

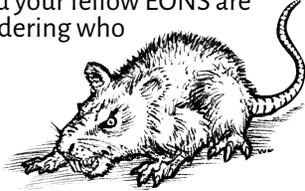
Books & Bullets

Players Guide

INTRODUCTION

You are a member of the Esoteric Order of Nameless Sensitives (EONS): a network of paranormal investigators. You have glimpsed unspeakable things that live in the darkness beyond the light of human understanding, and yet you still dare to seek them out – to warn others and perhaps contain or banish them if it is within your capabilities.

Walter Blackthorne, leader of your EONS cell, has just been found dead – in a locked room and ravaged as if by a wild beast! You and your fellow EONS are stunned, wondering who will be next!



Character Record:

Name

Style & Calling:

Portrait

Your Number

< for Books
> for Bullets
= Insight

CREATE CHARACTERS

Choose a style. No two players may choose the same style, draft them clockwise around the table..

Devious	Coarse	Ambitious
Jaded	Jovial	Flamboyant
Menacing	Naïve	Relentless
Proper	Seductive	Skeptical
Strict	Suave	Sympathetic

Choose a calling. No two players may choose the same calling, draft them in reverse order, the last to choose a style is the first to choose a calling.

Academic	Artist	Author
Athlete	Collector	Clergyman
Detective	Doctor	Dilettante
Journalist	Lawyer	Psychologist
Policeman	Scientist	Drifter

Choose a number from 2 to 5. Higher numbers are better at matters of the intellect (Books). Low numbers are better at action (Bullets).

Books: reason/logic, knowledge, study, investigation, culture, persuasion

Bullets: fighting, athletics, acrobatics, guns, stamina, intimidation

DISTINGUISH YOUR EONS CELL

Choose an edge. (As a group.)

Stylish	Wealthy	Allies
Archives	Informants	Diverse

Choose a weakness. (As a group.)

Exposed	Indebted	Hunted
Cursed	Haunted	Unpopular

Introduce your character. Briefly tell others about your look, reputation, or quirks. Specify your calling if it's broad in nature. For example, if you are an Academic, name your field. If you are an Artist, name your favored medium (paint, sculpting, piano, acting, etc.).

To begin the mystery, the Mythos Master (MM) will ask you some questions and frame the first scene.

ROLL THE DICE

When you do something risky, determine whether the action is governed by Books or Bullets. Then roll a d6 to find out how it goes. Roll another d6 if you're an expert. Roll another d6 if you're prepared.

Expert: You get this bonus die when the thing you are attempting is directly related to your calling: something you trained to handle.

Prepared: You get this die if you have taken time to set up your action in the fiction. Examples: you study a subject before setting out. You take time to aim before shooting or to prepare an ambush. You watch a person to learn their personality and habits before trying to persuade them to do something.

The MM has final say on how many dice to roll and whether Books or Bullets governs the action, based on the character and situation.

After rolling. Compare each die result to your number and count successes.

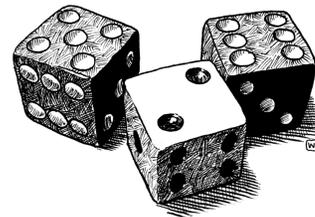
For Books you count the dice UNDER your number. For Bullets count the dice OVER your number. Dice ON your number are not successes, but have a special effect called Insight.

0 = It goes wrong. The MM says how things get worse, adding a complication, harm, or cost.

1 = You barely manage. The MM adds a complication, harm, or cost.

2 = You do it well.

3 = A critical success! You do it superbly; the MM may add a bonus effect.



INSIGHT

Any die you roll ON your number gives you an Insight; you may ask the MM one of the following questions and you will get an honest answer. You only get one insight per roll, regardless of the number of dice that hit your number.

- ▶ Is something concealed here?
- ▶ What happened here recently?
- ▶ What is about to happen?
- ▶ What should I be on the lookout for?
- ▶ What here is of use or value to me?
- ▶ Who's really in control here?
- ▶ What here isn't what it appears to be?



MYTHOS CHECKS

Regardless of a roll's outcome, the MM may reveal a horrific and supernatural truth to you, perhaps in response to an Insight question. When this happens, you *immediately* roll 1 to 5 dice as dictated by the MM, based on how mind-shattering the revelation is. If any die result matches your number, your sanity is rocked. The MM will choose two options from fight, flight, or freeze. You select which one of the two governs your character's reactions for the scene. Freeze doesn't have to be "do nothing;" it can mean hide, pray, surrender, frantically search, etc..

Helping & Hindering. You can take an action to try to help or hinder another's action, *if* the MM agrees it makes sense in the fiction. Say how you do it and roll to see if you succeed. If you do, add a d6 to that character's next roll or take one away – except a player never rolls less than one die! Also, helps and hinders never stack (max 1 each per roll.)

Books & Bullets

MM's Guide

YOUR AGENDA

As you follow the character's investigations, keep the following directives in your mind.

Ask questions and build on the answers.

Always address the questions to the characters. "Have any of you ever encountered the Society of Deep Drinkers before? What happened?" Or, "Your company is Indebted; what do you owe and to whom?" Their answers are now part of the story!

Foreshadow threats. Always show signs of something bad that is about to happen *before* it affects the characters. Then ask the characters what they do. Example: "When you pick up the strange artifact there is a squirming sensation in your brain and the hairs on your neck stand up. What do you do?"

Call for a roll when things are risky.

Risky means that not only is failure possible, but that failure would be *interesting* and *impactful*. The situation *always* changes after a roll, for good or ill. There are no "second tries" until the circumstances change.

Play to find out what happens. Don't pre-plan outcomes. Be a fan of the characters when they succeed! Consider letting the player describe their successes. When they fail, add something "weird" that makes the characters' lives more interesting and dangerous. New mysteries will often develop from these complications, even! especially the ones you think up on the fly. Keep track and try to "connect the dots" behind the scenes when you can.

COMPLICATIONS, HARM, COSTS

The fight, flight, or freeze reactions will cause characters to make sub-optimal choices and increase failure, which leads to more complications, harms, and costs.

Harm is written on a post-it note and placed near the player as a reminder: dazed, limping, bleeding, starving, chilled to the bone, etc. are good examples. Harm matters in the fiction. Bleeding characters, for instance, are easier to track! They can also hinder characters (-1d6) when relevant. A third harm means a character is out of the action (unconscious, too sick to move, etc.)

Complications represent things in the environment getting worse for the players, like more villains arrive. Costs are things the players lose/give up, like broken equipment or running out of water/food.

INSANITY & DEATH

Characters go insane or die only when their players choose to. Trust the players to know when it's time. Discuss it with them when you feel their character is near the end of their story. If they aren't ready to retire the character, ask them what they sacrifice to survive or stay sane.

HOW MANY MYTHOS DICE?

1d6: an unexplainable incident, apparition, elder sign scratched on a wall.

2d6: an encounter with inhuman minions, glancing at an occult tome.

3d6: seeing minor mythos creatures, studying an occult tome, casting a spell, glimpsing a strange or alien landscape

4d6: seeing a minor mythos creature, being transported to an alien world or other dimension.

5d6: Seeing a greater mythos creature.

MAGIC

Characters can cast spells (or use a magic item) if they find a formula and follow it. Dabbling with magic *always* evokes a Mythos check! No character should be an "expert" at magic, but they can prepare if they describe how (requires time/resources). Failure usually means some pretty awful backlash.

GETTING STARTED

Ask the characters questions about their cell. This gives the players a chance to ground themselves in the setting. Example: "Where is your EONS cell located?" "Is it hidden? If so, how?" "Name a room, what does it look like?" "Who is the most unusual member and why?" "Which member do you often quarrel with?"

MYSTERIES, RINGS, AND KEYS.

Mysteries are composed of a "ring" of keys that characters will discover/experience as they investigate and which lead to a more complete picture of what is going on. Keys can be NPC revelations, tomes, ominous signs, events, encounters, etc. Every scene should have at least one. Keys in the past are uncovered through research. Some may never be found (and for that reason, functional duplicates are a good idea). It's best if keys can be discovered in any order, but some might unlock others in a kind of chain.

EXAMPLE/FIRST MYSTERY

What Happened to Walter Blackthorne? Begin with the key in bold-face type and follow the players' lead. Be sure to drop in other weird things as you play that aren't listed – things inspired by the fiction that you invent on the fly or take from the Spare Keys. These may be part of a new ring. It's helpful to always be brewing more Mysteries while the characters are working on the current one. In a pinch, you can seed the next mystery with a key like "Dr. Strong turns into a column of smoke and vanishes." (Just when they had the bad guy cornered, right?)

Mysteries should end in a kind of major revelation that ties things together. To create your own, either tie together random keys with a revelation, or start with the revelation (e.g. "The EONS are being transformed into mushroom people by an infectious spore") then make a list of keys to support it.

WHAT HAPPENED TO WALTER BLACKTHORNE?

- Dr. Strong, a professor of linguistics, visited Walter Blackthorne yesterday. (It's in his appointment book.)
- They had tea. A maid saw S leave. When she went to collect the tea service, she discovered B sleeping in his chair, dreaming fitfully.
- A lock of B's hair has been hacked off.
- S used the lock to summon a creature from another dimension to attack B.
- B's savaged body is discovered.
- News of the discovery reaches the EONS at their club.** Ask, questions: "What were you all doing when the news arrived? How did the news arrive; who brought it?"
- S, having gotten B out of the way and thrown the EONS into disarray, raids B's office and steals a curious clock. *The characters may know some things about this clock. Ask them and use their answers.*
- S uses the clock to slip into the Dreamlands and recruit a tribe of ghouls. *Is there any way a character would know it is being used?*
- The ghouls, led by S discover a way into the headquarters of the EONS and (try to) wipe them out.



SPARE KEYS

- A strange, glowing patch of mold is found in the corner of B's study.
- A mute, phantom double of one of the characters is seen reading a book: *Die Alten Wege* ("The Old Ways").
- An unexpected meteor shower lights up the wee hours. The few who see it are prone to visions of the town smothered in purple fog.

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Resources

TECHNOLOGIES BY ERA

1890s: The Gaslight Era

- ▶ Transportation: steam trains/ships, horse and buggy
- ▶ Communication: telegraph, letters, courier
- ▶ Research: newspapers, public/private libraries, expert consultation, museums, personal laboratories

1920s: The Roaring 20s

- ▶ Transportation: diesel trains/ships, private automobile, bus, prop plane
- ▶ Communication: telegraph, letters, courier, telephone, short wave radio
- ▶ Research: public/private libraries, expert consultation, museums, personal/private laboratories

1950s: The Cold-War Era

- ▶ Transportation: diesel train, gas turbine ship, private plane, jet airlines, private automobile, bus
- ▶ Communication: telephone, radio, letters, telegram
- ▶ Research: newspapers, public/private libraries, expert consultation, museums, private laboratories, microfilm (1938 forward)

D66 HELPFUL WORDS

Count across (die 1), then down (die 2).

Adjectives

Bloated	Congeaed	Amorphous
Cyclopean	Decayed	Deformed
Degenerate	Depraved	Diseased
Festering	Fibrous	Fiendish
Gelatinous	Chastly	Hideous
Infected	Inhuman	Leptous

Liquefied	Malignant	Moldering
Mutilated	Noxious	Obscene
Odious	Perverse	Profane
Putrid	Rancid	Repulsive
Shrill	Spectral	Squamous
Unclean	Vast	Withered

Places

Altar	Island	Tunnel
Iron Door	Swamp	Cemetery
Garrett	Canyon	Catacomb
Basement	Cave	Church
Mound	Tundra	Pyramid
Beach	Desert	Hotel/Lodge

Grotto	Forest	Mausoleum
Quarry	Mountain	Obelisk
Pier	Jungle	Palace
Labyrinth	Ocean	Temple
Shrine	Lake/River	Statue
Well	Volcano	Train Station

People & Objects

Amulet	Bone	Alchemist
Tome	Crystal Ball	Astrologer
Casket	Pentagram	Astronomer
Coin/Gem	Casket	Coroner
Cirlet	Crown	Cultist
Instrument	Clock	Choul

Figurine	Dagger	Mortician
Trunk	Necklace	Psychic/Seer
Portrait	Sigil/Rune	Secret Society
Vermin	Tablet	Shaman
Ring	Tarot/Cards	Skeleton
Statue	Staff/Rod	Zombie

D66 NAMES

Count across (die 1), then down (die 2).

First Names (Male)

Aaron	Benjamin	Clark
Daneil	Edgar	Franklin
Gary	Harry	Isaac
Jack	Kirby	Luther
Maxwell	Nathaniel	Oliver
Patrick	Quinn	Randolph

Stuart	Theodore	Vernon
Willis	Xavier	Zane
Erasmus	Alexander	Barnaby
Caleb	Miles	Spencer
Lance	Jesse	Preston
Adam	Barry	Clive

First Names (Female)

Audrey	Barbara	Caroline
Delia	Elizabeth	Faith
Hannah	Isabel	Judith
Lucilia	Margaret	Nancy
Olivia	Phoebe	Rosalind
Samantha	Tabitha	Virginia

Alice	Dorothy	Lilly
Molly	Nancy	Polly
Rachel	Catherine	Pamela
Ellenor	Constance	Deborah
Emilia	Josephine	Mabel
Melanie	Agnes	Zenobia

Surnames

Hunter	Gibson	Jackson
Justice	Osborne	O'Grady
Morris	Hopkins	Nichols
Pierce	Reynolds	Frazier
Godfrey	Carter	Armstrong
Brooks	Marlowe	Brown

Chambers	Baldwin	Goodwin
Hammer	Overstreet	Rockford
Stone	Wheeler	Crutchfield
Woods	Young	Robbins
Peabody	Prince	Morgan
Ripley	Rogers	McClintock

D66 EQUIPMENT

Substitute era-appropriate equivalents as needed.

Weapons (1-3), Gear (4-6)

Fists	Knife	Brass Knucks
Club	Garrote	Broken Bottle
Pistol	Rifle	Machine Gun
Axe	Grenade	Elephant Gun
Blowgun	Poison	Sword-cane
Spear	Special*	Bolas/Sling

Lantern	Bicycle	Boat
Rope	Shovel	Mirror
Pick Axe	Lock Picks	Goggles
Car	Truck	Radio
Chalk	Matches	Field Guide
Dog	Poncho	Climbing Gear

* A hard-to-find item, like a flame-thrower, gas-bomb, or weaponized germ.



SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

- ▶ *Lasers & Feelings* by John Harper (core)
- ▶ *Lady Blackbird* by John Harper (idea for a fixed starting scenario)
- ▶ *Teachers & Tentacles* by Vincent Howard et al. (resource lists)
- ▶ *Dungeon World* by Sage LaTorra & Adam Koebel (insight questions)
- ▶ *The Everyone Everywhere List* by Erik James Olsrud (names)
- ▶ *Maze Rats* by Ben Milton (d66 table structure)
- ▶ *Unknown Armies* by Greg Stolze (fight, flight, freeze reactions)
- ▶ Art © William McAusland, by perm.
- ▶ More from Ray Otus at plundergrounds.quest.

