

ON THE GREAT GAME AND THE PREPARATION

Finally, I am in town. I have just one moon cycle to prepare for the Great Game on the Full Moon of Halloween. What is this game? To put it simply, when the moon happens to be full on Halloween, the boundary between our world and the cursed universe of the Elder Gods is at its thinnest. This is the night when the gate between the worlds can be opened, and this is the night when the bearers of forbidden knowledge meet for the Great Game. The Changers, tempted by the chaos and the cosmic darkness, want to open the Gate and give the Earth back to the Elder Ones, who ruled our world aeons ago. The Keepers are trying to stop them. They have always succeeded so far.

This time, however, everything can change, so I should be as concentrated as possible. Every night I need to make my move and step back as soon as I am done with my errands to let the other players act.

First, I collect the ingredients — household items, herbs, cemetery findings of the most disgusting qualities. Sometimes what you need is a piece of cloth you cut from some woman's dress in the street!

Then I see what I can do to complete one of the lesser rituals; I perform them to earn the support of the most dangerous beings from where space and time do not exist. If I don't have the ingredients I need, I create essences in my alchemy laboratory.

More than once, I will have to fight the most appalling creatures — from the rotting walking dead to the town police. The defeat will cost me my health, my mind, my reputation. Apart from that, some players are my rivals, and I need to track them down.

But I am strong. The greatness of my goal gives me power.

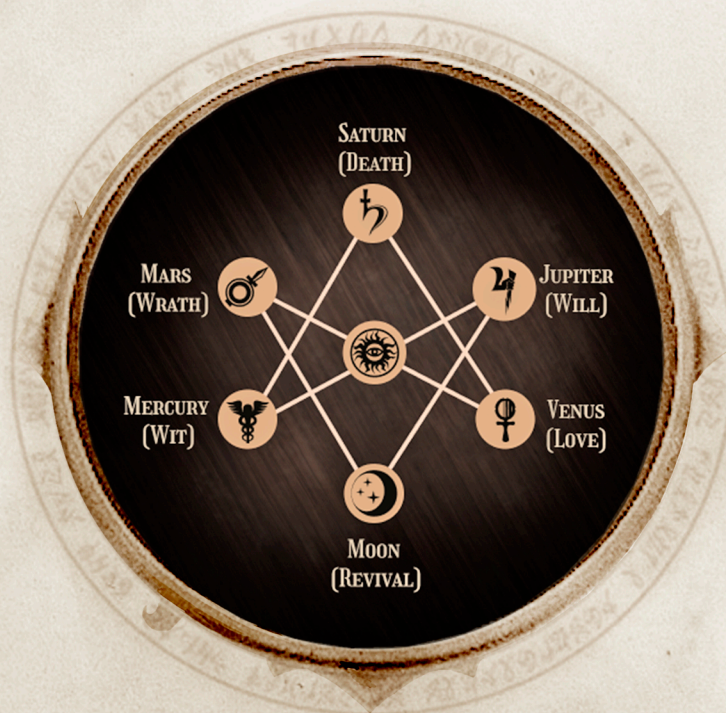


ON INVOCATION OF GODS IN LESSER RITUALS

The visions are becoming stranger and stranger, I wake up in the middle of sleep with terrible headaches, but I cannot permit myself to give up. I need to continue the rituals. And I will be rewarded with Their gifts.



For the rituals, I use the ingredients I collected.
Every ingredient contains two of the six primary elements:



To summon a god, I activate the lines of the ritual by placing on the altar the ingredients or essences with corresponding pairs of elements.

I need to complete as many lesser rituals as I can because if I do everything right, the gods will give me the knowledge those peasants can only dream about...

ON THE LOCATIONS WHERE MAGICAL INGREDIENTS CAN BE PROCURED

The lesser rituals require certain magical items. I searched around, and it looks like I can find everything I need in three places: the town, the cemetery, and the hollow.

I limit myself to one location per night to avoid arousing suspicions, getting into fights, and losing my mind, as neither humans nor eldritch spirits of this town ever seem to sleep.



ON ALCHEMICAL METAMORPHOSES

I think I found a way to receive additional favours from the gods I summon in lesser rituals. Rituals are much more efficient, when instead of simple ingredients I use pure essences received in the alchemical laboratory. Also, this is how I can replace the ingredients I didn't find. For every procedure of alchemic transmutation I take three ingredients, which I connect according to this formula:

$$AB \leftrightarrow BC \leftrightarrow CD = AD$$

Let's assume I need an ingredient that contains ☾ and ♂ Normally, it would have been a bottle of wine. But I don't have wine, only a human bone, a death cap mushroom, and a pumpkin. A bone contains ♂ (I need it) and ♀ A death cap contains ♀ and ♂ A pumpkin contains ♂ and ☾ (I need it). I place these three ingredients on the alchemy board, the elements in the middle double and precipitate, and I receive the essence of ☾ and ♂ which I can use in my ritual.





Like connecting domino tiles, but the primary elements in the ingredients can be flipped. Apparently, I can make essences out of other essences. There's a lot of potential for the experiments. I have heard that some alchemists can preserve the ingredient in the middle, but I have not figured out how to do it yet.





ON COMBAT WITH BLASPHEMOUS CREATURES

Last night I came across a repulsive creature. It emitted the stench of an opened grave, its livid claw clenched a human thigh bone, and the holes in its skull that once might have been eyes glowed with hunger. I put a lot of work into putting that vicious beast down for good. Below, I will explicate how it can be done.

First, I roll my Attack Dice, which have one of the primary elements on each side. These dice are used to predict the future and to manipulate reality.

To work with the dice, I emanate the hexagram. Each hexagram element corresponds with some combat action. I can inflict physical wounds on enemies, try to  break their will or  dodge the attacks.



Apart from the standard attack  there are other types of attacks, such as  true death,  fire or  beast force. Different enemies may be vulnerable to certain types of attack, not being able to dodge or block them.

WOODEN STAKE



Wooden stakes are especially dangerous against cemetery dwellers.

When I equip an item or ability, its hexagram overlaps with my hexagram, hiding some of the action icons and adding new ones. The actions not covered by the item's hexagram remain available to me.

After choosing the item, I let my opponent rolls their dice. After that, I can decide whether I want to reroll some of my dice. If I fight using an item, combat begins immediately after reroll. If I am barehanded, I can take another reroll before combat begins.

Here are three possible outcomes of combat: I kill the enemy and collect the remaining ingredients subdue their will and get a new minion; or, if I fail, I have to escape the location. Thanks to Nodens, this time I won, but next time I should be more careful.

ON METHODS OF SOCIAL DEDUCTION

One of the lesser rituals told me that five other cultists are planning to participate in The Great Game. There are three Changers against three Keepers. So, two of them are on my side. Now I need to figure out who is who. I developed a method of how to do it:

1. FIND OUT EVERYONE'S ROLES.

Each cultist in a team has one of the magical artefacts: the Wand, the Lamp, and the Book. Every time when three of us participate in a common event, we have different roles. That means, if I am a Wand Holder, the two others are a Lamp Bearer and the Book Master.

2. PAY ATTENTION TO GIFTS AND CURSES (KEEP BLUFFING IN MIND).

The cultist who sent a gift is most likely an ally. The one who cursed you is an enemy. But don't rely on this too much, if they are cunning enough to enter The Great Game, they definitely can bluff.

3. USE THE DEDUCTION PANEL.

I developed a device to track my social deduction. It shows all links between cultists who participated in common events. I mark my suspicions above everyone's portraits — I put a key sign for potential Changers and a keyhole sign for Keepers. If someone sends me a gift, I mark them as a possible ally, if someone curses me, I mark them as an enemy. Common events can also show who is who: if someone participated in several events that went well for the Changers, it is likely that they are a Changer.



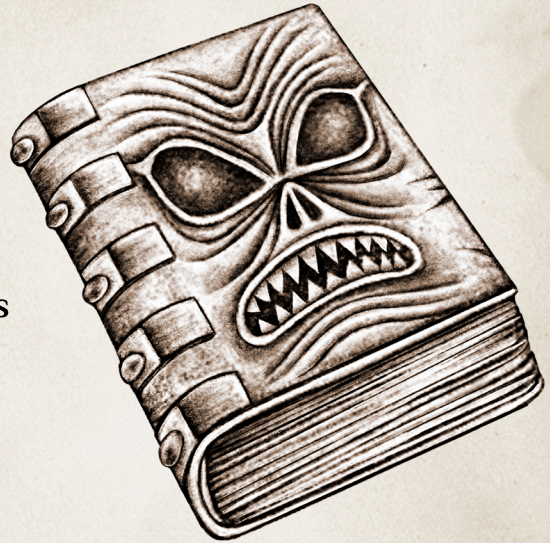
NB: After figuring out the alliances, it is important to weaken the enemies before the Final Ritual by cursing them, and to send healing potions and useful things to the allies.

ON THE ROLE ARTEFACTS



Every role artefact has unique magical properties. Before the Final Ritual, *the Wand Holder* can use it to cure themselves, but the Wand Holder of another team will be cured, too.

The Book Master can change the reality by appealing to the Chaos, which can be useful when looking for ingredients but can also make one insane.



The Lamp Bearer looks beyond the appearance and can see pure essences within ingredients without resorting to alchemy. However, the real power of these artefacts will not be disclosed until the Final Ritual.

ON FAMILIARS

I should give credit to the ones who are outshined by their powerful owners, but whose bites are not less painful because of that. I am talking about the familiars, the cultists' animal companions. And these are not merely cute pets, every familiar has a magical talent, and every one is dangerous in its own way.

Familiars give valuable advice to their masters, and each one has a unique ability, which can be an advantage in The Great Game. The synergy between the cultist and the familiar is crucial.

THE FINAL RITUAL: NOT AWE, BUT WISE ACTION

It is coming, the day when the fate of the world will be decided — whether it will be returned to The Great Old Ones, or remain as it is. I cannot let myself lose, the price of the defeat is worse than death.

For the Final Ritual, I will use the Dice of Fate, which have eight sides. Along with the six signs of primary elements, they have two sun signs. Each player will have a primary sign, according to their place on the hexagram, while the sun symbolizes the gates.

Every round, the team that has more gate points, unlocks a seal on the gate. The first team to unlock four seals wins.

When the dice roll the enemy's symbol, their body suffers. If the dice roll the ally's sign, they remove their injuries. If there is my own symbol on the Dice of Fate, I can activate the Role artefact.

In the Final Ritual, the role artefacts are used in a different way. The Wand strengthens the teammates, giving them additional dice. The Book cures the injured and even resurrects the dead. The light of the Lamp and the shadows it creates destroy the minds of the enemies.



Madness is dangerous because an insane player will not be able to influence the Gates, and their attacks will harm both enemies and allies; they can even harm themselves. But if Fate is on their side, they can heal their mind by rolling three ☺ signs.

The Great Game is an unsafe affair. But only it can decide who is worthy of the great power...

Notes

I bought these notes in the most peculiar little shop. An occult stand in a travelling circus - who came up with such nonsense?

The merchant smiled creepily when I asked him about the price. "You can't pay with money here," he said. I wonder how long his business will last like this.

...

I can't stop thinking about the book. I went back to the shop to talk to the merchant, but the circus was gone. The locals say that it's been half a century since the circus stopped there, and something terrifying happened then. When I tried to ask around, an elderly woman spat in my face, and a couple of men threatened to break my bones and have me arrested. I don't like this eerie town. I should go back to London as soon as I can.

...

Why does the cat talk to me every night? How do I even have a cat?

...

I need to understand what is going on. I found a bag of dice with the same symbols as in the book in a drawer yesterday. I rolled them, and someone screamed in the street.

Interesting coincidence.

I feel a strange smell and see the colours I have never seen before.

...

The cat has been living with me for a week, but I haven't fed it yet. I wonder how it sustains itself.

...

Cops are watching my house. Or I'm paranoid.

...

My cat found a police baton and dragged it home like a dog to show me. He's amusing.

...

I found what my cat eats. Now I know why our house smells funny.

...

A crowd of people with torches and pitchforks came to burn my house tonight.

They were raging.

I rolled the dice and said the words to calm them down.

They calmed down. The torches went out.

Cat says good job.

...

I need to talk to the merchant and understand what is going on. The key is in the book. I have almost all the ingredients for the first ritual, I only need a pinch of cinnamon. I'll have to go back to town. Cat is hungry.

