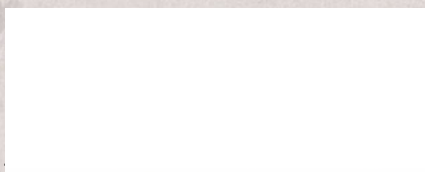


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# Credits

## WRITING AND DEVELOPMENT

Sam Gregor-Stewart, Leah Hawthorne, Keith Ryan Kappel, Maxine Newman, Brandon Perdue, Rook Riley, Lydia Suen, and Darren West

## SYSTEM DESIGN AND RPG MANAGER

Sam Gregor-Stewart

## EDITING AND PROOFREADING

Christine Crabb and Kate Cunningham

## ASMODEE FRANCHISE DEVELOPMENT

Andy Christensen, Joe DeSimone, Brian Mulcahy, Katrina Ostrander, and Sean Ryan

## PLAYTESTERS

Rachel Bakke, Nico Barden, Max Brooke, Michael Carney, Melissa Carr, Michael Coleman, Jeff Collins, Timothy Flanders, Michael Gernes, Weston Golyer, Sam Gregor-Stewart, Tucker Hammel, Philip D. Henrey, David Johnson, Kevin Jones, Lorne Lehrer, Phil Maiewski, Randy Mattson, Kevin Van Sloun, Rex Vogen, and Alex Werner-Adkins

## LAYOUT AND GRAPHIC DESIGN

Paco Dana and Sonia Gallardo Márquez

## COVER ART

Antonio Maínez Venegas

## MAPS

Damien Mammoliti

## ART DIRECTION

Antonio Maínez Venegas

## INTERIOR ART

Imad Awan, Cristian Balanescu, Helge C. Balzer, Tiziano Baracchi, Sara Biddle, Dimitri Bielak, Yoann Boissonnet, João Bosco, Marius Bota, Colin Boyer, Jason Caffoe, Marco Caradonna, JB Casacop, Alexander Chelyshev, Matthew Cowdery, Alexandre Dainche, Mauro Dal Bo, Stanislav Dikolenko, Adam Doyle, Guillaume Ducos, Lucas Durham, Derek D. Edgell, Erick Efata, Nicholas Elias, Anders Finer, Aurore Folny, Alexander Forsberg, Falk Haensel, Ethan Patrick Harris, Patrik Hell, Ilich Henriquez, Jeff Himmelman, Johanness Holm, David Hovey, Rafał Hryniewicz, Clark Huggins, Tomasz Jedruszek, Aleksander Karcz, Timo Karhula, Alexey Kim, Alexander Kozachenko, Lucas Lacerda, Robert Laskey, Chun Lo, Antonio Maínez, Jesse Mead, Mark Molnar, Reiko Murakami, Jacob Murray, David Auden Nash, Billy Norrby, John Pacer, Carlos Palma Cruchaga, Borja Pindado, Pixeloid Studios, Peter Polach, Paolo Puggioni, Chris Rallis, Axel Sauerwald, Stephen Somers, Lucas Staniec, Preston Stone, Bill Thompson, Andrea Ugrai, Jokubas Uogintas, Brian Valenzuela, Magali Villeneuve

## ASSISTANT PROJECT MANAGER

Curro Marín

## EDITORIAL MANAGER

Croc

## STUDIO COORDINATOR

Stéphane Bogard

## HEAD OF STUDIO

Michael Croitoriu

## SPECIAL THANKS TO THE CHAOSIUM TEAM

Rick Meints, Michael O'Brien, Jeff Richard, Neil Robinson, Daria Pilarczyk and Michal Lisowski.



For more information about ARKHAM HORROR — THE ROLEPLAYING GAME,  
visit us online at: [edge-studio.net](http://edge-studio.net)

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# THE WORLD OF ARKHAM HORROR

## The World We Know

It is the height of the roaring twenties, and the world has gone mad.

While the fires of the Great War continue to smolder overseas, economic prosperity has swept across the United States. New technology is reshaping cities and streets around the world. Telephones and radios have opened new lines of communication. Automobiles and aviation provide new avenues for transportation and shipping. The young are exploring wild new fashions, and jazz dominates the music scene. The introduction of new media technology, such as film and radio, has led to an explosion of celebrity names: actors, musicians, athletes, and the like. It is an era of modernity and change, a break in tradition that will cause ripples for more than a century.

For the older generation, it seems like the world has lost its way...but time marches ever on, and progress waits for no one. Young women now enjoy a newfound sense of freedom, independence, and entertainment, including the newly won right to vote. Many have been dubbed “flappers,” pushing the bounds of propriety by cutting their hair short and dancing in low-cut, knee-length dresses—things unheard of in times past. Across the United States, millions of Black Americans are leaving the rural South and traveling to the North, Midwest, and West in search of new opportunities. In Harlem, they built a new cultural mecca; a renaissance of dance, music, literature, and politics that will help shape Black lives for decades to come. Opportunities once closed to many are finally beginning to open up. Though there is still much work to be done, winds of change stir in the air.

In the United States, Prohibition is law, which has led to an explosion of organized crime. “Speakeasies”—secret, underground clubs that serve alcohol in defiance of the law—are scattered throughout every major city, raking

in cash for opportunistic crime families. Bootleggers use the new automobiles to smuggle alcohol into the country from afar, or they craft their own moonshine to sell. Bootlegging is a very lucrative business, one kept safe through bribery, intimidation, and violence. But the market is crowded. Turf wars are common, and the influx of new, deadlier firearms makes every act of violence that much more dangerous for innocents caught in the cross fire. Even so, bootleggers hold that they provide a much-needed service—and the truth is, while Prohibition agents, or “Prohis,” attempt to crack down on this activity, the public and police alike look the other way. Dealing with the Mob is a fact of life.

The twin calamities of the Great War and 1918 influenza pandemic wreaked havoc on individuals and communities. Veterans of the bloodiest war in history returned home haunted and scarred. Many find it difficult to integrate back into this rapidly changing society. Some try to lead peaceful lives, while others remain trapped in the past or embed themselves further into a familiar world of violence. Though peace and prosperity have come to the United States in the wake of the war, many countries in Europe remain devastated by the conflict, and world tensions run high. Who can say how long this peace will last?

For better and for worse, these strange new times have come to the brooding New England town of Arkham, Massachusetts. Nestled along the Miskatonic River, Arkham has a storied past and sordid history that are at odds with this era of modernity. Rumors of ghosts, witches, and ghoulish creatures haunt every doorstep. At the prestigious Miskatonic University, students and professors must balance new scientific breakthroughs with their focus on the traditional research disciplines of history, archeology, the study of rare books, and even alchemy.



## Arkham Horror versus the Real World

While the world of *Arkham Horror* is set in 1920s New England, it diverges from the 1920s of real life in several key ways. First, while the world of *Arkham Horror* is full of terrible and frightening things, we want our game to be a safe space for everyone, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity. For many, the 1920s was not a friendly time. Discrimination, prejudice, and sexism were the norm, a norm we do not wish to explore or re-create: not even for the sake of historical accuracy. To that end, our version of the 1920s may at times be somewhat anachronistic. We pointedly ignore many of these issues for the sake of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all players. Women and people of color in *Arkham Horror* can pursue any interest or career they desire: science, criminal investigation, academics, or the like. People of color, LGBTQ+ characters, disabled characters, and those from other underrepresented groups can and should exist and thrive in this setting. Representation in media—even among closed groups of players—is extremely important.

This is not to say that every character encountered should have a twenty-first century view of the world,

but players and game masters should be careful not to create a hostile environment for other players for the sake of “accuracy.” For instance, if a player or game master wishes to make a character’s ethnicity or sexuality a particular struggle for them, as may have been the case for such a person in the historical 1920s, they should check in with their play group first to ensure the game will still be safe and fun for all parties.

Other anachronisms may appear from time to time in *Arkham Horror*. For example, alien entities, scientific researchers, or secret government operations such as the Foundation, might have access to technologies significantly more advanced than those of the real-world 1920s. We also don’t expect every player to have a robust understanding of 1920s slang—although injecting some into your roleplaying can add a fun bit of flavor to the game.

Of course, our version of the 1920s also contains uncanny horrors; cosmic entities from the void of space; primordial forces lurking beyond reality; and mystical, paracausal powers that break the very laws of reality. These things are *probably* anachronistic. We think.

Along the coast to the north, the decrepit seaport of Innsmouth remains in steady decline, its waters hiding untold truths. To the west, the remote village of Dunwich is home to strange townfolk and unhallowed countryside. At the mouth of the Miskatonic River sleeps the town of Kingsport, its rocky cliffs and dark mists home to more than the naked eye can perceive.

Here, where ancient horrors gnaw at the foundations of the Earth, the concerns of the surface world pale in comparison to what lurks beyond. The world may have indeed gone mad, but if it has, it happened long, long ago.

### — The World behind the Veil

The world is so much more than what we see and feel, and even the masses of humanity are seemingly insignificant, small, and powerless in the face of this vastness. The cosmos holds forces much greater than us, entities that exist on a level of reality so far beyond our own that we are less than

insects to them. In the cavernous depths and dark crevices of the universe sleep creatures too terrible to behold. Deep in the void of space, alien entities wield technology we can scarcely begin to comprehend. Alternate dimensions and parallel universes host beings so profound, so powerful, they could end life on Earth in the blink of an eye. Beyond the skein of reality, primordial entities lie dormant, their desires unfathomable to all but themselves (that is, if they possess any desires at all besides their insatiable hunger).

These Ancient Ones exist, and perhaps have always existed, just beyond the surface of human reckoning—for most. On the rare occasions when that veil of ignorance has lifted, the person who has seen beyond it has faced an unimaginable burden. Such a person cannot truly go back to the life they once led. Perhaps their mind creates explanations for the unexplainable. Maybe they delve deeper, unraveling what scrap of rationality remains to them. They may even find purpose in worshipping or serving the Ancient One they had the misfortune to perceive, despite the peril.