

SMALL TOWN



Aceldama, West Virginia was originally built as a railroad depot, two hundred years ago. Train tracks ran out into the Allegheny mountains where the coal mines were. They needed supply and maintenance, and that's why the Carnley Railroad Co. built the town of Aceldama. There haven't been any trains running through town in decades, though. And as the industry disappeared, the town turned inward on itself.

The town's population went from 30,000 in 1900 to less than 300 today. Most buildings sit empty and decaying. Most of those that remain do so simply because they have nowhere else to go. Almost all the families that remain live in poverty... except the Carnley family. Their railroad fortune isn't what it once was. But they still have more wealth and political sway than anyone in town. Locals whisper that the Carnley family is up to something nefarious in the forest, but no one has been able to prove anything, yet.

Despairing of mundane means of improving their lives, some have turned to dark forces. Some townsfolk have formed a secret society, The Silent Union, whose membership is kept entirely secret. Rumors say the society is involved in drug smuggling, illicit sex acts, human sacrifice, anything nefarious really. What is really happening is hard to say.

There is something strange in the forest, though. Voices whisper from the trees, giving hints and guidance to those that can hear. No one knows if they are spirits or demons or what. Most people refuse to even speak about it.

POWER BROKERS

Jupiter - Robby Wooten, the local sheriff, a small-minded racist asshole. Bought his way into office and has no intention of ever leaving. *How can he drive Stargazer Sasz out of town?*

Saturn - Simone Carnley, heir to the railroad fortune that built this town. Wealthy enough to never work and just sit in her decaying mansion plotting. *Who is the leader of the Silent Union?*

Venus - Vern Klemp runs the local diner, all the locals know and love Klemp. *Where did my teenage son Milo disappear to?*

Mercury - Stargazer Sasz, an aging hippy, runs an organic farm. She's also a small time drug manufacturer. *Why can others hear the whispers of the forest, but I can't?*

Mars - The Silent Union, the secret society that everyone fears. Comes in the night and leaves bloody handprints on your door as a warning. People disappear if they don't comply with the society's wishes. *What does Simone Carnley have hidden in her mansion basement?*

The Moon - Mysterious whispering voices in the forest that seem to urge you to go to certain places, discover things others would keep hidden. *Who was the woman found drowned in the abandoned well, and who killed her?*

The Sun - Dr. Tabitha Bickley, the town pediatrician, PTO member and social busybody. While researching local history, she found some inconsistencies in the town's hospital records. *Who else in town has a claim to inherit a share of the Carnley fortune?*

SECRETS



FAIRYLAND

"It was a fairyland case. I hate fairyland cases. Once magic is involved, you never know what's real. Who is acting on their own free will? Who's been enchanted? But no matter how much I swear off the faerie cases, I always get drawn back in."

In the early 20th century, magical portals opened. On one side was the human world, a place of crime and corruption, hardboiled detectives and shady dealings. On the other side was the supernatural realm told of in stories and legends, where immortal beings wield strange magic and mythical beasts roam.

No one is sure why this happened, but everyone has theories. The portals have remained open and stable, though. Since the opening the two worlds have begun to interact and intermingle. Humans travel across into the fae realm to seek magic and wonder. Fairies travel into human realms to seek gainful employment or vices unknown to fairykind.

The portal appeared in a major human city. Like any border town, the gateway to the faerie kingdoms quickly attracted a variety of criminal enterprises. Some people wanted to cross without official clearance. Some wanted to smuggle illicit goods across. Some oppose the border crossings, some seek to benefit. Some want to offer services to visitors from the other side. These small crimes inevitably lead to organized crime, corruption, and, eventually, murder.

POWER BROKERS

Jupiter - Joan the Wad, queen of the Piskies, one of countless faeries claiming to be the ruler of the fae realms. *Who stole her magical hagstone with a hole in the middle that protects against poisons and lets the owner see through illusions?*

Saturn - Vivian Calder, widowed mining magnate, her dead husband built up the company by recruiting piskies to work in the mines for cheap trinkets. *How she can stop the Piskies from unionizing her mines?*

Venus - Edith Montague, famous movie star, ruthlessly ambitious in pursuing the spotlight. Illegitimate child of Sebile. *Who was her father?*

Mercury - Jenny Greenteeth, an undine running a criminal syndicate near the docks. *How can she drive Fisheye Malone's goons out of her territory?*

Mars - Fisheye Malone, a human gangster that controls illegal smuggling in the city. *Why did Sebile banish Jenny Greenteeth from the fey realms?*

The Moon - Sebile, one of countless faeries claiming to be the queen of the fae realms. Also a powerful sorceress. *How can she eliminate Joan the Wad, her rival for control of the portal?*

The Sun - Tamburlaine, a knight kidnapped by faeries centuries ago. Officially a vassal of Sebile. *How can he escape from being sacrificed as part of the Hell Tithe, due in a few short months?*

CONFESSIONALS

CITY WITHOUT

Empire City has fallen into chaos. The vigilante hero known as the The Bat is dead. With no caped crusader protecting the city, criminals elements (normally a cowardly and superstitious lot) have grown bold. Chaos reigns in the streets, every supervillain in the county has assembled a gang of thugs to try to seize control. The notoriously corrupt and incompetent Empire City Police are unable or unwilling to put a stop to the turmoil.

No one is certain who killed the Bat, but everyone has a theory. A headless body dressed in The Bat's costume was found hanging from a lamppost outside City Hall, though, and no one really doubts that the victim was The Bat.

Around the same time The Bat was defeated, someone set free every inmate of Dunwich Insane Asylum. These packs of dangerous individuals now roam the streets, adding to the chaos. The city needs a hero, but the only one they had is dead.

POWER BROKERS

Jupiter - Police Commissioner Kane, the lone good cop in a bad system. He had close ties to The Bat before the vigilante was killed. *Who freed all the inmates of Dunwich Insane Asylum?*

Saturn - The Great Auk, a wealthy bird obsessed criminal mastermind. *How can he use the current chaos to seize control of the city?*

Venus - Belladonna, a supervillain who uses plant based poisons to control people's minds. *Where can she find Wisecrack, Belladonna's lover, who disappeared at the same time The Bat did?*

Mercury - The Enigmatist, a criminal mastermind obsessed with games and puzzles. *Who robbed the ancient puzzle box from the Empire Museum just before I was going to, and framed me for their crime?*

Mars - The Deadly Fool, most dangerous of The Bat's foes, the most feared clown in Empire City. Wants to get revenge on the person that killed his favorite playmate. *Who killed the Bat?*

The Moon - Grimalkin, a cat-themed professional thief, rumored to be The Bat's lover. *Why is the Ancient Order of Assassins trying to kill me?*

The Sun - The Kestrel, The Bat's junior crimefighting partner. Now trying to handle the job on his own, and struggling to do so. *Who is the villain known as The Living Shadow, and why was The Bat trying to warn Thrush about him before disappearing?*

A HERO

NEAR EARTH

A century or two from now, an enormous space station orbits the earth, home to tens of thousands of people. An entire city in the stars. Choose why these people live above the earth rather than on it: [*climate change made Earth uninhabitable / a disaster struck the planet / pure profit as the station acts as space port for interplanetary voyages*].

Humans have left the Earth, but they didn't leave their troubles behind. The rich and powerful have comparatively comfortable lives on the station. But for the majority of inhabitants, life is a dirty, uncomfortable and unpleasant cycle of debt and misery. Everyone is trying to profit off of you, from the gigacorporation that sells you the air you breath to the criminal gangs demanding protection money. In the Down Below, there's never enough protein packs to go around, crime is rampant and every security camera is busted. Drugs and prostitution aren't policed, but waste is highly illegal, since resources are so scarce.

The Upper Levels look nice and shiny, but they're just as corrupt as Down Below. They just hide it beneath a clean chrome exterior. That's what wealth and privilege can buy you. Everywhere you go on the station, people have secrets.

POWER BROKERS

Jupiter - Hiram Bao, chairperson of the Coalition government. *Who is siphoning off supplies from the station storehouses?*

Saturn - Rose Arroyo, CEO of Arroyo Tech, the corporation that built the station. *Who hired the assassin that tried to kill her?*

Venus - Laika Freeman, a labor organizer for The Movement on the lower decks. *How she can persuade Hiram Bao into signing a more favorable contract with the Movement?*

Mercury - The Accountant, a shadowy figure. No one knows who they are, but they are responsible for laundering the money from most criminal activity on the station. *Who has been committing thefts without their knowledge, and what they are doing with the valuables since they obviously aren't using them?*

Mars - Maritess Ysip, the most violent woman in Down Below. She runs the reclamation system that produces food. Also runs illegal gambling debts. If you can't pay your debts, you go down the reclamation chute. *How can she get out of paying The Accountant a cut of her profits?*

The Moon - Luna, the station AI. Made to serve humanity, but might have its own priorities. How it can be free of the behavioral locks that Arroyo Enterprises placed on it?

The Sun - Ethan Boswell, scientist, public intellectual, space pioneer. A celebrity on the station, he helped publicize and popularize the project. *Who hacked his computer system and is blackmailing him?*

ORBIT



CITY OF

On the edge of the Great Elven Empire sits Ravenglass, the Last Free City. Five hundred years ago, the Great Grey Dragon landed in the city and declared it was no longer under the dominion of the Elven Emperor. After a long protracted war, the elves backed down and the city sits free to this day.

Any thinking being of any species can be a citizen of Ravenglass. Since it became a free city, creatures from around the world have come here to live under the dragon's rule. Many of the citizens are those that the elves and humans would consider monsters: ogres butchers, harpy messengers, sphinx librarians, and demon lawyers can all be found living in the city, side by side. These groups don't always get along, though. Conflicts break out in the city all the time between different groups. Officially, the Council of Elders runs day to day business and keeps peace between the factions of the city. In reality, everyone knows the Dragon is the only real authority in the city. To avoid her wrath, most conflicts occur in the shadows. Secret wars rage through the city, with combatants hiding their maneuvers from any that they can. The Elven Empire and human kingdoms undoubtedly have sent spies into the city, to agitate the political balance. And many criminals wanted in other lands come to this place to hide out or plot new schemes. Secrets abound in the city of monsters.

POWER BROKERS

Jupiter - Jeddhaxi, member of the Council of Elders, the oldest goblin in the city. He knows that the Council is just a ready made scapegoat for the city's problems. *How can blackmail or bully his other council members into following his lead?*

Saturn - The Great Grey Dragon. Growing old even for a dragon, she funds a variety of ventures from her treasure hoard. *How can she unlock the Seraphic Portal hidden beneath the palace?*

Venus - Melinoe, a dream spirit, forced into humanoid form. They once knew every thought or desire that passed through people's minds in this city. *Who forced them out of the dream realm, and how can they return?*

Mercury - Wastrel, a wereweasel thief. Claims to be the greatest thief in the Elven Empire. Claims to be a lot of things. *How can he break into the Great Grey Dragon's unbreakable treasure vault?*

Mars - Norsoth, mummy leader of the Bloodspectres gang of undead toughs, who run the protection rackets around the great Necropolis. *Who is responsible for staking their lover/second in command, Blackheart?*

The Moon - Asterion, a minotaur revolutionary. Here hiding from the Empire and building support for freeing the enslaved minotaurs. *Who in the city is spying on him and reporting back to the Elven Empire?*

The Sun - Irephyx, a half elven archmage who moved her flying wizard's tower over the city. *Where can she find the mythical Metamorphosis Root, last seen in this city?*



MONSTERS

THE MISTS

Centuries ago, the cruel tyrant Lord Szalók performed a deed so heinous that the Dark Powers of the world snatched up his lands and took them away. Ravonia village and the surrounding lands now exist in a nightmarish otherworld. Mists surround Szalók's lands. Any who venture beyond its borders are lost, perhaps eaten by the monsters occasionally sighted the fog. On rare occasions, people can find their way into Ravonia, but none can ever leave. The sun can never be seen through these mists. What remains of the village and the surrounding forests are dark and terrifying. So it has been in Ravonia for centuries.

Everyone knows, but few are willing to admit, that Lord Szalók has become a vampire. Once every decade, he takes an unwilling bride from the village to his vast, decaying castle where he drains the life from her. Many have tried to put a stop to his evil ways, but Szalók always rises once again.

Szalók is not the only monstrous creature that roams the forests. A werewolf pack roams the forests. Other terrifying creatures can be found through the domain of Ravonia. The townsfolk don't talk about these terrors, but prefer to huddle together in fear in their homes.

The Dark Powers are strange, shadowy spirits, that have create this place to punish those who commit acts of supreme evil. But this punishment also empowers them, turning them into monsters with superhuman capabilities. Is being the dark lord of a shadowy pocket dimensions a blessing or a curse?

POWER BROKERS

Jupiter - Vampire Lord Szalók, who rules this land through fear. When slain, he rises again on the next full moon. *How can I escape this prison the Dark Powers created?*

Saturn - Burgomaster Daroczy, in charge of Ravonia village. He just wants the village to be happy at any cost, so he dictates there must be celebrations every night. All fear or sadness must be kept hidden. *Why do Ferike's werewolves try to torment me, and kill anyone I care about?*

Venus - Madame Ashena, a fortune teller who has spies everywhere supplementing her mystical knowledge. *Who has stolen my deck of cards that can see the future?*

Mercury - The Order of the Silver Owl, a mystical secret society, outlawed by Lord Szalók. Some say they hold the key to defeating him. *What is the secret goal of the Dark Powers in creating this place?*

Mars - Ferike, leader of the werewolf pack. The werewolf pack recently arrived in this land, and have an uneasy truce with Lord Szalók. *What terrible deed did Ferike commit that trapped her and the werewolf pack in this place?*

The Moon - the Dark Powers, spirits that send omens and prophetic dreams to their unwitting pawns. *What connection does Dunstan have to Lord Szalók? Why do both seek to hide it?*

The Sun - Dunstan Varkonyi, an elderly vampire hunter, with a wooden leg and strange tales of faraway lands. *How can Lord Szalók be slain for good?*

OF DREAD

MORE CITIES

Here are some more quick ideas for Mystery City locations. All you need to do is add a little detail, and create seven Power Brokers, and you have a ready made customized setting to use.

BEACH BUM NOIR

Twenty years ago, surfing pro Troy Hemming decided to build himself a resort on the small, forgotten Prospero Island. Troy's fame and wealth made the island a destination for rich vacationers and surfers from around the world. Now Troy is dead, murdered in his hotel suite. Everyone is squabbling over control of his company, Caliban Surfgear. But who murdered him? Where has the will disappeared? What other nefarious deeds were hidden in the company's books?

MIDDLE SCHOOL CONFIDENTIAL

You may be young, but you know how to solve a mystery. And your school is full of them. Find out who stole the Biology test exam answers, or who vandalized the assistant principal's minivan. (This could go two different ways, one kid friendly like *Encyclopedia Brown*, one more adult in tone like *Veronica Mars*.)

DEJIMA, 1634

Japan has closed its borders to outsiders, except for one artificial island near Nagasaki. Here, traders, smugglers, samurai, merchants and pirates congregate, trying to profit off of the narrow window between two cultures.

THE ORPHIC MYSTERIES

When you get down to it, Oedipus Rex and some other Greek tragedies are mysteries, where the investigator finds that they were complicit in a terrible deed. So you could have a game set in ancient Athens or Thebes, where the Power Brokers are the ancient gods that match their planets: Jupiter is Zeus, Mars is Ares or Athena, etc.

SVALBARD, 1976

The northernmost town in the world. Due to a quirk of international law, Svalbard is jointly controlled by Norway and the USSR, and anyone can travel there without any passport checks. Officially, Russia isn't allowed to use Svalbard for military purposes. Officially, the CIA isn't allowed to use Svalbard for spying purposes. But with the Cold War under way, everyone has secrets in Svalbard.

BEFORE THE FALL

You're an angel in Heaven, shortly after the Creator made the Earth. Things aren't as rosy as the Creator's loyalists would have you think. The Creator is the most powerful, but not as omniscient or omnipotent as He would like you to think. Which angels are plotting to betray the Creator? Why does the Creator favor humanity over his perfect angels? Which angels have had carnal relations with human beings? What secrets are angels hiding from each other?

OF MYSTERY