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Clue

2023
SEASON

PLAY

PRODUCTION NUMBER 247

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◆ INTERESTING FACTS ◆

Turning hit movies into live theatre isn't very surprising anymore. However, it is still strange to see a board game turned into theatre. It's not impossible, though, as *Monopoly: The Musical* is in the works for a Broadway run.

But a live theatre experience inspiring a board game, which is made into a movie, which is then translated back into live theatre? It's a mystery worthy of Hercule Poirot, Jessica Fletcher, or Benoit Blanc.

The game's afoot, and we'll need a suspect, a location, and a weapon.

Let's unravel the mystery of *Clue*!

Was it Mr. & Mrs. Pratt in Tudor Close with a party game?

Would you like to own the very mansion that inspired *Clue*? If you had a spare 1.4 million dollars in 2021, you could have! Tudor Close was a hotel in Rottingdean, near the beaches of Brighton in England. It became a favorite of celebrities such as Bette Davis, Errol Flynn, and Cary Grant and the evening's entertainment was often interactive murder mysteries hosted by entertainers Anthony and Elva Pratt. After an evening of the Pratts playing music, guests and local actors would take on the roles of suspects and try to solve the "murder". The game would travel from room to room within the hotel, including the billiard room and ballroom, and even use the secret passageway between the kitchen and the bar.



Tudor Close hosted not only stars like Bette Davis and Cary Grant, but the murder mystery games which would go on to inspire the Clue boardgame.

Working in a factory during World War II, Pratt had the idea to turn these in-person events into a boardgame. Players would roll dice and move pieces through the rooms, corridors, and secret passages of a mansion, making suggestions and accusations to deduce the murderer, weapon, and room while refuting others' suggestions until someone solves the mystery or is the last player standing. He received a patent in 1947, but the game would see many changes before being released, including the removal of 4 of the original 10 characters and renaming "Nurse White" to "Mrs. White" and "Colonel Yellow" to "Mustard".



The original Cluedo?, published by Waddingtons in 1949

Was it Waddingtons in Leeds with a classic board game?

Pratt approached a company called Waddingtons in 1947, and they took an immediate interest, but it was not published until 1949 due to post-war supply shortages. Waddingtons was founded by an actor/playwright and initially specialized in theatrical printing: posters, playbills, and more. In 1922, it began adding card and board games to its line of products, teaming up with Parker Brothers to bring *Monopoly* to the United Kingdom and in return giving Parker Brothers the U.S. rights to *Clue* (renamed from the original "Cluedo").

In the over 70 years since its debut, *Clue* has sold more than 150 million copies in multiple editions and spawned not only a movie and multiple stage plays, but novels, video games, game shows, documentaries,

comic books, and jigsaw puzzles. It's the second most popular board game in the world, and new editions continue to be published — including one in January of 2023 which updates “Mrs. White” to a younger-looking chef “Chef White” with white, undercut hair, tattoos, and punk boots.



The original American version of Clue, published by Parker Brothers in 1949

Was it Jonathan Lynn in 1985 with a critical and commercial bomb?

It was nearly forty years later when director John Landis (*The Blues Brothers*, *Trading Places*, *Three Amigos!*) had the idea to try and make a movie based on a board game and settled on *Clue*. After multiple drafts of the screenplay, however, he realized he didn't know how to write a satisfying whodunit and decided to bring in writer Jonathan Lynn.

“John pitched it very excitably, running around his office and playing all the characters at once,” Lynn recalled in a 2023 interview. “Eventually he said, ‘Then the butler says, ‘I know who did it.’” So I said, ‘Well, who did it?’ And John said, ‘I don’t know. That’s why I need you to write it.’”

When Landis was unexpectedly called away to direct another film, he offered the reins to Lynn who was thrilled to get his first film directing job. In a nod to the game, the studio planned to have four different endings for the movie (only three were shot), and each theatre would get a version of the film with one of the endings. The idea was that audiences would come back to see the movie again to eventually see all three endings, but the film opened to poor reviews and dismal box office numbers perhaps due to that very gimmick. Film critic Roger Ebert summed up much of the critical response: “One ending is more than enough.”

When the film was released on VHS for home viewing in 1986, all three endings were attached in order, and the same format was used for TV broadcasts. Lynn credits that decision to the film's success in the nearly 40 years after: “I think that’s why it suddenly started to go well when people saw it on television. Because you only really enjoy the endings when you see them all together. The last thing I would’ve expected was that it would be a failure when it opened and an increasing success over the next four decades. Who would imagine that?”



Though most of Clue was filmed at Paramount Studios, the exterior gate and ballroom scenes were filmed at the Max Busch House in Pasadena, CA which burned down in 2005

Was it Sandy Rustin in the Cleveland Playhouse with a pandemic-delayed opening?

That cult film status inspired a 1997 off-Broadway musical featuring a possible 216 endings, but when new producers bought the stage rights in 2017, actress/playwright Sandy Rustin was brought on to adapt Jonathan Lynn's screenplay into a stage play. *Clue: On Stage* was intended to premiere in Cleveland first, then on the West Coast at La Mirada Playhouse and the East Coast at Paper Mill Playhouse.

While the Cleveland production did open as scheduled in January 2020, other openings were delayed until 2021 and 2022 due to the pandemic. Instead, a virtual version of the play intended to be performed on Zoom was released very quickly as theatres looked for ways to perform during a time when audiences couldn't gather.

Once audiences returned to the theatre, *Clue: On Stage* has quickly become a favorite, appearing on both American Theatre Magazine's list of the most professionally produced plays of 2022-2023 at #3, and the Educational Theatre Association's survey of the most produced High School plays at #1.

—HCTO Guest Dramaturg Mark Fossen, MFA