

Dark Architectures

An evening's tale of houses and the people that haunt them

Shawn McCarthy
@shawnmccarthy
s.t.mccarthy@gmail.com

For the 2015 RPGGeek 24 Hour RPG



Introductions

Ah, welcome! What an odd gathering of guests to all be arriving at once. But please, come in, wipe your shoes off and make yourselves at home. We have a bit of business to settle before it gets dark. I am Emerson Quin, representative for the late Lord Richard's estate and matters.

Surely you've all heard tales of the Hall? Ghosts, possession, crimes even I cannot bring myself to speak of... all hearsay and conjecture, the product of and busy little minds in this idle town. But there is enough to these bogeyman stories to draw you all, and per his final wishes, I've opened the door for one night to let the matter be settled.

Overview

In **Dark Architectures** we will become a brave handful of explorers that step over the threshold into the ancestral home of Lord Richard York, Colbridge Manor. Colbridge Manor perches atop a hill near the center of Goshenkirk, which is itself a small town tucked between a reedy lake and a whispering birch forest and nearly forgotten by maps.

One of us - perhaps the one who suggested this foolhardy incursion - will facilitate the flow of play, but they hold no special fiat beyond that. Each of us will take a turn leading

the group and it is all of our responsibilities to describe eerie rooms, confusing omens, and threatening setbacks. At times we as players will have an idea what *worst-possible-thing* a flash of lighting could reveal... but we do not share this knowledge with our characters; we send them groping into the darkened hallways to see what happens.



We will go room by room, each hoping to discover why we have been drawn so inexorably to Colbridge Manor, and working together to resolve the primary storyline. A few dice representing the mysterious nature and the sprit of the house itself will come into play, but quite often what hinders us will be our own histories and secrets.

Each of us will create a character by choosing an **Archetype** and spending a few minutes to share some characteristics that bring them to life. Next, we will establish the **Primary Storyline** - the pretense under which we have all congregated at Colbridge manor. Finally, each of us will write down the basis of our **Personal Storyline** - something that connects our character to the Manor, and if needed, make small changes to our initial description.

Once the guests have been introduced Emerson Quin takes their leave. The door latches shut with a solid slam and the outsiders' story begins.

Gather

Arrange the following on a sitting-room table scuffed by the corners of heavy whisky glasses:

-  Three standard six-sided dice in different colors. If you only have one die available, resolution can be sorted out just fine by rolling three times and making note of each result. Assign one dice as **The Player**, one as **The Manor**, and one as **The Uncanny**.
- Four to five wide candles, or a brass signal lamp, or a flashlight with nearly depleted batteries.
-  The set of cards from the end of this file, printed double-sided so that a **Room** is opposite an **Event**. The exact arrangement isn't important; two separate stacks will suffice, just tuck an **Event** face-down under each new **Room**.
- Pens, pencils, a sheet of paper for the fool's errand of remembering the Manor's layout.

Setup

Distribte a **Character Card** to each player along with a pencil or pen.

Basics

Everyone can start by filling in a **Name & Description** for their character or complete that at any point during Setup. Some Archetypes and Storylines might spark interesting ideas for their characters that they wouldn't have otherwise come up with.

Archetype

Each player in turn rolls a die, consults the table of suggested Archetypes, ticks it off the list, and fills the Archetype (and the quick note, if they like) on their Character Card.

There's room for discussion here - if a player really prefers to play a type that hasn't been claimed after everyone has rolled, they may swap. *Only if the group agrees*, there may be two or more of the same Archetype.

Personal Storyline

Each player in turn rolls a die and consults the table of suggested **Storylines**. There are two listing for each number, the player may choose one or the other (or roll again to break a tie). They tick their choice off the list, fill it in on their Character Card and consider how it interacts with their Archetype and the other players. Again, if an unchosen Storyline piques a player's interest, they may swap after everyone has rolled.

Primary Storyline

This isn't just a story about the player's characters, *it is also about the Manor*. Treating the Manor as an additional player, one person can roll against the Storyline table until the result is a Storyline not associated with a player. Write this Storyline in on the **Colbridge Manor Character Card**. During play, anyone can add notes to the Manor's card.

Anyone who waited on the details of their character, now is the time to tidy that up.


Take a few moments for meta-discussion:

- What will our characters be doing for the first few scenes? Do any of the characters know one another?
- What kind of tone are we interested in playing - gothic dread, gratuitous horror, self-referential lampshades everywhere?
- Is there anything that we as players really want to see in this story, or honestly want to avoid?
 - If you're using a **Safety valve system** like the [X-Card](#) or [Yellow/Red\(Brems/Kutt\)](#), now is also the time to make sure everybody is on the same page.

Light the candles, dim the lights, and we're off.

Scenes

The basic unit of time in Dark Architecture is a scene, and we have a ritual that accompanies each scene:

- A player receives the dice and becomes the **Leader** of that scene.
- The **Leader** places the dice on the table, near their Character Card, wine, and athame, where other players can easily point to them.
- The Leader decides whether to **remain in the current location** or **explore a new Room**. They can confer *briefly* with the other players, but the choice is theirs.
 - **Remain in place:** When deciding to stay, the Leader describes **what they are trying to accomplish** here that warrants staying put and others chime in with in-character speech, narration, and descriptions of what else they experience in the room. Once each player has spoken at least once - contributing a detail, a conversation, a question for someone else - the dice are now available. Players (including the Leader) can signal that the scene has built up enough and they want to **Resolve** it by **tipping a die** over.
 - Once all three dice have been tipped, it is time to roll for Resolution.
 - Clearly gesturing toward the dice, typing 'dice' in a Hangout, or speaking the word 'dice' while not interrupting another player are equivalent to actually tipping a die over.
 - If you are playing with fewer than three people the same underlying guideline applies - *everyone has contributed*. As well, try to get three or more contributions before each player tips a die and agrees to proceed.
 - Continue to **Resolution** to roll and wrap up the scene.
 - **Explore a new room:** If the leader presses on, reveal the next card in the  **Room deck** while keeping its Event side concealed. *If using two decks, tuck an Event under the Room.*
 - Lay this card on the table, nearby to whichever room you are leaving in one direction or another. Many rooms sound standard - rectangular, 3-10 meters on a side, and so on - while hallways are longer and connect several rooms, and others are moreso 'features' that expand other rooms. That's why *nearby* and not specifically *adjacent*; connect the rooms (initially) based on what makes sense, and later by embracing the strange.
 - Reveal the **Event** side of the **Room** you are departing. Quickly discuss what it means in context, and then




the Leader has final say.

- If the Event carries an impending threat, the Leader's scene framing must address that or the group will feel the weight of the threat made real.
- Contrariwise, the Event may change the state of play in ways the characters might not notice - as players, embrace these opportunities for the surreal, the dreadful, and the ironic.
- An impending threat should be **Resolved** with a roll, otherwise the same dice tipping rule applies. *Everyone contributes, at least three players tip dice, we **Resolve** the scene.*

Resolution




About half-way through each scene, we've built up enough description, sensory impressions, and stakes - or we have an impending threat to deal with - and we turn to our three dice.

Again, we point out which dice is which:

-  **The Player(s)** - a character acting individually or the group as a whole
-  **The Manor** - the bricks, timber, furnishings of the house
-  **The Uncanny** - the inky Dark, the occult, the thaumaturgic, the creatures and omens

If we are using but one die, we repeat the order for the roll and get ready to note the results.

To read the roll, we look for the highest die. If it is **unique**, we continue toward wrapping the scene based on the following gist:

-  **The Player(s)** - a character acting alone or with the group succeeds in what they're attempting - searching through old notebooks turns up the name of a secret lover, they are saved by physical prowess, characters who had been arguing find common ground.
-  **The Manor** - The wooden bones twist, radiator-steam blood hisses, stained glass eyes of Colbridge Manor shatters. Doors slam shut, when pried open there is only brick behind. A dumbwaiter opens with a chime. Beams start to splinter overhead. *The lights go out.*
-  **The Uncanny** - Whispers. Screams. A phone rings and plays back a secret conversation from before your explorations here. Flitting reflections in the glass. Someone's eyes have changed color, or they've aged a decade since you last looked. You taste blood and rock candy. A door, once locked, now opens to *Literally Hell* and something beckons you to enter.

On a **tie**, quickly discuss what a combination of those two results could look like using the concepts of **Yes...But** (A Player succeeds at their endeavor BUT a gust of wind extinguishes their old-fashioned oil lantern) and **Yes...And** (Not only does the vault

door swing shut while your backpack is still inside, shadows drip down from the ceiling and writhe behind you while you try to dial the combination). On **triples** (e.g. 1-1-1), it's **Yes...And...**
Also: Players get what they want but at great price or risk or sacrifice.

One important note here: no matter how bad it gets, it can always get worse. Players have final say on if their characters die. Generally, it's better to keep characters in the game until dramatic exit points.

When the scene has reached its natural end - everyone sort of nods or pauses - the Leader passes the dice clockwise (or alphabetically, for Hangouts) and we have a new Leader who can decide on whether to continue the narrative in place, or explore further.

One more thing before we move on...

Affecting the Roll

While most narratives have characters cooperating, some interactions or backstories may pit them against each other in a variety of different ways. When the Leader has just rolled for Resolution and reveals a 🎲 **Player win or tie**, a **different Player** may point to one of the dice and tip it to affect the outcome. **They choose any die and increment or decrement it by 1. This can make or break ties & triples.**

- This can only happen once per scene. If A rolls, B interjects and tips a die, C can offer commentary and suggestions but can't affect the dice for this scene.
- It can only affect a Player win or tie
- It's not specifically antagonistic to another player or character, *and we can all see that this is interesting fodder for the story. Right?*
- If the Leader wishes, they can ask another player to affect a roll but the decision is the Player's
- It is most certainly public *Player* knowledge who nudged the dice, but *Characters* aren't privvy to this knowledge. If a someone roleplays what their Character did to throw a wrench in, it's fair game.

When this happens, the **Player who tipped the die** can mark a **Storyline box** per the next section.

Advancing the Storylines

Underpinning all this is the concept of story arcs for each character, including Colbridge Manor. The **Primary Story** and

Personal Stories each have a track of checkboxes that we will fill in and help us tell a complete narrative.

Each time 🎲**The Manor** is part of the winning roll, mark off a box along the **Primary Storyline** track. Eight boxes should pace for a 3 hour session (assuming roughly 20 minutes between The Manor winning a resolution). If you're tight for time, play hard and ruthless to 6 boxes.

Each time 🎲**The Uncanny** is part of the winning roll, mark off a box for its track. There's eight boxes but really there's no upper bound; not once has "Well, at least it can't get any worse," ever been true. It's not backed by a rule, just a guideline: more filled boxes means everything escalates and piles on against the explorers.

Colbridge Manor

Primary Storyline:

Storyline Progress X _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

The Uncanny Progress _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ ...

Discoveries:

Each time 🎲**The Player** is part of the winning roll, mark off a box on the **Leader's** track.

Name

Archetype:

Description:

Personal Storyline:

Storyline Progress X _ _ _ _ _

Except: If another Player **Affected the Roll** such that it prevented the Leader from being credited with an outright win (not a tie or trips), they claim the advancement instead.

Example: The Leader A rolls and gets [🎲**The Player 6**, 🎲**The Manor 5**, 🎲**The Uncanny 2**]. If this roll stands, they shift narration to the players succeeding and claim an advancement on their **Personal Storyline**. If Player B gestures at the dice and changes either The Player or The Manor die such that they match, The **Primary Storyline** on the **Colbridge Manor Card** advances, and Player B marks an advancement on their **Storyline** as well.

Burning down the House

Or, tying up loose ends.

When there are only one or two boxes left on the **Primary Storyline** track, it's time to have another quick out-of-character talk about how to wrap up. Discuss what kind of endings might make sense given the current state of affairs and

player trajectories:

- Who has a Personal Storyline that's nearly completed, and can we help them finish it satisfactorily?
- Do we know what's going on with the Manor, given the Primary Storyline and details we've established?
- Do we have any sort of exit strategy?

Use the last few scenes to touch on as many of those as feel reasonable, but don't stretch to tie up every dangling thread. *If Will Navidson never retraced his steps and ascended the infinite staircase, surely someone would have gone back in looking for him...*

When the last box is marked on the **Primary Storyline**, finish this last scene and at most one more epilogue scene. Then tear up any remaining Room and Event cards rather thoroughly, and ignite with the last remaining candle. It's better to be safe than sorry.

Sources

Images

- House - Alexandre Delbos | CCBY2.0 - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alesk/2242430343>
- Game-Icons.net | CCBY3.0
 - <http://game-icons.net/delapouite/dice/perspective-dice-six-faces-six.html>
 - <http://game-icons.net/delapouite/originals/stack.html>
 - <http://game-icons.net/lorc/originals/empty-hourglass.html>

Archetypes

Roll once for a pair of options.

If you need to break a tie, roll again for even/odd.

1	Close family member You have a tie to the York family, and likely knew Lord Richard personally. You've experienced Colbridge Manor at least once in the past.
2	Peer You knew Lord Richard in a professional capacity. Besides the strong intuitive draw, some unsettled business requires your visit to the Manor.
3	Occultist You have beliefs about the true nature of the Manor - a convergence of ley lines, holy site of a Saint, hellmouth, haven for "good" ghosts.
4	Straight-laced Somebody at HQ must be having a good laugh. There's no reason a seasoned member of your three-letter-

	agency would be assigned here otherwise?
5	Skeptic There's obviously a good explanation for those claims. Shoddy insulation on the wires, marsh gas, dust motes in front the camera. Nothing spooky.
6	Wild card You're in tow with another guest. You woke up here. This is the best LARP ever. Your car broke down, can I use the phone? <i>Your choice...</i>

Storylines

Roll once for a pair of options.

If you need to break a tie, roll again for even/odd.

1+even	Pursuit: Someone entered Colbridge Manor and you're trying to catch them
1+odd	Escape: Running from something that seems worse than the spectre of the Manor.
2+even	Revenge: Against the late Lord Richard, his surviving family, or someone else. What for?
2+odd	The Mystery: Unearthing the hidden meaning of the house.
3+even	Sacrifice: Penitence, repayment, settling a score. One or all, literal or metaphorical.
3+odd	The Quest: Reaching a point or finding an object is of the utmost importance.
4+even	[Forbidden] Love: Between player or nonplayer characters, fraternal or romantic, on or off screen.
4+odd	Temptation: Morality, exploring character(s) ideals and a fundamental conflict.
5+even	Metamorphosis: The Manor doesn't just draw you in, it molds you like clay
5+odd	Rivalry: Between player or nonplayer characters. Conflict and subversion.
6+even	The Mundane: Everything seems uncanny and supernatural, but the simple truth is even more disturbing
6+odd	





Rooms & Features


11 Attic	31 Slave's quarters, repurposed	51 Carriage house
12 Bedroom (Master)	32 Garret, cubby under roof	52 Hidden storeroom
13 Closet	33 Balcony	53 Washroom / bathroom

14 Den	34 Long Hallway	54 Child's room, untouched since _____
15 Conservatory	35 Narrow passage	55 Painting & Sculpture
16 Dining room	36 Staircase, descending	56 Shelves of unmarked boxes
21 Family room / playroom	41 Staircase, grand	61 Small chapel
22 Foyer	42 Sauna	62 Family crypt
23 Guest Bedroom	43 Electrical panel	63 Wellhead, covered
24 Library	44 Coal / Wood Boiler	64 Cubby with roof access
25 Scullery	45 Cellar	65 Beneath the stairs
26 Kitchen	46 Tunnel	66 Courtyard

If you are not printing, the numbers can be used for a 6x6 roll. Roll 2 dice and read the numbers in order.

Events

11 A door or window opens or closes	31  Fingernails and teeth slowly start falling out, one each hour.	51 Choose a visited Room, echo its Event, and then destroy the Room
12 Lights flicker or throb to the rhythm of your breath	32  All color drains from view	52 Choose a visited Room, echo its Event, and then destroy the Room
13 Your chest is tight, it's impossible to breathe	33 There are mirrors here but their reflection is ... slower?	53 Choose a visited Room, echo its Event, and then destroy the Room
14 A chill passes over the room	34 A familiar voice shouts your name	54 Move a visited room, echo its Event.
15  You feel the draw of the house grow ever stronger and you want to press on recklessly	35  Clocks don't tick or count time, second hands and numbers flick back and forth	55 Move a visited room, echo its Event
16 Sounds of small feet or paws around the corner	36 A well-known constellation outside a window is missing stars	56 Move a visited room, echo its Event
21 Smoke then fire	41 Cancel an ongoing Effect marked with an	61 If you drew a new Room, put it back on

	hourglass	the deck. What you thought was a new room is revealed as an extension of this same room.
22 The next thing you speak comes out backwards	42 Cancel an ongoing Effect marked with an hourglass	62 If you drew a new Room, put it back on the deck. What you thought was a new room is revealed as an extension of this same room.
23 Shadows don't fall where they ought to and move when you're not looking	43 Cancel an ongoing Effect marked with an hourglass	63 If you drew a new Room, put it back on the deck. You step into a twisting passage that connects all rooms.
24 The earthy and repugnant smell of an opened grave	44 Cancel an ongoing Effect marked with an hourglass	64 If you turn your head you can see a sort of mirage; draw a second room and choose one to proceed.
25 Snakes.	45 Cancel an ongoing Effect marked with an hourglass	65 If you drew a new Room, put it back on the deck. Ahead is pure lightless void.
26  All the water you carry is now wine	46 Cancel an ongoing Effect marked with an hourglass	66 Everyone passes unconscious for a while

If you are not printing, the numbers can be used for a 6x6 roll. Roll 2 dice and read the numbers in order.

Cards with an hourglass stay in play unless the room they're attached to is destroyed.

Character Cards

Colbridge Manor

Primary Storyline:

Storyline Progress

The Darkness Progress

Discoveries:

— — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — ...

Name

Archetype:

Description:

Personal Storyline:

Storyline Progress

- - - - -

Name

Archetype:

Description:

Personal Storyline:

Storyline Progress

- - - - -

Name

Archetype:

Description:

Personal Storyline:

Storyline Progress

- - - - -

Name

Archetype:

Description:

Personal Storyline:

Storyline Progress

- - - - -