

The Situation

This takes place in the city where the actual game is being played.

Johnny Aprile was set to testify in court against the Spatafore crime family. Unfortunately, he was murdered before he got the chance. Four men separately fled the scene of the murder, and are now holed up in a “safehouse”. The police have reason to think that these four include:

- 1) the murderer
- 2) an undercover FBI operative
- 3) someone who has been set up to be framed for the crime
- 4) someone involved in shady dealings who doesn't want their own secret getting out

The police don't know which is which, though. They want to move in fast before the murderer escapes. They have reason to believe that the hit was performed by a someone very high up in the Spatafore family, someone they'll do anything to take down.

Meanwhile, in the safehouse, the four men know their time is running out. None of them are content to go their separate ways:

- 1) the murderer fears anyone deducing his identity and exposing him
- 2) the FBI agent is willing to risk his life to do just that
- 3) the set-up person needs to either expose the real murderer or befriend the FBI agent, to make sure the frame doesn't stick
- 4) the shady-dealer needs to make sure their own dirty secret doesn't come to light, either later, or now, for the leverage it would give the others

Phase One: Create Cards, Select a Character

See **Appendix: Checklist and Cards**. Print out the Checklist, or just write your own copy on a sheet of paper. “Cards” can be notecards, or just torn scraps of paper. Create the 4 large piles of What, When, How and Names, as well as the two small piles of Characters and Roles.

For all of the piles, it is important that they be shuffled and left face-down, so no one knows what they're about to pick. The one exception is Characters. All the info on the Characters cards is free for everyone to know.

Each player picks one Character, who they will play in Phase Three. Players are encouraged to play whichever gender is most familiar and comfortable for them to play. (Fran, Stephanie, Vivian and Josephine are some replacement name options for Freddy, Steve, Vic and Joe.)

Phase Two: Priming the Pump

In order to set the safehouse scene for the final hour of Phase Three, you will collaboratively flesh out how we got to this point by constructing:

- 1) the police file on the four people
- 2) the safehouse itself

The Police File

The police file contains mostly observations made by officers tailing the four suspects in the week before the murder. It may also include eyewitness testimony, wiretapped conversations, fingerprints on objects, and other evidence.

Players take turns, going clockwise through 16 observations. On their turn, the player randomly picks a What, a When, a How, and a Name (see end of document). These are drawn from four piles, and are discarded after use. These words are meant to inspire the player to get an observation rolling -- it is not mandatory to use all of the words, or even any other than the Named character. "Where" should be filled in based on actual nearby locations known to the players.

If the player whose turn it is wants to finish the observation, great. If not, as soon as they slow down, other players should jump in. An observation should be quick, and ends when the group agrees that a relevant fact about the character has been established, which makes them look like one of the four possibilities: hit man, patsy, agent or shady-dealer. Mark these off on the checklist, adding a word or short phrase to help you remember the observation later.

The Safehouse

Once an observation ends, the player whose turn it was names one feature of the safehouse. The safehouse is one room, with the dimensions of the room the actual players are playing in. All other details are established during this phase. If you can tie in the detail you contribute to the observation that was just created, that is ideal. However, anything inspired by play up to that point, or by the What, When or How words, is just fine.

Note on Characters

You do not have control over your character during this phase. Each character is entirely shared property. You may, however, wish to focus on your character and provide extra suggestions for observations about them, just to add extra context for when you play them in Phase Three.

Finishing Up

Once you've used up all the piles (that's 16 observations), Phase Two is over. Everyone should take a bathroom and snack break now so Phase Three can be played without interruption. You should also go over any info from The Situation on page one, or the observations you described, that you are fuzzy on.

Phase Three: The Final Hour

Each player randomly picks a Role from the pile, keeping their pick hidden from the other players. You now know whether you are a hit man, an agent, or someone with their own agenda. But what's everyone else? You have one hour of real time to figure out what you can from your fellows in the safehouse. After that hour, the cops raid the place.

Once you start, only three types of speech are permitted:

- 1) speaking in-character
- 2) describing your actions (though feel free to act them out instead if that works for your group)
- 3) asking other players about the appearance of their characters
- 4) describing the room, or asking others for reminders on what's in the room

If the identity of any player is agreed upon (correctly or otherwise) by all 3 others, that player is considered to be at the others' mercy -- the other 3 can tie him up, or kill him, or pat him on the back, depending on their preference. No one is armed, so it really is strength in numbers.

It is likewise true that anyone who tries to flee the safehouse without the permission of the other 3 will be unsuccessful.

Once everyone's ready, set a timer for one hour. During that hour, pursue your character's agenda in whatever way you choose. Once the timer rings, the police raid the place and the game ends. Assume that if all 4 characters have a coherent story to tell the police, that the police will buy it, and if they don't, then some sort of fiasco ensues which is bad for everyone.

Assume that there will not be an epilogue. However, if the game ends and everyone happens to want to have one, feel free. Do not agree on this beforehand -- playing with an epilogue in mind dilutes the point of The Final Hour, which is to immerse in this situation, here, right now.

Appendix: Checklist and Cards

The Characters

Freddy

No living family or known friends or lovers. Attended criminal justice school.

Steve

Manager of a shoe store. Married with one kid, who's away at college. Has been picked up for heroin possession on a few occasions; best guess is he's an addict.

Vic

Iraq War veteran. Has generated a lot of domestic abuse help calls, but his girlfriends have never pressed charges. Currently in Rage-a-holics counseling.

Joe

Rich sanitation contractor with lots of friends in the Spatafore family.

The Roles

Hit Man

Shady Dealer

Agent

Patsy

The Prompts

These should be written twice each (except for Names, which is 4 each) on scraps of paper and made into four piles of 16 scraps. Label the piles so you know which is When, which is What, etc.

When

midnight
noon
dawn
dusk
9am
3pm
3am
9pm

What

horse
gun
powder
blood
contract
envelope
phone
vial

How

burn
run
hide
take
hurt (or threaten)
see
hear
read

Names

Freddy
Steve
Vic
Joe

Checklist

Freddy

Hit man

Shady Dealer

FBI agent

Patsy

Steve

Hit man

Shady Dealer

FBI agent

Patsy

Vic

Hit man

Shady Dealer

FBI agent

Patsy

Joe

Hit man

Shady Dealer

FBI agent

Patsy