IN THE HEART OF DARKNESS

RULE BOOK

Contents

Credits

GAME DESIGN
The Moongrel

GAME DEVELOPMENT
Aaron Beedle (paperweightgames)

ARTWORK
Neri, Alexander Vasilyev,
Putra Kristiawan

RULE EDITING / WRITING
Aaron Beedle (paperweightgames)
The Moongrel

**SCAN FOR
GAMEPLAY VIDEO
AND FAQ**

COMPONENTS

The Western Shores
(Expansion Map)

Game Board
the Map

37 Spawn cards and
6 Event cards

7 Protagonists cards

5 Custom Dice

61 Loot Cards / Personal Items

7 Crawler Standees

7 Protagonist Standees

12 Curse Cards

Player Reference Cards

3 Devourer Standees

1 Guardian Standee

8 Gate Damaged tokens

4 Gate Destroyed tokens

5 Trap tokens

8 Strength tokens

1 Rescue Boat token

1 Guardian health token

10 Sanity tokens

6 Quest Complete tokens

1 Darkness token

Drawn to a mysterious island in search of fame, wealth and salvation, several individuals meet at this place of shadows only to be held there by misfortune as their ship is stranded upon the rocks. However, there is something more than misfortune here... some force. It seems escaping the Heart of Darkness is not as simple as leaving the island. Worse still, the island is seemingly devoid of life, the only inhabitants a number of hideous Creatures that move with a dark purpose. Vowing to leave no one behind, you dismantle your long range radio and split the Radio Parts between each person. Search the island for tools to survive and complete Quests that might help you unravel whatever forces hold you captive on this island.

SETUP

Rule modifications for Solo Play, Expansion and variable setups are on page 13.

1. Unfold the board and lay it flat on the table.

2. Give each player a Player Reference card and a random Protagonist card from those that have not yet been assigned to a player this game. This will be placed in front of them and the corresponding Protagonist standee should be placed at the Stranded Ship Location on the board if this is the start of the game, or at the Village if the game has already begun.

3. Each player takes the Personal Item card belonging to their Protagonist into their hand, using the reference Icon at the top right of the card to locate it. All unused Protagonist and Personal cards are then set aside for later.

4. Shuffle the Spawn and Event cards to form the Spawn deck, shuffle the Curse cards into a deck, then shuffle the Loot cards into a deck. Each player then draws 3 cards from the Loot deck and discards 1 of them, placing discarded Loot cards in a face down pile near the Loot deck.

Loot Cards

5. Place all tokens in a stock where players can reach them.

6. Set the Darkness track to 1 by placing the Darkness token on the first position.

How to Win

All players win or lose together. To win all players must be at the Harbour whilst the face-up Rescue Boat token is there, and between them have at least as many completed Quests as the amount of Protagonists.

Quests are hidden in the Loot deck and players can find them by using the **Loot Action** at certain Locations. Players will have to keep the Creatures under control as they search, and be very selective about when they communicate, so that they don't break **The Silence**...

How to Lose

If the Darkness Track increases above 7, OR if a Protagonist is killed and there are no surviving Protagonists, all players lose the game.

Players will want to avoid increases to the Darkness Track during the game, as this makes it increasingly more difficult to survive on the island!

The Rescue Boat

The Loot deck contains 5 'Radio Parts' Items. A player at the Lighthouse can play 3 of these at once and when they do so they must place the Rescue Boat token face down at the Harbour and increase the Darkness Track to 5 if it is lower.

At the end of the next round the Rescue Boat token is flipped face-up, indicating that the boat has arrived at the Harbour and is ready to ferry the Protagonists to safety if they've completed enough Quests.

Protagonists

During their turn each player takes **Actions** with their Protagonist, a bold but vulnerable guest on this strange island. Each Protagonist may carry up to 5 cards.

Strength

Impacts the amount of dice this Protagonist rolls in Combat and when playing Trap cards. Tokens are provided to track lost Strength.

Sanity

Impacts the amount of dice this Protagonist rolls when playing Ritual cards. Tokens are provided to track lost Sanity.

Reference Icon

Each Protagonist has a unique icon that indicates which Personal Item card they gain when brought into play.

Skill

Each Protagonist has a unique Skill that modifies core rules when playing them. These are passive effects that apply at all times they are relevant.

CAPTAIN CHRISTOPH YEATS

IGNORE THE FIRST TIME THE CAPTAIN LOSES STRENGTH ON EACH OF HIS TURNS.

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Killed Protagonists

If a Protagonist's Strength or Sanity is reduced to zero, or if they have 4 or more Curse cards, they are killed and the Darkness Track is increased by 1. They shuffle their Curse cards back into the Curse deck, discard all of their Trap tokens and return their Personal Item card to the game box.

That player then sets their Protagonist's Profile card aside with all of their cards placed underneath it, except for their completed Quests, which they keep. They lay their Protagonist Standee down at its Location to indicate it has been killed.

When a player starts their turn and has no Protagonist, they follow **Setup** steps 2 and 3 and then continue their turn as normal. If no Protagonists are available, players have lost the game.

Recovering Cards

As an Action a player may take all cards from a killed Protagonist at their Location, then return that Protagonist's profile card and Standee to the game box. This Protagonist cannot be returned to play during this playthrough.

The Silence

The island is draped in an oppressive silence that even the winds dare not disturb. Something listens through the darkness. Radios are not advised.

Players who communicate during the game will be cursed.

Any statement, question or reaction (such as cheering or grunting) that might influence another player's decisions at any point during the game is considered a breach of The Silence and the offending players must draw two **Curse cards**.

They are then immune from The Silence rule until the active player begins their next Action, or play proceeds to the next turn or phase.

Players CAN teach or clarify rules, though general chatter is not advised as it may obscure whether or not The Silence rule has been breached.

For example: Player A states that they are going to visit the Old Military Complex on their turn. They must now draw two Curse cards.

Player B reacts by tutting and slapping their hand down on the table because they also needed to go there, but they don't want to abandon the gates.

They must now draw two Curse cards.

This example illustrates why players might want to avoid announcing their actions BEFORE taking them, because it invites other players to offer feedback on whether they approve of those actions or not.

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Round Structure

Phase 1: Spawning

At the start of each round reveal as many cards from the top of the Spawn deck as the amount of players. This will mostly reveal Spawn cards which add Creatures to the map, but sometimes Event cards will be revealed, changing the behaviour of the Creatures already in play.

Spawn Card

NORTHERN GATE

CHAPEL

VILLAGE

Devourer icon

Guardian icon

Placing Creatures

For each Spawn card revealed a Crawler standee must be placed at one of the three illustrated Locations depending on the Darkness Tracker value;

At Darkness 1-2 the top Location is used.

At Darkness 3-4 the middle Location is used.

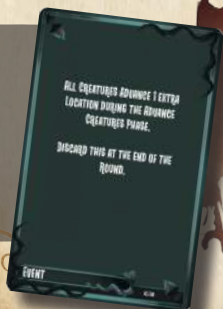**At Darkness 5+ the bottom Location is used.**

Some Locations on Spawn cards have a Devourer icon or Guardian icon, in which case those Creatures are placed instead of a Crawler. Whenever the Guardian Icon appears on a Spawn card, set the Guardian's health to the current value of the **Darkness Tracker**.

Placing a Creature does not cause any damage to Gates or Protagonists.

If no Creature of the correct type is available in the stock, the last player to take a turn can choose which Creature is placed, or place none if the stock is completely empty.

Event Cards

The Spawn deck provided with the core game contains 6 Event cards, punishing rule modifiers that remain active until their discard requirement is met.

ALL CREATURES ADVANCE 1 EXTRA
LOCATION DURING THE ADVANCE
CREATURES PHASE.

DISCARD THIS AT THE END OF THE
ROUND.

EVENT

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Darkness Track

This tracks the Darkness on the island, increasing each time a Gate Destroyed token is placed on the map, a Crawler enters the Heart of Darkness Location, or a Protagonist is killed. The Darkness Track impacts the difficulty of Creature Spawning and also tracks and defines the Guardian's health each time it is (or would be) placed on the map.

Here the Darkness Track is at 1, and so the top Location on Spawn cards is used to determine where Creatures will be placed.

Phase 2: Player Turns

Each player takes one turn in an order of their choosing. Players are allowed to state "I would / would not like to take my turn next" without it being a breach of **The Silence**, and should use this to establish who will take the next turn.

On their turn a player resolves Actions one at a time, taking up to as many Actions as their Action Allowance, detailed below.

Once all players have taken a turn, they move on to **Phase 3: Advance Creatures**.

When ending their turn, if a player has more than 5 cards in their hand, they must discard non-Curse cards from their hand until they hold no more than 5 cards.

Action Allowance

Each Protagonist can make a limited amount of Actions on each of their turns, based on the amount of players (not Protagonists);

1 PLAYER:	**5 Actions (for each Protagonist)**
2 PLAYERS:	**6 Actions**
3 PLAYERS:	**4 Actions**
4 PLAYERS:	**3 Actions**

Actions Allowance changes when players
Drop In and Out Mid-Game

Actions

On their turn a player may use each Action as many times as they wish, in any order, as long as they do not exceed their **Action Allowance.**

Move

Move your Protagonist to a Location on the map that is directly connected to their current Location by a path (see **Move** on page 10).

Talk and Trade

Talk privately with a single player of your choice at your Location. You can also Trade with them, which allows you both to look at each other's cards and give any amount of them to each other (except **Personal Items** and **Curse cards**). This also allows you to give and receive Trap tokens.

Some means of talking privately include pen and paper, whispering in ears or sending text messages. You can also present a lot of information just by showing the player your cards.

Initiate Combat

Once per turn per Location. Roll to kill Creatures at your Location. See '**Initiate Combat'** on page 11'.

Assemble, Consult, Repair or Move through Tunnels.

Only available at the relevant Locations. See **Location Actions** at the back of this rulebook.

Assemble. Move.

Consult. Repair.

Free Actions

Free Actions are ignored when calculating whether a player has reached their Action Allowance for each turn, but otherwise function the same as Actions.

Play a card

Reveal a Loot card from your hand and resolve its effect. Then discard it, or return it to your hand if it is a **Personal Item** card. **Weapons** may also be returned to your hand by their own effects.

Discard a card

Place a card from your hand face down into a pile next to the deck from which the card was originally drawn. **Curse** cards can only be discarded by their own effect.

Set Trap

Place one of your Trap tokens at your Protagonist's Location. See **Traps** on page 10 for more details.

Loot

Only available at Locations with the Loot icon. See **Location Actions** at the back of this rulebook.

Loot.

Locations and Cards

The references for Locations and Cards are found on the last pages of this rulebook.

MOVE

The Protagonist standee is moved to a Location on the map that is directly connected to its current Location by a path.

Movement and ranges are often referred to as 'X spaces'. For example 'within 3 spaces' would be anything that could be reached by following 3 or less paths.

Note: Moving to Locations containing Creatures does not cause damage to a Protagonist.

THE HEART OF DARKNESS

When a Protagonist enters this Location, they draw a Curse card. When a Crawler enters this Location, it is removed from the map and the Darkness track is increased by 1.

TRAPS

Traps are represented by Trap tokens which a player gains when they successfully play a Trap card. Protagonists may carry any amount of Trap tokens and placing them is a **Free Action**.

Traps will kill all Creatures that enter their Location within a single **Player Turn** or **Advance Creatures** Phase. If a Trap kills or damages any Creatures, it is returned to the token stock at the end of that Turn / Phase.

A Trap Token

GATE LOCATIONS

There are three Gate Locations on the main map; Northern Gate, Eastern Gate and Southern Gate, and one on the Expansion map called the Butcher's Gate. Each Creature moving out of a Gate Location that does not have a Gate Destroyed token on it will place a Gate Damaged token there instead of moving.

The **Repair Action** can be used at Gate Locations to remove Gate Damage tokens from them at a cost of 1 Action each.

DESTROYED GATE

When a Gate has a 3rd damage token placed on it, its damage tokens are removed and re-placed with a **'Gate Destroyed'** token, and the **Darkness Tracker** is increased by 1. A destroyed Gate cannot be repaired and will no longer hinder the movement of Creatures.

A Destroyed Gate token

Initiate Combat

Pay 1 Action to roll to attempt to kill Creatures at your Location. You may not use this Action more than once per Location during each of your turns.

First you may play one of your Weapon cards if you wish, before then rolling an amount of dice equal to your Protagonist's current Strength, remembering to apply dice modifiers from played Weapon cards and other effects.

For each Hit you roll you may kill a Crawler or Devourer at your Location, or spend Hits to reduce the Guardian's health by the amount spent. The Guardian is killed ONLY when it reaches zero health, and killed Creatures are returned to the stock.

Rolling Dice

The amount of dice a player rolls is typically based on either their Strength or Sanity. There are two Hit faces on each dice, each represented by a heart image. Each of the other 4 faces are blank, representing a 'Miss'.

If modifiers would cause you to roll no dice during a roll, you can still roll one dice. Only 5 dice are provided with the game, so for larger rolls you may need to re-use some dice.

The Hit Icon on a Dice

Phase 3: Advance Creatures

The Crawlers stumble towards the Heart to nourish and empower the Darkness, and the Protagonists are pursued by the Devourers, or worse, The Guardian.

First, each Protagonist at a Location containing any Creatures loses 1 Sanity.

Next, Move each Creature in play one space. The Guardian is always moved first, then Devourers, then Crawlers, following the instructions below;

- **The Guardian and Devourers move towards the closest Protagonist, favouring those who more recently took their turn if there is a tie.**

- **Crawlers move along the shortest route towards the Heart of Darkness.**

The Guardian

This Creature is different from the others. When players are instructed to place The Guardian on the map, the Guardian health token is placed on the Darkness track at the current Darkness level, regardless of whether the Guardian is already in play or not. This token is used to track the Guardian's health, and the Guardian can ONLY be killed by reducing its health to zero.

In Combat at The Guardian's Location, rolled Hits can be used to decrease the Guardian's health instead of removing other Creatures. When an effect or rule that kills a Creature (e.g. Traps, Ritual of Banishment) is applied to the Guardian, it will instead reduce The Guardian's health by 3, ONLY killing it if this then reduces its health to zero or lower.

If the Guardian's health is reduced to 0, it is killed and removed from the map.

Movement Scenarios

Below are the resolutions for the interactions that can occur when players are instructed to Move Creatures. If multiple are applicable, resolve them from top to bottom on this list;

Creature Moves to Trap

When Creatures enter a Location containing a Trap token they are killed. That Trap token is returned to the stock once the Turn / Phase finishes, which means a single Trap can kill multiple Creatures if they all move to its Location within a single Player Turn / Advance Creatures Phase.

In this image the Guardian's health is at 3, indicated by the position of the Guardian health token on the Darkness track.

Creature Moves to a Protagonist

When a Creature enters a Location, if a Trap does not kill that Creature, each Protagonist at that Location loses 1 Strength.

Devourer / The Guardian Moves from a Protagonist

Each time a Devourer or The Guardian would Move whilst in a Location containing Protagonists they instead remain at that Location and each Protagonist there loses 1 Strength.

These Creatures will not damage Gates since they are no longer going to Move.

Creature Moves from a 'Gate' Location

Each time a Creature would Move whilst at a Location with 'Gate' in its name and no '**Destroyed Gate**' token, the Creature will remain at the Location. If there are less than 2 Gate Damaged tokens at the Location they place one more there. If there are 2 already, they remove them and place a Gate Destroyed token there.

Crawler Moves to the Heart of Darkness

The Crawler is returned to the stock and the Darkness Tracker is increased by 1.

End of Round

Once all Creatures have been moved, check the conditions under **How To Win** and **How To Lose** before continuing with another round of play.

Unsure How to Proceed?

Should there be a situation where no instruction is offered to determine how a situation would be resolved, the most recent player to start their turn will decide how to resolve the situation.

When rules on a card contradict this rulebook, apply the rules on the card.

Rule Variants

Note: You may wish to note any rule variants you choose to play with so that you do not forget you are using them.

Joining and Leaving mid-game

Players can drop in and out at the end of a round if they wish, so long as the Rescue Boat has not been summoned. A player dropping out is conducted as though their Protagonist was Killed.

See **Action Allowance** to adjust for changes in player count.

Solo Play

You can play alone by setting up two Protagonists and playing both. Reduce your card limit for each Protagonist to 4, 1 less than usual, and your **Action Allowance** is 5 per Protagonist.

Note that playing Solo invalidates the challenge presented by **The Silence** rules, and so whilst the above rules are intended to increase difficulty to compensate for this, Solo play and Cooperative play provide very different gameplay experiences.

Difficulty

Before beginning a game players should agree on whether any difficulty modifiers will be applied to the session.

Make the game...

a) Much easier: You may take cards you play back to your hand if you wish.

b) Easier: Each time any player kills the last Creature at a Location they may draw a Loot card.

c) Easy: When you Loot, you can move any one Creature, it doesn't have to be one of the closest to you.

d) Hard: Protagonists cannot Move out of a Location containing the Guardian.

e) Harder: For each Curse card in player's hands an extra Spawn card is revealed in the Spawn Phase.

f) Deadly: After each player's turn they roll a Dice. On a Hit, play out **Phase 3: Advance Creatures**. Once all players have taken a turn and made this roll, skip the standard Phase 3 and begin a new round.

g) **A Plausible Simulation of Hell:** In Phase 1: Spawn, each player chooses a Creature from the stock and places it at their Location.

Expansion: Western Shores

This expansion extends the play map, increases the presence of Devourers and The Guardian on the island, and presents players with more challenging and unusual Quests.

When playing with this expansion, remove the 6 core game Quests found in the Loot deck and replace them with the 6 Western Shores expansion Quests, which are marked with a compass icon at the top right of the Quest card.

The expansion also includes 12 Spawn cards which are marked the same way and should be shuffled into the Spawn deck.

Place the Western Shores map to the left of the main map.

Expansion card icon

13 SPAWN CARDS

6 QUEST CARDS

THE WESTERN SHORES (EXPANSION MAP)

Loot Cards Reference

There are 6 card types; Items, Weapons, Rituals, Quests, Traps and Curse cards.

Players hold these cards in their hand until they play and / or discard them. Players are limited to holding 5 cards at the end of their turn, at which point they'll have to discard cards before play can continue.

If any deck runs out, form a new one by shuffling the discard pile and then continue play.

ITEM CARDS

These are played for their effect and then discarded.

PERSONAL ITEM CARDS

Personal Item cards can never be Traded and return to the owner's hand after they are played and resolved. They are gained only when a player places a new Protagonist onto the map and discarded Personal Item cards are removed from play.

WEAPON CARDS

Each time a player Initiates Combat, they may play a single Weapon card to apply its effect to that Combat. The Weapon card is then discarded, unless stated otherwise.

RITUAL CARDS

Rituals allow Protagonists to communicate with the unnatural powers present on the island, offering powerful benefits, but also exposing the user to the Darkness.

When you play a Ritual card you roll as many dice as your Protagonist's current Sanity, applying the Sanity modifier shown near the bottom right of the Ritual card. This is considered an 'attempt' at the ritual.

If any Hits are rolled, the Ritual is as 'success' and you then apply its effect and then discard it. If you don't roll any hits, the Ritual has failed, has no effect, then you discard it and draw a Curse card.

TRAP CARDS

When you play a Trap card you roll as many dice as your Protagonist's current Strength, applying the Strength modifier shown near the bottom right of the card. If you roll any Hits you gain 1 Trap token from the stock. Once you have resolved this roll, discard the Trap card.

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Quest Cards

Quests must be completed to escape the island (see **How To Win** on page 5).

To complete a Quest, you must first meet the conditions under 'Begin Quest' to place it face up in front of you. Placed Quests belong to you, not your Protagonist, and are no longer considered cards in your hand. Completed Quests will remain with you even when your Protagonist is killed. Unless a Quest condition text requires otherwise, it can only be completed on your turn in Locations with no Creatures in them.

Once a Quest is revealed it can be completed through its 'Resolution'. An 'unlocked' token should be placed on each completed Quest, which also indicates that the owner has access to the Quest's 'Benefit' for the remainder of the playthrough.

A player may have any amount of completed or in-progress revealed Quests. Quest requirements cannot be completed at Locations containing Creatures.

Curse Cards

These cards contribute to the owner's card limit and unless stated otherwise cannot be Traded and can only be discarded by playing them.

Discarded Curse cards are shuffled back into the Curse deck. If a Protagonist has 4 or more Curse cards they are immediately killed and all of their Curse cards are shuffled into the Curse deck.

A player gains a random Curse card each time they;
- Enter the Heart of Darkness.
- Fail an attempt at a Ritual.
- Break **The Silence** (which results in 2 Curse cards).
- Are instructed to by a card's text.

LOCATION ACTIONS

On their turn a player may use the Action of their current Location if it does not contain a Creature and they have not already done so at that Location that turn.

LOOT
Location: Cemetery, Old Mine, Village, Old Manor, Cave, Stranded Ship.
Free Action.
Draw 1 card from the Loot deck. If any Creatures are in play, choose one closest to your Protagonist and Move it, following the **Advance Creatures** rule on page 11.

ASSEMBLE
Location: Old Military Complex
Spend 1 Action to play one of your Trap cards and automatically pass the Strength Test.

NO EFFECT
Location: Abandoned Hut, Swamp, Lighthouse, Chapel, Harbour, Old Mine.

MOVE
Location: 'Tunnel' Locations.
When using a Move Action at this Location, you may move your Protagonist directly to any other Location with 'Tunnel' in its name.

REPAIR
Location: 'Gate' Locations.
Remove any amount of Gate Damage tokens from this Location at a cost of 1 Action each (does not allow you to remove 'Gate Destroyed' tokens).

CONSULT
Location: Ritual Cavern
Spend 1 Action to play one of your Ritual cards and automatically pass the Sanity Test.