

Gloom

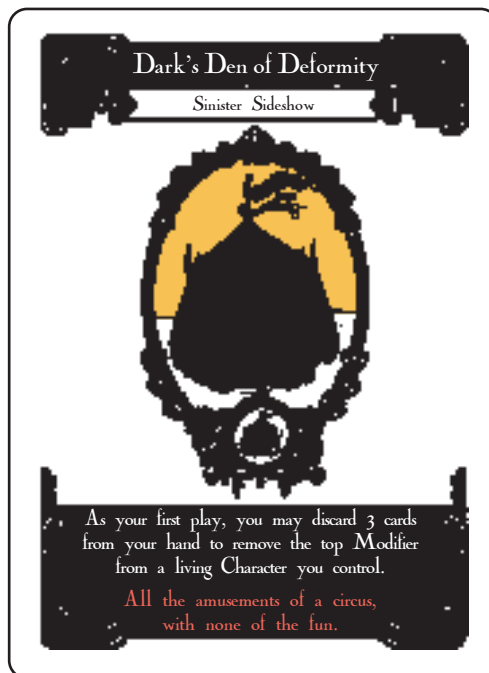
An Unhappy Home
of Your Own
by Keith Baker

(This article first appeared in Game Trade Magazine in the October 2004 issue.)

Just in time for Halloween, Atlas Games presents a melancholy new card game designed by Keith Baker: Gloom. 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.

Gloom is a traditional, non-collectable, stand-alone card game that follows the brief and tragic lives of four eccentric families:

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 in Gloom. The Old Dam and her hench- ... er, handyman 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.

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 death are set aside until an entire family is eliminated. Players then add together the Self-Worth scores of each of their own dead characters. The player with the lowest total Family Value wins.

While each family has its own distinct flavor, there is no functional difference between characters, since they have no point values to start. Gloom is printed on transparent plastic cards, which allows multiple modifier cards to be played on top of each character; since the cards are all clear except in the areas that are inked, elements from previously played modifier cards show through or are obscured by those played above them. If a new modifier card covers up the points, story icon, or special effect of a prior modifier card, that element is lost. It's the transparency of the modifiers that allows this innovative game mechanic, though the characters themselves have no intrinsic value.



For those who prefer a little variety in life (and death), we offer four Locations — the ancestral homes of the families of Gloom, which work much like a character with a little extra. Each Location allows the player who controls the family in question to break the rules in some special way. For the Blackwater clan, death is an everyday occurrence, and they don't let it slow them down; Hemlock Hall holds immense wealth, but this often brings tragedy to the unfortunate Wellington-Smythes; good fortune rarely lasts for long in Dark's Den of Deformity; and the worse things get for the Slogars, the more likely they are to find what they're looking for!

If you'd like to play with these optional rules, first cut out the four promo cards. Then select the appropriate Location card when you choose your family, and set it next to your characters on the table in front of you. You can't play Modifiers, Events, or Untimely Deaths on a Location. Nothing can take your house rule away from you, so enjoy it while you can!

2 to 4 players, ages 8 and up,
110 cards plus rules sheet

Stock No. AG1250
ISBN 1-58978-068-X
MSRP \$19.95

Shipping to Distributors
in October 2004

www.atlas-games.com/gloom