

Arkham Horror 2nd Edition

(Core Set, Revised Printing)

New Player Introduction

Arkham Horror 2nd edition (now sadly out of print) is a Role-Playing Board Game set in the fictional town of Arkham, Massachusetts in the Roaring Twenties, and is based on the weird fiction of H. P. Lovecraft. Players control one or more characters each (selected from the 16 pre-made characters that come with the game), and the resulting group of one to eight Investigators works cooperatively to stop the emergence of one of Lovecraft's Ancient Ones, using spells, items, allies and skills found or purchased during play in Arkham or one of eight Other Worlds that become accessible through the numerous Gates that open during play.

It is these Gates that will occupy most of the Investigators' attention; a new Gate can open as often as once a turn, and each open Gate brings Arkham one step closer to the awakening of the Ancient One, which will almost certainly spell doom for Arkham and the courageous Investigators seeking to save it.

The monsters that come through these Gates are a major problem too; besides the threat that they pose, and the precious time that it takes to kill them, the presence of too many monsters will cause potential allies to leave town and stores to close, leaving the Investigators on their own as the terror level ramps up in the town.

In fact, it is the interrelationship between monsters and gates that forms one of the more difficult balancing acts that the Investigators have to perform in the base game.

Every time a Gate opens, a Doom Token is added to the Ancient One's Doom Track, and the Awakening is one step closer. A new Gate can't open in a location that already has a Gate, or where a Gate has been properly sealed, so leaving Gates open until they can be both closed and sealed in the same turn is a tactic to limit progress on the Doom Track... but if a Gate opening fails because of an existing Gate, there is a surge of new monsters out of every open Gate, and that creates its own problems.

There is a limit on the number of monsters that can be in play, and whenever that limit is reached, any excess monsters that spawn are diverted to the Outskirts of town. There is also a limit on the number of monsters that can be in the Outskirts, and when the Outskirts gets full, the Terror Level in Arkham increases by one. Once the Terror Level hits the maximum, any additional Terror increases spill over to the Doom Track... bringing the Awakening that much closer.

Thus, Investigators must strike the right time-and-resource balance between limiting the number of open Gates and limiting the number of monsters in play... all in an environment that is prone to sudden, drastic changes.

There are multiple paths to victory. Sealing six Gates is the most straightforward way; an Investigator who manages to close a Gate can sacrifice five Clue tokens to seal it, and an Investigator with the coveted Elder Sign item can sacrifice it to close and seal a Gate in one step, without using up any valuable Clues. Obtaining Elder Signs is a strategic imperative.

Closing all open Gates can also lead to victory... if the Investigators have saved up enough Trophies from the Gates that they have closed.

If the Ancient One awakens, and the Investigators somehow defeat it, that counts as a victory as well.

Actually killing an Ancient One is so unlikely, however, that the Awakening can realistically be considered to be a defeat in and of itself... and there are many ways to awaken Those Who Sleep. A full Doom Track, too many open Gates, a full Terror Track and too many monsters in play, no available Gate or Monster markers when one spawns: all of these will awaken the Ancient One, and almost certainly spell defeat for the Investigators.

Speaking of those intrepid Investigators:

Characters have two attributes, Stamina and Sanity, which represent their physical and mental well-being. These attributes are represented by tokens that are regularly gained and lost during play; it is important that characters avoid being reduced to zero in either attribute—and critical that a character not be reduced to zero Sanity and Stamina simultaneously.

Characters also have six Skills, which are used to determine the success or failure of the actions that they take, and the results of the encounters that they have. These Skills are paired into three groups of two (Speed/Sneak, Fight/Will, Lore/Luck), such that a higher value for one skill requires a lower value for the paired skill. Players can make slight adjustments to their Skill values at the start of each game turn; characters with a higher Focus statistic can make greater changes.

This ability to tweak skill values is one of several mechanisms that allow players to regularly fine-tune the character to better meet upcoming tasks and challenges. Another is the ability to trade items, spells and money between characters that are, however briefly, on the same space on the board. Effective distribution of resources is an important part of successful gameplay.

Skill checks are handled quite differently than in most other RPGs. The character's Skill value is used to determine *how many dice* are rolled for the check, not what number must be rolled *on* the dice (which is the more common way of doing things). For each die (d6 are used), a roll of 5 or 6 is a success. The Difficulty of the check (always 1 unless otherwise specified) is how many successes must be obtained to pass the check. Modifiers to the check (+1, -1, etc.) adjust the number of dice rolled.

So, for example, a character with a Fight skill of 3, shooting a Tommy Gun (+6) at a Nightgaunt (-2, difficulty 2) would roll 7 dice ($3 + 6 - 2$), and would need to roll a 5 or 6 on at least two of them (because difficulty = 2) to pass the Combat check and destroy the Nightgaunt in a hail of .45 caliber lead.

This is all further complicated by the fact that a character can become Blessed or Cursed; a Blessed character succeeds on a roll of 4, 5 or 6, and a Cursed character only succeeds on a 6. And, Players may elect to spend Clue tokens to re-roll dice that didn't succeed; the need to pass mission-critical skill checks vs. the need to have Clue tokens available to seal gates is another one of the balancing acts in Arkham Horror.

The turn sequence is fairly standard— Upkeep, Movement, Encounters (divided into separate phases for Arkham and the Other Worlds), and then the Mythos Phase (the Ancient One's turn at bat)— but the implementation is, again, a bit unusual. In most games, each character would go through all turn phases during its turn, and then play would pass to the next character; in Arkham Horror, play rotates through all characters during each phase, so all characters upkeep in turn, then all characters move in turn, etc. This odd rotation is an effective nod to the collaborative nature of the game.

Getting to know the town of Arkham— which resources are available where, which Locations are most likely to spawn Clues or Gates, which skills are most often needed for encounters at which Locations— is critical for success, and prospective Investigators are urged to do their homework before challenging the horrors lurking in Arkham.

If all of this sounds like a lot... it is. Arkham Horror is a fairly complex game, but it is actually a lot easier to learn than it sounds (thanks to some well-planned, properly-executed game design and well-written, unambiguous rules), and it offers great, challenging, ever-changing role-playing gameplay as a reward.

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