

How to Play



STRANGEVILLE FILES

ABOUT

In this lighthearted storytelling-focused game you'll improvise supernatural mysteries in the style of Gravity Falls, Scooby Doo, Inside Job, X-Files, Men in Black, SCP Foundation.

In a world where every conspiracy theory is true, you will protect people from the weirdness of the world (or the weirdness of the world from the people).

HERO AND NARRATOR

One player roleplays as the Hero investigating the mystery. Another plays as a Narrator, describing the world around them and introducing the clues. Any other players play as Support - portraying supporting characters and adding details to the story.

Each new scene, the players switch their roles.

SETUP THE GAME

DEAL THE CARDS

Deal 3 location cards and 3 character cards, place them where everyone can see.

DEFINE THE SETTING

Together, describe a setting where your mystery takes place (inspired by the cards).

DEFINE THE HERO

Together, describe the Hero of your story: their name, appearance, personality, occupation, special skills or powers they have, and a reason for being in this place.

They should be someone who could encounter and investigate a mystery in this setting.

CHARACTERS AND LOCATIONS

Take turns. On your turn, select one of the cards, and describe a place or a person inspired by the card. Any player will be able to use these ideas during the story.

Avoid creating locations or characters that are overtly supernatural or too unusual for this setting.

Discard the card you've used and draw a new one.

Keep taking turns until you've created three locations and three supporting characters.

DRAW THE CLUE CARDS

Each player draws 3 clue cards. During the game you'll introduce clues inspired by them.

IMPROVISE A MYSTERY

HOOK

The player decides where the Hero is and what they are doing when they encounter the mystery.

The Narrator describes the scene. During the scene they introduce the first clue the Hero encounters (place a clue card and describe a clue inspired by it).

SPECULATE

After each scene, each player privately makes up a **theory** about what's going on, who/what is behind it, what they're doing, why, and what their endgame is.

Don't share your theory with the other players, don't discuss the direction the story is going.

Update your theory based on each new clue you've discovered. When it's your turn to be the Narrator, you'll introduce clues based on your theory.

INVESTIGATE

The player describes what Hero does to investigate the mystery - where do they go, how do they search for clues, what do they hope to learn about the mystery.

The Narrator introduces a **challenge** - some obstacle or complication that makes the investigation difficult.

If the Hero successfully overcomes the challenge, the Narrator reveals the next clue based on their theory. Place a clue card and create a clue inspired by it, or reveal something new related to an existing clue.

The clues should become progressively more obvious.

RESOLVE THE STORY

THE REVEAL

Investigate the mystery until someone is ready to reveal the truth, explain what's going on, and establish the location where the climax of the story takes place.

The Hero or the Narrator may describe how the main character discovers the solution to the mystery.

THE CLIMAX

Once the truth is revealed, the investigation story turns into a mission-based save-the-day scenario. If there's a culprit, their evil scheme is nearly complete. If there's a victim, they're in grave danger. The cause of the weirdness may need to be contained, protected, it may need help to escape or to stay hidden.

The Hero rushes to confront the culprit, help the person in need, solve the problem at the root of the mystery, protect the cause of the weirdness, or have some other dramatic resolution.

The Narrator comes up with the final challenge the Hero must overcome in order to succeed.

THE EPILOGUE

Play out the final scene that shows the consequences of the mystery and the fates of the characters.

Describe how things go back to normal, explain how the supernatural stays hidden from the world at large.

After the game, the players share their theories.

Location Cards



Ancient Place

EXAMPLES

- Imposing castle with dark secrets
- Dilapidated mansion or crumbling estate
- Archaic tower or obelisk of unknown origin
- Overgrown ruins of an ancient temple
- Primordial cavern or subterranean labyrinth
- Ancient solitary oak with gnarled branches

1 Location



Remote Place

EXAMPLES

- Solitary lighthouse on a distant shore
- Secluded mountain peak or hidden valley
- Desolate tundra or frigid arctic landscape
- Isolated outpost or remote research station
- Uncharted island with weird flora and fauna
- Unexplored jungle or untamed wilderness

2 Location



Sacred Place

EXAMPLES

- Candlelit shrine tucked away in an alley
- Fog-shrouded cemetery at the edge of town
- Humble monastery perched on a cliff side
- Ancestral burial mound or old battlefield
- Holy spring hidden in a tranquil grove
- Cliffside monk retreat

3 Location



Underground

EXAMPLES

- Network of caverns below a mountain
- Dank catacombs beneath an old cathedral
- Mineshaft that goes deep underground
- Smuggling tunnels under a city
- Ancient burial chambers carved into bedrock
- Cluttered basement of a run-down house

4 Location



Nature

EXAMPLES

- Tall mountain peak or dormant volcano
- Serene lake, turbulent sea, or winding river
- Dense forest or misty, treacherous swamp
- Majestic, snow-capped mountain range
- Lush valley or windswept coastal beach
- Fog-shrouded bayou with twisted trees

5 Location



Abandoned Place

EXAMPLES

- Deserted amusement park or carnival
- Abandoned mental asylum or prison
- Ghost town or forgotten village
- Derelict factory or warehouse
- Overgrown train station or vacant city lot
- Vacant manor or estate

6 Location



Urban Place

EXAMPLES

- Dimly-lit dive bar, nightclub, or casino
- Gloomy alley, underpass, or train tracks
- Lively park, stadium, or playground
- Subway station or underground parking lot
- Corporate offices in a skyscraper
- Busy street corner or a mall

7 Location



Spooky Location

EXAMPLES

- Foggy graveyard with crumbling tombstones
- Decaying mansion with creaking floorboards
- Abandoned asylum with rusty metal beds
- Misty swamp with half-submerged trees
- Eerie doll shop with glass eyes watching
- Condemned church with boarded windows

8 Location



Place of Knowledge

EXAMPLES

- Dusty stacks of an old library or a book shop
- Imposing observatory or astronomical tower
- Cluttered office of an eccentric professor
- Prestigious school or university
- High-tech lab with cutting-edge equipment
- Secured vault in an antiquities museum

9 Location



Rural Place

EXAMPLES

- Quaint village, rural farm or sprawling ranch
- Small-town diner or old-fashioned shop
- Rickety wooden water tower or windmill
- Volunteer fire station or tiny post office
- Roadside produce stand
- Charming bed-and-breakfast or country inn

10 Location



Forbidden Place

EXAMPLES

- High-security military base or missile silo
- Remote research station or secret lab
- Contaminated exclusion zone or waste dump
- Invitation-only private club or secret society
- Off-limits government facility or power plant
- Sealed-off crime scene or restricted vault

11 Location



Commercial Place

EXAMPLES

- Bank vault or bustling stock exchange
- Supermarket, mall, or corner bodega
- Treasury or exclusive auction house
- Busy port or cargo ship laden with goods
- Car dealership lot or mechanic's garage
- Pawn shop or antique store

12 Location



Opulent Place

EXAMPLES

- Grand ballroom or lavish banquet hall
- Exclusive country club or old mansion
- Luxurious penthouse suite or rooftop garden
- Prestigious high-end auction house
- Five-star restaurant or sophisticated lounge
- Extravagant yacht or sleek private jet

13 Location



Public Space

EXAMPLES

- Crowded town square with a fountain
- Busy public library with towering shelves
- Lively farmer's market filled with stalls
- Packed sports stadium during a big game
- Bustling airport terminal with long queues
- Noisy public swimming pool on a hot day

14 Location



Workplace

EXAMPLES

- Office cubicles with flickering lights
- Grease-stained auto repair shop
- Pristine research lab with microscopes
- Musty antique store with creaky floorboards
- Cozy bakery filled with the scent of bread
- Eerie mortuary with shiny metal surfaces

15 Location



Transit Hub

EXAMPLES

- Deserted train station at midnight
- Abandoned subway station
- Quiet bus station at the edge of town
- A bustling port with ships and boats
- Old-fashioned airfield
- Hiking trail

16 Location



Industrial Place

EXAMPLES

- Massive factory or manufacturing plant
- Busy warehouse or distribution center
- Noisy construction site or towering crane
- Active power plant or electrical substation
- Sprawling refinery or processing facility
- Bustling shipyard or airport

17 Location



High-Tech Location

EXAMPLES

- Sleek underground laboratory
- Cutting-edge medical facility
- Airport control room
- Hacker's den with laptops and gaming gear
- Inventor's laboratory with weird devices
- Advanced highly automated factory

18 Location



Government Place

EXAMPLES

- Embassy or consulate
- Tax office or registry
- Courthouse or town hall
- Police station or prison
- Public hospital conducting research
- Border checkpoint or customs office

19 Location



Extreme Environment

EXAMPLES

- Thunder-wracked sky or eternal storm
- Toxic swamp or contaminated wasteland
- Scorching desert or endless sand dunes
- Harsh, unforgiving tundra or frozen wastes
- Depths of the ocean or abyssal trenches
- Airless void or extraterrestrial landscape

20 Location

CHARACTER CARDS



WORKER

EXAMPLES

Gruff mechanic covered in engine grease

Diligent janitor mopping the hallways

Dedicated nurse assisting patients

Hardworking farmer tending to the fields

Friendly bartender wiping down the counter

Cheerful tour guide leading a group

1 Character



AUTHORITY FIGURE

EXAMPLES

Town mayor with a passion for history

High school principal known for fairness

Respected elder wielding a lot of influence

Stern judge with a commanding presence

Hospital chief of staff

Revered guru with an enigmatic aura

2 Character



POWERFUL PERSON

EXAMPLES

Wealthy CEO in a tailored business suit

Famous actress surrounded by paparazzi

Charismatic mayor with a winning smile

Stern judge with a commanding presence

Respected elder wielding a lot of influence

Charming cult leader with devoted followers

3 Character



WELL-CONNECTED

EXAMPLES

Chatty bartender who hears all the rumors

Nosy hairdresser with a gift for gab

Retired neighbor who loves to gossip

Friendly mailman who chats with everyone

Seasoned trucker with friends in every town

Sailor with a lot of stories to tell

4 Character



KEEPER OF SECRETS

EXAMPLES

Librarian with forbidden knowledge

Priest guarding ancient relics

Elder with tribal history

Archivist with classified documents

Lighthouse keeper with nautical tales

Government agent on a mission

5 Character



DANGEROUS PERSON

EXAMPLES

Ruthless mob boss feared by all

Corrupt politician with powerful connections

Unhinged drifter with a violent streak

Cold-blooded assassin with a code of honor

Unpredictable rebel with a turbulent past

Menacing bouncer with a short fuse

6 Character



CENTER OF ATTENTION

EXAMPLES

Celebrated author on a book tour

Charismatic influencer with mass following

Spoiled party girl hosting epic events

Rising star athlete in a major competition

Popular DJ with a cult following

Celebrity chef with a popular dining spot

7 Character



INVESTIGATOR

EXAMPLES

Grizzled police detective with a troubled past

Nosy reporter stirring up controversy

Curious archaeologist on a quest

Meticulous historian seeking ancient secrets

True crime podcaster seeking justice

Aspiring mystery novelist

8 Character



OLD-TIMER

EXAMPLES

Dapper gentleman with a pocket watch

Prim and proper lady in a vintage dress

Bow-tie wearing professor with dated slang

Grizzled prospector panning for gold

Superstitious grandparent

Nostalgic war veteran proud of his medals

9 Character



MEMBER OF A GROUP

EXAMPLES

Protective matriarch of a powerful family

A cult member of a secret society

Passionate enthusiast of an unusual hobby

A kid from a visiting tourist family

Member of a local street gang

Mischievous teen in a clique of locals

10 Character



BELIEVER

EXAMPLES

Devout priest with unshakable faith

Wide-eyed conspiracy theorist

Zealous revolutionary fighting for a cause

Activist championing a movement

Super-fan obsessed with a celebrity

Cultist devoted to a charismatic leader

11 Character



LAW ENFORCER

EXAMPLES

Grizzled detective with no-nonsense attitude

Intimidating bouncer with a stern glare

Cold-blooded hitman with a code

Loyal bodyguard with lightning reflexes

Ruthless debt collector with brass knuckles

Tax collector or a government official

12 Character



SUSPICIOUS OR SECRETIVE

EXAMPLES

Special agent on a secret mission

Reclusive outcast with a hidden past

Mysterious foreigner with a fake identity

Soft-spoken librarian guarding a secret

Paranoid conspiracy theorist

Enigmatic mastermind pulling strings

13 Character



TROUBLEMAKER

EXAMPLES

Angsty teenage rebel looking for trouble

Passionate activist, hacker, or whistleblower

Cunning schemer manipulating others

Ill-tempered graffiti artist or vandal

Attention-seeking diva creating drama

Former government agent gone rogue

14 Character



UNTRUSTWORTHY FIGURE

EXAMPLES

Imaginative child with a knack for tall tales

Red-nosed drunkard with slurred speech

Experienced con artist or fraudster

Criminal mastermind, hacker, master thief

Corrupt politician or bribed official

Forgetful senior with a wandering mind

15 Character



ADVENTURER

EXAMPLES

Rugged merchant with exotic wares

Enigmatic diplomat on a secret mission

Wide-eyed tourist snapping photos

Seasoned explorer seeking lost ruins

Daring smuggler with hidden compartments

Free-spirited backpacker following the wind

16 Character



EXPERT

EXAMPLES

Scholar on the brink of a breakthrough

Master craftsman creating exquisite works

World-class athlete shattering records

Master craftsman creating exquisite works

Acclaimed artist painting masterpieces

Veteran detective cracking unsolvable cases

17 Character



OUTCAST

EXAMPLES

Vagrant or homeless person

Exiled noble or disgraced aristocrat

Eccentric hermit or reclusive artist

Banjo-playing storyteller by the fire

Paranoid survivalist with a bunker

Wandering nomad or free-spirited drifter

18 Character



APPRENTICE

EXAMPLES

Wide-eyed student or eager apprentice

Rookie cop or detective-in-training

Fledgling artist or struggling writer

Intern or entry-level employee

Protégé or mentee seeking guidance

Novice craftsman or budding entrepreneur

19 Character



MERCHANT

EXAMPLES

Antiquities dealer with a hidden collection

Shady black market merchant

Cunning information broker trading secrets

Traveling merchant peddling cursed wares

Exotic animal trader with rare beasts

Friendly innkeeper with an unusual hobby

20 Character

CLUE CARDS

TRACKS OR REMAINS

EXAMPLES

Unusual tracks, footprints, or trail marks

An unknown material or substance

Strange scorch marks, stains, or residues

Remains of ritualistic offerings or sacrifices

Sounds, smells, or leftovers

Trail of destruction, signs of damage

1

Clue

STRANGE ARTIFACT

EXAMPLES

Statue or painting with unsettling qualities

Bizarre music, dance, or performance

Unusual mask or an amulet

Device or instrument of unknown origin

Art depicting unnerving scenes

Object seems designed for non-human use

2

Clue

WEIRD SPECIMEN OR SAMPLE

EXAMPLES

Bones or fossils of an unknown creature

Mummified corpse in strange state

Eggs, or cocoons of an unidentified species

Bizarre plant or fungus specimen

Pulsating cocoon of an otherworldly insect

Seeds that grow into carnivorous plants

3

Clue

TECHNOLOGY OR DEVICES

EXAMPLES

Quantum computer with powerful AI

Anachronistic clockwork device

Self-replicating nanobots

Holographic projector

Old laptop covered in spiderwebs

Microscope with strange properties

4

Clue

STRANGE BEHAVIOR

EXAMPLES

Keeps nervously glancing at a tower

Is seen where they don't belong

Attends secret midnight gatherings

Obviously lying or acting strangely nervous

Exhibits strong unexplained emotions

People speaking in unison

5

Clue

REVEALED SECRET

EXAMPLES

Character stole something valuable

Character has keys to all locked rooms

Character attends secret meetings

Character has a rare or dangerous item

Character conceals a famous identity

Character has an unusual pet

6

Clue

MYSTERIOUS SIGHTING

EXAMPLES

Ghostly figure appears in an old photograph

Enormous creature swims in the town lake

Floating lights moving through the forest

Brief glimpse of a portal in the night sky

Mysterious cloaked figure stalks the streets

Unexplained silhouette on a rooftop

7

Clue

DOCUMENTS AND RECORDS

EXAMPLES

Photographs, paintings, rough sketches

Blueprints for an unusual device

Ancient deeds or strange contracts

Newspaper stories or classifieds

Books, journals, or maps

Scientific studies and reports

8

Clue

SURVEILLANCE INTEL

EXAMPLES

Anomalies in security camera footage

Suspicious patterns in data or records

Discovery of hidden monitoring devices

Eyewitness reports of covert activities

Intercepted communication

Unexplained gaps in surveillance logs

9

Clue

CRYPTIC MESSAGE

EXAMPLES

Mysterious code or cipher

Puzzling riddle or enigmatic phrase

Message hidden in plain sight

Incomplete or interrupted transmission

Clue hidden in a work of art or music

Message from an unknown sender or source

10

Clue

STORIES AND MYTHS

EXAMPLES

Rumors or gossip of strange events or people

Local myths or folklore with a grain of truth

Eyewitness accounts or urban legends

Overheard conversations or stories

Whispers of a secret society's dark rituals

Legends of a cursed object or place

11

Clue

WITNESS TESTIMONY

EXAMPLES

Child claiming they saw a monster

Homeless man raves about alien beings

Fisherman's tale of a mysterious catch

Reports of people vanishing into thin air

Shopkeeper's account of a strange customer

Hiker's description of eerie sounds at night

12

Clue

CUSTOMS AND RITUALS

EXAMPLES

Bizarre local customs or taboo practices

Enigmatic sayings or coded messages

Abandoned ceremonial circle

Faint, rhythmic drumming from the woods

Unsettling midnight procession

Enigmatic town motto carved in wood

13

Clue

HIDDEN PLACE

EXAMPLES

Sealed cave behind a waterfall

Forgotten wing in an old mansion

Forgotten subway station, tracks sealed

Attic room with a locked, mysterious door

Underground bunker from a past era

Hidden passageway in the local inn

14

Clue

ANOMALOUS STRUCTURE

EXAMPLES

Impossibly large building or monument

Structure made of unknown materials

Building with an impossible layout or design

Structure predating known human presence

Black obelisk that defies gravity

Underground pyramid

15

Clue

DISAPPEARANCE

EXAMPLES

Missing person's belongings left behind

Unexplained absence from work or home

Abandoned vehicle or mode of transport

Unfinished meal or drink

Cryptic message or clue left behind

Unusual behavior before disappearance

16

Clue

UNUSUAL CREATURE

EXAMPLES

Stories about a monster stalking the woods

A huge nest with several eggs

Vampire squirrels with glowing eyes

A swarm of rats forming a larger creature

Moths drawn to people instead of light

Parrot reciting unsettling prophecies

17

Clue

AFFLICTION

EXAMPLES

Exposure to an unknown drug or poison

Outbreak of a mysterious disease or illness

Abnormal craving for strange substances

Odd symptoms like insomnia or high fever

Abnormal traits like glowing eyes or odd gait

Speaking in unknown, ancient tongues

18

Clue

MARKS AND SYMBOLS

EXAMPLES

Carvings depicting bizarre scenes

Impossibly ancient or futuristic symbols

Images hinting at a terrifying truth

Marks made of an otherworldly substance

Glyphs that glow or move when touched

Cryptic sigils that induce unease or dread

19

Clue

UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY

EXAMPLES

Ancient ruins unearthed during construction

Perfectly preserved vintage car in a barn

Skeletal remains found in the town square

Intricate tunnel system below an old factory

Diary of a long-dead resident surfaces

Unusual creatures in a newly dug well

20

Clue