

Unspeakable

A role-playing game of weird horror by Ray Otus

The year is 1881. Unspeakable horrors exist beyond the knowledge and understanding of common people. You have seen these horrors and, along with other members of the secret Order of Lamplighters, have vowed to uncover and thwart them, if possible.

To play, you will need one six-sided die (d6) and four Fudge dice (4dF), as well as pencils and a copy of rules (or at least the play aid on the reverse) for each player. Fudge dice have two each of the following faces: ☒, □, and ☑. The game is best with 3-6 players and sessions take 2-3 hours each. In each session, one player will be chosen as the Keeper and will represent the unspeakable threats as well as help tie the group's fiction together. Other players will each take on the role of a Lamplighter: an investigator of supernatural horror and champion of light.

Create characters. All players should create an investigator. The Lamplighters come from all walks of life. They communicate by coded letters and meet in back rooms to discuss odd clippings and rumors, swap encounter stories, or prepare forays against the darkness. To create a character, 1) choose a profession and write it on an index card (or the play aid). Your profession is a word or short phrase describing the character's core set of skills, like "History Professor" or "Town Drunk". 2) Choose a period appropriate name and write a 50-word biography; use full sentences. 3) Underline 5 traits, words or phrases in your biography and take 5 tokens. (The play aid has bubbles you can fill in instead.) Tokens are spent during the game to influence the dice; they are recovered only at the start of each session. 4) List three foundations of your sanity: things like faith in your country, loved ones, or your financial security. As these erode, so does your volition and wellbeing. When your last foundation collapses, you must narrate a scene in which your character dies, disappears, goes mad, or otherwise ends his or her story.

Start the game. Set out the d6 with the 1 face up to represent Peril. Each player then makes up and shares a different rumor, scrap of news, or plan to provoke/uncover malevolent entities. Players discuss and decide which item to pursue. A player whose news item or plan was *not* selected, then volunteers or is elected to be the Keeper.

The investigators take turns making scenes, beginning with the player whose item was selected. When it is your turn, your investigator is the focus. Any number of characters can be in a scene, but only yours is the focus. Players without a character in a scene may claim and play any non-player characters introduced by the scene-maker; otherwise the Keeper plays them. The Keeper only makes a scene when Peril reaches 6. Consequently, the Keeper's investigator is never the focus; that character is busy elsewhere or is working behind the scenes.

When you make a scene, choose a time and place, who is present, and what is going on. Take control of the narrative, telling everyone what happens until the Keeper calls for a roll, which usually happens when your investigator attempts something that is difficult, dangerous, or opposed. You may initiate dialogue with other investigators or ask players what their characters are doing in the scene. When choosing a time for the scene, you can jump

backward (a flashback) or forward, skipping hours, days, even months. Do your best to build on the fiction of other players. And if you can't think of a good scene, ask other players for ideas!

When the Keeper calls for a roll, roll 2dF, +1dF if the character's profession applies, +1dF if the character is risking physical or mental injury. (The Keeper will tell you how many to roll.) Then assign one die to each column: Clue, Peril, and (if applicable) Harm. Set aside the extra die, if there is one.

After assigning dice, the Keeper may use one or more tokens (the Keeper begins with five, just like the other players) to hinder the dice. For each token spent the Keeper may decrease a die one step, from ☒ to □ or □ to ☑. Or, if the character in focus had a relevant Harm leftover from a previous action, the Keeper can spend a token to switch two assigned dice!

Investigators may improve the dice, by spending one or more tokens of their own. Each token spent increases a die one step, from ☑ to □ or □ to ☒. When an investigator spends a token, however, the player must cite one of the character's relevant traits and explain how it applies (a different trait for each token spent).

The Keeper reads the dice, saying what happens as a result of the investigator's action. The situation always changes after a roll, for good or ill. After the Keeper has finished, the next investigator starts a new scene.

Peril represents the ever-growing threat of encountering the unspeakable. Assigning □ to Peril will cause it to increase 1; ☑ will increase Peril by 2. If Peril reaches 6, the Keeper immediately gets to create a scene in which an unspeakable threat manifests and every player rolls 1dF (and no other dice) for Harm! In this case, every investigator is in focus. Players may use tokens to reduce/avoid Harm. After the scene is over, Peril is reset to 1.

Clues are complete and reliable if you assign ☒. They may also contain a false element □, or be generally unreliable ☑ while still containing some truth. "Clue" means anything that moves the investigation forward. It can be re-interpreted according to another goal and read as a success ☒, mixed/marginal success □, or failure ☑. Clue is also used if you attempt to harm someone or something. (The Keeper will tell you if things are vulnerable to an attack. If you try to cause Harm, roll as normal. If you assign ☒ to Clue, you succeed. The die you assign to Harm, assuming you could also be harmed in the exchange, only applies to your character.

Harm can be mental, physical, or even social. It is avoided when you assign ☒. It lasts *through* your next scene if you assign □ and for the rest of the session if you assign ☑. Players record harm as a descriptive word or phrase (e.g. "Concussed") that the Keeper supplies. If a character in focus has an applicable Harm when rolling, the Keeper may switch two assigned dice (see above). If a character takes a third Harm, the Keeper crosses out a foundation (once per session only). The player must explain this loss in a future scene.

Weird Horror works by building contrast between the defined, historical, mundane world of the characters and the undefined, mutable, weird world of unspeakable threats. Two things will destroy this contrast: over-explaining the unspeakable and/or putting fanciful elements (steampunk inventions or casual wizardry) in the hands of characters.

Unspeakable v3.6 © Ray Otus 2015 was inspired by the weird fiction of Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Clarke Ashton Smith, William Hope Hodgson, H.P. Lovecraft and others. The game borrows ideas from Vincent Baker's *Otherkind Dice*, Meguey Baker's *Psi-Run*, and Ken Hite's *Trail of Cthulhu*. Find more of Ray's games at www.jellysaw.com.

Fold inward.



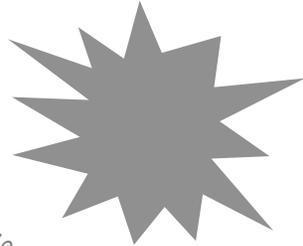
WHEN YOU ROLL

Roll 2dF (always),
+ 1dF if your profession applies,
+ 1dF if you risk Harm.

- Assign dice in the gray stripe.
- The Keeper may spend tokens to hinder.
- Then players may spend tokens to improve.
- The Keeper reads the dice
- The next player starts a new scene.

PERIL!

- No increase
- Increase 1
- Increase 2



- *Always assign 1 die.*
- Track Peril with a d6 here ↕
- When Peril = 6, the Keeper creates a scene. In which everyone rolls 1dF for Harm and may spend tokens to modify the result. Afterward, reset Peril to 1.

CLUES

- Reliable & complete (Success)
- Mostly reliable (Mixed Success)
- Mostly unreliable (Fail)

- *Always assign 1 die.*
- “Clues” can be anything that moves the investigation forward.
- When attempting violence, cause 1 Harm on a [+]. When attempting to heal, heal 1 Harm on a [+].

HARM

- None
- Through Your Next Turn
- Until End of Session

- Assign 1 die *if* Harm is possible.
- The Keeper tells you what Harm to write on your card.
- When you take a third harm the Keeper strikes out one of your foundations! (Once per session only.) When they are all gone, your story is over.

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Name

Profession

Biography & Traits

Foundations

- _____
- _____
- _____

Tokens

- ○ ○ ○ ○

