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Mystery House

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This article is about the Apple II computer game. For the California tourist attraction, see [Winchester Mystery House](#).

Mystery House is an [adventure computer game](#) released in 1980 by [Roberta](#) and [Ken Williams](#) for the [Apple II](#). The game is remembered as one of the first adventure games to feature [computer graphics](#) and the first game produced by On-Line Systems, the company which would evolve into [Sierra On-Line](#). Because of its use of graphics, *GamePro* named *Mystery House* the 51st most important game of all time in 2007.^[1]

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Story

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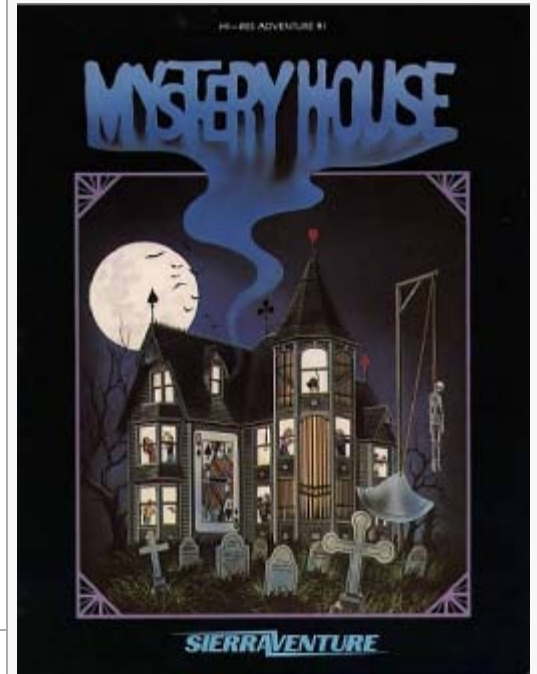


Screenshot from the opening scene of *Mystery House*

The game starts near an abandoned [Victorian](#) mansion. The player is soon locked inside the house with no other option than to explore. The mansion contains many interesting rooms and seven other people: Tom, a plumber; Sam, a mechanic; Sally, a seamstress; Dr. Green, a surgeon; Joe, a gravedigger; Bill, a butcher; and Daisy, a cook.

Initially, the player has to search the house in order to find a hidden cache of jewels. However, terrible events start happening and dead bodies (of the other people) begin appearing. It becomes obvious that there is a murderer on the loose in the house, and the player must discover who it is or

Mystery House



Developer(s)	On-Line Systems
Publisher(s)	On-Line Systems
Designer(s)	Roberta and Ken Williams
Series	Hi-Res Adventure
Platform(s)	Apple II
Release date(s)	1980, 1982
Genre(s)	Adventure
Mode(s)	Single player
Media	Floppy disk

become the next victim.

Development

[[edit](#)]

At the end of the 1970s, Ken Williams sought to set up a company for enterprise software for the market-dominating Apple II computer. One day, he took a [teletype terminal](#) to his residence to work on the development of an accounting program. Rummaging through a catalogue, he found a program called *[Colossal Cave Adventure](#)*. He and his wife Roberta both played it all the way through and their encounter with this game would have a strong influence on video-gaming history.

Having finished *Colossal Cave Adventure*, they began to search for something similar, but found the market underdeveloped. Roberta Williams liked the concept of a textual adventure very much, but she thought that the player would have a more satisfying experience with images and began to think of her own game. She thus conceived *Mystery House*, the first graphical adventure game, a detective story inspired by [Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None*](#).

Ken spent a few nights developing the game on his Apple II using 70 simple [two-dimensional](#) drawings done by Roberta. The software was packaged in [Ziploc](#) bags containing a [5¼-inch disk](#) and a photocopied paper describing the game and was sold in local software shops in Los Angeles County.^[*citation needed*] To their great surprise, *Mystery House* was an enormous success, quickly becoming a best-seller at a first-release price of USD\$24.95. Eventually, it sold more than 10,000 copies, which was a record-breaking phenomenon for the time.

Though Ken believed that the gaming market would be less of a growth market than the professional software market, he persevered with games. In 1980, the Williams founded On-Line Systems, which would become [Sierra On-Line](#) in 1982.

Mystery House was re-released in 1982 through the SierraVenture line, which produced a number of early Sierra games until 1983. It was also eventually released into the [public domain](#)^[2] and later developed into an application for the [iPhone](#) and the [iPod Touch](#).^[3]

Legacy

[[edit](#)]

Though the game is often considered the first to use graphics, [role playing games](#) had already been using graphics for several years at the time of release. Applying graphics to an adventure game, however, was unprecedented as previous story-based adventure games were entirely [text-based](#).

Mystery House was satirized in the 1982 adventure game *[Prisoner 2](#)*. One location from the game was a spooky house, whereupon his arrival the player is told, "He's killed Ken!" -- that is *Ken Williams* -- and must seek absolution for murder. Elements from the game were later reintroduced in the Sierra On-Line game *[The Colonel's Bequest](#)* in 1989.

References

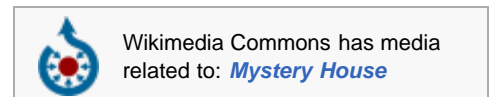
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- ↑ "[The 52 Most Important Video Games of All Time](#)" [↗](#). *GamePro*. 2007-04-24. Retrieved 2007-04-25.
- ↑ "[IF-Legends.org entry on Sierra On-Line](#)" [↗](#). Retrieved 2007-04-27.
- ↑ <http://itunes.apple.com/WebObjects/MZStore.woa/wa/viewSoftware?id=307511510&mt=8> [↗](#)

External links

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- [The Dot Eaters entry](#) [↗](#) profiling *Mystery House* and an early history of Sierra
- [Mystery House Taken Over](#) [↗](#): *remixes* and parodies of the game by [interactive fiction](#) writers.
- [Humorous review from a 2006 perspective](#) [↗](#).



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