

Statements of Fear

A “The Magnus Archives” Game, Powered by the Apocalypse

Introduction:

This is a horror-mystery mixed genre tabletop roleplaying game, based off of The Rusty Quill’s *The Magnus Archives*, a podcast written by Jonathan Sims. However, the players and narrator need not have listened to or interacted with the podcast to play- the system is rooted in the world, but your story does not have to be.

This guide will outline the system from the players’ perspective, the narrator’s perspective, and the overall scope of the world you are working in, including important content warnings and conversations about consent in gaming that should take place both in preparation and during the session.

Disclaimer: This is a fan-made property, and I have made no profit off of it. *The Magnus Archives* is the intellectual property of Jonathan Sims and The Rusty Quill Productions.

Content Warnings

The contents of this game system can be potentially triggering, as the subject matter pertains to fears. It is very important to consult your players before building a case, to ensure that your players are not stuck in an uncomfortable or triggering situation. Common triggers to inform all of your players of, regardless of what statement you have produced, are unreality, violence, paranoia, death, occult practices, and manipulation. Any additional triggers specific to each of the fears should be laid out before play, and it is highly recommended that there be safeguards in place for mid-session pauses. I highly recommend the Green-Yellow-Red Card system or the X-Card system, depending on your players’ preferences.

The World of the Play

Statements of Fear is a system that can be played in any time and any place. It does not have a set era or location. If you are playing in a time before (or potentially after) computers, and a player move involves computers, feel free to make the necessary edits for fair and creative play.

The unifying factor of this universe isn’t the where or the when, it’s the what. Your characters live in a world that is besieged by otherworldly horrors- eldritch monstrosities that feed off of the fear and anguish of your world. And they want more than anything to enter this world, to overrun the world we know with their terrors and plights. Brief descriptions of each of the canonical Fears are contained within this guide, and it is

these canonical Fears that the fourteen classes are built off of, but you are welcome to devise entities of your own and build new classes for them.

The premise of this system is that your characters are investigators looking into a statement that has been classified as 'Open'- this means that the victim is still alive, or that the events are ongoing. It is the overall objective of the group to solve this case, and prevent further bloodshed, or prevent the entity responsible from gaining a greater foothold in your area.

But there is a catch- each of your characters has been marked by one of the fourteen entities. **This game is as much a hidden roles game as it is a roleplaying game.** You can choose to be open with which entity is your patron, or you can keep that a secret- for as long as it is manageable to do so.

It is up to the players if they choose to continue solving the mystery, or if they begin to sabotage and work towards their own machinations, to gain favor with their entity- or another entity, if they are choosing to court more than one. Turning against your peers has consequences, of course, and the humanity scale will tick down as you walk further into the arms of your fearsome god.

Basics of Play

Statements of Fear is played in a modified Powered by the Apocalypse system. This system uses 2 six-sided dice for all rolls and checks, adding stat modifiers. A roll from 1-6 constitutes a failure, a roll of 7-9 is a mixed success, a roll of 10-12 is a success, and a roll of 13+ is an extreme success.

In cases of failure, the player marks experience and the Narrator has the opportunity to make a hard move. In cases of mixed success, the player succeeds with a consequence (or can choose to fail in order to avoid that consequence). In cases of success, the player does exactly what they intended. Extreme successes result in extra information, an advantage going forward, or similarly useful rewards.

The modifiers added to rolls are a standard array. When building your character, assign the following numbers to the stats: (+2, +1, +1, 0, -1). If you want to modify this standard array, contact your Narrator before assigning different stats.

When you fail a roll, you can spend a point of humanity to automatically succeed. This is considered success at a cost. You receive all of the benefits of a success, at the narrative cost of some of your human baseness.

This system does not rely on combat, and you can choose whether or not combat is a necessary part of your story. Combat should take place in short bursts- not drawn out in many turns. If combat seems to be dragging the story down, find a way to end it. The combat of this system should be narrative and atmospheric- whether that means a back alley brawl with someone stirred by the Slaughter or careful, planned

attacks on an enemy you can barely see in the Dark. Let it add to the story, rather than take away from it.

In terms of combat and other forms of harm, harm is relative. A normal person (with the exception of Relentless) does 1 harm with an unarmed attack, 2 harm with a knife or similar weapon, and 3+ harm with a gun or other highly volatile weapon. How easy or difficult it is to come across these weapons is dependent on the setting you choose for your story.

Each character starts with 6 harm. When a character is knocked down to 3 harm, they are staggered or knocked unconscious, and will need medical attention. A character at 0 harm is killed or otherwise removed from the case, dependent on the means of reaching those points of harm. Harm heals at a rate of 1 harm per long rest, unless medical attention is sought or a character takes special time to help another heal, or to use an ability that heals harm.

If you choose to have your investigators enter combat, be sure to match your monster or avatar's health and abilities to suit the encounter. Don't overpower them, but don't make it so that they die in one turn and feel underwhelming.

The Players

You are a researcher and archive assistant working for The Magnus Institute (or another similar institution in another time and place). It is up to you whether you are a new hire or an accomplished veteran- how long you've been on the force here, and how much of this paranormal business you actually believe in. But you've all been touched by at least one entity, and one entity has a hold on you. This entity determines your class- all of which are detailed in the Avatars document. Each entity bestows upon its Avatars certain gifts- and certain drawbacks for using those gifts.

When building a character, you start with two of these gifts, called Moves. You can choose to take one step closer to your entity and begin by burning one humanity point to start with three gifts. The other gifts are unlocked by leveling up, or by losing humanity and turning more fully to your entity.

It is entirely up to you, the player, if your character is open about their ties or not. You are welcome to use your powers openly and allow your coworkers to deduce your affiliation, to tell them outright, or to perform all of your work in surreptitious ways. The choices you make change the game for yourself and the other players, so be sure to decide at the start of the investigation how your character wants to present themselves.

If you are playing in a circumstance that allows for discussed relationships beforehand, you are encouraged to do so. Does your character have a rivalry with another? A romantic interest? Past encounters? Do two of you serve opposing entities?

Or the same, perhaps? These elements can add a deeper level of intrigue to conversations and events that unfold, but are not necessary for the game's continuity.

The Narrator

The Narrator serves as this system's MC, or Game Master. It is the Narrator's job to build the world that the players interact with, deliver the statement, provide them with avenues for investigation, and supplement the narrative with side characters. The Narrator should be impartial- not handing the players information without any effort on their part, but not needlessly preventing them from receiving information either. Actions taken by the side characters can help or hinder the characters, but nothing should block their way or speed them along without purpose.

The following is a list of Principles for the Narrator:

- Sprinkle evocative details everywhere
- Make the world seem real
- Create interesting dilemmas, not just interesting plots
- Address yourself to the characters, not the players
- Make your move, but misdirect
- Make your move, but never speak its name
- Look at your NPCs through crosshairs- anyone can be a target
- Ask provocative questions and build on the answers
- Respond with challenging circumstances and occasional rewards
- Be a fan of the player's characters
- Sometimes, reflect a question back to the players
- Instill a constant sense of urgency and dread
- Remind the players that this case is a small piece of a world-wide puzzle, and there is more at stake than meets the eye.

Some of these principles will factor more into your game than others- they do not all have to be adhered to at all times. These principles are simply meant to be a guide, a system by which to create your world and immerse your players in it.

The Narrator responds to character actions and helps to drive the plot by taking Moves. There are two kinds of moves: Normal Moves and Hard Moves. Normal Moves are standard actions- moves the Narrator takes when the player looks to them expectantly. Introducing a new side character or revealing a hidden page might feature as Normal Moves. Normal moves must do all three:

- It follows logically from the fiction.
- It gives the player an opportunity to react.
- It sets you up for a future harder move.

Hard Moves, on the other hand, are taken when a player character fails a roll (6 or below). These hard moves are consequences for the characters actions, and should feel reasonable and equivalent to the roll failed. For example- if a character is attempting to translate a document from a language they half-remember, a failed roll would not constitute immediate harm. But it might constitute incomplete or incorrect information that comes back to haunt them later. Hard moves must:

- It follows logically from the fiction.
- It is irrevocable.

A list of potential Narrator moves:

- Separate them
- Put them together
- Put someone in a high-stakes situation
- Trade harm for harm (as established)
- Deal harm (as established)
- Announce off-screen horror
- Foreshadow future horror
- Take something away from them
- Demonstrate an unforeseen or otherwise unknown bad side
- Give them a difficult decision to make
- Turn their action back on them
- Tell them the possible consequences and make them decide
- Distort reality
- Demonstrate the strength of the entities
- Reinforce the strength of the characters

You are welcome to use as many or as few of these moves as you need to serve your goals and the goals of the players. What matters most is that the move suits the action that it comes in response to, and that it adds to the story overall.

As the Narrator, you will be aware of all of the players' classes and patron entities- even if the other players are in the dark. It is your responsibility to keep the players' identities a secret for as long as they are capable of doing so- giving them chances to use their gifts, but also chances to be discovered. You may choose to set up a system of coded language, so that the other players do not know precisely what move a person is using. Discuss this with your group before enstating it, and ensure that all of the players understand how the system works. For example, if a player playing The Ringleader wants to use Tempting Melody, they could state 'I'm using my second move', to tell the Narrator what they are doing without cluing in the other players.

This system comes with a supplement on Rituals- if any of your players express an interest in burning their character down to zero humanity and attempting their entity's

Ritual, consult that page. It is recommended, if you are playing this game as a one-shot, that the Ritual be a separate session, as the time spent collecting materials for the Ritual (or attempting to stop it) would constitute a whole new investigation. If you are playing a more drawn out campaign, the Ritual processes can take place in the background and as side quests for the interested party(or parties).

The Fears

This system is based on the fourteen canonical Fears of The Magnus Archives. However, as stated above, you are welcome to remove Fears from this canon, or add your own. Each Fear is an influencing patron for a given class, so if you do choose to remove any, be sure to also remove the classes associated with them. And feel free to build a new class of Avatar for any new fear you engineer. Following is a list of the fears, with basic descriptions and associations. Pieces in bold are optional- they should be included if you are playing in The Magnus Archives canon, but can be ignored or used at will otherwise.

- The Buried
 - Fear of enclosed spaces, being buried alive, being trapped.
 - Coffins, cave systems, underground tunnels.
- The Corruption
 - Fear of rot and decay. Encompasses insects (not spiders), mold, disease, fungi, and corrupt systems of power.
 - Diseases, wasps, maggots, fungal blooms, decaying buildings
- The Dark
 - Fear of the dark and what lies within it.
 - Blindness, murky water, darkness.
 - **The Church of the Divine Host**
- The Desolation
 - Fear of loss and destruction. Fire, disaster, hopelessness, having everything ripped away from you.
 - Fire. Abandoned buildings. Natural disasters.
 - **The Cult of the Lightless Flame**
- The End
 - Fear of death. Fear of the deaths of your loved ones. Fear of leaving things unfinished.
 - Death. Visions of the end.
- The Eye
 - Fear of being watched. Fear of judgement. The need to learn new information- even at consequence to yourself or others.
 - Eyes. Government structures.

- **The Magnus Institute**
- The Flesh
 - Fear born from slaughter animals.
 - Industrialized meat industry. Cannibalism.
- The Hunt
 - Fear of being hunted and followed. Instinctive. Fight or flight response.
 - Hunters. Vampires.
- The Lonely
 - Fear of being alone. Fear of being abandoned. Fear of being forgotten and not missed.
 - Liminal spaces. Fog. Being alone in a crowd.
 - **The Lukas Family**
- The Slaughter
 - Fear of senseless violence. Fear of war. Fear of death and sacrifice without meaning.
 - War. Soldiers. The military-industrial complex. Weaponry.
- The Spiral
 - Fear of madness. Fear of getting lost- of being trapped in endless unrecognizable hallways. Fear of being lied to and caught in the lie.
 - Hallways. Doors. MC Escher style architecture. Bright colors. Spirals and patterns.
 - **Michael and/or Helen**
- The Stranger
 - Fear that people aren't who they seem. Fear that your loved ones have been replaced. Fear that you aren't being seen for who you really are.
 - Circuses. Dolls. Mannequins.
 - **The Circus of the Other**
- The Vast
 - Fear of open spaces. Fear of deep water. Fear of large creatures.
 - The ocean. Space. Open fields.
 - **The Fairchild Family**
- The Web
 - Fear of spiders. Fear of being manipulated. Fear of your actions not actually being your own.
 - Puppets. Spiders. Marionette strings. The Internet.

These fears can be expanded upon as necessary for your investigation. You do not need to include all of them, but should at least mention a couple of fears (aside from the main case) to remind the players that there are other entities at work here. It is

recommended that you pepper in references to the entities that your players serve, to tempt them further into service or scare them back from it.

Basic Structure

Whether you are playing a long-term campaign to stop a Ritual, or a short one shot to solve a single case, the structure should follow similar formats. Have your players begin by introducing themselves if they are new to each other, and then introducing their characters, in as much or as little detail as they wish. Describe a typical day at the office they work at, let them take some time to feel around the office and their desk space, and then introduce the case.

The case should begin with a Statement- a direct account of a person who has interacted with an entity or a servant of that entity. You can choose to have the victim give the statement live, or use the conceit of reading a previously written out statement. Either way, the victim's story is laid out for the players. This story should give hints as to what they were involved with, but leave open avenues for investigation.

From that point onward, the players are the driving force behind the investigation. They can decide whether they want to follow up and Perform an Interrogation on the victim or other people involved, or if they want to Elicit Private Evidence and produce something from the crime scene. They are welcome to Tread Carefully and return to the scene of the incident, and if they are a volatile type, perhaps they will find an Act of Assault is necessary to meet their goals. They are also capable of Facing Their Fear, using their otherworldly patron's power to aid (or hinder) in the investigation. As the Narrator, it is your job to have answers to their questions, details to expand upon, and consequences for when they press too far.

It is up to you what a successful ending for the case is. Do your investigators find a branch of a fear-worshipping cult and prevent them from taking another sacrifice? Do they clear out a stronghold of the Web? Do they simply find a safe place with no doors for the Spiral to open? Or do they open a door to a much bigger conspiracy- one with many more branches to clip before it can be truly stopped.

Or, will your investigators fail? Will they arrive just a moment too late- only in time to watch as the Desolation sets the victim's home ablaze. Will one of their own turn against them to serve their own ends? Half of the fear is in the knowledge of what is at stake if their actions aren't enough.