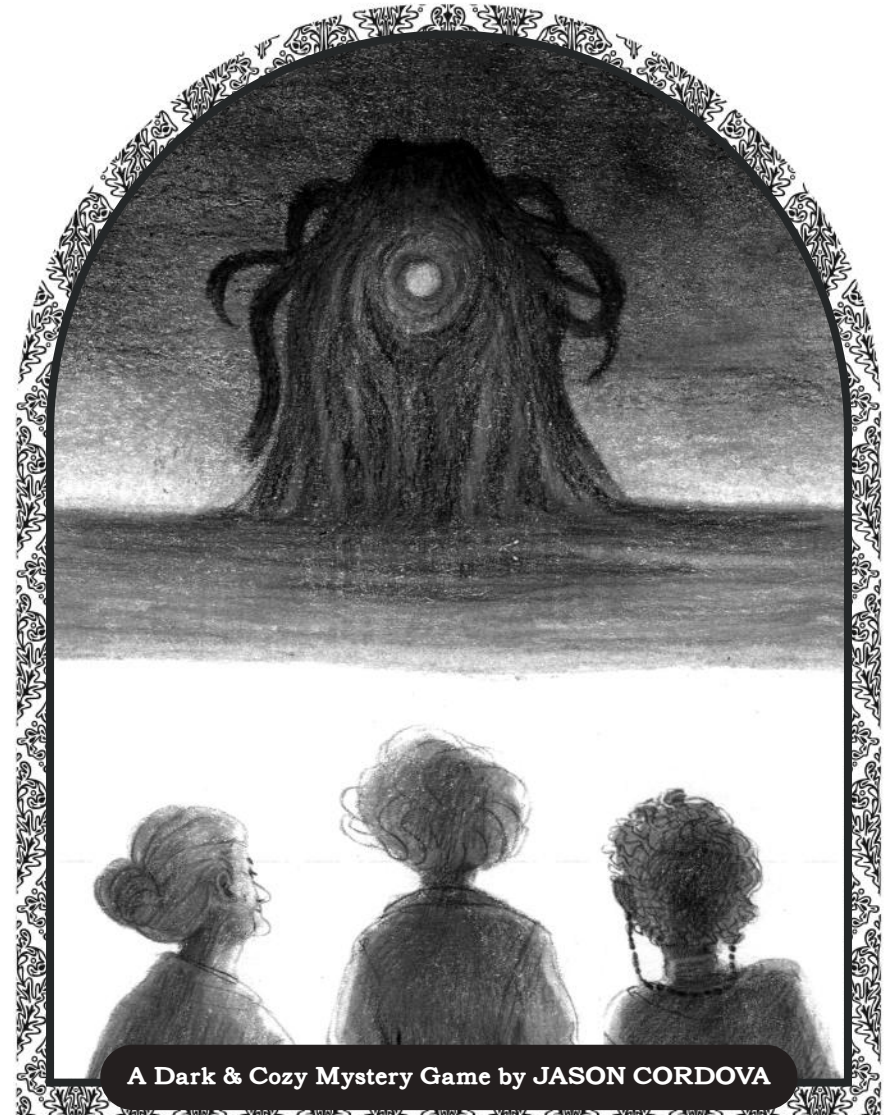


BRINDLEWOOD BAY



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Art by Cecilia Ferri and layout by Jesse Ross.

10. Investigation

The bulk of the session will be taken up by the Murder Mavens' investigation of the mystery. The players can pursue any leads their Mavens might be interested in, or they can request downtime scenes in which we see the Mavens bonding with each other or members of the community. The Keeper should call for breaks throughout, as needed. Note that the Mavens may not solve the mystery this session and that's ok—it carries over to the next session.

11. Crown Scenes

There are two special sections on the character sheet: The Crown of the Queen and The Crown of the Void. When text from those sections is marked during play, the player of the Maven in question must do as the text instructs. This frequently means narrating a very specific type of scene. Players can narrate such scenes whenever they wish, but must do so before the end of the session. When there are about fifteen minutes remaining in the scheduled play time, the Keeper should wrap up whatever scene is taking place and then call for Crown scenes that have not yet taken place.

12. End of Session Questions

Go around the table and have each player read aloud their marked End of Session questions. For each one they answer "Yes" to, they mark 1 XP.

13. Stars & Wishes

The Keeper and players should take a few minutes to share their stars and wishes. Stars are things about the session the participant enjoyed. Wishes are things they hope to see in the next session.

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5. Character Introductions and A Cozy Little Place

Go around the table and have every player introduce their Murder Maven by Name, Style, Cozy Activity, and Maven move.

Then, go around the table again and have each player describe three key aspects of their Maven's earlier life:

- Their deceased partner.
- Their children, if any (pets are ok here, too)
- Their career before they retired to Brindlewood Bay.

After a player discusses each of the three points above, the other players and Keeper should then name one object that can be found in their home in Brindlewood Bay. The player should note these objects on the part of their character sheet called A Cozy Little Place. By the end of this process, there should be between three and five objects in the player's Cozy Little Place. If needed, someone can name more than one object.

6. Break

Take a five minute break so everyone can get a drink of water and think a bit about their character.

7. Beginning of Session

Each player should now mark two End of Session questions in addition to the first, which is always marked. If any characters have Maven moves that fire off at the beginning of a session, resolve them now.

8. Cozy Vignettes

Each player narrates a short vignette showing their Maven enjoying her life in Brindlewood Bay. These scenes should be light and breezy or warm and cozy; they should show the Maven enjoying her hobbies, helping with a community project, or working around her home.

9. The Keeper Presents a Mystery

The Keeper will frame one or more scenes in which a murder mystery is introduced to the Mavens. The Keeper will also inform the players of the mystery's complexity rating, from 6 to 8. The presentation will include an establishing question that closely ties one or more Mavens to the mystery.



“Aim: Today we’re going to begin by creating characters. After we create characters, we’ll introduce them and populate a special section on the character sheet called A Cozy Little Place. After that, we’ll take a short break. When we come back from the break, we’ll have a Beginning of Session procedure, a special set of scenes called Cozy Vignettes, and then I’ll present the mystery your characters will be investigating. After that, we’ll begin regular play. At the end of the session, we’ll have a short debrief. In future sessions, I’ll present new mysteries near the beginning of the session and we’ll dive right into regular play.”

“Tone: The tone of this game bounces between the cozy and the creepy. Most of the time, it will be fairly lighthearted, but occasionally it will get very dark and menacing. Some kitschy, campy humor is permissible here—and very much in keeping with some of the game’s inspirations—but above all, your characters should take everything they do very seriously, even if we’re having a bit of a laugh from time to time.”

“Subject Matter: The subject matter may occasionally get dark and challenging, especially when the dark cult rears its head. In order to help ensure no one’s fun is ruined by triggering subject matter, we’re going to be using the following safety tools...”

For that last part, you should then explain the different safety tools that will be in use. The author of this game prefers Lines & Veils and the X-card, but you can use whatever tools your group is comfortable with.

CATS is a creation of Patrick O’Leary, slightly modified for these rules.

4. Character Creation

Here are the steps for character creation. Everyone can do these steps as they wish, but should stop when they get to the section of their character sheet called A Cozy Little Place.

1. Circle a Name and think of a surname
2. Circle a Style
3. Circle a Cozy Activity (no two Mavens can have the same cozy activity).
4. Assign 1 point to one of the abilities and then note the final ability modifiers.
5. Choose a Maven move from the Maven Moves sheet (no two Mavens can share the same Maven move in the beginning, and the Dale Cooper move and the Fox Mulder move cannot both be chosen).
6. Wait for everyone else to be finished.

Overview

Brindlewood Bay is a roleplaying game about a group of elderly women—members of the local Murder Mavens mystery book club—who frequently find themselves investigating (and solving!) real-life murder mysteries. They become increasingly aware that there are supernatural forces that connect the cases they are working on and, in particular, a cult dedicated to the dark, monstrous aspect of the goddess Persephone will come to vex them.

The game is directly inspired by the television show *Murder, She Wrote*, but also takes inspiration from the works of H.P. Lovecraft, “cozy” crime dramas, and American TV shows from the ‘70s, ‘80s, and ‘90s.

The Setting

Brindlewood Bay is a small coastal community in Massachusetts. A whaling town in the 18th and 19th centuries, it is now largely a tourist spot. Many locals have turned their homes into bed & breakfasts, and the town has antique shops, comfy dining spots, and artists and artisans of all kinds. Guided fishing trips are common.

The Murder Mavens

The Murder Mavens is a small mystery book club that has been meeting on the top floor of The Candlelight Booksellers every Saturday evening for the last ten years. The Murder Mavens are particularly fond of The Gold Crown Mysteries series by Robin Masterson, featuring the globe-trotting super-sleuth, Amanda Delacourt.

The Mavens themselves are all elderly women whose partners have passed away and whose children have long flown the nest. Now, they’re enjoying their golden years in the picturesque town of Brindlewood Bay, keeping their homes the way they like, pursuing their hobbies, and finding comfort and companionship in each other.

The Mavens are also amateur detectives, and by the time the game starts, they have helped local police solve several high profile crimes. Sometimes people approach them to get their help on a case, but usually the Mavens just stumble onto it—much to the chagrin of the authorities, who almost always resent their meddling.

The Midwives of the Fragrant Void

Why are so many murders taking place in and around Brindlewood Bay? And why are the Murder Mavens always around? Some have speculated that the Mavens must be committing these crimes themselves and using their knowledge gained from mystery books to frame others. But that, of course, is ridiculous. In fact, the reason Brindlewood Bay is the focus of so much death is because it is geographically and historically significant to a dark cult called the Midwives of the Fragrant Void.

At the start of the game, the Mavens don't know anything about the Midwives, but we do: they are a nihilistic cult of men and women dedicated to bringing forth the "children of Persephone," chthonic monstrosities that will usher in the End of All Things. Their interest in Brindlewood Bay is an historical one: in the late 19th century, a whaling ship crew accidentally slew a child of Persephone, believing it to be a whale, and sold its parts to museums all over the world. The wealth generated from that particular voyage was used to build the town of Brindlewood Bay into what it is today. This intimate connection to a child of Persephone makes Brindlewood Bay a place of power to the Midwives of the Fragrant Void.

As the game progresses, the Mavens will become ever-more-aware of the supernatural connections between the murders they are investigating, and will eventually come to understand the role of the Midwives of the Fragrant Void. They may begin to dabble in the occult in order to combat the dark forces arrayed against them, come face-to-face with a child of Persephone, or even be tempted to join the Midwives themselves.

Session 1 Procedure

1. Read the game and gather play materials

The Keeper should read these rules in their entirety and then gather the materials needed for the first play session. You will need:

- At least two 6-sided dice, though more is better.
- Index cards to make character name tents.
- Writing utensils.
- Enough character sheets for each player to have one.
- At least one reference sheet, but one per player is better.
- At least one Maven moves sheet.
- The mystery sheet for the chosen mystery ("Dad Overboard" is recommended for your first session).
- The dark conspiracy sheet.

2. Player and Keeper introductions

Going around the table, each participant should state their name, their pronouns, and anything else the group might find interesting about them.

3. CATS

CATS is an acronym that stands for Concept, Aim, Tone, and Subject Matter. It is usually presented by the Keeper and helps to establish some basic expectations for how the game is going to proceed. It's also a low-stakes way for the Keeper to get accustomed to being in the spotlight.

If you're the Keeper, you can develop your own CATS for *Brindlewood Bay*, or simply read the following aloud:

"Concept: Brindlewood Bay is a roleplaying game about a group of elderly women—members of the local Murder Mavens mystery book club—who frequently find themselves investigating (and solving!) real-life murder mysteries. They become increasingly aware that there are supernatural forces that connect the cases they are working on and, in particular, a cult dedicated to the dark, monstrous aspect of the goddess Persephone will come to vex them. The game is directly inspired by the television show Murder, She Wrote, but also takes inspiration from the works of H.P. Lovecraft, 'cozy' crime dramas, and American TV shows from the '70s, '80s, and '90s."

Structure of Play (Session Two and onward)

The following structure of play applies to every session starting with Session Two. Session One has its own structure, which can be found at the end of this text

Mystery Recap

Mysteries that are not resolved by the end of a session carry over into the next session, and there can be multiple mysteries active at any given time. The Keeper will spend a few minutes re-capping where each active mystery stands at the beginning of each session, with an emphasis on the Clues that have been found for each.

Resolve Cliffhangers

If the previous session ended with one or more cliffhangers, resolve them with regular play. Continue regular play until some downtime is reached in the story, at which point you should continue to the next step, the Beginning of Session. If the previous session did not end with any cliffhangers, skip this step and go straight to the Beginning of Session.

Beginning of Session

This is a short housekeeping phase in which players mark new End of Session questions (if they wish) and resolve moves that take place at the beginning of a session.

Cozy Vignettes

Each player narrates a short vignette showing their Maven enjoying her life in Brindlewood Bay. These scenes should be light and breezy or warm and cozy; they should show the Maven enjoying her hobbies, helping with a community project, or working around her home.

The Keeper Presents a New Mystery

The Keeper will frame one or more scenes in which a new murder mystery is introduced to the Mavens. The Keeper will also inform the players of the mystery's complexity rating, from 6 to 8. The presentation will always include an establishing question that closely ties one or more Mavens to the mystery. If there are already three active mysteries, skip this step.



Investigation

The bulk of the session will be taken up by the Murder Mavens' investigation of one or more active mysteries. The players can pursue any leads their Mavens might be interested in, or they can request downtime scenes in which we see the Mavens bonding with each other or members of the community.

Crown Scenes

There are two special sections on the character sheet: The Crown of the Queen and The Crown of the Void. When text from those sections is marked during play, the player of the Maven in question must do as the text instructs. This frequently means narrating a very specific type of scene. Players can narrate such scenes whenever they wish, but must do so before the End of Session (see: Anatomy of a Character Sheet > Putting on a Crown).

End of Session

The character sheet has a section called End of Session. At the end of the session, each player should read aloud the questions they have marked there. For each one they answer "yes" to, they mark an XP (see: Anatomy of a Character Sheet > End of Session Questions; XP Track).

Stars & Wishes

The Keeper and players should take a few minutes to share their stars and wishes. *Stars* are things about the session the participant enjoyed. *Wishes* are things they hope to see in the next session. Stars & Wishes is a technique by Lu Quade.

Elements of the Void Mystery

- Give the Void Mystery a title. Something ominous that references the name of the child of Persephone is a good place to start.
- The Void Mystery has a complexity rating of 10.
- Decide how to present the mystery. It can be as easy as the character chosen in the preliminary steps simply showing up to a Murder Mavens meeting and telling them what's going on (or the Mavens are told in one of the optional, move-based manners from the preliminary steps). When presenting the mystery, give the Mavens one or two names of cast characters, or one or two locations of interest, so they have something to work with in the beginning.
- There is no establishing question for the Void Mystery
- Decide on the cast (in a normal mystery, these characters are called Suspects). Ten or so characters is a good number here. You can create new characters, but feel free to use characters from the Dark Conspirators section of the dark conspiracy sheet, characters from past mysteries, or recurring characters in and around Brindlewood Bay. For new characters, be sure to jot down some descriptive notes.
- Choose four or five Paint the Scene locations, perhaps from previous mysteries, but give them all the same Paint the Scene question: In what way has this place been affected by the dark magic of the Midwives?
- Make a list of twenty clues. The clues can be new to this mystery or can be unused clues from previous mysteries. In the latter case, you may need to recontextualize them a bit.

Theorize (Void Mystery Version)

Theorize works similarly here, but with the following adjustments:

- The "solution" to the mystery is the time, location, and manner of the final ritual needed to summon the child of Persephone.
- There is no 12+ result.

You will use the Dark Conspiracy sheet to track the number of Void Clues the Mavens have turned up, and which parts of the conspiracy can be revealed at any given time. The sheet is divided into “layers,” and as each new layer is uncovered, the elements detailed within that layer are available to be shared with the Mavens (usually through The Meddling Move or Theorize), or can be used to inspire reactions that hinder or endanger the Mavens.

The final layer is the Void Mystery. This special mystery isn’t a murder mystery, but rather a mystery about the final ritual the Midwives need to complete in order to bring forth a child of Persephone. Solving this mystery means stopping the Midwives from completing the ritual. The Keeper is responsible for writing the Void Mystery.

Writing the Void mystery

Don’t be intimidated by the idea of writing the Void Mystery. Many aspects of the Void Mystery are similar to those of a regular murder mystery, and by the time you are ready to write the Void Mystery, you will be so experienced with *Brindlewood Bay*, and will have compiled so many interesting facts about the Midwives, coming up with details for this final mystery should be pretty easy. Additionally, you can simply populate the Void Mystery with many details from the previous mysteries, perhaps slightly recontextualized.

Preliminary steps

At the outset, you need to decide on two key details:

- Which child of Persephone are the Midwives trying to bring into the world? What’s it called (the Render of All Flesh, the Prismatic Lord, the Deepness, or something else)? What does it look like? What calamity will befall the world should the Midwives succeed?
- Which non-player character reveals the existence of the final ritual to the Mavens? Pick a character from a past mystery, someone with connections or someone who is in a place to do some research. Alternatively, if a Maven has the Dale Cooper move, the Fox Mulder move, or the Jim Rockford move, the existence of the final ritual can be revealed via a dream, the informant, or the answering machine character, respectively.

If the Dale Cooper move and/or the Fox Mulder move are in play, the dark conspiracy will be of more immediate concern to the Mavens, and the Void Mystery will come about a little quicker. If you don’t want to introduce aspects of the dark conspiracy so early in your game, you can simply make these moves unavailable at the start.

Anatomy of a Character Sheet

The following sections encompass the relevant rules for each part of the character sheet and are addressed to players.

Name

You should circle any given name you wish and then come up with a surname on your own. Alternatively, you can come up with both given name and surname.

Style

The chosen style should reflect the Maven’s basic outlook on life. The Mavens don’t always have to be dressed in a manner that matches their style.

Cozy Activity

The Maven’s cozy activity represents their favorite hobby or pastime. No two Mavens can have the same cozy activity.

End of Session

These questions represent roleplaying goals for the session. You can have three questions marked, and the first question on the list is always marked. For each marked question you answer “yes” to at the end of the session, mark an XP. At the beginning of a new session, you can unmark your two elective options and mark two different ones, or leave either or both the same.

XP Track

When you mark all five boxes on the XP track, erase them whenever you wish and mark an advancement (see Advancements, below). There are two ways to mark the XP track: 1) by answering “yes” to an End of Session question and 2) when the text of a move instructs you to.

Advancements

When you mark an advancement, immediately apply its effects to your character sheet. When all advancements have been marked, your Maven can no longer collect XP or advance, but they are in play until forced to retire by The Crown of the Void or until you decide to retire them (see Putting on a Crown).

Abilities

These are the character attributes that are applied to most die rolls.

Use **Vitality** if your Maven's action involves strength, dexterity, endurance, athleticism, or raw physicality.

Use **Composure** if your Maven's action requires a steady hand, a calm disposition, or intense concentration; or if they are trying to avoid a fear-based reaction.

Use **Reason** if your Maven is studying books, researching a problem, examining a crime scene, or otherwise engaging their mental faculty.

Use **Presence** if your Maven is trying to charm someone, intimidate someone, or capture someone's imagination.

Use **Sensitivity** if your Maven's action involves supernatural forces; the Keeper may decide that any action that is seemingly governed by a different ability is actually governed by Sensitivity because of the supernatural, spiritual, or occult nature of what is being undertaken.

Conditions

Conditions are negative traits that cause you to make die rolls at a disadvantage if they would feasibly hinder your Maven during an action (see Rolling the Dice). You can have up to three conditions. If you would ever take a fourth condition, you instead mark one of your Crowns (see Putting on a Crown). Conditions are removed as the result of moves or when the Keeper instructs you to do so.

Maven Moves

Unlike the basic moves on the Reference Sheet, a Maven move can only be used if you have it written on your character sheet. The Maven move is one of the ways you personalize your Murder Maven.

Nevertheless, be flexible. Maybe something offered is a bit of a stretch, but it gets a good reaction at the table—go with it. Perhaps the player using the move proposes a plan that pushes against the boundaries of physics or good sense, but that they're otherwise excited about—go with it. It won't break the game if things get a little hokey or gonzo from time to time.

Rick & A.J.

If a player chooses this move, you have a new, exciting avenue for Keeper reactions at your disposal. When that player gets into a jam, have their sibling show up, rescue them, and then never let them forget it. Alternatively, have the sibling get into some kind of trouble that distracts the Mavens from an active mystery. Importantly: by choosing this move, the player has signaled to you that they want this sibling character to be a major part of the story, even if they're occasionally troublesome.

Jim Rockford

Like the Dale Cooper move, this move requires some improvisation from you, especially if it's chosen during character creation. Think about this move between sessions so you aren't fumbling around in the heat of the moment. Importantly, this move represents a side story for the Maven who has it. Have fun with it: the messages don't need to make much sense in the beginning, they merely need to give the Maven some sort of task. The more cryptic, the better, especially at the start. Over time, the tasks can start to logically flow from one another or the motives of the caller can start to come into focus. As the Maven collects marks on her Crown of the Void, the tasks should become more shocking or ominous. The key to this move is the tasks be unconnected to any mystery, past or present, though they may start to tie into the dark conspiracy at some point, as you see fit. The identity of the caller should never be revealed.

The Dark Conspiracy

One of your major responsibilities, especially in a game that lasts more than a few sessions, is to track and reveal the dark conspiracy of the Midwives of the Fragrant Void. The Midwives aren't a major part of the story in the first few sessions of Brindlewood Bay. They will start to become more prevalent around Session Four or Five. Eventually, a distinct switch will take place and the Mavens' principal concern will be the cult's scheming. This culminates in the Void Mystery, wherein a final encounter between the Mavens and the Midwives takes place.

Maven moves

Below is Keeper advice for some of the trickier Maven moves.

Dale Cooper

This move requires a bit of improvisation from you, especially if it was chosen as part of character creation. You will need to open each session by narrating the Maven's creepy dream. Fortunately, the dreams don't have to make sense—they just need to be strange and unsettling. Think about the content of these dreams between sessions so you're not fumbling around with the details in the heat of the moment. You might even head over to YouTube and watch some choice scenes from *Twin Peaks* to get inspired. Importantly: do not forget to reveal a Void Clue!

Milton Hardcastle

"Extrajudicial punishment" doesn't necessarily mean harsh punishment. Make sure the player of the Maven with this move understands this. It would seriously break tone if the Maven in question pulled out a gun and shot a murder suspect in an act of ruthless vigilantism. Perhaps, instead, the Maven swipes some stock certificates belonging to the killer and gives them to the victim's family as an unofficial form of restitution. Or perhaps a Maven publishes the killer's prized salsa recipe on the internet for all to enjoy. The Milton Hardcastle move is designed to show the Maven's rebellious streak, but it should be a rebelliousness that is appropriate for an elderly do-gooder.

Additionally, "wrongdoer" doesn't necessarily mean the killer. It can be any character who has done something worthy of retribution. For example, if Gordon Thune, the local banker, is trying to foreclose on a poor old widow's home, perhaps the Maven whips up a publicity campaign meant to embarrass the bank. Or perhaps snooty June Willoughby has been spreading malicious gossip around town, and the Maven decides to punish her by telling the Brindlewood Bay Homeowners Association about her unauthorized lawn ornaments.

Angus MacGyver

You are free to overrule any suggestion from a player that is just plain implausible or could be chalked up to pure luck. For example, if the Maven is trying to break into someone's home and they trigger the Angus MacGyver move, you should overrule the player who says the Maven finds a key to the front door somewhere in the environment. Finding a key to the front door is not improvising, it's dumb luck.

Putting on a Crown

The next section of the character sheet is divided into two parts: The Crown of the Queen and The Crown of the Void. You will occasionally be instructed to "put on a Crown," in which case you read the specific instructions on the character sheet and then mark a box from one of these two sections. You must then do as the marked text instructs before the current session ends.

The Crown of the Queen represents the idea of your Maven as a woman. The text involves flashbacks to her life as a partner, mother, and sister; and present-day scenes that show her being romantic or sexual, or having a complicated inner life. The entries can be marked in any order.

The Crown of the Void represents the effects of the dark conspiracy on your Maven. The text is always marked in order, and the last box heralds your Maven's retirement from the game.

A Cozy Little Place

This section of the character sheet is where you note interesting and distinctive items that can be found in your Maven's home in Brindlewood Bay. This section also functions as an equipment list, since anything from the Cozy Little Place that might reasonably be on a Maven's person in a scene, is. Items from your Cozy Little Place can be marked to get an advantage on a die roll (see Rolling the Dice). Generally-speaking, they cannot be un-marked, but marked items remain in your Cozy Little Place for use in future scenes, in which case they add to the fictional positioning of your Maven's actions but do not convey a bonus to a die roll.

At the beginning of Session One, you and the other players will have an opportunity to add items to your Cozy Little Place. After that, items can be added as the result of moves or when the Keeper instructs you to do so.

Rolling Dice

In *Brindlewood Bay*, only players roll dice, and so this section is addressed to them.

2d6 + ability modifier

In most cases, when you roll dice because a move instructed you to do so, you roll two 6-sided dice, sum them, and then add the modifier from the relevant ability. You then check the result against the text of the move. If a move refers to a “hit,” it means a result of 7+. If a move refers to a “miss,” it means a result of 6-.

Advantage

When you have an advantage, you roll three dice, keep the two highest, sum them, and then add the modifier of the relevant ability. You will most often have an advantage because of the following:

- A move gives you an advantage.
- Your Maven is using an un-marked item from the Cozy Little Place in their action.

Disadvantage

When you're at a disadvantage, you roll three dice, keep the two lowest, sum them, and then add the modifier of the relevant ability. You will most often be at a disadvantage because of the following:

- A condition negatively impacts your Maven's action.
- The Keeper believes it's appropriate under the current circumstances.

Advantage and disadvantage?

If circumstances would cause you to both have an advantage and be at a disadvantage during an action, they cancel each other out and you roll as normal. Please note, however, that advantage and disadvantage do not “stack,” nor can one outweigh the other. For example, if you have two conditions, each of which would plausibly put you at a disadvantage, and one Maven move that gives you an advantage, you would simply roll as normal, without advantage or disadvantage.

to look at Elena's hands during the investigation, but during Theorize, it's ok for an incriminating detail like this to be added to the fiction. And so, a player might suggest that Elena was always seen wearing gloves, and that might be how she hides her wound. As the Keeper, you should encourage this kind of “ret-conning” of the established fiction so the players can arrive at a theory of the crime that incorporates most or all of the Clues.

A Cozy Little Place

Look for opportunities to let players add items to the Cozy Little Place section of their character sheets. If an object is particularly memorable during the mystery, or if the Maven goes through the trouble to find something strange or rare, invite the player of the Maven most closely associated with the object to add it to their Cozy Little Place.

When it comes to Mavens actually using items in the Cozy Little Place, you will need to remind the players about this, especially during the first couple of sessions. So, if a die roll is coming up—especially one where the stakes are high—ask the player how something from their Cozy Little Place might be helpful so they can get an advantage (or negate a disadvantage).

Running Brindlewood Bay as a one-shot

Sometimes you only have one session to play *Brindlewood Bay*, perhaps because you are running it at a convention or as a short diversion for your regular group. To run the game as a one-shot, simply follow the Session One Procedure at the end of this text but lower your chosen mystery's complexity to 4 or 5. A complexity of 4 or 5 is high enough to present a challenge but low enough to make it very likely the mystery can get solved in one sitting.

No matter what, when you have about half an hour remaining in the session, wrap up whatever scene is taking place and then go straight to Theorize. If the Theorize move goes poorly, end the session on a cliffhanger and explain to the players you would pick up the mystery in a hypothetical Session Two.

Certain aspects of the game, such as the dark conspiracy and putting on a Crown, won't have as much significance in a one-shot. You should still play things out as-written so that participants get a sense of the game's tone and what a longer campaign would be like.

Additionally, it may be important to provide extra context for the Clue. Using the example above, it will be important to know, at a minimum, who is being cut out of the will. The text of the Clue doesn't tell you that—it's on you to provide those details when you reveal it. When providing that extra context, be careful you don't automatically solve the mystery or otherwise discourage further investigation.

Sometimes a Clue has a natural follow-up question the Mavens will want the answer to. In that case, let them do The Day Move or The Night Move to find the answer—or just give it to them if it would be fairly easy to come by—and then change the text of the Clue to reflect the new information. Do not count the new information as a new Clue. An example:

The Mavens find the following Clue: "A sequence of numbers written on a slip of paper." They decide they want to know what the numbers mean and so they take them to an expert who explains the numbers are most likely the combination to a safe. The Keeper then rewrites the Clue to reflect this new information: "A slip of paper with the combination to a safe on it."

Theorize

The text of the move says "When the Mavens have an open, freewheeling discussion..." but, in practice, this discussion is being had by the players, not the Mavens, and, as the Keeper, you have a role to play, too. You should feel free to offer your own thoughts, challenge the assumptions being made, and interrogate theories that fail to account for certain Clues. If a player is being demure during this process, cut in and ask them for their opinion on things. If a player is dominating the conversation, go around and confirm with the other players that they agree with what the dominant player is suggesting. Importantly, you need to guide the conversation to a consensus so a die roll can take place.

Another important job you have during Theorize is to invite the players to offer critical context to the discussion of Clues. The Clues they have gathered will frequently seem disjointed or incongruent with one another—and that's by design, so they can be used flexibly. Encourage the players to add the context necessary to make the Clues fit their theory. For example, if the Mavens found a severed finger during an investigation, and they are leaning toward accusing a character named Elena, they need to account for how the finger might be connected to Elena (after all, a severed finger is a difficult Clue to ignore). The conversation may turn to the idea that whoever killed the victim had a finger cleaved off in the struggle, and so if Elena is missing a finger, she definitely did it. Very likely, no one thought

The Crown and die rolls

In *Brindlewood Bay*, the Keeper will always go hard against you because you have a tool that allows you to resist their moves: putting on a Crown. After a die roll, *and after an outcome has been narrated*, you can choose to put on a Crown and increase your die result by one tier (so, a miss becomes a 7–9, a 7–9 becomes a 10–11, and a 10–11 becomes a 12). In that case, we narrate a different result, and what was previously narrated does not occur (we say it was a different timeline that we got to collectively experience but that did not actually happen).

An example:

Oli's character, Hyacinth, is attempting to escape the clutches of an angry mobster she has just revealed to be the murderer in a case. Oli triggers a move, rolls his dice, and gets a miss. The Keeper describes how the mobster catches Hyacinth and throws her off a cliff—to her death—to prevent her from bringing her evidence to the police. Oli decides he doesn't like this outcome and puts on a Crown, making his die result a 7-9. This time, Hyacinth escapes but drops a piece of information the mobster can use to track her down later.

You may be asking yourself: "Why does the Keeper fully narrate a result that they know the player is just going to discard by putting on a Crown?" Answer: because it's fun! The Crown lets us glimpse different timelines, play them out, *feel them*, experience the anguish and terror, and then... do something different. It's sort of like one of those old Choose Your Own Adventure books: part of the fun is making the wrong choice so you can see the disaster that befalls your character (and putting on a Crown is like putting your thumb on the page of those old books, so you can go back and choose something else if you chose poorly).

Moves

There are two types of moves: basic moves and Maven moves. Mavens have access to all the basic moves in addition to one or more Maven moves specific to them. Where the text of a Maven move contradicts a basic move, the Maven move has priority. The Maven moves can be found on the Maven Moves sheet. The basic moves can be found on the Reference Sheet and are discussed below.

The Day Move

When you **do something risky or face something you fear**, name what you're afraid will happen if you fail or lose your nerve, then roll with an appropriate ability.

On a 10+, you do what you intended or you hold steady; describe what it looks like.

On a 7–9, the Keeper will tell you how your actions would leave you vulnerable, and you can choose to back down or go through with it. If you go through with it, the Keeper describes what it looks like.

On a 12+, you do what you intended or you hold steady, and the Keeper will tell you some extra benefit or advantage you receive. Describe what it looks like.

The Day Move is a catch-all move for actions that take place during the day. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.

The Night Move

When you **do something risky or face something you fear**, name what you're afraid will happen if you fail or lose your nerve. The Keeper will tell you how it is worse than you fear. You can choose to back down or go through with it. If you go through with it, roll with an appropriate ability.

On a 10+, you do what you intended or you hold steady; describe what it looks like.

On a 7–9, you do it or hold steady, but there is a complication or cost; the Keeper describes what it looks like.

downside of the move is they have to give up their immortal soul to do so, or even do battle with the demon after it has served its purpose!

If you're unsure how to proceed when it comes to writing new moves, the best way to get started is to simply make a very fictionally-specific version of The Night Move, one that has a detailed miss result and that disregards the player-Keeper negotiation. Here's a basic framework:

When you [do the thing that triggers the move], roll with Sensitivity.

On a 10+, you [succeed at whatever you were trying to do]. Describe it.

On a 7–9, [you succeed at what you were trying to do] but [very specific complication or cost]. The Keeper describes it.

On a miss, [very strong, specific cost]. The Keeper describes it.

Here's an example of the framework in action:

*When you **attempt to summon a demon servitor to your side**, roll with Sensitivity.*

On a 10+, the demon appears and will serve you for a time. Describe it.

On a 7–9, the demon appears and will serve you for a time, but will require a blood sacrifice as payment for its services.

On a miss, the demon appears but is not bound to you.

Clues and Void Clues

The Clues listed for each mystery are written to be fairly diverse and flexible—you should be able to find something that fits the situation. Importantly, you can make adjustments to the Clues so that they make sense in the context of the investigation. Consider the Clue “Instructions to cut someone out of a will.” These could be literal instructions, such as written correspondence to a lawyer a Maven finds on someone's desk, but perhaps the Maven learns this detail in a conversation with the person who was cut out of the will.

ous injury, tell them that. If it's possible for a Maven to be killed, tell them that. They have the option of backing down after you say how bad it's going to be but before they actually roll. If they roll, get a miss, and then you show their Maven being killed when you didn't previously tell them this was a possibility, the player is going to feel cheated.

One final thing about The Day Move and The Night Move: they trigger whenever a Maven is facing something they fear. This is a somewhat passive use-case (and thus easy to forget), but a very important one for a game that has horror elements. The Mavens will witness things that are shocking or horrifying, and depending on how they handle themselves in that moment, things could get very sticky for them. Trigger The Day or Night move to see if they can keep it together (in most cases, they will be rolling with Composure).

The Meddling Move

This move is a critical part of the engine that makes this game go—if the Mavens aren't gathering Clues, they aren't getting any closer to solving mysteries, and the story comes to a complete halt. The important thing to understand here is that you should be very generous when interpreting what counts as triggering this move. Sometimes it will be very obvious: if a Maven is poking around someone's home, they are definitely doing the Meddling Move. Other times, it will be more subtle: if they're comforting a grieving family member, they may be doing so in order to get that person to reveal something important. Ask the player if you're unsure: "Are you trying to trigger the Meddling Move here?"

The Occult Move

This move should be used very infrequently and, in fact, it's quite dangerous to use at all—a 9 or lower will put a Maven one step closer to retirement. The text of the move should be enough to dissuade most players, but you might go one step further and require that the Mavens have a strong fictional justification for attempting something of an occult nature. Maybe they need to find the instructions for a ritual before they can attempt magic, or perhaps they need to find a special set of tarot cards before they can attempt divination.

When writing new moves, be willing to give the player what they want, but make sure they understand the consequences of failure might be very high indeed—a high reward means a high risk. For example, if they want to write a move that allows the Mavens to summon demon-like servitors to help them battle the monstrous children of Persephone, perhaps the

On a 12+, you do what you intended or you hold steady, and the Keeper will tell you some extra benefit or advantage you receive. Describe what it looks like.

The Night Move is the catch-all move for actions that take place at night. Since taking action at night is more dangerous than doing so in the day, the Night Move is written to have more perilous outcomes for the Mavens than the Day Move. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.

The Meddling Move

*When you **search for a clue, conduct research, or otherwise gather information**, describe how you're doing so and roll with an appropriate ability.*

On a hit, you find a Clue. The Keeper will tell you what it is.

On a 7–9, there's a complication—either with the Clue itself, or a complication you encounter while searching. The Keeper will tell you what the complication is.

On a 12+, you also find a Void Clue OR you learn something about the dark conspiracy in Brindlewood Bay (Keeper's choice).

The Meddling Move is the main way a Maven turns up Clues. The Meddling Move is written to cover all types of information-gathering actions, and the ability used for the roll should match whatever action is taken. So, for example, if a Maven is gathering information by sweet-talking a local law enforcement official, her player would roll with Presence. If they are gathering information by silently listening to a conversation they aren't supposed to hear, her player would roll with Composure. If they are digging through books at the local library, they'd roll with Reason. And so forth. The Keeper has final say on which ability is used for the roll.

The Cozy Move

*When you **have an intimate moment with another Maven while one of you is engaged in your cozy activity**, choose two from below if it's your cozy activity. Otherwise, choose one.*

- *You may ask the other player a question about their Maven which they must answer truthfully and completely.*
- *The other Maven agrees on a particular course of action, or give them a condition if they refuse.*
- *Clear an appropriate condition (can be chosen twice).*

Alternatively, if it's your cozy activity, you may:

- *Stumble on a Clue relevant to an active mystery. Tell the Keeper what it is. The Clue cannot conclusively solve the mystery by itself.*

This move serves several practical purposes, such as clearing conditions, but is principally designed to show the close relationship between individual Murder Mavens, as well as giving a glimpse into their lives in the community of Brindlewood Bay.

The Gold Crown Mysteries Move

Once per game, **when any Maven says “This reminds me of something that happened to Amanda Delacourt!”**, work with the other players to describe how something that is happening in the situation reminds the Mavens of an event from one of The Gold Crown Mysteries. At a minimum, you must provide the following information:

- *The name of the Gold Crown Mystery in question (no repeats, please!).*
 - *The problem or situation Amanda found herself in that is similar to what the Mavens are experiencing.*
 - *How Amanda eventually overcame the problem or resolved the situation.*
- Then, take a 12+ to a single relevant roll OR state a fact about the current situation that the Keeper must incorporate.*

The Murder Mavens share a love for the Amanda Delacourt novels penned by the mysterious author, Robin Masterson, and will frequently refer to Amanda's travails when investigating mysteries of their own. This move is very powerful and, generally-speaking, can only be used once—total—per session.

The Occult Move

When you **engage in an activity related to the supernatural or the occult for the first time**, imagine what your actions would look like as a move. Say what triggers the move and roll with Sensitivity.

On a hit, it works; work with the Keeper to write the move—it is now a move all Mavens can use for the rest of the game and your roll stands.

On a 7–9, you must also mark The Crown of the Void.

On a miss, it's not something the Mavens can ever do and you also mark The Crown of the Void.

a commercial inspired by the prompt. If they do so, return to the regular scene and allow the player to narrate the outcome as if they had rolled a 10–11.

This Keeper reaction is actually a powerful benefit to the players, so be judicious with how often you use it—once per session is plenty.

Detailed Keeper Advice

This section contains advice for specific moves, rules, and procedures. You can easily run Brindlewood Bay using only the Keeper principles and reactions above, but the following will significantly enrich the experience for you and your players.

The Day Move and The Night Move

The Day Move and The Night Move are going to get rolled for the vast majority of non-investigation actions requiring a die roll, and so you need to have a good understanding of how they work, how they differ from one another, and when to trigger them.

The first thing you need to be aware of is that these moves do not have miss conditions in their text. Should a player roll a miss, they most likely fail in the action they were taking, but not necessarily—it's up to you whether they fail or succeed. In either case, you will perform a Keeper reaction. In general, this Keeper reaction should be stronger (or harder) than the complication or cost they might have incurred on a 7-9, and it should flow logically from the established fiction.

Another thing to understand here is that these moves are a negotiation between player and Keeper. The player tells you what they are afraid will happen if they should fail the roll. You are free to disregard what the player has offered when considering how to react—especially if the player’s suggestion is soft or nonsensical—but if they have given a good, genuine answer to what they are afraid of, you should do your best to incorporate it. Doing so sends a signal to the player that this is a collaborative storytelling process, and they’ll be eager to give you some good stuff to work with in the future.

The Night Move has a slight wrinkle: after the player says what they're afraid of, you must tell them how it's worse than they fear. Again, when saying how things are worse, you can disregard what the player suggested if what they suggested was too soft, but do your best to riff off what they give you. Another important aspect of "telling them how it's worse" is being honest about how it's worse. If it's possible for the Maven to sustain a seri-

Put a Maven in danger

“Danger” can mean physical danger or something else. Is a Maven sneaking into a warehouse after hours? Maybe a shadowy figure trains a gun on her and tells her to go back where she came from. Are the Murder Mavens tagging along with a fishing tour in order to question the tour operator? Maybe a powerful storm suddenly appears on the horizon. Is a Maven a contestant on the Jolly Good Baking Show? Maybe the custard for her tarte tatin isn’t setting properly.

Show a Maven being killed

Kill a Maven! It’s totally fine. Make it gruesome, if you want. The players can always put on a Crown to get a fictional do-over. Note that this is a very strong reaction that is only appropriate as the result of a missed roll, and even then only if it was adequately telegraphed to the player beforehand (see Detailed Keeper Advice, The Day Move and The Night Move).

Remove an item from their Cozy Little Place

Just like inflicting a condition, this is a very dependable, go-to reaction for many situations. Essentially, if they were using something from their Cozy Little Place, have them lose it—it breaks, is stolen, is misplaced, etc.

Have an official show up

This reaction is a very important genre convention and should be used liberally. The idea is that an official, usually a member of local law enforcement, shows up and interferes with the Mavens’ investigation in some way. Note that we use the term “official” very loosely here—anyone with authority over the situation will do. A nosy maitre’d can be just as troublesome in a fancy restaurant as a surly detective can be at a crime scene.

Cut to commercial

This is a very special Keeper reaction, one that pays homage to the television shows that inspired the game, and suggests that *Brindlewood Bay* is, itself, a television show. Here’s how it works: if a Maven undertakes a perilous or dramatic action that provokes a die roll, and that die roll is a miss, you can say “Let’s cut to commercial!” before the outcome is narrated. Then, give the player of the Maven a short prompt related to the sorts of things that might be advertised to elderly people, or people who are at home in the middle of the day, such as “furniture store,” “Life Alert,” “sweepstakes,” or “personal injury attorney.” The player may then narrate

At the beginning of the game, the Murder Mavens have little to no familiarity with the occult, and they are entirely unaware of the dark conspiracy of the Midwives of the Fragrant Void. But as the game progresses, they will become more attuned to the deeper mysteries, and may even begin to dabble in the occult themselves. This move helps cover those situations and creates new moves based on what the Mavens undertake. But beware! This move is incredibly dangerous, as even a hit can push the Maven one step closer to retirement.

Theorize

*When the Mavens **have an open, freewheeling discussion about the solution to a mystery based on the clues they have uncovered—and reach a consensus**—roll plus the number of Clues found (not including Void Clues), minus the mystery’s complexity.*

On a 10+, it’s the correct solution. The Keeper will present an opportunity to take down the culprit or otherwise save the day.

On a 7–9, it’s the correct solution, but the Keeper will either add an unwelcome complication to the solution itself, or present a complicated or dangerous opportunity to take down the culprit or save the day.

On a 6-, the solution is incorrect, and the Keeper reacts.

On a 12+, a person involved in the dark conspiracy of Brindlewood Bay also reveals themselves to the Mavens.

Theorize is a very fun move, and meant to simulate those great scenes in mystery stories where the protagonists are puzzling aloud about who might have done it. Note that it doesn’t matter who rolls Theorize when the time comes. Also, Theorize is not subject to any modifiers on the die roll (Advantage, the effects of The Gold Crown Mysteries Move, etc.) nor can it be affected by putting on a Crown.

The Keeper

This section is addressed to whoever will be the Keeper for your game of *Brindlewood Bay*—that is, the person responsible for presenting mysteries, describing environments, portraying non-player characters, and depicting how the world reacts to the actions the Murder Mavens take.

Your Role

This is a game about solving mysteries. You'll present the basics of a murder mystery to the player characters, who will conduct an investigation, gather clues, and ultimately bring the culprit to justice. If you have played other tabletop roleplaying games where the characters solve mysteries, much of *Brindlewood Bay* will feel familiar. However, there are three significant differences with most of those games you need to be aware of: 1) the clues are not located in specific places, and, in fact, can be found wherever the Mavens are looking; 2) you don't have any notion who the killer is until the Mavens successfully do the Theorize move; and 3) the murder mysteries aren't the real mystery—there's a layer beneath them, a dark conspiracy that you will develop and track through multiple sessions of play.

In addition to presenting the murder mysteries and managing the dark conspiracy, you are generally responsible for portraying the world around the Murder Mavens. This means you give voice to non-player characters they interact with, you describe elements of a scene when needed, you challenge them with dangers and obstacles, and you show how the world reacts to the actions they take.

Anatomy of a Mystery

What follows are the elements that make up a *Brindlewood Bay* mystery. You can use mysteries published for use with *Brindlewood Bay*, or make up your own following this structure.

Title

The name of the mystery. Feel free to share this with the players. A good title will include a pun or some other groan-worthy joke.

Complexity

A number between 6 and 8 that represents the relative length and difficulty of the mystery. For local or shorter mysteries, 6 or 7 is appropriate. For mysteries that extend to places outside *Brindlewood Bay* or are particularly complex, 8 is appropriate.

Keeper Reactions

You will frequently be asked to define and narrate complications resulting from a die roll, or otherwise “react” to a situation. Generally-speaking, a good reaction is one that complicates a Maven's life in an interesting way and follows logically from the established fiction. If you can't think of a natural reaction based on what's happening in the fiction, choose a reaction from the list below, modifying as needed.

Separate the Mavens

The Mavens will usually want to stay together, so complicate their lives by separating one or more of them from the group. Are the Mavens looking around a creepy old mansion? Perhaps one of them enters a one-way secret passage. Are they getting nosy in the middle of a swanky cocktail party? Have a guest come whisk one of them away. Are they snooping around a private yacht? Maybe a shadowy figure locks one of them in a cabin. The important thing is that whatever happens next to the separated Maven(s) should be fascinating or perilous.

Kill a Suspect

Nothing will get the Mavens' (and players') attention like having a Suspect turn up dead. This reaction is particularly effective if the Mavens were starting to narrow in on this character as the perpetrator of the original murder that kicked off the mystery. Note that this is a very strong Keeper reaction, and really only appropriate as the result of a missed roll.

Inflict a condition

This is a trusty, go-to Keeper reaction for nearly any situation. A condition is a one-word adjective or short phrase, and it should follow directly from whatever just happened in the fiction. For example, if a Maven got side-swiped by a car peeling away from a crime scene, you might give them the condition “Banged-up.” If they just had a very frustrating, condescending conversation with Sheriff Dalrymple, you might give them the condition “Irritated.” If they are having a little too much fun at Abner Vidal's Halloween party, you might give them the condition “Had one too many.” A condition can be cleared by the use of the Cozy Move, or simply because you think it's appropriate given the circumstances.

Keep it cozy

This is a very important principle for capturing the feel of the game. Don't let dangerous scenes take up the whole session, and don't always focus on the grim details of the murder or the dark conspiracy. Reveal and discuss those things as needed, but always return to the soft, cozy aspects of the setting: cut to the day when appropriate, showing the Mavens living their lives in Brindlewood Bay; encourage the use of the Cozy Move, especially if a Maven has a condition; and ask lots of questions about the Mavens' lives in this charming little town.

Make nighttime dangerous

And yet, any scenes at night should be heightened by a sense of dread or pregnant with grim portent. In this game, the main characters can be placed in direct, physical danger, which is a departure from the cozy crime dramas that inspire it, but necessary for it to have real stakes—and appropriate, considering the dark conspiracy that underpins the story.

Keep dangerous characters occluded

The Mavens will frequently be put in physical danger before they have solved a mystery. It's very important that any time a character threatens the Mavens, their identity is unknown—to the Mavens, to the players, and to you. They must always stay in the shadows, be wearing a disguise, or simply be a character the Mavens can't identify. To do otherwise would risk saying too much about the solution to the mystery.

Of course, once the Mavens have engaged the Theorize move, you can disregard this principle for the mystery in question.

Present the Void in a matter-of-fact way

Void Clues and the unfurling conspiracy of the Midwives stand in sharp relief against the cozy backdrop of Brindlewood Bay. The temptation is to present these things in a “scary” manner—perhaps with exaggerated, Vincent Price-esque mannerisms. Unless you feel particularly confident in your ability to be “scary” at the table, you should present creepy things in a calm, measured, matter-of-fact way. That calm, plain presentation will itself stand in contrast to the things being described, which is its own kind of creepy. The players' imaginations will do the rest.

Presenting the Mystery

These are the details the Keeper needs to explain to the players when beginning a new mystery. This section frequently indicates the manner and place in which the Mavens learn about the mystery, usually through one or more scenes. In most mysteries, you will also be required to introduce the Suspects during this process.

Establishing Question

This is a question posed to one player character shortly after the presentation of the mystery. The goals are to personalize the mystery for one of the Mavens, to give the group more of a reason to be invested, and to give the player answering the question a chance to shape the events to come.

Suspects

These are the non-player characters who are most likely to turn up during the mystery (though it is certainly not an exhaustive list). Each Suspect has a name, three descriptive details, a short explanation of their personality or role, and a quote to inspire your roleplaying. For mysteries with a complexity rating of 6 or 7, a cast of seven or eight Suspects is appropriate. For mysteries with a complexity rating of 8, a cast of nine or more Suspects is appropriate, with twelve as the upper limit.

Paint the Scene

Paint the Scene is a Keeper technique wherein you ask the players, sometimes out-of-character, a question about an environment or location that helps explore a theme or idea associated with that location. The Paint the Scene locations are likely to be prominent in the mystery. For a mystery with a complexity rating of 6 or 7, three or four Paint the Scene locations is appropriate. For a mystery with a complexity rating of 8, four or five Paint the Scene locations is appropriate. Typically, you pose the Paint the Scene question to the players when their Mavens first enter the associated location.

Clues

These are uncovered by the players' use of the Meddling Move (and, more rarely, the Cozy Move and certain Maven moves). When the time comes to reveal a Clue, simply circle one on the mystery sheet and work it into the fiction. A mystery should have at least twenty possible Clues.

Void Clues

These are special clues the Mavens may discover during their investigation. These Void Clues have no direct bearing on the mystery's resolution. Rather, they are meant to show the influence of the Midwives of the Fragrant Void and their dark conspiracy. When the time comes to reveal a Void Clue, simply circle one on the mystery sheet and work it into the fiction. You may also want to track the number of Void Clues discovered on the dark conspiracy sheet. A mystery should have at least six possible Void Clues.



Keeper Principles

This section explains the general principles you should bear in mind when running a game of *Brindlewood Bay*. You will occasionally find yourself in a situation that isn't explicitly covered by the rules or where you need to make up something on the fly. So long as you are following the Keeper principles, your improvisations will come across as authentic and fair.

Advice for specific moves and game circumstances will be given later (see Detailed Keeper Advice).

Play to find out what happens

You have a mystery, a cast of Suspects, and a list of Clues, but none of it is set in stone. Be willing to let the session unfurl on its own terms. If a player has a cool idea that doesn't quite match what's on the mystery sheet, go with it. In fact, many parts of the game will explicitly challenge your preconceived ideas—answers to establishing questions, answers to Paint the Scene questions, the Gold Crown Mysteries move, and Theorize, to name a few—so be flexible and ready to incorporate things you hadn't considered.

Make the world and everyone in it seem real

Describe the world in sensory-rich detail. You have some help here: the Suspects in a mystery each come with three descriptive details and notes on how to play them, and key mystery locations have Paint the Scene questions to help enrich the scene. Use these as a foundation for how you approach everything in the world. Give non-player characters not listed among the Suspects three descriptive details to bring them alive; think of your own Paint the Scene question for a location that takes on sudden importance.

Be a fan of the Mavens

This doesn't mean "let them win." It means "give them challenges that make you root for them."

Sometimes, disclaim decision-making

You are co-creating the story with the players. Let them chime-in to flesh out the world, describe things they see, and get invested in what's happening. Also, when you aren't sure how to react to the result of a move, ask the table for advice.