

# THE UNWORLD MYSTERIES

BY TOM GRAY

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a brown trench coat, stands in a dark, overgrown area at night. She holds a flashlight in her right hand, casting a beam of light. In the background, a dark, dilapidated building with a window that glows with a red light is visible. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and horror-themed.

**RULES-LITE, NARRATIVE-FOCUSED  
ACTION PACKED HORROR INVESTIGATIONS!**

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**In this game you will find clues, interpret meanings, confront bad-guys, flee from monsters, and solve mysteries.** Think Lovecraft, The X-Files, noir stories, detective stories, that sort of thing.

**The rules are designed to be fast paced and cinematic.** The mechanics are quite light, to help keep action moving, and the moment-to-moment gameplay is heavily driven by Gumshoe principles.

**The game is narrative-focused and “sandbox-y”.** Story, characters, fun, action and mystery are all more important than hard rules and mechanics. The mystery will twist and bend depending on what the investigators do, and how they do it.

**The game is designed to be dangerous!** Investigators can succumb to injury, death-defying stunts, or the forces of evil! Hey, nobody said that defeating the forces of the Unworld would be easy!

**The default setting of the assumes early 1900s noir-ish detectives,** but feel free to play with the setting to make it your own.

This game was written by me, Tom Gray. You can find me on Twitter at [twitter.com/tmcgry](https://twitter.com/tmcgry) or on Itch.io at [thunderchild15.itch.io](https://thunderchild15.itch.io)

Huge thanks and gratitude given to the games that inspired Unworld Mysteries. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **Call of Cthulhu**, by Sandy Petersen, Mike Mason, Paul Fricker, and Lynn Willis.
- **Trail of Cthulhu**, by Kenneth Hite.
- **GUMSHOE**, by Robin Laws.
- **Cthulhu Dark**, by Graham Walmsley.
- **Blades in the Dark**, by John Harper.
- **Apocalypse World**, by D. Vincent Baker and Meguey Baker.
- **Silent Legions**, by Kevin Crawford.

*This document assumes the reader has a base understanding of what RPGs are and how you play them. If you don't, that's OK! "Role playing games" covers a broad variety of games across many, many genres and styles. The internet has a wealth of information - start Googling, and happy playing!*

# CORE PRINCIPLES

## THE UNWORLD

**The Unworld is an infection in reality.** It bleeds into our universe from somewhere outside of our understanding. It is wrong and it is broken and it should not be. We do not understand its true nature.

**The Unworld is a place.** It exists outside of space and time. It is a diseased mirror to our world. It should not be able to sustain life, but abhorrent monstrosities call it home nonetheless. We know nothing about them.

**The Unworld is an energy.** It is everywhere and nowhere. Like radiation, it pours in through the cracks in our world, and every day those cracks grow a little wider.

**It is your job to stop the spread of The Unworld!** Nefarious cults, short-sighted gangsters, misguided scientists - all of these and more are trying to harness The Unworld for their own goals. They must be stopped!

*Think of The Unworld as 50% “the Force from Star Wars but bad” and 50% “the upside down from Stranger Things”!*

## CORRUPTION

**If you get too close to The Unworld, or it gets too close to you, it changes you.** Your mind breaks, your spirit cracks, and nightmares become your waking life. This is called Corruption.

**The GM will tell you when you gain Corruption, and what it does to you.**

Sometimes, it's just a warning - “you begin to feel light headed. What do you do?” If you push your luck, however, you are likely to end up in serious trouble...

**If your Corruption becomes too great, you can gain Trauma.** Trauma is explained in the “Your Investigator” chapter, but it is as it sounds - Trauma is something to be avoided!

## THE INVESTIGATORS

**It is the investigator's job to gather clues, interpret the evidence, and solve the mystery.** Along the way they are sure to run into danger and get themselves into more than one spot of trouble.

**The core mechanics of the investigators are to Investigate Clues and/or to Brave Danger.** These mechanics are covered in later chapters, but doing both of these activities are the primary times that investigators will be rolling dice.

**An investigator can always be of any nationality, race, creed or background.** The stories we tell in The Unworld Mysteries are not bound by the inequalities of the real world.

*Consider speaking with the GM and other players to see how you investigator could fit in with the group as a whole. A cohesive group of investigators is a successful group of investigators!*



# INVESTIGATORS

Take a Investigator Sheet (or a blank piece of paper) and fill in your:

- **Name & Background.** Anything you like.
- **Expertise.** Pick any 3 from the Expertise Table. Fit them into your Background if you want/can.
- **Appearance.** Roll 1d6 per column on the Appearance Table, or choose your own.
- **Corruption.** Starts at 1.
- **Fortune.** Starts at 1d10.
- **Trauma.** It starts empty.
- **Inventory.** You can carry whatever makes fictional sense for your character.
- **Assets.** Things you own that you don't carry on you. Cars, houses, etc.

## TRAUMA

**Trauma represents the physical and mental onslaught you take during your adventure.**

As your toils take their toll on your mind, body and spirit, your Trauma builds and builds until breaking point. This is represented by your Trauma Stack becoming filled.

**Your Trauma Stack has 2 levels: Minor and Major.** As the name implies, Minor Trauma is the lowest level, and Major is as bad as it gets.

**When you gain a Trauma, write it into an empty Trauma slot of the matching level.**

So if your GM says "you gain a Minor Trauma of panic", write the word "Panic" into an empty Minor Trauma slot.

**If you gain a Minor Trauma and all your Minor slots are already full, write it in a Major slot instead.** Trauma stacks up! So be sure to remove it as fast as you can.

**If you gain a new Trauma and your Trauma stack is already completely full, you succumb to your Trauma!** Regardless of whether your final Trauma was mental or physical, you can withstand no more. See the Death and Dying.

## FORTUNE

**Fortune is a dwindling resource that you spend to re-roll dice rolls.** Fortune can be used on any dice roll: there is no restriction to this. Investigation rolls, braving danger rolls, fighting corruption rolls - any time you roll a die, you can use your Fortune.

**When you call on your Fortune, roll your Fortune die.** As you can see on your character sheet, your Fortune starts at 1d10.

**As long as you roll anything except a 1, your luck turns!** You can now re-roll as many dice from the original roll that you want, and you get to keep either result on any die.

However, you must now reduce your Fortune die size by 1. Dice sizes are standard polyhedral dice sizes:

d10 → d8 → d6 → d4.

**If you roll a 1, uh-oh - your luck has caught up with you!** Your GM will tell you how and in what way. You still get to keep your original roll, but who knows when your bad luck will catch up with you.

**When you eventually roll a 1 on a d4, deal with your bad luck then reset your Fortune die to d10.** Bad luck can't last forever!

## EXPERTISE TABLE

<b>ACADEMIA</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research techniques.</li> <li>Comprehending complex files.</li> <li>Navigating bureaucracies.</li> </ul>	<b>ATHLETICISM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Running, climbing, swimming.</li> <li>Balancing, leaping.</li> <li>General stamina.</li> </ul>	<b>BIOLOGY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying common flora/fauna.</li> <li>Analysing biological samples.</li> <li>Examining cadavers.</li> </ul>
<b>CHEMISTRY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying substances.</li> <li>Reading scientific results.</li> <li>Handling laboratory equipment.</li> </ul>	<b>CONCEAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move unseen.</li> <li>Sleight of hand.</li> <li>Hide an object very well.</li> </ul>	<b>CULTURE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appraising contemporary art.</li> <li>Foreign customs and values.</li> <li>Aristocrats and high society.</li> </ul>
<b>DRIVING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Excellent driving of all cars.</li> <li>Competent with motorcycles.</li> <li>Find anomalies with vehicles.</li> </ul>	<b>FIREARMS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Taking aim and hitting a target.</li> <li>Weapon maintenance.</li> <li>Covering others.</li> </ul>	<b>HISTORY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ancient societies.</li> <li>Historic customs.</li> <li>Appraising antiques.</li> </ul>
<b>LEADERSHIP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructing others.</li> <li>Calming a rowdy mob.</li> <li>Organising groups of people.</li> </ul>	<b>LINGUISTICS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deciphering symbols.</li> <li>Deriving meaning from script.</li> <li>Rudimentary interpretation skills.</li> </ul>	<b>MANIPULATE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Charm/intimidate someone.</li> <li>Fast talking.</li> <li>Deceiving others.</li> </ul>
<b>MEDICINE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patching up a wound.</li> <li>Diagnosing ailments.</li> <li>Stabilizing a casualty.</li> </ul>	<b>MELEE</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hand-to-hand fighting.</li> <li>Subduing and restraining.</li> <li>Physical self-defense.</li> </ul>	<b>PARANORMAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occultism, mystics, shamanism.</li> <li>Star charts and moon phases.</li> <li>Fringe science (alchemy, etc.).</li> </ul>
<b>SKULDUGGERY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Breaking-and-entering.</li> <li>Scrutinising a crime scene.</li> <li>Hot-wiring a vehicle.</li> </ul>	<b>SURVIVAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Roughing it overnight.</li> <li>Living off the land.</li> <li>Utilising raw materials.</li> </ul>	<b>TINKERING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analysing machines or electrics.</li> <li>Machine repair/maintenance.</li> <li>Operating gadgets.</li> </ul>

## APPEARANCE TABLE

	FRAME	CLOTHING	TEMPERAMENT
1	Scrawny	Rugged, working, tough.	Skittish, jumpy, anxious.
2	Lithe	Uniform, outfit, work attire.	Stern, cold, withdrawn.
3	Stocky	Office, clean, formal.	Aggressive, harsh, hostile.
4	Tall	Casual, easy, comfy.	Loving, caring, kind.
5	Pudgy	Fancy, loud, splendor.	Depressed, sorrowful, sad.
6	Average	Modest, discreet, low-key.	Content, happy, joyful.

# INVESTIGATING CLUES

When you tell the GM that you are...

- *digging through papers and notes to glean facts.*
- *charming someone to make them reveal a secret.*
- *deciphering runes and carvings to understand them.*
- *exploring a space or location to find clues.*
- *studying an ancient tome to discern its knowledge.*

Or the GM tells you that...

- *You notice something move out of the corner of your eye.*
- *You realise something about the runes on the vase.*
- *You smell an odour rising from the basement entrance.*
- *You think you recognise a building in the background of a found photo.*
- *You hear a subtle but distinctive sound coming from inside the abandoned church.*

...or any other suitable form of active or passive investigating, and if the GM confirms that there is indeed information that you can find, roll:

+ 1d6 if an ordinary person could stumble across the information.

+ 1d6 if you can build on previous insights, or leverage an item you have.

+ 1d6 if you have a relevant Expertise.

and take the **highest value die**.

**If you roll a 1, 2 or 3, you learn the core information.** You can continue with your investigation.

**If you roll a 4 or 5, also learn something more.** The extra info will be helpful!

**If you roll a 6, you achieve astounding insight.** You learn everything there is to learn.

# BRAVING DANGER

When you tell the GM that you...

- Leap from rooftop to rooftop, chasing a shadowy character.
- Try and punch the security guard as they reach for their truncheon.
- Try and defuse the bomb as the seconds of the timer tick by.
- Try to Intimidate a brute into retreat.
- Shield a helpless friend or ally from attack using your own body.

Or the GM tells you that...

- A thug takes a swing at you with their crowbar or club.
- You need to take the wheel of a car while in a high speed chase.
- The cultists open fire on you with their revolvers.
- Someone you are sneaking past gets suspicious and looks your way.
- You must fast-talk and deceive your way out of a sticky conversation.

...or any other suitable form of danger-invoking situation arises, and if the GM confirms that there is a chance of you walking away from this, roll:

+ 1d6 if an ordinary person could pull through.

+ 1d6 if you can build on previous insights, or leverage an item you have.

+ 1d6 if you have a relevant Expertise.

and take the **highest value die**.

**If you roll a 1, 2 or 3, danger is upon you!** The GM will tell you any consequences you may incur.

**If you roll a 4 or 5, you pull through - just.** But there are unresolved consequences or problems.

**If you roll a 6, you also gain an upper hand.** The GM will tell you how you can leverage this.



# DOWNTIME AND RECOVERY

**Taking time to rest and recuperate is important for all investigators.** But remember that you will always be working on a deadline! While you rest and recover, the forces of the Unworld will be moving against you...

**When taking Downtime, commit to how long you are wanting to spend in Downtime.** The 3 levels are below, and you can also see the benefit you get for committing to each level.



**If you spend 30 minutes to an hour...**

*...catching your breath.  
...applying pressure to a wound.  
...resting your eyes.  
...quenching your hunger/thirst.  
...having a stiff drink.  
...being comforted by a friend.*

*...then you can remove 2 Minor Traumas OR reduce your Corruption score by 1.*

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**If you spend an afternoon...**

*...seeing a friend.  
...bandaging your bruises.  
...relaxing at home.  
...going for a walk.  
...indulging in a vice.*

*...then you can remove all Minor Traumas OR remove 1 Major Trauma OR reduce your Corruption score by 2.*

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**If you spend a day or two...**

*...staying with friends across town.  
...recovering in a hospital.  
...blowing off steam downtown.  
...visiting a loved one.*

*...then you can remove all Traumas OR reduce your Corruption score by 3.*

## FIGHTING CORRUPTION

The GM will sometimes tell you that you must “fight against Corruption”. Oh no! The Unworld is affecting you. This will happen at the GMs discretion.

**Roll 1d6.** You have no skills that help you fight the Corruption, so add nothing.

**If you roll EQUAL to your Corruption score OR LOWER, oh no!** Your investigator gains a new Trauma, and their Corruption goes up by 1.

**If you are called to fight against Corruption but your Corruption is already at 6, take a Major Trauma instead, and reset your Corruption to 1.** The influence of the Unworld is too much to bear! Your body and mind suffer as a result.

## DEATH AND DYING

Eventually, your Corruption and/or Trauma may become too great. Try as you might, it's a dangerous world out there! And thwarting the plans of the Unworld will make you many enemies.

**When you gain a Trauma and your Trauma stack is already full, your investigator succumbs to their Trauma.** Whether it be physical injury, mental destruction, or Corruption breaking away your spirit - your Investigator has met their end.

**Speak with the other players and GM and decide who you would like to play next.** The GM will often have an idea of who you could easily play as next. Maybe an NPC of an organisation you've already interacted with? An ally, or a friend? Feel free to suggest things to your GM and the group, and go with what excites you.

