Eccentric Millionaire

An online RPG
By Nick Wedig

Somewhere in the wilderness, an eccentric millionaire has buried $50 million worth of bearer bonds, gold, historic artifacts and art treasures.

You're going to hunt for it, from the comfort of your own homes.

There are a lot of other people also searching for the treasure, too. Work with them for more clues, but don't trust them. If they get the treasure first, they get millions of dollars. Second place gets nothing.

Overview

Eccentric Millionaire is an online game of logical deduction and social deception. One player acts as the host and organizer of the game. They will also play the role of *the Eccentric Millionaire*. The other players take on the role of *treasure hunters*. The game is played online, through chat systems like **Discord** or **Slack**, and via online map tools like **Google Maps**. Gameplay takes place over days or weeks, as the treasure hunters uncover more clues and zero in on the location of the treasure. Eventually, one player will find the treasure and win the game.

The host player secretly selects a location, using **Google Maps** or similar online mapping system. The other players compete to try to guess the secret location.

Treasure hunter players roleplay as people working to solve the eccentric millionaire's riddles and find the hidden treasure. Each treasure hunter belongs to two groups, one based on background and one based on motivation. Each round of the game, all hunters with the same background will learn one clue and all hunters with the same motivation will learn a different clue.

Host Player

So you want to host a game of Eccentric Millionaire. This section will describe to you, the host player, the steps you should follow to run the game for your friends. As host player, you can't win the game, but maybe you can have a fun time playing regardless.

The first thing you'll need to do is recruit some friends. These could be people you know in real life, or people you know on the internet. Either way, you probably want **6-24 people**. Too few and the game will probably slowly grind to a halt as players lose interest. Too many may be difficult to handle logistically. But put out feelers online for interested players, see who expresses interest.
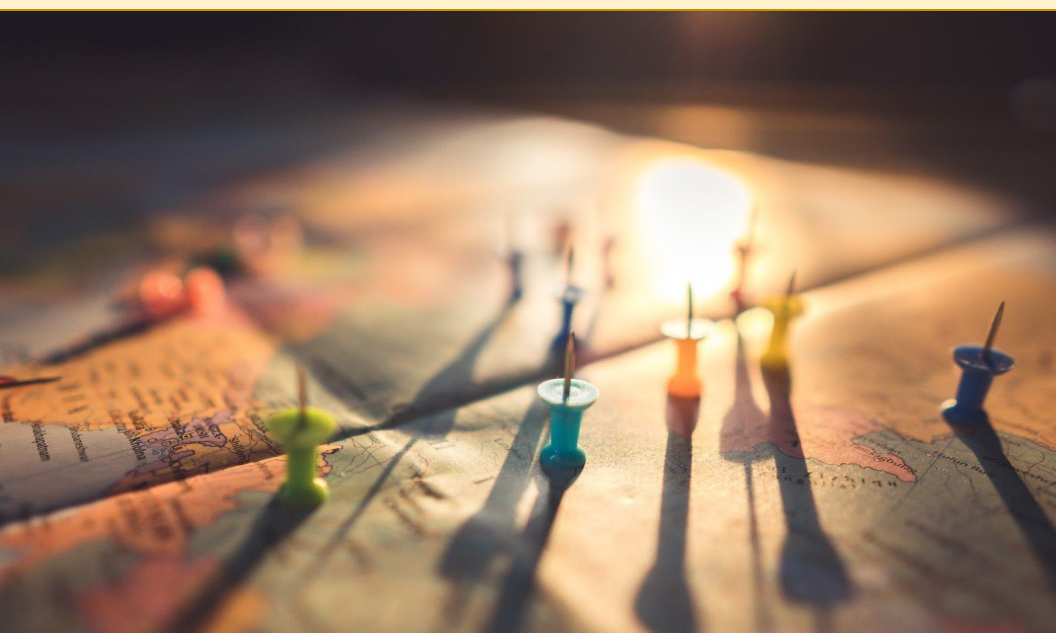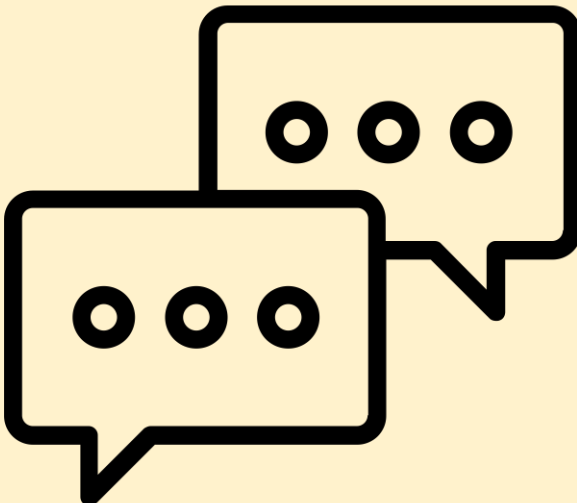
The Eccentric Millionaire

Most of the host player's job is about organizing the logistics of the game: getting people to play, setting up a **Discord** server, establishing game parameters, etc.

When answering questions, though, you have some leeway to roleplay as the eccentric millionaire. The eccentric millionaire has hidden away a vast fortune, and released to the world a series of riddles that hint at the treasure's location. You won't actually be creating these riddles, though, until after the treasure hunters solve the riddles. When a hunter asks a question and you answer it, you can provide details then about the riddle and how they solved it to create a clue. The players do not have to solve any riddles. Their characters automatically solve the riddles when you choose to answer their question. The job of the players is to take the clues and try to guess the location. Your answers should always be completely truthful and accurate. Your answers are not the riddles that the eccentric millionaire has left behind. No player should be wondering what your answer meant. You can have your eccentric millionaire speak or write in a distinctive manner, or behave oddly. But the meaning of their answers should be clear to anyone with access to that answer.

Communications

Set up a communications system. This could work with a **Slack** channel, **Discord**, a series of **Facebook** groups, or just by **email** lists. There should be a public group chat, where everyone can publicly discuss and theorize. You also need the ability for individual members to form their own subgroup, visible only to members, or to send direct messages or such. Lots of online platforms have these capabilities.

To begin the game, you will have to set up several initial groups. You will need a private message chat for each of the motivations and for each of the backgrounds (see below). These private boards should only be visible to members of those groups.

The Treasure Location

Before play, you secretly choose a spot somewhere on Earth. This is where the eccentric millionaire buried the treasure, in a box about 2-3 feet on each side. They placed the box in total secrecy, with no witnesses. So you have to keep this location a secret. There is no obvious sign of the box until a treasure hunter player guesses the right location. You'll want to be as precise as you can be about the location. Simply saying "Hong Kong" isn't enough. Pick a specific street corner in Hong Kong, or a precise set of latitude and longitude coordinates in the middle of the wilderness. Using Google Maps or some other extremely thorough mapping system is recommended, to give you very exacting details. Record the precise location of the treasure somewhere, so that you can refer to it later.

You must choose a location on land. Most of the globe is ocean, but that doesn't make for good treasure hunts.

The eccentric millionaire publicly revealed a series of obscure clues that should, if decoded, lead treasure hunters to the location of the treasure. Decide what form the eccentric millionaire's initial clues took. This should be a series of clues, enough to get the players started on their hunt. A diary,

epic poem, set of maps, fictional encyclopedia, allegorical novel or bizarre website might all be good clue sources. A statue or painting would be problem clue sources, because it would be hard to justify several rounds of studying and decoding clues in the artwork. You want there to be enough layers of mystery that players can keep hunting, and that they can invent details about the clues to justify the new hints they have uncovered. Don't worry about making any actual clues. That will all be handled while you play the game.

Parameters

Before the game begins, you need to choose some guidelines for gameplay. Discuss with your players how the game will work, and what player expectations are.

Pace

One important issue to decide is the pace of the game. How often will the eccentric millionaire answer questions? The game will work best if you set a schedule and keep to it. I suggest the EM answer one group of questions per day, but you could do once per week, or several times a week. Each round, the EM will have to answer one question for each motivation in play or one question for each background in play or pone public question for all players.

(You may want to plan your pace to account for weekends and holidays, as well.)

A larger group probably wants a slower pace, to have more time to discuss the new information. A

smaller group might stall out and lose interest if you go too slowly.

Leave some time (I suggest a day or two) after the last question, before the new round starts, so that players can discuss and make guesses.

As host, you might want to set up a reminder and a calendar and such to keep yourself to the schedule.

Precision

If someone makes a guess, how close is close enough to be correct? The world is a huge place, so even getting within a mile is difficult. Demanding they get the exact location, down to the foot, will make the game take much longer.

As a host, you will decide a radius around your treasure's location. If someone guesses within that radius, it counts as a success and they win the game. A smaller radius means more frustration and longer games. A larger radius means shorter games, that could be over too quickly. With more players, you probably want to require more precision. With fewer, less precision means the game will still end at some point. Choose a radius based on how long you want the game to go and how many players you have. (I have no idea what a

good radius is, so I'm going to set it to 1 kilometer for my first game.)

Time

Set a time limit. If the treasure hunters haven't found the treasure after 60 rounds or something, it is presumed lost forever. Everyone loses. Even having someone else find the treasure is better than it being lost forever.

Treasure Hunters

Players are collaborating but also competing. They can *say* whatever they like about their questions to the EM, or about what happened in their other group chats. But you can't screenshot those chats, copy text directly, or show someone your screen with it or anything like that. The idea is that I can go off and tell you that the EM said one thing, and you have no way to verify. If you show me the message from the EM answering the question, then that is a very different situation (one we hope to avoid.) The unreliability of the other players is a big part of the game. If someone tells you the treasure is in Antarctica, do you believe them?

(*If you are concerned with someone cheating by sharing screenshots or the like, I suggest you play with a better class of people who won't do petty stupid shit like that just to win a stupid game.*)

Creating Your Treasure Hunter

When you first join the server, the host presents each player with a choice of one background and one motive. The player chooses one of those, and is free to pick the other one themselves, so long as they don't duplicate a combination of motive and background already used by another player.

As host, you should be trying to balance out the number of people in each motivation and each background. You want multiple people in each group, and no group should have vastly more people than any other group. Do what you can to balance things, by offering groups that have fewer people (if one group is too large). If a motivation or background is getting too crowded, offer up new options instead.

(*If you have more than 40 people, you may want to add more motives and backgrounds. If you have fewer than 20 people, you should remove some motives and backgrounds from play.*)

Before the first round of private questions begins, every player can ask one question in the public chat. The EM chooses one of those questions and answers it publicly as well.

Roleplaying

This is a treasure hunt guessing game, but it is also a roleplaying game. Characters are assumed to know each other online, but not in face-to-face real life. That means that all communication in the game is in-character.

It also means that any interaction you have with fellow players in real life *isn't* part of the game. So don't hold grudges from the game in real life. And don't collude with each other in secret, unless you do it through the online platform of choice.

Backgrounds

Suburbanite - Life can be pretty boring, once you have a house and two kids in school and a spouse with a well-paying job. So you went looking for something to spice up your life. Add something interesting to the same daily routine. And what could be more exciting than buried treasure?

Adventurer - Modern day explorers and extreme sport enthusiasts and gamblers, you travel the world looking for crazy experiences. No one can top your wild stories of past experiences. But finding millions of dollars in buried treasure? That would be a story no one could beat. Plus, the money would help offset some of the travel expenses from your frequent trips around the globe.

Dilettantes - The idle rich need something to occupy their time, and hunting for buried treasure sounds like an adventure. It's the rare problem in your life that you can't solve by throwing a pile of money at it, and that makes the mystery all the more compelling. Maybe you're an eccentric millionaire yourself, who plans to find the treasure and rebury it somewhere else.

Schoolteacher - It started as a project for your middle school class. You'd discuss the story of the

treasure, and use it as an excuse to teach the kids about geography and maps and stuff. But now it's taken over your class time. The project was supposed to end weeks ago, but your kids are still helping you decode more clues. So you're going to keep looking.

Journalist At first, this was just another story, a part of your job. But then you started looking at the clues. And the more you interviewed and researched, the more you wanted to know where the treasure was buried. Slowly, you got sucked into your own story, until you were an obsessive treasure hunter, just like the people you were writing about.

Tech Startup - You have constructed new AI techniques and recursive algorithms and self-modifying neural networks. And you plan to use them to decode the clues and solve the mystery faster than any human mind can even formulate the question.

Motivations

Greed - Pure and simple. You don't care about the hunt. You just want the money. Millions of dollars are just sitting there waiting for someone to pick it up and become obscenely wealthy. That person might as well be you.

Curiosity - You're drawn to this mystery not because of the treasure but because of the *mystery*. There aren't many real mysteries left in the age of the internet. This is a puzzle that no one knows the answer to. And you really want to find out the truth.

History - Besides the money, the eccentric millionaire left several priceless historical artifacts in the safe. These objects really belong in a museum, where people can study them and learn from them.

Altruism - You don't want the money for yourself, but you can imagine how you could use the wealth to make the world a better place. That much money could save countless lives in the developing world. Or you might use it to fight climate change and protect endangered species. There's all sorts of improvement you could make, if you just had the resources.

Conspiracy Theories - Sure, the eccentric millionaire claims he buried gold and priceless art and historic artifacts in a hidden location. But you know that there's a deeper truth hiding in the story. You know the box has the evidence to prove that the Illuminati assassinated JFK as part of their effort to recruit the Grey aliens in their secret war against the Antarctic Space Nazis, or whatever.

Spite - You don't want the treasure for yourself, so much as you want to make sure no one else gets it first. You're just trying to prove their ridiculous theories wrong... but the only way to do that is by making a better theory and then proving that correct.

Fame - Whoever finds that treasure will be world famous, instantly. Your name will be recognized everywhere as the greatest treasure hunter of the 21st century. You can probably take that fame and spin off some books, podcasts, maybe a reality TV and become a genuine star.

Competitiveness - You want to win, just for the sake of winning. The treasure would be nice, sure, but you're in this for the hunt itself. Competition is how you prove your innate superiority to those around you. You know you're better than all the other treasure hunters. Once you find the treasure, everyone else will know it, too.

Gameplay

Over the course of the game, treasure hunter players will theorize in their chat groups. Any player can post discussions and theories in the public chat or in any group they are a member of. You can use these discussions to work through options, come up with ideas, and try to mislead other players down the wrong path. Any player can participate in these discussions whenever they like, throughout the game, as much or as little as they choose.

The game will take place in a series of rounds. The first round, the EM will answer one question for each Background group. In the second round, they will answer one question in each motivation group. In the third round, they will answer one question in the public group. Then the cycle repeats: one round of backgrounds, one of motives, one public, again and again until someone finds the treasure.

Questions

Much of the gameplay consists of the players asking question of the EM about the treasure's location. When a player poses a question to the EM, that represents their treasure hunter working to decode one of the eccentric millionaire's riddles. The EM will choose one question each round to answer in each group, so everyone gains pieces of knowledge slowly as they go.

When posing a question to the EM, you should tag the EM's username, if the chat system allows that. If possible, you want to **Bold** the question, *Italicize* the question, mark th question in **a distinct color** or otherwise make it visually distinct so the host player and other treasure hunters can easily identify questions to the EM. Establish a convention based ont he capabilities of your chat platform, and stick to it

Questions to the EM are always phrased as **Yes or No questions**. You might ask questions like "Is the treasure within 50 km of the ocean?" or "Is it in a desert area?" or "is it North of the Canadian border?"

The EM must identify qhich question they are answering and give an answer of Yes or No. The

EM can also answer "Unclear" if a question is ambiguous. But it's usually better to just pick a different, less ambiguous question to answer, if there is one.

Each player in that group can ask one (1) question of the EM in each group. You can pose a question at any time. If you pose two questions during the same round, then the EM will answer neither question of yours.

When it is the round for backgrounds, the EM chooses **one** of the questions in each background's group and answers it. Similarly, in the round for motives, the EM goes into each motivation group and answers **one** of the questions asked. And int he public question round, all players have the chance to ask a question, and the EM will answer **one** question for all players.

The EM is encouraged to answer questions that will make for more interesting gameplay: answerign a more informative question if a group is struggling, less useful questions if they are doing well, etc. The EM is also encouraged to choose questions that best embody the background or motive of that group: They might choose a question about the Illuminati for the conspiracy theory group, for example, just because it is thematic.

Joining Late

People can join the game late, no problem. The GM offers them a choice of background and motivation, as normal. New treasure hunters also get to ask one public question, which the EM will answer publicly. And they get the full chatlog of the channel for the public channel and the two groups they belong to. They're at a bit of a disadvantage, but they may also bring in something new. They can ask their question **after** reading the public and group chatlogs, so that may mean that their question has more utility, maybe, if they are clever about it. They also can choose their motive and background after reading any public information, if they choose, so they could use that as a method to gain some leverage, maybe.
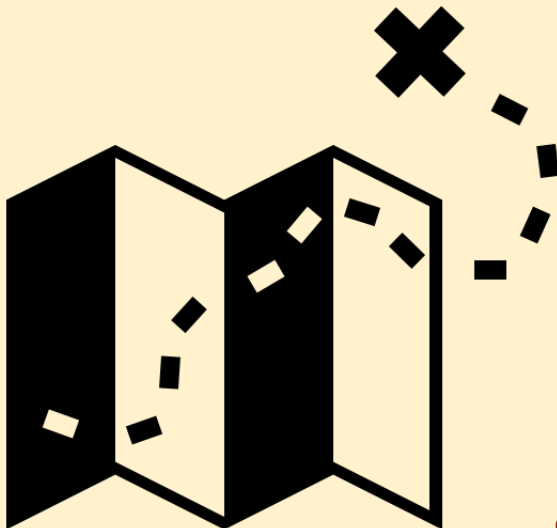
Guessing

A cycle is a complete set of rounds: one round for background questions, one for motivation questions, and one for public questions.

Players can make one guess per cycle as to the location of the treasure. They can do this at any time, but it probably is tactically wise to wait until they have heard as many questions as they are going to get. Guesses are always made in secret, using a private message on your communications channel.

When you guess, the EM tells you if you are correct (within the precision radius of the targeted point) or not. Probably you won't be.
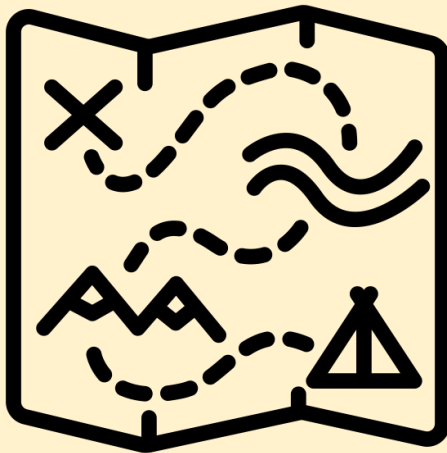
When one player finally makes a guess within the appropriate radius, then the EM will make that fact known to that player. Then they will publicly announce that someone has found the treasure. Players at that point can feel free to narrate epilogues for their characters, if they so choose

Lying

When talking with other treasure hunter players, players can reveal any information they want, or lie about any information they want, in player discussions. They can tell others the questions they asked, the locations they guessed, etc. But they don't have to be honest about it.

The only rule is that you can't reveal information that guarantees the truth. You can't show people your private chatlogs, or directly copy and paste information, or screenshot things, or any of that. Actual evidence isn't allowed to beshared. If they want to believe you, then they have to take your word on it.

Treasure hunter players should always be honest when communicating with the EM, though.