

MYSTERY CITY

The city hides countless secrets, but secrets can't stay buried forever.

THE CITY

Everyone works together to pick a playset (*see playset pack*) or to create one (*see page 3*). Create a mystery card for each mystery a power broker wants solved: take an index card or scrap of paper, write the central question on the top, and the GM creates a starting clue for the mystery. Any further clues for that mystery get recorded on the card as well.

CHARACTER CREATION

Tell us your investigator's name, pronouns, occupation. Choose two Power Brokers from the setting that you have a starting relationship with. Decide if each relationship is positive (*your goals and their align, so they help you*), negative (*your enmity give you an edge when investigating their misdeeds*) or conflicted (*you don't know if they are ally or enemy*). Choose three traits of your investigator, one ranked at d10, one at d8 and one at d6. Create a mystery card for a mystery that you wish to solve for personal reasons, that is different than the mysteries the Power Brokers and other investigators want solved. Your personal die starts at d10.

INVESTIGATION

When you do something that isn't investigating a mystery, either you just describe your character doing it, or the GM describes an obstacle that prevents you from doing it. To enact any significant change in the world, you must investigate a mystery.

When you investigate a mystery, the GM tells you some of the possible risks and dangers of your actions. At that point, you can decide if it is worth the risk, or you can change tactics, or investigate something else. If you decide to take the risk, then you roll your personal die and add the number of clues you have toward that mystery to the roll.

Before or after your roll, you can invoke a trait or relationship by narrating how that trait or relationship helps your investigation. This lets you roll that die with your personal die. Power Broker relationships always use a d12 for their die. If you prefer, you can check a trait or relationship as used to substitute that die result for your personal die in the roll total. Once a die is checked as used, then you can't invoke it again until you get a refresh, by solving a mystery or by making a Devil's Bargain.

A total of 5 or less is a miss, you fail to achieve what you were trying for and the danger comes true.

A total of 6 to 8 is a success but with a cost, consequence or compromise. You might not get all you want, or you might suffer in the process. You might gain a clue toward this mystery (*GM decides*).

A total of 9-10 is a full success, you do it without complications. You gain a clue toward this mystery.

On 11-12 you discover a connection between this mystery and another one. Gain a clue on both mysteries.

On a 13 or higher, you solve the mystery!

If a roll was dangerous, and you rolled a miss or a success with cost, then you reduce your personal die by one size: d10 to d8 to d6 to d4. If you would reduce a d4, your investigator dies.

When you gain a clue, record the clue on the mystery's card.

When you solve a mystery, you reset your personal die to its maximum (d10) and uncheck any invoked traits and relationships. In addition, you can add a new trait at d6, increase an existing trait one die size (*to a maximum of d10*) or add a relationship with a power broker that wanted that mystery solved. You can have up to two points of relationship with any individual power broker.

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TEAMWORK

This game makes no assumption that the PCs are working as a team or party. You could run the game as a series of interrelated stories, with the GM cutting back and forth between different characters to maintain narrative momentum. Actions in one storyline will affect those in the other, just based on the indirect connections through the city's Power Brokers.

But if two investigators get together and cooperate on an investigation, they can roll the largest personal die of the characters involved, and any investigator can invoke traits or relationships for the die roll. Any investigator involved in a die roll also exposes themselves to risk: on a miss or a success with cost, they all suffer any harm and negative consequences.

DEVIL'S BARGAINS

Sometimes you are in a hard place, and you require the help of someone powerful. You can describe going to a power broker for help, and they will offer you a Devil's Bargain. A Devil's Bargain is a favor you can perform for them, an act of betrayal or villainy that you would be reluctant to perform but that furthers their goals. The GM and the other players decide what would be the worst thing for the broker to demand of you, and that is what they ask for. If you refuse, then you check off all relationships with that broker as used, but you walk away with your dignity intact. If you accept the deal, then you can reset your Personal die to d10 and refresh your traits and your relationships with that broker. Once you agree to perform the deed, you need to make significant action toward that goal, and the Power Broker will be unhappy with you if you don't finish the job, which could have mechanical (*potentially checking their relationship, or even losing points from the relationship*) or narrative consequences (*Broker sends goons to get revenge*).

TWO MYSTERY METHODS

There are two basic ways to run a mystery in an RPG: the GM decides the answer in advance, or you collaboratively make up the answers as you play. Decide which way you'll be playing *Mystery City*.

GM Keeps Secrets - In this play mode, the GM decides in advance the answer to every mystery. Then as players discover clues, the GM reveals a clue based on the method of investigation. It is likely helpful to have a list of at least 6 clues for each mystery, maybe more, that can hint at the answer but never reveal the entirety until the mystery is solved.

Create As You Play - In this mode, the GM may have theories, but they have about the same authority over these mysteries as the other players. Each player should have a working theory as to the truth of the mystery, that they keep a secret from the other players. Keep it loose and value, but enough to explain the truth. When you roll a clue result, if your die roll is even, then the GM describes a clue that fits their theory of the case. When you roll an odd result, the player investigating describes a clue that matches their personal theory of the mystery. Then everyone should pause for a moment and try to fit the new clue into their theory, revising it if necessary. Sometimes, you'll have to discard your theory entirely after a clue is revealed, and create an entirely new theory instead.

In either mode of play, clues are the only certainties you get in this crazy world. No clue is a red herring or falsehood. On the other hand, no clue should give away the entire mystery in one go: every clue leaves room for uncertainty and ambiguity. You always add the total number of clues to your die roll. Even if your character doesn't know the truth, we players as audience do (*and the die roll/clue system is a pacing mechanic as much as it is anything else*).

YOUR OWN

To create your own Mystery City, you need a short pitch, maybe two or three paragraphs long, and a list of seven Power Brokers. A GM can create the Mystery City on their own in advance, or you can work together with players to decide these details.

The Pitch: Think of a setting or genre that would be interesting to explore, that would be full of mysteries and double crosses and shadowy motives. Decide a few basic details about the setting. Just enough to get everyone on the same page. The setting will get more fleshed out in play as clues are discovered and mysteries solved, so you don't need pages of backstory to begin with.

The Power Brokers: Every Mystery City has some Power Brokers that exert influence over the city. These will be your major NPCs of the setting. To make setting creation simple, and to guarantee a variety of Brokers, we have 7 categories of Power Broker, inspired by the 7 classical planets (*see right hand column*). Each Mystery City will begin with one of each. I think it is best to brainstorm a couple powerful individuals for the setting, assign them to planetary roles, then create new Brokers to fill in any empty slots. You will find that some Broker ideas might fit into multiple slots, and might take a different flavor in each.

Each Power Broker starts with a mystery they want solved. Ideally, some of these mysteries point toward other Power Brokers. You want to make sure the Power Brokers have differing goals and motives, that no two are perfect allies.

POWER BROKERS

Jupiter - The person who officially holds the legal and political power. Since the Mystery City is inherently full of crime, the Jupiter must be corrupt, incompetent or overwhelmed. They still need the investigator PCs to find answers.

Saturn - The person whose wealth gives them power. The person at the top of the social pyramid. Not officially in charge, but money can buy a lot of control.

Venus - Someone whose power is entirely social, through interpersonal connections. Everybody knows the Venus, and most people like the Venus.

Mercury - The god of thieves, Mercury represents the underworld. This is a person whose connections to illegal and illicit deeds gives them connections and power.

Mars - Someone who rules through violence and fear. Mars has power because people are afraid of them. They may be one extremely deadly person, or the head of a gang of dangerous thugs.

The Moon - The moon is shifting, inconstant, untrustworthy. The moon is someone who sometimes you can trust and sometimes you can't, someone whose motives are unclear or someone who is morally ambiguous.

The Sun - The shining star, the golden boy, girl or other. The Sun is the person who embodies the noble ideals of the society, the person who seems noble on the surface. But like everyone else, they might be hiding dark secrets.

MYSTERY CITY



NAME

PRONOUNS

PERSONAL DIE

D10 D8 D6 D4 DEAD

PERSONAL MYSTERY

OCCUPATION

DEVIL'S BARGAINS

RELATIONSHIPS

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

TRAITS

USED D10 D8 D6

USED D10 D8 D6

USED D10 D8 D6

USED D10 D8 D6



NAME

PRONOUNS

PERSONAL DIE

D10 D8 D6 D4 DEAD

PERSONAL MYSTERY

OCCUPATION

DEVIL'S BARGAINS

RELATIONSHIPS

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

_____ D12

USED POSITIVE CONFLICTED NEGATIVE

TRAITS

USED D10 D8 D6

USED D10 D8 D6

USED D10 D8 D6

USED D10 D8 D6



MYSTERY

WHO WANTS IT SOLVED?

CLUES

- _____
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- _____
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NOTABLE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

NOTES



MYSTERY

WHO WANTS IT SOLVED?

CLUES

- _____
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NOTABLE CHARACTERS INVOLVED

NOTES