

Chapter I

A Primer

Colonial Gothic is a supernatural historical roleplaying game that draws inspiration from the colonial period of America. From discovery to the War of Independence, **Colonial Gothic** gives you the tools to set games during this period. In **Colonial Gothic** you play a Hero, who through the course of adventures, slowly uncovers the reality of the world in which they live.

What is this reality?

Lurking in the shadows are mysterious and foul plots. Enemies have been influencing events and pulling strings. Though the world is entering a new age of reason, many see the world in a different way. Creatures of the occult and supernatural exist. Magic is a real force of nature. Your Hero might know this, or they might come to know this.

Everything you need to know as a player and Game Master (or “GM”) is found in this book. This primer tells you what to expect from the game, explains the core mechanic, and what to do with the game.

What to do with the game?

Yes. Roleplaying games tend to forget to tell you what to do with the game. After all, the rules and options, often little room is spent telling you what a game should feel like. As a player, you should know after reading this chapter what your Hero is able to do, and what they should expect from the world of **Colonial Gothic**. As a GM, you will know what to do with **Colonial Gothic** and the type of games you can run. The primer is your amuse-bouche if you will. This one bite sets the table for what is to come. So without further ado, here is **Colonial Gothic**.

Setting

Colonial Gothic is a world mired in mysteries, secrets and plots. Some of these secrets and plots you determine for yourself; others are found within this book. In this rulebook, the horror relies heavily upon your imagination and ingenuity in using the tools provided to you to play the game. Whether you choose to play a Hero fighting a campaign in the American Revolution who discovers the brutality of war, or you decide to play a Hero tracking down witches, it is entirely up to you. Your Hero will discover more and more about the Villains they face, and you will begin to realize that some

enemies are all too human, while others might have never been human to begin with.

Colonial Gothic is designed with a simple premise: the occult and supernatural are real. Drawing upon history, **Colonial Gothic's** perspective is how the colonists viewed the occult and supernatural. Witches are real. Devils exist, as do demons. Magic actually exists and is able to be worked. Colonists have dealt with magic in one of three ways: they have chosen to rationalize the occult and supernatural away, they have been irreversibly damaged by their experiences with magic, or they have accepted it for what it is. Those accepting it have chosen to put their sanity, faith and reputation on the line. Viewing themselves as the last line of defense, these Heroes battle with forces out of sight in the shadows.



On a larger scale, there is something not right in the world of **Colonial Gothic**. Something dark, malicious, and purposeful gnaws at the edges and its touch causes the world to go awry. Though many try to give this a name, no name defines it and no one knows what it truly is. Not even the Natives who have lived on the land before the White Man, know what it is. They know evil infects the land, and it is spreading. What is this evil? There are many theories, but no real answers. What is known is that it influences things, inspires events, and threatens all life. Who stands against this? Your Hero.

Are you up to the challenge?

For the Players

Your Hero is a colonist hailing from one of the colonies found in the New World. For the most part the world is entering a new age: The Age of Reason. The world is slowly leaving behind its roots of myth and superstition and is embracing a world defined by mathematics and science. It was Descartes, Hobbes, Newton, and others who moved the world into this new way of thinking. Though most have embraced these new roots, some have not. There are those who know the truth — magic is real!

In **Colonial Gothic**, you play a Hero who not only knows that magic is real, but the horrors it creates. These monsters could be anywhere. They could be witches cursing a settlement, vampires that followed European immigrants to the New World, or angry spirits terrorizing a Cherokee tribe. Whether you are fighting in the frontier or you are fending off a supernatural disease like Curse from the Grave, you along with others like you, wage a hidden war because there is no one else brave enough to face the Devil's minions; fight them and win.

*Heroes, be warned: something waits for you in the dark.
And it hungers.*

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For the GM

As a GM, you create adventures and campaigns inspired by Colonial American history. The horror adventures you create revolve around the supernatural and the mundane. From monsters to scheming merchants and politicians, there are many campaign possibilities for you to discover in **Colonial Gothic**. To help you craft your game, we have outlined three different styles of play: High Action Style, Occult & Mystery, and Supernatural Style.

High Action Style downplays the supernatural and the occult. Instead of slaying demons, the Heroes will fight against more common threats like slavers, French Traders, and the British Military, to name a few. Campaigns working well for this style can be found in movies like *Last of the Mohicans*, *Dances with Wolves*, or *The Patriot*; or the stories of James Fenimore Cooper. If a military campaign does not interest you, you could create a campaign based around discovery or exploration. The colonies are still new to most people – many resources and native cultures are waiting to be discovered. This style works well for players that like a lot of movement in their game; it also works well for players who want to explore the natural side to this setting.



Occult & Mystery Style introduces players to the occult, but takes a softer approach to the horrors awaiting them. The threats your players face are few and far between because you create adventures focused around a mystery. The mystery you design might be based on a strange cult intent on winning the War for its own devilish reasons, or a mage intent on infiltrating the militia. While the setting details of movies like *Sleepy Hollow* and *From Hell* are not an exact fit to **Colonial Gothic**, these are two movies in a similar vein; strong setting, an aura of dark mystery, and a suspension of disbelief. As for books, the writings of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorn, Washington Irving, H. P. Lovecraft, and Robert E. Howard are ideal for tone, setting and scope. Whatever mystery you choose, the goal of this style is to create adventures that are more centered around investigation than the engagement in constant, heavy combat.

Supernatural Style is the default style of **Colonial Gothic**. Similar to Occult & Mystery, this style has that same touch of magic and mayhem. However, in this style of

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play, the Hero's threats are more ancient and widespread than they would be in Occult & Mystery. Similarly themed examples of a larger, supernatural threat that would be considered "epic" would be movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Brotherhood of the Wolf*. These movies each have a large enough threat that, if it succeeds, would change the world's fabric of reality. For writers, Shelly and Stroker have the style to set the tone. Many Heroes do not know how Magic works; they only have a vague understanding of how to fight the monsters it sometimes creates. Some Heroes try to use Magic and the occult to their own advantage; others shy away from it.

Regardless of the style you choose, action in **Colonial Gothic** is larger-than-life. What does this mean to you as a GM? Heroes and Villains are capable of performing feats that others find impossible. When designing adventures and running your games, remember to think "big," but allow your players to react "bigger."

12°

Everything you need to know in order to play **Colonial Gothic** is found in this book. The basics found in this chapter allow you to quickly understand the game's mechanical foundations. Of course, **Colonial Gothic**, is not complex. Most rules are fairly straightforward and easy to remember. Nevertheless, there are a handful of occasions when multiple modifiers and special cases come into play. The better you understand the basic rules, the better equipped you will be to deal with those few exceptions.

Playing the Game

To play **Colonial Gothic**, you need:

- Two twelve-sided dice (D12). GMs might want to have a few more handy.
- A blank piece of paper (or a Hero sheet) and a pencil.
- A willingness to have fun.

Rules Overview

Action in **Colonial Gothic** is not intended to be "realistic" or "gritty." It is meant to recreate the type of action you are likely to read in fiction, see in comic books, or watch in a movie or television show. Note, **Colonial Gothic** is not cartoonish or ridiculously over the top, but the emphasis is on verisimilitude and plausibility rather than a strict reality simulation. The game's rules, known as **12°**, are designed to accommodate this style of play with ease. Action is about doing things in a flashy and larger-than-life way. It is one thing to say your Hero is fighting a zombie; it is another to say they are doing so while balancing on a church roof.

Every action, regardless if your Hero is firing a musket or intimidating a merchant, is handled the same way. Roll 2d12 and if the result is equal to or less than your Target Number (TN), the action succeeds.

Simple as that.

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Your TN is a number based on two associated Abilities or Skills plus or minus any modifiers. For example, if your Hero wants to throw a tomahawk and has an Agility 6 and Throw 6, your TN is 12. Thus, rolling a 2d12 and getting a result of 11 results in success; rolling 2d12 and getting a 23 results in failure.

Tests

All actions in **Colonial Gothic** are called Tests. There are three types of Tests – Ability, Skill, and Opposed – that depend on specific situations; the Gamemaster will tell you what type of Test you need to make if it is not obvious.

Ability Tests

Ability Tests depend on one of your Hero's Abilities and is used in times of great need or danger. These Tests are not tied to Skills; instead they are tied to your Hero's inherent ability to do something. Your Target Number is always the unmodified Rank in your Ability.

For example, suppose your Hero is running away from some cultist thugs. You decide to shake your pursuers by declaring your Hero is diving into a nearby canal and holding his breath while underwater, hoping the thugs do not spot him. Once your Hero reaches his limit, your GM tells you to make a Body Test, to see if your Hero still manages to hold his breath. In this case your TN would be your Hero's Body Ability (8). Rolling 2d12 the result is 15, failure. Thus your Hero fails his Body Test and begins to drown.



Skill Tests

Skill Tests are the most common tests found in **Colonial Gothic**. Most actions, from shooting a musket to researching a demon, are handled by Skill Tests. Your Target Number in a Skill Test equals your Skill Rank plus the Rank of the Skill's associated Ability, plus or minus any bonus or penalties associated with the Test. The resulting number is the one you need to meet in order to succeed.

For example, your Hero is climbing a wall. This is normally a Routine Test. Unfortunately, your Hero is attempting to climb a wall in the pouring rain while not being spotted by guards patrolling the area. Your Hero's Athletics skill is 7 and his Agility is 6, making your TN 13. Due to the rain and the need for your Hero to be silent, your GM assesses your Hero a -4 penalty, which lowers your Hero's TN to 9 for this Test.

Opposed Tests

Opposed Tests are tests between two separate Heroes, usually occurring when your Hero is competing against another Hero or is acting out against a non-player Hero of some sort. Opposed Tests are necessary when the degree of your Hero's success (or failure) determines how the game's events unfold. Opposed Tests require two or more

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parties to make a Test; whoever rolls highest, but still below their Target Number, succeeds. Opposed Tests also come into play for some specific skills, such as Stealth, as well as in combat.

An example of an Opposed Test for Stealth would be in the case of infiltrating. Your Hero is trying to sneak into a protected house. A guard is keeping watch, and the GM states that the guard has a chance of noticing your Hero sneaking into the house. The GM tells you to make a Stealth Test; while the GM makes an Observe Test for the guard. Rolling the dice, your result is a 4 (your TN was 12)—success! The GM, rolling for the guard (whose TN is 9), rolls a 12 — failure. Your Hero easily sneaks into the house, while the guard standing watch fails to notice him.

Success & Failure

As long as you roll a number equal to your Target Number or lower, your Hero succeeds at his actions. Any time you roll higher than your TN, your Hero fails. In some cases, your Hero may also experience a Dramatic Success or a Dramatic Failure.

Dramatic Success

Any time you roll a “2” on a 2d12, you score a Dramatic Success. The meaning of a Dramatic Success varies with the type of Test being used. Typically it means your Hero has not only succeeded, but did so in a spectacular, memorable fashion. In combat, a Dramatic Success indicates you have dealt your opponent maximum damage for his weapon type, whereas in a Skill Test it indicates that you have achieved what you were attempting, and more.

Dramatic Failure

Rolling a “24” on a 2d12 means your Hero experiences a Dramatic Failure. What this means is that the Hero not only failed the Test, but also performed his action so badly that he has either placed himself in danger or otherwise adversely affected himself (and possibly his companions). In combat, a Dramatic Failure indicates, for example, that your sword breaks; while in a Skill Test it indicates that you are either badly mistaken or have failed in such a way so as to make the situation more precarious.

Degrees

As you might expect a game mechanic called 12°, your Hero’s Degree of Success is important. Your Degree of Success is the amount by which you roll under your Target Number. For example, your Hero’s TN is 14 and you roll 11, your Degree of Success is 3. In combat, your Degree of Success acts as a multiplier to your weapon’s base damage.

Using the above example, if your Hero is fighting with a sword with a base damage value of 5 and achieves 3 Degrees of Success, he would deal 15 points of damage to his opponent.

In skill use, Degrees of Success have a much more “impressionistic” meaning; which is to say, it is largely up to the GM. Generally, degrees of success either indicate the time

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factor removed from the task or the increase in its effectiveness. Returning to the above example, a task normally taking 10 rounds might take only 7 if you achieve 3 Degrees of Success. Ultimately, the Gamemaster is the final arbiter of how Degrees of Success improve Skill-based tasks, but it should always be an obvious improvement that increases with the more degrees of success a Hero achieves.

Bonus & Penalties

Sometimes, depending on the situation, your Hero gains a bonus or penalty to a Test. These modifiers change the Target Number of the Test, making it easier (or harder) for your Hero to achieve what you want. Bonuses and penalties are never applied to the die roll; they are added (or subtracted) directly to the TN.

GMs, as they run adventures, determine what the situations are and whether any penalties come into play. For example, suppose you are the GM, and one of your players wants to fire a musket while riding a running horse. Typically, firing a musket is a Routine Task (no modifier), but firing it from a running horse is more challenging. As the GM, you decide that due to the nature of this task, the player suffers a -3 (Challenging) penalty while firing from a running horse.

Situation	Modifier
Impossible	-6
Daring	-5
Reckless	-4
Challenging	-3
Difficult	-2
Hard	-1
Routine	0
Feeble	+1
Easy	+2
Trivial	+3
Simple	+4
Basic	+5
Instinctive	+6

Fate Cards & Faith Points

Colonial Gothic succeeds, or fails, based on how the Heroes play. Of course, the Game Master's skill at creating an interesting and fun adventure is almost as important, but it is the Heroes and their actions driving the game. In order to encourage you to create interesting and well-rounded Heroes, and to bring their most interesting Heroics

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to bear in your adventures, **Colonial Gothic** uses Fate Cards (or Hooks).

Fate Cards are roleplaying tools that describe some aspect of your Hero's past history, personality, or connections to other Heroes, among other things. For example, a Hero might have "Last surviving member of their family" or "Bearer of the devil mark" or "Strong as an ox" as Hooks. Each of these hooks is suggestive about your Hero and possibly about his relationship to the larger world; both of which make them invaluable to the GM as he plans engaging adventures in **Colonial Gothic**. Besides suggesting interesting things about your Hero to the GM, hooks have another more immediate benefit: Faith Points.

Faith Points (or Action Points) are dramatic "currency" you acquire by creating Hooks. They can be traded for situational boons, such as bonuses to your Target Number, free re-rolls, and other benefits. Fate Cards are finite in number, with Heroes having no more than 10 at any given time, sometimes less. Fate Points can be regained by bringing your hooks to bear in an adventure in ways your GM thinks makes the game more exciting and fun for everyone.

