

A Few House Rules for Arkham Horror

by *Richard Launius*

Arkham Horror is an adventure game that draws from both the stories of HP Lovecraft as well as the imaginations of the players. This aspect of the game is very much aligned with the play of any role-playing game and one of the primary goals of the **Arkham Horror** design was to create the feeling of being these stories, taking many role-playing concepts and bringing them to a board game format. Therefore, **Arkham Horror** is very different from most board games as it is more focused on the adventure for the sake of adventure, rather than winning or losing. In fact, a well-played loss can often be as much fun to the players as a victory. It is the story that is important; that and the fun the players can have immersing in it.

Having fun playing **Arkham Horror** is as much about the creativity and imagination of the players as it is about the various encounters and battles within the game. Therefore, like most role-playing games, people should feel free to craft changes to the game to make it more enjoyable for their gaming group. This statement in no way means that the rules are incomplete, but rather that the rules are a sound basis for play that can be altered by consent of the players prior to starting to better meet the gaming style and experience level of the collective players. The House Rules below are just some that I most often use to toughen the game for more veteran players, soften it slightly for novices, or just add a little more flavor and fun. Feel free to use some, none, or all in your games as they best fit the personality and experience of your players.

Game Preparation:

Rule 1 – Two Monsters on First Gate: In the Setup of the game – when placing the first open Gate draw and place 2 Monsters on the gate rather than 1. Additionally, if playing with 4 or more players, have 2 Monsters appear each time a new Gate is drawn.

Reason for House Rule: From an adventure perspective, this sets the tone early, especially with first time players, that bad things are happening in Arkham. From a game play perspective, this offers more opportunity immediately for Monsters to move and for the Investigators to kill some monsters quickly. If using the continual 2 Monsters Appearance as new Gates are revealed, this puts more pressure on the players of games with 4 or more players to battle the Monsters or they will quickly begin to see the Terror Track rise, and battling Monsters will mean they cannot just hold all their Clue Tokens for Sealing of Gates.

Rule 2 – Choosing Investigators: At the start of play, randomly deal 2 or 3 Investigator Cards to each player. Players must choose their Investigator from those dealt to them.

Reason for House Rule: *Prohibits always using the same Investigators, but still allows for some choice. This assignment process forces the players to use different Characters from game to game, and therefore different strategies. It also increases game replayability and overall fun.*

Playing the Game:

Rule 3 - Gate Locations Unknown: All gates are placed face down on the board rather than face up. With this rule, the gate is only revealed when an Investigator goes to the location and travels through it. At the point an Investigator enters the location and announces they are traveling through the gate, flip the Gate over and the Investigator immediately moves through it. (This rule works best with Rule 4, below.)

Reason for House Rule: *Creates mystery and makes the game even more interesting. No longer can any players rush their Investigator to a Gate because they know it is the Dreamlands and they feel more comfortable about traveling to that location than the Abyss. This rule does make the game a little more difficult, but the trade-off is it creates a lot of dialog and role-playing with a creative crowd.*

Rule 4 – Choose to Travel through Gate: Locations with gates do not automatically suck the Investigator through. Moving through a Gate is a choice for the player, unless a Gate opens at a location where an Investigator just happens to be visiting – then they are sucked through as noted in the Rules.

Reason for the House Rule: *Enables players more choices and opportunities to have Arkham Location Encounters. My logic for the rule is that the gate is not huge, probably only 12 feet by 12 feet and may even be in the basement of the building. The areas at each location are large - buildings with multiple floors and rooms, or acres of thick woods so there is an opportunity to still have normal encounters in a location even though nasty creatures may be slithering through a gate in the basement below...*

Rule 5 – Insanity results in Permanent Memory Loss: Going insane causes the Investigator to Discard 1 Spell or 1 Skill to meet the Requirements. This replaces the loss of half their items. Loss of half their Clue Tokens is still applied – things they have forgotten from the trauma.

Reason for the House Rule: *It seems like a logical effect of the insanity, but it also makes strong fighters respect the monsters that inflict greater Sanity Loss when they realize it may cost them a valuable Skill or Spell.*

Rule 6 - Monster Guards Sucked Through Closing Gates: Monsters Guarding a Gate (on the same space as the gate) are sucked through the Gate when it is closed. Players do not get to claim these monsters as trophies, only the Gate.

Reason for the House Rule: *The creatures did not see (or understand) the actions of the Investigator, so were caught off guard and sucked through the gate just like any monsters that match the symbol on the Gate Token. This is helpful with novice players and a lot of Monsters roaming the board and especially valuable for disposing of the stronger monsters. I primarily use this House Rule when playing with 2 monsters appearing at each new Gate.*

Rule 7 - Sanity Loss for Trapping Another Investigator in a Gate: The Investigators are responsible for their actions, so sealing a gate that traps another Investigator with no way to return to Arkham is something that should haunt them. Therefore, in the event this should happen (and it did happen at Origins '05 – in fact a mother ignored her daughter's pleas from the other world and shut the gate rather than waiting a turn for her to return), the Investigator should lose D3 Sanity (roll a die and divide the result by two, rounding up). This is one example – the players may expand this to include any activity in which a player inflicts damage knowingly to another player.

Reason for the House Rule: *Adds to the role-play aspect and fun of the game. This rule existed in the original Arkham Horror, but of course the penalty for being trapped in a Gate in the original was death. While we have softened that somewhat in the current edition with only penalizing the trapped Investigator by sending them to Lost in Space & Time, they still lose half their items and half their Clues. Therefore the Investigator that causes such pain (even if there is good reason, like making sure no new monster appeared) should be haunted by their actions.*

Rule 8 – One Round of Combat – Free Evade: With novice players I give the option to continue to fight after one round or to get a free Evade, which ends their turn and allows them to leave this space freely on the next move. They may not have an Encounter at this location as they are hiding from the monster that is there. This does not free them from any new monster combat as the result of Monster Movement in the Mythos Phase.

Reason for the House Rule: *This rule enables the novice players to leave after one round of combat without being reduced to zero Stamina in subsequent rounds. Therefore they can choose to go to the hospital on future turns and heal rather than being carted there by an ambulance and discarding half their items, spells and money. This rule speeds up game play by not only reducing what may be fatal combat rounds, but more importantly by reducing the turns required for injured Investigators to build back up by replacing the stuff they lost.*

Rule 9 – No Victory for Sealed Gates: When I want a tougher game, especially with veteran players, I use the No Victory for Six Sealed Gates rule. This has no effect on play other than removing one of the paths to victory. Sealed Gates continue to prohibit new Gates from opening at the location, and are therefore still valuable in the play of the game.

Reason for the House Rule: *Toughens the game and forces the players to use new strategies. Should be considered by experienced players, especially if they win more than 50% of the games they play.*

Rule 10 – Double Gate Appearance: With five or more players, begin having 2 Gates appear once the Great Old One's Doom Track reaches 6. This rule is a change to the Mythos Phase in that after the first Mythos Card is drawn and all actions completed, a second Mythos card is now drawn and only the Gate portion of this second card is used. If the location on the second card does not have a Gate and is not Sealed, a Gate is placed on that location. If the location has a Gate on it – 1 Monster comes through that Gate < not the other gates on the board as in a normal Monster Surge. If the location is Sealed by an Elder Sign, the Elder sign is broken and discarded. No Gate appears, but the warding has been broken by the will of the Great Old One.

Reason for the House Rule: *Toughens the game considerably for larger group play. Also starts out slower and puts more pressure on later in the game. Creates a random end game – when only two spaces are left on the Doom Track the Great Old One could arrive at any turn.*

Rule 11 - Great Old Ones Really Great: For players that would liked a tougher end game, I recommend the following House Rules:

- 1. Sanity Rolls for the Great Old One using their Combat Modifier as the Sanity Modifier. If failed Discard half your Items, half your Spells, and Half of your Allies (rounding up). Then the Start of Battle begins combat with the Great Old One per normal Rules.**
- 2. If less than 4 investigators in the game – treat 4 as the “to hit” number each round of combat. This means it takes 4 hits to remove one token from the Great Old One's Doom Track. And no – hits are not banked from round to round if less than 4, they are lost after the Investigators complete their attacks and the Great Old One attacks.**
- 3. Special non-combat abilities may not be used unless no attack is taken and may only be used once the entire battle. In other words using a some skill or item to restore Health or Sanity may only be used once in combat with the Great Old One.**

Reason for the House Rule: *All these rules significantly make it tougher for any size group to successfully defeat the Great Old One. The final battle is intended to be a last*

ditch effort to save Arkham – not the primary plan of any team for Victory. These House Rules assure veteran players cannot just stock up weapons and wait for the big guy to arrive.

Rule 12 – Keeper of the Old One: this rule is for one player to act as the game keeper or game master and control the flow of the game. Works best with large numbers of players (especially if they are new to the game). The keeper controls all mythos draws, monster movement, and encounter card resolution. For Mythos Card Draws, they draw 2 cards and put one in play each turn, discarding the other. They move the monsters according to the card draw, adjust the Doom Track and Terror Track when required, they fan the encounter cards for locations and let the player at that location pick one that they then read to the player. They also draw any gate cards for other world encounters and read the encounter to the players. In essence they control the flow of the game for the enjoyment of the players like any game master in a role playing game.

Reason for the House Rule: Speeds up play for larger and new play groups. Represents the expert on any rule issues, and sets the mood by reading the encounters and forcing players to quickly make their choices. Often, an experienced player in this game can increase or decrease the play of the game by the Mythos card they put into play each turn to better match the adventure to the players.

Solitaire Play:

Rule 13 – Team of Investigators: In solitaire (and 2 player games) deal 6 Investigators and keep 4 to play. The game is played using 4 players as the base for victory conditions, monsters, combat with the Great Old One, etc...

Reason for the House Rule: It is more fun and more competitive to play as a team of Investigators. This way, if one Investigator is having tough luck, the others can keep you in the game. The team creates more strategic opportunities for the player, and in the end makes for a better adventure and gaming experience.

That is all for now. Feel free to use any of these rules, or make up your own as you become more experienced with playing the game. I have enjoyed reading some of your ideas on the message board and encourage you to continue to craft the game to your group's level and enjoyment. **Arkham Horror** is a place that should encourage your imagination and take you and your friends on an adventure into the world of HP Lovecraft. So play the game, let your imaginations soar, kill a few monsters, go a little crazy, and enjoy your visit to Arkham.