



FEAR ITSELF



Pelgrane Press

FEAR ITSELF

A HORROR GAME POWERED BY THE GUMSHOE SYSTEM
BY ROBIN D. LAWS AND GARETH RYDER-HANRAHAN



FEAR ITSELF

SHATTERED VEIL EDITION

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Phil Rodger, Roy Miller, Sinclair Manson and Sunain Rai.

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

Tony Williams and Timothy Daly for their invaluable feedback on the Premonition Edition.
Fran, Marlock, Marta, Claudia, Arturo and everyone at Shadowlands Editions, for sharing their
design.

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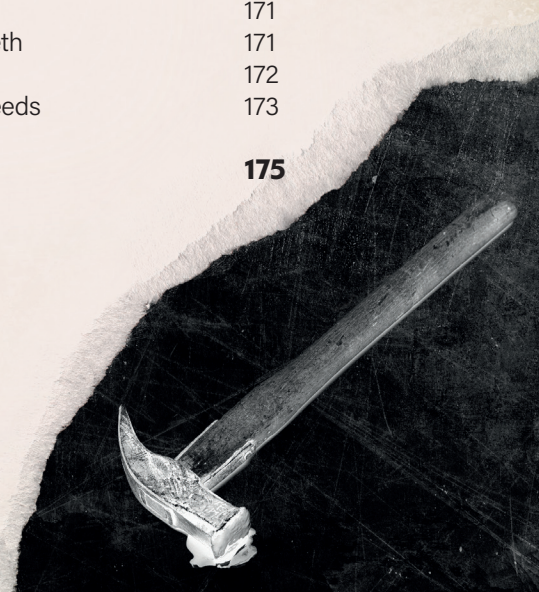
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FEAR ITSELF

Fear Itself plunges ordinary people into a disturbing contemporary world of madness and violence. Players take the role of regular folk much like themselves, who are inexorably drawn into a confrontation with an unearthly realm of alien menace. GMs can use it to replicate the shudders and shocks of the horror genre in both film and literature.

Fear Itself serves as an ideal platform for one-shot games in which, like any self-respecting horror flick, few if any of the protagonists are expected to survive the climax. It can also be employed to run ongoing or even open-ended campaigns in which the leading characters gradually discover more about the disturbing supernatural reality hiding in the shadows of the ordinary world. Over time, they grow more adept at combating these threats — or spiral tragically into insanity and death.

HOW TABLETOP ROLEPLAYING WORKS

A roleplaying game is a shared exploration of a fictional situation. One participant, the Game Moderator (GM), describes what's happening. The other participants, the players, play characters in that setting and decide what their characters do in response to challenges and mysteries posed by the GM. There's much, much more to it, but that's the basic idea: the GM describes the current situation, the players describe what their characters do about it, and the GM uses the rules in this book to work out whether or not they succeed.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

All *Fear Itself* games use the same core rules, presented in Chapter 4.

- * Game Moderators (GMs) should read Chapters 5 and 6, discussing how to design and run a mystery.

FEAR ITSELF AND OTHER GUMSHOE HORROR GAMES

Fear Itself adapts the GUMSHOE rules system originally presented in *The Esoterorists*. They both share the background of Creatures of Unremitting Horror trying to break through the Membrane (see p. XX), which is all that separates our world from their domain — the Outer Dark (p. XX). While *Fear Itself* pits ordinary people against these antagonists, player characters in *The Esoterorists* are ultracompetent operatives, supported by a well-resourced international organization (the Ordo Veritatis) in their fight against the eponymous human conspiracy that abets the Creatures' entrance into our world.

The GUMSHOE rules are also used in the supernatural horror games *Night's Black Agents* (in which burned-out spies uncover vampiric conspiracies) and *Trail of Cthulhu* (a reworking of the classic *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos).

Fear Itself's 2nd Edition refactors the original text, expanding on the differences between one-shot and campaign play and adding more support for different ways to play. It presents a variety of tools and techniques for the GM to use while pursuing the ghastly thrill of unremitting horror.



- * Players should read Chapters 1, 2, and 3, which contain advice and rules for creating characters.
- * Chapters 7 (Creatures of Unremitting Horror) and 8 (Psychic Powers) should be referenced as needed — not every game will involve either psychic powers or monsters.
- * Chapter 9 is all about one-shots; Chapter 10 is a sample one-shot adventure.
- * Chapter 11 is all about limited-session miniseries; Chapter 12 is a sample miniseries.
- * Chapter 13 discusses open-ended campaigns; Chapter 14 is a sample campaign.

So, if you're a...

PLAYER	GAME MODERATOR, RUNNING A...		
	A ONE-SHOT...	A MINISERIES...	A CAMPAIGN...
YOU SHOULD READ...			
1. GUMSHOE 101 2. Creating Characters 3. Tips for Players (Ask your GM if you should look at 8. Psychic Powers)	4. Basic Rules 5. Designing a Mystery 6. Running a Mystery 7. Creatures of Unremitting Horror 9. One-Shots	4. Basic Rules 5. Designing a Mystery 6. Running a Mystery 7. Creatures of Unremitting Horror 11. Miniseries	4. Basic Rules 5. Designing a Mystery 6. Running a Mystery 7. Creatures of Unremitting Horror 13. Campaigns
AND YOU SHOULD CHECK OUT...			
	10. The Circle	12. Glass Beach Summer	14. The Dispatchers



THE OUTER DARK

The default supernatural threat in *Fear Itself 2nd Edition* is the Outer Dark, a dimension of horror and suffering inhabited by ghastly Creatures of Unremitting Horror. The Outer Dark is separated from our reality by a thin and fraying Membrane; monsters and psychic effluvia seep through gaps in this Membrane, resulting in supernatural horror. The Membrane is especially weak in places where hopelessness and suffering hold sway; cultists and lunatics seek to manipulate such conditions, or find other occult ways of breaching the divide and releasing their monstrous patrons into our world.

You don't have to use the Outer Dark mythology in your games, but it's ideally suited for stories of grisly terror and urban decay.





CHAPTER ONE

FEAR ITSELF 101

In *Fear Itself*, you're playing an ordinary person who's about to be drawn into a mystery, or plunged into a horrific situation. If you're going to survive, you'll need to understand how the game works.

The three key sections of your character sheet are your **Investigative Abilities**, your **General Abilities**, and your **Risk Factors**.

INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES

Investigative Abilities are how you find clues. GUMSHOE is all about acquiring and using information, and Investigative Abilities let you find information. They're divided into three categories — Academic, Interpersonal, and Technical — but they all work the same way.

You never need to roll dice for these abilities — **if you've got the right ability for the current situation, you'll get a clue.** Say you're looking around a library. If you point out to the GM that you're using your Research ability, you'll find any Research-related information automatically. You'll never fail to find information because you rolled badly — you just need to ask the right questions and roleplay the right actions.

If you have allocated character points in an Investigative Ability, you've got a rating in it, and you can find clues related to that topic. You never need to spend points to get key (or "core") clues. Instead, you **spend points for advantages** like extra information, bonus General Ability points, or story twists. Your GM will suggest opportunities to spend points; you can also suggest possible benefits for spending Investigative points.

Spending points from an Investigative Ability does not prevent you from using that ability to find clues.

GENERAL ABILITIES

General Abilities are how you get things done. They're how you actually use the information you gained with your Investigative Abilities.

You have to roll for General Abilities. GUMSHOE uses **a standard six-sided die**, and you usually need to **roll a 4 or higher** (the GM gets to secretly pick the Difficulty you need to beat). You can **spend points** from the appropriate General Ability to boost your chances before rolling; **every point spent gives you a +1 to the roll**. So, if you're trying to use Hiding to hide from a monster, you could just take your chances by rolling the die, or spend 3 points to be certain of getting at least a 4.

Two General Abilities work differently from the rest — your **Health** and your **Stability**. These measure your character's physical and psychological integrity. As long as you've got a positive value in these abilities, you're OK. If damage or stress takes your **Health or Stability below 0, you're in trouble**. If you go **below -5** in either ability, you're in big trouble. You can regain Health with the Medic ability, and regain Stability with Shrink.

RISK FACTORS

Risk Factors are why you can't run away. The particular Risk Factors used depend on the game you're playing, and the GM will tell you what they are. All Risk Factors have two things in common. First, **they draw you into the mystery**. Maybe you're looking for your lost brother. Maybe you're trying to free yourself from recurring nightmares. Maybe you're searching for redemption.

Second, **ignoring Risk Factors hurts**. If you go against a Risk Factor — say you decide not to go into the abandoned mine to look for your missing brother, even though you found a clue pointing there — then you lose Stability.

So, embrace the risk. Follow the clues. And pray you survive the horrors that await you.

You have nothing to fear but... ***Fear Itself.***



