

# Murder Express

An investigative mystery game for one  
GM and three to four investigators.



# Murder Express

## HOW TO PLAY

In a game of Murder Express, no dice are rolled. Investigators uncover information by asking the right questions, examining scenes, sharing information with each other and using the special abilities on their character sheets.

Each player will have one of four specific investigator roles:

DETECTIVE GENIUS  
POLICE INSPECTOR

AFFABLE COMPANION  
EAGER CONSTABLE

Each role has their own special abilities and restrictions that determine how they can interact with the mystery, and some need to work together to be effective.

All investigators have their own specific background information for each crime. Most of the background knowledge can be shared freely if the player chooses. Anything marked "SECRET" is something the character would rather keep to themselves.

As investigators interact with the crime and its suspects, they discover clues. These are sometimes spoken aloud by the GM to the whole table, sometimes written down and passed specifically to the player(s) discovering them, and sometimes included in the background information given with your character sheets.

The game is over when the perpetrator is caught, or when all but two suspects are eliminated (dead or falsely accused). In a competitive game the winners are those who either solved the crime first, or with a more complete understanding of what happened and why.

## PLAYER NUMBERS

3-player games are cooperative, with all players working together to solve the case. One player must play the Detective Genius, another the Police Inspector, and the third may choose either the Affable Sidekick or the Eager Constable.

4-player games include all investigators and players can choose to what extent the two pairings (Detective Genius/Affable Sidekick and Police Inspector/Eager Constable) will cooperate with each other. A 4-player game may even be played as two fully competitive teams.

# Murder Express

## GM INFORMATION

You can run Murder Express with your own crimes or with one of the pre-written crimesets that are available from MacGuffin & Co.

Before you start, you'll need:

- These rules!
- Investigator character sheets
- Index cards, post-it notes or scraps of paper
- Pens or pencils
- A crimeset, including *set-up*, *suspects*, *clues*, *escalation points* and *solution*
- Two cards or tokens that look identical on one side but are clearly different on the other. Two playing cards of different suits work well, as do two pieces of paper or card with blank backs and a tick or a cross on the other side.

To run one of the pre-written crimesets, first read through the set-up, suspects, investigator background information, clues, escalation points and solution. The crimeset comes with all information that each of the investigators know before the game starts, which should be handed out with the character sheets.

## STARTING THE GAME

You can either start the game with the investigators immediately discovering the *set-up*, or with a bit of role-play beforehand. Some crimesets work best with role-play before the murder is discovered (a poisoning at a fancy party), while others work best with the set-up right at the start (called to the scene of a locked-room murder), but any crimeset can be run either way with a small amount of tweaking. If you do choose to role-play at the start, try to introduce the victim and all the suspects before you trigger the set-up (unless the crimeset says otherwise).

After triggering the set-up, place the suspect list where all the investigators can see it.

## GIVING CLUES

As the investigators role-play, ask questions and use their special abilities, give them information from the clues list. Some of the clues can only be given if the investigators do certain things - don't worry if your players don't trigger these clues. The mystery can still be solved without them, it might just take a little more time and deduction!

# Murder Express

Most of the clues can be read out to the table but some will be marked for a specific investigator only. The game runs smoothest if you write these clues down on index cards or post-its before you run the session (or print and cut up the clues list), so you can mysteriously slide them to players at the right time.

Certain clues are given through suspect interrogation. When your investigators decide to interview someone, you take on the role of the suspect and feed information from the relevant part of the clue list, depending on the questions the investigators ask. Occasionally a suspect will might have information marked "SECRET", similarly to investigators. This is information the suspect would rather keep to themselves. Unless a specific situation is specified, it's up to you what it will take for them to share it.

## LYING

You may choose to have suspects lie during interviews (and in the case of the killer, will almost certainly have to!) The Detective Genius and Police Inspector will both know if the suspect was lying or hiding anything, but only find out at the end of an interview. You can signal this to the players however you wish, but it is a good idea to prepare a pair cards or tokens beforehand (one 'Honest' and one 'Liar') that you can slide across the table. You must always give the Detective Genius the correct card, but can choose to give the wrong one to the Police Inspector (usually about one in three interviews) to send them chasing after red herrings. If the Detective Genius and Police Inspector are in the same interview, give the card to the Police Inspector first, and make sure to hide whether it's the same card you are giving to the Detective Genius. The Police Inspector may choose to share this card with the Eager Constable.

Whenever you give a clue to the Police Inspector and the Eager Constable can also see or hear it (this includes an interviewee's honesty), you must let the Eager Constable know if the information is helpful or misleading. Irrelevant information is also considered misleading. You can either agree on a covert signal beforehand or use the tokens/cards similar to those used during witness interviews.

Whenever the Affable Companion makes a wild conjecture, you can again use a covert signal or the tokens/cards above to let the Detective Genius if the guess is correct or not (feel free to set a limit of once per scene on this if your Affable Companion is abusing this power).

# Murder Express

## ESCALATION

Each crimeset comes with a few escalation points to move the story along and give the investigators some urgency. These are the big dramatic moments so, when they're triggered (either by in-game events or by time), be sure to play it up and give them some space to react and roleplay. Just after an escalation point is the perfect time to have a break, grab a drink and gather your thoughts before diving in for the next bit.

## WHAT IF MY INVESTIGATORS DO SOMETHING UNEXPECTED?

That's fine! If they're trying to interact with something small but irrelevant (e.g. one of them decides there's definitely a secret drawer in the very unimportant desk), you can quickly describe what happens before telling them they don't find anything, or say that they find something but that it doesn't look relevant.

If your investigators try to investigate an avenue that's not provided for in the crimeset (such as going for a field trip to a neighbouring town mentioned off-handedly in one of the clues), spend some time describing their interactions and investigations without going into too much specific detail. Try to limit their opportunities for role-playing with NPCs while they're chasing this loose thread. If the players don't figure out they're on the wrong track after a minute or two, trigger the next escalation point to bring their focus back to the core of the mystery.

Of course, sometimes your players will come up with something totally unexpected but really fun or clever! If they do, reward them, either by giving appropriate clues from the list, or by making up your own details, either for fun or to point them towards leads.

No crimeset can cover everything your players might want to interact with so, as with any role-playing game, you should feel free to make up your own elements and change things as much as you like!

## CONTENT WARNINGS

As Murder Express is primarily a game about crime, it's inevitable that some of the darker aspects of human behaviour will come up. We try to present it in the style of classic detective stories like those of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, focusing on the deduction rather than revelling in the seedier parts of the crime.

# Murder Express

That said, there will be elements of any given crimeset that might not be fun for everyone (and everyone having fun is very much the point of games).

We put content notes at the start of every crimeset to let you know what sensitive topics are included and we recommend you share these with the whole group before starting a game. If you're worried that sharing content notes will ruin the mystery, be assured we keep our content notes broad and sharing them really does let everyone at the table relax and have a good time. If you're still really worried about it, discuss it with your players and get their views on it, but if any player asks you for the content notes, you must provide them.

You can assume all our crimesets come with a content notes for violence, crime, murder and law enforcement. We never use sexual violence or hate crimes in any of our crimesets.



## DETECTIVE GENIUS

You notice every relevant detail during the investigation.

You receive extra information about some clues.

You know if a suspect lied or withheld information during an interview (but not what they lied about/omitted).

You may point things out or draw attention to details, but may never directly share information (such as whether a suspect was lying), nor can you confer, or discuss your theories or reasoning with other players.

## AFFABLE COMPANION

You have more contextual and background knowledge than the other investigators

You may freely confer and give this knowledge to other players.

When you ask questions and examine clues, the Detective Genius receives additional information as though they were the one doing so.

*"Am I on time?"* - once per game, you can negate any action by a suspect through perfect timing and blind luck: perhaps by opening a door, dropping something out of a window or happening upon them in a lane and starting a friendly chat.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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POLICE INSPECTOR

You receive more information than any other investigator but some of it is misleading

You may share information freely  
with any other player

You usually know if a suspect lied or withheld information during an interview, but your instincts may mislead you.

"We've got 'em dead to rights" - once per game, you may chose two suspects. The GM will pick one of them, and that suspect is arrested and removed from the game. The GM must pick an innocent suspect, and provide any of their clues they feel appropriate to the Detective Genius.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

## EAGER CONSTABLE

You know which of the Police Inspector's clues are irrelevant or misleading (this includes the honesty of a witness).

You can never tell the Police Inspector that they are wrong. If they ever ask you to choose between clues or avenues of investigation, you must answer "Whatever you think's best, Chief" or words to that effect.

"Gym time is mandatory" - you are the only player with enough stamina to chase or restrain suspects.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

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