

# FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN

*Fear of the Unknown* is an investigative horror roleplaying game, powered by the apocalypse, about solving mysteries, encountering horrors, and how doing that changes you as a person. One of you will be the **Oracle**, or Game Master, in charge of coming up with the initial secret for the mystery that you're trying to uncover, and reacting to what the rest of you do. The rest of you will be **Investigators**, ordinary people who either seek out or are thrust into the secret horrors of the world. Each Investigator will need a copy of these quickstart rules, and it's not a bad idea for the Oracle to have one to reference too.

The next page has your character sheet on it, where you'll record your positive tags - short descriptive phrases of things you're good at or resources you have (which help when you **Engage Physically** or **Investigate**), your negative tags (which hinder when you Engage Physically or Investigate, but also grant you Humanity), your wild tags, including temporary tags and town tags (which can help or hinder you), and the three forms of experience: **Horror**, which you get when you **Encounter True Horror** and which you also add to that roll, **Humanity**, which you get when your negative tags are invoked and which you use to improve yourself, and **Foreboding**, which you get when you roll a 6 or below on any roll and which you use to affect the story outside yourself.

Before you each make your characters, together you'll make the town where your story will take place. The rules for that are on the page after your character sheet. Then you'll make your characters, with the rules on the next page. After that are the rules to Engage Physically and Investigate,

then Encounter True Horror, then the three options for what to do in your downtime - **Let the Horror Sink In**, **Take Care of Yourself**, or **Something Unexpected Comes to Pass**. These moves have options you'll mark off - you DO NOT GET THESE BACK unless something specifically says you recover them! This is why everyone needs their own copy of this handout.

If you're the Oracle, listen carefully to the ideas the Investigators have, and see if any inspire you to create a horrible secret they can try to uncover. If so, once they've all made their characters, hit them with an inciting incident that introduces them to the fact that there is in fact a secret to uncover, and ask them to pick what tags they want to use to start to Investigate it. Be sure to throw a few obstacles in their way with their negative tags.

From there, **play to find out what happens!** Whenever an investigator does something or is in a situation where it would make sense that they might die, then they need to Engage Physically - pick the tags they want to use and then roll to see if and how they use that to save themselves. Whenever they have questions they don't already know how to find the answers to, they need to Investigate - pick a starting question they want to ask, the tags they want to use to try to figure it out, and roll to see if they do, and what sorts of follow up questions they get to ask. And whenever they Encounter True Horror, don't forget to have them roll and add their horror for that.



# TOWN CREATION

Your game takes place in a small town that you and the players create during your first session. To create the town, ask the players each of these questions. Once you all arrive at consensus for the answer, everyone should write it down as a town tag on their character sheet. Town tags are wild tags that players or the Oracle can invoke in scenes that involve them. You can also mark them off instead of marking off an option on Engage Physically - sacrificing something in town to save yourself.

**1** - What's a local landmark? Gain a town tag, like *the abandoned quarry*, or *the statue of the beloved town founder*, or *the only diner in town*.

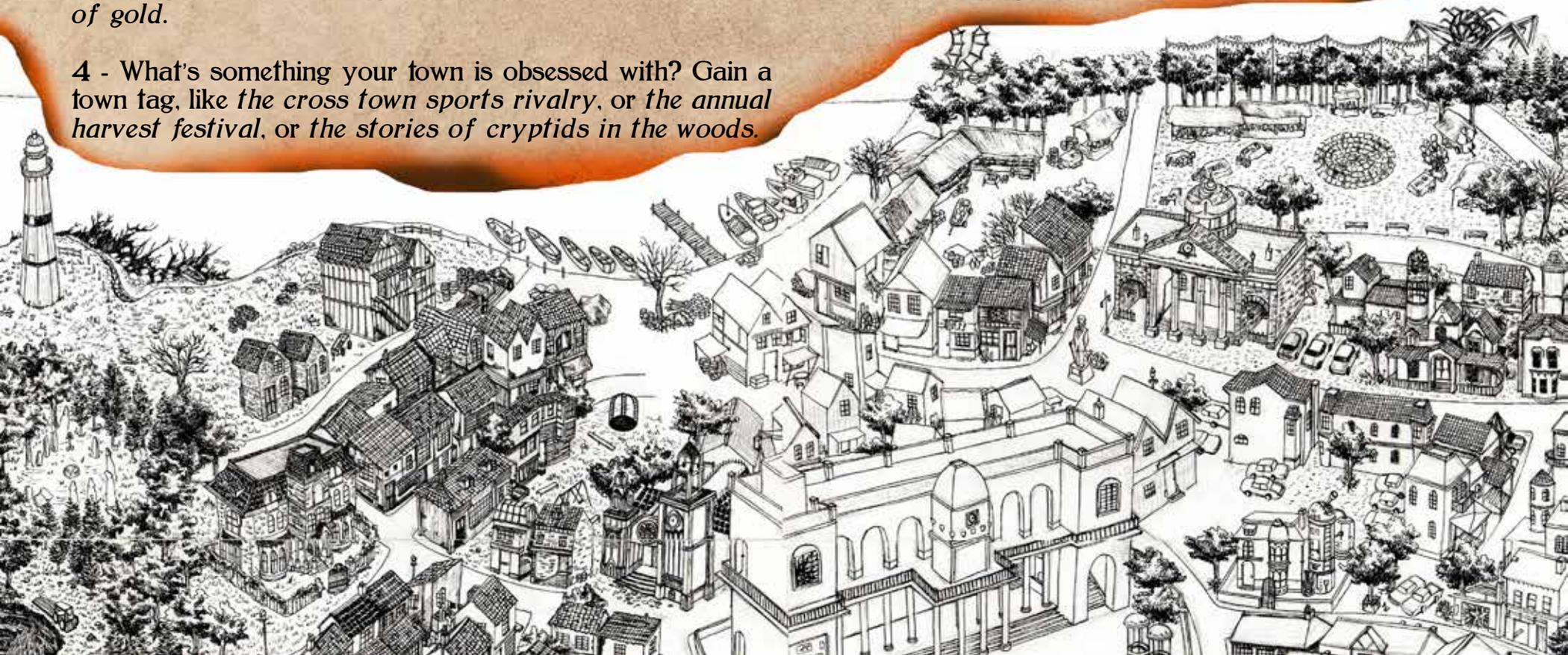
**2** - Who's someone that everyone in town knows - or at least knows of? Gain a town tag, like *the gregarious dean*, or *the slimy mayor*, or *the quietly intimidating crime lord*.

**3** - What's a group that at least a sizable portion of the town despises? Gain a town tag, like *the corrupt police*, or *the ivory tower university*, or *the biker gang with hearts of gold*.

**4** - What's something your town is obsessed with? Gain a town tag, like *the cross town sports rivalry*, or *the annual harvest festival*, or *the stories of cryptids in the woods*.

**5** - For the fifth town tag, ask the players which of the above questions they would like to repeat. Ask the question again, and everyone writes that new town tag as well.

After you have five town tags, ask each player to come up with one **rumour** they've heard around town - most likely, but not necessarily, about one of the above tags. These rumours aren't necessarily true, they're just things that their character has heard. It's up to you, the Oracle, to decide whether they're true or not.



# CHARACTER CREATION

To make your character, go through these questions and write the appropriate tag in the column on your character sheet. Don't worry about horror, humanity, or foreboding - you'll gain those later. You'll notice the character sheet also has a "bonds" section - you'll need the full rules to fill out that part!

**1** - What have you trained for the most in your life? Gain a positive tag, like *seventh generation farmer*, or *promising young mathematician*, or *golden gloves boxer*. Go to question 2.

**2** - Which do you value most - wealth (go to question 3), knowledge (4), or power (5)?

**3** - You had to do something bad for cash once. What was it? Gain a negative tag, like *gambling addict*, or *wanted criminal*, or *owe the Don*. Go to question 6.

**4** - What's something you already know a bit about, and want to know more about? Gain a positive tag, like *obscure geography facts*, or *astronomy enthusiast*, or *this weird old book I found*. Go to question 7.

**5** - You haven't always used your power for good. What's one time you regret using it? Gain a negative tag, like *don't know my own strength*, or *quick to anger*, or *I've made enemies*. Go to question 8.

**6** - You've got money, and you know how to spend it. What did you buy? Gain a positive tag, like an *ancient amulet*, or a *seat on the University board*, or a *well maintained automobile*. Go to question 9.

**7** - You learned something you'd rather not have. What was it? Gain a negative tag, like *I talk to myself*, or *I know what the Dean did last summer*, or *I need to know more about that old stone circle*. Go to question 9.

**8** - All that effort's paying off. What have you been doing? Gain a positive tag, like *weightlifter*, or *police detective*, or *authority in her subcommunity*. Go to question 9.

**9** - Have you been more of a risk taker in life? If so, go to question 10. Or did you try to take things easy? In that case, go to question 11.

**10** - What was the biggest thing that went wrong in your life because you took a risk - or something that stopped you from going as far as you wanted? Gain a negative tag, like *permanent limp*, or *serious debts*, or *someone has a grudge*. Go to question 11.

**11** - What's something you're good at that people might not guess? Gain a positive tag, like *chess master*, or *bar room brawler*, or *former sailor*. Go to question 12.

**12** - Has anything else gone seriously wrong with your life? If so, go to question 13. If not, go to question 14.

**13** - What's still afflicting you? Gain a negative tag, like *Innsmouth look*, or *discriminated against by bigots*, or *cursed*. Go to question 14.

**14** - What's a connection you particularly value? Gain a positive tag, like *parents with interesting jobs*, or *my pet dog*, or *drinking buddies*. Go to question 15.

**15** - What's your favorite thing about yourself? Gain a positive tag, like *good dancer*, or *I always have something useful in my bag*, or *my analytical mind*.

**16** - What is something you like about yourself that some people consider a character flaw? Gain a wild tag, like *I know I'm gorgeous*, or *I'm the life of the party*, or *I'm convinced I'm the smartest person in the room*.

# INVESTIGATE

Whenever you want to talk to the regulars at the dive bar the fishers frequent, interview prominent townsfolk, interrogate a suspect, research at a library, or you're *investigating*. Ask a question, then roll 2d6 and add the number of relevant positive tags (up to 3) minus the number of relevant negative tags (up to 2). You pick the positive tags, and the Oracle picks the negative tags. Rolling higher is better. The tags that you invoke represent the resources and abilities you're attempting to pull into play to answer the question, and you, the Oracle, and the other players will construct a scene using them and the result of the roll as the prompt.

On a 7+ you find a **clue** relevant to the question you were asking.

This could be the answer, or it could be learning where you can find more information. If you get more than one clue, you can use those questions to follow up on your first clue.

**10+** In addition to the clue you get for hitting, you may choose one.

○You find something useful. You gain a wild tag, such as *a shotgun*, or *blackmail on that obnoxious dilettante*, or *a fragment of an*

*Elder Sign*. Mark this off.

- You find an additional clue, on your choice of subject. Mark this off.
- Someone notices your investigation, and takes an interest. Recover the other two options.

**7-9** In addition to the clue you get for hitting, you may choose one.

- You find an additional clue, relevant to the question you were asking. Ask a question about your current investigation, then mark this off.
- You find an additional clue, unrelated to the question you were asking. Ask a question about something else, then mark this off.
- While you're investigating, something significant happens elsewhere. Recover the other two options.

**6-** You gain Foreboding and the Oracle chooses one or more of the following options.

- Your negative tags that were invoked come into play in a major way.
- You can still discover something, but you have to make some sort of sacrifice or bargain. If you do, gain a temporary tag the Oracle will tell you.
- You can still discover something, but someone who assisted you must suffer in some way.
- You learn what you wanted – and something you didn't want to know.
- You learn a horrible secret that tests your mettle, and have to Encounter True Horror.
- Someone else learns something about you that you'd rather they didn't.
- You end up in a treacherous situation, and likely have to Engage Physically.
- Something bad happens to a town tag that was invoked.
- Some other devious scenario of the Oracle's invention.

Two investigators examine evidence left behind by a serial killer whose shadow looms large over their investigation



# ENGAGE PHYSICALLY

Whenever you're attacked by an antagonist, be they monster or man, or you confront them yourself, or you have to Engage Physically with any threat that might kill you, roll 2d6 and add the number of relevant positive tags (up to 3) minus the number of relevant negative tags (up to 2). You pick the positive tags, and the Oracle picks the negative tags. Rolling higher is better. On a hit (7+), you accomplish something, and probably don't die. Combat is frequently a single engage physically roll, or a single roll per investigator.

**10+** Choose one.

○Your experience, and your success at it, affects you for the better. You gain a positive tag, such as a *sense of calm*, or a *sharp eye*, or even (with the Oracle's approval) *I know what hurts them*. Mark this off.

○You find something that gets you out of the situation safely. You gain a positive tag, such as an *old camp axe*, or a *cultist's decoder ring*, or a *truck*. Mark this off.

○You make or reveal a connection with an NPC who helps you out. Gain a wild tag naming them, such as *my study partner Szandor*, or *my childhood bestie Rebecca*, or *"Laces" the hobo*. Mark this off.

• You succeed, but barely, at the skin of your teeth. It costs you something. Mark off a positive or wild tag, or a town tag that was invoked on this roll. Recover one of the other three options.

**7-9** Choose one.

○Succeed without a scratch. You pull off what you meant to do and manage to avoid any further negative effects, for now. Mark this off.

○Suffer a minor injury - lose a temporary tag you invoked in this scene, or gain a temporary tag, like *I smacked my hand*, or *I'm feeling dizzy*, or *I lost my glasses*. Mark this off.

○Suffer a chronic injury - gain a negative tag, like *horrific scar*, or *missing an ear*, or *permanent limp*. Mark this

off.

○Suffer a crippling injury - gain a negative tag, like *broken leg*, or *missing eye*, or *lost a hand*. If you don't receive medical attention soon, choose an additional result on this list. If you do, replace the negative tag with a wild tag, like *uses a sturdy silver-topped cane*, or *wears a mesmerizing glass eye*, or *has an artificial hand*. Mark this off.

• You manage to escape unscathed, but something in town doesn't. Mark off a town tag you or the Oracle invoked in this scene.

○Die. Work with the Oracle to describe how you die.

**6-** You gain Foreboding and the Oracle chooses one or more of the following options.

• Your negative tags that were invoked come into play in a major way.

• You die. This should only happen in particularly dangerous or foolhardy situations.

• You mark off a 7-9 option and something else goes wrong.

• Something terrible happens to someone who assisted you.

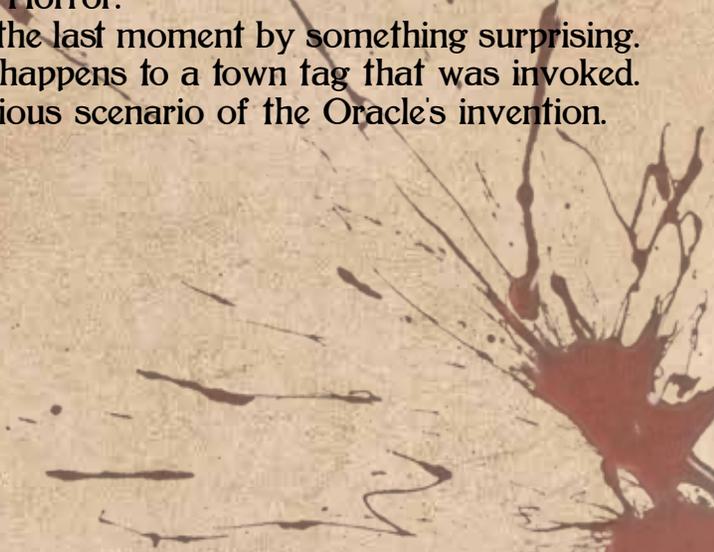
• You find yourself in a yet more dangerous position.

• Something truly horrible happens, and you have to Encounter True Horror.

• You're saved at the last moment by something surprising.

• Something bad happens to a town tag that was invoked.

• Some other devious scenario of the Oracle's invention.



# ENCOUNTER TRUE HORROR

When you see a creature that science tells you shouldn't exist, or learn something that defies your understanding of reality, or encounter a scene of terror beyond anything most people will ever see, or otherwise encounter true horror, roll **2d6 and add your horror** - there's no limit to how much. Rolling lower is safer.

Roll plus horror. Whatever the result, you gain a horror.

**13+** Choose one of the following.

- You lose yourself in the horror. Perhaps you find something compelling in it and switch allegiances, or perhaps you retreat into your mind and never leave the fetal position again, or perhaps you retreat to your room to write a mysterious tome for the rest of your life. You(r character) almost certainly becomes an NPC. Mark this off.
- You're barely holding on. Mark off a positive tag or a town tag. Perhaps you're too traumatized to use a particular skill again, or perhaps later tonight you sleepwalk and burn down the town mall, or perhaps you lash out and break your favorite tool in the process.

**10-12** Choose one of the following.

- You take foolish or selfish action, endangering yourself and/or the people around you. Perhaps you rush at a monster you have no hope of defeating, or perhaps you read the spell you just discovered aloud from the tome before anyone can stop you, or perhaps you attempt to flee in a way that makes it harder for your allies to follow. Mark this off.
- You experience the sudden shock to your system in a way that permanently alters your sense of self. Gain a wild tag, like *prophetic nightmares*, or *foolhardy bravery*, or *obsessive paranoia*. Mark this off.
- Your experiences are wearing on you. Gain a negative tag, like *pareidolia (seeing patterns that aren't there)*, or *losing moments of time*, or another trauma symptom or mental illness that you as the player want to explore with your character, and which your fellow players and the Oracle are comfortable with having in the game. Recover the other two options.

**7-9** Choose one of the following.

- You notice something useful in the fear, and gain a clue. Perhaps you spot a potential weakness in the creature that just surprised you, or notice a useful detail in the instructions for the spell in the tome you just read, or piece together a pattern you hadn't noticed before. Ask a question about what you've encountered and mark this off.
- You spot an opportunity, and put either yourself or someone else in danger to take advantage of it. Perhaps the spell will require a sacrifice, and you don't tell one of your fellow casters that, or perhaps you can leap in between your allies and the creature to aid their escape, or perhaps you knock one of them down to aid your own. Mark this off.
- Your trauma is starting to pile up. Gain an additional horror. Recover the other two options.

**6-** You gain foreboding, and aside from becoming slightly more horrified, nothing else bad happens - yet.



# DOWNTIME

Whenever you have some downtime and are not actively investigating a mystery, you can do one of these moves.

## Let the Horror Sink In

Unlike adding positive tags when rolling for mundane moves, where the most you can gain is +3, there is no upper limit to how much horror you add when you Encounter True Horror (and remember, higher results are worse) - if you have 7 horror, you'll be adding +7 to all of those rolls, so you'll likely want to get spend some of it sooner or later.

Spend three **horror** and gain one of the following effects.

- You can no longer rely on something you used to depend on. What was it? How will you still make partial use of it, or its replacement, going forward? Mark off a positive tag. Gain a related wild tag. Mark this off.
- Your experiences leave you shaken and with new problems. What are they? Gain a negative tag. Mark this off.
- Your experiences are making you lose part of yourself. Which part, and why? Mark off a positive tag. Recover the other two options.

## Take Care of Yourself

Spend three **humanity** to gain one of the following effects

- You heal from your wounds. How do you do so? Emergency surgery in a hospital, convalescing at home, black market opiates? Recover a marked off option on *engage physically*. Mark this off.
- You're able to cope with things better than expected. How so? Recover an option on any move - mundane, horror, or downtime. Mark this off.
- You're not just trying to recover - you're actively improving. In what way? Practicing with a weapon or martial art, studying a new subject, going shopping? Alternatively, this can also represent revealing an aspect of your past that had not yet been brought up in the story. Gain a positive tag naming your new (or newly revealed) ability or resource.
- You're working on overcoming your weaknesses.

Which one are you currently working on, and how are you improving? Get a cane to help with your chronic limp, go to therapy to rein in your neuroses, pay off a debt? Mark off a negative tag, and gain a related wild tag.

## Something Unexpected Comes to Pass

Spend three **foreboding** to gain one of the following effects.

- There's a new landmark, organization, or prominent player in town. Who or what is it? A biker gang that just rode into town, a new bookstore that opened on Main Street, a famous scientist who just joined the university? The town gains a tag naming them or it.
- Someone you know comes to town. Who are they? A cousin from the country, a colleague returning from an expedition, a touring musician you grew up with? What is your relationship like? Gain a wild tag naming them.
- Some new and interesting item arrives on the scene. What is it? A rare tome at the University library, a strange statue at the art gallery, a mysterious machine in a warehouse by the docks? If you can manage to gain possession of the item, gain a wild tag naming it.

