

A General Overview of “Treasure Hunts”

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Definition of a Treasure Hunt:

A treasure hunt is a game in which each person or team attempts to be first to find something that has been hidden. The hunter will discover the hidden item’s whereabouts by researching, solving puzzles, riddles, or ciphers.

Treasure Hunts provide a challenging, fun, and rewarding opportunity to explore new places, work in a team, and enjoy solving clues while seeking a monetary reward.

What’s the “treasure” and Where Does the Money Come From?

The “treasure” is normally a cash grand prize between \$100 and \$10,000. The treasure may also include jewels, jewelry, precious metals and/or valuable old coins.

The creators and coordinators of the hunt fund the treasure’s reward through personal assets, registration fees, book sales, and/or business sponsors and donations.

Rules and Terms:

Any hunt worth doing has written rules and terms of engagement to which hunters agree when registering. Rules include safety, laws, etiquette, as well as common-sense reminders. The consequences of breaking rules should be clear and reasonable. Coordinators can and should disqualify rule breakers and often ban them from all future hunts.

Location of Hunts:

1. Online/Virtual only – Fully Armchair

Registration is free or purchased. Participants submit payment/personal info/email address to become an official hunter. Hunters are provided clues online then research the internet to “find” the hidden item virtually. The item is a real thing that can be found in an internet accessible photograph or is described in detail online. To win, hunters submit their answer by a deadline. Hunters never have to leave the house.

The Advantages of Armchair Hunts:

- Hunting from home is comfortable.
- You can hunt privately, and you don’t have to rely on others to join you.
- The hunt lasts a few days online so you can hunt at your convenience.
- There are no extra costs or risks such as gas money, driving, etc.

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2. Physical/Boots on the Ground (BOTG):

Registration usually includes paying to participate. This may be purchasing of a book or paying for an access code on the hunt website. Clues are hidden within written narrative, videos, songs, and/or in riddles. No/few additional hints offered. Hunters may or may not connect and communicate with one another online. In some BOTG hunts, hunters must go to various locations to access the next clue and/or to find the treasure. Treasure is either buried or is hidden above ground (proxy). BOTG hunts often include a defined geographic area in which to hunt.

The Advantages of Boots on the Ground Hunts:

- Hunting with a team of friends while out and about is FUN!
- Enjoy the “thrill of the race” to the hidden physical item.
- Get to visit new places, meet new people, get some exercise.
- Makes great memories.

3. Combination of both Online and Physical: Many hunts combine the need to do online research and clue work (Armchair) followed by a BOTG hunt. Most clues are released online and worked out through research, puzzle solving, deciphering, riddle reflection and research. Hunters must then go out physically to locate the hidden treasure.

What are Hunters Looking For?:

1. In a fully armchair hunt, the virtually “hidden” item is in full view at a specific website. Solving clues will narrow the possibilities down within a geographic area, then to a location, and finally to the item itself. Example: Ohio, Putnam County, Pandora, Suter’s Produce, Morningstar Cider Press, and finally the item: the air-pressurized corn cannon.

2. In a BOTG hunt, the treasure may be:

- an actual treasure within a container
- if treasure is buried and contains metal, metal detectorists have an advantage

OR

- a congratulatory note that lets a hunter know that they have won and gives them directions for next steps to receive treasure, or to go to a check in station nearby to claim their successful place in the hunt.

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How Clues are Hidden:

- riddles
- codes, ciphers, and puzzles
- a story or narrative that reveals hints/clues
- graphics: illustrations/paintings in book/website contain hidden ciphers/clues
- clues within videos, songs, poems, novels, historic documents, photos....
- physical items sent to hunters or use of common household objects (dice, playing cards, etc.)
- history, geography, biology, math, etc. used to reveal answers to clues
- a combination of above that leads to the overall solution

Timing of Clue Release Variations:

- The coordinator releases all the clues at the very beginning of the hunt,
- The coordinator releases one clue at a time over the course of several days,

OR

- The coordinator releases one clue at a time to hunters who prove they have successfully solved the previous clue and have satisfied the requirements to receive their next clue. (Posting videos of themselves on location, emailing the clue's solution, etc.)

Variations on Who Wins:

- The first individual/team who finds the treasure and satisfies the requirements wins all,
- The first individual/team who finds the treasure comes in first and receives the bulk of the treasure amount, the second receives a lesser amount, and the third receives the least – the treasure is divided among the top three,

OR

- all hunt-defined "successful" hunters are put in a raffle to win key(s) to treasure chest(s). The treasure is divided among the key winners based on which treasure chest their key(s) open.

Hunters:

Demographics and Motives:

1. Individuals and/or small teams of close associates who enjoy solving mysteries, the thrill of competition and being on a common quest.

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2. Hardcore treasure hunters who need/want the money
3. Highly competitive individuals – winning IS their reward
4. Groups of adult friends on a fun seeking lark
5. Families with kids looking for a memory-making outing

Creators:

Much the same as authors of murder mysteries or detective stories, creators of a treasure hunt are detail-minded, ambitious people who enjoy authoring a mystery, and equally enjoy watching others unravel their work. Creators invest many hours researching locations, local history, notable people, and “forgotten” oddities. They enjoy creating puzzles, and using ciphers and codes to make clues that will lead dedicated hunters closer and closer to the final solution and the location of the treasure.

Motives for Creating Treasure Hunts:

- It’s a fun, creative outlet that might make them some money (or at least not lose money)
- Increase foot traffic in a community and/or to a specific type of business.
- Increase awareness and funding for a non-profit organization. Example: The Hunt For Good

The difference between a treasure hunt and a scavenger hunt:

Treasure Hunt: a game in which each person or team attempts to be first in finding something that has been hidden, using written directions or clues.

Scavenger Hunt: a game in which individuals or teams are sent out to accumulate, without purchasing, a series of common, outlandish, or humorous objects, the winner being the first person or team that returns with all the items.