



*"I think the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness."*

- Fyodor Dostoyevsky

In the 1980s, a moral panic swept the United States. Rumors swirled of a vast underground network of devil worshippers, and claims of Satanic Ritual Abuse flooded the airwaves. Role-playing games were gateways to black magic, and backwards messages, hidden in heavy metal music, spurred teenagers to Satanism or suicide. The devil was everywhere and something needed to be done. In response to growing public fears, the FBI assembled a taskforce to investigate occult activity.

*Darkly Through the Labyrinth* is a role-playing game where players assume the roles of FBI agents assigned to this special taskforce. They investigate doomsday cults, fringe religious groups, and ritualistic crimes. *Darkly Through the Labyrinth* is a horror game, but the monsters are human. The evils perpetrated upon society are entirely manmade; there is no supernatural agency at work. The enemy is one of us.

## ROLE-PLAYING

A role-playing game is akin to improvisational theater. Players assume the roles of characters (referred to as player characters or PCs) who are the protagonists of the play. In some regards, a role-playing game is like Radio Theater in that the story is told verbally and not physically acted out.

Players are the actors and actresses of *Darkly Through the Labyrinth*. They are the ones who bring the stories to life. Their characters are the principals of the drama. The players decide who their characters are, what they look like, what they do, and how they act; they fuel the dynamic that drives the game

via the actions of their characters.

Being a player is, in some ways, more complex than being an actor... because there is no script. In a play, the script tells the performer what to do and what to say. In contrast, a role-playing game is wholly freeform and improvisational. The player must decide on the spot what the character does and says.

In a role-playing game, one participant assumes the role of Game Master (GM). He or she acts as the director, establishing the setting, plot, and mood. The Game Master must set the stage for the story being told, creating the framework in which the players act. It is the GM's responsibility to relate the environment to the players; this person is the players' eyes and ears, describing all that they see, hear, or otherwise experience in the fictional world. The Game Master also assumes the roles of all the characters with whom the players interact outside their group. These GM controlled characters are known as non-player characters (NPCs). While the GM must create the initial framework of the story, the players will determine the ultimate direction of the plot.

In addition to helping the player characters interact with their environment, the GM also acts as referee. The GM must interpret the rules of the game in a fair and impartial manner to facilitate play. Thus, the Game Master should be familiar with the rules beforehand so that informed and rational rulings can be made.

## CHARACTERS

The player characters are FBI agents who investigate crimes involving religion and the occult. While all the PCs have this in common, their individual talents and abilities will vary. One character might rely on instinct and intuition for guidance

while another operates by sheer grit and determination. A third character might prefer a more intellectual path. These distinct approaches to investigation are known as *Methods*, and they are the foundation of each character. They define how a character works a case.

Characters are not solely defined by their *Methods*. Each possesses skills and training that can be brought to bear. PCs have other traits as well, such as their ability to cope with trauma and the willpower to forge on when lesser men and women would falter.

## RULES

While role-playing is best described as collaborative storytelling, it's important to remember that it's also a game—and like all games it is governed by rules. When the result of a character's action is in doubt, the rules come into play.

*Darkly Through the Labyrinth* uses dice to simulate chance. These are more than just the common six-sided dice found in most board games; the game uses four, six, eight, ten, twelve, and twenty-sided dice (abbreviated d4, d6, d8, d10, d12, and d20).

A character's *Methods* are rated by die type from d4 to d20. The higher the die type, the stronger a character is with a given *Method*. An action's *Difficulty* is also rated by die type, with d4 being easiest and d20 being hardest.

To determine an action's success or failure, a player rolls two dice. One die represents the *Method* the character is employing; the other die represents the action's *Difficulty*, which is determined by the Game Master. If the *Method* die's result meets or exceeds the *Difficulty* die's result, the action is

a success. If the *Difficulty* die's result is higher, the action has failed. This basic mechanic is used to resolve all actions in the game.

Characters possess a variety of traits that can modify dice rolls in their favors. These skills and abilities increase the *Method* die type or decrease the *Difficulty* die type.

## SETTING

*Darkly Through the Labyrinth* is set in the mid-1980s. During this period, social conservatism is ascendant and the Moral Majority influences public policy. Child abuse and abductions are blamed on secret cabals of Satanists. The Devil's hand is seen in music, film, and other entertainment. Fear and paranoia grips the nation.

Satanists are not the only perceived threat to the social order. Pagan groups are under suspicion, their non-Christian beliefs seen as affronts to traditional values. Fringe religious groups with unorthodox philosophies are also easy targets.

The fears of the decade were ultimately proven unfounded. No vast conspiracy of devil worshippers threatened society, children were safe at daycare, and the youth did not turn to the Devil. But what if some of these fears were real? This is the premise of *Darkly Through the Labyrinth*. However, even in the game's setting, the supernatural is not a reality. There is no bogeyman behind the horror. Crimes involving the occult are few and far between and the culprits are always human. The Devil does not make anyone do anything. Demons are not real. The only monsters in the game are the depraved and twisted souls who commit unspeakable acts in the name of some unseen supernatural entity... and their dark gods will never make an appearance.

*Darkly Through the Labyrinth* is an investigative game well served by its 1980s setting. Technology is advanced enough that the era will not be too foreign or too distant. However, modern conveniences like cell phones and the Internet are still years away. This means characters will have to do research the old fashioned way: by reviewing newspaper articles on microfiche and sorting through documents and records at the FBI. It also means the PCs are often on their own should they get into trouble. Without cell phones, help is not always accessible.

## ATMOSPHERE

The mood of *Darkly Through the Labyrinth* is one of suspense, mystery, and dread. To help create such an atmosphere, the game draws upon gothic influences. This is not to say that characters will be parading around medieval castles and foggy moors. Gothic is an aesthetic. When properly used it can engender the dread and suspense critical to the game.

Gothic fiction presents a decaying, immoral world. Feelings of anxiety and dread underpin the genre. Gothic horror cultivates an air of mystery designed to evoke terror and suspense. Gothic stories are set in grim and foreboding locations that, more often than not, have fallen into ruin. This is true for *Darkly Through the Labyrinth*. Scenes can be set in dilapidated churches, crumbling urban hovels, and abandoned subway tunnels. A few small touches can make a location more imposing; a screen door dangling by a single rusty hinge, occult symbols scrawled on an alley wall, and bloodshot eyes peering through broken windowpanes can ratchet up the disquiet.

Gothic fiction is concerned with the psychological states of its characters. A penetrating stare or constant hand wringing can hint at what is going on inside an NPC's head. In the gothic tradition, protagonists are often flawed individuals and so it is

with the player characters. Each bears scars from the work they do.

While a gothic atmosphere is important to establishing the mood of *Darkly Through the Labyrinth*, these elements should not be overused. Doing so will quickly devolve the game into parody. They should be contrasted with more mundane elements. If every scene takes place during a thunderstorm or is set in a ruined building, the spell will be broken.

## BACKGROUND

The Behavioral Science Unit (BSU) is an instructional arm of the FBI. It was established in 1972 to provide training, research, and consultation services to law enforcement agencies. The BSU specializes in criminal psychology and behavior. Its dedicated agents delve into the minds of criminals.

The player characters are special agents with the BSU. They mostly work normal cases or teach at the FBI Academy. However, when an assignment surfaces with religious or ritualistic elements, they are drafted into a special taskforce mandated to handle such investigations. This taskforce has no proper name or designation. It is assembled on a case-by-case basis. Taskforce membership is small and agents are rotated in and out. The player characters represent the core of the taskforce. They are called upon for most



cases. They answer to Special Agent In Charge (SAC) Jim Lewis.

Jim Lewis began his FBI career in 1973 as a criminal psychologist working under John E. Douglas, the father of modern criminal profiling. Lewis excelled at the BSU, working on many high profile cases. In 1978, he was assigned to the Jonestown investigation.

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1978, over 900 people died at the mass suicide at Jonestown. While leaving the settlement, Rep. Leo Ryan was murdered. As the FBI is responsible for investigating violence against public officials, they were tasked with the follow-up investigation. This was Jim Lewis's first major assignment.

Lewis was sickened by the Jonestown tragedy. He was deeply troubled that religion could be used in such a horrifying manner. However, he was not a naïve man. He knew what a depraved mind was capable of and was well aware of the role religion played in other tragedies throughout history. Still, something about this was different. It ignited an obsession in Lewis. Investigating cults and fringe religious groups became his passion. Therefore, in the early 1980s, when the FBI decided to create a taskforce to investigate the occult, Jim Lewis was the natural choice to lead it.

Lewis determines which agents work on the taskforce. He values dedication and discretion in his agents. Those lacking either don't work on the taskforce for very long. Lewis takes the taskforce's mandate very seriously. However, while he is highly dedicated, he is not a zealot.

## PRESENTATION

Like other role-playing games, *Darkly Through the Labyrinth*

uses specialized terminology in its rules. Any game-specific terms are capitalized and italicized to bring attention to them. Key rule points are bolded to make them stand out on the page.

## DISCLAIMER

*Darkly Through the Labyrinth* is intended for mature audiences. It deals with subject matter that some may find troubling. *Darkly Through the Labyrinth* is not an aspersion on religion or spirituality. If anything it is a comment on man's abuse of such ideas to justify cruel and inhuman behavior.