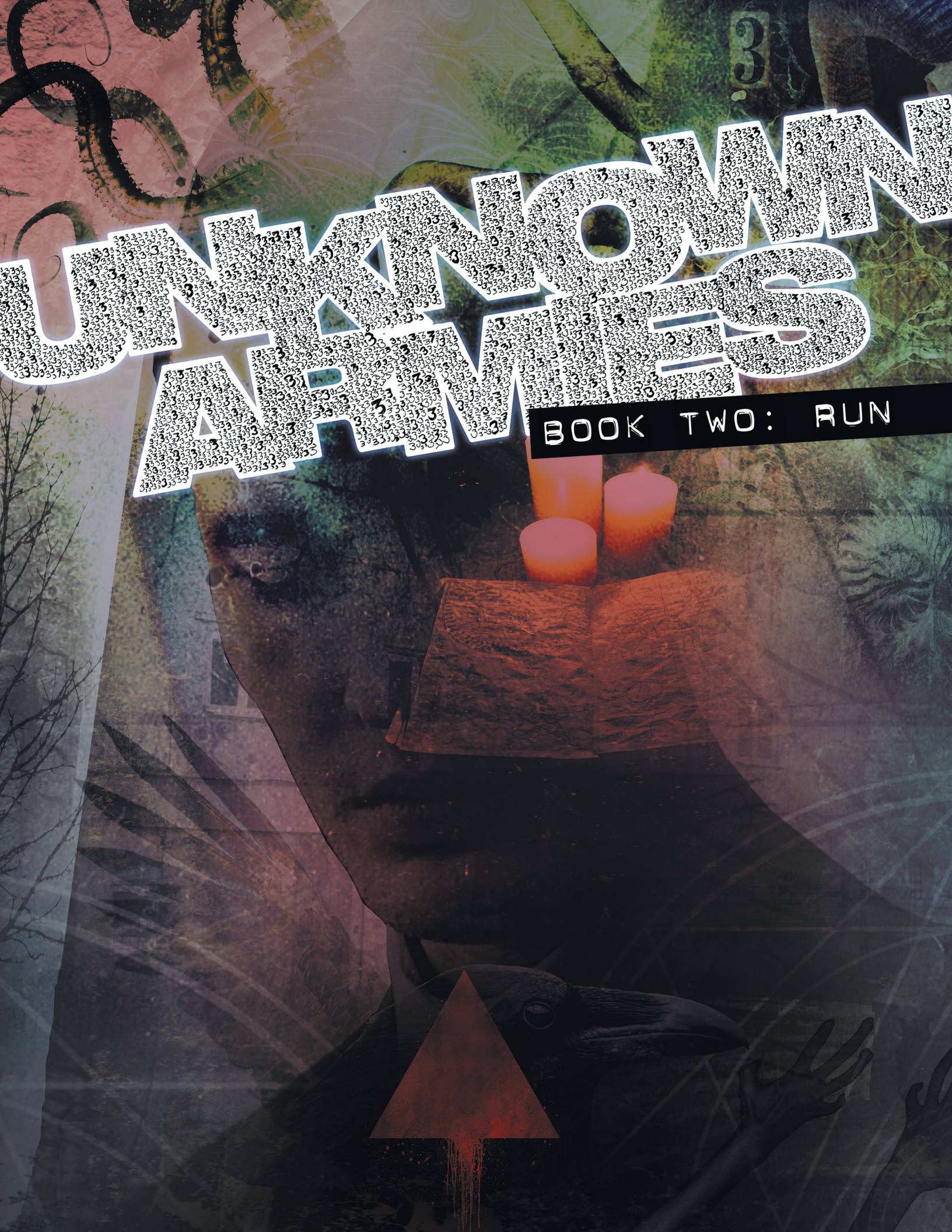
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UNKNOWN ARMIES
BOOK TWO: RUN

UNKNOWN ARMIES™

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To our legions of alpha, beta, and gamma playtesters and to our generous backers — this game exists because of you! You did this!

We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams; —
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.
Ode, Arthur O'Shaughnessy

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1: THE GM'S ROLE

You want to run a roleplaying game. I assume you do, anyhow, since you're reading this. If you already know how to do that, and have, you presumably understand what you're getting into. You still might want to read this chapter to get specific pointers on how to run *this* game. If you're a stone-cold absolute beginner, check out the "How to Run an RPG" download at atlas-games.com/unknownarmies — it's my attempt to summarize everything I've been writing on this strange little art.

Maybe you don't want to be a **gamemaster (GM)**, because you don't think you could imagine enough cool stuff, or because you're afraid it'll be silly, or because you're shy.

I would suggest that you *do* want to run a game, you just don't know it yet.

Running *Unknown Armies* requires some imagination and effort, but don't kid yourself: just about anyone can do it. From the other side of the GM screen, it may seem like an immense undertaking, where you have to create and describe a world from scratch, while keeping track of all the **player characters'** (PCs') foibles and weaknesses and plot plans *and* adjudicating a set of rules so complicated they require three whole books!

It's not as hard as all that. You don't have to do all those things at once, you do them one at a time in the order that they're needed. The imagining you can do on your own time, bolstered by every book, website, and news story you can rip off and disguise. The players are inclined to *remind* you of their PCs' individual peccadillos, because the rules reward them for invoking character meat like passions and relationships. As for running the mechanics: read the books and decide what you like. It's all there if you want to use it, but you can discard anything you don't care for. For the most part, you can break it down to stress checks and identity rolls, with abilities catching the leftovers. Those three categories — each of them a percentile roll on two dice — cover at least 70% of what comes up in an *Unknown Armies* game. Objectives usually just plump up to 100% and then fall like ripe fruit, and they're not even as complicated as an identity. By the way, if you don't have any idea what a stress check is, or what objective and identity mean in this context, go read *Book One: Play* — or its first three chapters, at least. This book can wait until you've done that. The rest, you can look up before a session if you know a car chase or court scene impends, offload it on the players if one of them is the adept or avatar with special rules, or improvise and go with what sounds right. It's better to do something a little wrong while the game keeps flowing than to grind everything to a halt while you agonizingly consult the manual.

Once you have some command of the rules and setting, you're ready to step into the lynchpin role of gamemaster. Or game moderator if "master" sounds a little too BDSM for you. Without a GM, *Unknown Armies* doesn't really work, because as a horror game it thrives on uncertainty, and as a mystery game it requires that the answers be elusive but ultimately knowable.

Your job, running a game, is to provide the right amount of antagonism and challenge.

They're always better buttered.

One error is to provide too much challenge. If you send wave after wave of fanatical cultists against the PCs, each fighting to the death, the cruelly indifferent combat system is going to chew up and burp out PCs pretty fast. You want the players beleaguered, and to feel helpless *sometimes*, but ultimately they need to know they can get things done and make a difference, no matter how much they're flailing in the short term.

That said, don't just lie back and surrender, making the game a cakewalk. If they don't have to work for their victories, they won't feel anything but hollow. The cake you're handed as your reward for playing is less delicious than the cake you had to claw and scratch to win. That's why everyone praises a meal that's cooked from scratch, that's where that phrase comes from. Honest.

In short, let the players succeed when they succeed, without bending over backwards to snatch away their victory. Let them fail when they fail, without catering to their laziness and fears. Hard knocks teach the best lessons, and in the end they remember the character who died awesomely with more fondness than the one who was just sort of... there, safely nibbling away at the plot from a position of sedentary security.

MASTER
these entertainments would play differently if the title was "game servant" and always had been

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