

SURGRY CITIES

A mini-RPG for 1 to 6 players, written by Côme Martin in December 2018.

The City wants to keep the Traveler inside it. The Traveler is looking for something in the City; they don't know that they're going to find much more... at their own risk.

Start by deciding who is playing the City and who is playing the Traveler(s). Several players, or none, can play either of the roles: two players can control the same City, three players can play three Travelers or control a single one... Every combination is possible.

Scaffoldings - The City

The City is a fantasized 1930s town, with a little more mechanical technology than the average. Each player tells a rumor about it, the kind you would find in traveling books and stories; then, the City draws two red cards and two black cards out of a 52-cards deck and reads the table at the back. It chooses a card of each color: they represent the two patterns that will constitute the central themes of the session and will keep on appearing, more and more insistently, in its descriptions. Afterwards, it puts these cards back into the deck.

Then, it removes from the deck the cards above 8 (Aces count for 1s) and shuffles the rest into a pile. It takes 5 cards from this pile to make itself a hand.

If no one is playing the City, these 5 cards are put face up on the table and will be randomly played at the beginning of each scene.

Scaffoldings - The Travelers

The Travelers invent, decide or draw in the following table (with cards they then put back into the deck) the reason why they're visiting the City, what may particularly attract them and what would drive them away. They complete their description with any detail they want and prepare two levels, Attraction and Repulsion, which both start empty and contain 4 boxes.

If no one is playing a Traveler, prepare two levels for an anonymous Traveler who is never fully described.

| / | Reason for the visit | Attraction | Deterrent |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ♥ | Find someone in particular | Great adventures | Things which are too simple |
| ♦ | Make up a map of the place | Stories to reveal | Discordance |
| ♠ | Overthrow the existing power | Secret connections | Physical violence |
| ♣ | Amass wealth | Occasions of helping someone | Things which are too complex |

Explorations - The Travelers

The story begins when the Travelers enter the City; they react to the encounters and events they are faced with anyway they like. In general, their actions succeed or fail when they wish it so: no setting is indestructible, no NPC is indispensable, all are but cogs in the City's trap.

A scene begins when the City plays a card face up and ends when everyone agrees to. At the end of a scene, the Travelers tick as many boxes as they want on their Attraction and/or Repulsion levels: they can tick none, tick all five boxes of a level at once, tick one box in a level and two in the other, etc. If no one plays a Traveler, it's the card played by the

City which determines how levels are filled: as many boxes in Attraction (red card) or Repulsion (black card) as there are cards of the same color in the last 5 which have been played.

When either level of a Traveler is filled, the City stages an interlude, after which both level of all Travelers are emptied. After the sixth interlude, the Travelers decide whether they run away from the City or lose themselves in it forever: in the latter case, they become its newest inhabitants, ready to welcome new Travelers. The story then ends.

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This game contains bits and pieces of all the fictional cities I've traveled through: *Cities of the Fantastic*, *Exil* and *Itras By* among others.

Explorations - The City

The story begins when the Travelers enter the City; it describes, with one of the cards in its hand (or the first one from the pile) the first thing, scene or person they meet. To this end, it puts the card face up in front of everyone. Cards played by the City refer to the table below. In general, everything that the City introduces should appear mysterious, secretly wonderful, and the City should build upon the Travelers' expectations while also implying there are other attractive things a little farther, a little deeper, so as to incite the Travelers to explore it more and more. The City can change or complete the details of the table as it likes.

As soon as the City plays a card, it draws another, so it always has 5 cards in hand. If the pile is empty, every card which is face up except for the last 5 ones is shuffled back into a new pile.

The City has to adapt its descriptions depending on the way both levels of the Travelers fill up and try to attract them as much as it can without driving them away. Every element of the city can thus be constantly modified: neighborhoods rearrange, people change their looks, streets lead to more desirable places...

When either level of a Traveler is filled at the end of a scene, the City stages an interlude: this is a scene which spotlights the attractive (when Attraction is filled) or dark (when Repulsion is filled) pattern which was drawn before play. Travelers needn't be present during an interlude but should sense something has changed in the City.

After an interlude, the City puts the cards it's holding back into the pile. It then removes from the deck the lowest four cards (randomly if necessary) and adds four cards to it: the 9s after the first interlude, the 10s after the second, and so on.

Interludes are brief and the patterns they spotlight fleeting when the 9s, 10s and Jacks are put into the deck; they become more important when the Queens and Kings are put into the deck.

Once the Kings are put into the deck, the next interlude (the sixth one) is the last one and constitutes the apex of the City's exploration. The Travelers then decide whether they run away from the City or lose themselves in it forever: in the latter case, they become its newest inhabitants, ready to welcome new Travelers. The story then ends.

| | Attractive thing (♦ or ♥) | Dark aspect (♠ or ♣) |
|----|---|---|
| A | An unusually attractive inhabitant (expensive clothes, magnetic charisma, atypical looks) | A fragment from a building falls down and threatens to hurt a Traveler |
| 2 | Allusion to the City's rich and complex history | A fight breaks out for no apparent reason |
| 3 | Intriguing things escaping from a basement window (lights, sounds, smells) | An inhabitant insists the Travelers should flee and is then swiftly arrested |
| 4 | A great fair filled with unusual things (plants, animals, objects) | A public execution is being set up |
| 5 | A luxurious place is abandoned and yet perfectly preserved | An attractive thing is actually a ruin or in decay (food, building, plant) |
| 6 | A private museum, recently robbed | A work of art describing the Travelers' horrible death |
| 7 | Signs leading to a precise place (perfume, etchings, hidden passages) | The setting's constant rearrangement causes unpleasant effects (dissonant music, acrid smoke) |
| 8 | Seemingly inhuman acrobatics | Inhabitants are replaced by others |
| 9 | A small shop of unusual things (automatons, paintings, rare books) | Travelers are spied on by agents always out of reach |
| 10 | A magnificent person seen from afar | Inhabitants seem to be controlled from afar |
| J | An artist breathing life into their works | A foul creature slithers nearby |
| Q | A natural element (forest, river) is out of place | Inhabitants pray to dark deities |
| K | A procession of being of a superior rank | Buildings around the Travelers are mere facades |