

Elder Sign: Revised Core Rules v1.0

About these Revised Rules

This document is designed as a full replacement of the original rules. Many of the game's rules have been altered but the game uses the same mechanics and components and generally should play and feel like the original game. Most rules changes come in the form of removing restrictions and exceptions so the revised rules should be less complex and more intuitive overall.

This revised rule set exclusively applies to the original core game of Elder Sign. It addresses perceived issues of swingy but generally insufficient difficulty, as well as having a number of unnecessarily fiddly and/or unthematic rules and rules exceptions.

These rules are thus primarily intended for players of the core set who wish for a more difficult, more consistent and/or better customisable experience.

Many of the expansions to the core game address the perceived lack of difficulty of the core but do so introducing new mechanics in varying quantity; these mechanics are not a subject of these revised rules and may or may not work without significant friction if using these rules.

All of these changes have been tested extensively over the course of several months, using 4 randomly chosen investigators against the different Great Old Ones.

While the revised rules themselves have been tested for almost all combinations of investigators and Great Old Ones multiple times, the Esoteric Orders module has been tested less extensively and might see adjustments in the future.

Rules of Play

Objective and End of the Game

The objective of the game is for a team of occult Investigators to acquire a number of Elder Signs and use them in a ritual to seal away an awakening Great Old One.

- The Investigators win if they manage to place all required Elder Signs on the Location of the Great Old One.
- The Investigators lose if all Investigators are devoured.

Doom Track, Awakening of the Great Old One and using Elder Signs

The Doom track represents how close the Great Old One is to awakening, as well as indicating how their influence manifests in the Investigators' reality of the Arkham Museum and beyond.

The Doom track consists of a sequence of symbols specific in its length and composition to each Great Old One. The number of symbols is a general indicator for how long it will take for the Great Old One to fully awaken, and the symbols depicted govern what will happen along the way.

Any given step on the Doom track is either a Monster symbol - depicting a winged elder creature, or a Doom symbol - depicting a cultist and tentacles.

Whenever a token is added to the Doom track, check if the step it is placed upon shows a Monster symbol - if it does, a monster will appear!

If it shows a Doom symbol, nothing bad happens, unless you choose to play with the Esoteric Orders module.

If the Doom track ever reaches its end, the Great Old One awakens - remove all Doom tokens placed thus far. The game is not lost, yet, but sealing away the Great Old One will be even more challenging from now on.

The Great Old One might trigger an effect on Awakening; if so, it will be specified on its card. Additionally, every time the Clock strikes Midnight the Great Old One will Attack, as specified on their card.

As soon as the Investigators have acquired the requisite number of Elder Signs, they may attempt to use them to seal away the Great Old One.

To do this an Investigator with one or more Elder Signs in their possession must Move to the Great Old One's Location and successfully complete the Task specified on their card, and possibly defeat any Monsters in that Location.

The Great Old One's Location uses their attack as a Terror effect.

When the Great Old One is awakened, the Great Old One's Location additionally uses their Attack as Location Penalty.

The Great Old One's Location Reward is always to transfer all Elder Signs in that Investigator's possession onto the Great Old One's Location.

When the number of Elder Signs specified by the Great Old One's Location has been collected on their card, the Investigators win.

Investigators

Each Investigator has an Ability, a maximum Sanity, a maximum Stamina, and a number of starting Items.

Investigators start with their maximum Sanity and Stamina, and start with a random Item of each type specified on their card.

The Ability text on their card specifies when and how their Ability may be used.

If an Investigator's Sanity or Stamina ever reaches 0, they are Devoured by the Great Old One:

- Put all their Trophies under their respective Adventure Location stacks or into the Monster cup immediately
- Put all their Items onto the Entrance when the Clock next strikes Midnight
- Remove the Investigator from play immediately
- Put a Doom token on the track immediately
- When it is the dead Investigator player's next turn they may choose another Investigator if available; otherwise they skip their turn but do advance the Clock

Investigator's Turn

On their turn an Investigator must perform 2 of the following actions:

- Move to a different Location
- Attempt Adventure at the current Location
- Use exactly 1 of the Entrance facilities if on the Entrance Location if there is no Monster on the Entrance
- Give 1 Item to a single other Investigator in the same Location if there is no Monster in the current Location
- Do nothing if there are no Monsters in the current Location

Adventures, Rewards and Penalties

The acquiring of Clues, Items and, most importantly, Elder Signs requires Investigators to complete Adventures in Locations around the museum and even in otherworldly places.

Whenever they succeed in braving these dangerous Adventures they will gain the Rewards specified by the Location, otherwise they will suffer the Penalties instead.

Rewards usually come in the form of random Items, Clues and Elder Signs; sometimes they might also cause Doom tokens to be placed, Monsters to appear or a random Other World Location to be added.

There are always 6 regular Adventure Locations present and the Location of the Great Old One. During the game additional Locations may be added.

Whenever one of the 6 regular Adventure Locations is removed, draw and put a new one in its place after you have resolved all of its Rewards.

All regular and Other World Adventures are accessible at all times.

The Location of the Great Old One becomes accessible as soon as the Investigators have found the number of Elder Signs specified by the Great Old One; they only have to do so once, the location will remain accessible even if they lose some or all of these Elder Signs later on.

Tasks, Dice, Assistance and Terror Effects

Locked and Saved Dice

Events, Monsters and Adventure locations may lock Green, Yellow and Red dice.

Locked dice cannot be used even if an Investigator would otherwise be available to add them to their dice pool.

Locked dice are freed when the Mythos card, Adventure Location or Monster is removed; since Monsters are only removed after an Adventure has been either failed or completed, defeating a Monster locking dice does not make these dice available during this same Adventure resolution.

Saved dice on Investigators or Spells are considered part of the active Investigator's dice pool; they can be used as if they were rolled with their specific result.

Each location consists of 1 or more groups of Tasks - horizontal lines of 1 or more Tasks grouped closely together.

Tasks most often require specific dice results:

- Investigation 1-9 (Magnifying Glass)
- Peril (Skull)
- Terror (Tentacles)
- Lore (Scroll)

Some Tasks show 2 results for a single Task - in this case either result will complete the Task.

In addition to the dice results Tasks may show the following symbols:

- -X Sanity
- -X Stamina
- Clock Advance

These results do not require any dice to be placed but instead require the active Investigator to lose the specified amount of Sanity, Stamina, or to advance the Clock by 1 increment for each Clock symbol.

Any of these only need to be lost if the Investigator chooses to complete the Task group they are a part of.

When resolving an Adventure the active player rolls their available dice and attempts to place them on the Adventure's Tasks to complete them all.

By default, this means rolling the 6 green dice, although Items and other game elements might add to or remove from this pool.

After rolling the dice the player may attempt to satisfy a single Task group with the dice results that they rolled. For Scroll, Skull and Tentacle tasks exactly 1 die of that type must be placed on the Task symbol; for a Magnifying Glass Task any number of Magnifying Glass dice results may be used for a single Task symbol as long as their numbers add up to at least the number specified by the Task.

If all Tasks of a single Task group could be completed by placing dice on them the roll is considered successful; the Investigator may now roll the remaining dice, that is those not placed on completed tasks, and attempt completing another group of Tasks.

If the Investigator can't or won't place the dice results such that a Task group is completed, that roll is failed; they must discard 1 of the dice for the remainder of the Adventure.

They may also choose to place up to 1 rolled die on each Investigator on this Adventure, locking them for later use.

Additionally, if at least one of the rolled dice shows the Tentacle result and the Adventure has a Terror effect, its Terror effect is triggered.

If after discarding 1 die and potentially resolving Terror effects there are still dice left in the pool - including dice saved on Spells or Investigators, the active Investigator may roll the remaining dice again and attempt to complete a Task group.

If all Task groups on an Adventure have been completed the Adventure Location is given to the Investigator as a Trophy, their marker returned to their Investigator card and they gain the Rewards specified; may share up to 1 of these Rewards with each other Investigator on the same Adventure.

If the Adventure was a regular Adventure Location a new random regular Adventure Location is placed in its stead.

After failing a Task and discarding a die, if no dice remain to be rolled and no dice are saved on Investigators or Spells, the Adventure is failed - apply the Adventure Penalty, and leave the Investigator tokens on the Location.

If the Investigator defeated any Monsters during the Adventure resolution they gain these Monsters as Trophies, regardless of failure or completion of the Adventure.

Items

During their turn an Investigator may use any number of Items in their possession at any point, unless other rules (e.g. on Events, Items, etc.) specify otherwise.

Common and Unique Items

Most Common and Unique Items provide either an extra Yellow die, an extra Red die, or both.

When such an Item is used, the Investigator may add the respective dice to their pool of dice for Adventure resolution.

If a Common or Unique Item has any other or additional rules they are specified in the card text.

Spells

Most Spells allow the active Investigator to save 1 or 2 of their rolled dice results during Adventure resolution on that Spell's available slots.

Saved results are considered rolled results and can be used as part of a roll to complete a Task on an Adventure.

Unlike dice saved on Investigators, however, they are not discarded after the current Adventure is completed or failed, and may be used or freed by other Investigators during their turn - subject to the approval of the Investigator possessing the Spell.

When all saved dice are removed from a Spell, discard that Spell.

If a Spell has any other or additional rules they are specified in the card text.

Allies

Allies specify how they function in their own card text.

Additionally, Allies provide a small boost when perusing the Lost & Found at the Entrance Location of the Museum.

Entrance Location

First Aid

An Investigator may do 1 of the following:

- Restore 1 Sanity or Stamina for free
- Restore either Sanity or Stamina fully for Trophies worth 2 or more
- Restore fully both Sanity and Stamina for Trophies worth 4 or more

Lost & Found

An Investigator may roll 1 green die for each Investigator and each Ally on the Entrance and choose a single die result:

- Investigation: Lose 1 Sanity or 1 Stamina; if there are any Elder Signs at the Lost & Found, also gain a number of those equal to the Investigation number result
- Peril/Skull: Gain 1 Clue
- Lore/Scroll: Gain 1 Common Item
- Terror/Tentacles: Gain 1 Unique Item

Souvenir Shop

An Investigator may buy any number of the 5 Items exhibited:

- 2 Trophies for the Common Item
- 3 Trophies for the Unique Item
- 4 Trophies for the Spell
- 5 Trophies for the Ally
- 6 Trophies for the Investigator

If an Investigator has an ability that allows them to gain an additional Item of a specific type, draw one of that type from the draw pile.

When acquiring an Investigator, that Investigator's sheet is placed nearby and may come into play in case any of the current Investigators have been Devoured.

Monsters

The Doom track, Mythos events, Adventure cards and Adventure rewards may cause Monsters to appear.

Monsters are represented by tiles drawn from the Monster cup.

Monster tiles have Tasks on them just like on Adventure Locations do, and sometimes might have symbols locking specific dice.

Any Tasks imposed by Monsters must be completed in addition to the Adventure Location's own Tasks to complete the Adventure.

Unlike an Adventure Task, however, completing a Monster's Task does defeat this Monster regardless of the completion of the remainder of the Tasks - failure or completion, the Monster is defeated after the resolution of this Adventure has ended and will be awarded as a Trophy.

When you receive a Monster as a Trophy, put it face down on your Investigator sheet to see its Trophy value, and if it has any additional rules specific to it.

Monster Boxes

Adventure Locations may have one or more white frames on them, referred to as Monster Boxes. When Monsters appear these boxes are both preferred for Monster placement and may cause Monsters to be distributed unevenly among Adventure Locations.

Monster Boxes may form their own Task group, replace an existing Task group or extend an existing Task group.

When a Monster is its own Task group or is placed fully over an existing Task group, defeating the Monster is considered a fulfilled Task for the Adventure - any potential covered Tasks below the Monster tile are ignored for the remainder of this Adventure resolution, even after the Monster is defeated; you may flip over the Monster tile to keep track of this.

If a Monster extends an existing Task by being placed directly beside a Task group, both the uncovered Tasks and the Monster Tasks need to be fulfilled together.

If an Investigator defeats a Monster but fails to complete the non-Monster Tasks, this Task group is failed but for the next attempt the Monster Tasks are not part of the Task group anymore.

Monster Placement

When a Monster appears, place it according to the following priority sequence:

1. If the trigger specifies placement rules follow those
2. If the Great Old One has awakened place the Monster below their card, and below any Monsters that might already be placed there
3. If there are any empty white-bordered Monster boxes on any of the Adventure Locations, place it on the first empty box, starting from the top left Adventure Location and going clockwise
4. If there are any Adventure Locations with fewer Monsters placed below them than at least one other Adventure Location, place it below the first such Adventure Location, starting from the top left Adventure Location and going clockwise
5. Place it below the top left Adventure Location

Events and Midnight Effects

At Midnight, the Great Old One comes closer to fully awakening, new challenges await the investigators, and sometimes even opportunities arise to be exploited. Apply any relevant Midnight effects in the following order:

1. Add a Doom token to the Great Old One's Doom track
2. Resolve Midnight effects from Adventure Locations if any
3. Resolve the Lingering effect from Mythos card if any
4. Draw a new Mythos card, replacing the previous one
5. Resolve the Immediate effect from the Mythos card if any

Setup

1. Choose 1 Investigator for each player by selection, draft or random draw
2. Set the Investigators' Sanity and Stamina to their maximum values
3. Draw and assign the Investigators' starting Items
4. Place the Entrance sheet on the table
5. Place all Investigator tokens on the Entrance
6. Below the Entrance sheet, place 1 card face up of each of the Common Item, Unique Item, Spell, Ally and Investigator stacks; place the corresponding stacks face down below
7. Beside the Entrance sheet place the Clock, set to 6 o'clock
8. Below the Clock place the stack of Mythos cards face down
9. Above the Entrance sheet place the stacks of Other World and regular Locations face down
10. Draw 6 regular Locations and array them face up in 2 rows of 3 cards each
11. Choose a Great Old One by selection, draft or random draw and place their card above the Adventure Locations

12. Place the number of Elder Signs and Doom tokens specified on the Great Old One's card and place them below it
13. Place all dice that are locked by Adventures on their corresponding symbols
14. Place all remaining green, yellow and red dice on the Entrance sheet
15. Decide upon the first player, they may begin the game

Difficulty

Clock Advance

Normal: 3 hours per clock advance

Hard: 4 hours

Very Hard: 5 hours

Impossible: 6 hours

Event Deck

Easy: Use only Events that don't add Doom tokens as an immediate effect, conditionally or unconditionally.

Normal: Use only Events that add a Doom token as a conditional immediate effect.

Hard: Use only Events that add a Doom token as an unconditional immediate effect.

For a more finegrained difficulty selection feel free to mix Events from 2 different difficulties.

You can, of course, also use the entire Mythos deck for the original, much more randomly difficult experience.

Esoteric Orders

This is a very small module intended to provide some additional theme, as well as a significant rise in difficulty.

To use Esoteric Orders adjust the setup and general rules as follows:

- Put all Cultists to the side instead of in the Monster cup.
- Any Doom token placed on a non-Monster Doom track step lets a Cultist appear instead of doing nothing.
- When you would return a Cultist to the cup, e.g. to pay for a service on the Entrance, put it to the side instead of in the Monster cup.

Additionally, each Great Old One has specific rules on how their Cultists affect the game:

Hastur

When a Cultist appears, place them below the Hastur location.

Yog-Sothoth

When a Cultist appears, a Gate opens; when a Cultist is defeated the oldest Gate closes. Investigators on a closing Gate are devoured.

Nyarlahotep

When a Cultist appears, place them on the Entrance.

Shub-Niggurath

After you defeat a Cultist, a Monster appears.

Yig

Cultists have an additional Task: -1 Stamina

Azathoth

Each Cultist increases the Elder Sign requirement by 2.

Ithaqua

Each Cultist locks the yellow die.

Cthulhu

Each Cultist reduces maximum Sanity or Stamina; alternating, and starting with Sanity.

Quick References

Adventure Resolution

1. Choose to voluntarily fail the Adventure and proceed to 9, otherwise to 2
2. If all Tasks have been fulfilled, the Adventure is completed - gain defeated Monster Trophies, apply the Location Reward, distribute Items among Investigators, then put Investigator tokens on their respective character sheets
3. Roll available dice
4. Place matching dice on Tasks if able and willing to complete a Task group
5. Lose Sanity/Stamina/Time if required and able and willing to complete a Task group; then proceed to 1
6. Discard 1 die if unable or unwilling to complete a Task group
7. Resolve Terror effect if present and at least one die is a Terror result, including the discarded result
8. Place up to 1 die on each Investigator at the Adventure to save the result - these dice need not be rolled again and the results can subsequently be used as if rolled
9. If voluntarily chosen, or if both no dice are saved and no dice remain to be rolled the Adventure is failed; the active Investigator gains and defeated Monsters as Trophies and suffers the specified Penalties; each other Investigator on that Adventure must

choose to lose either 1 Sanity or 1 Stamina; all dice locked on Investigators are freed up again; leave Investigator tokens on the Location

Monster Placement

1. If the trigger specifies placement rules follow those
2. If the Great Old One has awakened place the Monster below their card, and below any Monsters that might already be placed there
3. If there are any empty white-bordered Monster boxes on any of the Adventure Locations, place it on the first empty box, starting from the top left Adventure Location and going clockwise
4. If there are any Adventure Locations with fewer Monsters placed below them than at least one other Adventure Location, place it below the first such Adventure Location, starting from the top left Adventure Location and going clockwise
5. Place it below the top left Adventure Location

Midnight effect order

1. Add a Doom token to the Great Old One's Doom track
2. Resolve Midnight effects from Adventure Locations if any
3. Resolve the Lingering effect from the current Mythos card if any
4. Draw a new Mythos card, replacing the previous one if any
5. Resolve the Immediate effect from the new Mythos card if any

Setup

1. Choose 1 Investigator for each player by selection, draft or random draw
2. Set the Investigators' Sanity and Stamina to their maximum values
3. Draw and assign the Investigators' starting Items
4. Place the Entrance sheet on the table
5. Place all Investigator tokens on the Entrance
6. Below the Entrance sheet, place 1 card face up of each of the Common Item, Unique Item, Spell, Ally and Investigator stacks; place the corresponding stacks face down below
7. Beside the Entrance sheet place the Clock, set to 6 o'clock
8. Below the Clock place the stack of Mythos cards face down
9. Above the Entrance sheet place the stacks of Other World and regular Locations face down
10. Draw 6 regular Locations and array them face up in 2 rows of 3 cards each
11. Choose a Great Old One by selection, draft or random draw and place their card above the Adventure Locations
12. Place the number of Elder Signs and Doom tokens specified on the Great Old One's card and place them below it
13. Place all dice that are locked by Adventures on their corresponding symbols
14. Place all remaining green, yellow and red dice on the Entrance sheet
15. Decide upon the first player, they may begin the game

Strategy Tips

All Adventures have a minimum number of dice that need to be placed on them, depending on their Tasks.

Try to exceed the number of dice needed by 2 if feasible.

Consider Adventures with ordered Tasks to require an additional die.

Consider Adventures with large Task groups, i.e. 3 or more dice symbols, to require an additional die.

Every Clue, Spell and Investigator will make Adventure Locations easier.

Attempt Adventures that provide you with Item rewards over those that don't, unless you have Items or Trophies to spare.

Help other Investigators with their Locations, especially when they just failed an Adventure and/or are running out of Items.

When the Great Old One is close to awakening make sure you have the resources to weather at least a few of their Attacks.

Version History

1.0 First public release