



A game of  
cultists vs. investigators

by Steve Hickey

# Soth

Play cultists in small-town America trying to summon the dark god Soth.

- Conceal your murderous crimes
- Deceive family and friends
- Thwart meddling investigators

If you can complete three more rituals, Soth will rise.

Can you do it?

**Duration:** 1-3 sessions

**Players:** 3-7

**Ages:** 16+

**Genre:** Cthonic noir

**System:** diceless, low prep,  
low complexity



# Contents

- 5 A Summary of the Rules
- 6 Preparing to Play
- 12 Creating Characters and Situation
- 31 Continuing The Game
- 36 What the Keeper Does
- 40 What the Keeper Does: Invisible Actions
- 55 What the Keeper Does: Visible Actions
- 69 Death, Chaos & Endgame: Miscellaneous Rules
- 76 *End Credits*
- 81 *Optional Rules*
- 92 *Keeper's Handouts*
- 100 *Players' Handouts*

## Feedback and Social Media Contacts

Throughout these rules, weblinks are highlighted in blue. Internal page references are linked (but not highlighted).

- **Twitter**  
[@SteveHickeyRPG](#) and [@SothRPG](#)
- **Hashtags**  
[#SothRPG](#) and [#SummonSoth](#)
- **Google Plus**  
[+Steve Hickey](#)
- **Email**  
[stevehickeygames+soth@gmail.com](mailto:stevehickeygames+soth@gmail.com)
- **Facebook**  
[Steve Hickey](#)
- **Blog**  
[Steve Hickey Games](#)

## If You Have A Free Copy Of Soth

This is my work—thanks for checking it out. If you get value out of reading or playing *Soth*, please consider:

- telling others why you liked it, online
- running it at conventions
- putting some money in my [Paypal](#) tipjar ([wave.goodnight@gmail.com](mailto:wave.goodnight@gmail.com))
- purchasing it from [Payhip](#) or [DriveThruRPG](#).

Best,  
Steve Hickey

11 June 2015



# Structure Of This Book

Pages 7 to 11 cover how to prepare and set up a game of *Soth* and how to introduce it to other players.

Pages 13 to 30 explain how to create cultists and the town they live in, and how to establish the cultists' starting situation.

The remaining rules (pages 32 to 75) describe how to facilitate the game. This is the section that the Keeper will refer to most often during play. These rules are divided into **invisible actions** (moments the cultists can't see), **visible actions** (moments where the game focuses on one or more cultists), and other miscellaneous rules.

The Appendices contain optional rules, and handouts for the Keeper and players.

## Summary Of The Rules

There's a five-page overview of how to run *Soth* in the Keeper's Handouts section. (The **Keeper** is the person who introduces and facilitates the game and who decides on the consequences of the cultists' actions.)

- ⑤ Keeper's Handouts 1 and 2 summarise how to introduce the game, create characters, and establish the starting situation .
- ⑤ Keeper's Handout 3 lists ways to react to the cultists
- ⑤ Keeper's Handout 4 describes how to resolve conflicts and summon supernatural entities
- ⑤ Keeper's Handout 5 provides guidelines for assessing how suspicious the cultists are, and how to use that suspicion to create problematic consequences.

You can find an introduction to the essential techniques used to facilitate *Soth* on pages 37 to 40.



# Preparing To Play



# Setting Up

## Player Requirements

*Soth* requires three to seven players. A three-player game will be fun but challenging.

Players should be enthusiastic about any of the following:

- evil cults
- the noir genre—particularly thrillers and stories told from the villain's perspective
- the Call of Cthulhu role-playing game or any fiction by (or inspired by) H.P. Lovecraft.

## Handouts

Print the following handouts for use and reference:

- A character sheet for each player (Player Handout A)
- The Tome of Soth (Player Handout B)
- The Cult Leader (Player Handout C)
- For the Holder of the Tome of Soth / For the Cult Leader (Player Handouts D and E)
- The Compulsions cards (Player Handout F). Print and cut these out to distribute during the game.
- The Servitor of the Gate (Player Handout G)



Optionally, print out one copy of each of these Keeper handouts:

- ☉ Introducing the Game (Keeper Handouts 1 and 2)
- ☉ How to run the game (Keeper Handout 3)
- ☉ Useful rules (Keeper Handout 4)
- ☉ Suspicion (Keeper Handout 5)
- ☉ Names and Places (Keeper Handout 6)

You may find it useful to print two Keeper Handouts per page. Handouts 1 and 2, Handouts 3 and 6, and Handouts 4 and 5 work well printed together.

## Materials

Choose a place to play where you feel comfortable portraying evil cultists and describing what they do.

You will need a blank sheet of paper to draw a relationship diagram on (see page 19) and one six-sided die (referred to as a **d6**). If you use the optional rules for creating a map of the town (page 82), you may need up to five d6.

Everyone will need something to write with.

## How Long Does Soth Take To Play?

### Preparation Time

About 15 minutes to create the cultists and their town.

### Playing Time

The average playing time is about three to four hours. If the players make entertainingly poor decisions, the game could be over within an hour.

The game could last up to 7 hours, if the cultists are careful and methodical, and explore relationships.

See page 87 for advice on running the game in under three hours.





# Explain The Game

Once you've gathered to play, read the following aloud:

*This is a game about cultists in small-town America.*

*The tone of the game is noir: bad people doing bad things, and keeping them secret in order to achieve their goals. In terms of genre, the game usually plays out somewhere between a thriller and a (very) black comedy.*

*We play the game to put the cultists under pressure: to see if they can summon the dark god Soth without being discovered or stopped.*

At this point, you can describe some of *Soth's* media influences (below). I usually cite TV shows like *Dexter* and *Hannibal*, which have a strong focus on people plotting and getting away with murder. *Breaking Bad* illustrates the dilemmas faced by people who hide crimes from their loved ones.

## Media Influences

### Film and TV

*American Gothic, Blood Simple, Breaking Bad, Dexter, Hannibal, The Player, Psycho, the Saw movie series (especially later entries), The Shield, True Detective.*

For insights into small-town life in America, add *Fargo*, *Friday Night Lights*, and *Gilmore Girls*.

### Novels and Short Stories

*A Good Marriage* by Stephen King, *Neonomicon* by Alan Moore, *The Ceremonies* by T.E.D Klein. For insights into small-town life, add *Salem's Lot* by Stephen King.



# Set The Tone

Read the following aloud:

*Most of us will play cultists. We'll describe the unpleasant things we do to summon Soth—like sacrificing friends and family.*

*That means we have to accept we'll be dealing regularly with the subject matter of murdering innocent people.*

*But for every other type of violence or abuse, every person at the table has permission to stop the game any time something comes up that makes you uncomfortable. We'll pause and discuss how to deal with that particular issue.*

*Here are a couple of techniques we might find useful.*

*The first is the idea of **Lines**. These are subjects we will and won't allow into the game. As in, "That crosses the line for me." If something crosses a Line for someone, we should figure out how to modify the idea or remove it from the game.*

*We can also use the second technique—which is the **Veil**. This is about how much we choose to describe of a particular event. The Veil lets us draw a curtain over a problematic moment in a number of different ways: we can cut away entirely, we can describe it less graphically or more broadly, or maybe we can decide to only show part of it.*

# The Game Is a Conversation

If anyone hasn't played a role-playing game before, read the following aloud:

*While most of us play cultists, one of us will be the Keeper. The Keeper controls the supporting characters in the cultists' small town, and uses the rules to make sure that whatever the cultists try to do, there are consequences.*

*The game is played as a conversation between the Keeper and the players. The players drive the action by describing how their cultists attempt to complete the final three rituals to summon Soth. Everyone describes what their characters do and say, and how they react to each other.*

*Like any conversation, you take turns but—just like a conversation—the turns aren't formal. Sometimes you'll talk over each other or build on each others' ideas, or we'll focus the spotlight on one character in particular.*

If you haven't already, choose one of the players to be the Keeper.

**NB:** While anyone can read the rest of these rules, they'll be addressed directly to the Keeper.



# Creating Characters and Situation



# Create The Setting

As Keeper, you lead the following process. Read out the steps and options, below.

As a group, decide on the time period:

- 1920s
- 1950s
- 1980s.

Your cultists live in a small town, with a population between 700 and 5000.

- 1920s: pop. 700
- 1950s: pop. 3,000
- 1980s: pop. 5,000.

As a group, decide what part of the United States the cultists live in:

- Kansas
- Louisiana
- Massachusetts
- California.

You decide which town you live in:

- Greenville (near a lake or river)
- Ashland (near a former centre of industry)
- Milton (near an old railway line)
- Winchester (near a large, effectively-unmapped forest).

Highlight decade, state and town on Keeper Handout 3.

# Create The Cultists

Give each player a copy of the character sheet (Player Handout A).

There are four stages to creating a cultist:

- Choose your role in the cult
- Choose your reputation in the town and your occupation
- Create your obligations to the community
- Choose a name for your cultist.

Throughout the following process, the Keeper sets the tone by advising if an idea might be too silly or unrealistic.

## Choose Roles

Ask the group the following questions:

Which one of you keeps hold of the Tome of Soth?

Give this cultist the 'Holder of the Tome of Soth' card (Player Handout B)

Which one of you leads the cult?

Give this cultist the 'Cult Leader' card (Player Handout C).

**NB:** At the start of the game, the same cultist can't hold both of these roles.

Now read this to the group:

*On the top left of your character sheets, you have a score called **Clarity**. Clarity measures how difficult it is for your cultist to seem like a normal person. Having a high Clarity score means it's more likely your cultist will reveal something about Soth to the people outside your cult.*

*Your Clarity score doesn't have any impact on the way you portray your cultist. A higher score doesn't mean you have to make them act more 'insane'. The Mask of Sanity rules on your character sheet will take care of that (and I'll explain those more fully, later).*

**NB:** The Mask of Sanity rules are explained in detail on page 26.

Read this to the group:

*Each role has a Clarity score associated with it. Write those down.*

*Every cultist who doesn't have a role should write down that they have a Clarity score of '0' (zero).*

### **Resolve Ties If A Role Is Contested**

If more than one person wants to be either the cult leader or the holder of the Tome of Soth, each of these competing players rolls a d6. The highest roll wins (keep rolling until all ties are resolved).

Everyone who rolled the d6 (e.g. every competing player) increases their Clarity by one point.

Each winner increases their Clarity by one additional point (to a total Clarity of 3).

### **Special Abilities: Holder of the Tome of Soth**

Whoever holds the Tome of Soth can summon a supernatural entity and command it to do their bidding (page 52).

### **Special Abilities: The Cult Leader**

The cult leader chooses who performs a ritual's sacrifice. The chosen cultist increases their Clarity by 1.

The cult leader has the capacity to take 4 Injuries (page 66), compared to normal cultists, who can take 3 Injuries before dying. If they lose leadership of the cult, they return to that normal capacity. If they have 4 Injuries when this happens, they'll die.

The cult leader can give each cultist an order they must obey, once per cultist per game. This order cannot involve the cultist killing themselves or putting themselves into a position where their death is inevitable.



## Choose Reputations & Create Occupations

Ask each player what their cultist's reputation in the town is:

- Excellent
- Average
- Seedy.

Different reputations will give the cultists the ability to enter different social spaces without drawing attention.

*Some examples.*

*A banker with an excellent reputation will stand out if he enters a speak-easy.*

*A seedy jazz musician who is also the leader of the cult will stand out if he tries to order a banker around.*

Ask each cultist to choose their occupation based on their reputation. Here are some examples:

- Excellent:** judge, town elder, mayor, priest, sheriff, doctor, wealthy farmer, dilettante.
- Normal:** psychiatrist, shopkeeper, asylum warden, prison warden, deputy sheriff, librarian, teacher, farmer, dentist, innkeeper.
- Seedy:** janitor, vagrant, musician, grave digger.

## Create Family Connections

Read the following to the group and wait for them to make their choices:

*If you have an excellent or average reputation, choose a family relationship where you live with someone:*

- Marriage
- Relatives: parents.

*If you have a seedy reputation, choose one of the following relationships:*

- Marriage (live together)
- Relatives: parents (live together)
- Relatives: siblings
- Divorced with children
- Widower with children
- Unmarried sex partner.

## Create Obligations

Read the following to the group:

*Each of your cultists has an **Obligation**: something they have to do every day for a specific person. Your Obligation could be to your job or (if you're unemployed) to your cultist's community, friends or family. If you don't do it, it will draw attention and cause concern.*

Some examples:

- A town elder who needs to meet constituents
- A priest who needs to conduct daily sacraments
- A teacher who needs to attend classes.

If someone can't come up with an idea, then use a more generic Obligation, such as:

- Ⓒ Preparing for a surprise party, family reunion or wedding (that you have significant family involvement in)
- Ⓒ Entertaining a relative or work colleague who is visiting for a holiday.

On the relationship diagram (see below), write down the people the cultists have Obligations to.

## Choose Names

If they haven't already done it, ask the players to name their cultists. Keeper Handout 6 (Names and Places) can provide ideas.

## Creating Supporting Characters and a 'Relationship Diagram'

During this process (and throughout the game), you should note any **supporting characters** the players create. Supporting characters include everyone who isn't a cultist. They live in the cultists' town and have known the cultists for many years.

A player can create a supporting character either by directly talking about them or through the implications of what they say about their cultists.

Whenever a supporting character is introduced in the game, give them a name (either from the 'Names and Places' handout (Keeper's Handout 6), or a name that makes sense with the story so far).

Write the name of every new supporting character onto a piece of paper and then draw lines to indicate how they're connected to other people. This is called the **relationship diagram**.

There must be a relationship between the supporting character and at least one of the cultists. If this relationship hasn't been established by previous events, define their relationship with one of the items from the following list:

- Family
- Friend or Enemy
- Work
- Sex
- History
- School.

As Keeper, you control supporting characters. You can read more about them on page 67.

## Create The Starting Situation

The Keeper and the players now decide what happened during the first ritual to summon Soth.

As Keeper, ask the group these questions:

*Where is your temple and what stops it from being discovered?*

Once they've answered, read the following aloud:

*You're about to perform the first of the four rituals necessary to summon Soth. As a group, you'll figure out how that went.*

Give Player Handout D to the player whose cultist holds the Tome of Soth. Ask this player to complete it and tell the others the results. This tells you how the victim was brought to the temple.

The cultist with the Tome of Soth will ask you what went wrong en-route to the temple. Respond with an idea that seems obvious to you—an idea that *threatens* to expose the cultists.

Some ideas include:

- Ⓒ The kidnappers are observed while transporting the victim
- Ⓒ The victim attempts to escape
- Ⓒ The vehicle they're using to transport the victim breaks down.

Ask the players how their cultists dealt with that setback. Tell them they were successful.

Give Player Handout E to the leader of the cult. Ask them to complete it and tell everyone the results. This tells you how the victim is related to the cultist who murdered them.

The leader of the cult will ask you give the victim a name (if they don't already have one). Use Keeper Handout 6 (Names and Places), if you need ideas.

The leader of the cult will ask you what the victim's last words were. Use your creativity and sense of the group's mood to choose something with an emotional impact. The victim doesn't need to say more than a few words. These last words could do any of the following:

- Ⓒ Emphasise their emotional connection to the cultist
- Ⓒ Create a problem for the cultist because of the victim's death
- Ⓒ Hint at a secret the cultist would want to know the answer to.

Through this process, ask the players questions to clarify what's happened—particularly about the order and location of events, and any bystanders or witnesses.

# Assign Suspicion

**Suspicion** is a resource you gain by evaluating how suspicious each cultist's actions are. It's explained in detail on page 42.

For now, read the following aloud to the players:

*Your goal is to advance the cult's plans to summon Soth and prevent your crimes from being detected.*

*Summoning Soth won't be easy. During the game, I'll play people who are trying to figure out what's going on and who are trying to stop you. If you make a mistake, I'll take advantage of it.*

*You can play cultists who are obviously crazy or evil, but that will make it easy for you to fail.*

*As we play, I'll keep track of how suspicious you've been. I won't tell you the results but the more suspicious you are, the more power I'll have to stop you. Right now, I'm going to evaluate how you did with your kidnapping and sacrifice.*

Choose an item from the following list that best matches your judgment of how effective the cultists were at kidnapping their victim. Listed after each item is the amount of Suspicion it earns.

- Was it a perfect crime? (0 Suspicion)
- Could someone clever figure out the crime? (+1 Suspicion)
- Was there a loose end? (+2 Suspicion)
- Was the crime obvious? (+3 Suspicion)

- Ⓒ Is the crime obviously linked to one or more of the cultists? (+5 Suspicion)
- Ⓒ Was a cultist caught red-handed? (+7 Suspicion)

Write this number on Keeper Handout 5 (Suspicion).

## What Happens Next?

The cultists need to deal with the consequences of the first ritual. This phase of the game has six parts. The first three parts happen in a sequence:

- Ⓒ The cultists deal with the aftermath of the sacrifice
- Ⓒ The Keeper introduces a problematic supporting character and assigns Suspicion based on the outcome of that encounter
- Ⓒ The cultists deal with any Obligations they need to meet.

After completing this sequence, continue play until you feel there is a natural pause in the game. At that point, run the final three parts of this phase:

- Ⓒ Assign Compulsions that make it problematic for each cultist to maintain the appearance of having a normal life
- Ⓒ Update the relationship diagram and choose one supporting character who will begin investigating the cultists
- Ⓒ Mark off the time that's elapsed.

## Deal With The Sacrifice's Aftermath

Ask the cultists what they do. Let any ensuing actions or conversations play out for an entertaining amount of time.

Inform the cultists that later rituals require a knife that's been consecrated by the blood of all of the previous sacrifices.

Ask the cultists if there were any loose ends to this sacrifice and (if so) what they do about it.

Ask what they will do with the body of the victim.

**NB:** This is the last time you, in your role as Keeper, will help the other players.

Tell the cultists the next ritual must happen at least 24 hours from now. The holder of the Tome of Soth can tell them more.

## Introduce A Problematic Character

As soon as possible after the cultists leave the temple, describe the arrival of one or more supporting characters who want to interact with the cultists.

These supporting characters can be previously established (or logically connected to someone who was previously established). Alternatively, they can be completely new characters it would be plausible to meet in this location.

The supporting character(s) will do one or both of the following (Keeper's choice):

- Witness the cultists doing something suspicious
- Start an innocent conversation with one or more of the cultists.



If necessary, read this aloud:

*When you're having long or intimate conversations with people who aren't in the cult, you need to use the 'Mask of Sanity' rules—which are on your character sheet.*

*Also, if you give each other advice when your cultists can't talk freely or you're in different locations, I'll earn 1 Suspicion.*

### **Introduce A Witness**

You can introduce someone who witnesses one or more of the cultists doing something suspicious.

Describe how this witness reacts to them.

Ask the cultist(s) what they do in response.

### **Start An Innocent Conversation**

You can introduce a supporting character (possibly the witness, above) and have them start a lengthy, innocent, and probing conversation with a cultist.

This supporting character doesn't have an agenda. They're not trying to expose the cultists' crimes; they're just making conversation. Describe them asking friendly but difficult questions—ones that start with 'What', 'Where', 'Who', 'How', 'Why', and 'When' are good.

The conversation should continue longer than the cultists are comfortable with.

### **'The Mask of Sanity' rules**

When a cultist with a Clarity of 1 (or higher) has a long or intimate conversation with a non-cultist, the cultist will act suspiciously in some way.

The cultist's player must choose an action from the following list to do during the conversation. The action must be equal to or higher than the cultist's Clarity score.

1. Mention Soth or say something obviously odd
2. Hint at your superiority to the non-cultist
3. Say something that flags to the people you're with that all is not well with you
4. Perform a single action that demonstrates all is not well with you
5. Describe an aspect of Soth's glory or power
6. Hint at the cult's plans
7. Indirectly or subtly confess to a cult-related crime
8. Menace the person you're with.

If the player forgets to have their cultist do this, the cultist still did something suspicious—it's just they don't know what it was. As Keeper, you gain Suspicion equal to the cultist's Clarity.

These 'Mask of Sanity' rules only apply to people having a conversation. They do not apply to cultists who are simply nearby.

### **The 'Table Talk' rules**

If a player gives advice to another player when their cultists would not be able to talk freely, the Keeper gains one point of Suspicion (for each piece of advice).

It's fine for players to non-verbally communicate in a way their cultists could. Keep a close eye on how obvious a player has to be in order to communicate their idea.

## Assign Suspicion Based On The Outcomes Of Those Conversations

If a cultist deceived someone or covered something up about the cult's activities while speaking with the supporting character(s), choose one of the following options and assign Suspicion:

- Did the cultist pull it off flawlessly? (-2 Suspicion)
- Will the deceived supporting character think about it later? (+1 Suspicion)
- Was the deception pretty comprehensively botched? (+3 Suspicion)
- Is the cultist clearly connected to recent horrible crimes? (+5 Suspicion)

If the cultist's reputation would be an advantage in the deception or cover up, decrease the Suspicion you earn by 1; if their reputation would disadvantage them, increase Suspicion by 1.

If a player has a Clarity of 0 (and doesn't need to use the 'Mask of Sanity' rules), their cultist could still come across as creepy, withdrawn or acting out-of-character—just from the way they behave during the conversation. For each cultist this applies to, the Keeper gains 1 point of Suspicion.

## Deal With Any Urgent Obligations

Review the cultists' Obligations. If any are urgent, ask the affected players how (or if) their cultists are going to fulfill the Obligation.

A cultist can elect to not fulfill an Obligation. See page 68 for the consequences of that decision, which will take effect during the following day.

## Randomly Assign Compulsions

Once you feel there's a natural pause in the game, read the following aloud:

*There's one final part to creating your cultist. Each of you has a **Compulsion**: this is something you have to do at least once per day but it creates problems for you. If you don't do it, your cultist gains 1 point of Clarity.*

*Compulsions cannot be cured.*

Assign a Compulsion to each cultist:

- 🕒 Shuffle the Compulsion cards on Player Handout F
- 🕒 Each player selects a card
- 🕒 Allow players to choose a new card, if required (or if they're uncomfortable with the card they've chosen).

While the players are finalising their card choices, work through the 'Update the Relationship Diagram and Create an Investigator' section (page 29) and the 'Mark off any time that's elapsed' section (page 30). Then come back here.

Read this aloud:

*At the moment, your cultists don't know about each others' Compulsions. They may learn about them as you play.*

*It's your choice whether you keep your Compulsion secret from the other players—and you don't all have to make the same decision.*

*Now, could I have a look at the cards you've chosen?*

Review the Compulsion cards the players selected.

Read this aloud:

*What do you do next?*

See 'Continuing the Game' on page 31 for the rules for running the rest of the game.

## **Update The Relationship Diagram and Create An Investigator**

While the players are choosing and thinking about their cultists' Compulsions, take a moment to update the relationship diagram.

If the cultists' actions have earned any Suspicion at all, choose one of the established supporting characters to become an **Investigator**. An Investigator is someone who is suspicious of the cultists, who tries to figure out what they're up to, and (eventually) could be in a position to stop them summoning Soth.

The Keeper selects someone who seems the best fit for one or more of the following criteria:

- They saw the cultists doing something suspicious
- They're related to the victim
- They're someone who's had an opportunity to observe a cultist's increasingly odd behaviour
- They noticed the kidnapping
- They're the supporting character in the town most likely to become suspicious
- They're the nosiest supporting character in town.

The Keeper spends one point of Suspicion to turn a supporting character into an Investigator.

## Mark Off Any Time That's Elapsed

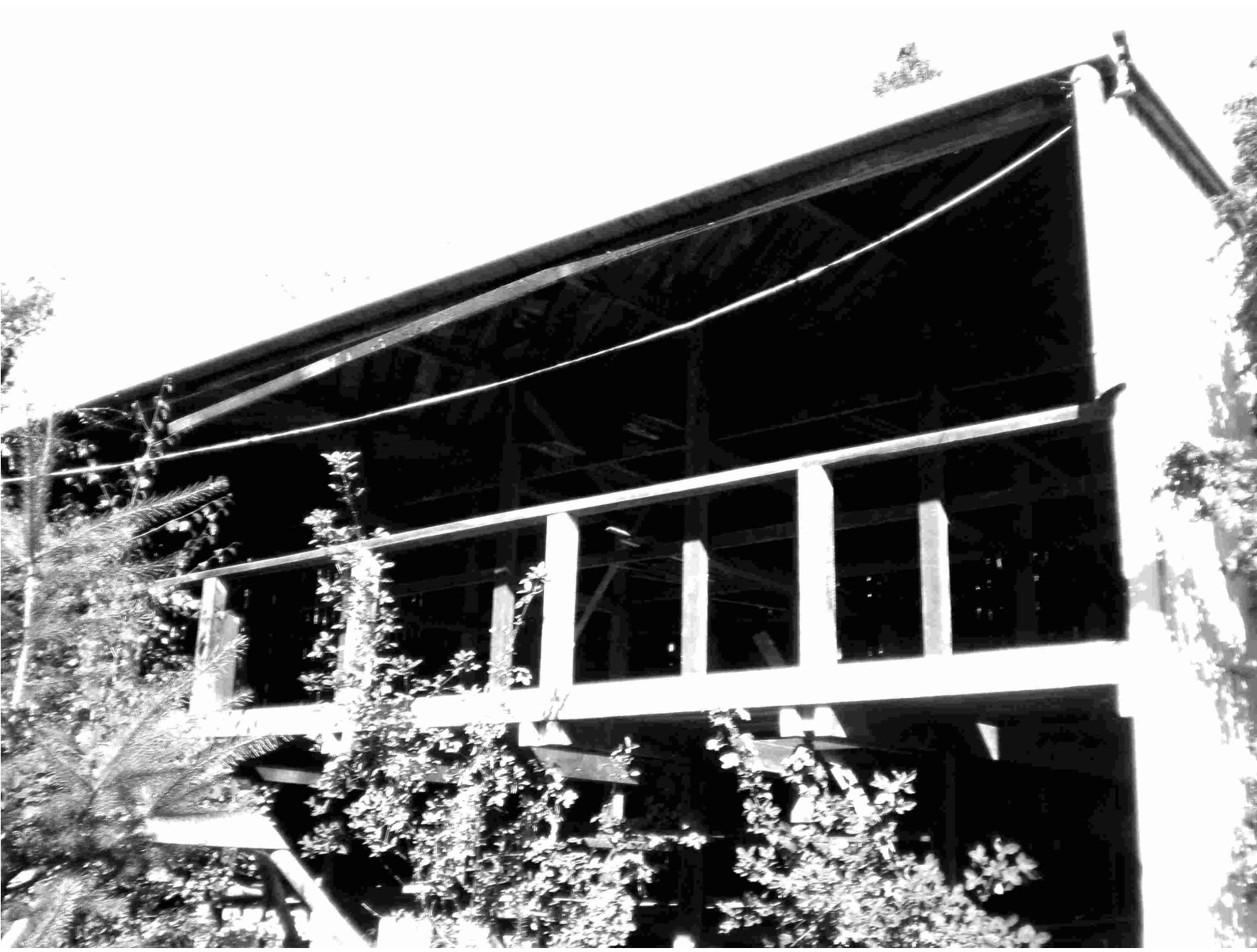
Keeper's Handout 3 (How To Run The Game) has a calendar on the right-hand side. You can use this to mark off any time that's elapsed and track how long it is until the next ritual.

Mark off any time that's elapsed so far during the game. Keep doing this as you play.

*An example.*

*If the events of the game so far have lasted from noon till nightfall, cross off the 'Midday' and 'Evening' lines of the first day.*

# Continuing The Game





The preceding pages have set up the cultists' starting situation and given them a clear goal: to complete the remaining three rituals to summon Soth.

Now, the game becomes more open-ended, as the cultists try to summon Soth, deal with their Compulsions, and conceal their crimes. You'll keep track of two time-scales while playing: what happens in the story moment-by-moment, and what happens between rituals.

## **Moment-By-Moment**

You can rely on the cultists to drive the action. The cultists will prepare for the next ritual(s) and interact with their neighbours and friends—creating the following opportunities to appear suspicious:

- Their Compulsions will make them exhibit compromising behaviour
- They'll have to use the 'Mask of Sanity' rules during lengthy or intimate conversations forced on them by Obligations or circumstances
- They won't always perfectly conceal their crimes or co-ordinate their actions.

This lets you earn Suspicion. You use Suspicion to help the Investigators uncover the cultists' plans (see page 46 for more details).

Describe how the world reacts to the cultists' actions. Introduce the results of things that have happened outside the cultists' awareness.

You control all of the supporting characters in the game. Treat them as real people living in a small town who are genuinely interested in what each cultist is up to. Have them start friendly conversations with the cultists.



## Between rituals

*Soth* doesn't have a pre-determined plot. However, here are a few things that could happen as the cultists attempt to summon *Soth*.

### Between The First and Second Rituals

- The players explore the relationships their cultists have with other people in the town
- The cultists may act as a team to cover up any mistakes or loose ends
- Any murders or disappearances will cause alarm in the town. The police will begin official investigations (unless they are all cultists), and neighbours will offer emotional support to anyone affected.

Unless the players are extremely competent, you'll probably earn moderate amounts of Suspicion throughout this section of the game.

As Keeper, identify supporting characters who would be concerned with or curious about the behaviour of the cultists and turn them into Investigators (see page 46).

### The Second Ritual

The second ritual is called the Sounding of the Bell. It must be completed within the minute of noon at least 24 hours after the first ritual. The ritual requires two human sacrifices. It must occur in a place where the public gather regularly, where the cultists must make a noise capable of deafening nearby listeners.

The players will have creative solutions about how their cultists will fulfill these requirements for the location and components. As Keeper, agree to these solutions for this (and subsequent) rituals.

## **Between The Second and Third Rituals**

- ⦿ Investigators (and unfulfilled Obligations) will make it more difficult for the cultists to appear innocent
- ⦿ After the Sounding of the Bell ritual, a bright new star appears in the sky. This star is a sign of Soth's coming. As Keeper, describe how it changes in size, intensity and colour.
- ⦿ If it's been publicly known since before the second ritual that people have been murdered or have disappeared, any further crimes will make the townsfolk aware something highly abnormal is occurring
- ⦿ It's possible one or more of the cultists will be arrested or ambushed.

## **The Third Ritual**

The third ritual is called The Opening of the Gate. It must occur at precisely sunset at any point from at least 30 hours after the Sounding of the Bell ritual. It requires the sacrifice of a cultist of Soth using a knife consecrated by the blood of the previous sacrifices. It must take place in the Temple.

It's OK if the cult falls apart at this point, perhaps due to internal tensions or too much Suspicion. Remind the players that it's not supposed to be easy to summon Soth. See the 'Ending the Game' section on page 75 for more.

If some cultists are dead but the game continues, the players of dead cultists can now take on the roles of Investigators and other supporting characters (page 70), or a supernatural entity (page 71).

## **Between The Third and Final Rituals**

- Ⓒ The cultist who was sacrificed now portrays a Servitor (a supernatural entity described in more detail on page 71).  
Hand the player of this cultist Player Handout G (The Servitor of the Gate).
- Ⓒ It's likely the Servitor will take actions that will alarm the town
- Ⓒ After the Opening of the Gate ritual, describe the frequent earthquakes that are now occurring. These quakes are a sign of Soth's coming. As Keeper, describe how they change in frequency, intensity and effect.
- Ⓒ It's likely the Keeper will have spent Suspicion to trigger one or both of the 'high alert' conditions that last until the end of the game: 'the authorities are everywhere' and 'the townsfolk are suspicious and cautious'.
- Ⓒ There will almost certainly be multiple Investigators (and teams of Investigators) trying to uncover what the cultists are doing.

## **The Final Ritual**

The final ritual is called The Breaking of the Skein. It requires two sacrifices: an unmarried adult and a healer. It must occur at least two hours after the third ritual, under the light of Soth (which you can interpret as the new star in the sky), in a place where the public gather regularly.

## **The Game Ends When ...**

- Ⓒ all of the cultists are dead
- Ⓒ the cultists are unable or unwilling to summon Soth
- Ⓒ the cultists succeed (see page 75).

# What the Keeper does



# What The Keeper Does: An Overview

The following 30 pages detail how the Keeper facilitates a game of *Soth*. Here's the high-level overview of what that involves.

## Assess and Describe Consequences

As Keeper, you aren't in competition with the players. You aren't trying to stop the cultists from summoning *Soth*—although that can easily happen if the cultists' actions raise the suspicions of the people around them.

Instead, you decide on the consequences of the cultists' actions.

I use a metaphor of 'rock-climbing' to describe the players' and the Keeper's activities while playing *Soth*:

- The players are 'the climbers'. They're trying to figure out their cultists' best next move and dealing with sudden set-backs.
- The Keeper is 'gravity': relentless, always present, and making sure any mistake a cultist makes has consequences.

## Facilitate The Conversation By Selecting Scenes

On page 11, I described the game as a conversation where the Keeper and the players take turns contributing and describing what happens.

When the conversation focuses on a group of characters in a single location, that's called a scene.

**Scene selection** is the process of deciding which scenes happen next.

Everyone shares the authority for selecting scenes: players will ask for scenes with their cultists and they'll set scenes up all the time. As Keeper, you also select scenes and you have two specific areas of responsibility:

- Orchestrating sequences of scenes
- Within a scene

### **Orchestrating Sequences Of Scenes**

The Keeper ensures attention is focused on each cultist in a way that meets the needs of the players, the demands of the story, and the interest of the group.

Use your own sense of drama or the following principles to select which cultist(s) will have the next scene:

- Who haven't you seen for a while?
- Who are you interested in right now?
- Do we need to understand how things turn out for specific characters before we can continue?

It can also be good to pause after a burst of action and summarise what's happened. Ask all the players what each of their cultists are going to do next. To decide on the best order for the next set of scenes, think about the following:

- Which cultists will have scenes together?
- Who do we have to see first before we can continue (as above)?

## Within A Scene

If you want, you can share responsibility with the other players for the following aspects of facilitating a scene:

- ⦿ Define when the scene occurs, relative to the scenes that have already happened.
- ⦿ Decide which supporting characters are present. As Keeper, you must decide what (if anything) they want to achieve. Base this on their most recent experiences in the story and their relationships with the cultists.
- ⦿ Decide at what point the scene starts. Do we follow characters and play out every moment? Do we start later in the scene—in the middle of a conflict or deep conversation? (Doing this will make a game of *Soth* run more quickly.)
- ⦿ Make sure all players in the scene have the opportunity to contribute. Two useful questions to facilitate this are “What do you do?” and “How do you react to that?”
- ⦿ If you feel like we should get an insight into a cultist's emotional state, you can specifically ask, “What emotion do we see on your face right now?”
- ⦿ End the scene. Scenes don't always need to be fully resolved before shifting to another one. It may be best to leave the scene on a cliff-hanger or in the middle of a confrontation. This can give a player time to think of a response; it can also hold peoples' interest while we cut to other situations.

You can return to the same scene later or you can leave some ambiguity about how it resolves.

## Apply The Rules

The Keeper has primary responsibility for applying *Soth's* rules. You apply them in one of two ways:

- ⦿ **Invisible actions** (below): These are the moments the cultists can't see. Most invisible actions focus on the results of what supporting characters do.
- ⦿ **Visible actions** (page 55): These are when the game focuses on the cultists: what they can see and what happens when they act.

## What The Keeper Does: Invisible Actions

The Keeper has eight specific invisible tasks. I'll list them here, and explain them in more detail in the following pages.

- ⦿ Evaluate Clarity, a score that determines how difficult it is for a cultist to remain undetected
- ⦿ Evaluate Suspicion, a resource that allows the Keeper to have supporting characters investigate the cultists
- ⦿ Use Suspicion to create Investigators (and teams of Investigators)
- ⦿ Use Suspicion to investigate the cultists and put obstacles in their way
- ⦿ Think about what's happening off-screen (e.g. away from the cultists, outside their awareness)
- ⦿ Conduct an end-of-the-day review
- ⦿ Decide what Servitors (supernatural creatures summoned and commanded by the cultists) do
- ⦿ Develop a mythology about *Soth*.



## Evaluate Clarity

Clarity measures how difficult it is for each cultist to pass as a normal citizen in their town. A cultist adds one point of Clarity whenever any of the following is true:

- ☉ If they don't act on their Compulsion at least once per day
- ☉ Whenever they sacrifice someone in a ritual or murder someone
- ☉ If they have the 'Addict' Compulsion
- ☉ When they gain possession of the Tome of Soth for the first time
- ☉ When they become the new leader of the cult
- ☉ When they seize the initiative in a conflict.

There's a summary of these conditions on Keeper Handout 3 (How To Run The Game).



## Evaluate Suspicion

Suspicion is a resource you create by secretly evaluating whether the cultists are covering up their crimes effectively.

There are eight ways the Keeper can gain Suspicion (explained in more detail on pages 43 to 45):

- ⦿ When a cultist commits a crime or murders someone
- ⦿ When a cultist deceives someone or covers something up
- ⦿ If a player gives advice to another player when their cultists would not be able to talk freely
- ⦿ If a player fails to use the 'Mask of Sanity' rules while having a lengthy or intimate conversation with an supporting character
- ⦿ If a player doesn't need to use the 'Mask of Sanity' rules but their cultist comes across as creepy, withdrawn, or like they're acting out-of-character
- ⦿ If you skip forward to the next ritual
- ⦿ If investigators (either individuals or teams) remain at-large at the end of the day.

Record Suspicion on Keeper Handout 5.

## **Commit A Crime or Murder Someone**

When a cultist commits a crime or murders someone, ask how they do it. Describe how the victim reacts and what they do. Apply the rules on page 59 for resolving murders, and (if necessary) the rules for resolving other conflicts (page 61).

Once it's clear how the situation is resolved, choose the option (below) that most closely matches the results. Each option generates a different level of Suspicion:

- Was it a perfect crime? (0 Suspicion)
- Could someone clever figure out the crime? (+1 Suspicion)
- Was there a loose end? (+2 Suspicion)
- Was the crime obvious? (+3 Suspicion)
- Does the crime seem linked to one or more of the cultists? (+5 Suspicion)
- Was a cultist caught red-handed? (+7 Suspicion)

*An example.*

*A cultist struggles with his step-father in their kitchen. The cultist eventually strangles him with a dish-cloth, but not before his step-father hits his head on a table and bleeds profusely. The cultist then has to quickly tidy up before leaving for church.*

*The Keeper evaluates how the cultist's plan was executed. It definitely wasn't a 'perfect crime'. There will be loose ends ... but it seems likely that it will be linked to the cultist. The Keeper secretly notes that this murder generated 5 Suspicion.*

## **Deceive Someone or Cover Something Up**

When a cultist deceives someone or covers something up about the cult's activities, choose one and assign Suspicion.

- Did the cultist pull it off flawlessly? (-2 Suspicion)
- Does the cultist's story not quite add up, or will the person being deceived think about it later? (+1 Suspicion)
- Was the deception pretty comprehensively botched? (+3 Suspicion)
- Is the cultist clearly connected to recent horrible crimes? (+5 Suspicion)

If the cultist's reputation would be an advantage in the deception or cover up, decrease the Suspicion you earn by 1; if their reputation would disadvantage them, increase Suspicion by 1.

## **Table Talk**

During the game, the cultists will often split up to do different things. In these situations, they will have no obvious way to communicate with or advise each other. Similarly, there may be moments where two or more cultists are in the same location together but can't speak freely to give each other advice.

If a player gives advice to another player when their cultists would not be able to talk freely, the Keeper gains 1 Suspicion. The Keeper gains 1 Suspicion for each piece of advice.

*An example of table-talk.*

*One player says to another, "Hey, you should have your cultist move over to the phone and unplug it from the wall without your husband noticing."*

It's fine for players to non-verbally communicate in a way their cultists could. Keep a close eye on how obvious a player has to be in order to communicate their idea.

**NB:** When you leave the table, for any reason, expect the players to plot behind your back. That's fine.

### **The Mask of Sanity**

As described on page 26, when a cultist with a Clarity of 1 (or higher) has a long or intimate conversation with a non-cultist, the cultist will act suspiciously in some way. If the player forgets to use these rules, you gain Suspicion equal to the cultist's Clarity.

If a player has a Clarity of 0 (and doesn't need to use the 'Mask of Sanity' rules) but their cultist still comes across as creepy, withdrawn or acting out-of-character, the Keeper gains 1 point of Suspicion.

### **If Time Skips Forward To The Next Ritual**

For each day you skip, gain three points of Suspicion for each cultist. As an aside: the cultists are also penalised for neglecting their Obligations or Compulsions (see page 52).

### **At The End Of Each Day, With Investigators At-Large**

The Investigators are continuously researching, asking questions, breaking into places, and following up on loose ends the cultists have left. These activities mostly happen **off-screen**: they're events the cultists don't know about.

- Every day an Investigator who is not in a team remains at large, gain one point of Suspicion for that Investigator.
- Every day that a team of Investigators remains at large, gain two points of Suspicion per Investigator in the team.

## Create Investigators

As demonstrated on page 29, Suspicion is used to create Investigators (and teams of Investigators) who try to stop the cultists from summoning Soth.

- It costs one Suspicion to turn a supporting character into an Investigator.
- It costs three Suspicion to have two investigators team up, or to add an Investigator to a team.

Investigators must live in the town. They must have a reason to be suspicious of or curious about what one or more of the cultists have been doing or saying.

Use your best judgment to determine if it's plausible for Investigators to team up.

On the relationship diagram, mark who is an Investigator and who is in a team together.

Never tell the other players who the Investigators are.

## Use Suspicion

You spend Suspicion to buy one of the actions listed on pages 47 to 48. Typically, this represents an Investigator taking actions against the cultists. It could also mean that the town has become more hostile or paranoid.

You can buy multiple actions at the same time, if that's justified by your vision of the events that are happening off-screen. However, in a conflict (page 59) each Investigator can only buy one action per turn.

*While the cultists break into a nightclub to steal a PA system, an Investigator observes them. The Keeper spends 2 Suspicion for the Investigator to get there first, and 3 Suspicion to gain unauthorised access and remain unnoticed.*

Using Suspicion can be an invisible or a visible action.

Each member of a team of Investigators has to spend Suspicion to perform the same action.

**NB:** Unless you have good reason to do otherwise, assume team members are aware of what each Investigator in their team is doing or planning on doing.

*re: the previous example.*

*The Keeper can assume the other members of the Investigator's team are aware of her plans to follow the cultists to the nightclub ... unless she has had no opportunity to communicate with her team.*

*Alternatively, if two Investigators in a team want to observe the cultists in the nightclub, the Keeper would have to spend 10 Suspicion to have them both get there first and remain unnoticed.*

Here is the list of actions you can spend Suspicion to perform:

- {1} Inflict 1 injury on a cultist
- {1} Show up somewhere inconvenient
- {1} Gain unauthorised access to a location (but they will be noticed or identifiable in some way)
- {2} Get somewhere first
- {2} Bring one non-Investigator friend
- {2} Follow a cultist, unobserved
- {2} Witness something inconvenient
- {3} Steal something of value to a cultist

- {3} Gain unauthorised access to a location (and remain undetected)
- {3} Call for help (in a noticeable way)
- {4} Isolate a cultist
- {4} Find a carefully hidden secret
- {4} Seize the initiative in a conflict with a cultist
- {5} Call for help (and remain undetected)
- {7} The Investigator (or a specific Team) is now convinced the cultists are responsible for what's happening (trigger this when you believe off-screen events have justified it.)
- {7} Convince the authorities to take one cultist in for questioning
- {8} Escape, against the odds
- {8} Find the Temple
- {8} Survive a Servitor's attack
- {9} Every supporting character in the town is suspicious and cautious. This lasts until the end of the game, makes manipulating a supporting character impossible, and makes every supporting character a viable option for becoming an Investigator.
- {10} Convince the authorities to arrest one cultist
- {11} The authorities are everywhere. This lasts until the end of the game, and means the Keeper can introduce a police officer or other official into any scene where it seems possible.
- {11} Convince the authorities to raid the Temple (if its location is known).

Keeper Handout 5 summarises these actions.



### **If Events Happen Without Spending Suspicion**

Situations may arise where an Investigator achieves something on the Suspicion list without spending Suspicion.

*For example.*

*An Investigator follows a cultist unobserved—and the cultist goes to the Temple.*

*Logically, this means the Temple has been found.*

In these cases, you don't have to spend Suspicion. However, the event is obvious to any cultist who could notice. Give these cultists the opportunity to respond as if they had seized the initiative in a conflict (page 63).

### **If You Don't Know How Much Suspicion To Spend**

Spend 5 Suspicion for any action not on the above list where it feels appropriate to spend Suspicion.

### **If An Investigator Dies**

If the dead Investigator was part of a team, increase Suspicion by 4. Otherwise, decrease Suspicion by 4.

## Think About What's Happening Off-Screen

As Keeper, you need to imagine what other supporting characters in the town are doing while the cultists aren't keeping track of them. This helps you apply the 'Using Suspicion' rules, above.

*Example.*

*The town sheriff visits a cultist's family. He wants to interview them about the disappearance of their mother. During the interview, the cultist throws the sheriff's suspicions onto the cultist's boyfriend.*

*The game continues, focusing on what the other cultists are doing. However, the Keeper decides the sheriff will visit the boyfriend at some point. This visit may happen completely off-screen: the sheriff and the boyfriend talk, and then the boyfriend comes to visit the cultist as a result.*

*Alternatively, it could happen on-screen: when the cultist next visits her boyfriend, the sheriff shows up to talk to him.*

This technique will also help when applying the following rules (explained below):

- Ⓒ describing what the Servitors do (page 52)
- Ⓒ describing how the world responds (page 56)
- Ⓒ making the cultists' lives difficult (page 58).

## **Lackeys and Minions**

If a cultist gets a supporting character to do something for them, give that supporting character a competency rating:

- Average
- Mediocre
- Useless.

The supporting character will produce results that match their competency.

If they're doing something criminal or suspicious, they will generate the following amounts of Suspicion:

- Average: 2 Suspicion
- Mediocre: 4 Suspicion
- Useless: 6 Suspicion.

If they know they're doing something wrong, add 2 Suspicion to the total.

## Conduct An End Of The Day Review

At the end of each day in the game, you should decide if there are any off-screen actions you haven't accounted for. You can retroactively spend Suspicion to have these actions happen.

At this point, the Keeper also gains Suspicion:

- 1 Suspicion for each individual investigator
- 2 Suspicion for each investigator in a team.

Only apply one of these options to each investigator (they're either an individual or in a team).

If a cultist has neglected their Obligation or Compulsion, apply the penalties for those.

- +1 Clarity for a neglected Compulsion
- one person affected by the neglected Obligation will track down the cultist. For each additional day after the first that the Obligation has been neglected, this person will be accompanied by an additional 'concerned neighbour' (to a maximum of four).

To help you track the passage of time over the first few days of the game, you can refer to the calendar on Keeper's Handout 3.

## Describe What Servitors Do

The person who currently possesses the Tome of Soth can summon a Servitor to perform a task for them.

A Servitor is a supernatural entity. They frequently cause massive amounts of collateral damage while fulfilling the commands they're given. For example, if the Servitor is asked to kill a particular person, they might pulverize an entire house in order to get at the victim inside or smash the victim into tiny pieces in the town square.

To summon a Servitor, the cultist must neglect their Obligation for the day and physically touch the tome.

The player whose cultist possesses the Tome of Soth will work through the following rules for creating a Servitor and tell you the results.

Choose from 1 to 6 of the following (the **number**). Tell everyone what you're choosing. You can choose each option multiple times:

- Give it the ability to inflict +1 injury
- Give the Servitor a special ability. The Holder can invent their own ability or choose one from the list on Player Handout B.
- Describe the servitor.

A Servitor can be given a **command** (one action against one thing). For instance, 'kill him', 'steal this object'.

Any conditions on the command, such as 'but not in public' or 'if anyone else is around, don't kill them' count as an additional command.

When a Servitor is commanded, ask the summoner what their number is. Roll a d6. For every additional command, subtract 1 from the result.

Compare the final result to this chart. If the result is:

- Over the number:** The Servitor performs any commands to the letter, and nothing more.
- A draw:** If the number is '1', use the "On a 1" option, below. Otherwise, the Servitor performs any commands to the letter, but causes as much havoc as possible in the process. Increase Suspicion by an amount equal to the number.
- Below the number:** The Servitor ignores additional commands, and twists the main command as best as it can, to cause maximum destruction and pain. Increase Suspicion by an amount equal to the number and create an Investigator for free.
- On a '1':** Follow the rules for 'Below the number'. The Servitor then takes one extra action, following its own agenda (Keeper's choice).

The Keeper determines the effect of the Servitor's actions. Consider the following:

- Ⓒ Where it happens. How isolated is it?
- Ⓒ Who is there? Are there any Investigators present?
- Ⓒ The Servitor will use blunt force unless commanded otherwise
- Ⓒ The visible effects will be consistent with the Servitor's special abilities. For instance, people will react differently (or not at all) to an invisible Servitor.
- Ⓒ A Servitor will kill or injure someone based on its Injury rating—an Investigator may spend Suspicion to avoid an attack.

The Servitor disappears after:

- Ⓒ fulfilling all commands the cultist has given it OR it performs the command for an hour
- Ⓒ it has taken an extra action (following its own agenda), if you rolled a '1'
- Ⓒ five of the summoner's breaths, if the Servitor is given no commands.

## **Develop A Mythology For Soth**

Throughout the game, keep track of what the players say about Soth.

Ask the cultists questions to expand on these facts.

Bring these facts back into the game at appropriate moments. Use them to hint at the coming of Soth.

When you notice inconsistencies between what cultists believe about Soth, ask questions to find out why they believe different things.

# What The Keeper Does: Visible Actions

The Keeper has six specific tasks that require interacting with the players:

- Ⓒ Ask what the cultists do next, often
- Ⓒ Describe the world and how it responds
- Ⓒ Make the cultists' lives as difficult as they deserve
- Ⓒ Resolve conflicts by adjudicating the characters' actions (clarifying what the cultists are doing and determining if they are successful)
- Ⓒ Create and play supporting characters
- Ⓒ Enforce Obligations.

## Ask What The Cultists Do Next, Often

Frequently ask the players what the cultists do next. Their answers will drive the action.

Ask the players how their cultists do things. The more specific they are, the more information you'll have in order to describe how the world responds (below) and to adjudicate their actions in order to resolve conflicts (page 59).

If you're ever unsure about what to do next, do one of the following:

- Ⓒ Describe the world (page 56)
- Ⓒ Choose an item from the 'Make the cultists' lives difficult as they deserve' section (page 58)
- Ⓒ Ask the cultists "What's the next thing you do about the ritual?" and start a scene with the cultists in the middle of doing that
- Ⓒ Skip forward in time to the next ritual (page 56).

### **Skipping To The Next Ritual**

If you elect to skip to the next ritual, tell the players how many days you'll be moving forward and ask each player whether their cultist neglected their Compulsion or their Obligation during this time. They must neglect one or the other. Apply the consequences for the full period of time they've skipped.

- For each day skipped, gain 3 Suspicion per cultist.
- For each Compulsion skipped, a cultist gains 1 Clarity (to a maximum of +3).
- For each Obligation neglected, the person they're obliged to will track down the cultist—along with one additional 'concerned neighbour' per day the Obligation was neglected (to a maximum of four).

### **Describe The World And How It Responds**

After finding out what the cultists do, you describe the reactions of supporting characters (townsfolk, Investigators, and Servitors) and the world (the town and the environment).

In general, say what you honestly believe would happen if this situation was happening in a thriller. Supporting characters react as smartly or foolishly as they would in a thriller.

You can also do the following:

- Describe the reality of small-town life in this time and place
- Foreshadow the coming of Soth
- Describe the effects of actions that Investigators have taken off-screen.



## **The Realities Of Small-Town Life**

The group's choices about the setting influence how you describe the world:

- 1920s:** Emphasise conservatism and tradition
- 1950s:** Emphasise post-World War 2 social tensions and trauma, and paranoia about communism
- 1980s:** Emphasise the threat of nuclear annihilation in Reagan's cold-war America
- Kansas:** Emphasise the rural isolation
- Louisiana:** Emphasise the close-knit, inter-related community
- Massachusetts:** Emphasise the tension between the educated and the salt-of-the-earth
- California:** Emphasise the differences between conventional lifestyles and alternative/eccentric ones.

## **The Coming of Soth**

The progress the cultists have made towards summoning Soth also influences how you describe the world.

If the cultists have cast The Sounding of the Bell ritual, describe a bright new star appearing in the sky and how it changes colour and is visible during the day.

If the cultists have cast The Opening of the Gate ritual, describe the frequent earthquakes that are now occurring.

## **The Consequences Of Investigator Actions**

Consider what you've decided about the Investigators' off-screen actions. Whenever a cultist would have an opportunity to notice them, describe the effects of these actions as fairly as possible without focusing on them.

Remember to apply the rock-climbing metaphor: the Keeper is 'gravity': relentless, always present, and making sure that mistakes have consequences. In this case, gravity is working against the Investigators.

After describing what they've noticed, ask the cultists what they do next.

## **Make The Cultists' Lives As Difficult As They Deserve**

Whenever you're unsure what to do next, take one of the following actions:

- ⓪ Spend Suspicion (page 46) and describe the results
- ⓪ Show the emotional consequences of the cultists' deceptions, crimes, or murders on the community or on an individual
- ⓪ Introduce someone the cultists don't want to see
- ⓪ Start a conversation with a cultist: have an established supporting character or a new character who is currently in the background ask the cultist innocent but inconvenient questions. Maintain this conversation for longer than the cultist would like
- ⓪ Focus on an aspect of a cultist's mundane life and responsibilities
- ⓪ Point out any reasons for the cultists to split up

## Resolve Conflicts By Adjudicating Characters' Actions

In general, the game plays like a conversation—taking turns describing what we do and selecting which scenes and characters to focus on next.

But this conversation can be interrupted if a player feels they need to stop (or avoid) the actions of another cultist, supporting character, or Investigator.

This is a **Conflict**. Examples of conflicts include:

*Someone trying to split a cultist's head open with an axe, while the cultist would prefer that didn't happen*

*A cultist wants to intercept another cultist who is heading off to kidnap a family member*

*An Investigator tries to escape the Temple.*

There are specific ways of determining success when a cultist is attempting to:

- Ⓒ murder supporting characters, Investigators, and other cultists
- Ⓒ manipulate supporting characters and Investigators

The process for resolving other conflicts is described on page 61.

### **Determining Success: Murders**

If a cultist tries to murder a supporting character who is not an Investigator, the murder will succeed.

If a cultist tries to murder an Investigator, the murder will succeed unless you spend Suspicion to do something like inflict an injury or escape.

If a cultist tries to murder another cultist (or if an Investigator spends Suspicion to inflict harm or escape), you play out the murder using the process described in 'Determining Success: Other Conflicts' (page 61).

### **Determining Success: Manipulation**

When a cultist tries to make a supporting character do what they want, the cultist will succeed if:

- Ⓒ the supporting character is not an Investigator, and
- Ⓒ the cultist's reputation or relationship would give them a positive influence over the supporting character, and
- Ⓒ the townsfolk are not suspicious and cautious (as the result of spending 9 Suspicion on this option).

If any of those things aren't true, then you (the Keeper) choose one of the following:

- Ⓒ Play out the conversation between the characters. Have the supporting character make a decision that's appropriate to how the request was presented
- Ⓒ The supporting character asks the cultist to promise them something extra first (this becomes a new daily Obligation). If the cultist makes the promise and demonstrates concretely that they mean it, the supporting character will do what the cultist wants
- Ⓒ The supporting character does it but you spend 1 Suspicion and make them an Investigator.

## **Determining Success: Other conflicts**

During a conflict, the Keeper leads the group through the following process:

- Ⓒ The Keeper establishes the current location and characters' intended actions for this 'round'
- Ⓒ Characters can radically change their intended action by spending either Clarity or Suspicion, or by deciding to act at a disadvantage
- Ⓒ The duration of the round is set by establishing which character will finish their intended action first
- Ⓒ The Keeper establishes the order characters act in
- Ⓒ Players narrate their character's action
- Ⓒ The Keeper decides how effective the action will be—and whether the action causes an injury or changes the situation
- Ⓒ Repeat until a winner is clear, no-one is willing to continue, or the situation stalemates.

The following pages flesh out this process. To be as clear as possible I'll specify what the Keeper does and what the players do:

### **1. Establish The Situation**

The Keeper describes the environment—drawing a map, if necessary.

The Keeper states their understanding of where each character is, what they're doing, and what their intended action is.

Players inform the Keeper if the Keeper has misunderstood anything. The Keeper revises their description of the actions.

**NB:** Be sure to apply the Table Talk rules (page 44) throughout this step.



However, if the Keeper has understood a character's intended action but the player wishes to radically change it, the player has two options:

- Ⓒ To change actions without penalty, add one point of Clarity to the cultist's score (see the rules for 'Seizing the Initiative' on page 63). Investigators spend 4 Suspicion.
- Ⓒ To change actions but act at a **disadvantage**, simply describe the new action.

**NB:** Supporting characters can only change their actions by acting at a disadvantage.

Players can change their cultist's actions at any step in the conflict.

## **2. Establish The Duration Of Everyone's Actions**

The Keeper assesses which character should finish their action first. This sets the duration of this **round** of actions:

- Ⓒ moments (the character has an action like, “I unlatch the cage”, “I ram through the police blockade”)
- Ⓒ minutes (“I open the safe”, “I rig the dynamite”)
- Ⓒ longer-term (“I race her to the next town”, “I burn down the house”).

### *Example*

*If someone is sneaking through a forest while someone else is firing a pistol, the duration of the round will be the time it takes to 'aim and pull the pistol's trigger'.*

### 3. Establish The Action Order

The Keeper establishes in which order the characters act (the **action order**).

Any player can **seize the initiative** to have their character's action happen immediately.

To seize the initiative:

- ☉ Cultists add one point of Clarity to their score (e.g. going from 1 Clarity to 2 Clarity)
- ☉ Investigators spend 4 Suspicion.

**NB:** Characters who have already gained Clarity or spent Suspicion to change their actions in Step 1 are considered to have seized the initiative.

Supporting characters cannot seize the initiative.

If multiple players seize the initiative:

- ☉ cultists go before Investigators
- ☉ the cultist with the lowest Clarity goes first
- ☉ If the cultists' Clarity scores are equal, these players each roll a d6. Highest result wins.

The Keeper then divides the remaining characters into two groups:

- ☉ Characters with no disadvantages (page 62) act next in the conflict
- ☉ Characters with disadvantages act last in the conflict.

The Keeper determines the action order within each of these two groups based on whether each character has:

- Ⓒ superior position (e.g. behind someone and holding a gun to their head)
- Ⓒ superior resources (e.g. riding a dirt bike while chasing someone on foot)
- Ⓒ superior capability (e.g. a former US Marine fighting a school-teacher)
- Ⓒ momentum or surprise (e.g. ambushing someone)
- Ⓒ a lack of injuries that would hamper them

Characters who possess more of these qualities act before characters who possess fewer.

If multiple characters could act next, the Keeper breaks ties using this process:

- Ⓒ Investigators go before supporting characters
- Ⓒ Cultists go before Investigators
- Ⓒ The cultist with the lowest Clarity goes first
- Ⓒ If the cultists' Clarity scores are equal, these players each roll a d6. Highest result wins.

If no-one wants to take the next action, the Keeper can:

- Ⓒ take an action from the 'Make the cultists' lives as difficult as they deserve' list
- Ⓒ end the conflict.



#### **4. Establish How Each Action Occurs**

Each player narrates how their character's action occurs.

The Keeper compares this to the action of the fastest-acting character (as established in Step 2). The Keeper decides if the currently-acting character is only able to partially complete their action in this round.

Anyone can ask questions to get more details about how the character is performing their action.

*Example*

*"Would a farmer really know the best untraceable poison to steal from a pharmacy?"*

#### **5. Establish The Effect Of Each Action**

The Keeper describes the effect of each action before moving to the next one.

In determining the result of an action, the Keeper assesses whether the character has:

- Ⓒ the capability (knowledge and skills)
- Ⓒ the resources (equipment or physical ability)
- Ⓒ the position (are they in the right spot)
- Ⓒ a disadvantage (from changing actions), or
- Ⓒ been affected by the results of previous actions.

If the effect is still possible, the Keeper describes it succeeding.

Otherwise, the Keeper decides if the effect will be partially successful or whether it will fail. The Keeper informs the player and asks if they would like to continue or if they would like to change their action (as in Step 1).

If the player continues, the Keeper describes the partial success or failure of the action.



The effect should be an injury or a result that's consistent with the Keeper's understanding of what's happening.

Most characters can take 3 points of **Injury** before they die. The fourth point of Injury kills them. The Cult Leader can take 4 Injuries. The Servitor of the Gate (see Player Handout G) can take 5 Injuries.

- Ⓒ 1 Injury stuns a person and throw them off-balance
- Ⓒ 2 Injuries requires bed rest
- Ⓒ 3 Injuries requires hospitalization.

The Keeper decides when to move an injury from one level to another, based on their understanding of the attack and the injured character's resilience.

For instance, a punch will cause one injury to a normal adult. Four punches won't necessarily kill them—any of the following things might be true if someone is punched four times:

- Ⓒ It might not do any additional damage to an adult who is used to fighting (0 Injuries)
- Ⓒ It might throw an adult who is healthy but unused to fighting off-balance (1 Injury)
- Ⓒ It might knock a healthy adult in a fight with an experienced brawler onto the floor, where they hit their head (2 Injuries)
- Ⓒ It might hospitalise an 75-year old (3 Injuries).

**NB:** The rules for healing are on page 70.

An Investigator can only inflict 1 Injury per turn. They do this by spending 1 Suspicion.

An action can have other effects aside from causing Injuries. They can change the cultists' situation; they can affect another character—making it less likely they will achieve their effect, if they're acting next.

*Some examples of non-Injury effects*

*Cornering someone.  
Putting someone in a headlock.  
Getting to a knife first.  
Unlocking a safe.*

## **6. Ending The Conflict**

A conflict could conclude when opposing characters are unwilling or unable to take further actions. Alternatively, the situation may have changed so much that continuing the conflict is impractical or low-priority.

If a conflict needs to continue after the end of a round, return to Step 1.

During a conflict, quicker-acting characters may be able to complete several actions before slower-to-finish characters.

## **Create Supporting Characters**

The process for creating supporting characters and connecting them to the cultists is on page 19 and summarised on Keeper's Handout 3.

Supporting characters are created either by the Keeper or a player. Supporting characters can be pro-actively invented, implied by a description, or created in response to a question from the Keeper.

*Example*

*A player describes their cultist meeting their son at a diner. The Keeper can introduce a waiter, a fry-cook, or any other character who could plausibly be at the diner.*

Cultists will often try to avoid having conversations and interactions with supporting characters. That's why it's important for the Keeper to have supporting characters push their way into the cultists' affairs—interrupting and asking awkward questions, or 'helping' them meet their Obligations.

## **Enforce Obligations**

A cultist who meets their Obligation is likely to find themselves in a conversation. This creates a situation where Suspicion could be generated.

If a cultist chooses to ignore their Obligation, the person (or people) they're obligated to (the obligee) will attempt to find the cultist. They will be concerned and will ask a number of questions to establish if they're all right. They are a likely candidate to become an Investigator if the cultist's answers don't satisfy them.

For every day the Obligation is ignored, the obligee will bring an extra person along on their search—to a maximum of four people (including the obligee), total.

*Example.*

*If the Obligation has been ignored for one day, two people will be looking for the cultist.*

*If it's been ignored for five days, four people will be looking.*

A cultist does not have to fulfill their Obligation if they are wanted by the authorities for their crimes or if the 'The Authorities Are Everywhere' Suspicion option has been selected.

# **Death, Chaos & Endgame:**

## **Miscellaneous Rules**



# Healing

The rules for injuring characters are on page 66.

3 Injuries requires hospitalization. To heal down to 2 Injuries requires two weeks of healing and care.

2 Injuries requires bed rest. To heal down to 1 Injury requires three days of convalescence.

1 Injury will stun a person and throw them off-balance. They can remove this after a period of time that seems reasonable.

A Servitor can also heal Injuries. Each Injury healed counts as a special ability.

Remember: the Keeper must be relentless in determining the consequences of the cultists' actions. Given that, be willing to let supporting characters and cultists die.

## What Happens When A Cultist Dies?

When a cultist dies, change the seating so the player of the dead cultist is now next to the Keeper.

The player lets the Keeper know which supporting characters they'd like to play now. This can include Investigators. They should play at least two characters, so the cultists remain uncertain who is acting against them.

When playing an Investigator, they have access to the same Suspicion moves as the Keeper.



## **Sacrificing A Cultist In The Third Ritual Summons The Servitor of the Gate**

If a cultist is sacrificed as part of the third ritual (the Opening of the Gate), they now play a newly-summoned Servitor, known as the **Servitor of the Gate**.

The Servitor of the Gate's goal is to bring about the arrival of Soth.

The Servitor of the Gate remains in play until the end of the game or until all the cultists die. It does not vanish after fulfilling a command.

### **Creating The Servitor of the Gate**

The following rules are also found on Player Handout G.

The player describes the Servitor of the Gate's **appearance**. They can invent their own descriptors or choose some of the following:

*translucent, insectile, globular, multi-eyed, squat, tentacular, detached limbs, angular, boneless, looming, asymmetrical, multi-planar, shifting.*

The Servitor cannot speak. The player can describe its expressions, body language, and actions.

The player chooses one **need** for the Servitor of the Gate from the following options:

*Create chaos and fear*

*Destroy human creations*

*Gather worshippers for Soth*

*Punish unbelievers*

The player can change this need whenever they want, during the remainder of the game.





The player takes a number of **points** equal to their now-dead cultist's Clarity + 1.

The player spends these points to choose **methods** from the following list (they can choose each option multiple times):

- Ⓒ Give the Servitor the ability to inflict +1 injury (it starts with the ability to inflict 1 Injury), or
- Ⓒ Choose one of the following special abilities:

*Burrowing, Cause natural disaster (affects an area about the size of a barn), Emotional telepathic projection, Flight, Frictionless, Giant Strength, Pyrokinesis, Reality Warp (a living-room-sized part of the world changes its appearance, looking like it will after Soth appears)*

### **Obeying Commands**

The Servitor of the Gate obeys one command at a time. Any cultist can command the Servitor, but the Servitor gives priority to whoever currently holds the Tome of Soth.

As with the standard Servitor rules, a command is one action done to one thing. The Servitor of the Gate can choose to ignore any additional sub-commands.

When given a command, the Servitor of the Gate needs to do all of the following:

- Ⓒ try to fulfill it until they succeed **OR** for up to 1 hour
- Ⓒ take 1 action to meet their Need with their Methods
- Ⓒ return to the Temple (unless issued a new command).



If they haven't been given a command for an hour, the Servitor of the Gate can choose to:

- take 1 action to satisfy their Need with their Method, or
- take one action of their choice.

The Servitor can refuse a command and (instead) perform one action of their choice, if they are given a command that:

- conflicts with another command
- contradicts their Need
- does not advance the summoning of Soth, or
- are given multiple commands when the Holder of the Tome of Soth is not present.

### **Other Notes**

The Servitor of the Gate automatically seizes the initiative in a conflict, acting before cultists and investigators.

It can take five points of injury before dying. The sixth point kills it.

After Soth appears, the Servitor of the Gate can no longer be commanded. It cannot harm the cultists or supporting characters during the epilogues (page 75).

# Changing The Leader Of The Cult

Circumstances can result in the leader of the cult changing.

You can replace the current cult leader with a vote or by murdering them. There's a maximum of one vote per day. There is no maximum number of murder attempts.

When someone becomes the cult leader, their Clarity increases by 1.



# What Happens When Soth Appears?

If the fourth ritual is successful, Soth appears.

The cult leader guides the group through creating the game's epilogue (described on Player Handout C).

Each player whose cultist has survived to this point narrates an epilogue for their cultist. Each epilogue:

- Ⓒ takes place one year after the previous one
- Ⓒ describes the increasingly horrid state of the world
- Ⓒ describes the fate of their cultist (and, if appropriate, other people from the town)
- Ⓒ introduces one fact about Soth.

Epilogues can't determine the fate of other surviving cultists, but can incorporate previously established facts.

## Narrate Epilogues From Highest to Lowest Clarity

The cultist with the highest Clarity has the first epilogue (in the case of ties, narrate a joint epilogue). Epilogues then proceed in decreasing order of Clarity, finishing with cultists who have 0 Clarity.

## Ending The Game

The game ends when the cultists' situation reaches a new and final status quo. This could be when Soth is summoned or when all the cultists are dead.

If the group is interested, the game can continue after the cultists are unable (or unwilling) to summon Soth. The consequences of their actions can still play out (investigations, police pursuits, etc).



# Dedication

To the designers of the Call of Cthulhu role-playing game (3rd edition).

To John-Paul, Danyl, Richard, Matt, Nat, Margo, James, Emma, Gino, and Sean and our many dead or insane investigators.

# Thanks

Simon Carryer and Mike Sands: fellow members of the Game Design Cabal.

For advice, insight, and support: Ron Edwards, Paul Czege, Vincent Baker, Adrian Thoen, Brie Sheldon, Jesse Burneko, Martin Ralya, Dave M/dindenver, Grant Robinson, Marguerite Hill, Angus Dingwall, Freya Saksen, Jan-Yves Ruzicka, Andrew Kenrick, John Harper, Larry Lade, Michael Miller, Claytonian JP, David Berg, and Zak S.

To my many playtesters—particularly: Alasdair Sinclair, Malcolm Craig, and Fraser Peat (my first playtesters); Ciaran Spencer Searle, Robert Vincent, Sam Nicholls, Ian Raymond, and Lauren (my SAGA playtesters who helped me in the final push to publication); and Sam Nicholls, Emma Moreton (our Servitor of the Gate), and Chloe Sutherland (my endgame playtesters).

# Game Influences

*Acts of Evil* by Paul Czege, *Apocalypse World* by Vincent Baker, *Call of Cthulhu 3rd Edition* (multiple authors, published by Chaosium Press), *Covenant* by Matt Machell, *The Farm* by Jared Sorenson, *My Life with Master* by Paul Czege, *Sex and Sorcery* by Ron Edwards, *Simple World* by Avery McDaldno, *Stealing Cthulhu* by Graham Walmsley.



# Soundtrack

Here's some of what I listened to while writing *Soth*:

*Genkai-1* by Biosphere, *New Seeds* by Boards of Canada, *Akrasia* by Heroin and Your Veins, *Powerchord* by Dimmer, *Death* from the FEZ soundtrack by DisasterPeace, *Queer (F.T.F.O.I remix)* by Garbage, *Utopia Overture* and *Utopia Finale* by Crisobal Tapia De Veer, *Devil Town* by Bright Eyes, *In The House*, *In a Heartbeat* by John Murphy.

# Credits & Colophon

Writing and layout by Steve Hickey

Titles in WC Roughtrad by Christophe Féray (<http://www.wcfonts.com>) (CC BY-ND 3.0)

Body in Georgia

# Acknowledgements

'Lines and Veils' concepts (page 10) from *Sex and Sorcery* with permission of Ron Edwards.

'The Game is a Conversation' concept (page 12) from *Apocalypse World* with permission of D. Vincent Baker.

The term "Keeper" has been taken from the game *Call of Cthulhu*, copyright Chaosium Press.

The die-drop technique for creating a map of the town (page 82) is taken from *Vornheim: The Complete City Kit* with permission of Zak S.

# Images

Eclipse (cover icon), moon bullets, tentacles, death skull and dice icons from games-icons.net, under a [CC BY 3.0](#) licence.

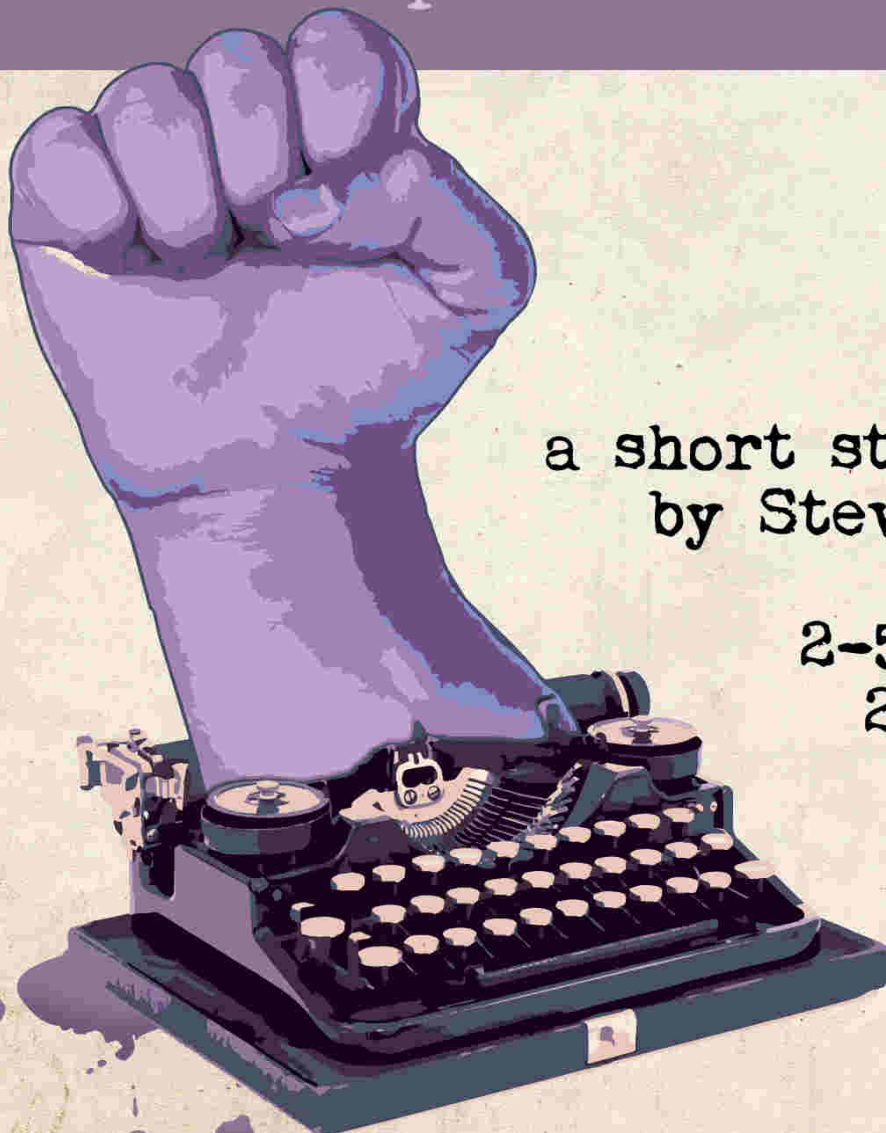
- **Eclipse:** image has been reversed and shaded with scratches on the front cover. Colours have been altered for both the screen-friendly and print-friendly versions.
- **Moon:** image has been reduced and used as bullet-points.
- **Tentacle Strike:** image has been reversed and re-coloured. Page numbers inserted into base.

- **Servitor of the Gate handout background** © Tristan Bowersox. [CC BY 2.0](#): Image has been manipulated.
- **Burnt Paper Textures (Keeper Handout 7, Player Handouts A, B, F)** © [designshard.com](#)
- **Cult Leader background and Page 69 image** © Jeff Barton. [CC BY 2.0](#): Image has been manipulated.
- **Abandoned Barn (page 6)** © Big D2112. [CC BY-ND 2.0](#): Image has been colour-adjusted
- **Abandoned (page 74)** © Ganesh Dhamodkar. [CC BY-SA 2.0](#): Image has been colour-inverted and adjusted
- **Creepy Wall (page 12) and Ruined Barn (page 31)** © Marguerite Hill. Used with permission.
- **The Town Elevator (page 36)** © waferboard [CC BY 2.0](#): Image has been colour-inverted.

# Left Coast

Los Angeles, 1970.

A sci-fi author's novel  
spills into real life.



a short story game  
by Steve Hickey

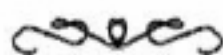
2-5 players  
2-3 hours

\$6.99

# My Life as the GM

An evil genius.

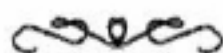
Minions with low self-esteem.



Presenting a step-by-step guide to running *My Life with Master*, the award-winning and darkly comic game by Paul Czege.

Contains:

- an original scenario
- four pre-generated minions
- a snake-wielding Master
- expanded advice on running all aspects of the game



Requires *My Life with Master* to play  
Available at [DriveThruRPG.com](http://DriveThruRPG.com)  
Pay-What-You-Want





# **Optional Rules**

# Create A Map Of The Town

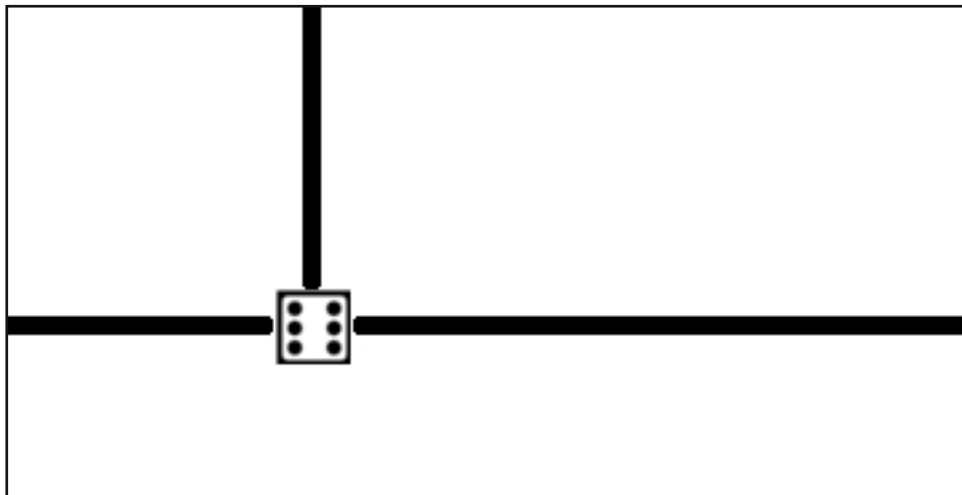
You may find it useful to create a rough map of the town and its roads and surroundings. Here's an easy way to do this.

Based on the time-period of the game, gather a number of d6s.

- **1920s:** 3 d6s
- **1950s:** 4 d6s
- **1980s:** 5 d6s

Roll the dice onto a blank sheet of paper (make sure all the dice land on the page).

Wherever a d6 lands, draw lines (roads) outward from it to the edge of the paper:



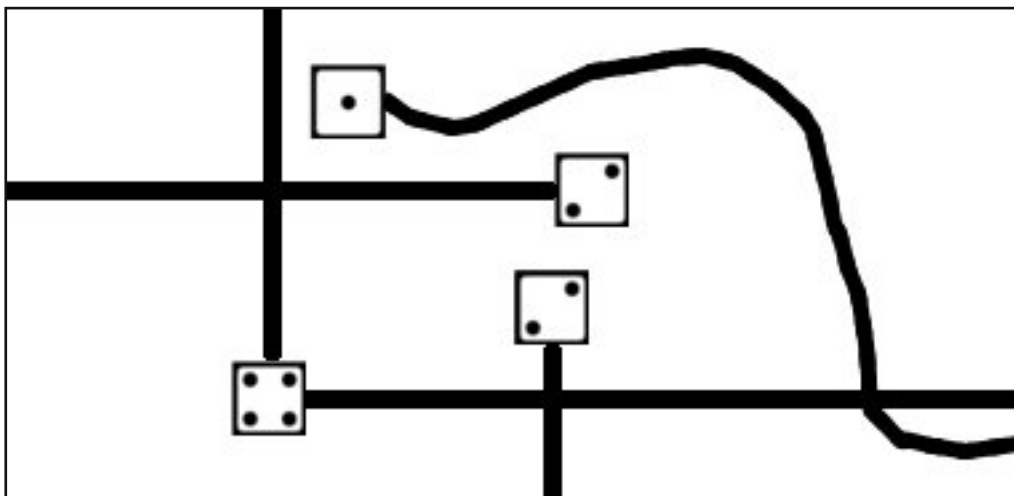
The number of roads you draw depends on the number you rolled:

- Ⓒ 1-2: Draw one road
- Ⓒ 3-4: Draw two roads
- Ⓒ 5-6: Draw three roads.

You may want more variety in the roads, other than just straight lines that intersect at right angles. Here's an optional rule:

- Ⓒ If the d6 shows an even number, draw it as a straight line to represent a paved road or main thoroughfare.
- Ⓒ If the d6 shows an odd number, draw the road in a way that marks it out as different (for instance, 'winding', 'dirt track', or 'inaccessible').

In the example below, the winding road represents a river.



Each d6 represents a location of interest. If somewhere in the game becomes important, use one of these.

The most-central die is the town. If you want to create a map of the town, zoom in and repeat this process.

Add the town's setting feature (an unmapped forest, etc) and you're ready to go.

# Alternative Settings

*Soth* uses the specific setting of small-town USA. I've found this makes the game easy to pitch and set up quickly.

However, nothing about *Soth's* rules requires you to use this setting. You can easily port it to somewhere that fires up your imagination more.

The only requirement is for your new setting to be a tight-knit community whose inhabitants will recognise if the cultists have changed.

Here are some examples:

- ⓪ the East End of London
- ⓪ a Cornish fishing village
- ⓪ rural New Zealand
- ⓪ a retirement community
- ⓪ a military base
- ⓪ a university.

The important thing is to ensure your new setting (in both time and place) has a central apocalyptic, tension-provoking, or pressure-inducing motif you can use to inspire your narration.

# Using Conflict Diagrams

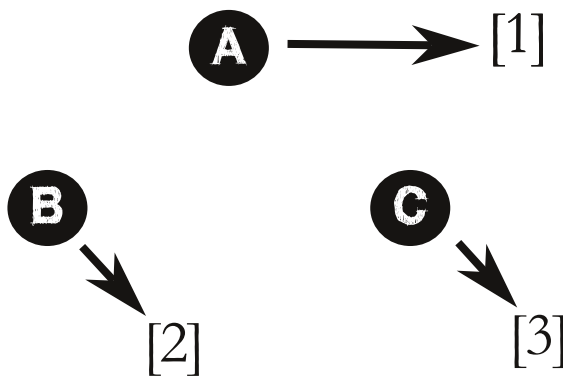
It may be useful to draw a diagram to record who is taking action—and who is trying to interfere with (or prevent) those actions.

This can just be a quick and simple sketch. Follow this process:

- ① Write down each character involved in the scene.
- ② Write down each target of the conflict (if you haven't already). A target doesn't need to be a person: for example, someone might be trying to grab the Tome of Soth.
- ③ Draw arrows from each character to the target they want to affect.

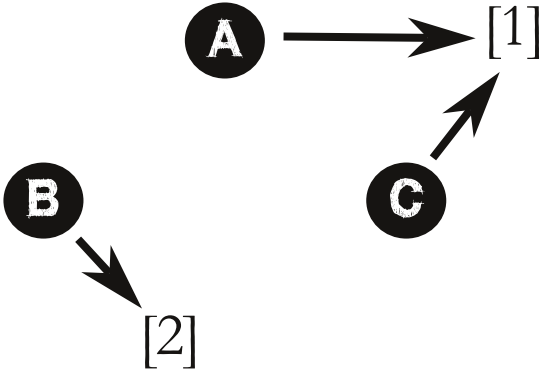
In the diagrams below, the letters A, B, and C indicate Cultist A, Cultist B, and Cultist C. The numbers [1], [2], and [3] indicate three separate things or people the cultists' actions could be targeting.

## Diagram 1: No Conflict



Each character has a separate target

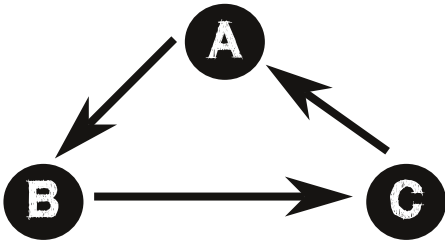
### Diagram 2: Partial Conflict



Conflict between A and C.

B is unopposed and succeeds.

### Diagram 3: Full Conflict



A, B, and C target each other.

# Advice for one-shots

You may want to run *Soth* in a session that has a specific duration (such as a three-hour slot at a convention).

Given this time constraint, the players may not be able to complete all four rituals and summon *Soth* before the session ends.

Here are four options for running the game in a single session (each one leading to a different play-experience):

## 1. Run The Game As Normal

This option produces a game that has an 'unforced' and 'considered' pace, like a smart thriller.

At the start of the session, inform the players the game may not reach its official finishing point.

During play, identify a satisfying point to end the session. You may want to spend some time after the game discussing what the cultists' next steps would have been and how close they were to being detected.

## 2. Run The Game Faster

Set the game up as normal. However, as Keeper use an 'aggressive' style of scene selection. Start in the middle of scenes. Start scenes with crises for the cultists. Skip over or summarise scenes that don't increase pressure on the cultists.

This option produces a game that may lack in character development but will have the pace of an intense and demanding thriller.

## 3. Run The Game On Fast Forward

Run the game as normal up until the end of the 'What Happens Next?' section. Then inform the players you'll be advancing time forward to the second ritual.

Before skipping to the second ritual, the Keeper asks each player to choose whether their cultist neglects their Obligation or their Compulsion.

The Keeper also decides whether to play out how the cultists gather their victims for the second ritual (this may eat up quite a bit of time). Alternatively, the Keeper can resume the game at the start or middle of the second ritual, or just after the cultists have completed it.

This option leads to the game having a slight loss of continuity and a weaker connection with supporting characters.

#### **4. Skip To The Second Ritual**

Run character creation as normal. In the 'Create the Starting Situation' section, replace the first ritual with the second ritual. The cultists must kidnap two victims.

This option is the most likely to complete the game in a single session. It also leads to a moderate loss of connection with the game's supporting characters, as the cultists will have fewer scenes with people where the cultists aren't trying to achieve their plans.

You'll need to amend the opening instructions for the Keeper and on Keeper Handouts 1 and 2 about what ritual is being conducted, how many sacrifices are required, and the number of victims. You'll also need to amend the Tome of Soth handout.

The Keeper earns +3 Suspicion per cultist (in addition to Suspicion earned in the 'What Happens Next' section).

After completing the 'What Happens Next' section, ask the group to name someone they think suspects what they're doing. You can turn that supporting character into an Investigator for free. If they're already an Investigator, create a second Investigator for free.

A final 'dial' you can use to determine the duration of the game is the amount of time cultists must wait before performing the next ritual.





If you reduce this time (see 'Advice for replaying the game', below), the game will be shorter and easier. There will be fewer character-building and relationship-developing scenes. The tone of the game will be more intense and overt.

## **Advice For Replaying The Game**

To increase replayability, you can adjust the order of the rituals and their required components.

Keeper Handout 7 is a version of the Tome of Soth handout that contains blank spaces for you to make these changes.

### **Adjust The Order**

You can swap the order of the rituals, so that they occur in any way you wish.

If you want to build suspicion and pressure within the cult, swap the order of the third and fourth rituals (but leave their requirements unchanged). This makes it more likely a cultist will detect they're being conspired against as the final ritual approaches.

If you want to make the game run longer, add the first ritual and play it (and its preparations) through in full. Define the first ritual using the components on the following pages, then choose a starting point for the game.

One possible starting point is to inform the holder of the Tome of Soth they have just translated the requirements of the first ritual. It needs to be conducted in two hours time. Ask the holder what they do next.



## Adjust The Components

Each ritual says it requires:

- Ⓒ The sacrifice of \_\_\_\_\_ (define who is sacrificed and how many sacrifices there are)
- Ⓒ It must be completed by \_\_\_\_\_ (define a specific time and a period of delay)
- Ⓒ It must take place in \_\_\_\_\_ (define either a specific place or a place that possesses a quality)
- Ⓒ and you must \_\_\_\_\_ (define a specific, positive requirement)

You may stay with the default components for a particular ritual, or define your own components. If you choose to define your own components, be sensitive to the possibility that you may cross someone's Line and you may need to change the requirement.

Alternatively, you can choose one of the options, below.

### Sacrifices

*the wisest person, the oldest person, a twin, one who has been tainted with money, a cultist of Soth, a healer, one who has seen the face of Death, one who brings joy*

You can decide that a ritual requires multiple sacrifices of either the same type (e.g. two healers) or different types (e.g. the oldest person and someone who brings joy).

**Time**

Define a significant time of day (dawn, noon, sunset, moonrise, midnight).

Define a length of time the cultists must wait after the previous ritual to perform this ritual. The longer the length of time, the greater the chance of discovery; the shorter the length of time, the quicker, easier, and more overt the game will be.

**Location**

*at a place where the public gather regularly, in the temple, at the home of an unbeliever of Soth, on the highest point within an hour's walk of the Temple, in the presence of unwitting bystanders, in a burning building, under the light of Soth, at the site of an ancient atrocity, in a graveyard, where all hope was lost*

**Requirements**

*a knife consecrated in the blood of the previous victims, a sound capable of deafening nearby listeners, a bonfire capable of burning someone alive, all but one of the cultists must be blindfolded, while holding the Tome of Soth aloft, the cultists must be naked*



# **Keeper's Handouts**

## 1. Introduce the Game

Read the following to the players:

- This game is about cultists in small-town America
- The tone of the game is noir
- Most of us play cultists trying to summon the dark god, Soth
- We play the game to put the cultists under pressure and to see if they can succeed
- Media influences include *Breaking Bad*, *Dexter*, *Hannibal*, the *Saw* series
- Cultists murder innocent people
- If you're ever uncomfortable about any other violence or abuse that enters the game, anyone can call a time-out and we'll discuss it
- Here are 2 techniques to help us
- **Lines** are subjects we won't allow
- **Veils** allow us to describe an event less graphically

## 2. Create the Setting

- Group decides: 1920s, 1950s, 1980s
- Group decides: Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, California
- Keeper decides on a town: Greenville (near a lake or river), Ashland (near a former centre of industry), Milton (near an old railway line), Winchester (near a large, effectively-unmapped forest)
- Highlight time and state on Keeper's Handout 3.

## 3. Create the Cultists

Give each player a copy of Player Handout A (the character sheet).

In the following steps, write down any supporting characters who are created or implied.

### 3a. Choose Roles

Ask the group the following questions:

- Which one of you keeps hold of the Tome of Soth? [*Give them Player Handout B*]
- Which one of you leads the cult? [*Give them Player Handout C*]

Resolve ties with a die-roll: highest result wins. Anyone who rolled the die increases their Clarity by one point. The winner increases Clarity by one additional point.

Cultists without a role get Clarity = 0.

### 3b. Choose Reputations & Create Occupations

Ask each player what their cultist's reputation in the town is: Excellent, Average, Seedy.

Each cultist chooses their occupation based on their reputation. Examples on page 17.

### 3c. Create Family Connections

If you have an excellent or average reputation, choose a family relationship where you live with someone:

- Marriage
- Relatives: parents

If you have a seedy reputation, choose one of the following relationships:

- Marriage (live together)
- Relatives: parents (live together)
- Relatives: siblings
- Divorced with children
- Widower with children
- A strong non-family relationship
- Unmarried sex partner

### 3d. Create Obligations

Each player invents a daily **Obligation** their cultist has to their job, community or friends and family. It must bring them into face-to-face contact with a specific person.

### 3e. Choose Names

Ask the players to name their cultists (if they haven't done it already). Use Keeper Handout 6 (Names and Places), if necessary.

## 4. Create The Starting Situation

Ask the players where their temple is and what stops it from being discovered.

Tell the players they are about to perform the first of four rituals to summon Soth: 'The Lighting of the Way'. The ritual is taking place in the temple right now, at midday. All of the cultists are there. As a group, you'll figure out how it went.

Ask the cultist with the Tome of Soth to complete Player Handout D.

When prompted, say what went wrong *en route*, and asks how the cultists dealt with it. Assume they succeed.

Ask the cult leader to complete Player Handout E and share the results.

When prompted, name the victim and describe their last words. Make their last words problematic for one of the cultists. You can:

- emphasise an emotional connection
- make this death cause a problem
- hint at a secret only the victim knew

At any point, ask clarifying questions.

Add any new supporting characters to the relationship diagram.

## 5. Assign Suspicion

Read the following to the players:

- Your goals are to advance your cult's plans to summon Soth and to prevent your crimes from being detected
- I'll play people trying to stop you or figure out what's going on
- If you play cultists who are obviously crazy, it'll be easy for you to fail
- Now I'll figure out how much Suspicion your kidnapping and sacrifice have caused
- I'll do this secretly throughout the game: the more suspicious your activities are, the more power I'll have to stop you.

Choose which of the following best matches how the kidnapping and sacrifice played out:

- Was it a perfect crime? 0 Suspicion
- Could someone clever figure out the crime? +1 Suspicion
- Was there a loose end? +2 Suspicion
- Was the crime obvious? +3 Suspicion
- Is the crime obviously linked to one or more of the cultists? +5 Suspicion
- Was a cultist caught red-handed? +7 Suspicion

Add this amount of Suspicion to Keeper Handout 5 (Suspicion).

## 6. The Consequences

### 6a. Play Out The Aftermath Of The Sacrifice

Ask the cultists:

- what they do after the sacrifice
- if there were any loose ends to this sacrifice and (if so) what they do
- what they will do with the body

Tell the cultists that the next ritual can be performed a day from now. The owner of the Tome of Soth can tell them more.

### 6b(i). Introduce a Witness

Introduce someone who can see one or more of the cultists doing something suspicious.

—or—

### 6b(ii). Start an Innocent Chat

Introduce a supporting character and have them start a lengthy, innocent and probing conversation with a cultist.

### 6c. Assign Suspicion

After this encounter, evaluate how suspicious the cultists' responses were using the following sections of Keeper Handout 5 (Suspicion):

- Deceive or Cover Up
- Mask of Sanity
- Table Talk

### 6d. Review Obligations

If any of the cultists' Obligations are urgent, ask how they will fulfill them.

### 6e. Randomly Assign Compulsions

Once there's a natural pause in the game, shuffle and hand out Compulsion cards (Player Handout F).

A **Compulsion** is something sub-optimal the cultist has to do once per day.

Once Compulsions have been assigned, the Keeper asks the cultists what they do.

### 6f. Update Relationship Diagram

### 6g. Create an Investigator

If the cultists' actions have earned any Suspicion, spend 1 Suspicion to turn a supporting character into an Investigator.

Choose someone who:

- saw the cultists acting suspiciously
- is related to the victim
- has had an opportunity to observe a cultist's increasingly odd behaviour
- noticed the kidnapping, or
- is the person in the town most likely to become suspicious or who has the most curiosity.

### 6h. Mark off any time that's elapsed

Use the calendar on Keeper Handout 3 to record time passing .

## 7. Ask The Cultists What They Do Next

The Keeper can put this sheet aside now. Run the rest of the game using the following handouts:

- Use Keeper's Handout 3 to react to what the cultists do
- Use Keeper's Handout 4 to resolve conflicts, assess injuries, and command servitors
- Use Keeper's Handout 5 to assess how suspicious the cultists' actions are and to use the Investigators to cause them problems.



## Ask What The Cultists Do Next

## Make The Cultists' Lives As Difficult As They Deserve

If you're unsure what to do next, choose one of the following options:

- Spend Suspicion and describe the results
- Show the emotional consequences of the cultists' deceptions, crimes, or murders on the community
- Introduce someone a cultist doesn't want to see
- Start a conversation with a cultist: have an established supporting character or a new character ask them innocent but inconvenient questions. Maintain this conversation for longer than the cultist would like
- Focus on an aspect of a cultist's mundane life and responsibilities
- Point out any reasons for the cultists to split up

## Foreshadow The Coming of Soth

- Describe an aspect of Soth that has been established by previous events
- After the Sounding of the Bell ritual, describe a bright new star appearing in the sky and how it changes
- After the Opening of the Gate ritual, describe the frequent earthquakes that are now occurring.

## Describe the World and How It Responds

## Describe These Aspects of the World

Tick the decade you've chosen:

- **1920s:** Emphasise conservatism and tradition. (Population: 700)
- **1950s:** Emphasise trauma from World War 2, and paranoia about communism. (Population: 3,000)
- **1980s:** Emphasise the threat of nuclear annihilation in Reagan's cold-war America. (Population: 5,000)

## Describe These Aspects of Small-Town Life

Tick the state you've chosen:

- **Kansas:** Emphasise the rural isolation
- **Louisiana:** Emphasise the close knit, inter-related community
- **Massachusetts:** Emphasise the tension between the educated and the salt-of-the-earth
- **California:** Emphasise the differences between conventional and alternative/eccentric lifestyles

## The Town

- **Greenville** (near a lake or river)
- **Ashland** (near a former centre of industry)
- **Milton** (near an old railway line)
- **Winchester** (near a large, effectively-unmapped forest)

## Create supporting characters

Define their relationship either 'as established' or from the following list:

*Family, Friend or Enemy, Work, Sex, History, School*

## Evaluate Clarity

A cultist gains 1 point of Clarity when they:

- sacrifice someone or murder someone outside of a ritual
- possess the Tome of Soth for the first time
- become the new leader of the cult
- seize the initiative in a conflict
- don't act on their Compulsion at least once per day, or
- when a Compulsion card says so

## The Mask of Sanity

During long or intimate talks with non-cultists, a cultist with a 'Clarity higher than 1' must choose one of the following actions rated equal to their Clarity score or higher:

- 1 Mention Soth or say something odd
- 2 Hint at your superiority to the non-cultist
- 3 Say something that flags to the people you're with that all is not well with you
- 4 Perform a single action that demonstrates that all is not well with you
- 5 Describe an aspect of Soth
- 6 Hint at the cult's plans
- 7 Obliquely confess to a cult-related crime
- 8 Menace the person you're with

If a cultist fails to use these rules, you gain Suspicion equal to the cultist's Clarity.

## Mark Off Time Passing on the Ritual Calendar

At the end of each day, increase Suspicion for each of the following conditions that are true:

- an individual Investigator is still at large [+1 *Suspicion, per individual*]
- a team of Investigators is still at large [+2 *Suspicion, for each Investigator in a team. Does not stack with the previous option.*]

If an Obligation has not been fulfilled, people = days missing will look for the cultist (to a maximum of four people).

Day One	Morning
<del>Midday</del>	Midday
Evening	Evening
Midnight	Midnight
[Assess]	[Assess]
Morning	Morning
Midday	Midday
Evening	Evening
Midnight	Midnight
[Assess]	[Assess]
Morning	Morning
Midday	Midday
Evening	Evening
Midnight	Midnight
[Assess]	[Assess]
Morning	Morning
Midday	Midday
Evening	Evening
Midnight	Midnight
[Assess]	[Assess]

# Resolving Conflicts

## Murder

If a cultist tries to murder ...

- an Investigator, then the murder succeeds unless the Keeper spends Suspicion (in which case, use the 'Other Conflicts' rules, below.)
- any other supporting character, then the murder succeeds
- a cultist, then use the 'Other Conflicts' rules, below.

## Manipulating Supporting Characters

The cultist succeeds if the supporting character:

- is not an Investigator, and
- has a positive relationship with the cultist, and
- the town is not 'suspicious and cautious'.

Otherwise, Keeper chooses a response:

- No, unless the cultist makes a new daily Obligation to them
- Yes, but spend 1 Suspicion and make them an Investigator
- Maybe: decide based on how the conversation plays out.

## Other Conflicts

Establish current location and characters' intended actions.

If a player wants to radically change their intended action, choose one:

- To change an action without penalty, **seize the initiative**. (Cultists spend 1 Clarity; Investigators, 4 Suspicion)
- Otherwise, the character changes actions but is at a **disadvantage**

## Other Conflicts (cont.)

Keeper sets the duration of the round by establishing which character will finish their intended action first

Characters act in the following first-to-last order

- Anyone who **seized the initiative**:
  - \* Cultists before Investigators
  - \* low Clarity before high Clarity
  - \* Tied Clarity, roll d6 (higher wins)
- Characters without a disadvantage
- Characters with a disadvantage

For the last two groups, the action order is based on whether a character has superior position, resources, or capability (including a lack of injuries).

Characters with more qualities act before characters with fewer. Break ties using 'Seize the Initiative' (above).

If the next action's unclear, the Keeper

- takes an action from the 'Make the cultists' lives as difficult as they deserve' list, or
- ends the conflict.

Player narrates their character's action.

Keeper ensures the amount of action they narrate stays within the duration of the round

Keeper decides how effective the action will be, by assessing:

- Capability, resources, position and effects of previous actions
- Is the intended action still possible? Partially possible? Not possible?
- If the character is acting at a disadvantage (their effect will be weaker).

## Other Conflicts (cont.)

Keeper decides on the action's effect:

- **1 Injury**: stunned
- **2 Injuries**: requires bed rest
- **3 Injuries**: requires hospitalisation
- **4 Injuries**: death
- **Non-Injury effect**: change the situation or affect capability, resources, or position.

An Investigator can only inflict 1 Injury per turn (cost = 1 Suspicion).

Repeat until a winner is clear, no-one is willing to continue, or stalemate.

## Injuries, Healing, Dying

To reduce from ...

... 3 to 2 injuries requires two weeks of healing and care

... 2 to 1 injuries requires 3 days of convalescence

... 1 to 0 injuries requires a short recovery period (Keeper's choice).

If a cultist dies, the player takes control of other members of the town, including the investigators (page 70).

## Lackeys and Minions

If a supporting character does something for a cultist, give them a competency level that determines the results they'll achieve:

- Average (2 Suspicion)
- Mediocre (4 Suspicion)
- Useless (6 Suspicion)

If the task is ordinary, no Suspicion is generated.

If the supporting character know what they're doing is wrong, add 2 Suspicion.

# Describe What Servitors Do

The holder of the Tome of Soth can command a Servitor to perform one action against one thing. Each condition on the command counts as an additional command.

To determine how the Servitor obeys, ask the summoner what their 'number' is. The Keeper rolls a d6 and subtracts 1 from the result for each additional command.

- **Over the number**: The Servitor performs any commands to the letter, and nothing more.
- **Draw**: The Servitor performs any commands to the letter, but causes as much havoc as possible in the process. Increase Suspicion by an amount equal to the number
- **Below the number**: The Servitor ignores additional commands and twists the main command to cause maximum chaos. Increase Suspicion by an amount equal to the number. Create an Investigator for free
- **On a '1'**: Follow the rules for 'Below the number'. The Servitor also takes one extra action, following its own agenda (Keeper's choice).

The Servitor's effectiveness is based on: where they go, who's there, its special abilities, and its Injury rating.

The servitor disappears after:

- fulfilling all commands the cultist has given it OR one hour passes
- it has taken one extra action, following its own agenda (if you rolled a '1')
- five of the summoner's breaths, if it is given no commands.



## Suspicion:

### Commit a crime or murder

Once it's clear how the situation resolves, choose one of the following options and assign Suspicion:

- Was it a perfect crime? (0 Suspicion)
- Could someone clever figure out the crime? (+1 Suspicion)
- Was there a loose end? (+2 Suspicion)
- Was the crime obvious? (+3 Suspicion)
- Is the crime obviously linked to one or more of the cultists? (+5 Suspicion)
- Was a cultist caught red-handed? (+7 Suspicion)

### Deceive or cover up

Choose one of the following and assign Suspicion:

- Did the cultist pull it off flawlessly? (-2 Suspicion)
- Will the person being deceived think about it later? (+1 Suspicion)
- Was the deception pretty comprehensively botched? (+3 Suspicion)
- Is the cultist clearly connected to recent horrible crimes? (+5 Suspicion)

- **-1 Suspicion** if the cultist's reputation would be an advantage in this situation.
- **+1 Suspicion** if their reputation would disadvantage them.

### Table talk

If a player gives advice to another player when their cultists would not be able to talk freely, gain +1 Suspicion per piece of advice.

### The Mask of Sanity

If a cultist has a lengthy or intimate conversation and doesn't use the Mask of Sanity rules (Keeper Handout 3), gain Suspicion equal to their Clarity.

If a cultist with no Clarity comes across as creepy, withdrawn or strange, gain 1 point of Suspicion.

### If you skip a day

For each day skipped, gain 3 Suspicion for each cultist.

### At the end of each day

- 1 Suspicion for each Investigator remaining at-large, or
- 2 Suspicion for each Investigator in a team who's still at-large

### When Investigators die

- If the dead Investigator was part of a team then increase Suspicion by 4
- Otherwise, remove 4 Suspicion

### Creating investigators and teams

Spend the following amount of Suspicion:

- {1} Turn a supporting character into an Investigator
- {3} Have two Investigators team up, or add an Investigator to an existing team

### What investigators always do

Investigators can do the following without spending Suspicion:

- Ask a penetrating question
- Notice an inconsistency

## How Investigators use Suspicion

Investigators can spend Suspicion to do the following:

- {1} Inflict 1 injury on a cultist
- {1} Show up somewhere inconvenient
- {1} Gain unauthorised access (but is detected)
- {2} Get somewhere first
- {2} Bring one non-Investigator friend
- {2} Follow a cultist, unobserved
- {2} Witness something inconvenient
- {3} Steal something of value to a cultist
- {3} Gain unauthorised access (and is undetected)
- {3} Call for help (but is detected)
- {4} Isolate a cultist
- {4} Find a carefully hidden secret
- {4} Seize the initiative in a conflict with a cultist
- {5} Call for help (and remain undetected)
- {7} The Investigator (or a specific team) is now convinced the cultists are responsible (trigger when justified by off-screen events)
- {7} Convince the authorities to take one cultist in for questioning
- {8} Escape, against the odds
- {8} Find the Temple
- {8} Survive a Servitor's attack
- {9} All supporting characters are suspicious and cautious (permanent, affects **manipulation**, Obligations no longer apply)
- {10} Convince the authorities to arrest one cultist
- {11} The authorities are everywhere (permanent, can introduce police into any plausible scene)
- {11} Convince the authorities to raid the Temple (if its location is known)

After spending Suspicion, give any affected cultists a chance to react .

If an Investigator achieves something on the above list without spending Suspicion, it's obvious to any cultist who could notice. Don't spend Suspicion; let cultists respond as if they had seized the initiative.

Spend 5 Suspicion for any action not on the above list where it feels appropriate to spend Suspicion.

## First Names by Decade

1920s	1920s	1950s	1950s	1980s	1980s
Albert	Lottie	Roy/Ray	Evelyn	Jason	Alice
Clarence	Flora	Joseph	Blanche	Jeremy	Heather
Earl	Ida/Irma	Charles	Ruth	Tom/Tod	Jennifer
Oscar	Nettie	Frank	Lucy/Lois	Chris	Molly
Eugene	Dora	Harold	Marion	Alex	Nancy
Claude	Viola	Carl	Vera	Billy	Lisa/Liz
Lester	Agnes	Jack	Jean	Dave	Natalie
Clifford	Esther	George	Dorothy	Doug	Blair
Dewey	Clara	Edward	Bettie	Patrick	Cindy
Percy	Harriet	Ralph	Shirley	Andrew	Robin

## Surnames by State

### Louisiana

LeBlanc	Fontenot
Hebert	Harris
Landry	Boudreaux
Jackson	Richard
Parker	Washington
Abellard	Dimitry
Jarreau	Kenner
Frayle	

### Massachusetts

Thompson	Williams
Johnson	White
Kelly	Walsh
O'Brien	Murphy
McCarthy	Anderson
Sullivan	Smith
Miller	Brown
Jones	

### Kansas

Larson	Hansen
Meyer	Baker
Miller	Nelson
Taylor	Christensen
Olson	Schmidt
Young	Wright
Lewis	Lee
Erickson	

### California

Hernandez	Garcia
Meyer	Young
Lee	Ramsay
Ackerley	Nicholls
McPherson	Parsons
Bacon	Scott
Edwards	Isaacs
Telfer	

Or choose any name from another state.

## Names of Roads

### A road named after ...

- a surname or first name
- something built by humans
- a tree or natural feature
- another state or city
- a road you have lived on
- a direction or a number
- a religious or historical figure
- a value or ideal

### Types of Roads

Alley, Avenue, Boulevard, Close, Court, Drive, Lane, Place, Route, Rue, Road, Square, Street, Terrace, Way

### Examples

Main Street, North Road, Oregon Way, Pine Avenue, Olson's Lane, Station Place

## Small Town Places

### Generally...

Farm, Bridge, Bluff, Police Station, General Store, Cemetery, Doctor's, Butchery, Green-Grocer's, Stables

### 1920s

Blacksmith, Railway, Church, Inn, General Store

### 1950s

Telephone Switchboard, Soda Fountain, Drive-In Theatre, Garage, Diner, Housing Development, Biker Bar

### 1980s

Video Arcade/Bowling Alley, Video Rental Store (VHS/Betamax/Laser Disc), Savings and Loan Bank, Discoteque, BMX track/Skate Park

# The Tome of Soth

You are now the holder of the Tome of Soth! **Gain one point of Clarity.**

Your cult has decoded this ancient tome of spells and knowledge. It has a **rotting brown-and-black leather cover**, and is about **300 pages long**. Some of the pages have been defaced by the **scrawls** of people who have previously possessed and studied it. **Two pages are missing.**

**Where do you keep the Tome?** Write it down (and show the Keeper): \_\_\_\_\_

If someone finds or takes the Tome from you, give them this card.

## To summon Soth...

... you must complete four rituals.

- The Lighting of the Way has been completed.
- The Sounding of the Bell requires the sacrifice of \_\_\_\_\_  
It must be completed by \_\_\_\_\_,  
It must take place in/on/at \_\_\_\_\_  
and you must \_\_\_\_\_.
- The Opening of the Gate requires the sacrifice of \_\_\_\_\_  
It must be completed by \_\_\_\_\_,  
It must take place in/on/at \_\_\_\_\_  
and you must \_\_\_\_\_.
- The Breaking of the Skein requires the sacrifice of \_\_\_\_\_  
It must be completed by \_\_\_\_\_,  
It must take place in/on/at \_\_\_\_\_  
and you must \_\_\_\_\_.

**NB:** You can attempt failed rituals again.

## To call on supernatural aid

Whoever holds the Tome can summon a supernatural entity and command it to do their bidding. These 'servitors' disappear after a single command.

### To conduct the summoning ritual

Touch the Tome of Soth and neglect your daily Obligation.

### To create a servitor

Choose from 1 to 6 of the following ('the number'). Tell everyone what you're choosing. You can choose each option multiple times:

- Give it the ability to inflict +1 injury
- Give it a special ability. Invent your own or use these examples: Burrowing, Flight, Heal 1 Injury, Invisible, Perfectly Silent, Pyrokinesis, Teleporting

Then describe the servitor. Some examples: translucent, insectile, globular, multi-eyed, tentacular, boneless, looming, asymmetrical, shadowed, bat-like, fungal

### To command the servitor

Tell it to do one thing (e.g. kill one person, take one object). Any conditions (e.g. 'but not in public', 'don't kill anyone else') count as an additional command.

**NB:** Servitors cannot speak but do understand.

Soth may reward your faith with a servitor. Anyone can command it—you must never

# **Players' Handouts**

## Clarity

### Throughout the game...

- work with your cult to complete the 4 rituals and summon Soth
- prevent your crimes from being detected
- fulfill your obligations as a member of the community

### Ability: Seize Initiative

If you need to act before someone else, you can choose to add one point of Clarity to your score.

This represents you pushing yourself and having a mental breakthrough that allows you to triumph.

If multiple players want to seize the initiative:

- cultists go before Investigators
- the cultist with the lowest Clarity (closest to zero) goes first
- If the cultists' Clarity scores are equal, these players each roll a d6. Highest result wins.

### Replace the Cult Leader

You can replace the current cult leader with a vote or by murdering them. There's a maximum of one vote per day. The cult leader can take an extra point of injury (see 'Dying', on the right).

### Summon a Servitor

If you have the Tome of Soth, you can summon and command a supernatural creature.

#### Reputation:

Excellent  
Average  
Seedy

#### Name:

#### Occupation:

### In each scene...

- show how your cultist advances their plans
- react to the Keeper's situations / answer their questions
- respond to your fellow cultists' actions, and the actions of your neighbours
- be a member of your community

### The Mask of Sanity:

**When you have a long or intimate talk with a non-cultist**, if you have 1 Clarity (or higher), choose one of the following actions to do during your conversation. The action must be equal to or higher than your Clarity score.

1. Mention Soth or say something odd
2. Hint at your superiority to the non-cultist
3. Say something that flags to the people you're with that all is not well with you
4. Perform a single action that demonstrates all is not well with you
5. Describe an aspect of Soth's glory or power
6. Hint at the cult's plans
7. Indirectly or subtly confess to a cult-related crime
8. Menace the person you're with

If you forget to do this, you still did something suspicious—you just don't know what it is. The Keeper gains Suspicion equal to your Clarity.

If your Clarity is higher than 8, choose 'Menace the person you're with'.

#### Obligation:

( 1 / day )

### Advice for Cultists

Soth is a 'cat-and-mouse' story. You play an insane cultist and your plans **will** fall apart, but don't make it easy for the Keeper to stop you

### Table Talk

If you give advice to another player when your cultists can't talk freely, the Keeper earns Suspicion for each piece of advice.

### Dying

You can take three points of injury before dying. The fourth point kills you.

To reduce from ...

... 3 to 2 injuries requires two weeks of healing and care

... 2 to 1 injuries requires 3 days of convalescence

... 1 to 0 injuries requires a short recovery period.

If your cultist dies, you get to play other members of the town, including the Investigators.

1

2

3



A



# The Tome of Soth

You are now the holder of the Tome of Soth! **Gain one point of Clarity.**

Your cult has decoded this ancient tome of spells and knowledge. It has a **rotting brown-and-black leather cover**, and is about **300 pages long**. Some of the pages have been defaced by the **scrawls** of people who have previously possessed and studied it. **Two pages are missing.**

**Where do you keep the Tome?** Write it down (and show the Keeper): \_\_\_\_\_

If someone finds or takes the Tome from you, give them this card.

## To summon Soth...

... complete four rituals (pay special attention to the third ritual's requirements).

- 1** The Lighting of the Way has been completed.
- 2** The Sounding of the Bell must be completed in the minute of noon on any day that's at least 24 hours later. It requires **two human sacrifices** in a place where the public gather regularly, and you must make a noise capable of deafening nearby listeners.
- 3** The Opening of the Gate must occur at precisely sunset at any point from at least 30 hours after the Sounding of the Bell ritual. It requires the **sacrifice of a cultist** of Soth via a **knife** consecrated in the blood of the previous sacrifices. It must take place in the Temple.  
Ask the Keeper to give the cultist who has been murdered a **copy of Player Handout J**.
- 4** The Breaking of the Skein requires **two sacrifices**: an unmarried adult and a healer. It must occur at least two hours later, **under the light of Soth**, in a place where the public gather regularly.

If successful, ask the Cult Leader (or the person with **Player Handout C**) to start the epilogues.

**NB:** You can re-attempt a failed ritual.

## To call on supernatural aid

Whoever holds the Tome can summon a supernatural entity and command it to do their bidding. These 'servitors' disappear after a single command.

### To conduct the summoning ritual

Touch the Tome of Soth and neglect your daily Obligation.

### To create a servitor

Choose from 1 to 6 of the following (the **number**). Tell everyone what you're choosing. You can choose each option multiple times:

- Give it the ability to inflict +1 injury
- Give it a special ability. Invent your own or use these examples: Burrowing, Flight, Heal 1 Injury, Invisible, Perfectly Silent, Pyrokinesis, Teleporting

Then describe the servitor. Some examples: translucent, insectile, globular, multi-eyed, tentacular, boneless, looming, asymmetrical, shadowed, bat-like, fungal

### To command the servitor

Tell it to do one thing (e.g. kill one person, take one object). Any conditions (e.g. 'but not in public', 'don't kill anyone else') count as an additional command.

**NB:** Servitors cannot speak but do understand.

Soth may reward your faith with a servitor. Anyone can command it—you must never

# You Are The Leader of The Cult ...

Gain 1 point of Clarity.

During rituals, you choose which cultists murder the sacrifice(s). These cultists increase their Clarity by 1 per murder.

You can give each cultist an order they must obey, once per cultist per game. This order cannot involve them killing themselves or putting themselves into a position where their death is inevitable.

You gain the ability to take one extra point of injury:



If you lose the leadership, you return to having a maximum capacity for taking only 3 injuries.

Leadership can be stripped from you by vote (you do not get a vote) or your death.

# If You Complete the 4th Ritual...

Read the following aloud to the group:

... Soth appears.

The player of each surviving cultist narrates an epilogue. Describe the fate of your cultist (and other people from the town, if appropriate).

You can't say what happened to other surviving cultists, but you have the option to incorporate their hints.

Each epilogue should describe the increasingly horrid condition of the world.

Which surviving cultist has the highest Clarity? Say:

You have the first epilogue. It's set one year after Soth was summoned.

NB: If there's a Clarity tie, choose who goes first or give them the option of having a joint epilogue.

After the first epilogue is complete, say:

The rest of the epilogues go in decreasing order of Clarity, finishing with cultists who have no Clarity. Each epilogue takes place one year after the previous one.

## For the holder of the Tome of Soth...

Read the following information aloud to the group:

The first ritual to summon Soth (The Lighting of the Way) had to happen urgently at midday at the temple.

That means we had to abduct the victim we are sacrificing without making any preparations.

Ask the group this question:

Which one of you helped me abduct them?

You (the Holder) had to take the victim from somewhere you could have been observed. Tell the group where that was. Ask the group for ideas, if necessary.

Ask every cultist (including yourself) to answer this:

Each of us needs to answer this question: What did you do during the abduction or while travelling to the temple that could have drawn attention to yourself?

Then, ask every cultist (including yourself) this question:

Each of us needs to answer this: Who did you have to ignore or disappoint in order to kidnap the victim? What's your close or personal connection with them?

If it hasn't already been established, tell the group how you transported the victim to the temple. Ask for ideas, if necessary.

Ask the Keeper what went wrong *en route*....

**D**

## For the Cult Leader...

Read the following aloud to the group:

Now I'll choose one of you to make the sacrifice.

Choose one of the cultists to make the sacrifice. Say the following to them:

I choose you. Are you the victim's friend or their lover?

Once the cultist has chosen, say the following:

Because you're making the sacrifice, increase your Clarity by 1.

Read the following information aloud to the group:

Any time you murder someone, you increase your Clarity by 1.

If the identity of the sacrifice hasn't already been established, ask the Keeper to give them a first and last name.

Ask the Keeper to tell the group what the sacrifice's last words were.

**E**



## Insubordinate

(If you are the cult leader, choose another card.)

The current Cult Leader once insulted you in a way they don't even remember.

Every day, you must ignore one order they give you or your role in a plan they've devised. (**NB:** You can't ignore an order the Cult Leader gives using their special ability.)

If they lose the position of cult leader, your motivation changes to taking revenge: take one concrete action per day to ruin their life.

You have to **fulfill your compulsion at least once per day**. If you do not, you gain 1 point of Clarity.

## Sex addict

Choose one of the supporting characters created by another cultist.

You are in the throes of a passionate and consensual love affair and must have sex with them.

Each time you have sex, you must escalate the risk that you will be discovered.

The Keeper will decide if you've fulfilled this requirement. If not, you are free to try again.

You have to **fulfill your compulsion at least once per day**. If you do not, you gain 1 point of Clarity.

## Doom-sayer

Choose the most important person in the town another player has created.

You must taunt this person with hints and signs of their coming doom at the hands of Soth. This can be either verbally or through your deeds.

Each time you taunt them, you must escalate the level of specificity about their doom.

The Keeper will decide if you've fulfilled this requirement. If not, you are free to try again.

You have to **fulfill your compulsion at least once per day**. If you do not, you gain 1 point of Clarity.

## Witness

Your cult's actions affect people you've known your entire life.

Each day, you need to choose a person whose life has been negatively and intimately affected by the cult.

You need to spend at least five minutes experiencing the reactions of that neighbour. This can include eavesdropping on their conversations or visiting them.

You have to **fulfill your compulsion at least once per day**. If you do not, you gain 1 point of Clarity.

## Addict

Your experiments with unlocking the rituals in the Tome of Soth have led to you becoming addicted to a potent, locally-grown hallucinogenic mushroom.

Gain 1 point of Clarity (this is a one-off gain).

Whenever you consume the mushroom (which must be freshly picked), ask the Keeper to describe your hallucinations.

You have to **fulfill your compulsion at least once per day**. If you do not, you gain 1 point of Clarity.

## Saviour

Select any supporting character that another player created. In the aftermath of the first ritual, you've decided to regularly chat with this person—to convert them to the worship of Soth, and bring them into the cult.

Each time you talk you must escalate the specificity of what you're suggesting.

The Keeper will decide if you've fulfilled this requirement. If not, you are free to try again at a later time.

You have to **fulfill your compulsion at least once per day**. If you do not, you gain 1 point of Clarity.

# The Servitor of the Gate

Your sacrifice summons a Servitor—who you'll play for the rest of the game.

## Create your servitor

There are **four** steps to creating a servitor: decide on your appearance, choose your Need and Methods, and introduce yourself to the cultists.

### 1 Your Appearance

You decide on the Servitor's appearance. If you like, choose some the following:

*translucent, insectile, globular, multi-eyed, squat tentacular, detached limbs, angular, boneless, looming, asymmetrical, multi-planar, shifting.*

**NB:** The Servitor cannot speak.

### 2 Your Need

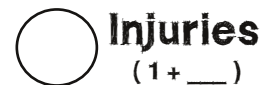
Choose one of the following (change when you want):

*Create chaos and fear, Destroy human creations, Gather worshippers for Soth, Punish unbelievers*

### 3 Your Methods

Divide **points** equal to your Clarity + 1 between the following two options. You can choose each option multiple times:

- Give the servitor the ability to inflict +1 injury (you start with the ability to inflict 1 Injury)



**Injuries**  
(1 + \_\_\_)

- Choose one of the following special abilities:

*Burrowing, Cause natural disaster (affects a barn-sized area), Emotional telepathic projection, Flight, Frictionless, Giant Strength, Pyrokinesis, Reality Warp (a car-sized part of the world now looks like it will after Soth appears)*

### 4 Introduce yourself

You manifest in the Temple while the cultists' attentions are focused on completing the third ritual and its aftermath.

Describe to the other cultists how they finally notice your presence. Describe your appearance. You cannot speak. Feel free to describe your expressions, body language and actions.

### Obeying commands

You obey one command at a time—given by any cultist (priority to the holder of the Tome of Soth).

A command is one action done to one thing. You can choose to ignore any additional commands if you want.

#### When given a command, do all of these:

- Try to fulfill it until you succeed or for up to 1 hour
- Take 1 action to meet your Need with your Methods
- Return to the Temple (unless issued a command)

#### If you haven't been given a command for five minutes, choose one of the following:

- Take 1 action to satisfy your Need with your Method, or
- Take one action of your choice

#### Refuse a command & perform one action of your choice if you're given a command that:

- conflicts with another command
- contradicts your Need
- does not advance summoning Soth, or
- if you are given multiple commands when the Holder of the Tome of Soth is not present

### Your Goal

Your goal is to bring about the arrival of Soth. If all the cultists die, you will vanish.

### Special ability

You automatically seize the initiative, acting before cultists and Investigators.

### After Soth appears

You can no longer be commanded. Do not harm the cultists or supporting characters

### Dying

You can take five points of injury before dying. The sixth point kills you.

