Gloom

The Game of Inauspicious Incidents & Grave Consequences

The world of *Gloom* is a sad and benighted place. The sky is gray, the tea is cold, and a new tragedy lies around every corner. Debt, disease, heartache, and packs of rabid flesh-eating mice — just when it seems like things can't get any worse, they do. But some say that one's reward in the afterlife is based on the misery endured in life. If so, there may yet be hope — if not in this world, then in the peace that lies beyond.

In the *Gloom* card game, you assume control of the fate of an eccentric family of misfits and misanthropes. The goal of the game is sad, but simple: you want your characters to suffer the greatest tragedies possible before passing on to the well-deserved respite of death. You'll play horrible mishaps like Pursued by Poodles or Mocked by Midgets on your own characters to lower their Self-Worth scores, while trying to cheer your opponents' characters with marriages and other happy occasions that pile on positive points. When one of your family members finally suffers an Untimely Death, that character and all of the tragic circumstances that led up to his demise are set aside until the end of the game.

The game ends the instant an entire family is eliminated. Each player then totals the visible Pathos points on each of his own dead Character cards to get their Self-Worth scores, and then adds these scores together to get his total Family Value. The player with the *lowest* total Family Value wins.

COMPONENTS

Gloom is a card game for 2 to 4 players, ages 8 years and up. Game play takes about 1 hour. In addition to this rules sheet, *Gloom* includes 20 Character cards, 58 Modifier cards, 12 Event cards, and 20 Untimely Death cards.

SETUP

Before play begins, you'll need to *choose characters* and *draw hands*.

Choose Characters

Sort out the Character cards from the deck by looking for the ones with a skull on the back. Each player chooses a family and takes the 5 Character cards with the same symbol in the lower middle area of the card: Castle Slogar is represented by a disembodied brain, Hemlock Hall by a top hat, Blackwater Watch by a scythe, and Dark's Den of Deformity by a circus tent. Your Character cards are placed face up in front of you on the table. Families that aren't chosen by a player are set to the side for the duration of the game.

FAMILY SYMBOLS



Draw a Hand

The rest of the cards in the deck are shuffled and placed face down in a stack at the center of the table to form the draw pile. Each player then draws 5 cards from it to make up his starting hand. A discard pile will form face up next to the draw pile during the course of the game. If the draw pile ever runs out, reshuffle the discard pile to create a new one.

Now you're ready to torment your characters! The player who has had the worst day goes first; if you've all had equally miserable days, the owner of the game takes the first turn. Play continues in a clockwise direction.

TURN ORDER

When it's your turn, you *play or discard up to 2 cards*, then *draw your hand back up*, in the following order. A "free play" means you may play a card without counting it toward your 2 standard plays.

First Play

You may play or discard any 1 card from your hand, or choose to pass.

Second Play

Untimely Deaths can't be played on your second play. You may play an Event card or Modifier card from your hand, discard any 1 card from your hand, or choose to pass.

Draw Phase

Draw until the number of cards in your hand is equal to your current draw limit. *Unless it's altered by card effects, the draw limit is 5 cards*. You are not forced to discard cards; if you end up with 7 cards in your hand and your draw limit is 5, you simply don't draw until you have fewer than 5 cards. Once you've drawn, the player to your left begins his turn.

STORYTELLING

Half the fun of *Gloom* is the stories that unfold as the game progresses. On your turn, it's up to you to explain the effects of your plays and how these tragic events have come to pass. For example, the previous round, Lord Slogar was Wondrously Well Wed. So, how is it that he now finds himself Driven to Drink and Chastised by the Church? What effect will this have on his poor daughter Melissa, herself still in recovery from a childhood bout of consumption?

Storytelling isn't a required part of the game, but give it a try — you'll have more fun if you do!

CARD TYPES

Gloom uses four types of cards: *Characters, Modifiers, Events,* and *Untimely Deaths*. Cards are resolved in the order in which they're played.

Character Cards

A Character card can be identified by the skull on the back, the cheerful character portrait in the center, and the family symbol below it. These cards have no inherent Pathos points — characters start with no Self-Worth — but are the foundation of the game. Modifier cards are placed on top of character cards to change their Self-Worth scores, and Untimely Deaths can be played on characters with negative scores to secure those points until they're counted at the end of the game. The families in *Gloom* include:

Castle Slogar: This gloomy castle is the perfect place to raise a family … from the dead. Professor Helena Slogar has used unorthodox science to preserve the life of her daughter Melissa and her husband, Lord Slogar, though it might have been kinder to let them go. Currently, she's building a groom for Melissa, with the assistance of freelance gravedigger Elias E. Gorr.

Hemlock Hall: Lord Wellington-Smythe's wife died giving birth to two adorable twins … who are possessed by *evil!* He dotes on his lovely children, little realizing the nanny is preparing them for a dark destiny. Meanwhile, older daughter Lola just wants to have fun, and the butler, Butterfield, is up to no good.

Blackwater Watch: There are many more of the Blackwater clan than seen here. The Old Dam and her hench- … er, *hand*yman Willem Stark keep them all in line, murdering those who don't follow the matriarch's lead. Angel is her favorite niece, while Cousin Mordecai has recently been foisted onto her household and probably won't last long. As for Balthazar, this meddling mutt has a knack for digging up things best left buried.

Dark's Den of Deformity: Darius Dark has formed an extremely unsuccessful circus full of failed freaks. Darius wants to be a ringmaster, but has terrible talent when it comes to picking acts. His unremarkable bearded man, painfully modest illustrated lady, minute but mediocre opera singer, and creepy clown are truly fatal attractions.

CHARACTER CARD



Modifier Cards

Each Modifier card has a transparent center, black text plate, and decorative scrollwork in the corners. Modifiers are played from a player's hand during his turn onto a Character card to contribute the Pathos points along the left edge to its Self-Worth score, add a story icon, or give it a special effect. Multiple Modifiers can be played on the same Character card; if a new Modifier card covers up the Pathos, story icon, or special effect of a prior Modifier, that element is overridden. You may play Modifier cards on your own characters, or on characters controlled by other players. Generally, you want to play Modifiers with negative values on characters you control, and Modifiers with positive values on your opponents — though there may be reasons to break this rule.

Pathos: A Modifier card may have up to three spaces for Pathos points; add all visible points on a Character card together to determine the character's current Self-Worth score.

Story Icons: The story icon in the lower right corner of some Modifier cards has no effect on its own, but may interact with other cards.

Beast: This icon usually indicates the presence of dangerous animals.

Blank: This opaque block covers up a previous icon, nullifing its effect.

Death: Modifiers with this icon are concerned with disease or supernatural horror — ghosts, curses, catching consumption, and so on.

Duck: Sometimes jokes can hurt; beware the morbid waterfowl.

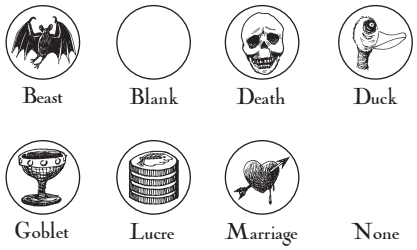
Goblet: This Modifier deals with feasts, poison, and other food-related events.

Lucre: This Modifier involves money.

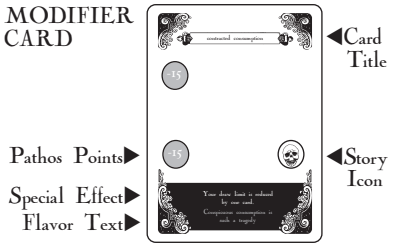
Marriage: This icon deals with relationships, both good and bad.

None: A clear space that lets a previous icon show through means that icon is still in effect.

STORY ICONS



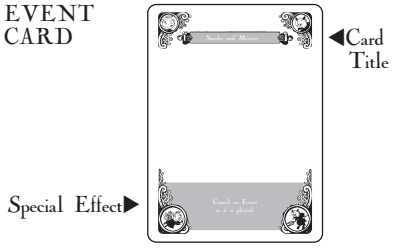
Special Effects: Many Modifier cards also have *immediate* special effects that are triggered when the card is played (such as forcing a player to draw or discard cards) or *continuous* special effects that work as long as the card's effect text is visible (like increasing or decreasing a player's draw limit). These effects always apply to the person who *controls the character* to which the Modifier card is attached, *not* the person who played the Modifier.



Event Card

Event cards each have a transparent center, red text plate, and angel and devil icons in the corners. These single-use cards are played from a player's hand and then discarded. They each have an *immediate* special effect that's triggered when the card is played (such as bringing a character back from the dead), and are usually played on the player's turn. However, if an Event card says "Cancel ____ as it is played," it may be used during another player's turn as a *response* to an action.

Certain Event cards move Modifiers from one Character card to another. This isn't the same as playing a Modifier card, and it doesn't trigger *immediate* special effects. However, *continuous* effects *do* move with the Modifier card on which they're written.



Untimely Death Cards

Every Untimely Death card has a transparent center, white text plate, and gravestone icons in the corners. These cards turn worthless living characters into valuable dead ones.

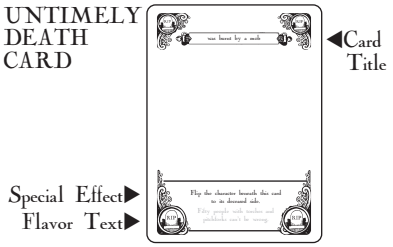
During the First Play step on your turn, you may choose to play an Untimely Death card from your hand onto any Character card, regardless of who the character's owner is, *as long as it has a current Self-Worth score less than zero;* some sort of tragedy must befall the character before he can die. Some cards also have special effects that can cause a death to occur on another player's turn.

SAMPLE FAMILY IN MID-GAME



Darius' Self-Worth is -30 | Elissandre's Self-Worth is -40 (final) | Giggles' Self-Worth is +5 | Samson's Self-Worth is -20 (final) | Thumbelisa's Self-Worth is +10

When an Untimely Death is played on a character, turn the Character card over to the deceased side, so the skull on the back shows through its Modifiers, and place the Untimely Death card on top of the pile. Then set aside that Character card along with all the cards that have been played on it. Players can't play additional Modifier cards on a dead character, and only a few Event cards affect dead characters. *Only visible Pathos points count toward a character's Self-Worth score;* those that have been covered are ignored. You receive Pathos points at the end of the game just for your own dead characters; your living characters, and the dead characters of your opponents, don't contribute to your total Family Value.



STRATEGY

Much of the outcome of *Gloom* will fall to the whim of cruel fate, but there are a few things to bear in mind.

- Points in the 3 Pathos spaces vary in rarity of appearance, from top (most common) to bottom (rarest) along the left edge of the Modifer cards. A card that affects the bottom Pathos space is therefore more valuable than one that targets the top.
- The game ends when one family is completely eliminated. However, you don't lose or gain Pathos points for living characters. If you're ahead, it may be to your advantage to kill an opponent's character in order to end the game.
- Likewise, if you kill an opponent's character with a negligible Self-Worth (like a score of –5), he'll be unable to place more-valuable Modifier cards on that character.
- Early in the game, it can be useful to play positive Modifier cards on your own characters to benefit from their special effects. You never lose or gain Pathos points for living characters, and in the long run you'll probably get negative modifiers to cover them.
- Many cards can be used either offensively or defensively. To Be or Not To Be lets you remove an Untimely Death from one character and place it on another. This can allow you to return an opponent's character to life while killing one of your own — or it can let you remove that Died Without Cares and turn it back on an enemy!
- Discarding cards may help if you don't have the cards you need.
- For a shorter game, reduce the number of Character cards in each family. For example, in a 4-player game you may limit each family to 4 characters.

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