

# OSR COSMIC HORROR SOLO ROLEPLAYING

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## INTRODUCTION

This booklet gives you the tools you need to play Eldritch Tales: Lovecraftian White Box Role-Playing without the need for a GM.

There are some rules in this booklet that supersede the printed rules in the main rulebook. In other cases the main rules suggested one or more optional rules, and I have specified which of these options I recommend for solo play. Most of this book includes extensions to the main rules that facilitate playing without a GM.

## NO GAME MASTER?

Roleplaying games evolved out of tabletop wargames. They started life as a way of representing the impact of a single hero could have on a mass battle. That was back in the 1970s, and it didn't take long for those battlefield heroes to head off on adventures into dungeons and temples and all the other places we have taken out role-playing.

Back, long before the first role-playing games were created, solo wargaming was a perfectly normal part of wargaming. In 1973 Donald Featherstone's Solo-Wargaming introduced simple d6 tables that provided a way of answering the questions of what would the opposing general do?

The role of GM comprises many duties. One is that of setting up the world for your character to explore. This is easier in Eldritch Tales than in other fantasy role-playing games as the world is ostensibly our own but with a dark shadow world lingering in the corners.

Another duty is that of answering your questions as a player. There would always be discrepancies between what the GM envisioned when they set up a scene and the same mental picture perceived by each player. A certain amount of back and forth questioning is inevitable. In a solo game, there is no loss of fidelity when picturing scenes, NPCs, or challenges. Everything takes place in your *oimagination*, so the way you see it is how it is, or how it appears to be. On top of that is a simple game mechanic that can give you answers to questions about the world. This is based upon the Attribute Feat, roll one d6, and the high results lean towards yes, low results lean towards No.

The reason you are rolling dice is that without some random elements in your stories, the stories could become rather linear. When you set out to start your investigations, you will not know what the clues are that you will find. If you look for traces of blood on the driver's seat of an automobile, there could be some there, or not. How would that random element change your theories about the case?

There are many different questions you could ask the different tools are provided to help you improvise the most common types of situation.

## TIME AND TIDE WAITS FOR NO ONE

Asking questions and improvising answers will allow you to play through almost any situation. However, Eldritch Tales is not the sort of game where the world stands still waiting for your arrival. There are forces at work in the world that have their own agenda.

Games that deal with the Cthuhlu mythos and cosmic horror have worse things than your character's death. This way lies madness. Character retirement is as common, if not more common, than your character falling in combat.

Capturing this essence of the world being out to get you, or at least the things that lie just beyond our world are out to get you, I have introduced a mechanism called The Oncoming Horror. You can read more about this later.

The last departure from the main rules is another tool for managing dramatic situations that fall outside of the immediate scene. This is called the Dramatic Pool and can track many things that are happening off-camera on the periphery of your adventure but could come crashing in at any moment.





These rules normally only use d6 dice. Most rolls will be 1d6, but you may make several d6 rolls in sequence. It is useful to have several d6s of different colors so you can decide which is the first and which is the second die.

Some of the d6s will be put aside as a dice pool during your adventures. This could use 6d6 or possibly more.

The Oncoming Horror uses either a single suit from a pack of playing cards (13 cards) or a single d12.

## IMPROVISATION

We take it for granted in group role-playing that the dice will tell us how we should be improvising. All role-playing is improvisation. As players, we don't know what the Game Master is going to throw at us, and as Game Master, we have no idea of what the players are going to make of the lines we feed them.

We may have an idea of what we expect to come next, and that foreshadowing is an important part of solo role-play. If you can imagine your character stood before grand double doors of a library, throwing them open and striding in, and being prepared to deal with anything that the Game Master has put on the other side, then you are most likely going to make an excellent solo roleplayer.

Every roll of the dice in this booklet is all about feeding you a prompt to improvise with. The adventures will be wild and unexpected because you cannot possibly know what the outcomes will be.

You need to balance three influences. The style of game you want to have, the story so far, and the result you rolled.

## STYLE

If you want a game with suspense and only the slightest hint of cults and magic is lost and almost forgotten, that will shape some of the answers you will create.

## STORY

If you have been infiltrating a cult that masquerades as a club for rich industrialists when you need to imagine a scene, you are likely to see dark mahogany wood paneling, polished silver trays, and all the trappings of opulence. A cult that has been lost in a South Asian jungle for a thousand years will create different mental images. In either situation, you may feel that there should be an enemy and a confrontation. This is where the story should guide you as to what you are more likely to encounter.

## ANSWERS

Some of the answers you roll will be obvious as if that was what you had already decided, and the roll confirms it. Other answers will go completely against what you were expecting. This is when you need to fall back on the game style and the story so far.

If you roll for an answer and in the specific situation you think the rolled answer is simply the wrong answer for your game, then the story wins out.

## YES-NO QUESTIONS

The simple yes-no question is the mainstay of much solo role-playing. Are the keys in the car? Is there blood on her hands? Do the cultists try and block off your escape?

All of these can be answered with a simple yes or no.

## LIKELIHOOD

When you formulate a yes-no question, you should have an idea of whether you expect the answer to be either yes or no. You can apply a modifier of -3 to +3 depending on your belief of what makes the most sense. A +3 would be so certain to be yes as to make a No answer impossible. Likewise, a -3 would make a Yes answer impossible.

Most of the time, you should restrict yourself to -2 to +2 or no modifier at all.

1 or less	No, and...
2	No
3	No, but...
4	Yes, but...
5	Yes
6 or more	Yes, and...

You can see immediately that there are more than yes and no answers.

The 'and...' modifier means that the result is more than you expected. If you wanted to know if the Store security guards were alert and you get a 'No, and...' maybe a Police Officer has just demanded that the Store security follow him and rushes off into the busy street. If you got a 'Yes, and...', maybe not only are they alert, but one of them thinks you look suspicious.

The 'but...' is the opposite of the 'and' modifier. If the answer is a 'yes, but' it isn't as good as you had hoped. Think of it as adding some kind of drawback.

## PUT THE DIE ASIDE

Once you have rolled your answer, put that d6 to one side, showing the same face that you rolled.





if the same number comes up on the die, you have created a Plot Twist.

Plot Twists appear as a short two-part sentence. Their purpose is to feed your improvisation.

## PLOT TWISTS

There is a one in six chance of you rolling the same number again on two consecutive yes-no questions and answer. These are not uncommon.

Roll either one die twice or 2d6 selecting one as the first and the other as the second die.

### FIRST DIE

- 1 An NPC
- 2 Your PC
- 3 An organization
- 4 A physical event
- 5 An emotional event
- 6 An item

### SECOND DIE

- 1 appears.
- 2 alters the location.
- 3 helps the hero.
- 4 hinders the hero.
- 5 changes the goal.
- 6 ends the scene.

With your two results, put them together to make a short sentence such as “A physical event changes the goal.”

Most of these results need some explanation.

**AN NPC.** You should be familiar with what an NPC is. You can either introduce a new NPC or reuse an existing NPC in your story (See record-keeping below).

**YOUR PC.** Somehow the root cause of the even comes from your character’s actions, intentionally or otherwise. Have you ever seen a scene in a movie where a character leans against a bookcase only for it to shift and reveal a secret passage? That is the PC driving a twist.

**AN ORGANIZATION.** An organization can be anything from a village council to an entire army or just a single representative of the organization. Most urban settings have many organizations from government, law enforcement to gentlemen’s clubs, and cults.

**A PHYSICAL EVENT.** This is an external physical event; it could be a door opening somewhere in a house that is supposed to be deserted or car headlamps shining out in the dark. A barroom brawl would just as easily fit under this heading.

**AN EMOTIONAL EVENT.** Emotional events are those that force or play on your character’s emotions. It could be a random act of kindness or something that plays on your characters back story.

**AN ITEM.** Characters are surrounded by items and simple machines. You have their own equipment, objects around them as well as traps and unique items in the world.

**APPEARS.** This twist introduces something into the current scene. It could imply a discovery or the situation changes.

**ALTERS THE LOCATION.** Something happens that should drive the story to change the location of the action. It could be as simple as learning that the private investigator you are looking for is in a different city or a secret door in the library reveals a hidden laboratory.

**HELPS THE HERO.** The help could mean revealing a clue or useful information, or it can mean physical assistance.

**HINDERS THE HERO.** There are always hundreds of ways of making your character’s life harder. This will be one of those times.

**CHANGES THE GOAL.** This twist can really change your story. Changing a goal could be a piece of information that changes what you were planning to do next. It could be that someone else is also involved in the investigation and is ahead of you?

**ENDS THE SCENE.** You should see Scenes below for more on scenes. In short, a scene ends whenever a director would shout ‘Cut!’ when the Game Master would handwave away a period of time or the action changes location. When this twist comes up, something will happen to bring about the end of the scene.





## PLAYING OUT TWISTS

A twist does not have to happen instantly, the second you roll it. You should rather see it as a note pinned to your character or storyboard. Once you have decided what the twist would mean for your character, you should then try to work it into your character's adventure. Sometimes they will be instant. Frequently, the best solution will create so many unanswered questions that they will drive some amazing role-playing and challenge your improvisation skills. Deep in an Egyptian pyramid and the dice say an NPC helps the hero. Where did this NPC come from? How did they get here? You just need to let your imagination provide an answer.

## SCENES

These rules have mentioned scenes. A scene ends when you could imagine a director shouting Cut! or you feel like skipping a block of time. More importantly, you can think in scenes. You do not need to play every scene. If you were sat around a gaming table with friends, you would not role play every minute of a mundane journey into town. As you are the only player and the game is for your benefit, only you can pick the scenes you want to play. There is no reason not to skip great swathes of an investigation around an old Scottish castle ruin, and just play the most exciting scenes, the first scene to set the tone and picture the ruins, discovering a subterranean catacomb level and then fighting to escape from the horror that the cultists had summoned up.

When we cover record keeping, scenes are one of the things that you may want to keep a record of.

## COMPLEX QUESTIONS

Not every question can be answered with a yes or a no. If you steal a letter from an occultist to a confidant, a yes or no is not much use to you.

In these cases, you roll two dice, or one die twice, and check the following table, just like building a twist.

### FIRST DIE

- 1 Plotting against
- 2 Uncovering
- 3 Supporting
- 4 Opposing
- 5 Creating
- 6 Discovering

### SECOND DIE

- 1 an ally or colleague.
- 2 a foe or traitor.
- 3 a new force or an old enemy.
- 4 old lore or magic.
- 5 a death or murder.
- 6 an alliance or surrender.

As before [plot twists], you build a short sentence and then try and work this into your game. Typical complex questions give meaning to conversations, the contents of diaries and journals, and the motives of people you meet. Still, you will come up with hundreds of other uses.

The golden rule is that you consider the story so far, the current situation, the sort of adventure you want to have, and finally, the dice rolls. If an interpretation does not come to you within 20 seconds, then forget it, either roll again or if you have an idea in mind, go with that.

Imagine you are trying to research some disappearances in a town library. You find an article in the newspaper archive. Rolling 2d6, you rolled (4) and (2). This gives you Opposing a foe or traitor. Your instant reaction is that the disappearances all happened in an old house that once belonged to a local man, executed as a traitor. This now gives you a reason to go and investigate the house. You can, of course, improvise more details about this man, who he was and what he supposedly did.

The same rolls made while reading a tome of mythos lore could contain the Banish spell as a ritual.

## NPCs, FRIEND OR FOE?

Not everyone is going to be your friend, and likewise, not everyone is going to draw a pistol and try and shoot you. NPC reactions can be handled using the regular Oracle, but you can use your characters Charisma feat bonus in addition to likelihood modifiers. For example, if it is highly unlikely [-1] that a museum guard will let you pass after closing, but you have a +2 modifier from your Charisma that gives you a net +1 on the roll. You must remember that depending on the question, the modifier may go one way or the other. If you ask a negative question where a Yes will be bad for your character, then inverting your Charisma bonus/penalty would make more sense.







## WHO SAID THAT?

Using the Complex Questions tool too often in a game session can lead to a great deal of repetition. When the question relates to NPCs and conversations, then here is an alternative. If you can only hear one side of the conversation, then just roll on one or the other side, possibly alternating with each use. If you can hear, both sides roll a first and second die.

ROLL	SPEAKER 1	SPEAKER 2	ROLL
1	Strongly Disagrees with...	Strongly agrees with ...	1
2	Disagrees with...	Agrees with...	2
3	Has news	Is shocked by...	3
4	Needs to know...	Doesn't care	3
5	Agrees with...	Disagrees with...	5
6	Strongly agrees with...	Strongly disagrees with...	6

You still need to improvise what the conversation is about, but it gives you the speaker's position from which you can visualize their attitudes, body language, and tone of voice.

## RECORD KEEPING

It is helpful to keep a written log or journal of your solo adventures. This helps you pick up where you were later. This is no different from keeping game notes, except there is no planned campaign as a backdrop.

Some people will make a few oracle question rolls and then write up an entire scene as if it is a chapter in a book. Others will record very little. I personally just use bullet points and record questions, answers, and key points. It is very terse and would mean nothing to anyone else, but it only has to serve as a reminder to me. I also find that the less time I spend writing, the more time I can spend in character.

The journal in Eldritch Tales is possibly more important than in many other games. Anything based around investigations and collecting and interpreting clues needs to keep a log of potential clues. As you are investigating, you may have no idea as to which are real clues, which are red herrings and which relate to other mysterious goings-on that you are yet to investigate.

Regardless of the style of the journal you keep, it is helpful to keep a few lists.

## NPC LIST

An NPC list just needs to keep the barest of details, name race and location, and a brief note about your meeting. The location is important. When you revisit a place, it helps if the same NPCs are there. It helps to make the world more consistent. If you have a list of NPCs and the oracle tells you to introduce an NPC, it often makes sense

to use an existing NPC rather than constantly creating new ones. For you, a player and DM, not having to create hundreds of individual personalities, makes life easier.

## CLUE LIST

Below, here is an entire section on how to run investigations. A natural consequence of investigating is finding clues. The fun in Eldritch Tales is piecing the clues together to learn the truth.

The Clue list is a place for you to record what you believe to be the clues in your investigation.

## SCENE LIST

You can number or name scenes as you play them, and at the end of the scene, add a descriptive note. Glancing down a scene list is almost like fast-forwarding through your adventure. Still, it is also useful if you want to insert a flashback scene between a pair of scenes you have already played. I record which NPCs were present as well as what I was trying to achieve.

## LOOSE ENDS LIST

You will inevitably end up with a great many unexplored plot threads or loose ends. Why did your Lord Bathesphere drive to Salem the day you wanted to interview him? Who was the lieutenant plotting to kill? Plot Twists can create loose ends, and complex questions do the same.

When this list gets to more than half a dozen, it is worth seeing if you can tie some of them together into a deeper and more complex plot that your character has just brushed the surface of. Highlighter pens are useful here as you can group by color. These loose ends could be used to explain some of the more unusual dice rolls. If someone is going to be murdered, that could explain why the gangster, you are looking for has fled town!







## SOLO PLAY HINTS AND TIPS

- ❖ The golden rule is do not ask too many questions. Ask a question and possibly a follow up if you are still not sure but then just start to improvise.
- ❖ Do not ask game-breaking questions. Don't ask if you wake up and find \$1000 under your pillow or the Necronomicon at the end of the bed. If you need these things, just add them to your character sheet. It is your game, no one will ever know!
- ❖ Playing as a solo investigator in a game designed for parties of 6-8 is hard. You may want to start at 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> level. This also adds more scope for skipping back into your character's past to play flashbacks.
- ❖ Take a leaf from Hollywood and start your adventures right in the thick of the action, a rooftop fight against cultists, in a runaway train careering towards a cliff or alone in a house where something definitely just moved upstairs. You know the sort of adventure you want to have. Start there and start in the thick of it.
- ❖ The first time you solo play, it will probably be slow and stilted as you don't know the rules or what to expect. Don't worry; this is normal, and the more you play, the faster and more fluid it all becomes.
- ❖ It is useful to have a stock of pre-generated NPCs. When you are learning a new game, it is useful to make a few characters to try and get an idea for how the rules work. Keep those characters and use them when you need an NPC. That saves breaking up your game to create an NPC at a crucial moment.
- ❖ Narrative Description is your friend. Have you ever had a character in a Chicago barroom brawl and asked the GM if there a bottle or chair at the table you can throw? Or maybe you asked is the chandelier secured by a rope, when you wanted to swing across the hall. In solo play, the answer to all these questions is yes. It is your story, your adventure, you are the star and director. The props will always be in the right place.
- ❖ Fail Forward. If something goes wrong and the adventure would end, or there is no way out, ask the oracle. In the movies, the hero faces seemingly impossible situations all the time and somehow gets out of them. You are the hero; it is OK to save yourself... most of the time.
- ❖ The questions you ask should be the ones best for the game and not what is best for your character.

## HOW TO RUN AN INVESTIGATION

There are, at least, two ways to run an investigation. The first is the 'sandbox' approach. The second is the pre-written investigation, such as *The Tupilak* in the *Eldritch Tales* rulebook.

This section deals with the sandbox game.

A sandbox is a game in which your character can go anywhere, do anything, and they will stumble into adventures and investigations. You may start with an idea of what your first case is, but nothing is set in stone.

The table below may help suggest the initial clue to that first investigation.

You could have this clue come to your character passively, reading about in the paper, a piece on the wireless, or an academic journal that crosses your character's desk. Alternatively, you can say, 'this is what started it all, but right now, I am hanging from a window ledge by my fingertips....' and take the adventure from there. This is a Hollywood entrance and is far more dramatic. You can fill in the details as to how you got from the first clue to the window ledge just as you would build a character background.

ROLL	WHO	WHAT	LORE
1	Witch	an ancestor	Antarctica
2	Cultist	a dream of	Atlantis
3	Artist	police report	Averoigne
4	Criminal	informant	Carcosa
5	Detective	newspaper cutting	Hyperborea
6	Doctor	cult	R'lyeh

To use the table, roll once on each column, and build a plot hook. For example, Rolling (6), (4), and (6) gives:

1. Who: A Doctor
2. What: an informant
3. Lore: R'lyeh

Taking these prompts, it could mean that at a dinner party, a friend, who is a doctor, tells of an interesting patient who should have been completely anesthetized during an operation, suddenly sat up and started babbling about a place called R'lyeh. This went on for several minutes before the patient lay down and was sound asleep. Once they recovered from the operation, they had no memory of the incident and didn't even recognize the name R'lyeh.

This hook could tie into having a doctor as a contact, it could give the patient as someone to investigate, or try and interview, or maybe your character already knows of R'lyeh, which is why the doctor thought you would be interested in the story.





You now have a starting point.

However you choose to proceed, at some point, you will make a Feat test, it could be to test the anesthetic to make sure the drugs had not been tampered with, maybe you get the patients name and address from the hospital and track them down.

Once you make the Feat test to try and extract some information, if the test is successful, you will follow up with a yes-no question to see if there is anything to be learned. If there is, you have found a clue.

You should make a note of the clue, I suggest keeping a list of them.

The clue you found is directly related to what you were doing to find it. If you were looking for tampering of the chemicals, then that is what you will find.

You are going to build your own investigation, and case by seeking out the next piece of evidence at each stage. Once you have found the chemicals have tampered with, you may want to find out who had access to them or where they were bought, who prepared the anesthetic.

Many of these clues may well point to mundane causes and motivations, or your investigation could be so wide-ranging that there is little or no connection between the clues beyond that you looked for them. To tie your investigation into the Eldritch world, we have the word track.

## THE WORD TRACK

Roll a d6 and count that many words into the list of words below.

This word is now associated with the clue that you just found.

For example, Having rolled a (5) the keyword is Irem., having decided to investigate the source of the chemicals

used in the anesthetic, it turns out that they were an experimental new anesthetic. The source of them was a laboratory in Egypt, owned by an Arabian company.

Some of these connections will create problems for your character. If they lack the means to go to Egypt or Saudi Arabia to carry on their investigation, this could create a dead-end, for now.

With each subsequent clue that you discover, you roll another d6 and count on from the last word you used. This word is then used to add a bit of Lovecraftian flavor to the clue, either directly or by prompting you to shade your improvisation. If you rolled Necronomicon, it does not mean that you have found the book, but it could mean that someone scrawled *Necronomicon*? In the margin of the import manifest, you are looking at, or better still, on the half of the manifest, with the other half missing.

These words are not meant to be clues in themselves. They are improvisation prompts that insert some of the flavor of the world into your game.

## BUILDING TENSION

There are times when your character is facing the risk of discovery, or they are racing against time. In these situations, you can use one of two methods to simulate events happening 'off-camera'. The first is a counter, the second is a dice pool.

### WORD TRACK

Gibbering, Fainting, Dagon, Daemonic, Irem, Noisome, Cyclopean, Singular, Antiquarian, Kadath, Abnormal, Disproportionate, Stench, Nameless, Mortal, Comprehension, Shub-Niggurath, Fungous, Ululate, Gambrel, Cat, Yog-Sothoth, Lurk, Necronomicon, Dunwich, Decadent, Spectral, Innsmouth, Immemorial, Kingsport, Unnamable, Nameless Cults, Loathing, Charnel, Gibbous, R'lyeh, Nodens, Furtive, Nyarlathotep, Blasphemous, Things, Azathoth, Hideous, Manuscript, Arkham, Ululating, Pnakotic Manuscripts, Amorphous, Tentacles, Dank, Loathsome, Non-Euclidean, Foetid, Swarthy, Book of Eibon, Shoggoth, Unmentionable, Eldritch, Madness, Locations, Blasphemy, Eltdown Shards, Squamous, Fainted, Miskatonic, Yuggoth, Proportion, Tentacle, Gibbered, Singularly, Fungoid, Effulgence, Cthulhu, Leng, Accursed, Antique, De Vermis Mysteriis, Tenebrous, Stygian, Elder Sign, Iridescence, Fungus, Shunned, Unaussprechlichen Kulten, Antediluvian, Unutterable, Indescribable





## USING A COUNTER

A counter counts down to an event. If a suspect is trying to make their getaway, for example, you may want to track their progress.

Take a single d6 and place it with the 1 face uppermost.

Now, with every time you are delayed, distracted by another event or held up, advance the die one face. Should you find a way to get ahead, turn the die back a face. If the die reaches the 6 face, the suspect got away.

Another example could be attempting to sneak into an antiquities museum after dark and avoiding the guards. Every time you do something that could be detected or alert the guards, you advance the die a face. If you force a lock, and that could be detected, you advance it. If you fail a feat test to sneak quietly, you advance the die. When the die reaches 6, the guards are alerted.

This rule saves you have to make dozens of tests for each guard to see if you are detected or not as you make your way through the museum.

## USING A DICE POOL

One of the features of the counter is that you can see the counter counting up to the crisis point. If you want to see how close you are to success or failure, how a single failure can tip the balance.

A dice pool serves the same purpose as a counter, but you never know when the crisis event will happen.

Take 6d6 and put them to one side. This time when you get held up during the chase, or you make a noise when you are trying to be stealthy, roll the dice pool. You then discard any dice that show a 6.

The next time you are delayed or make a noise, roll the remaining dice pool, discarding any sixes from the pool.

When the last die is discarded, the crisis event happens, the suspect escapes, the guards discover your intrusion, or whatever you are tracking.

With the dice pool, you never know when the event will happen, maybe a single slip will see your quarry getaway. Alternatively, the pool may never empty itself.

This option means that you do not have the tension of knowing that one last slip will be enough to bring the crisis down on you.

What is does give you is uncertainty.

## THE ONCOMING HORROR

Whether you are facing cultists, dark magicians brought back from centuries back, or an industrialist conspiracy, they are unlikely to want you revealing their secrets or spoiling their plans.

The oncoming horror is a mechanism that operates in a similar way to the counter die.

Take a regular pack of cards and sort them into suits. Take the thirteen cards and shuffle them. Leave them face down.

When you have decided that you think you know who or what is behind the case you are investigating, the Oncoming Horror comes into play.

From the moment you think you know the dark force behind the case, every time you start a new scene from this moment on, you turn over the top card of the Horror deck.

When you turn over the Ace, the dark forces act against you.

This does not mean the end of the world! The dark forces acting against you could mean that a thug is dispatched to steal your research, destroy your notes, or even just to warn you off. It could mean that something worse happens, it is your story, you get to decide what would make sense.

Once the dark forces have acted, you shuffle the deck and continue to turn over cards with each new scene. The second Ace means an escalation in the threat against you.

## MORE THAN AN ACE

You can, if you associate different cards with different NPCs, horrors, or groups. For example, the Mi-go are very secretive and tend to use human operatives to achieve their aim of maintaining secrecy. You could decide that the King card represents an actual Mi-go encounter, where the Ace is a Pinkerton Detective working for them. This now gives you two chances of brushing up against the Mi-go with each new scene.

If a plot twist introduced a witches coven into your story, the Queen card could represent the coven.

In all cases, when one of the trigger cards is turned over, the dark forces act against you in an attempt to thwart you. The deck of cards is shuffled, and it repeats.

## COMPLEX PLOTS

You may start out by investigating an organization that wants to use an anaesthetic to introduce mind-altering and controlling drugs into the population. That is a nice starting investigation, but along the way, you may go





through a plot twist that introduces a coven of Salem witches to your story. You are now diverted from your original investigation, to look into the coven's activities.

You can use one suit of cards to represent the shadowy organization with the chemical scheme, and a second suit to represent the coven, so you shuffle 26 cards.

You could have a game with four different factions, each out to get you, and use the entire deck of cards. You could even assign different figures within the suits to different elements within each faction.

How detailed you want to go will depend on how you choose to play your solo game.

## NO CARDS?

If you don't have a pack of cards handy, you can replace it with a d12. The d12 is a much-underused dice in many games. It has a very similar probability as the 13 cards in a suit.

## CHARACTER CREATION

Frequently in solo play, it is necessary to boost a starting character. Eldritch Tales was written with 3-6 players in mind. In solo play, there is just you. One character cannot have the breadth of skills and professions that a group of investigators has.

These are three optional rules in Eldritch Tales that I suggest you apply.

The first is the bleeding and death option.

- ❖ At 0 hit points and below, characters are unconscious and bleeding out, losing 1 hit point each round until he dies at -10 hit points.

The gain from this rule is that it allows you to 'fail forward,' a defeat in a fight does not necessarily mean death. You could be captured and taken to another location. You are still in a bad position, and you could end up dead. Still, you also could possibly escape or convince your capturers that you are more valuable alive.

If you are in negative hit points and left for dead, an innocent bystander could always stem the flow of blood and get you to a doctor or hospital.

The second optional rule is the Exploding Dice.

- ❖ The second method is called "exploding dice." When maximum damage is rolled on a damage die (usually "6"), roll another d6 and add that result to the total damage. Every maximum roll results in another d6 roll.

In a game with guns and bullets, it can seem non-sensical that a character could be shot ten or twenty times every

month and never die. That is what can happen with increasing hit points each level, but damage not scaling.

Yes, this will make combat more dangerous, but if you approach Eldritch Tales as a game where you want to kill all the monsters, you will not survive very long.

If you know fights will be deadly, you will be encouraged to find other solutions.

The next options are the Pulp Adventures modifications.

- ❖ For each Attribute, allow players to roll 4d6 and drop the lowest die;
- ❖ At levels 3 and 6, each character may add 1 point to an Attribute of his choice;
- ❖ Increase the modifiers gained from Attributes, so that a score of 3 incurs a -2 penalty, while an 18 grants a +2 benefit;
- ❖ Grant every character maximum HP at 1st level;
- ❖ Increase the Maximum Insanity that a character can incur to the sum of a character's Wisdom and Intelligence.
- ❖ Allow characters to "heal" Insanity every day, as with hit point recovery.

The objective is to make your character more functional. By functional, I mean that higher attributes mean that you have more chance of making the attribute feats required to find the clues that drive the game. The slight increase in starting hitpoints has very little impact on the long term survivability. It is balanced by the exploding damage rules.

The insanity rules are important. In a group, the study of arcane texts and spells may be shared out around a few characters. In solo play, you will take every blow to your sanity. If you are going to take every point of sanity loss, you need a bigger stock of sanity to balance out the increased burden.

## INSANITY

Insanity, and the implied loss of control of your character may not work so well in solo play. You may roll for random insanities if you wish but I suggest that you pick (not roll) from this curtailed list.

### TEMPORARY

Blindness  
Confusion  
Fainting  
Panic  
Short-Term Memory Loss

### PERMANENT

Amnesia  
Compulsion  
Night Terrors  
Panic  
Phobia

These were chosen as they are the easiest to roleplay while maintaining a functioning character. Amnesia and Short-Term Memory Loss are interesting roleplaying challenges.





The available phobias can be chosen to mesh in with the cause of the insanity, reading a blasphemous text could give your character a phobia of entering churches, or insanity from encountering Night-Gaunts could lead to either night terrors or a Nyctophobia.

If you chose to roll for an insanity and you do not like or want to play the result, change it.

## HOW TO: SOLO A MODULE/INVESTIGATION

### The Tupilak

Solo playing a purchased module or investigation is different from putting a regular group through one. Still, some of the same preparation is required.

A scenario is often divided into five sections. **Information for the Referee**, gives an outline of the antagonist(s), the opening of the scenario, and how to involve the characters. **Investigations** describe various ways the player characters may learn more about the situation. **Scenes & Locations** outlines some of the places the player characters are likely to visit and certain scenes that they may experience. **The climax**, in this case, “**Confrontation at Chubb’s Point**,” outlines the climax of the scenario in which the party challenges Ehrenreich. Finally, “**Resolution**” discusses the awarding of experience and ramifications of the scenario.

## ORGANIZE THE ADVENTURE

What you need to do next is create what amounts to a flow diagram of the key points in the investigation. These are the things that **MUST** happen if your character is going to arrive at Chubb’s Point or the investigation is going to be completed. I suggest putting each Must Happen point on a post-it™ or sticky note.

In The Tupilak, the flow diagram would start with the museum, the robbery scene, and then branch out into the possible consequences. You will only likely follow one of these paths.

The scenes, the museum, the clinic, Igors apartment, and Chubb’s Point should all be added to the flow diagram.

If you are using the Oncoming Horror, Ehrenreich will interfere on an Ace (1 on the d12).

Now make a brief note for each important attribute feat or skill test, with the associated clue.

Finally, create a sticky note for each key NPC.

You can now rearrange the investigation. As you play through the initial scene in the museum and the robbery, you can group the location and NPCs (the thugs).

By separating the skill tests and feats from the locations, they are easy to move to where your character chooses to investigate.

## NO SURPRISES

One of the difficulties in running a published investigation is that you get to know the surprise ending before you start play. This is unavoidable. Without an over view of the entire adventure there is a danger that you could head off in completely the wrong direction, misinterpret clues or even kill off essential NPCs.



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