

Host a Murder Mystery Party: Original Printable Game

Solve the North Pier Museum case by comparing four statements with a meeting note, badge record, and audit trail.

Host guide / Letter / Adult party mystery / 30–45 minutes

Read the guide privately first if this activity has hidden answers. Print single-sided at Actual size / 100%. Cut only sheets marked CARDS. Keep answer keys with the host.

What you need

- One host copy of the complete packet
- Four role cards, one per role or player pair
- Two clue-round sheets or envelopes
- Paper and pens for a team timeline
- A timer (optional)

How to run it

1. Before play, separate the player briefing, four public role cards, two clue rounds, host-only character note, host hints, and solution card. Give players only their public role cards. Keep every host-only sheet separate until the final reveal.
2. Assign the roles of Mira, Jules, Lena, and Adrian. With fewer than four players, combine roles or have the host read the statements. With more players, make role pairs and one or more investigation teams.
3. Read the opening briefing and ground rule aloud: the fictional death is not described; the group is solving a timeline and evidence puzzle.
4. Give players three minutes to read their roles and note where they were during the preview. Reveal Clue Round One and allow 6–8 minutes to build a timeline.
5. Reveal Clue Round Two. Ask the team to identify a suspect, a motive, and three separate clues that support the conclusion.
6. If needed, give Hint 1, wait at least two minutes, and then offer Hint 2. Do not hand out the host solution before the team commits to a theory or time is called.
7. Read the solution and ending aloud. Debrief how the records narrowed opportunity and why a single suspicious motive would not have been enough. Reset by returning role cards and clues to their labeled sections.

Opening briefing

At 8:31 p.m., caretaker Sam Bell finds museum director Elias Rowan dead in his private office after the North Pier Maritime Museum's preview event. The story does not show how the death occurred and gives no medical or physical details. Staff have paused the event and are preserving the written record. Four people had reasons to be in or near the museum: curator Mira Chen, event host Jules Avery, conservator Lena Ortiz, and finance officer Adrian Vale.

The team is not asked to guess a technical method. Solve the case from the timeline: who could reach the office during the relevant window, whose account conflicts with a reliable record, and what documented issue gave that person a reason to meet the director? The museum's office badge system logs entries, and each staff member has a different assignment during the preview.

- Victim: Elias Rowan, museum director.
- Relevant window: after the 8:13 p.m. call and before the 8:31 p.m. discovery; Rowan was alone in the office at 8:13.
- Team answer: name the responsible person, the reason, and at least three supporting clues.

How to host a fair-play round

Give each participant only the role card assigned to them. Players may volunteer information from their card, but the investigator team should ask concrete questions about times, locations, and records. The host can read role-card details aloud if a participant prefers not to perform. No one has to act out a death, imitate distress, or describe violence.

A strong solution uses more than a motive. Motive narrows the story but does not establish opportunity. The access record, the office window, and the contradiction in one person's departure claim are the decisive chain. Ask the group to keep separate what a witness saw, what a document records, and what they infer. This makes the answer accessible without requiring theatrical improv or specialist knowledge.

- Recommended group: four to ten adults.
- Use a no-score format, or award one point each for person, motive, and three supporting clues.
- Allow a participant to pass on role-play and have the host read that statement.

Host-only solution and debrief

Intended solution: Adrian Vale killed director Elias Rowan during the preview. The fictional motive was to prevent Rowan from confronting him over repeated charges on a museum vendor account. The packet deliberately leaves the manner of death unspecified; the answer rests on opportunity and records, not a physical method.

The fair-play chain is: Rowan's calendar shows an 8:15 invoice-reconciliation meeting with A.V.; the office door log records badge AV-04 entering at 8:14 and leaving at 8:22; the badge custody sheet assigns AV-04 solely to Adrian and shows no handoff or return; Adrian says he left the building at 8:10 and turned in his badge; the front-desk return log has no badge from him; the three other staff accounts align with a stage log, guided-tour roster, or lab sign-in; and the audit sheet links duplicated vendor charges to A.V. No other suspect has the same combination of access, a contradicted departure claim, and a documented reason for the appointment.

The solution is an intended fictional puzzle answer, not a claim that this evidence would meet real investigative or legal standards. During the debrief, ask which clue established access, which established a contradiction, and which gave context for motive.

- Answer: Adrian Vale.
- Motive: conceal repeated vendor-account charges before the director's reconciliation meeting.
- Ending: read the final card verbatim; it keeps the event non-graphic and closes the story.

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R_MYSTERY-001 / Player briefing

PLAYER BRIEFING — THE NORTH PIER PREVIEW

At 8:31 p.m., museum caretaker Sam Bell finds director Elias Rowan dead in his private office during a preview at the fictional North Pier Maritime Museum. The death happens off-page. This activity contains no description of injuries, cause, weapon, or method. The event is paused while staff preserve the records.

Four people had museum duties that evening: curator Mira Chen, host Jules Avery, conservator Lena Ortiz, and finance officer Adrian Vale. The office door is monitored by a staff badge reader, and the preview schedule records where people were assigned.

Your task is to name the person responsible, explain the likely motive, and support your conclusion with at least three clues. Build a timeline before accusing anyone. A motive alone is not enough; look for access and contradictions.

PUZZLE GIVENS: For this closed fictional puzzle, the death was a deliberate act by one of these four staff members after the 8:13 call and before the 8:31 discovery. Rowan was alone in his office at 8:13. The badge-controlled corridor is its only entrance. The door and custody records are complete and accurate, and nobody borrowed, lost, or duplicated a badge. Work only from the supplied evidence; there are no hidden accomplices or unlisted routes. Every person entering the office used their own badge separately and appears in the entry record; nobody followed another person through the door. The culprit was physically present in the office when the deliberate act occurred within that window. There was no earlier, delayed, or remotely triggered act.

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R_MYSTERY-002 / Role card

ROLE CARD — MIRA CHEN, CURATOR

You were leading a guided preview of the North Pier charts in Gallery Two from 8:10 to 8:23 p.m. The tour roster has guest initials at 8:12, 8:17, and 8:21, and the event photographer's contact sheet shows you in the gallery during that interval. You did not enter the director's office that evening.

You disagreed with Rowan about delaying a new map display, but you had no appointment with him during the preview. If investigators ask what you heard, say that you were speaking with visitors and did not hear an argument from the gallery.

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R_MYSTERY-003 / Role card

ROLE CARD — JULES AVERY, EVENT HOST

You introduced the preview and remained on the small main-hall platform from 8:11 to 8:24 p.m. The microphone handoff sheet and two program volunteers can confirm the schedule. You did not have a keycard that opened the director's office corridor.

Rowan had questioned the event budget earlier in the week, but your spending was recorded on the hospitality sheet. You did not meet with Rowan during the relevant window. If asked, explain that you were on the platform when the second welcome announcement was made at 8:16.

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R_MYSTERY-004 / Role card

ROLE CARD — LENA ORTIZ, CONSERVATOR

You worked in the paper lab from 8:08 to 8:25 p.m. The lab sign-in sheet records your start time, and assistant conservator Nia Park checked a humidity log with you at 8:16. You used the west corridor once to bring a folder back to the lab, but you did not enter Rowan's office.

You had argued with Rowan about whether to lend a fragile chart to another museum. You were not scheduled to meet him that evening. If asked, explain that the lab work log and Nia can account for most of your time during the event.

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R_MYSTERY-005 / Role card

ROLE CARD — ADRIAN VALE, FINANCE OFFICER

You handled vendor invoices and held staff badge AV-04. The director scheduled a private 8:15 p.m. “invoice reconciliation” meeting with you. You told the event host that you left the museum at 8:10 and returned your badge at the front desk.

In the role-play, stick to the statement above. Do not invent a badge loan, missing record, additional suspect, or new alibi.

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R_MYSTERY-006 / Clue round one

CLUE ROUND ONE — THE SCHEDULE

- A. Director Rowan's desk calendar has one entry for 8:15 p.m.: "A. Vale — invoice reconciliation."
- B. Office intercom log: at 8:13 p.m., Rowan called the event desk and said, "I am ready for the 8:15 meeting." This is the last confirmed message from him.
- C. Preview assignments: Mira Chen, Gallery Two tour, 8:10–8:23; Jules Avery, main-hall welcome, 8:11–8:24; Lena Ortiz, paper lab, 8:08–8:25; Adrian Vale, "available for director meeting."
- D. Guest services recorded the event beginning at 8:10 p.m. and no guest access to staff-only rooms.

Discuss: Which statements are supported by a schedule? Which person had a planned one-to-one meeting with Rowan? What additional evidence would be needed before making a conclusion?

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R_MYSTERY-007 / Clue round two

CLUE ROUND TWO — BADGE AND AUDIT RECORDS

E. Office corridor badge log: AV-04 entered at 8:14 p.m. and exited at 8:22 p.m. The time is generated by the door reader. No other office-corridor entry appears from Rowan's 8:13 message through the 8:31 discovery.

F. Badge custody sheet: AV-04 was assigned to Adrian Vale at 5:02 p.m. No checkout, duplicate, or handoff appears before the 8:31 p.m. discovery. The front-desk return log has no badge recorded from Adrian.

G. Adrian's written statement: "I left at 8:10 and turned my badge in at the front desk."

H. Audit summary prepared by Rowan: three repeated vendor charges are marked "review with A.V." The summary does not prove guilt by itself; it explains the scheduled meeting.

Discuss: Which record conflicts with Adrian's account? How do the access log, custody sheet, schedule, and audit summary fit together?

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R_MYSTERY-008 / Host-only character note

HOST-ONLY CHARACTER NOTE — KEEP SEPARATE FROM ROLE CARDS

You did not leave. You entered Rowan's office corridor at 8:14 and left at 8:22. Rowan had found repeated charges on a vendor account you managed. You killed him to keep the discrepancies from being investigated. Do not show this private note to other players. In a role-play version, you may deny the accusation until the evidence is presented, but do not invent additional facts.

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R_MYSTERY-009 / Host hint card

HOST HINTS — KEEP PRIVATE

Hint 1: Put the four people on a timeline from 8:08 to 8:25. Separate their own statements from records made by other people or systems.

Hint 2: One person says they had already left before a badge assigned only to them entered the office corridor. Check the calendar to see why that person was expected to meet Rowan.

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R_MYSTERY-010 / Host-only solution and ending

HOST SOLUTION AND READ-ALoud ENDING — KEEP PRIVATE UNTIL THE REVEAL

Intended answer: Adrian Vale killed Elias Rowan. The motive was to prevent Rowan from confronting him about repeated vendor charges. The evidence is Rowan's 8:13 message confirming he was alive and ready for the 8:15 appointment; AV-04's entry at 8:14 and exit at 8:22, with no other office-corridor entry before discovery; exclusive assignment of AV-04 to Adrian with no handoff or return; Adrian's false statement that he had left and returned the badge; the other three staff members' supported assignments; and the audit summary connecting the meeting to a serious financial dispute. The story does not specify or depict how the killing happened.

READ ALOUD: "The timeline settles the question. Adrian Vale had the only scheduled meeting with Elias Rowan, and the door record places Adrian's assigned badge in the office corridor during the relevant window. Adrian's claim that he had already left and returned the badge does not match the custody record. The audit summary explains why Rowan wanted to speak with him. The museum now has a clear account to give investigators, and the preview is over for the evening. The team solved the mystery by checking the records against the story."

Debrief: Which clue showed opportunity? Which clue contradicted a statement? Which clue established a possible motive? A realistic investigation would require more evidence; this is a closed fictional party puzzle.

Host answer key

Keep this section separate from player cards. Accept equivalent wording where the meaning matches.

10. Adrian Vale, motivated by the director's planned review of repeated vendor charges.

The answer follows from his exclusive badge custody, Rowan's 8:13 last-confirmed message and the only office-corridor entry from 8:13 to discovery, a contradicted departure claim, an 8:15 meeting entry, and the audit summary.

Hosting questions

Is the death depicted?

No. The fictional death happens off-page, and the packet contains no injury, cause, weapon, or method details.

How many people can play?

The activity works with four to ten adults. Roles can be combined or assigned to pairs.

Does the host reveal the culprit at the start?

No. Keep the private role note, host hints, and solution card separate until the reveal.

Is this based on a real museum or case?

No. All people, records, the museum, and the events are fictional.

Original AI-assisted resource with AI editorial review. Independent human playtesting and physical printing have not been completed. Answer, listen, or pass.