

Merger

A game of macrocosmic corporate horror

Prototype

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Touchstones: Michael Clayton (2007) by Tony Gilroy, Margin Call (2011) by J. C. Chandor, Essays by Sara Zedig

Welcome to the Corporate Body

Everyone thinks you are a headhunter, a fixer, an employee of a vast hedge fund, corporation, or law firm. You solve difficult problems, and attend to your company's various needs across different time zones and countries. Nothing on Earth is more powerful than the corporation. There is nothing they cannot know, no hidden thing they cannot see, and not a single piece of this world that they cannot buy.

And then one day you saw your company for what it really was.

You are not an employee. You are the cell of an immense being. A superior form of life made up of millions of people. These unintentionally constructed predators are the only organisms that can live across spans of time and space all at once, and there is nothing on this planet like them.

It is not your job to solve problems, it is your assigned function within the corporate body to steal and kill and spy to make your host more powerful than all the others. You feed it. You defend it. You break barriers so it can grow. It's schemes are so complex no one can make sense of them unless they fail catastrophically.

What you have seen cannot be unseen. You cannot leave and you cannot stay. If the work doesn't kill you, the corporate body will. It will stare back at you, eat you up, and shit you out.

Now get back to work.

The Game

Merger is a single-player roleplaying game about working for a living corporation. It is about the terror of knowing you are part of a massive body, and bearing witness to the awful things it does to perpetuate itself. There are themes of horror, dread, existential uncertainty, and corporate greed.

You will create a character, a single cell of a much larger thing of impossible scope. This character will be given certain tasks by the corporate body and you will imagine how they overcome the challenges associated with these goals. You will roll dice to determine how difficult these challenges are. Then you will roll a different pool of dice to see if your character succeeded or failed. As the game progresses your character will start to succumb to the various stresses placed upon them and will eventually perish in the course of their job. You cannot save them. You are a witness to how the corporate body destroys human life.

What You'll Need

- At least 6 of the following dice: d4, d6, d8, d10, d12
- One twenty-sided die
- A copy of the rules (this book)
- Writing tools (pen and paper, a digital document, etc.)
- An hour or two

Taste Menu

To ensure your game only contains ideas, themes, and stories that you are comfortable with, create a **Taste Menu** of things that you do or do not want to see in the course of the game. Take a piece of paper or some sort of document and create two columns labelled “Yes” and “No” or “Okay” and “Not Okay”. Write whatever you definitely want to see in the game, “Yes”, or something you definitely do not want to see in the game, “No”. The two columns don’t need to be even, they just need to include anything you feel strongly about. You can always add or remove topics as the game progresses.

These could be particular themes or subjects likely to come up in Merger, like corporate malfeasance, rich and extravagant lifestyles, or anti-corporate demonstrations, or more general content you are interested in including or excluding, like excessive violence, bigotry, or magic.

Merger already includes topics that some may find uncomfortable like body horror, existential dread, destructive vices, and immorally extravagant wealth. Read through the rules and feel free to ignore or alter content that you would rather not experience in the course of your game. Just because this is a single player game doesn’t mean the story will always go according to your plan. Random die rolls may bring up topics you’d rather not interact with. Do what you need to protect yourself.

Character Creation

Follow the steps below to make your character. You'll need two six-sided dice (d6) and a few minutes.

Name

What do people call you? Select an option below or roll a six-sided die twice.

1-3

1. Malia
2. Imran
3. Richard
4. Dior
5. Otis
6. Dhana

4/5

1. Jacqueline
2. Royce
3. Charlie
4. Laurent
5. Chanel
6. Renny

6

1. Lux
2. Silver
3. Lira
4. Copper
5. Banks
6. Mercedes

Skills

What are you good at? How were you educated? Roll a six-sided die twice to get a skill, record it on your character sheet and circle the related die. Do this 3 times so your character has 3 skills.

1-3

1. Delegation (d4)
2. Customer Service (d4)
3. Strategizing (d4)
4. Prayer (d4)
5. Leadership (d4)
6. Sixth Sense (d4)

4/5

1. Finances (d6)
2. Rituals (d6)
3. Finesse (d6)
4. Networking (d6)
5. Resourceful (d6)
6. Researching (d6)

6

1. Sales (d8)
2. Athletics (d8)
3. Management (d8)
4. Combat (d8)
5. Rhetoric (d8)
6. Law (d8)

Items

What do you carry with you that helps you with your job? Are these big status items or tools of the trade? Roll a six-sided die twice to get an item, record it on your character sheet and circle the related die. Do this 3 times so your character has 3 items.

1-3

1. Family name (d4)
2. Knife (d4)
3. Personal assistant (d4)
4. Smart phone (d4)
5. Wad of cash (d4)
6. Energy drinks (d4)

4/5

1. Ancient Tome (d6)
2. Private business (d6)
3. Personal lawyer (d6)
4. Gun (d6)
5. Poison (d6)
6. Fixer friend (d6)

6

1. Tailored suit (d8)
2. Luxury car (d8)
3. Expensive drugs (d8)
4. Obsidian credit card (d8)
5. Bodyguard (d8)
6. Ritual dagger (d10)

Complication

Why can't you leave the corporate body? Roll a six-sided die twice to get a complication, record it on your character sheet and circle the related die.

1-3

1. Medication (d4) They provide medicine you need to live.
2. Money (d4) Your expensive lifestyle has made you reliant on the salary you get
3. Debt (d4) You owe money, a lot of money
4. Security (d4) They are protecting you from something or someone
5. Medicine (d4) They provide you a medication that you give to someone you care about
6. All your friends are here (d4) You hang out after, it's nice

4-6

1. All your family is here (d6) It's a family business, sort of
2. They know an awful secret about you (d6) If it gets out, your life is ruined
3. All you know is work (d6) You've never had a life outside the corporate body
4. Hunted (d6) Another corporate body is after you, and this company protects you
5. Vice (d6) They provide an experience you can't find anywhere else
6. Favour (d6) They helped you out of a terrible mess, now you owe them forever

Vice

How do you cope with your job and the terrible revelation about the corporate body? Roll a six-sided die twice to get a vice, record it on your character sheet and circle the related die.

1-3

1. Gambling (d4)
2. Sex (d4)
3. Drugs (d4)
4. Violence (d4)
5. Alcohol (d4)
6. Luxury items (d4)

4-6

1. Dark rituals (d6)
2. Charity (d6)
3. Faith (d6)
4. Corporate culture (d6)
5. Adrenaline (d6)
6. Annihilation (d6)

Encounters

Merger is fueled by encounters. These are challenges and tasks presented by your employer and other corporate bodies across the world. You start the game with the first corporate body and its first encounter. When you finish the encounter, you move on to the next until you finish the last encounter for that corporate body. Then you move on to the next corporate body. Each encounter is made up of a corporate roll and an action roll.

The Corporate Roll

Each corporate body has an associated die (either a d8, d10, or d12) and each encounter has an associated die (again either a d8, d10, or d12). For each of your character's **corruption**, add another copy of the corporate body's die to the pool. To start an encounter, roll the corporate dice and the encounter dice, and sum the two highest results together. This represents how difficult the encounter will be for your character.

The Action Roll

Your character has skills, vices, items, and complications they can use to overcome these corporate encounters. After you know the result of the corporate roll, look at the details of the encounter and the corporate body and decide which of your traits you can use to overcome this encounter. Add the die tied to the trait to your pool.

If you have any corporate secrets unlocked for that corporate body, add that die to the pool.

You can push yourself to get more or larger dice. When you push yourself mark 2 stress and either add an additional copy of a die in the pool, or upgrade a die by one size (so a d4 becomes a d6, becomes a d8, etc.) You can do one or the other when you push yourself, not both. You can only push yourself once per action roll.

You may also sacrifice a trait. When you sacrifice a trait your character breaks a relationship, destroys an item, or puts themselves in harm's way to get an extra edge. When you sacrifice you mark 2 stress, strike out a trait, and add 1d20 to your pool. If that trait die was added to your pool, remove it from the pool. You cannot use that trait again for the rest of the game, so choose wisely! You can only make one sacrifice per action roll.

Each action roll you may push yourself and sacrifice something.

Roll your dice and sum the two highest together.

If the result of the action roll doubles the result of the corporate roll or more, that's a **success**. Your character overcomes the encounter, does what they set out to do, and is free from consequences. When you succeed, choose two benefits from the list below:

- Increase a trait by one die size
- Clear all marked stress
- Clear 1 complication
- Increase the corporate secret die by one size

If the result of the action roll is higher than or equal to the corporate roll, that's a **mixed success**. Your character overcomes the encounter but there are consequences. When you get a mixed success, choose one benefit and one consequence from the list below:

Benefits

- Clear all marked stress
- Clear 1 complication
- Increase the corporate secret die by one size

Consequences

- Mark 1 complication
- Mark 2 stress
- Decrease a trait by one die size
- You must overcome the same encounter again

If the result of the action roll is lower than the result of the corporate roll, that's a **failure**. Your character does not achieve what they want, or does but at a terrible price. When you fail, pick 2 consequences from the list below.

- Mark 1 complication
- Mark 2 stress
- Decrease a trait by one die size
- You must overcome the same encounter again

Benefits & Consequences

- **Stress.** This is difficult work. When your character's stress track is full, clear the track and mark 1 corruption and 1 insight. Corruption adds dice to the corporate roll, and insight grants your character special abilities they can use to break and bend the rules of the game in their favour. When you stress track fills and you can no longer mark corruption, your character dies or is lost forever in the corporate body
- **Complication.** This can be harm, promises you have made, mental stress, etc. When you suffer a complication write it on one of the free spaces on your character sheet. These can potentially limit which traits can be used or augment how your character behaves. Your character can take 5 complications. If you would mark a sixth complication, your character dies. When you can remove a complication, pick one and erase it. You may write a new complication in that space as a consequence.
- **Corporate Secrets.** Each corporate body has 4 secrets that can help your character get an edge against them represented by 1d4, 1d6, 1d8, and 1d10. When you first take this benefit, you can add 1d4 to your action rolls against that corporate body. The corporate secret die cannot be higher than d10.
- **Increasing & Decreasing Traits.** These encounters will take a toll on your character. They will learn, they will be tested, their things will break and they'll buy new things and learn valuable lessons. A trait cannot decrease lower than 1d4, or higher than 1d10.
- **Overcome the same encounter again.** Sometimes your character will fall, and fall hard. They'll need to regroup and attempt the same thing again. Sometimes retreat is the safest thing to do.

Insights

- **Lucky.** You have learned there is a secret language to fate and destiny, and if you look for the signs, you can turn failure into opportunity. When you have this insight, if you get the same result on any dice, you may reroll one of those dice and add it to your action roll result. For example, if you have a 1 on a d6 and a 1 on a d4, you may reroll the d6 or d4 and add that result to the total.
- **Saboteur.** You know how to make the most of someone's weaknesses. When you have this insight, you get an additional copy of the corporate secret die in your pool. For example, if your corporate secrets die is d8, you would add 2d8 to your pool rather than 1d8.
- **Tough.** You've been through the wringer long enough that you know how to push yourself without going over the edge. When you have this insight, it costs only 1 stress to push yourself.
- **Cold.** To survive in all this you'll have to cut off parts of yourself. The less that hurts, the better. When you have this insight, it costs only 1 stress to sacrifice a trait.

Corporate Body 1 (The Chemical/Medical Company)

Corporate Die: d8

Corporate Secrets

1. The corporate body regularly bribes employees to cover up accidents (d4)
2. (d6)
3. (d8)
4. (d10)

Encounters

1. Dealing with employees (d8)
2. Legal problems (d8)
3. Money problems (d10)
4. Weird magic stuff (d10)
5. The MERGER (d12)

Corporate Body 2 (The Media Company)

Corporate Die: d8

Corporate Secrets

1. The corporate body regularly bribes employees to cover up accidents (d4)
2. (d6)
3. (d8)
4. (d10)

Encounters

1. Dealing with employees (d8)
2. Legal problems (d8)
3. Money problems (d10)
4. Weird magic stuff (d10)
5. The MERGER (d12)

Corporate Body 3 (The Tech Company)

Corporate Die: d10

Corporate Secrets

1. (d4)
2. (d6)
3. (d8)
4. (d10)

Encounters

1. Dealing with employees (d8)
2. Legal problems (d8)
3. Money problems (d10)
4. Weird magic stuff (d10)
5. The MERGER (d12)

Corporate Body 4 (The Hedge Fund)

Corporate Die: d10

Corporate Secrets

1. (d4)
2. (d6)
3. (d8)
4. (d10)

Encounters

1. Dealing with employees (d8)
2. Legal problems (d8)
3. Money problems (d10)
4. Weird magic stuff (d10)
5. The MERGER (d12)

Corporate Body 5 (The Law Firm)

Corporate Die: d12

Special Rule: Since this is your employer, you start with corporate secrets. Circle the d4 secret.

Corporate Secrets

1. (d4)
2. (d6)
3. (d8)
4. (d10)

Encounters

1. Dealing with employees (d8)
2. Legal problems (d8)
3. Money problems (d10)
4. Weird magic stuff (d10)
5. The MERGER (d12)