should each have a character sheet so that it looks like they were provided a character, just as Murphy was.

As Game Master, you will help to coordinate the characters and ensure that their roles are balanced. If someone has a secret, someone else should secretly know their secret. If someone has a clear motive or opportunity for murdering the director, someone else should have (but not necessarily be motivated to reveal) an alibi for them. Characters don't need to be incredibly detailed, but should have enough relationships, motives, and backstory that their player usually has something juicy to say when they interact with Murphy.

If you know that some of your players enjoy improvising and being in the spotlight, you can make this more likely to happen by giving their characters more links to other characters (e.g., "is having an affair with...", "had their secret diary read by ...", "... knows about their sordid past", etc.). If a player is more introverted, they may enjoy a character with fewer links and a simpler backstory.

Items

The items you will need for this game are:

- a fake axe (or whatever the murder weapon is) covered in fake blood
- a body, or a representation of a body
- a slip of paper that says "NEW GOAL: Discover who murdered the Director" to give to Murphy after the body is discovered
- fake blood (optional, but fun)
- a cake, or other celebratory dessert

Additionally, players will need:

- distinctive clothing that is easy to swap with other players
- name tags
- whatever items/props they want for their characters

To simplify your job, you can ask players to find or make the items for their characters. For example, a secret undercover spy may have some fake passports that another character finds, a character with a secret addiction may have a forged prescription slip, etc. Players can use their props to add drama when interacting with Murphy, or give them to another player to secretly reveal to Murphy behind their back.

Gameplay

The players (other than Murphy) should all know how the gameplay is going to unfold. Ensuring that all players have a solid shared understanding of these four scenes is the MOST IMPORTANT part of preparation. Everything else can be improvised or adjusted by players on-the-fly, as long as everyone is fully coordinated around this core structure.

The Missing Director (~30 minutes)

Everyone arrives and mingles like it's a normal murder mystery party. When interacting with Murphy, we focus on introducing our character, introducing some of the rivalries we have with other characters,

exposing rivalries and tensions they have with each other, and suggesting reasons why other characters may have had tension with the Director. People may note that they haven't seen the Director at the party yet.

The Corpse Revealed (~60 minutes)

The Director's body is discovered! Give Murphy their new goal: it's now a murder investigation. Murphy begins questioning and interrogating the other characters. For example, after examining the body, the doctor might reveal that the Director was killed with an axe. We each try to explicitly tell Murphy someone else's motive and give them incriminating information or props. This is a good time to stage loud arguments between your characters where accusations are thrown back and forth (as though you're all also trying to solve the mystery). The Game Master may take players away from the game occasionally to give them items and to give Murphy's player the sense that being taken away by the Game Master is perfectly normal.

Insanity Descends (~20 minutes)

Murphy is taken away by the Game Master to go find a clue (the murder weapon). Meanwhile, everyone else moves indoors (if not already there) and swaps costumes (including nametags). Have fun with the décor: make blood drip down paintings, turn clocks upside down, and rearrange things to suggest that Murphy is losing touch with reality. When Murphy gets back, we all act as though nothing is different, that we've each been that character the whole time. Our characters start asking Murphy why Murphy is acting so strangely, and start to act wary of Murphy as if they're behaving suspiciously. One fun possibility is for the players, who've so far been coming "out of character" to interact with the Game Master, to now stay "in character" and act as if the Game Master isn't there and must be a figment of Murphy's imagination. If the Game Master decides to take this role, they could start whispering paranoid thoughts to Murphy: "Why are they acting like can't they see me anymore? Are they lying to you? Maybe they're all murders? Are they coming for you next? Don't trust anyone!"

The Finale (~20 minutes)

This is a [birthday/retirement/etc.] party, so it's time to bring out the cake! Murphy is given a knife and asked to cut the cake. When they start cutting it, the lights go out. There are screams. The lights come back on, and half of the characters are lying dead and bloodied on the ground. The remaining characters fly into a panic and begin screaming that Murphy is an insane murderer and is going to kill us all.

The lights go out again. There are screams. The lights come back on, and everyone is dead except for Murphy who is holding a knife. You could even attempt to make the knife bloody by cleverly handing Murphy a pre-bloodied knife without them noticing, having the cake filled with blood or having the Game Master pour fake blood on the knife during the lights-out chaos.

If this is a birthday event, players can now sing "You murdered us all" to the tune of "Happy Birthday".

*You murdered us all
You murdered us all
You're a mass-murderer [NAME]
and you murdered us all*

Game Master Checklist

- Put together the invite list. Brief the other players on the gameplay and remind them not to reveal any secrets to Murphy.
- Help players develop their characters and ensure that the characters fit together coherently in the game. You can either have a planning session with the players (don't let Murphy find out) or coordinate separately. Make sure the players are ready for the final scenes and know what their prompts will be.
- Pick a date, time, and venue for the party.
- Send players the background information and their personal character sheet, when completed.
- Prepare items and any décor for the party.
- During the event, you are responsible for progressing the game through the gameplay scenes. You may want to practice run the final scene with the non-Murphy players before the event to ensure it runs smoothly during the event.