

ClusterFubar

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ClusterFubar is a freeform LARP about investigating a comedically violent encounter in a small space that went horribly wrong in mere seconds. Players will alternate between playing action scene participants, and investigators in the present figuring what the hell happened.

*“That's two sound theories in one day, neither of which deal with abnormally sized men. Kind of makes me feel like Riverdancing. [Begins dancing]... There was a fire-fight!!”
Boondock Saints*

This game requires:

- 3-8 players
- Lots of sticky notes, of two different colours, and plenty of markers
- Two hours

This game is GM-less – the facilitator can also play.

The Space Of Play Matters

Unlike other games, this game plays out in the real physical room you're in. It doesn't happen in the imaginary abstract space where we pretend we're somewhere else. Everything you see is really there. Scuff marks on the floor are evidence. If there's a skylight, someone definitely crashed through it at some point; but who, and their direction of movement is to be determined during play. Enjoy looking at the room around you – let your imagination go wildly paranoid and see evidence of a scuffle everywhere.

Anything you brought with you, such as jackets or backpacks, can safely be ignored.

Try to play in a room that is a little interesting, with at least two entrances (air vents count), and some cover.

Inspired By...

This game is inspired by whacky action scenes and those that investigate the confusing mess after the fact, as seen in *The Wire*, Aragorn in *Lord of the Rings*, many Tarantino films, *Lock Stock and Two Smoking Barrels*, *Boondocks Saints*, and more.

*“You ever seen that show "Cops"? I was watching it one time, and there was this cop on, and he was talking about this gun fight he had in the hallway with this guy, right, and he just unloaded on this guy, and nothing happened, he didn't hit nothing. Okay, it was just him and this guy. I mean, you know, it's freaky, but it happens.”
Vincent in *Pulp Fiction*, by Quentin Tarantino*

Content Warning and Negotiation

This game is about comedic violence that unfolds quickly and chaotically. Extended torture scenes, excessive gore, or sexual violence are out completely of scope. It will be hard to veil any action in this game, so please discuss with everyone and declare Lines in advance of starting to play. Importantly: you will point pretend weapons at each other, roleplay physically threatening each other and may even take hostages, so take extra time to establish comfort levels before beginning.

*“Fuck” “Fuck” “Fuck” “Fuck” “Fuckity, Fuck Fuck Fucker.”
The Wire*

Investigate By Collecting Evidence and Proposing Theories

The number of participants in the action scene in the recent past will (eventually) be the same as the number of players. The scene will start simple, but then get more complicated as investigators collect evidence, and add more participants. During this game, you'll walk/run/crawl/shoulder roll through the scene dozens of times. Whenever you aren't playing a scene participant, you're an investigator in the present, proposing theories about what actually happened.

Use sticky notes of one colour to mark evidence, and another colour to keep track of where scene participants moved during the scene. As more evidence is collected over time, and investigators come up with more complex theories, the sticky notes representing action scene participants' movements will change significantly.

When the group walks through the scene, not every player has to play their scene participant each time - this would make it hard to do investigating! The sticky notes will help you remember the location of evidence and participants as you work on the scene.

Choose a Context

As a group, choose a context that your scene participants will be from. The context will constrain what sort of characters will appear, and what they might be carrying, and what actions are possible. You should clearly agree on a context before starting play.

Example Contexts (Basic)

- Modern (Guns, etc.)
- Medieval (Swords, etc.)
- Martial Arts (No actual weapons, but Jackie Chan-style improvised weapons)

Example Contexts (Advanced)

- Fantasy aka "Wizard SWAT Team"
- Science Fiction (laser swords, other shenanigans)
- Paranormal Investigators (proton packs, ghost traps, etc.)
- Realistic WWII (hey, whatever you're into)

*"Well, you don't gotta be Stonewall Jackson to know you don't wanna fight in a basement."
Inglorious Basterds*

If it makes sense for your context, define the purpose of the room you're in. For example, it could be a tavern, a drug kingpin den, or a space prison lobby.

Start By Actually Looking at the Room

In a turn order, each player should state an initial observation of the room that doesn't, yet, have to do with the action scene. For example:

- "There's water damage on the ceiling."
- "There's a central column right in line between the two doors, blocking sightlines."
- "Window above the sink, would be awkward to climb in."
- "This extension cord is a trip hazard"

Initial Occupants Start the The First Walkthrough

Choose 1 or 2 players to become action participants, and have them pose in starting positions. These are the **initial occupants**. Based on your observations of the room, and the context you chose, figure out what this first participant or pair of participants is currently doing. The why doesn't matter – you'll figure that out later. You should have names for these participants, even if it's John Doe A, John Doe B etc. The names can get more specific later with more advanced theories and evidence.

*“When in doubt, have a man come through the door with a gun in his hand”
Raymond Chandler*

Have someone enter the room with an intent to do violence. Another player will become this scene participant - **The Instigator**.

Decide, as a group, how The Instigator enters the room, and how they intend to do violence.

The Instigator must both succeed in a major way, and fail in a major way. Here we'll introduce a new mechanic: **discovering evidence**.

In addition to observing the real room, the investigators can find new evidence you can't see with your real eyes. This could be anything appropriate you can imagine for the context: a piece of broken glass, a splatter of blood, laser blast markings, lingering ooze. A vase that exists in real room could actually be broken in the reality of the crime scene.

Discuss amongst yourselves as investigators and discover one piece of evidence that shows how The Instigator succeeded, and another piece of evidence that shows how they failed. Mark each of these with a labelled sticky note. You don't need to decide whether the instigator or the initial occupants of the room got out alive or died in the action scene yet; this is just evidence right now - it's going to get way more complicated!

When the Instigator is doing their action, the starting occupants of the room must have reacted in some way. As a group, decide how they reacted.

You've just wrapped up the first run-through of the scene! Use sticky notes to mark the starting positions of the initial occupants, the instigator, how they ended up, with in-between steps if necessary. A useful participant sticky note has a name, and maybe an arrow on it. Sticky notes with evidence that exists in the present is set in stone, but the actions of the characters in the scene is tentative and will change as you work as investigators.

“I've got a dead body, a crime scene with wings. Something very wrong happened in this plane.”

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation

More Evidence Appears

Now, go around the group of players and take turns collecting evidence. This could be either discovering evidence as above, or noticing evidence that exists in the real room. Mark all of this new evidence with an evidence-colour sticky note. The evidence could explain what happened during, before or after the conflict between the instigator and the initial occupants.

*“Dead men tell no lies.”
Rashomon, by Akira Kurosawa*

Continuing Moves Complicate The Scene

You can take turns going through each player in an order, or if your group has gotten comfortable, you can take turns in any order whenever inspiration strikes. On a player's turn, you can take one of the following actions:

1. **"Here's what going on."** Describe a theory for why participants are doing what they're doing, or add context to the ongoing scene.
2. **"Wait, that's not what actually happened."** Edit the actions of any action scene participants in the scene. Remember: any evidence that's in the present is fixed. How it ended up that way is flexible as you investigate. Adjust sticky notes describing participants as needed.
3. **"Found something!"** Collect evidence: either discover evidence, or notice evidence in the real room. Label any new evidence with a sticky note.
4. **"There was another person here."** Add another participant to the scene. This can be another initial occupant of the room, another instigator or defender that may or not be allied with any of the participants already in the scene.

Any time it's needed, run through the action scene again! This isn't required for every turn.

The Game Ends When Everything Has Been Explained

Take turns until every player has a character that's a participant in the scene, and continue until the group of players is satisfied with the scene you've described.