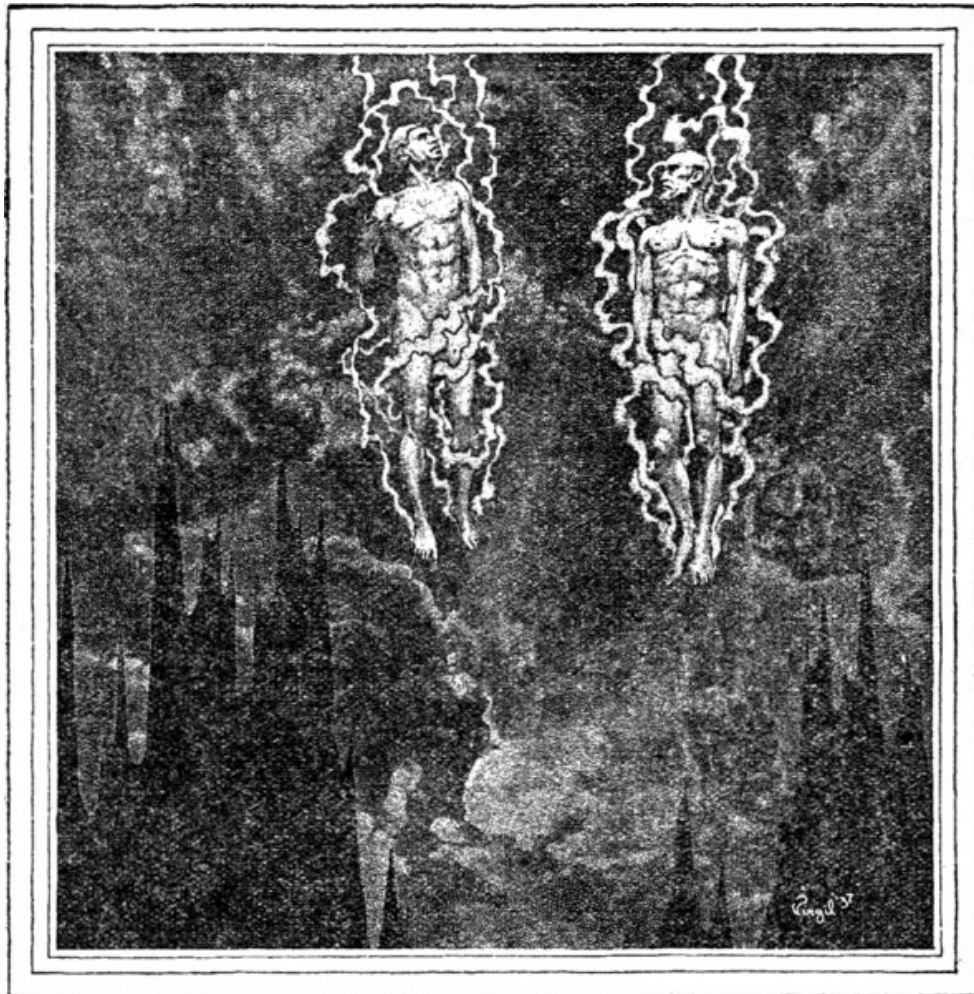


RPG REVIEW

Issue #18, December 2012



The Cthulhu Mythos and Gaming

Three Cthulhu Mythos System Reviews ... Cthulhu in Variant Settings ... Call of Cthulhu House Rules and Situational Modifiers ... EPOCH: Horror Gaming ... Dirty Secrets ... T&T Monster Compilation ... V/H/S Review ... Industry News

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ADMINISTRIVIA

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The cover is the main illustration for the story "Beyond the Wall of Sleep". Internal illustration from the pulp magazine Weird Tales (March 1938, vol. 31, no. 3, page 331).

EDITORIAL

The influence of Howard Phillips Lovecraft and the Cthulhu mythos he developed are second only to the works of J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth in terms of their influence on the roleplaying game hobby. Being second, of course, in literary expression does not mean 'worse', but rather 'different'. After all, the Cthulhu mythos is not elves, dwarves, hobbits and magical rings of power. It's about madness and terror, aliens monsters who are either malevolent or completely inconsiderate to humans, and a universe that is meaningless.

"The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age."

-- H.P. Lovecraft, opening lines to "The Call of Cthulhu"

Whilst it is clear that it is not Middle-Earth, interestingly there are a couple of similarities between the author's respective narratives. The stories include a great evil that threatens human (et al.,) existence which can only be prevented by the actions of a noble few who break from their normal lives and rise to the occasion. It is this level of

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heroism from normal people that provides games related to the mythos their appeal. It is not something that appeals to everyone of course; many, and indeed, probably the majority, of game players prefer the incremental improvement "from zero to hero", characters who build their way up from being challenged by a large rat or kobold, to being of superheroic ability where even dragons and demons are but a modicum of a challenge. In the Cthulhu mythos, a band of Deep Ones is as threatening from the beginning as it is in the end, at least physically. It is smarts that will always count in this genre.

The choice of the Cthulhu mythos as the core theme of RPG Review issue 18 was not one made without some consideration. After all, there are other game genres and gameworlds that could have been chosen in preference and we have, after all published a fair number of articles related to this setting. But given the range of games that have been produced in this setting and the continuing interest in this long-running setting, it seemed appropriate. It is also with some sadness that this issue has also co-incided with the recent demise of co-designer of Call of Cthulhu, Lynn Willis. The first article of this 'zine therefore offers some commentary on the contribution of this fine designer and author over the decades.

The Cthulhu mythos has provided a great number of game systems over the years; three of the most significant are reviewed here by your editor (Call of Cthulhu, Call of Cthulhu D20, Trail of Cthulhu) which represent quite different approaches to the setting. In addition, a review of four of the more unusual settings (Dark Ages, Dreamlands, Delta Green, Cybercthulhu) shows the scope of settings that can be carried out with the same thematic considerations. For rules-crafting Allan Goodall provides some skill difficulty levels for Call of Cthulhu, one of the more surprising omissions from that game system, whereas Matt Puccio provides a range of house rules incorporating in his games. In more Cthulhu-related material, Chris Tamm provides an elaboration on an interesting alternate setting, being the use of the Cthulhu mythos with Metropolis.

Of course, every issue of RPG Review is not entirely devoted to its main feature topic. This is no exception. On a related issue Dale Elvy provides designer's notes for EPOCH: Horror Gaming, and fellow New Zealander Alasdair Sinclair, puts the issue of investigative gaming rules upfront in a deep theory article. On a more comic line, Chris Tamm returns for another round with 'Gamma Gobblers', a feature creature that provides a light-hearted but possibly frightening (in the right context) mutant turkey, whilst Karl Brown provides a collection of appropriate creatures stats for Tunnels & Trolls. Also contributing to the issue are our regular features of industry news by Wu Mingshi, console game reviews by Matt Lindus, and a horror movie review by Andrew Moshos (he really doesn't like everything you know). Finally, great gratitude must also be expressed to Daniel Heald for his artistic contributions which are scattered throughout this entire issue; this is truly the sort of artwork that emphasizes the alien and hidden.

There is an issue which every discussion of H.P. Lovecraft should raise (and sometimes is unfortunately overlooked), and that was his racism. Of course it was not at all uncommon at the time to believe that there was such a thing as race, as various subspecies of *homo sapien sapiens*, indeed the best scientific minds at the time considered it fairly obvious. But H.P. Lovecraft went much further than that, expressing significant disdain towards those whom he considered to be of "lesser" races. They are of sufficiently poor taste that there is little desire to reprint examples here.

On a matter of pure psychoanalytic speculation however, it is not impossible to suggest however that Lovecraft's racism was projected into the monsters of the Cthulhu mythos. Just as Lovecraft himself expressed disdain or even malevolence towards particular humans, it is perhaps unsurprising to discover that, in a vastly enlarged manner, that he imagined an alien species that thought of all humans in the same manner.

"He who fights with monsters should look to it that he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you."

Pleasant reading victims,

Lev lev@rpgreview.net

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VALEDICTIONS, LYNN WILLIS

by *The Chaosium*

As *RPG Review* was undergoing editing its final articles, a report was received of the passing of Lynn Willis who, for many years, have been the main editor and developer of *Call of Cthulhu*. The following obituary was posted by *The Chaosium*, and is reprinted here in respect of a great contributor to the hobby.

We are sad to announce the passing of Lynn Willis, a pillar of *Chaosium*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and of the roleplaying community. Lynn had been combating aging and illness for several years, and passed while in a hospital for treatment. He is survived by his partner Marcia, and a community of friends and admirers.

Lynn began in gaming as a board game designer, and entered *Chaosium* with *Lords of the Middle Sea*. He was the third employee of *Chaosium*, first as an editor and then as the mastermind behind the entire *Call of Cthulhu* line, as well as other projects, for the decades that he was with us. He loved his work and brought all his abilities to the job. He was incredibly smart, astonishingly widely read, detail oriented, and capable. He is largely responsible for the high quality, playability, and popularity of the leading horror RPG in our field.

CREDITS: *Chaosium Dude* since 1978; co-creator of *Call of Cthulhu*. Other credits include BOARD GAMES: *Dragon Pass*, *Lords of the Middle Sea*, *Stomp*, *Reich*, *Raiders and Traders*, *Panzer Pranks*, *Arkham Horror*. ROLEPLAYING GAMES: *Basic Roleplaying*, *M.U. Graduate Kit*, *Keeper's Kit 1, 2*, *Engage & Destroy*, *Vive l'Empreur*, *Thieves' World*, *Thieves' World Companion*, *Worlds of Wonder*, *Ringworld*, *Ringworld Companion*, *King Arthur Companion 1, 2, 3*, *RuneQuest 1, 2, 3, etc.*, *Apple Lane 1, 2, etc.*, *Snakepipe Hollow 1, 2, etc.*, *Cults of Prax 1, 2, etc.*, *Cults of Terror*, *Borderlands*, *Pavis*, *The Big Rubble*, *Questworld*, *Stormbringer Companion*, *Demon Magic*, *Cities*, *Carse*, *Tulan of the Isles*, *Elric*, *Melnibone*, *Fate of Fools*, *Bronze Grimoire*, *Atlas of the Young Kingdoms*, *Seas of Fate*, *The Unknown East*, *Cthulhu Live*, *Call of Cthulhu 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 5.5, 6*, *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*, *The Asylum*, *Cthulhu Companion*, *Fragments of Fear*, *Masks of Nyarlathotep*, *Alone against the Wendigo*, *Alone against the Dark*, *Cthulhu by Gaslight*, *Dreamlands*, *Spawn of Azathoth*, *Terror Australis*, *Great Old Ones*, *Cthulhu Now*, *Arkham Unveiled*, *At Your Door*, *Fatal Experiments*, *Blood Brothers*, *Blood Brothers II*, *Horror on the Orient Express*, *Cairo Guidebook*, *Dark Designs*, *Fearful Passages London Guidebook*, *King of Chicago*, *Miskatonic University*, *Taint of Madness*, *Compact Arkham Unveiled*, *Booke of Monstres 1 and 2*, *No Man's Land*, *Horror's Heart*, *Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep*, *Resection of Time*, *Secrets*, *Dreaming Stone*, *Before the Fall*, *Last Rites*, *Beyond the Mountains of Madness*, *M.U. Antarctic Expedition Pack*, *Unseen Masters*, *Keeper's Companion 1*. FICTION: *Castle of Eyes*, *Hastur Cycle*, *Singers of Strange Songs*, *Complete Pegana*, *Nightmare's Disciple*, *Percival*, *Bear of Britain*, *Book of Dzryan*, *S. Petersen's Field Guide to Cthulhu Monsters*, *S. Petersen's Field Guide to Creatures of the Dreamlands*.

He will be missed. We trust that he is at peace. We give Marcia our thanks and blessings for her devoted love and support for Lynn, and wish her joy, happiness, and success in her future endeavors and memories of the past.

Charlie Krank, President *Chaosium Inc.*

Greg Stafford, Founder *Chaosium Inc.*

http://www.chaosium.com/article.php?story_id=530

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HOT GOSSIP: INDUSTRY NEWS

by Wu Mingshi

Hosei bo Mr. Lev,

My kaki, you very late again! You not lobo, I arrow you to release on time, next time! Chop-chop kali pok! For months two I have been sitting on this article, you think it is egg I want to hatch? Perhaps you think Mingshi little chicken, lah? Finish RPG Review on time, excuses no more! [Ed: I've been told]

This quartering quiet on news. Perhaps winter in country that has winter. First, big news, Minshi hear that Fantasy Flight Games have license for new Star Wars roleplaying game and plan release of first big book, *Star Wars: Edge of Empire Core Rulebook*, along with special kit for Gamemasters, and then fourteen special dice. New game system very much like Warhammer Fantasy RPG, swee swee bo zao zwee!

In comic-book land, Hero Games going to release new edition of Champions, which includes bits and pieces of Hero 6th edition rulebooks and supplements. It like vegetables in noodle dish, select from many bowls.



Because it Cthulhu edition, Mingshi decide she need Cthulhu carpet in her apartment. Not news, but news for her. Kirill Rozhkov make *Dark Water for Danish* carpet inspired by Cthulhu, very choi!

Kenneth Hite write new Gumshoe system game, combine spies with horror, called *Night's Black Agents*. Good combination (Mingshi still think noodle, must be lunchtime).

Mingshi's new reading book collection of short stories called *We Are Dust*, from RPG called *Our Best Last Hope* from Magpie Games. You know, end of world, can humans survive, si beh tok kong lah!

Also, big wave to Protodimension Magazine, new horror-conspiracy-weirdness PDF magazine, you come at right time for Cthulhu Mythos and Gaming edition of RPG Review. Don't take our sales, lah!

Enough from me this quartering! Go head!

Mingshi! xx mingshi@rpgreview.net

THREE CTHULHU MYTHOS SYSTEM REVIEWS

by *Lev Lafayette*

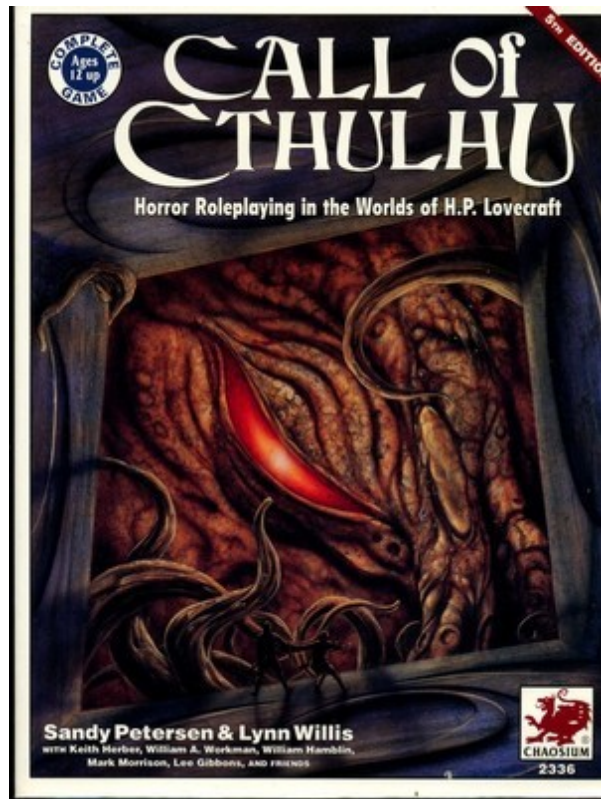
Call of Cthulhu (5th edition)

Introduction and Product

With the notorious calendar change, the stars are right for another review of Call of Cthulhu. This classic of horror roleplaying games has gone through around a dozen editions, albeit spread out through versions one to six, along with several other new systems (Trail of Cthulhu, D20 Call of Cthulhu etc). The edition being reviewed here however is 5th edition, by which I mean 5, 5.1, or 5.2 for the sake of argument. Anyone would think that Chaosium is playing with our head, but they wouldn't do that would they? In any case, we're referring to a game that has won at least three Origins awards, so we know where we're at. The fifth edition consists of 240 pages, two-column justified with a serif font and several styles of boxed and highlighted section.

Page numbers and chapter titles are clear, there is an ideal amount of white space to separate the text without losing density. The writing style is mostly very good, although there are some sections where it becomes annoyingly chatty. There is a handy section tab for "Rules" on the margin, but oddly not for anything else. The cover art "The Eye of Cthulhu" by Lee Gibbons, illustrates the Great Old One gazing upon some hapless investigators; it is fair-good in terms of creativity and technique. The internal art is a combination of black and white sketches from previous editions and some excellent newer line drawings with a slightly cubist and pop influence. Many of the latter are used for chapter title pages and fillers. The portraits in the Lovecraft personalities section however leaves a little to be desired. The artwork is mostly appropriate to context, especially (thankfully) in the "Creatures of the Cthulhu Mythos" section. There is a table of contents and index, but both are somewhat short, however there is an excellent selection of tables and example characters in the appendix. As a softback book, the book is very well glued and seems to be able to take a fair bit of usage.

There is an introductory chapter entitled "Orientation", which establishes the source material for the game (the mythos generated by horror writer H.P. Lovecraft), recommended characters (investigative), an non-systematic encouragement to roleplay ("A player has a duty to roleplay an investigator"), a distinction between Investigators (the Cthulhu word for "player characters") and the Keeper (the Cthulhu word for "game master"), and recognition of the three potential settings of the game (1890s, 1920s, and 1990s). A very sensible set of general hints is recommended for player characters ("use your head", "avoid gunfights"), concluding with use of figures, source material, and an extremely handy two-page graphic summary of character generation.



Character Generation and Game System

As a number of other BRP-derived games CoC has seven main characteristics used to generate an Investigator; STrength, DEXterity, CONstitution, POWer, APPEARance all rolled on 3d6 and INTelligence and SIZE rolled on 2d6+6. There is an implication that these are rolled in order, but it is not exactly clear. In addition there is an EDUCation characteristic, rolled on 3d6+3. These characteristics generated characteristic rolls, percentile, roll-under checks, expressed in multiples, and typically of 5x. Of sufficient importance to make their presence on the character sheet are Idea rolls (INT*5), Luck (POW*5), and Knowledge (EDU*5). Hit points are derived from the average of CON and SIZ, Magic Points are directly derived from POW, and Damage Bonus from cross-referencing a table from SIZ+STR. Characteristics also receive a guernsey for the Resistance Table, which cross-reference equivalent values to derive a percentage change of success. Essentially the formula is $(\text{CHAR} * 5) - (\text{CHAR} * 5) = \text{percentage chance of success}$. So a STR 14 character has a 60% chance of lifting a SIZ 12 rock etc.

There is also a very interesting characteristic called a SANity, which starts at POW*5, but can never be more than 99 minus the character's Cthulhu Mythos skill roll. In this single brilliant design decision the central theme of Call of Cthulhu - that certain knowledge is dangerous to one's mental health - was incorporated into the game system. Characters simply cannot have knowledge of the Cthulhu mythos without tragically ever-increasing their risk of madness. And what glorious madness it is! From being surprised by a mutilated corpse to encountering a gibbering Outer God various levels of SAN are blown away from the character's mind; some causing short term shock (a failed SAN check resulting in more than 5 points lost), to indeterminate (more than 20% of SAN lost in a short period), to permanent (character reduced to 0 SAN). If a Keeper doesn't have DSM-V readily available, there is a handy set of typically insanities and associated behaviour in a short chapter dedicated to the subject. It should be mentioned that it's possible to improve SAN, through psychotherapy, mythos monsters and plots, and even through skill improvement.

Character starting wealth is determined with a flat probability distribution, a particularly unrealistic design. Also, the wealth charts for 1920s and 1890s are confused due to an editorial omission. Appropriate occupations are selected which provide a set of several skills that background experience can be added into based on EDU*20 skill points. Characters also receive personal interest as background experience as well, at a value of INT*10. In addition to these skill points, many skills also have a base chance (e.g., Climb 40%). Skills are almost invariably utterly independent from characteristics (with the exception of Dodge and Own Language). A character can be, for example, a complete dullard with the charismatic empathy of a slug and suffer no penalty to Fast Talk.

Call of Cthulhu uses a percentile roll-under skill system. Remarkably however - and probably due to a design and editorial oversight spanning several editions - there are no rules for skill roll modifications in standard use. Rules-as-writ (and paraphrasing comments by others I have discussed this with), performing tonsillectomy in a well-equipped hospital is the same difficulty as performing brain surgery in a remote log cabin. This is so bad, I lost a point of SAN as I searched desperately searched through the eldritch tomes (i.e., the rulebooks of multiple editions) praying that I could possibly be wrong; I wasn't. Such a decision has very real effects. Rather than being a more difficult implementation, Medicine is a separate skill to First Aid, Psychoanalysis is separate to Psychology and - especially odd given that the monsters are real - Occultism is separate to Cthulhu Mythos. Despite claims to be an investigative game, combat skills are given particular variation: rather than "Brawling" there are separate skills for Punch, Kick, Head Butt, Grapple, and even Martial Arts, rather than "Firearms" there are separate skills for Handgun, Rifle, Machine Gun, and Shotgun.

Indeed, combat is one area where special attention is paid. Actions are in order of DEX with phases for firearms,

movement, melee, and then multishot firearms. A successful modified "to hit" roll can be challenged by parry (lots of breakages) or dodge, but if it gets through the attacker rolls damage, subtracting the defender's armour (rare in 1890s and 1920s settings). Effectively a character can do two of the three per round of attack, dodge, or parry. Note that there are in combat alone skill roll modifiers (e.g., in ranged weapons, partial cover, and environment). This is the only place in the core rules where "degree of success" has influence as well (there is an optional rule as well); bullets and pointy melee attacks do double damage on a roll of 20% or less of the modified chance. Damage that reduces a character to two or one hit points causes unconsciousness, and at 0 or less the character will die the following round (which means the maximum possible loss is -2, as healing will fix 1d3). Appropriately, characters can drop pretty fast, especially when guns are pulled out. However the threshold for unconsciousness seems too slim.

Monsters and Magic

The Keeper's Section is a surprisingly wordy and sometimes repetitive chapter which also contains some some excellent substance. It is here that both descriptions and mechanics for the tomes of the Cthulhu mythos are provided, an overview of the mythos itself (especially the distinction between the otherworldly Outer Gods, the malevolent and local Great Old Ones, and the Servitor and Independent races). The actual advice on running the game is also placed in this section, especially good for terms of pacing, narrative structure, roleplaying, and Investigator mortality. There is a selection for optional rules which include "special" skill successes, probably the most useful suggestion. Finally there is a short set of notes on the civil authorities that PCs are most likely to encounter - the police and mental health authorities.

A huge section of the book is entitled "Reference Section", which can be summarised as 'Monsters and Magic'. There is approximately eighty of so critters of the mythos described and provided stat blocks. Each are provided a short paragraph from the literature, a few to several paragraphs of the creature in context, following by characteristics, weapons, skills (if appropriate), and the Sanity losses said beings cause. Even the great Outer Gods are provided stats, and as awe-inspiring as they may seem to be single investigator, in a more contemporary context a team of strong-willed individuals packing serious heat could make even destroy Azathoth, albeit for several hours. In most situations however, a good half of the mythos creatures are not the sort that any group of Investigators should engage in a straight-out conflict. As a personal preference I have always had a soft spot for the Great Race of Yith, and the more alien of the mythos creatures such as (Daoloth, Yog Sothoth, and the Colours Out Of Space) in contrast to the "giant carnivore with big teeth" variety of horrors, even if the latter are probably more frightening.

In addition to the Mythos creatures there is also a chapter on normal and occult animals; so one will find Bats and Bunyips to Wolves and Wraiths. It's a slightly weird combination, but somewhat necessary in a game which has an over-riding mythos which is then separate from world mythologies. A short selection of around a dozen personalities from H.P. Lovecraft's tales is provided, including quite a number in the realm of permanent insanity. Each character is provided a quote from a relevant story, a paragraph on their appearance or activities, and a stat-block.

The various creatures and people are followed by a chapter of spells, "The Greater Grimoire". Most magic in Call of Cthulhu involves contacting the various creatures of the mythos, summoning such creatures, and binding them. It is usually a good idea to be aware of the need to have a binding spell before casting the summoning spell. There is also a small set of spells for creating gates, enchanting items and the like, along with some sample magic artifacts. There is also a collection of some eighty "Lesser Grimoire" spells of a more utilitarian variety. Magic typically costs magic points, Sanity, and sometimes even POW to cast; some spells can be resisted, magic points of the caster versus magic points of the victim. Spell ranges are deliberately vague, with a great deal of Keeper interpretation - effects however are clearly stated.

Scenarios and Setting

The final section is entitled "Resources" which begins by providing three excellent scenarios, albeit all nominally set in the 1920s period. "The Edge of Darkness" in particular makes a great introduction to a small group. This is followed by a literary biography of H.P. Lovecraft, and then an exceptional linguistic essay in an academic style which argues the world-wide exposure of the mythos in various languages, coming to the convincing conclusion "Traces of ancient Cthulhu worship exist in the records of all major Old World civilizations". If three time periods are not sufficient, a short chapter on the Dreamlands is also provided, a weird alternate reality accessible only when one is asleep. An handy essay of some length on forensic pathology follows for the three time periods, then a timeline of events covering the period from 1890 to 1992, along with another timeline of disasters, "natural and man-made", and then "events occult, criminal, and futurist". The main text concludes with a very handy set of equipment and service tables for across the three time periods with an emphasis on the sort of things that Investigators are likely to purchase and the distances they are likely to travel.

Conclusion

In the past numerous reviewers have declared that Call of Cthulhu is the greatest roleplaying game of all time. This is true, but only in a particularly narrow band of greatness. It is arguably the coolest RPG of all time, and certainly is very high on the fun quotient (playing the odds of almost certain madness and almost certain death is fun!). The page-count to content is excellent, and the range of content is extremely good as well. The book itself has excellent layout, is readable, solid, and some decent artwork as well. Perhaps most importantly, Call of Cthulhu established a thematic orientation towards roleplaying games; it was not a game of killing fantastic monsters and taking their stuff - it was a game of killing fantastic monsters that were so awe-inspiring they could easily destroy dozens of people, and taking their stuff because it contained the only possible way of stopping the horrors from destroying all life on earth.

Where Call of Cthulhu does slip is in the game system; it's not the core system has a major problem, after it it's the BRP engine, well known for being flexible, easy to pick up, and having a good degree of realism. The main issue is the implementation, where entirely the wrong issues are implemented (e.g., combat over investigation), where there is a lack of believability (e.g., skill implementation), and even with the statistics for the major creatures of the mythos which are presented more of a whimsy than serious consideration. It is fortunate in most contexts the rules "fade in the background" in actual play, but often - all too often - there is a jarring reminder of their less than optimal workmanship. It is this issue that causes Call of Cthulhu a somewhat lower substance value than it could achieve. Will these issues be resolved in an upcoming seventh edition? One can hope; but it does seem rather long in the tooth to get these matters right. Despite these criticisms, Call of Cthulhu remains a truly excellent game, strongly encapsulating a fascinating setting and theme in an accessible manner.

Style: $1 + 0.7$ (layout) + 0.7 (art) + 1.0 (coolness) + 0.7 (readability) + 0.7 (product) = 4.8

Substance: $1 + 0.8$ (content) + 0.7 (text) + 0.9 (fun) + 0.3 (workmanship) + 0.6 (system) = 4.3

Call of Cthulhu d20

About the Game and The Product

In a previous review that were more contemporary to the release, the D20 line was described as "unstoppable as a Shoggoth in heat", which of course is a very disturbing mental image, and even more so when considering telepathic abilities. The release of Call of Cthulhu D20 generated a great deal of debate at the time, especially over the applicability of a level-based system to this specific horror genre, and whether it was a necessary contribution to an existing Cthulhu mythos in gaming. Both those issues will be addressed in this review.

Call of Cthulhu (D20) comes as a 319p hardback book. The cover art, by Ann Koi and Jason Soles, suggests a old leather tome that has distorted into a demonic face, is quite evocative. The book itself is well bound, with gloss paper and full colour throughout. The content is in a dense slanted two-column justified serif font throughout with a page margin that clearly provides page number and chapter heading. There is a two-page table of contents and a two-page index, which is possible a little short. There are twelve chapters to the game, along with two adventures, and appendices, and a single-page character sheet. The artwork, a mixture of black and white and colour, is typically very good in terms of technique (Ithaqua on page 306 is an unfortunate exception), shows creativity, and is mostly contextually appropriate.

Character Generation, Skills, Feats, Sanity

The first four chapters, taking up a modest fifty one pages, are essentially about character generation. This is a D20 so most gamers will be in familiar territory here. The well-known character abilities (Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, Charisma) are based on 4d6, drop lowest, and assign according to player's choice. Abilities have positive and negative modifiers to the ubiquitous d20 checks with a consistent scale (10-11 no difference, every plus or minus two points is a plus or minus one modifier). If age ever becomes an issue, there's notable breakpoints at 50, 65, and 80. For every four levels a character gains +1 to the an ability score.

Yes, levels - and experience points, and hit points, and base attack bonuses, oh my. They are slightly different however. In a sense there's two broad classes (or classes of classes, goodness, it's like an object-orientated programmer has been let into the room); offensive or defensive. An offensive character starts off with one good progression of saving throws (from Will, Reflex, and Fortitude) and a good progression in base attack bonus. The defensive character receives two good progressions in saving throws. Both classes have the same experience point requirements for level progression, the same number of skill ranks, feats, and ability increases. Regardless of what class is taken, characters are also differentiated by their selection of profession which determines their core skills. Character class does not determine profession; a character can be an offensive clergyman and a defensive soldier, if the player so desires. Professions also modify savings and income, based on 1d6 roll multiplied by the 20th century era that the individual game is set in. An optional, more "pulp era", rule gives offensive classes a free weapon proficiency and a level based bonus to AC for defensive characters.

Characters start with four times their usual level of skills ranks at first level. Ranks are capped by level and whether the skill in profession is core or non-core to the character profession. Non-core skills also cost double, so the character really is heavily biased towards their core professional skills, which cannot be changed (there is no multiclass option as

such). Skill modifiers are the sum of the skill and an relevant ability modifier, with skill tests based on a d20 roll over Difficulty Class (5 for easy, up to 30 for heroic). Certain skills checks are based on opposed rolls (e.g., Move Silently vs Listen) with the Difficulty Class equal to opposed roll. There is just under fifty core skills, along with a variety of specialisations for Know, Speak Other Language, Craft, and Performance. The time taken for a skill varies, with the game noting six action times ranging from automatic reactions to greater than full round actions; and action represents six seconds of time. Characters may take 10 (i.e., automatically have a result of 10 plus modifiers instead of rolling d20) if not subject to distraction, or even take 20, although this will take 20 times as long as the standard test. Characters may sometimes co-operate in skill use, and use skills synergistically for further bonuses (e.g., Animal Empathy to Handle Animal).

Each skill is provided a few paragraphs of description along with notes for circumstances, Difficulty Classes, special options, and synergy. Of particular note is the Cthulhu Mythos skill, which can only be gained by studying tomes of said information. Each rank in Cthulhu Mythos skill reduces the character's Sanity by an equivalent number. There is also a Psychic Focus skill which allows for the performance of psychic feats, if allowed in the campaign. There is also a Psychoanalysis skill which allows for the curing of the effects of shock; in contrast psychology is treated as an Know specialisation. As a whole, the skill descriptions are heavily derived from early versions of D20 Dungeons & Dragons and with the issues, positive (e.g., consistent system) and negative (e.g., the power of Diplomacy), that this game has.

There are approximately fifty general feats, most of which are combat or action orientated. They are primarily used to grouped skill bonuses (e.g., Acrobatic gives +2 to Jump and Tumble), for combat actions (e.g., Blind-Fight, Dodge, Quick Draw etc). Again these are heavily D&D-derived, which is perhaps not entirely appropriate to the Cthulhu mythos, or implying a stylistic change to the setting. There is also ten Psychic Feats, hitherto not really a part of Call of Cthulhu (except for those who have cast a sufficient number of Sanity-blasting spells), again implying a more cinematic change.

The Sanity system is pretty much taken directly from the BRP Call of Cthulhu, but with a scaling issue. As with the original game, characters must make a Sanity check when encountering a gruesome or supernatural event and roll under the Sanity for a minor effect (or none at all), with a major effect if the character fails. Starting Sanity is based on five time the character's Wisdom score, and maximum Sanity is 99 minus the character's Cthulhu Mythos rank. Note that this is the rank - not the rank times five. Characters can now acquire significant levels of Mythos knowledge without the threat of insanity; the knowledge of "things than Man was not meant to know" is not so much at all. Sanity checks are made on a d100, roll under mechanic, the same as BRP. Note that this is a break from the usual D20 mechanic, of roll d20, roll high. If a character loses more Sanity points than half their Wisdom in a single roll, they suffer an temporary insanity (lasting rounds to hours), if they suffer more than 20% of their current score they become Indefinitely Insane, lasting 1d6 months with an active infliction. If they reach -10 Sanity, they become Permanently Insane. Sanity improvements occur through therapy, medications, and level improvements. There is an excellent description and game effects of various disorders, along with historical information on treatments.

Combat, Equipment, and Magic

Call of Cthulhu D20 uses a hit points method for character wounds, based on 1d6 per level, with 6 for the first level. The combat system is also heavily derived from D&D3e. With various perception skill checks determining activity during a surprise round, initiative is based on D20 plus modifiers determining order. An attack roll is 1d20 plus modifiers versus the Armor Class of the opponent, which incorporates their physical armour, Dexterity bonus, and other defensive bonuses, with a fairly clear distinction between "touch only" attacks and "flat-footed" situations where Dexterity isn't counted. In each round a character may make two move actions, a move and attack combination, or a

full-round action.

A successful hit results in damage, based on the weapon. By way of example a Spide of Leng does 2d6+6 damage (plus poison), an AK-47 does 2d6 (with autofire), and a combat knife 1d4 (plus Strength bonus). A character is disabled at 0 hit points, and dead at -10. If a character takes more than 10 hit points in a single round, a "massive damage threshold" they must make a Fortitude saving check with a DC of 15, or die immediately. "Creatures" (everything from an insect from Shaggai upwards?) have a threshold of fifty hit points, and failure causes unconsciousness rather than death.

Overall, this is less than optimal method. Indeed, call it a kludge. Whilst the massive damage threshold does reduce the heroic fantasy trope where a character receives enormous damage (whether abstracted or direct) and shrugs it off, it still exists to a point; experienced characters - even those with sedentary professions - will have more hit points than low-level professional soldiers, along with better overall combat abilities (BAB etc). Assuming that they have taken the same broad class, a 10th level technician is, *ceteris paribus*, far more dangerous than a fifth level soldier - and that certainly should not be the case. In general, lower level characters are much weaker in combat situations than standard BRP-based CoC characters and higher level D20 CoC characters are stronger.

As a whole however, the combat system is quite sophisticated and detailed. There is various modifiers and specific rules for size, flanking, co-ordinated attacks, creature size, concealment, critical hits, subdual damage, attacking and breaking objects, striking weapons, disarming and grappling, trips, and so forth. Of particular importance of course is fire combat, especially when considers that the equipment chapter, some twenty pages, is almost entirely dedicated to firearms, melee weapons, and armour (there's a small price list for lodging, entertainment, communications, clothing etc).

Firearms, depending on the weapon, can come with autofire, multifire, or standard. A standard weapon is capable of one extra shot per round, a multifire weapon with an extra attack but a better chance to hit, and an autofire attack with two extra attacks per round (albeit with each attack using three bullets). All three options come with some fairly punishing penalties. By way of example, a character with a Base Attack Bonus of +5 will, of course, average around 15 per single shot. With an autofire weapon they can fire off nine bullets and have three attack rolls at -1 each, averaging 9 per shot. Rather unusually for a combat chapter, various environmental damages are included as well in this section; such as diseases, poisons, starvation, extreme heat and cold, drowning and falling, etc.

The magic system begins with "strange events" on tomes and artifacts, but with an overall similar system to that in BRP CoC. Essentially there is a list of mythos tomes which take a long to time to properly study, but which grant bonuses to the Cthulhu Mythos skill, contain a number of spells, and reduce Sanity. The number of spells is notably higher than BRP CoC, and the number of books and artifacts described is notably fewer. The spell system is an interesting amalgamation of the BRP approach and that of the D20 line. The format (saving throw, duration, components) etc are derived from the D20 line, as are some of the requirements (e.g., concentration, caster level). But the effects and costs are very much in the style of BRP CoC, with both Sanity loss and temporary Ability score loses, especially for Int, as the character allows for alien knowledge with real effects to take their mind. Arguably this could also improve Int. In actual play, the ability loss significantly reduces the number of spells that can be cast in succession - spellcasting is, and should, be quite rare. Some one hundred and twenty spells are described, most of which are less orientated towards the ritualistic summonings and bindings and more orientated towards immediate effects.

Creatures, Setting, GM, Stories, and More

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The first thing that is notable for the various creatures is that they are given the same sort of broad classifications present in D&D's Monster Manual; that is, creatures are classified as Aberration, Animal, Beast, Dragon (e.g., Hunting Horror, who knew?), Giant, Humanoid, etc. with various present abilities according to this taxonomy. Strong definition is given to the various abilities and attributes of creatures, as is expected with that game system, including modifications due to Size, challenge rating, advancement and, of course, Sanity losses. Around forty creatures are described with templates for creating different beasts of various sorts, with each receiving around about a page each with an emphasis on the combative abilities, but with introductory quotes from the relevant literature.

Some sixty pages take up information on the Cthulhu mythos, GM advice, and settings. The mythos information is true to the central themes of Lovecraft and presented in an evocative fashion. The checklist approach for cults, tomes, gods and monsters (there is no difference), secrets, etc., are handy for the experienced gamemaster and almost essential for the novice. Similar utility continues in the GM chapter which gives emphasis to gradual revelation, pacing, and atmospheric, although this is a little more wordy, and to the Stories chapter which provides a variety of basic adventure seeds, and some suggestions of narrative flow.

The Settings chapter distinguishes along a matrix of here/now and then/far indicating the challenges of having settings outside a GM's frame of reference. Brief setting information is given on the decade's following the 1890s, with initially an overview followed by some appropriate mythos-related feeds based on literary reconstruction. Some of this is handy, but as a whole the section seems to be a little too scattered.

Two adventures are provided with the book, "The End of Paradise" and "Little Slices of Death". Both are introductory in presentation, giving a solid experience in investigative gaming. The first scenario, unfortunately, requires significant failure on the part of the PCs to actually generate the best horror. The second scenario certainly has a stronger feel of a creeping horror and includes much of the delightful dissociation experiences that can really bring a Lovecraft story into a similar realm to that of Phillip K. Dick.

The final chapters discuss the possibility of using the Cthulhu mythos in D&D games, a concept which returns us back to the days of the first printings of *Dies Irae & Demigods*. We even, again, receive stats for the Great Old Ones, although they are substantially improved as one would expect for D&D3e, and one just has to cackle madly to discover that they have a Treasure value too now (even our dear Azathoth comes with a x5 rating for that statistic). A brief set of conversion notes and recommended reading concludes the rules.

Conclusion

As a means to introduce new D&D/D20 players to the Cthulhu mythos and the central themes of that literature, *CofC D20* must be counted as a success. In this very attractive book, is a game that works, and works quite well, with a good exposition of the setting and themes, and a rules system which allows for variations of difficulty and degrees of success. The 'coolness' rating however is slightly reduced from the original because it is such a highly derivative work, although it too far to describe it as redundant. In addition there is a couple of notable bugs plus an intrinsic issue which is difficult to extract from the entire system.

The first, and subject to a relatively easy fix, is the issue with maximum Sanity and Cthulhu mythos. Rules-as-writ, this

reduces the core theme of "knowledge being dangerous"; fortunately the fix is relatively easy - simply multiply the Mythos modifier by five when calculating maximum Sanity.

The most problematic issue however is the association with levels with combatitive ability. It is unavoidable in a D20 game that "level" has a correlation with Basic Attack Bonus, Hit Points, Saving Throws etc, which simply doesn't work well with the realist and thematic considerations of Call of Cthulhu. Hit point too fall into this category, even when considered in their most abstract measure. If levels were an abstract measure of the character's ability in a particular profession (or professions, it must be emphasised), then much of this could be resolved.

As an unusual situation, the substance ratings for Call of Cthulhu D20 are higher than the BRP version, although the latter is preferred for play. The reason for comes from the fact that although the BRP version has more and significant flaws in the game system and the workmanship of that game system, the problems that it has are significantly easier to fix than those that are part of CofC D20. Nevertheless, this remains an excellent game and one which is a welcome addition to the collection of any fan of this genre.

Style: $1 + 0.7 \text{ (layout)} + 0.8 \text{ (art)} + 0.7 \text{ (coolness)} + 0.7 \text{ (readability)} + 0.9 \text{ (product)} = 5.0$

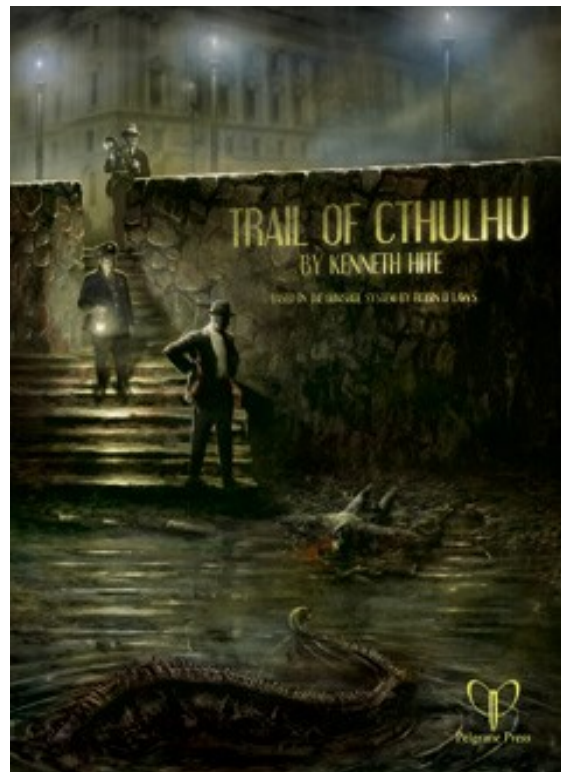
Substance: $1 + 0.7 \text{ (content)} + 0.6 \text{ (text)} + 0.7 \text{ (fun)} + 0.5 \text{ (workmanship)} + 0.8 \text{ (system)} = 4.4$

Trail of Cthulhu

The Product

Trail of Cthulhu explicitly exists to combine the "greatest RPG of all time" (Call of Cthulhu) with Robin D. Laws's Gumshoe system, designed for investigate game. The solidly-bound 248pp hardback is presented with a consistent murky-green artwork by Jérôme Huguenin throughout the text, reminiscent of old, washed-out, photographs. My feelings on the artwork, both in terms of technique and creativity, is mixed; there is some excellent pieces which work particularly well in that style; the image of the Great Race of Yith on p136 is particularly tasty. Others - including the cover! - are barely passable. The layout, also by Huguenin, is three-column ragged-right with a serif font, and sans-serif headings, with deco-styled borders. It is extremely pleasing to the eye and shows some knowledge in these techniques, except in a couple of instances where the primary headings are less obvious than elements of the text (e.g., spell descriptions).

There is an very good table of contents, index and a fine collection of appendices. The main chapters are "The Investigator", "Clues, Tests and Contests", "The Cthulhu Mythos", "The Thirties" (the setting, contrast with Call of Cthulhu's 1920s default), "Putting It All Together",



"Campaign Frames", and "The Kingsbury Horror". In actual play, I found moments where the organisation of the text could have been improved, especially with some jumping between descriptions of investigator abilities and their actual use in play. The game is designed to be run as purist or pulp modes, noting that H.P. Lovecraft wrote with both orientations. The rules have specially marked sections depending on which method the Keeper wishes to use (the game uses the old Call of Cthulhu terms 'Keeper' and 'Investigator' to describe the GM and PCs). Finally, the text includes a lot of appropriate quotes from the famous author in an illustrative manner.

Investigators and System

The first two chapters provide the core of the game system. Descriptions of some eighteen setting and genre-appropriate occupations are provided, along with occupational abilities, credit rating band and any special abilities. Occupational abilities are those that the Investigator can purchase at half-cost in this point-build system. A default of 65 points is provided to purchase from the 65 abilities, with characters start with Sanity of 4, Stability and Health at 1 and the lower end of their Credit Rating band. Note there is no generic 'statistics' as such which add to 'skills'; the two components are collapsed into one broad category - abilities - which is also broad enough to include fairly particular values such as Sanity and Stability. All occupations have a special ability which often are framed in a narrative orientation (e.g., an Antiquarian "once per adventure" may have a suitable or informative item "back at the shop". Finally, Investigators also come with Drives, "a core desire that impels him to seek strange, far truths at the cost of everything that he once held dear". Some fourteen are described, such as Antiquarianism, Curiosity, Revenge Scholarship etc. As a direct influence on play, refusing a Drive costs Stability.

Investigator abilities are described in roughly a quarter of a page each with a brief definition and some examples. More detail is entered for some of the core abilities of the game, such as Credit Rating (which comes with an annual income and lifestyle signifiers chart), Cthulhu Mythos, Sanity and Stability. The Cthulhu Mythos ability allows Investigators to "piece together the secret rules of the real world", costing Sanity and Stability in the process. Sanity is the ability to sustain fundamental human concerns; for every three full points of Sanity a character also associates a Pillar of Sanity, one human concern (ideology, religion, social institution) that gives the character meaning. Likewise for Stability, the resistance to mental trauma, a character must choose a Source of Stability for every three points, being a person who they emotionally rely upon. An Investigator can have a low Sanity, but high Stability (inwardly mad but apparently unfazable) or vice-versa (highly dedicated and connected, but of nervous disposition).

The core, investigative, system rule is that if Investigators turn up to a scene they will discover the core clues. The emphasis of the story is not so much finding the clues (although finding additional clues can be an issue, if you don't have the right ability), but rather interpretation the clues that they find. This is to ensure that storylines are not wrecked by (say) a failed "Library Use" roll or equivalent. For tests, simply roll a d6, add a number of points from the Investigator's pool in their ability (the rating) and try to defeat the target number. Whilst this adds another element of resource management in the game, and the tension that arises from that, I am not sure it added much in a genre-specific sense. The pools can be occasionally refreshed, although at different rates; investigative ability pools are refreshed only at the end of each case, whereas three general ability pools (except Health, Sanity and Stability) can be refreshed when the Investigators are independent of a danger area. Health can be refreshed at 2 points per day of 'restful activity', whereas Sanity and Stability may be refreshed between adventures.

Contests are defined as competitive tests. This can be used for chases, combat etc. In turn, each character involved attempts a test, and continues to do if they succeed; those that fail have lost the contest. In combat contests, the test is based on a 'hit threshold' (3 or 4 if Athletics 8+, other conditional modifiers) and damage is based on a single die, modified by weapon type, and is subtracted from the Health pool (amour, although rare, is possible). Physical injury is

marked as either hurt (Health 0 to -5, Seriously Wounded -6 to -11, or Dead -12 or more), with graduated effects and healing difficulty. This chart is somewhat replicated when psychic damage is described, and the appropriate tests are called for, again with variable thresholds and damage values (e.g., fresh corpse is 1 stability point loss, killing one's spouse is 8). It is possible, under desperate circumstances, for the character to spend themselves negative e.g., they just have to cast that Stability-blasting spell. Negative stability is rated from 0 to -5 (shaken), -6 to -11 (blasted) and -12 (incurably insane). Unlike Stability, when Sanity reaches 0, the character is permanently insane. Sanity is lost through Mythos shocks which drop the character's Stability below 0, or using the Mythos ability. If somehow an investigation comes to a conclusion and there is absolutely no proof of any Mythos activity Sanity can be recovered by 1 point. Short descriptions of several common insanities are provided.

Mythos, Setting and Story

The chapter on the Cthulhu Mythos begins with "Gods and Titans", the big entities, such as Azathoth, Cthulhu, Hastur, Yog-Sothoth and so forth. Each of these entities comes with extra damage values for Stability and Sanity pool losses. Each being is introduced with a description from Lovecraft then several dot point paragraphs describing the entity and their core interests. No ability ratings are provided for these beings, which I must confess I missed somewhat, but rather more effort is placed into giving tantalising indirect suggestions on how they could be included into an investigation. This contrasts somewhat with the Alien Races described later, where each species is given a thorough physical and sometimes psychic description, along with a range of appropriate (i.e., usually combat-based) core abilities are provided, along with hit threshold, armor, weapons, and stability loss. An interesting component is Investigator ability-derived descriptions of clues that are linked with the aliens. Finally, Beasts and Monsters are also described with statistical components but far less adventure-driven aspects.

Quite confusingly, the section on 'Tomes and Magic' is thrown in-between the 'Gods and Titans' and 'Alien Races' sections. Tomes are defined as either clues or resources. Clue tomes can skim/read, whereas a resource tome must be pored over in an indeterminate period of time. Tomes can, of course, be both and provide various benefits and problems. The Eltdown Shards, for example, provide 1 dedicated Occult pool point by skimming, but +1 Cthulhu Mythos by poring over it, or +2 if the Investigator has already encountered the Great Race of Yith or Elder Things. Tomes can also include Spells which can take but a few days to learn with training and appropriate abilities. Spells come with a description of casting, effects and components, along with Stability Test difficulty values, Stability costs, and casting time, which can vary from several seconds to multiple hours for summoning rituals. Around twenty-four spells and twelve rituals are described.

Several sample cults are described with distribution, plot hooks and responses provided, along with notes for Keeper's creating their own cult, preceding the chapter on the 1930s which is accurately defined as 'a desperate decade', where poverty, racism and war were the norm. Headline news items are provided, along with a significant section on the rise of totalitarianism. 'Nightmare countries' (Abyssinia, Belgian Congo, Egypt, Germany, Soviet Union, Thibit) are provided some mundane and Cthulhu related information, although I must protest the exclusion of the Australian continent, New Guinea and the Malay archipelago from discussion! The chapter concludes with an obligatory equipment list which includes a page and a half (although with larger font and spacing) of vehicle stats, a page for weapons, and two pages of sundries.

Storytelling and Scenario

Two chapters ("Putting It All Together", "Campaign Frames") are Investigator and Keeper advice pages. They are quite

good for the model of "storylike" tempo which the author, and game-system designer, both aspire towards. Keeping the story moving, keeping the responses interesting, providing hooks, breadcrumbs, revealing the awful truth, taking historical sources and adding a Cthulhu flavour, engaging in cliffhanger scenes, and keeping the sense of menace is all described in the first chapter. The second is more orientated towards dealing with the larger campaign story and enframing those in consistent manner, especially with regards to setting, style, appropriate investigators and variant rules. Three example campaigns are provided in some detail with these campaign frames.

The sample scenario, the Kingsbury Horror, is derived from a real-world, unsolved, serial killer events on Cleveland in the 1930s. Actual play found that the tempo could be maintained quite well, and the issue of resource management did add tension to the story development. But in order to do so the Keeper must be constantly aware of the plot speed, and introduce the numerous floating clues to ensure the narrative moves forward scene-by-scene and keeps the players on their toes. There are a couple of red herrings in the storyline which I would prefer were integrated, albeit in an unexpected way, given that the scenes otherwise hang a little oddly to the tale. Nevertheless, it did provide an interesting and challenging scenario spread over several sessions with some great roleplaying encounters, plenty of opportunities for investigation and a challenging climax.

Overall

Trail of Cthulhu is a solid product which achieves its stated aims. In terms of style, the layout was very good, the artwork fair-good, it is fairly well written, solidly produced, and yes, it's Cthulhu and therefore it does pretty well on the 'cool' stakes. In terms of substance, this book provides pretty much what is needed for a good game - investigators, entities, . The efficiency of this writing is only fair as well. The game system largely comes together quite nicely, even if the 1d6 core mechanic for tests does seem a little invariable and even more so when dealing with particularly large and powerful entities - it doesn't scale very well. The tension over resource management can work, along with the sources of stability and pillars of sanity, as long as the Keeper pays attention to it and integrates it with the general plot.

Trail of Cthulhu is a good game and part of the run of licenses on Cthulhu, including Shadows of Cthulhu (True20), Realms of Cthulhu (Savage Worlds), D20 Call of Cthulhu. As a game series however, its biggest challenge will be the development of epic storylines that are similar quality as Masks of Nyarlathotep, Horror on the Orient Express, Shadows of Yog-Sothoth etc.

Style: 1 + .8 (layout) + .6 (art) + .8 (coolness) + .7 (readability) + .9 (product) = 4.6

Substance: 1 + .6 (content) + .6 (text) + .7 (fun) + .7 (workmanship) + .7 (system) = 4.3



CTHULHU

1d6 investigators per round.

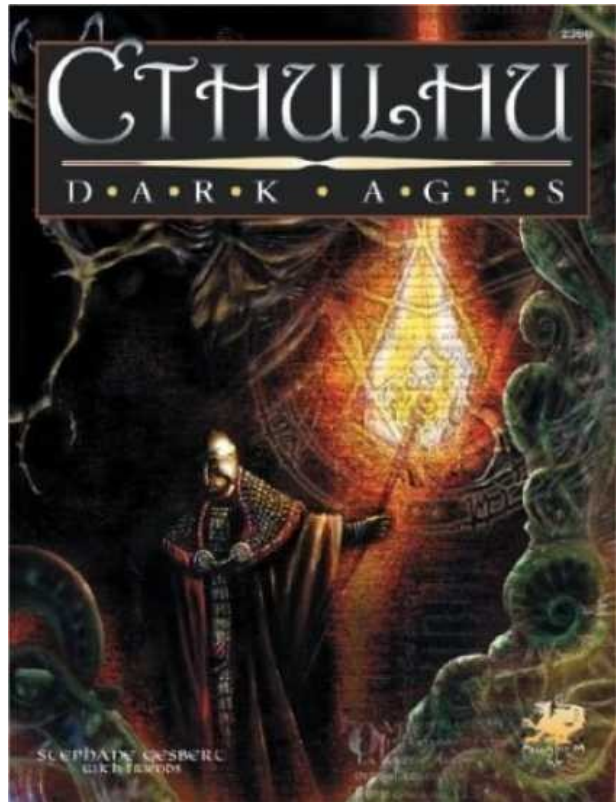
VARIANT CTHULHU MYTHOS SETTINGS

by *Lev Lafayette*

Cthulhu Dark Ages

Product and About

Call of Cthulhu Dark Ages is a 173 page softback that has that company's usual good standards in binding. Francois Launet attractive cover of a Norman investigator with torchlight has some particular nice shades of red, black, and gold and gives the sense of unearthing and illumination that should be part of any dungeon crawl. The text is two-column, serif, ragged-right with a gutter suggesting a faded manuscript, although this is not used for page and chapter information which is found on the bottom of the page. Space is also wasted on each page having different header art according to chapter. The original internal artwork varies in quality, with many of the pieces in the Bestiary chapter particularly good, and with a good collection of appropriate public domain historical pienes, and is usually in context. There is a single page for the table of contents and index for the six chapters. Particular text (e.g., tables, spot rules) are boxed and highlighted. Stéphane Gesbert's writing is formal, but light, with a great deal of evocative quotes from in supplement.



There are two items of note for any potential purchaser. The first is that the setting is 950-1050 A.D., which whilst is an excellent time for Millenarianism, may not be what some readers expect from the the term 'dark ages'. The issue is moot in academia, and certainly historically the original use of the "saeculum obscurum" does fall within that time. But just in case one thought that they were getting a book for roleplaying just after the fall of the Roman Empire, this explanation is provided. The second is more significant; this is not a supplement for Call of Cthulhu, but rather an entire independent game in itself, although using the same core system, modified for the setting.

Character Generation and Skills

The text launches into the thematic considerations of the setting right away, along with some meta-game recommendations (i.e., scare the players). There is also a short collection of source material, which really is quite limited in range and quality. Following this is the game system, taking up a but 44 pages. Characteristics are APP (Appearance), CON (Constitution), DEX (Dexterity), EDU (Education), INT (Intelligence), POW (Power), SIZ (Size), and STR (Strength). This is a point-buy system, with 100 points allocated, averaging 12.5. Derived characteristics include SAN (Sanity) from $POW * 5$, Damage Bonus (from $STR+SIZ$), Hit Points ($((CON + SIZ)/2)$), and with

characteristic rolls based on the core value times five.

A small selection of Anglo-Saxon, Old French, and Old High German names is provided as suggestions, with character starting languages influenced by regional dialect. Characters begin at age 15, with an option of increments of +10 years providing 20 occupation points and -1 to a characteristic. Characters have 20*EDU to distribute points according to their profession, and 10*INT according to personal interest. Professions also provide starting monies, and a yearly income. Twenty appropriate and normal professions are described.

Around fifty core skills are described in around a paragraph along with their base chance. These can be translated to more contemporary CoC skill titles, with some minor modifications (e.g., a generic "Science" takes the place of the specialist disciplines). With the exception of Dodge, Library Use, and Own Language, characteristics do not modify skills. Some skills require specialisations (e.g., Craft, Other Languages), and others which are specialised should be amalgamated (e.g., Head Butt, Grapple, Kick, Punch, individual weapons). There is no Psychoanalysis skill, which certainly should be included if under a different name, and Psychology is included as Insight. Deception also uses the Insight skill with competition through the resistance table, which is somewhat inappropriate.

As per other editions of Call of Cthulhu, skill tests are a straight d100 roll without modifiers (however the scenario below does include multipliers), and a successful test under stress results in an immediate skill check (roll under current value, gain 1d10 percentiles). Notably skill checks are only taken when the situation is dangerous, although some skills (e.g., Pilot, Boat, Climb, Sword etc) are considered "inherently dramatic or dangerous". When a character receives 90% or more in a skill they gain 2d6 SAN. For characteristic vs characteristic checks a resistance table is provided which can be expressed by the formula: (active CHAR * 5 - resisting CHAR * 5) + 50%.

The Environment and Combat

Environmental factors, as they should be, are an important part of Cthulhu Dark Ages. All characters have the same movement rate (40m per round, running), although there are rules for chases. Wilderness survival and the effects of hunger, exposure and aphixiation are provided, along with fire and light. The issues traversing human and natural obstacles receives similar prominence. Physical damage through combat situations are, of course, not forgotten. Whilst the effects of poison are carried out as resistance roll attacks for their effect, or characteristic tests for disease, most damage occurs as a reduction in hit points. Spot rules are provided for acid, drowning, falling, fire, and healing (1d3 points per week, 1d3 points for first aid, c1d3 per week for hospitalisation). Individual wounds have classification levels (10% of hit points, 50% of hit point, 100% of hit points etc) which indicate, for example, a shock threshold (50%) which can cause unconsciousness.

Combat rounds are an elastic measure of time from several to a dozen seconds. Armour reduces damage (e.g., quilted leather 1, chainmail 7, kite shield with iron straps, 30). There is rules for impaling damage, dodges and parries, surprise, knock-out attacks (damage as an attack on the resistance table), weapon length and closing. The latter rules, less common in BRP games, states that longer weapons always strike first, regardless of DEX (the usual determinant of initiative), and that a successful dodge is required to close for a strike (and a successful dodge for the longer-armed opponent to re-establish optimal distance). Missile weapons have three ranges, base, double, and point-blank; at double the skill is halved at point-blank (the attacker's DEX in yards) it is doubled. Thrown weapons apply half of any damage bonus. There is also a collection of weapon statistics for war engines; they are not very accurate (at all), but as one could imagine very handy against large, static targets - like buildings.

As per other versions of Call of Cthulhu, Sanity is distinguished between temporary, indefinite, and permanent. Temporary insanity lasts from 1d10+4 rounds to 1d10*10 hours, and is expressed as the results of shock - the loss of 5 or more SAN points. Increasing skill in Cthulhu Mythos correlates with a reduction of maximum SAN. Indefinite insanity results from the loss of 20% of SAN points within one game hour; it causes the usual effects that one recognises in the deranged (amnesia, hallucinations, paraphilias, paranoia, obsessive-compulsive behaviour, etc). This typically removes a character from play for 1D6 game months. Permanent insanity occurs where the character's SAN reaches zero or less, which puts the character out of play from anywhere from a year to the rest of their life.

Setting

The conclusion of the System chapter has a short collection of common equipment purchases, up to boats and houses. This previous a prelude to the setting chapter entitled "Utilities". This begins with a very good introduction common knowledge and experience of the world, with an emphasis on the monastic and farming lives (which is pretty much everybody). In terms of languages, the game really only concentrates on Romantic and Germanic languages; this is very much a western European setting, and as a result a Catholic one, to the point of emphasising Catholic heresies of the time (e.g., Manicheans) and the remains of paganism. On the other hand, we get a good sense of the various religious and secular duties and responsibilities, home life, clothing, and diet. Warlords and princes receive their necessary recognition, for their military strength and their enforcement of secular order, along with a description of their experience, in increasing relative opulence and one moves up the social ladder to castle management.

Whilst the overwhelming percentage of the population engaged in agrarian activity to support city populations, cities do receive their own section primarily as centres of trade, and therefore of military concentration, as well as being centres of religious communities. There is emphasis on the use of rivercourses as the main communications route, and the location of most towns - not just for their ready supply of water (as necessary as that is), but for the speed and relative safety of transport. There is some mention of the role of Jews in western European cities as well as side-bar references to the particular organisation of Russian cities. A section on technology discusses medicine, horse technologies, milling, ore and salts, textiles and glassware.

This serves as an introduction to the world at large; world meaning in this context the Arabic and Europe. These are extremely brief; the Kingdom of Burgundy and the Kingdom of Italy, for example, are each described in a single sentence. The largest and most important cities (Baghdad, Cordoba, Constantinople, Kiev, Prague, Rome, Venice etc) receive a paragraph. Some areas are described in aggregate (e.g., "Slavonic States"). As a whole, the section provides one, perhaps two, items of interest to each city or region. This is probably insufficient, and certainly makes a great deal of assumptions of the GM's knowledge of the region (e.g., language, religion, ethnic groups, technology level, etc). There is a map, but it is certainly suggested that one seek a second opinion (at least) to the location and number of the sovereign states mentioned. In contrast however the three page dark ages glossary, the four pages of natural, political, and occult history, and the page of "who's who" does give a certain level of density. The glossary is particularly useful, although one doesn't get a sense of the historical movements from reading the history timeline - some extra adjectives could have assisted a great deal.

Mythos and Grimoire

The Mythos and Grimoire can be considered together, even if they are presented in separate chapters. The first part is,

after all, is a mere three pages. This brief explanation of the Cthulhu Mythos which the standard and familiar themes, along with the content (Outer Gods, Great Old Ones, Servitor Races, Independent Races etc). An opportunity was lost here to strongly tie encounters with the mythos rationalised into the traditional-religious worldview of the setting. It is about the Cthulhu Mythos, but it is not about the Cthulhu Mythos in the Dark Ages.

Magic users, of various types, live on the fringes of the Cthulhu Dark Ages society. Casting spells typically costs SAN, and if that isn't enough some colourful examples are provided for making spell-casting less encouraging. Spells are learned from a spirit or mythos entity, from another person, or from a book which are, as expected, quite rare. Each are provided a short and adequate description; from a spirit it's usually automatically (ingrained in the brain!), from a person takes at least a week, and from a book takes 2D6 weeks. Spell-casting can lead to POW improvements, which also increases maximum SAN.

Spells are described according to according to name, with categorisations, range (touch, sight, indefinite), duration (instant, one round, one day, permanent are standard), magic point or POW cost, SAN cost, resistance table modifications (many spells can be resisted, magic points vs magic points), and with a description including components. Ritual magic occurs when the magic point costs exceeds that the caster has available, and as a result typically taking hours derived from all those who know the spell with supporters contributing the best they can through protection (they can't - surprisingly - contribute in any meaningful way directly to the casting).

About fifty core spells are described. These are a combination of some age-old favourites from Call of Cthulhu, plus some new introductions which come with a distinctly dark ages feel. For example, "Become Spectral" operates by shifting the caster's body to Limbo, characteristics and skill classes can be Blessed, Devil's can be cast out, Demonic perception can be granted, and so forth. One spell which will be inevitably popular is Exaltation which can provide a bonus of 1d6 to SAN for 12 MP (very impressive!) or remove an indefinite insanity for a cost of 1 POW. It is a little overpowered to put it mildly. In contrast the Heal spell only maximises a character's healing rate - even a modest improvement would have been preferable.

Even more deeply ingrained in the Judeo-Christian mythos (and more) is Limbo, the equivalent of the Spirit Plane for RuneQuest aficionados. Beyond that is the Ultimate Abyss; "[t]he Ultimate Abyss is hell in the strictest sense of the word: Yog-Sothoth's hole or hidden place. These descriptions provide the prelude to the description of spirit combat, which involves the typical contest of magic points, but with some neat features, such as the loss of SAN and the description of the psychological effects of the loss of magic points. The chapter concludes with a description of the various books of the mythos. Unlike other versions of CoC, this presentation is very clear in exactly how many weeks each tome takes to read and exactly what spells are included; as others it includes the bonus to the Cthulhu mythos skills, SAN costs, and the language of the book.

The Bestiary chapter takes up just over twenty pages and covers around forty or so beings from animals, to monsters, to creatures of god like-powers, spanning both medieval fantasy and traditional Cthulhu mythos beings, with the latter often re-interpreted into the representation of the former (e.g., the dark young as goblins, gugs as unclean giants). Likely to cause some confusion is the "Old Ones", a spiritual (i.e., INT and POW only) greater servitor race of Yog-Sothoth. Satan receives a brief description, but no statistics - but the powerful Lilith does. Cthulhu, sleeping in the South Pacific, isn't mentioned at all - except indirectly through his servitor's the Star Spawn of Cthulhu. There is a simple encounter table - certainly needing greater development - differentiated into wilderness, gate, and limbo areas.

Sample Scenario: The Tomb

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Taking up around a third of the book (but certainly not a third of this review) is the sample scenario, The Tomb. The setting is a forested region of eastern march of Germany, north of Vienna, which is immediately notable for being an area that is not as well served by the character generation system as western Europe. The opening settlement of Laa is inhabited by local Slavs and colonist Germans, in alliance against the eastern Magyars. The scenario begins with the investigators joining to senior Brothers (important NPCs) and some warrior-monks (redshirts) in a missionary quest to convert or otherwise pacify the heathern Magyars.

There is an excellent historical summary of the region in the two-page Keeper Play Aids, although the forest narrative information should have been included in the main text. The scenario starts with quite a kicker, although PCs are likely once again to suffer by the different focus of the scenario and the character generation assumptions. As is not unusual for a Call of Cthulhu plot there will be the discovery of bodies, hideously mutilated, and a subsequent investigation. The investigation, also unsurprisingly, involves locals who are distant and suspicious - except for the innkeeper's daughter (oh, to be slain by these tropes), the acquisition of rumours, and even a study of written records.

The narrative continues with suspicions and bodies piling up, leading to an eventual encounter with various mythos beings, consisting of a fairly improbable alliance, and a serious case of misjudgment. An opportunity arises to have a change of pace from an investigative scenario to something not unlike aliens, which is as much of a spoiler that one should give; it is quite a good chance mid-scenario.

Overall however the scenario was far too wordy and took up too much space in the book. It's good for a couple of sessions if you stretch it out; which is really insufficient and a lot less from the material from other CoC books. It would have been better to write a number of denser scenarios or even provide better elaboration of the background.

Overall

Call of Cthulhu Dark Ages was such a good opportunity there a degree of inevitably that it was going to be a worthwhile product. Physically it is just fine, and whilst the writing style is good in readability levels, it loses somewhat in density. There are a number of times when the product combines both the feel of the mythos with the feel of the dark ages world view very well. But equally there is a large number of missed opportunities and material that simply could do with a better signal to noise ratio. Overall the book is good, but with a little more editorial and author care it could have been a lot better.

Style: 1 + 0.3 (layout) + 0.5 (art) + 0.7 (coolness) + 0.7 (readability) + 0.8 (product) = 3.7

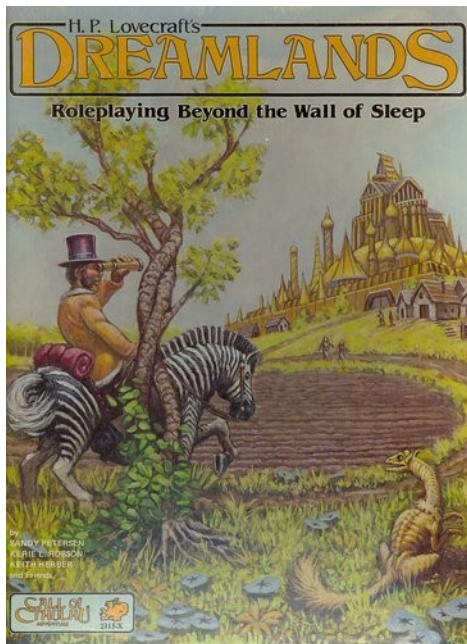
Substance: 1 + 0.6 (content) + 0.5 (text) + 0.7 (fun) + 0.4 (workmanship) + 0.6 (system) = 3.9

H.P. Lovecraft's Dreamlands

Introduction and Product

H.P. Lovecraft's Dreamlands is a supplement for Call of Cthulhu covering a shared location with surreal and often horrifying qualities accessible from sleep. From a personal collection there are three editions to choose this review from, the 1986 boxed set, the 1988 book, and the 1992 book, although damned if the third can be unearthed at the moment for comparative purposes. In any case there is certainly extremely little difference between the first two editions (even the errors are the same), and there there have been three other editions since. Simply as a case of personal preference, this review covers the first edition boxed set.

The cover is an "Approach to Sarrub" by Tom Sullivan, a colourful and exotic piece of a Victorian era gentleman explorer riding a zebra towards a town. A furry looking lizard creature looks on with is almost a smile. Inside is three saddle-stapled booklets, "The Dreamlands", 40 pages with a disturbing Gug and victim, "Dream Journeys", 72 pages (heavy, handle with care) with a Nash and Kaman-Thah, the two priests who guard the Dreamlands, and "Handouts", 32 pages with character sheets. There is also an impressively large map of the Dreamlands. The black and white shaded internal art by Kevin Ramos is really quite excellent, contextually right, creative, and well-executed, as are the maps and diagrams by Carolyn Schultz. The text within is two-column, justified, with clear "sidebar" regions. The text is well-written, clear, quite dense, and with only an occasional typographic error ("three loaves of bred" is personal favourite).



The Dreamlands

The first book begins with an introduction by Sandy Petersen, emphasising the atmospherics of the Dreamlands, along with a selection of recommended reading material from Lovecraft, which is elaborated several pages pages latter with a pleasing colour scheme. This is followed by four known methods of entering the Dreamlands; spell or artifact, finding a point of intersection, through some particular dreaming, and potentially by dying. Dreaming is, of course, one of the preferred methods, but this known entrance does come with a test by Nasht and Kaman-That, who ensure that those who enter have the sufficient combination of SAN and Mythos skill.

Characters may remain in the Dreamlands for a period of time equal to their POW in hours. Characters who succeed an Idea roll when leaving retain the skills and knowledges acquired. Whilst SAN gains can occur in the Dreamlands, SAN losses of 20% or more in a single encounter cause Nightmare effects, and those that lose all their SAN are transformed. Characters who die in the Dreamlands are awakened from this psychological death-experience, losing significant SAN

and can never enter the Dreamlands again.

As the Dreamlands are gradually created over a process of some five hundred years, contemporary technologies simple cannot be created or transported. From the new skill, Dreaming, a character can alter the reality that they are in. The skill is really well done, a beautiful integration of the game system where the value of the skill equates with the degree that the reality can be altered. A second skill, Dream Lore, is as it is written on the box; it is the character's recognition of creatures, people, and lands of the Dreamlands. In addition to these skills, descriptions of an artifacts and a spell are provided that allow for potential dream journeys.

A dozen pages provides a brief summary of major locations within the Dreamlands and the Underworld, including cities, geographical landscapes and the like, including literary references. This is followed by almost fifty new spells; the Dreamlands are considered a more magical place than the waking world, and the spells there are particular to that reality. Some personal favourites include Anathema, a counter-magic spell, Mandrake, to create a simulacrum, and the Vortex of Far Journeying, a rather evil djinni-style method of transportation.

The book concludes with a selection of statistics for notable persons and creatures of the mythos, around fifty in all. The Cloudbeasts, Spiders of Leng, and Moon Beasts, are well-known challenges. Cats receive special prominence on the grounds that they are experts in dreaming. The cat-sized Zoog, essentially rats with tentacles, are intelligent and opportunistic spell-casting omnivores. It is hard to justify potential SAN loss to a creature that's so cute.

Dream Journeys

The hefty book of Dream Journeys is a collection of several scenarios for the Dreamlands. The first, "To Sleep, Perchance to Dream", is a very gentle introduction to the setting, exotic but not threatening. In contrast "Captives of Two Worlds" is very threatening indeed, but gives the opportunity to illustrate to players how their characters can make use of the Dreamlands to solve Mythos-related cultist problems in the waking world.

"Pickman's Student" is a notably longer scenario where the walls between the dreamworld and the waking world are not quite a thick as they should be, and the interest of the former in the latter can be just as strong as the reverse. This border, somewhat unsurprisingly (at least to anyone with a taste for surrealism), finds its expression through works of art. Although there isn't much guessing involved when one of the works is entitled "R'lyeh At Dawn". A rather charming sorceress has a collection of lovely spells that destroy bodies creatively and, if led to her devices, will allow the scenario to tranform into your favourite zombie film, but in the wrong way. This is followed by a shorter scenario in a similar theme, "Season of the Witch", which brings together some favourite mythos-related waking world locations with the Dreamlands.

The fifth scenario, "Lemon Sails" is entirely based in the Dreamlands, with the opportunity to journey to several great locations in that environments and deal with a number of exotic NPCs on the way. The final scenario, "The Land of Lost Dreams", by Mark Morrison, is explicitly stated to be for experienced Call of Cthulhu/Dreamlands Keepers and Investigators, a position first expressed by Sandy Petersen in the introduction to the book. This is a particularly densely written text, and it is recommended that the Keeper make copious notes before running.

Overall

This is an excellent product, enjoyable to play and well-presented. The Dreamlands are a more exotic setting from the

Cthulhu mythos and at least in the literary sense, were previously considered somewhat separate, more orientated towards surreal fantasy than horror. The way that the Dreamlands supplement has kept this feel but also introduced the horror elements is to be congratulated, and the integration with the core Core of Cthulhu ruleset is painless. The scenarios provided are also of an excellent quality and should provide many hours of entertainment. The only cause of concern is the relative flimsiness of the Journeys book, a problem largely resolved by the second edition.

Style: 1 + 0.7 (layout) + 0.8 (art) + 0.8 (coolness) + 0.8 (readability) + 0.8 (product) = 4.9

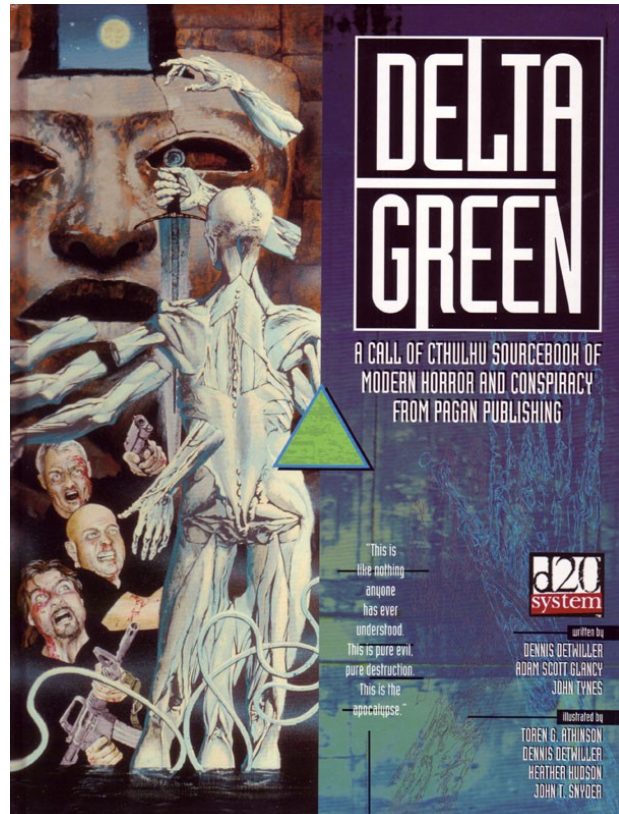
Substance: 1 + 0.6 (content) + 0.8 (text) + 0.8 (fun) + 0.5 (workmanship) + 0.7 (system) = 4.4

Delta Green

Product and About

Spoilers may follow.

Delta Green is a product of some significant popularity, an elaboration of the setting originally published as "Cthulhu Now!" with the conspiracy theory gaming that gained significant popularity in the 1990s. The well-bound and glued softback book is almost 300 pages, of which over half is appendices. The cover art by Blair Reynolds depicts something very close to the final scene of *Horror on the Orient Express*, except with more contemporary victims. The internal art is equally set to the theme and in context, and as a whole artwork definitely indicates technical ability and imaginative capacity; the choice of a new host on p175 was particularly delightful. The text is in two-column justified serif font, with chapter and page numbers clearly marked. The text itself is a little on the verbose side; there's a lot of content, and whilst very interesting, it doesn't come across with a particularly creative flair.



The six chapters cover "The Big Picture" (an overview), "Delta Green" (the good guys, a defunded and disbanded paranormal paramilitary unit that still exists through personal networks), "Majestic-12" (a government-sponsored UFO investigation group), "Karotechia" (Nazi occultists), "Saucerwatch" (a private UFO investigation group), and "The Fate" (a powerful mythos-worshipping crime syndicate). The appendices include a bibliography, glossary, and security classifications, mysterious manuscripts, three full-length adventures, investigator creation rules, federal agencies, new skills, and modern firearms. There is a single page table of contents and a three-page index. The game argues a core theme in "The Big Picture"; that Call of Cthulhu stories have greater familiarity if set in contemporary times and locations, and that characters need a defining association plus authority in order to carry out their investigations with the plot making sense.

The Organisations

A little under half the book is dedicated to the aforementioned organisations. Each of these consists of around twenty pages of history for the two major groups (Delta Green and Majestic-12), down to a minimum of a mere six for the Karotechia. Delta Green and Majestic-12 also receive a timeline, such is their relative importance and complexity. Each group also comes with a number of sample NPCs, of varying ability, rank, and background. Some are fairly pedestrian, as much as any character involved in such an environment can be, others are quite colourful - Lt. Col. Emil Furst stands out as one particular example, a character whose profession is listed as "warrior-shaman", dressed in a combination of army fatigues, and central African trinkets, standing 6'9", weighing "250 lbs of muscle, bone, and scar tissue".

There is a nice touch in the thematic considerations of the various organisations as revealed by their history and practise. With an exploration of conspiratorial themes, it is a nice touch to make the group that the PCs are most likely to belong to a conspiracy in themselves. There is an additional impetus to the conspiracy, given that the semi-legitimate (at least among Republican administrations, what?) Majestic-12 considers Delta Green a threat of some seriousness, although their association and indeed, indirect control, by aliens also creates a conspiracy around them. The Karotechia are deliberately evil incarnate with a "Boys From Brazil" or "Forgotten Fatherland" feel to them; they are complete thugs, they have a very high opinion of themselves and they are relatively ineffective. They make a good introductory target for PC groups.

With a more civilian orientation, Saucerwatch, are obvious candidates as allies to the Delta Green operatives and indeed, even a plausible source for alternative PCs. They are also set up as fall guys for a suggested narrative development, the closer the PCs are to the organisation the more painful their destruction. As an alternative civilian organisation which would nominally be set up against the PCs, The Fate were an extremely interesting and disturbing group; they "extort the extortionists, and the syndicates pay up without a second thought", and they do so through magical abilities, which they have not acquired through friendly means.

Overall the organisations provide the foundation of the interleaved conspiracies with a deep integration with creatures from the Cthulhu mythos, yet on the surface, they seem more remote than in other campaign packs. In some way the competing organisations are reminiscent of the various White Wolf and Ars Magica products, with significant detail that combines both real-world history, real-world conspiracies, and game-world additions.

Supporting Material and Adventures

The first appendix consists of a fairly good bibliography that includes various spy agencies, conspiracies, ufology, and the various strange places that Delta Green implies. It is not, of course, a comprehensive review of such things; the Illuminati, for example, don't really feature in Delta Green. The bibliography is nicely supplemented by a subcultural glossary of terms, locations, operations, organisations, procedures, etc., common from U.S. intelligence agencies, along with game-specific inclusions clearly marked. Also adding to the material is an accurate list of security classifications, and a collection of "Mysterious Manuscripts", again both fictional and real-world conspiratorial (e.g., Jessup's "The Case for the UFO").

The three adventures included with the supplement are of increasingly complexity. The first, "Puppet Shows and Shadow Plays", is deliberately designed as an introductory scenario which introduces the PCs to the conspiracies,

supernatural involvement, and Delta Green - the starting assumption is that the PCs are not members of DG. In the second scenario, "Convergence", now as fully fledged members of DG, the PCs encounter the first tantalising hints of the influence of those that come from beyond the stars and their plans for the human species, along with the competitor organisations. This is also a far more deadly scenario and careless players may find their characters on the very wrong end of an infection of sorts. The third scenario, "The New Age", is a double-length feature that includes even more of our friends from the stars, a new age cult, and an Outer God. It's a nice way to provide a sense of the scale of the issue.

Following the adventures, rather unusually, the appendices return to the supporting material, specifically how to create a Delta Green investigator (templates, cell structure), followed by a descriptive listing of federal agencies, occupation templates, and sample characters. The layout of these latter pages is particularly annoying, with an additional margin placed around an already generous margin. There also a collection of new skills for Call of Cthulhu, including some general tasks likely in military-focussed operations (e.g., Parachuting), as well as those quite general (e.g., Mathematics). Notably the game does acknowledge the possibility of negative modifiers (e.g., using neurosurgery from the surgery skill). An appendix on modern firearms works on a three-second combat round, damage based on calibre, and an fairly extensive summary of weapons from around the world.

Overall

Overall Delta Green is an excellent contemporary conspiracy game that is well integrated with the Cthulhu mythos. A sense of familiarity is present with the setting, the characters have the authority to engage in the investigations, a sense of impending doom is also present. All these narrative contributions add significantly to the enjoyment of the product. It is not unlike popular TV shows of the time, such as the X-files, it has a touch of the weirdness of games like Unknown Armies, and it's all wrapped up with mythos stories. Overall, in terms of content, story 'coolness', and 'fun', it's hard to go wrong with Delta Green.

Style: $1 + 0.6 \text{ (layout)} + 0.6 \text{ (art)} + 1.0 \text{ (coolness)} + 0.5 \text{ (readability)} + 0.7 \text{ (product)} = 4.4$

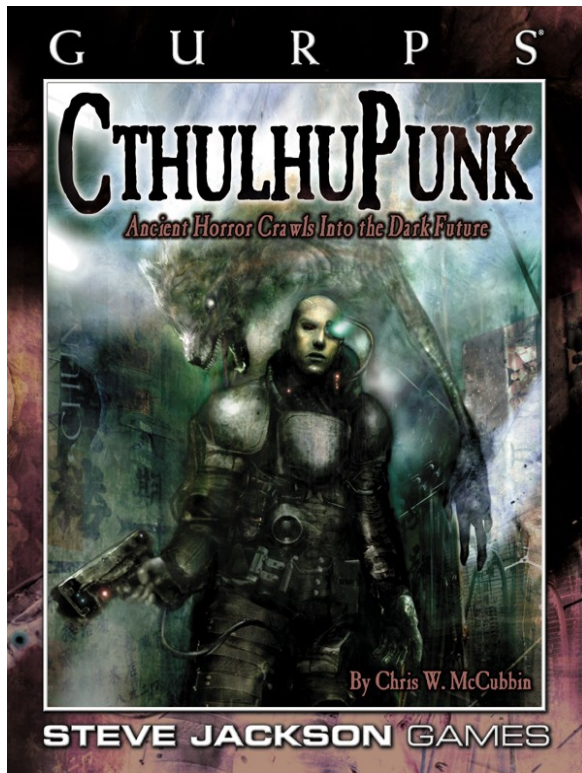
Substance: $1 + 0.8 \text{ (content)} + 0.4 \text{ (text)} + 0.8 \text{ (fun)} + 0.7 \text{ (workmanship)} + 0.6 \text{ (system)} = 4.3$

GURPS CthulhuPunk

Introduction and Product

As a standard GURPS supplement, CthulhuPunk comes as a 128 page softbound book with good binding. The excellent cover art by Christopher Shy has a low light cyborg soldier with a large Hound of Tindalos behind them, pretty much capturing the port-manteau title of cyberpunk plus the Cthulhu mythos. The internal art by Dan Smith is quite variable; there are some excellent pieces in accord to his high-contrast, sharp line-drawn style with the detail and even humour that he is known for. Other works come across as half-finished pieces. They often, but by no means always, have a degree of contextual appropriateness. The text is mostly single-column, serif, and justified, with a hefty sidebar region. Chapter markings are well-marked, more so than page numbers. There is a good two-page table of contents and a three-page index. The writing style is semi-formal and somewhat unfocussed, an issue which becomes more apparent as one continues through the text. The first two chapters cover the Cthulhu mythos and a sample Cyberpunk world. This is

followed by character generation notes in the setting, running a Cthulhupunk campaign, a chapter each on Investigators, Cultists, Bestiary, and finally Adventure Seeds and Conversions.



The Mythos and The World

The opening chapter proper, following the obligatory 'what is GURPS', 'who is the author', etc, explains the Cthulhu mythos. This a good summary, covering all the major bases; who are the Great Old Ones and the taxonomic order of these and other mythos beings, the existential position of humanity vis-a-vis such beings, the literary history of the mythos creation, etc. There is a collection of "Blasphemous Tomes" where the first piece of system integration is found; two Fright checks, one for skimming the book, and another for reading it in detail, and a maximum increase to the Mythos Lore skill; no time period is specified. Fright checks, it must also be said, are a very poor representation of the effects of Mythos lore acquisition. The chapter also contains descriptions of a selection of the major geographic and astronomical features of the Cthulhu mythos, including a the Dreamlands, before providing a three page timeline of prehistorical and historical events, with the addition of the influence of mythos-related activities. There is notably no attempt (such as found in Delta Green, for example) to discuss why the earthly geographical features would not or have not been discovered given the mapping and visualisation technologies of the cyberpunk era.

The second chapter gives a description of a cyberpunk world. This is not the thematic considerations or other key elements of the literary genre, but rather a particular example, with two major contributions; a devastating disease that wipes out 52.5% of the world's population (vaguely plausible given HPAI A H5N1), a worldwide stockmarket crash that leads to de-globalisation of the financial system (considerably less likely), the disappearance of everyone from continental Australia, and the formation of some very improbable geopolitical alliances. The Technology Level is on the cusp of TL 7 and 8, although contemporary GURPS experts suggest we're in the midst of TL8. There is also an overview of crime syndicates (more so that corporations!), and popular culture ("loud, vulgar, and excessive"), and a little bit on space travel and undersea exploration. Overall, this material is is pretty much lifted straight from GURPS Cyberworld, a fairly poor choice, and thus repeats the problems in that book. What is particularly surprising is how little integration with the Cthulhu mythos is even attempted.

Characters

The Characters chapter begins with the recognition that point totals don't really matter in a CthulhuPunk game, and then goes on to explain how they will matter. Around twenty character concepts are described, which is mainly a skill set and advantages suggestion. A distinction is drawn between Fright Checks and Mythos Fright Checks; essentially the latter is at half value. Mythos acquired quirks and disadvantages cannot simply be bought off, but have a time requirement of 1 week per point. There are new advantages including Mythos Awareness, a sort of specialised Danger

Sense, and Unfazeable, which made it into subsequent editions of the core rules. A new disadvantage "The Innsmouth Look", refers to that famous fishy apperance of those infected by the Deep Ones, and there is an elaboration of a new skill "Mythos Lore", which each improvement requiring a semi-Mythos Fright Check with the new value as a negative to the check. This will mean some strange shock effects at initial levels, then new Phobia or Delusion and increasing severity and incidence from then on.

(e.g., a character with Will 12 reads a +4 Mythos book, fairly mild on the scheme of things. Although it is a Mythos Check it is not halved for this book-learning activity. Their Fright Check is at -9, because that would be the level they'll attain following the check. Rolling a 10, they fail by 7. Rolling an 11 for their Fright Check effects, a total of 18 is rolled. They faint and take a point of damage as they finish the final page.)

In addition there is a Psi Skill called Dream Travel, which does as it says, although with out the dream-changing ability. A number of Mythos-related spells are provided of the Summon, Bind, Contact, Call, and Dismiss variety. There is a few examples of of weird crossover science pieces, which are relatively unexciting in game terms, but thematically appropriate - indeed they represent the sort of crossover that the book should have been about.

Setting

The chapter on "The CthulhuPunk Campaign" is almost entirely descriptive. Using Stephen King, three kinds of fear are described; revulsion, horror, then terror. It is recommended that all three are used in a CthulhuPunk campaign; it would have been better still to describe how, in gaming terms, these could be incorporated. CthulhuPunk campaigns are differntiated as either being investigative and scholarly, compared to campaigns that are activist and (although unstated) with a more military focus. The two orientations are not mutually exclusive, and as an alternative a section also describes "splatterpunk", an activist orientation focussed on revulsion. It is a style undeserving of the attention provided considering the genre. One of the more interesting discussions involves the incorporation of online gaming for CthulhuPunk, to a degree innovative at the time. The chapter concludes with a useful discussion of several thematic orientations for a CthulhuPunk campaign, named "Adventure Archetypes".

The second setting-based chapter refers to Investigators. This is essentially a compilation of sample NPCs and organisations. The NPCs are remarkably detailed, and surprisingly uninteresting. Organisations includes those associated with the academic journal Parapsychological Review (which is actually the name of an Australian journal), the Homo Sapiens League, Miskatonic University, various governments, corporations, criminal groups, and religions. Association with the occult in all cases tends to be peripheral even for those who have a strong interest and history with the occult.

The Cultists chapter is sort of the same as the Investigator chapter, except for the bad guys. There is less emphasis on organisations and more on character archetypes; True Believers, Mad Scientists, Nihilists, Revolutionaries (?!), and Rogue Investigators. There is some mention of organisations, i.e., cults, distinguished between the inhuman (Deep Ones, Ghouls, etc), and Native cults (e.g., Tcho-Tcho). Again there is some NPCs described in notable detail.

The fourth setting-based chapter is a Mythos Bestiary. Although a mere seventeen pages, it packs a lot of information in, providing descriptions and statistics for the Great Old Ones, Lesser Creatures, and NPC races (the standard taxonomy of the Mythos is not applied here). Unfortunately here too the opportunity to seriously discuss the crossover potential of the Cthulhu Mythos and Cyberpunk is surprisingly largely absent, with the exception of a discussion on the

ready availability of high-powered weaponry among cyberpunk characters - and some rather horrible kludges to overcome the issue.

Following this are two short chapters, one providing adventure seeds and the other conversion notes. The seeds are quite literally that, and are sufficiently interesting that they should get the creative juices flowing for an enthusiastic GM. The Conversion chapter for Call of Cthulhu and GURPS is short and fairly sensible; the method of converting skills is possibly the most controversial, but the method described (correlate from skill levels, rather than a direct translation of raw skill values) is the best way of getting around the differences between the two systems.

Overall

Whilst providing a fair introduction to a cyberpunk setting and an fair-good translation of the Cthulhu mythos into a GURPS context, there is a notable lack of material that combines the genres of cyberpunk and the Cthulhu mythos together. This is quite surprising and disappointing. If the suggested cyberpunk world is not to the GMs pleasing, the value of this text is even less.

Despite these criticisms, this remains a good product. Of course, designing a good supplement from the Cthulhu mythos and cyberpunk is rather like shooting fish in a barrel, insofar it is difficult to imagine how one can fail with even a modicum of care. It is just that there are a number of missed opportunities here to produce something that really was Cthulhupunk.

Style: 1 + 0.7 (layout) + 0.4 (art) + 0.8 (coolness) + 0.6 (readability) + 0.7 (product) = 4.2

Substance: 1 + 0.4 (content) + 0.6 (text) + 0.7 (fun) + 0.3 (workmanship) + 0.7 (system) = 3.7



CALL OF CTHULHU DIFFICULTY MODIFIERS

by Alan Goodall

This rule is inspired by RuneQuest, 3rd Edition, © 1984 by Chaosium, Inc., and published by Avalon Hill.

General Rule

A character's skill level represents the chance of the character succeeding in a skill under "normal" stress levels. The Keeper can alter this percentage by adding or subtracting percentiles from a character's skill. For instance, if a character is climbing an incline, the character's Climb skill may be modified by -20% if the incline is particularly steep or the footing is crumbly. A Mechanical Repair (or Locksmith, if using the optional Pagan Publishing rules) skill may be modified by -25% if the lock is particularly difficult or if the locksmith doesn't have his tools.

Likewise, skills can be modified by adding skill percentages. If a character has pitons to help climbing, a +20% modifier may be appropriate. If a lock is cheap and fairly easy to pick, a Keeper may assign a +30% chance to open it. A player may also decide that a skill can be modified by doubling the skill percentage, or by reducing it by half or by a quarter. This is how weapon skills are altered due to range. A skill check is allowed for all skills that succeed, even those with positive modifiers.

Specific Skill Modifiers

The following modifiers are suggested for use with specific skills.

Hide Skill

The Hide skill is modified as follows:

Scrub is waist high grass or such grass mixed with brush. If hiding in scrub the modifiers are:

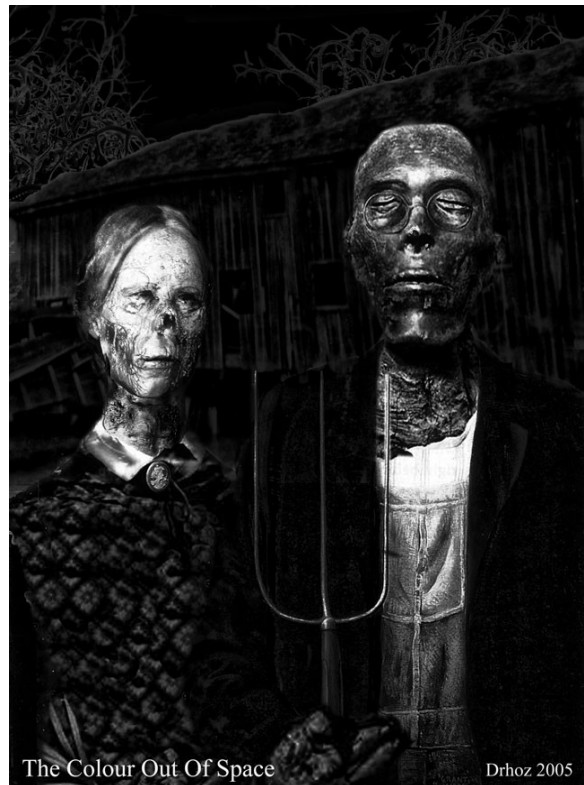
- +5% for light scrub
- +10% for medium scrub
- +15% for heavy scrub

Bush is waist high to head high brush. If hiding in bushes the modifiers are:

- +10% for light bushes
- +20% for medium bushes
- +30% for heavy bushes

Forest is woods made up of brush and/or trees that are head height or taller. If hiding in a forest, the modifiers are:

- +10% for light forest



+20% for medium forest

+50% for heavy forest.

Sneak Skill

The Sneak skill is modified as follows:

Scrub is waist high grass or such grass mixed with brush. If sneaking in scrub the modifiers are:

-5% for light scrub

-10% for medium scrub

-15% for heavy scrub

Bush is waist high to head high brush. If sneaking in bushes the modifiers are:

-10% for light bushes

-20% for medium bushes

-30% for heavy bushes

Forest is woods made up of brush and/or trees that are head height or taller. If sneaking in a forest, the modifiers are:

-10% for light forest

-20% for medium forest

-50% for heavy forest

Spot Hidden Skill

The Spot Hidden skill is modified as follows:

Camouflage modifies the spot hidden roll by -20% as long as the character isn't moving or is moving slowly. A ghillie suit modifies the spot hidden roll by -40% as long as the character isn't moving or is moving slowly and the suit is worn in an area with bushes or other suitable terrain.

Darkness modifies the spot hidden roll as follows:

-15% for deep shadows (e.g. night time with a full moon and/or nearby street lights)

-30% for normal night time darkness (e.g. night time with a partial moon showing and/or light from distant street lights)

-50% for near total darkness (e.g. night time with no moon and no terrestrial light source)

Scrub is waist high grass or such grass mixed with brush. If spotting something in scrub the modifiers are:

-5% for light scrub

-10% for medium scrub

-15% for heavy scrub

Bush is waist high to head high brush. If spotting something in bushes the modifiers are:

- 10% for light bushes
- 20% for medium bushes
- 30% for heavy bushes

Forest is woods made up of brush and/or trees that are head height or taller. If spotting something in a forest, the modifiers are:

- 10% for light forest
- 20% for medium forest
- 50% for heavy forest

Track Skill

The Track skill is modified as follows:

Scrub is waist high grass or such grass mixed with brush. If tracking something in scrub the modifiers are:

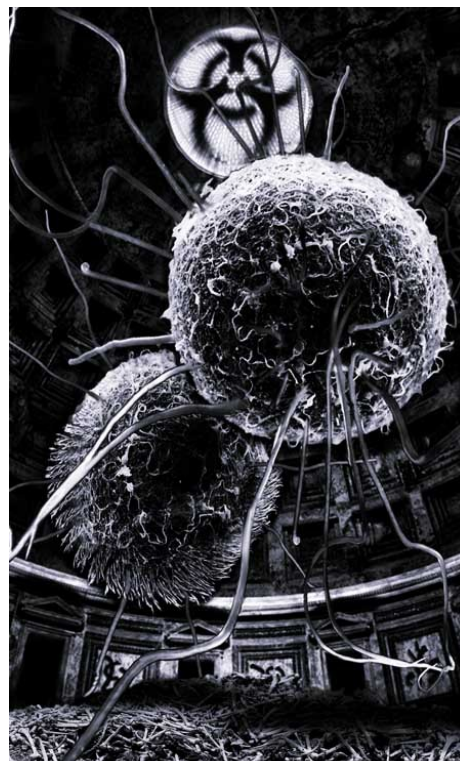
- 5% for light scrub
- 10% for medium scrub
- 15% for heavy scrub

Bush is waist high to head high brush. If tracking something in bushes the modifiers are:

- 10% for light bushes
- 20% for medium bushes
- 30% for heavy bushes

Forest is woods made up of brush and/or trees that are head height or taller. If tracking something in a forest, the modifiers are:

- 10% for light forest
- 20% for medium forest
- 50% for heavy forest



Weapon Skills

The following are additional modifiers for shooting, in addition to those in the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook.

Some of these modifiers came from, or were inspired by, The Weapons Compendium, © 1993 by John H. Crowe, III, and published by Pagan Publishing.

Aiming

Only apply the **Precision Aim, Telescopic Sights** rule in the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook to rifles with telescopic sights.

Any character firing any weapon may spend additional time aiming. If a character fires his first shot in the second DEX cycle of a combat round, he gets to add 10% to his chance to hit. Any additional shots in the same combat round do not get this modifier. This modifier only applies to the first target if a character is firing a burst of bullets at multiple targets.

Bracing

If a character braces himself against some object (wall, sofa, log, etc.) or uses a bipod, increase his chance to hit by 10%.

Firing Through Glass

If firing through regular glass, subtract 20% off the chance to hit. If firing through a car windshield, subtract 30% off the chance to hit, and treat the glass as 2 points of armour.

Moving Shooter

A character can move and fire at the same time. Characters can still fire during the various phases of the combat round, but they are considered to be moving throughout the combat round and the Moving Shooter modifier applies to all gunshots taken by the character that turn.

While the character is classed as moving throughout the combat round, the character doesn't *physically* begin to move until the second phase of the combat round. This means that all aimed shots at the character apply to where the character was standing at the beginning of the combat round. For instance, a character declares that he is ducking behind a wall. All aimed shots at that character occur as if he had not yet ducked behind the wall. If the character later declares that he is jumping up from behind the wall, he can not fire a first, aimed shot because he would still be considered behind the wall for the first part of the combat round.

Characters can move up to 1/4 their movement in a game turn without adversely affecting their chance to hit (this represents the shuffling walk while aiming a weapon practiced by Special Forces teams).

A character can pop up from behind concealing cover and then fire. All shots that round have a -20% modifier applied to them. If the character moves more than a quarter but up to 1/2 their movement rate, the character's chance to hit is 50% of normal.

If the character moves more than half their rate, any fire is considered to be Blind Fire (see the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook).

Apply all positive and negative modifiers to a character's skill before applying any percentage modifiers. This includes percentage modifiers for Easy or Hard tasks, as outlined in *Keeper's Companion 1*.

Moving Target

If using the *Keeper's Companion 1*, allow a moving target to roll their Dodge skill. If successful, treat the shot against the target as "difficult". If the Dodge roll is failed, don't modify the the firearm roll (or, optionally, subtract 10% from the weapon skill).

Precision Shooting

If players insist on precision shooting at specific parts of a target's body, such as aiming for the head, or trying to fire at an arm, I suggest using Biohazard Games' *Killer Crosshairs* product.

If you can't, or don't want to, use *Killer Crosshairs*, then use this rule instead. Allow the character to fire at a specific aim point. Half the chance to hit after all positive modifiers have been applied, but before any negative modifiers have been applied.

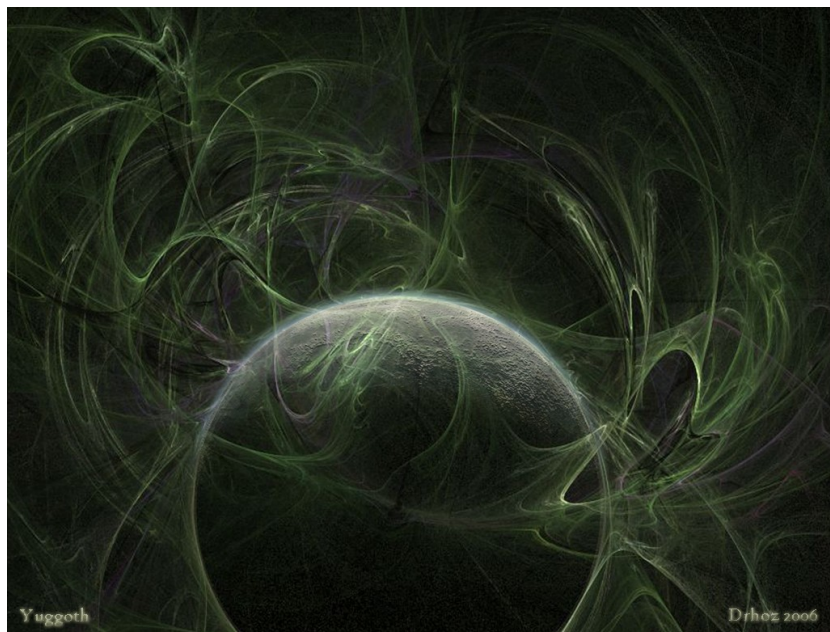
Shotguns

Shotguns are fired using the Rifle skill. A shotgun firing shot a 5% bonus to hit. A sawn-off shotgun firing shot has a 10% bonus to hit. The shotgun bonus is not applied when the weapon fires solid slugs.

Design Notes

The rule for adding or subtracting percentages is taken from 3rd Edition RuneQuest, which uses the same system as Call of Cthulhu (the Chaosium Basic Role Play system). While never formally mentioned in the Call of Cthulhu rules, they are there in spirit. In Call of Cthulhu 5.5 Edition the chase rules have situational modifiers that add or subtract percentages from a character's drive skill. Modifiers are also found in some Call of Cthulhu scenario and campaign packs.

The Keeper is given a lot of latitude in deciding the penalty or bonus to a specific skill. This is how it's done in RuneQuest as well as other roleplaying games that allow skill modifiers due to difficulty. In general, only exceptional circumstances should have a skill modifier.



CALL OF CTHULHU HOUSE RULES

by Matt Puccio

1) Character Generation - A point-buy system where stats start at 10 as a base. You have 36 creation points to spend to raise stats. See the "cost" column below as some stats cost more than others to raise. If you want to lower a certain stat below the base, you can do so and get a refund of the creation points to use on other stats.

| STAT | COST | MAX | MIN | BASE |
|--------------|------|-----|-----|------|
| STRENGTH | 1 | 18 | 3 | 10 |
| CONSTITUTION | 1 | 18 | 3 | 10 |
| SIZE | 1 | 18 | 8 | 10 |
| DEXTERITY | 3 | 18 | 3 | 10 |
| APPEARANCE | 1 | 18 | 3 | 10 |
| INTELLIGENCE | 3 | 18 | 3 | 10 |
| POWER | 3 | 18 | 3 | 10 |
| EDUCATION | 3 | 21 | 3 | 10 |

Skill Points: EDU x 25 points for Occupation Skills (determined by the occupation you choose); INT x 15 points for Personal Interest Skills

2) Occupations - Generally I allow players to come up with whatever occupation they wish that makes sense, and let them put points into Occupation skills that make sense.

3) Initiative - Roll d6 and add to your DEX; readied firearms roll d10 instead

4) Combat Declarations - Don't require players to declare their actions at the beginning of the round; they can choose what to do when their turn comes up

5) DODGE - A character can Dodge if he's already used his action this round, but he sacrifices his next action

6) Combat Actions - During combat, allow players to take an action (like attacking, dodging, using a skill, reloading, etc.) AND move (the standard 8") in the same round. They can convert the standard action into a move in order to "run."

7) Skills - A single skill "Awareness" in place of the two skills "Spot Hidden" and "Listen." Default 25%.

8) Skills - A single skill "Stealth" in place of the two skills "Hide" and "Sneak." Default 10%.

9) Skills - A single skill "Personal Attack" in place of all the various punch/kick/headbutt skills. Default is 25%. The base damage this skill does increases as your skill % increases:

| Skill % | Damage Die |
|---------|-------------------|
| 1-25% | (d2)+damage bonus |
| 26%-50% | (d3)+damage bonus |
| 51%-75% | (d4)+damage bonus |
| 76%-95% | (d6)+damage bonus |

10) Skills - A modified Martial Arts skill. Once your MA skill % exceeds your Personal Attack, it increases the PA damage (to the next highest Die type in the PA skill, with the highest Die being a D8). You only have to make one roll when attacking if you have this skill. Default 0%.

11) Stats - A new "Preparedness" attribute that is the average of LUCK and KNOW. I don't like to spend a lot of time having my players list everything they have on their character sheets, or deal with a lot of roleplaying of buying mundane items, so instead of them listing every dictionary, flashlight, magnifying glass, 50' rope, etc., at the start of an adventure I ask "is there anything special you're bringing with you?" If later on they say "I would have thought to bring my 'microscope' (or whatever) with me" I have them roll Preparedness to see if they thought of it. Sometimes they ask for something ridiculous and I just flat out decline it.

12) Skills Modifiers - I've give Bonus/Penalty 10s Die modifiers in certain cases. For example, if you're knocked down and you try to dodge, I may give you a Penalty Die (roll an extra 10s die, you must take the worst/highest of the dice you rolled). If you have an unaware opponent, I may give you a Bonus Die (roll an extra 10s die and take the best/lowest of the dice you rolled). If you roleplay your Persuade argument particularly well I may give you a Bonus Die, etc.

Skill Difficulty - I've adopted the concept of a Success/Half Success/Fifth Success for skill rolls. I may, for example, ask for a Half Awareness roll to see if you notice that stealthy cultist that is following you.

13) Skills - I Reduce First Aid skill to d2 healing; Medicine still provides d3, but you need an occupational justification to take Medicine and the right equipment to use it.

14) Skills - Only allow First Aid skill to be used on a character once for a combat, instead of once for every wound (which I believe is how 6e describes it, which seems contrary to the purported "lethality" of the system)

15) Combat - All weapons can do critical damage on a critical attack roll, not just piercing weapons. Roll an additional damage die just as with Impales.

16) Skill Progression - When rolling to raise your skills at the end of a chapter/adventure, the higher your skill is, instead of roll straight d10 to increase the skill, it's a progression:

| Current Skill | Raise Die |
|---------------|-----------|
| 1%-59%+d10 | |
| 60%-75% | +d6 |
| 76%-90% | +d4 |
| 91%-99% | +1 |

17) Burden - Since I've been running an Invictus game, I've introduced some burden rules, because the players all want to wear armor, and so I've come up with a list of penalties that apply the more armor you have on. Helmets reduce Awareness by 20%.

- Light Burden - Reduce Move by 1. No other effects.
- Medium Burden - Reduce Move by 2. Reduce DEX based skills by 10% (e.g., 2 points of DEX). This includes initiative.
- Heavy Burden - Reduce Move by 3. Reduce DEX based skills by 20% (e.g., 4 points of DEX). This includes initiative.
- Great Burden - Reduce Move by 4. Reduce DEX based skills by 35% (e.g., 7 points of DEX). This includes initiative.
- Crushing Burden - Reduce Move by 5. Reduce DEX based skills by 50% (e.g., 10 points of DEX).

Typical Roman-era leather armor usually gives a Light burden level; heavier armor like Lorica Segmentata gives a Medium burden. This can be increased if the character want to wear a helmet, use a shield, carry a lot of equipment, etc. Crushing burden would be a heavily armored man carrying another heavily armored body, etc.

18) Connections - I use the concept of Connections from Trail of Cthulhu and now in the 7e draft rules. I allow players to call upon their Connections to restore d4 SAN per connection, once per "chapter" of the story. Note that as a result of this, I rarely give out SAN rewards at the end of a scenario.

19) Temporary Insanity - Instead of rolling on the temporary insanity table, I have a deck of cards that I've made up with much more elaborate descriptions of the short and long term sanity effects. The first time a player goes temporarily insane they draw a card, from which they suffer the immediate short term effect on that card. The long term effect on that card "sets their course of insanity" - that is, it describes the psychological problem that will plague them in the long term. The next time they go insane, they again draw a card and suffer the immediate effect, but also deepen their long term "course of insanity" from the first card. This mainly gives them a guide or an idea of how their character is afflicted. When this happens, one of their Connections also gets corrupted - they can no longer use it to restore SAN.

When I want to run a more pulpy game:

20) Combat - Players die at (starting HP/2) below zero; they go unconscious at 0 unless they can make a CONx5 check each round; they get one Penalty Die for each HP below 0 for any rolls they make while below zero HP. In combat, they also lose one action (e.g., they can either Move or take an Action, but not both) and there is a bleeding out rule.

21a) Skill Rolls - I give my players a "reroll" token they can use once per story. If they don't use it, it goes away. They can use it to reroll any one roll they want, at any time during a scenario. I recently replaced this with the SAN spend, below.

21b) Skill Rolls - Spending SAN to modify rolls - this came from a 7e thread on YSDC about the use of LUCK spends to modify rolls. Someone had the idea to spend SAN instead, and ask the player to justify how/why they were stressing themselves to do this. In practice, my players rarely do it as they realize how important SAN is, unless they really want to make a roll and they are only 1 or 2 points off. This follows all the SAN loss rules (e.g., you can make yourself insane trying really hard to make that obscure Read Sanskrit roll - although I've yet to have a player do this). I'm not entirely sold on this one yet, but I am currently using it.



CTHULHU METROPOLIS

by Chris Tamm

It is the year 2026 and the city of metropolis dominated the world economy and houses 52 million persons. For the rich – a designer deco paradise of urban engineering. Where the rich live lives of pleasure the workers dwell in squalid subterranean factories. At its center is new Babylon – the control center where the head of the metropolis bank monitors everything - from global money markets to the thunderous work floors of the great machine beneath the city.

Some things are less visible – like the army of servants who serve the rich, or the dilapidated cathedral haunted by the spectre of old religion. Similarly in a run down section of the city is the ancient house of the scientist magician Rotwang – the master brain behind Metropolis, his mechanical hand and other forbidden secrets. Then there are the caverns beneath the city said to be over 2000 years old, where rebel workers meet in secret and who knows what else dwells.

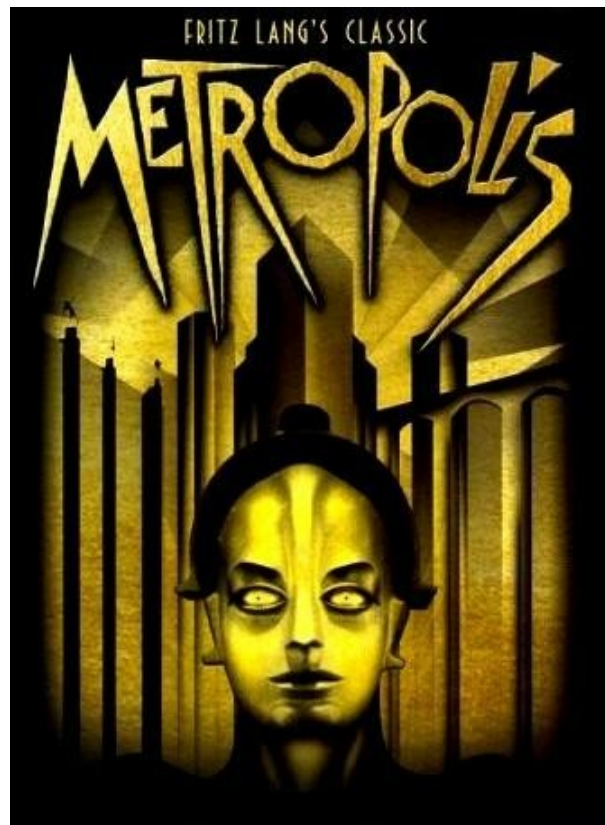
This is a set of notes for setting the horrors of HP Lovecraft in a fantasy world of the future imagined by the silent cinema film Metropolis and the novel by Thea Von Harbau of the same name. I was inspired in part by watching the film with the more recent Call of Cthulhu silent film together – where the idea of editing the two together occurred to me. Kim Numans famous monsters of film land also inspired this with his short story where Superman and metropolis converge with other silent movie characters like Dr Caligari, Nosferatu and others.

1. Concepts

- using narrative of film as background activity
- explore as a deco punk sci fi horror pulp setting
- No Nazis, Hitler and WW2 never happened, obscure political cult
- Metropolis and capitalistic monopolies have crushed the world
- Many cyber punk ideas are in metropolis like machine consciousness
- There are video phones but guns and cars have not changed since WW1
- Firearms are used by some agents but are very rare

2. Locations in City of metropolis

- New Babylon
- Yoshiwara
- Pleasure Hives
- Cathedral
- Catacombs
- Subterranean Church
- Private library of the Elite
- Workers City
- Factory Floor
- Drain network
- Master Machine
- Wizard House
- Roads And Transport (aircraft, autogiros, rail, elevators, automobiles)



-Dreamlands of Metropolis (Ancient Babylon)

3. Organizations

- Bank of Metropolis
- NWI New World Industries Building
- Pluto Mining Corporation
- Church
- Silver twilight
- Metropolis Astronomers Society (Astronomers Club)
- Look to the future
- Oceanic Inc

4. Characters

-Credit Rating determines social class - under 30 subteranean labour, 31-59 servant, 50+ ruling class

5. The Mythos in Metropolis - Adventure Seeds

Independent Races

Deep Ones – The sprawling drains and waterworks and subterranean reservoirs of water are connected distantly to far off seas. With its awesome population and industrial capacity Metropolis requires huge capacities of water – for use of humans but also for industrial use (which may be highly polluted). Some of these sections have their own workers accommodation for those doomed to crawl through miles of damp pipes. A Deep One colony has come to occupy one of the most isolated worker colonies – who in turn infiltrate and infect other similar outposts and communicate via their secret networks of globe traveling sailors. Some of the catacombs connect to water sources also making the odd deep one or hybrid agent encounter, especially in the dankest parts.

Great Race of Yith – Multiple citizens of Metropolis (among the more mobile wealthy classes) are currently possessed and several agent cells exist to serve them. Some use Yithian communicators and have lightning guns which can be used to disintegrate evidence if necessary. Some seek Flying polyps vaults in the catacombs. Others just interested in gathering information. A character could accidentally come into conflict with a cult gathering information or artifacts.



Ghouls – The city with all its efficiencies does not tolerate the wasteful practice of burials where possible but ancient graves remain built over by the sprawling city. Some use parts of the catacombs the city under as secret burials. The cathedral houses a vault of ancient corpses added to occasionally on the death of an important religious person. Some of the rich bury their dead in mausoleums sky scrapers. With the lower levels for cremated remains and ceremonies.

Cthonians –The tunnels are more than thousands of years old and new sections are sometimes discovered – which are actually dug by the children of Shudde Myell. Cultists crawl beneath the catacombs and expand their influence over new territories by commissioning new tunnels. The Cthonians like some other species crave rare earths and use cultists to obtain them. They sometimes come into conflict with Mi-go.

MiGo – From the sprawling Pluto Towers a decrepit sprawling office block, staffed by wizened old men embroiled in incomprehensible esoteric tasks of a tedious bureaucracy. Actually they are MiGo with bioengineered synthetic human skins. They run Pluto Mining Corporation and have humans from across the world delivering them the rare earths they crave so much. Their agents serve them as butlers, drivers, clerks, messengers and other duties. Several floors of the building are dedicated to human brain canisters networked serially to act a supercomputer by the Mi-go to manage their business and foreign money markets.

Serpent Men – Several serpent men sorcerers dwell in human form representing different factions of ancient serpent man culture. While several rogue wizards have been active for millennia (at least one sits on the board of metropolis bank) two main colonies dwell beneath Metropolis. One of degenerate albino cave dwellers which has been adopted by a bachelor sorcerer who stumbled across them. Plans to breed them into a new serpent master race. The second clan too proud to consort with degenerates awake periodically to monitor humanity – currently they are infiltrating metropolis and trying to find and eliminate other rogue serpent men. They await a time they can revive their whole city and walk on the surface.

Shoggoth – Somewhere in the subterranean depths a shoggoth may occasionally dwell – usually acting on a mission for the deep one cult.

Flying Polyps – Somewhere sealed in a basic vault – several Flying Polyps have been sealed. If freed they would slaughter all they could find in the tunnels then one night launch into the sky, murder a few dozen citizens then flee to some secret place they can plot to free more of their kind.

Insect From Shaggai – A few Insects from their colony in the british isles have infiltrated Metropolis. A more restrained Insect dwells in New Babylon – plundering information it can use for insider trading for the Insects corporation. Several others roam the sublevels finding isolated individuals to sadistically torture

Star Vampires – Mostly summoned by rooftop sorcerers for travel or murder. One left to its own devices would stay and horribly kill a highrise dweller every night.

Dimensional Shamblers – Mostly summoned by wizards to kill others without evidence. A terrifying prospect with the cities confined spaces and maze like corridors. A wizard might also be use one for transport to another dimension.

Servitor Races

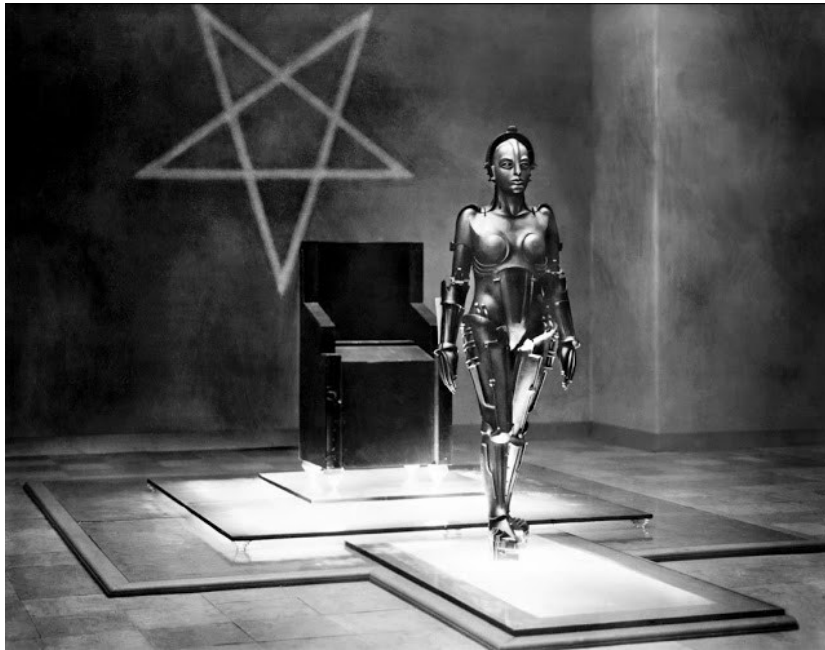
Spawn of Tsathogua – A worn down chamber once a hyperborean temple contains a vault were a guardian spawn dwells. Defilers will be slain if they cannot make the sign of tsathogua or use his name.

Byakee – Used by sorcerors especially Hastur cultists or those wishing to traverse the stars.

Rat Things – possibly the familiars of a witch or wizard or just inhabit haunted old houses. Rundown old houses walls vibrate with rats. And occasionally a “ball” of rats with fused tails is discovered.

Dark Spawn – The city is mostly treeless other than the gardens of the rich. A private garden on a rooftop could house several for rich cultists. Triffids might be more convenient size.

Fire Vampires – several Cthuga cults exist and there are several loner arsonists have appeared from time to time. The city observatory has several cultists. They keep their activities fairly secret – even hunting their rogue brethren who indiscriminately start fires and summon fire vampires.



Deities

Chaugnar Faun – His statue is housed in a private cult museum where his cult sacrifice innocents to him. His brothers statues have gathered in Metropolis and hold corporate offices. They are fairly discreet.

Cthuga

several Cthuga cults exist and there are several loner arsonists have appeared from time to time. The city observatory has several cultists. They keep their activities fairly secret – even hunting their rogue

brethren who indiscriminately start fires and summon fire vampires.

Cthulhu – Various Cthulhu cults from across meet via the waterways of metropolis.

Deep ones have settled colonies and hybrid agents in the dampest bowels of the machine. While land locked it has millions of miles of pipes and has controlling interest in many European port cities. A river is used to produce hydro electric power, flows in and out of the city with multiple canals. All this allows cultists, deep ones and even shoggoths to enter the bowels of the city and the damper parts of the catacombs. Some more affluent cultists are involved in global trade with corporations such as Oceanic (a trade and sea mining corporation). Cthulhu also influences many with his dreams – some witness or hear him first, or touch a relic or is hexed by a cultist or hybrid. Dagon, Hydra and Starspawn may also have telepathic influence.

Eihort - Goods from across the world get to Metropolis markets and labs and museums. One day a sickly truck driver parks his cab and looked for somewhere quiet he could be sick. To find he was vomiting creatures into the factory drain - but the sick never stopped leaving the driver host a sack of burst skin. Characters investigate the new species till they find an infected victim explodes before them proving it is a potentially dangerous plague. They track it back to the cult who helping Eihort by bringing him victims through a gateway in the cult base near a truck stop. Prostitute cultists kidnap drivers.

Hastur and The King In Yellow – Most of chambers mythos fiction could be translated here especially the Repairer of Reputations – which is in an already alternate future would fit in well – or could even be used as a basis for USA. Trying to find an heir to Hastur on earth who once crowned works to ruin the world and rule the remnants would make a fine pulp villain. More mainstream (orthodox) Hastur cultists call directly to the horror in the lake of Hali himself on Carcosa. In with the Astronomers Club. Some wizards deal with Hastur to control Byakee and travel the stars. A few rooftops have V shaped pillars concealed to summon Hastur directly.

Nyagthoa – In deepest reaches of the caverns is a dank soot stained chamber with black handprints and marks which could be writing or random sooty marks. In the middle is a sealed stone well, with carved marks around the edges.

Sometimes huddled robed cults meet here to summon Nyagthoa.

Tsathogua – Remnants of Hyperborean civilization is buried beneath metropolis and many wizards sealed foul things beneath it. Tsathogua has one ancient temple and guardian beneath metropolis (see under dark spawn). Also found are several dream inducing black monoliths and a handful of artifacts. Other hidden temples or worse things were buried. Possibly a gate to Saturn's dreamlands or a artifact of Eibon.

Outer Gods

Azathoth – While not often directly worshipped, many cultists are concerned to find the location of azathoth and his myriad spawn which cause dimensional distortions. A number of the astronomers of metropolis worship azathoth.

Shub Niggurath – A cult thrive in the outlying agriculture regions but a few wealthy operate rooftop greenhouse temples. Some of the medical, farming and food companies have shrines in metropolis. Some greenhouses actually house a dark spawn.

Nylarthotep - Multiple cults of Nyarlothotep dwell here. Nyalathotep has appeared to help plan the last days and direct his cult to hide mythos activity. He does not appear openly in public. Curious investigators who risk public exposure are listed as pawns to be destroyed or sent to be sacrificed to a specific god with a trail of clues. Various businesses, labs, small churches and other small esoteric orders all act for Nyarlothotep..

Yog-Sothoth – A number of wizards and cults exist especially among the astronomers. Several summoning towers exist in the city rooftops.

Moloch - my mythos addition

A god whom inhabitants mega machines and alters their purpose to enslave mankind and be fed sacrifices. Moloch may inhabit a dangerous factory, a foul power plant, a decrepit coal mine where child miners die en mass or certainly a whole city. The machine could include primitive temple city complex, the Babylonian library, roman factory mill or any complex human built system. Even monoliths arranged as a calenders could form a cult and be uninhabited by him. He may use parts of the machine to kill or even form a cybernetic body.

Other Silent Era Adventures

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari. – Dr Caligari runs Metropolis Asylum. He is a fiendish hypnotist and mind controlling wizard, exerting his influence over persons of all walks of life from bankers to criminals to carnival folk to other cultists. He also has controlled agents who prowl by night killing and kidnapping victims. Ideally those investigating him discover him in some other identity before waking up themselves in Metropolis Asylum.

Der Golem - Outside the core of Metropolis are sprawling slums and factories in constant process of change. One includes a Jewish worker ghetto set to be demolished. The authorities would like to develop into a more “modern” metropolis factory zone but have been acting slowly In fear of a popular people movement. Apartments for bureaucrats already on topmost part of city. From a crumbling old Synagogue a Rabbi sends forth his golem to waylay the development. Characters intercede before situation gets worse.

Nosferatu – A character is invited to Transylvania to act as a legal agent....

Frau In Der Monde – A trip to the moon is within Metropolis reach and investigators are probably generated for the mission. Investigators can explore lunar ruins of ancient civilizations, battle cultist crew infiltrators, and discover the whole mission was funded by cultists and even return to earth with an unwelcome entity. Moon heroes are welcomed by ticker tape parade – with hungry looking workers children waving flags.

Diary of a lost Girl – Workhouse for girls who have children out of wedlock is run by a cult. The best are selected as

sacrifices and to be brides of cult members. Investigators find links in several of their cases.

Pandora's Box – The femme fatale LuLu enters the characters lives, causing suicide, duels and multiple deaths among their friends family and peers. Eventually Investigators investigate only to have several of their mad suitors harm them who may abuse their powers or just attack. Finally tracking her to distant parts they fend off a wanted serial killer before cornering her. She is a lamia with a casket that opens to Abboth – using it to create smaller abboth spawn or flooding a building with Abboth's lake sized body of bioplasmic viscous fluid. She is spawn of a Succubus from the dawn of civilization. Who menaced Babylon for years. Allowed to continue she will destroy the city.

Olympia – Annual games for the children of the elite are being used to select sacrifices and host bodies than cults. Date set at an auspicious season for wizards. Characters investigate several horrid murders where prospective winning youths were killed. Cults feud over who has broken their deal. Encounter multiple cultist groups out for blood. Powerful old lechers may persuing athletes may be viable red herrings. Provide a demo of many cults active. Partly inspired by notorious Olympic documentary.

Other Pulp and Heroic Adventures

Any other pulp adventures could appear just more multilingual

Use novel 1984 for the UK.

Robert W Chambers future for North AmericaFilm - "Dark City" worth a look

I use a mythic looking ancient Babylon for the dreamlands of metropolis. Not unlike in the unfinished epic "deliverance". Lilith, Moloch and other ancient forces have been drawn here.



EPOCH: AN EXPERIMENT IN HORROR GAMING

by Dale Elvy

I have recently published EPOCH on DriveThruRPG and RPGNow. I thought I'd pause for a moment to reflect on the journey that led to this point (imagine some wavy lines on either side of the screen).

It all began in February 2010 when I dived into a discussion on horror games on the venerable Gametime website. In my righteous passion I said:

“My own philosophy is that if it is to be done successfully, we must take a page from horror movies, and try and employ similar techniques. Without going into too much detail I break these down into:

- Player buy-in and empathy (through a degree of shared narration)
- Visual and audio aids (not in a major way - just to cover learning bases)
- GM ground rules and time out zones
- Table discipline
- System reduction
- Shared Character development
- Identifiable setting
- Identifiable situations and choices
- Distance closing techniques
- Disruptive player techniques
- Increasing the stakes with (almost) every successive scene”

This list became the core of my Horror Manifesto, the techniques which I believed, if done properly, could deliver a genuinely tense suspenseful horror game in a single session 'con environment.

So, why then did it take me nearly 3 years to draw this together into EPOCH? Well besides all the real-life considerations, I needed to test my ideas. Using different games and settings I started to experiment with a variety of techniques.

I started with character creation. I realised around 2010 that many of my pre-generated characters that I was so very proud of, used similar elements to stimulate conflict and drama. Therefore, I wondered, could those elements be isolated, and assigned randomly to characters? I tested this with the superhero genre first, and found that people readily grasped the elements, and wove them into clever combinations I'd never anticipated, but I also noted that the initial establishment of the character was particularly challenging for some players. Players needed to ease into their characters, and allowed the space to weave the elements together. So that's what's in EPOCH

My superhero games also helped me to realise that a story built around the characters is much stronger than a story which the characters encounter. Ivan had previously helped me with this conclusion with my WFRP game, but seeing the elegance of concentrating a one-shot game around the way the characters develop and interact with one another, and the game environment helped me see the often competing agenda written into many scenarios. Rather than have the players take responsibility for the story (as many indie games do) I wanted to bring the story to the characters as much



as possible in a traditional format (without having pre-generated characters). I tested this too, and while a little bumpy, it convinced me this was a viable proposition if the characters and players were on board.

Next I wondered just how much more immersion a game could have if I explicitly stated my aims to the players before the game, and sought their agreement to challenge each other to make for a more immersive game. Again, I experimented and found that players were willing to embrace this concept, and when they did so, the game got that much better. But I also found that it was very hard to sustain this concentration for prolonged periods. Just as with a movie audience, concentration is often fragmentary and should be managed to allow natural relaxation. So I added that to EPOCH as well.



I also pondered whether ‘combat’ really served much purpose in a ‘con game. As GM I was usually much more interested in what the cost of a combat was to the characters, how they reconciled violence, or responded to injuries. The mechanical resolution stole too much time from my one-shot sessions, and even the most basic system often served as a distraction from the game immersion. So I decided I’d predetermine the outcomes of combat, but let the players determine what kind of injuries or psychological trauma their characters sustained, and when.

I had thought this alone was enough, but talking with people over the years, I discovered many players (although not all) really like to know during a scenario how their actions might have played out differently. Players like to compare notes about how different groups had acted during a scenario – they liked to feel like there was meaning to their characters actions beyond the impact to their characters. I wasn’t willing to walk too far down the path of investigative games – Gumshoe and Call of Cthulhu have trod this path enough – and in a ‘con environment investigative games can go

very badly wrong. So I used a simple mechanic which would dictate how happy, or otherwise the final scenes of a game were for the surviving characters. Not all my early readers like this, but I was very taken with the symbolism of a GM literally laying all their cards on the table at the beginning of a game.

Then of course I had to write some scenarios to illustrate how all these things would actually work in practise...

So that’s an overview of some of the major elements of EPOCH, and how they came to be included. It is a game with a specific purpose. It’s not a game for everyone. It is an experiment in horror gaming.

GAMMA GOBBLERS

by Chris Tamm

As most of my readers are American I've been bombed with thanksgiving cheer but luckily thanks to American TV lots of Australians know more about US traditions and history than our own. But I love turkeys and had some as my best pals growing up. Until we ate them.

I got Mutant Epoch bundle from rpg drivethrough and have been digesting it. It has variation table for each species and lotsa goodies. Lots of really horrible mutants including bug size critters. It probably influenced me a bit from here say before I saw it. Probably will do so again. Good to see a really dense well illustrated game book after seeing too many over designed hardcovers with little content.

I hope to do some more DnD stuff but my players enjoying gamma gaming at the moment. I'm tempted to do my own d1000 mutation table with ideas from Mutant epoch, 1st ed 40k, gammaworld and others. Still looking for my fantasy game maps from 80s-90s. So here is some Gamma Gobbler goodness for now as I'm feeling lazy.



Name: Riding Gobblers
Number: Wild 2d6+5 flock
Morale: 6 (8 male)
HD: 8d8+4
Armour: 7

Land Speed: 12/900/18

MS 2d6+2 IN 1d4+2
DX 3d6+3 CH 2d4+1
CN 3d6+2 PS 4d4+10 (4d4+20 male)

Attacks: Peck or wing buffet 2d6 or Males can make Jumping Spur Charge 2d4+6 when closing

Mutations: see below

Description: Riding gobblers are stupid but domesticated riding birds mutated from turkeys usually white, ginger, grey or wild have black-brown brindle patterned. They are also delicious but eating lots is sleep inducing. They also lay tasty eggs. Wild ones tend to hang about human settlements and don't resist being fenced off and tamed like many other creatures. Different strains with various colours and mutations abound with local breed names. Most are too fat to fly but they can hop up to 30m and like to rest in trees. With a

rider this is only 10m. May do notoriously stupid things like jump in a barrel to keep out of rain and drown. Seekers often ride and farm them as do many new tribes.

d50 Common variants - usually whole group has same and colours

- 1 Intelligent - +2d6 Int, 33% chance can talk
- 2 Shock Prone - if fail morale roll freezes till source of fear gone +1d20 minutes
- 3 Gas generation - if scared produce 2d6+3 tear gas - it is immune
- 4 Antlers - 2d8 extra horn attack
- 5 Gamma Eye - can KO enemies
- 6 Radiation Eyes - zap foes with radiation
- 7 Explodes on death like a chemax grenadier (seekers can kill them without this effect)
- 8 Contagious Wattles - close prolonged contact develops wattled red flesh bubbles on rider
- 9 Teleport - when failed morale teleport to safety with rider
- 10 Sonic Blast - super destructive gobbler noises
- 11 Fly - full wings
- 12 Extra Legs - 1d4+1 extra legs +10% speed per leg - grow back if amputated (yummy)
- 13 Metallic Feathers - AC4
- 14 Cyborg - thermographic vision, eye view radio up-link, 2 weapon mounts
- 15 Berserker - If threatened attacks +4 hit till foe or self dead
- 16 Laughter inducing poison lasts 1d4 hours after eating 2d6+6 intensity
- 17 Unigobbler - a single horn extra attack+1d10, poop cures 1d3 dam, lasts only 1 day (d6/day)
- 18 Sense Metal - gobbles and struts if walks over buried metal
- 19 Altered diet - eats 1d6 1=plastic, 2=metal, 3=flesh only, 4=concrete, 5-6=contaminated waste
- 20 Inflatable - gobbler if enraged inflates to 4 times size and floats away as gasbag mutation
- 21 Extra heads - 1d3 extra alert heads sleep in shifts, sometimes try run different directions
- 22 Luminous - glow various colours at night depending on strain
- 23 Tentacles - 1d4+2 wattle covered pseudopods used to feed and grapple attack
- 24 Cluster bomblets - shoot 1d6 explosive 2d6 dam pellets from wattles ahead if surprised
- 25 Fire breather 10m cone of 4d6 fire once a day if disturbed
- 26 Saw wings like biological chainsaws 3d6 dam
- 27 Forms telepathic bonds with kin or riders
- 28 Danger sense - start to cluck warnings if ambush or danger near
- 29 Turn invisible if fail morale roll
- 30 Poison beak intensity 13 paralysis venom on beak
- 31 Wings with functional hands - tool users
- 32 Build mounds or rotting vegetation to hatch young (Australian bush turkeys do this)
- 33 Chameleon feathers - aids in hiding and communication
- 34 Spits gobs of acid 2d6 ranged attack 25m range
- 35 Grows bigger, redder, beak glows with heat if mad +2d6 peck
- 36 Shoots black spines from bristly beard, 1d4 shots of 1d6 per round 18m range
- 37 Prehensile Snood (dangly thing on beak) uses as a hand - reach to 6m
- 38 X-ray vision - can see hidden weapons or enemies
- 39 Razor spurs - spur attack wounds bleed 1hp per round till treated
- 40 Elongating neck - can stretch to 5m to feed or spot danger
- 41 Has a bulgy single eye
- 42 Wattle covered - red fleshy lumps all over - hideous
- 43 Silence field 10m radius when nervous or can be trained to raise
- 44 Aquatic - webbed feet and can swim like a duck
- 45 No legs, floats by self inflation with gas, multiple self healing gas chambers
- 46 Larger +1d6 PS, CN and +4 HD
- 47 Radiation resistant but mildly radioactive poop 1d4 intensity
- 48 Fear aura - if startles activates fear cloak intensity 2d4+6 mental attack once per encounter
- 49 Extra delicious - addictive intensity 2d6+6 to resist lifelong cravings
- 50 Regenerates - 1hp per round, may surgically remove meat and will recover

Gamma gobblers take to untrained riders well but look to each other for morale - all rolling as a group. They may attack with mutations if surprised or spooked. A trained rider can make his gobblers jump, attack, be silent, sit and can use their weapons unhindered from turkey back. A trained rider makes his gobbler follow his lead not the group. A trained gobbler rider can make a CHA check to sway all surrounding gobblers in the caravan to not panic. Wild gobblers sometimes follow people home and hang about till trapped. Tamed gobblers with missing riders head to any beings that don't look scary for help.

Mr Gobbles the Bonapartist ambassador is invited to dinner with the seekers as guest of honour. He will be sure to tell his kin of the friendly greeting he received.

A TASTE FOR DIRTY SECRETS

by Alasdair Sinclair

One of the things which has often perturbed me a little about the so-called "Story Games" has been how they shy away from really getting to grips with the mechanics of the genre form they're going to try and emulate.

For example, *A Wilderness of Mirrors* brings onto the table the concepts of planning a mission and Control eliminating a "rogue" agent - but it never ever talks about what kinds of things happen on a spy mission and why those things happen that way. This means that the game is totally flexible but it also means that unless you can bring substantial genre understanding to the table yourself, the resultant story may not even fall within the right genre. The game works best in the hands of people who possibly don't even really need the system to begin with. Examples are surprisingly common, and I would include two of my favourite games in that set: *Zombie Cinema* and *Fiasco*. Both work well with the people I play them with because we're genre fans first and foremost.

On the other end of the spectrum, probably the majority, there are story games that focus on the minutiae of procedure. They break down the stories they want to emulate into small chunks and guide you step-by-step. These processes are the result of structural forces inside the fiction. Games which focus on the processes are, in essence, recipe books rather than a manuals of principles. They allow you to replicate an experience, but not necessarily understand why the experience was shaped that way. I want to talk a bit more about two specific games that fall into this category: *A Taste For Murder* and *Dirty Secrets*.

Both of these games are about crimes and their solution and I offer some perspectives near the end on solving their specific genre questions in a different way later on. Investigation is intended to serve as an example of a more general problem where game mechanics are not explicitly tied to fictive outcomes, or are tied to them, but not in a way which explains why the fiction is structured that way. There is probably no game that is more riddled with these than early iterations of *Dungeons and Dragons*. Consider such as the difficulty of rationalizing weapon restrictions inside the fiction. E Gary Gygax offers no useful advice on why a Magic User can't pick up a sword in a desperate situation and run someone through, the rules simply constrain the fiction and leave the players to figure out why. Investigation is an easier genre to try and tackle because it is more consistently formulaic, and there are over 100 years of literary criticism of the originating genre to draw on in tackling how the games should or could work.

A Taste For Murder and *Dirty Secrets* are games that try and evade the central question posed in all detective fiction: Whodunnit? Both games explicitly want this to be unresolved until the last possible moment, when it is resolved by the mechanics and then post-rationalized by the play-group. Normally in detective fiction, "Whodunnit" is approached through 3 different and contra-balanced questions: Motive, Means, and Opportunity. These are the basic story-mechanical entities in play, and the basis of almost all classical detective fiction is that one of these things is never directly stated, but must be rationally deduced.

This mirrors the revelations in a classical detective story, where the murderer is unmasked amidst a gathering of the suspects. There is another entire tradition in the genre, of showing the execution of the crime and then focusing on the unraveling. The famous use of this technique by Columbo prompted Malcom Craig to suggest this as a possible solution in 2007 with the working title of "Columboism" [<http://gametime.livejournal.com/42287.html>] The approach taken by these two games is the opposite. Instead of everyone knowing the murderer at the start, nobody does, and indeed, every character is Schroedinger's Murderer: there's no way to know until you crank all the way through to the end of the system and open the box.

A Taste For Murder is structured in two distinct story phases. In the first the group establishes the familial relationships

with the instruction to the players to make the relationships dysfunctional. A victim is then selected and that player becomes the inspector, who "investigates" the various remaining characters, all of whom are encouraged to reveal deep dark secrets that would motivate the murder. After a character has been "investigated" enough times, with successful escalation of their motives for murder, the criminal is revealed.

This evasion of the central question seems like a neat circumvention of the well-known problems with investigative games. Instead of tediously piecing together clues, you simply decide who's guilty and then reconcile everything. However, on a fundamental level of story structure this evasion means that these two games leave only the surface appearance of the genre intact. In order for this approach to work, the game must inherently violate almost all of the famous "Rules of Detection" that lurk in the story mechanics of most of the "Golden Age" fiction.

These rules were most cogently and clearly set out by R Austin Freeman and Willard Wright writing as S. S. van Dine's, both in *The Art of the Detective Story*, edited by Howard Haycraft. Both advocate strongly for the core principles of "ratiocination" (i.e. logical deduction) and see the genre as entirely based around the concept of equalizing the information accessible to the detective and the reader. These principles are thrown out on the simple basis that there is no logical process for determining the guilty party.

What that means is that inside the fiction created by these games, we no longer need to really address the three principal questions of detective fiction. The action of the game can thus be nominally "investigative" but the investigation is actually irrelevant. It can be completely impossible to solve the crime in fictional terms: without the arbitrary and irrevocable intervention of the system, ambiguity could always remain. That makes the stories inherently unsatisfying as mysteries - it shunts the games firmly into another interesting genre, the melodrama, where the revelations and counter-revelations are given impetus by a murder.

I think this is reinforced by the play advice after the main rules, which is all about the interpersonal relationships and period detail. For me though, this begs the question of the game's existence. Why would I play a game called *A Taste for Murder* for my dose of melodrama and interpersonal strife?

Dirty Secrets takes a quite different approach, and in a lot of ways is even more difficult to use to create a satisfying crime story. The main difficulty is that where *A Taste For Murder* calls for a collaborative "and" approach to improvised detail, *Dirty Secrets* actively and enthusiastically calls for blocking and obstruction at every turn. It is the most adversarial game I've ever read and after several attempts we eventually had a fun game with it by basically disregarding all the play-style advice. It does redeem itself though by mentioning the key phrase "Theory of the Crime." What it says is that in every scene, each player should have a theory of who did it, why and how, and be working to insinuate facts which support their theory into the game.

It gives little guidance on what this theory should look like - what are the moving parts, what are the constraints - but it does mention it. Once you as a group decide that the adversarial aspect isn't necessary, and collaborate on the theory of crime, moving the conflicts into the fiction rather than around the table, the game does produce a fictionally-functional crime, inasmuch as you are capable of it based on your understanding of genre.

Is it practical to demand any genre-emulating game to also function as a poetics for that genre? Do we need *A Taste For Murder* and *Dirty Secrets* to spell out the possible crime schemas? Well- yes. I think that there is a tendency, exemplified by these two games, to try and treat the game mechanics and the fiction they create separately. The two are usually explained in parallel, encouraging the reader to see the points of equivalence, but there is a strong causal relationship to story "anomalies" from certain mechanics. What we're looking for here is a statement like "X Rule implies Y player behaviour."

In *A Taste for Murder* all the play advice is structured around the melodrama, but there is no specific discussion of how the need to have motives for murder will shape that melodrama. The advice is "investigate relationships, don't investigate clues." But there isn't a discussion on what kind of relationship is appropriate for the needs of the story,

other than it should be dark, and even that is mostly implicit from the text on the character sheet.

One game that does integrate the fiction with the experience at the table fairly well is *EPOCH*. It is built around explicitly calling out the effect of certain mechanics on player behaviour, and hence on fictional outcomes. For example, when your survival inside the fiction relies on you being interesting, then you make that effort to be interesting. In the play-advice, *EPOCH* is one of the clearest games around for outlining what will actually happen at the table, and how the game mechanics push the game to turn out that way.

For my money then, we still need a better mouse-trap. For all that there have been innovations around the field, the fundamental problems that exist with investigation-based games have not been resolved. The most fundamental problem is the construction of a crime with sufficient clues and sufficient robustness to be resolved adequately.

The various iterations of *Gumshoe* are often discussed as solving this problem, but I think that while they have solved the problem of investigations stalling due to failed dice rolls, no iteration that I've read cuts to the heart of how crimes should be structured in fictional terms.

I think it's worth being upfront in admitting that this is a problem with the fictional as well as the gaming genre. There are two different answers - one in the so-called "English" school AKA "Fair Play Method" AKA "Golden Age", and one for the so-called "hardboiled" detective.

The fair-play genre, that almost all investigative games have as their implicit model, is based around the process of outlining a number of facts (aka clues) some of which turn out to be false, and by cross-checking all the various stories against each other you derive the one true situation. So inherently the genre is about penetrating lies, and it is all-too-easy for an author (and hence, a GM) to "unfairly" stack the deck such that the mystery might technically be solvable, but in practice be impossible. Adding supernatural elements into the equation only compounds the problem.

To try and ensure that mysteries were "fair", you get lists of rules like the ones cited above. Van Dyne's rules constrain the type of crime and criminal quite closely. Freeman and others allowed more freedom, but at the core, all of them wanted the clues to be plainly and completely stated as such, and for those clues to fit together in a logical pattern for the crime. I think that the GM must at least manage that much - a puzzle with sufficient clues, which are apparent to the reader as clues. At that point, a solution is at least possible. In conceptual terms, I think that is as far as *Gumshoe* usually takes us. At this point, it is still very easy for something that the GM believes is obvious to be all but incomprehensible to his players.

We must refine the concept of what a clue actually is in fictional terms. At the most basic level you must deal with the three key questions: motive, means and opportunity. In practical terms, most Golden Age fiction is oriented towards untangling the very complex means and opportunity for the murder, with motives often being fairly nominal - you can always default back to greed as a catch-all motivation. Means and opportunity are the two rational parts of the equation - they're simply factual entities, and so easy to deal with fictively.

The GM needs to look at every one of their "clues" and ask themselves which of these three major questions is answered by the clue. Does the clue point to a means? Does it point to a motive? Does it point to an opportunity? If not - then it's not a clue; at best it's a link in a scavenger hunt or a pointer to where a real clue is hidden. A mystery then needs a minimum of 3 clues, one for each of the big questions, and that is the critical element that needs to be discussed in game-structuring advice.

For RPGs these three things need to be relatively simple in comparison to the fiction. I almost always use television as a guide for what can happen in an RPG. For a 3 hour session, I expect to get about the same amount of story and information as in a 40 minute American TV episode. Or better yet, an episode of *Scooby Doo*. In that context, strictures like van Dyne's limit of 1 killer make a lot of sense.

Looking at the story mechanics in this way, we can see that *A Taste for Murder* assumes that everyone has a means and opportunity, and so focuses exclusively on motive. It is thus pretty much an inversion of the focus of a detective fiction. And that makes a lot of sense from the point of view of structuring a game, since that is the human component, and the component we are both naturally most interested in and best able to deal with in terms of creating a fiction. As a result of the focus on motive, the text is almost silent on those two big questions of Means and Opportunity. That is why it wants you to investigate relationships instead of clues, but it needs to come right out and say that. This is a constraint on the fiction: you cannot create any aspect of the fiction which eliminates you as the guilty party on the basis of lacking means or lacking opportunity. By pre-setting those, you now at least guarantee a fiction that when it is arbitrarily resolved, makes sense. If you want to be sophisticated about it, you can create the appearance of lacking means or lacking opportunity, but you must always accept that facts will be revealed which dispell this misconception.

Hardboiled detectives took another approach entirely, which was to have a very simple puzzle whose solution created a problematic situation. The drama then comes from living with the crime, rather than solving it. This is one reason why it is claimed to be "more realistic" even though it is patently not.

There is perhaps no clearer fictional example than *The Maltese Falcon*. Sam Spade knows the solution to the formal problem almost immediately, and then spends the bulk of the novel trying to decide what to do about it. Most hardboiled novels resolve not through a careful recitation of facts, but the inherently unstable situation creating a cascade of scenes until the guilty are played out. Investigation is still an important part of the equation, but the fictions are built around the concept that human drama is more important than puzzle solving. This is particularly evident in the works of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler; later hardboiled writers became more and more adept at integrating their essentially melodramatic stories with a clue-puzzle complex. For example, Ross Macdonald can be read and enjoyed in either mode.

This is a far better tack to take with RPGs, because it has no "failure" mode (i.e. not solving the mystery) and has the possibility of numerous different possible outcomes.



TUNNELS & TROLLS BESTIARY A-E

by Karl D. Brown

This is the third of a series of articles for 5th edition Tunnels & Trolls, the first appeared in RPG Review 12 and the second in issue 15. Each will provide some house rules and/or a selection of monsters in alphabetical order.

Air Elemental

MR varies

Dice varies

Adds varies

Natural Weapons: blasts of air are the weapons of an air elemental. The elemental can divide its dice into attacks as it pleases. The attacks all do physical damage of blunt or rending types.

Natural Armour 0 despite being made of air blows disrupt their internal airflows injuring them. That this does little damage is covered by their large CON.

Special Attacks: if an elemental has sufficient strength (STx10 is greater than the mass in pounds of the victim and her gear) to lift a character then it can capture them in turbulence powerful enough to can tear someone apart. Treat as a normal attack except shields are ineffective and the character must save on luck at the elementals MR/10 round down or be thrown prone, battered, and dizzy unable to take any further actions opportunistic or initiated for the rest of the round.

If the elemental has sufficient strength (STx5 is greater than the mass in pounds of the victim and her gear) to lift a character into the air and drop them for falling damage.

Special Defences: immune to poisons, invisible.

ST 12 + 0.25*MR IQ 10 (x1) LK 18 + 0.25*MR CON equal to MR

DEX 3 (x0.25) they have sufficient control to hurl blunt weapons and stones

CHR equal to ¼xMR SP 12 (x1) (constantly flies)

Size: one cubic yard per MR. A referee using miniatures can represent this with a separate 1yard square piece of paper for every 1MR.

Weight negligible

Starting Age: NA

Old at: NA

As conjured by the Air, Earth, Fire and Water spell. They are invisible but if a detect magic is cast they appear as a 'blob' of insubstantial magic that can extend thick pseudo pods (1 yard diameter). If attacked by an Earth elemental there is a rush of wind carrying billowing dust and both are destroyed.

Ape Folk

MR 120:30 Dice 7 Adds 60

Natural Weapons: Two fists 3d each and one bite for 1d

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 60 (x6) IQ 10 (x1) LK 25 (x2.5) CON 30 (x3) DEX 8 (x0.8) CHR 8 (x0.8) SP 10 (x1)

Height x8/10 Weight x1 Starting Age: 3d+8 Old at: 60

Ape folk look like chimpanzees as big as a human that walk upright. Those unfamiliar with them are often surprised by the strength they possess, the ape folk pack much more muscle and bone into their bodies than humans. Extra muscle and bone also protects vital organs increasing their already substantial toughness. Ape folk wear garish coloured clothing. Ape folk are as technologically advanced as humans but do not mine so make less use of metals (which they get mostly from bog iron and trade). They build tree-top towns in the densest jungles ploughing up the undergrowth and planting crops and grazing goats. Ape folk are clannish; the largest political group they are able to organise is towns of about 300 adults and an equal number of slaves of other kin. Ape folk respect strength; their towns are led by the strongest warriors and they view most other kin as inferior weaklings. These social and technological disadvantages have prevented them from expanding their domains. Ape folk are not evil but their moods are extreme and mercurial they can exhibit howling laughter, murderous rage and paralysing grief within minutes of each other. Ape folk speak their own language, an advanced version of Simian, those knowing the low tongue of Simian understand Ape Folk about as well as a

three year old. Many also know common.

Asp

MR 5 Dice 1 Adds 2

Natural Weapons: a chilling touch 1d.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks poison 4x damage from bite before adds but after victims armour as per main rules section 1.52.5

Special Defences nil

ST 2 (x1/5) IQ 1 (x1/10) LK 30 (x3) CON 5 (x0.5) DEX 0(x0) CHR -4 (x-1/2) SP 12 (x1) (half this on land)

Height x1/3 Weight x1/650 Starting Age: 1d/2 Old at: 6

A more typical small poisonous snake than the larger serpents summoned by the Serpent (Magic Fangs) spell. The poison is proportionally more toxic than that of many larger snakes. An asp can 'see' in darkness using vibration, scent and heat.

Asrai

MR 6 Dice 1 Adds 3

Natural Weapons: a chilling touch 1d.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 10 (x1) IQ 16 (x1.5) LK 14 (x1.5) CON 6 (x0.5) DEX 13 (x1.5) CHR 19 (x2)

SP 12 (x1) (half this on land) Height x11/10 Weight x1

Starting Age: 3d+50 Old at: 200

The asrai are a faerie kin native to the seas of cold or temperate regions. An asrai resembles an elf with webbed hands and feet, and skin so cold its touch burns. They are perfectly adapted to the cold waters they call home and generally go naked. Asrai take double damage from heat and fire based attacks or hostile conditions. Asrai can breathe only salt water and so generally don't make good player characters. Most asrai speak only their own language, a version of Elvish.

Bear, Huge

MR 258 Dice 26 Adds 129

Natural Weapons: bite 10d, two claws 8d,

Natural Armour 5 thick fur

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 150 (x15) IQ 4 (x0.5) LK 8 (x1) CON 258 (x26) DEX 0 (x0)

CHR -6 (x-0.5). While animals and not monsters huge bears are solitary, easily enraged and have reputations to match. They are poor leaders

SP 8 (x1) Height x1.5

Weight x10 Starting Age: 3d+4 Old at: 30

This category includes large brown bears, grizzly bears and polar bears. 'Dancing bears' and the like tend to be smaller varieties than this. A sharp sense of smell enables them to track like a hound. Huge bears are incredibly strong: able to kill a cow with a single blow and drag it back to their lair. Huge were-bears do exist they can be represented by PCs who start as per a 'large bear' and gain levels rather than using this template. Such a character relies on personal adds rather than gaining more dice to match this template and should choose a high starting weight and size.

Bear, Large

MR 36 Dice 4 Adds 18

Natural Weapons: bite 2d, two claws 2d,

Natural Armour 5 thick fur

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 40 (x4) IQ 4 (x0.5) LK 8 (x1) CON 36 (x3.5) DEX 0 (x0)

CHR -6 (x-0.5). While animals and not monsters, bears are solitary, and can be bad tempered.
SP 9 (x1) Height x1 Weight x2 Starting Age: 3d+4 Old at: 30

This category includes smaller brown bears and black bears. 'Dancing bears' and the like tend to be smaller varieties than this but large bears can sometimes be put to this use. A sharp sense of smell enables them to track like a hound. Were-bear PCs usually use this template.

Those that wish to be brown bears *and* aspire to become huge bears as they rise in levels may have a max. ST of 4x starting ST (i.e. 16x starting human ST) *while in bear form only*. While in *bear form* they must add 5 pounds of weight and 1/3" of height for every 1 ST gained by experience and perhaps have a high starting ST, weight, and size. As the character bulks up any old gear and clothing fitted to the *bear form* will become too small. You need only worry about the following if your character has such gear. After 20pt of ST has been added they must adjust gear etc. for Size and Weight modifiers of x1.1 and x3 for the bear form. After 40pt of ST has been added they must adjust bear gear etc. for Size and Weight modifiers of x1.25 and x 4. After 60pt of ST has been added they must adjust gear etc. for Size and Weight modifiers of x1.3 and x6. After 80pt of ST has been added they must adjust gear etc. for Size and Weight modifiers of x1.4 and x8. After 100pt of ST has been added they must adjust bear gear etc. for Size and Weight modifiers of x1.5 and x 10.

Boar

MR 32 Dice 4 Adds 16
Natural Weapons: Gore with tusks 4d
Natural Armour 2 thick coarse hair and hide
Special Attacks nil
Special Defences nil
ST 36 (x3.5) IQ 4 (x0.5) LK 11 (x1) CON 32 (x3) DEX 0 (x0)
CHR -5 (x-0.5). While animals and not monsters boars can be bad tempered, and have a reputation for this.
SP 14 (x1.5) Length x1 Weight x1.7 Starting Age: x1/15 Old at: 15

Representing wild boars but also wart hogs and other porcine beasts. For domestic pigs increase the weight to x2 and replace the gore with a simple body slam for 4d. Were boars are generally stubborn curmudgeons, but also very brave.

Brute

MR 80 Dice 9 Adds 40
Natural Weapons: two toughened fists dominant hand 5d, off hand 4d
Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil
Special Defences nil
ST 55 (x5.5) IQ 5 (x0.5) LK 7 (x0.5) CON 80 (x8) DEX 6 (x0.5) CHR 7 (x0.5)
SP 8 (x1) Height x2 Weight x10 Starting Age: 3d+10 Old at: 50

Appearing like a huge bulky human this lesser sort of giant is not evil by nature but can be found working for almost anyone anywhere brute strength without finesse is needed.

Cat

MR 10:5 Dice 2 Adds 5
Natural Weapons: bite 1d, claw 1d
Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil
Special Defences nil
ST 3 (x1/2) IQ 4 (x 1/2) LK 32 (x3) CON 5 (x 1/2) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 10 (x1)
SP 20 (x2) Length x2/7 (not including tail) Weight x1/57 Starting Age: x1/15 Old at: 12

These statistics are for a common domestic cat or one gone feral. Small wildcat species could also use these attributes. Cat weres are rare but not unknown in the West, they are more common in oriental lands where they are known as a kind of *hengeyokai*.

Carp

MR 4 Dice 1 Adds 2

Natural Weapons: Bite *or* tail-slap, either does 1d.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 6 (x0.5) IQ 1 (x1/10) LK 26 (x2.5) carp are hard to hit and considered lucky in some cultures

CON 4 (x1/2) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 1 (x1/10)

SP 10 (x1) Height/Length x2/5 Weight x1/5 Starting Age: x1/7 Old at: 30

The common carp is a very large fresh-water fish that is a suitable prey item for hungry adventurers. Brightly coloured coi can be found in the ornamental ponds of many palaces. Carp *hengeyokai* (oriental 'weres') are often the guardians of rivers. The main advantage of being a shape shifter who becomes a fish is not in combat but the ability to explore underwater with ease.

Centaur

MR 32 Dice 4 Adds 16

Natural Weapons: Four kicks for 1d each.

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 28 (x3) IQ 9 (x1) LK 10 (x1) CON 32 (x3) DEX 10 (x1) CHR 7 (x0.5) most are boisterous and carousing.

SP 26 (x2.5) Height/Length x1.5 Weight x6.5 Starting Age: 3d+8 Old at: 55

These creatures are part human, part horse; apt to cause trouble if given wine.

Cu Sidhe

MR 40 Dice 5 Adds 20

Natural Weapons: bite 3d, two claws 1d each

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 20 (x2) IQ 6 (x ½) (max 9) LK 37 (x2.5) CON 20 (x2) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 10 (x1) SP 20 (x2)

Length x ½ without tail Weight x ½ Starting Age: 2d+10 Old at: 50

Cu sidhe (pronounced coo shee) are fey hounds. They are large hounds of high quality with white hair. Cu sidhe speak the low tongue of canine but some have a little understanding of the elf tongue though they cannot shape words themselves. Like the great apes, cu sidhe walk the line between beast and thinking kin. Though cu shee attributes are suitable for use as a were, no were-cu sidhe have ever been reported.

Dog, Medium

MR 10 Dice 2 Adds 5

Natural Weapons: bite 2d

Natural Armour 0

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 10 (x1) IQ 4 (x ½) LK 25 (x2.5) CON 10 (x1) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 10 (x1)

SP 20 (x2) Length x 1/3 without tail Weight x 1/3 Starting Age: x1/16 Old at: 10

These attributes could be used to represent common domestic dogs or typical wilddogs.

Dog weres are rare but not unknown in the West, they are more common in Oriental lands.

Dog, Large

MR 20 Dice 2 Adds 8

Natural Weapons: bite 3d
Natural Armour 0
Special Attacks nil
Special Defences nil
ST 18 (x2) IQ 4 (x ½) LK 27 (x2.5) CON 20 (x2) DEX 0 (x0) CHR 10 (x1)
SP 20 (x2) Length x ½ without tail Weight x ½
Starting Age: x1/16 Old at: 10

Dog weres are rare but not unknown in the West, they are more common in Oriental lands.

Dragon

MR 250 Dice 26 Adds 125

Natural Weapons: bite 8d, two claws 4d, tail slap 10d

Natural Armour 25

Special Attacks: Fiery breath once every 5 combat turns see below range 30' (5' wide jet) doing 26d +adds damage. The act of breathing flame is strenuous, more like vomiting than breathing out, and the dragon can initiate no other action that combat turn. Treat as a missile weapon against the primary target except that since the blast is 5' across the save to hit is one level lower (and use LK not DEX) and the roll to dodge one level higher. Since the dragons neck is long and flexible the height and angle means that secondary targets in that look like they are in the path of the jet of flame may more easily avoid it roll to hit these at one level higher and their dodge at one level lower. Of coarse situations may alter this, for example characters packed into a 5' wide by 6' high corridor should all be treated as primary targets.

Special Defences nil. Despite the rumours dragons are susceptible to poison.

ST 137 (x13.5) IQ 50 (x5) LK 10 (x1) CON 250 (x25) DEX 3 (x0.5) max 4. CHR -65 (x-6.5)

SP 20 (x2) able to fly, run and swim at this speed.

Length x5. The neck is about a quarter of this and the tail accounts for a third of length. Wingspan is the same as length. Weight x125

Starting Age: 3d+100 Old at: 200

Dragon venom poison is a misnomer it is extracted from the tails of wyverns. Despite the rumours dragons are susceptible to poison.

Drake

MR 2 Dice 1 Adds 1

Natural Weapons: bite 1d, two claws 0d, tail slap 0d

Natural Armour 1

Special Attacks: Fiery breath once every 5 combat turns see below range 5' (1" wide jet) doing 1d+adds damage. The act of breathing flame is strenuous, more like vomiting than breathing out, and the drake can initiate no other action that combat turn.

Special Defences nil.

ST 2 (x0.25) IQ 12 (x1) LK 24 (x2.5) CON 2 (x0.25) DEX 2 (x0.25) max 4. CHR -1 (x-0.1)

SP 18 (x2) able to fly, run and swim at this speed.

Length x0.5 The neck is about a quarter of this and the tail accounts for a third of length. Wingspan is the same as length. Weight x0.125

Starting Age: 3d+10 (but aging begins at 118 years) Old at: 200

A drake is an immature dragon about the size of a large cat. The reproductive strategy of dragons resembles that of crocodiles. The mother watches over the nest and the very young hatchlings but then loses interest. The hatchlings themselves are born active and vigorous immediately able to hunt for themselves and soon after are living independently. Though not full grown the drake has survived the perilous period of being a hatchling and has comparable life experience to a youth but is more self-reliant. After reaching drake-hood dragons grow sporadically in response to stress.

Very daring referees may allow drakes as PCs. Drakes beginning adventuring have weaker attributes than other kin but do have natural armour and weapons, can breath fire, swim and fly. Initially drakes are a 'special ability' kind of character rather than a 'combat machine' this however changes at higher levels. PC drakes are a new type. They don't gain extra protection from armour or spells, instead their natural abilities improve. This is fortunate since drake DEX and ST prevents use of most tools and weapons. A drake's fore-talons only barely function as hands, experience may never raise a drake's DEX over 4. Dragon armour is also unheard of. Note down starting CON. For every ten CON added by experience the drake gets: one extra die to add to a natural weapon (the

maximum number of die that can be added to weapons is the dice used by dragons for that weapon); natural armour also improves 1pt; similarly fiery breath gains 1d, another 1' of range and 1" of width. When the jet of fire is 3' across it becomes harder to dodge as per a dragon. Maximum ST for a drake is 150 regardless of starting value. Experience may never raise ST to more than current CON (not initial CON) and CON may never be raised higher than more than twice current ST. On the down side and all increases in a drake's powers are linked to growth, eventually size becomes inconvenient. The length of older drakes (at second level and higher) and mature dragons will be at least inches equal to (square root ST) x30 and mass at least ST squared. To find the multiplier for equipping the character with scaled gear (from after their first growth spurt) divide height by 66 inches and mass by 170 pounds (if over 5x round up). Minimum scaling multipliers for height and weight are 0.5 and 0.125 respectively, raise if below these values. However, it takes a long time for a dragon to reach its full size (the Dragon listing above is roughly equivalent to a 45th level character).

Dread Beasts

These were normal animals that the monster gods or evil wizards thought had potential, such as wolves and bats, and so were warped into ferocious, evil and cunning versions of their former selves. The offspring of these warped beasts have become new and terrible species. Dread beasts are about 3.5x the mass and 1.5x the size of their normal counterparts, have semi-intelligence (IQ8) and 2.5x the normal MR. Any gained dice are generally added to the most powerful attack. When given full statistics generally priority is given to increasing ST and CON then the other attributes. Given these guidelines all manner of dread beast can be created. For an example see dread wolf.

Duck

MR 2 Dice 1 Adds 1 (-2 in flight and -7 on land).
Natural Weapons: peck 1d, remember minimum after 'adds' is 1pt.
Natural Armour 2 feathers
Special Attacks nil.
Special Defences nil
ST 1 (x0.1) IQ 2 (x0.2) LK 31 (x3) half this in the air (15), ¼ this on land (8). CON 2 (x0.2) DEX 0 (x0) max 0
CHR 5 (x0.5)
SP 20 (x2) half this in water, ¼ this on land Length x1/6
Weight x5/1000 Starting Age: x1/35 Old at: 16

Ducks have the advantage of being able to move through the air, in the water or on land and enjoy natural armour and waterproofing from their feathers. They can also live off the land by eating a variety of foods including pondweed, snails, and worms of all kinds. Some varieties have decorative plumage, such as the mandarin. On the down side ducks are blunt and tasty. Players considering duck *hengeyokai* (oriental 'weres') should weigh up all these pros and cons before committing.

Eagle, Giant

MR 24 Dice 3 Adds 12
Natural Weapons: bite 1d, two claws 1d each.
Natural Armour 8 from feathers
Special Attacks: nil
Special Defences nil
ST 26 (x2.5) IQ 10 (x1) LK 18 (x2) CON 24 (x2.5) DEX 0 (x0), max. 1 CHR -20 (x-2) not 'evil' but solitary and with few social instincts
SP 40 (x4) able to fly at this speed but act on land at 1/16th of this
Height x1.5 (wingspan is double height) Weight x4.5
Starting Age: 3d+10 Old at: 80

Giant eagles live apart from the world of humans and other kin in the deepest forests and highest mountains. They are solitary creatures living the life of a wild predator but are as intelligent as humans. Among themselves the eagles speak an advanced form of Avian. Those speaking normal Avian can understand Eagle about as well as a three year old.

Earth Elemental

MR varies Dice varies Adds varies

Natural Weapons: attacks resemble earthquakes and rock slides. The elemental can divide its dice into attacks as it pleases. The attacks all do physical damage of blunt, crushing kind.

Natural Armour 0 That this blows do them little damage is covered by their large CON.

Special Attacks: if an elemental has sufficient strength ($ST \times 10$ is greater than the mass in pounds of the victim and her gear) to lift a character then it can engulf them doing crushing damage and preventing any further action by the victim unless they first beat the elemental in a confrontational STR save to break free. An engulfed character begins to suffocate. At a cost of 1 CON per pound the earth elemental can create then hurl boulders.

Special Defences: immune to poisons.

ST 13 $0.25 * MR$ IQ 10 (x1) LK 12 + $0.25 * MR$ CON equal to MR DEX 2 (x0.25) they have sufficient control to hurl blunt weapons and stones. CHR equal to $\frac{1}{4} * MR$

SP 8 (x0.75) able to move over the surface of the earth or swim through it enabling it to pass through stone and earthen walls and floors. Size: a mound with a radius and height of one yard per 10 MR.

Weight 1 ton per MR Starting Age: NA Old at: NA

As conjured by the Air, Earth, Fire and Water spell. Appears as a mounding up of tumbling stone and earth. If attacked by an air elemental there is a rush of wind carrying billowing dust and both are destroyed.

Elephant, Huge

MR 952 Dice 96 Adds 476

Natural Weapons: Trunk slap 3d, Tusks gore once 13d, slam and/or trample for four attacks doing 20d each.

Natural Armour 7 tough hide

Special Attacks nil

Special Defences nil

ST 500 (x50) IQ 5 (x $\frac{1}{2}$) LK 5 (x0.5) CON 952 (x95) DEX 1 (x $\frac{1}{8}$ max 3)

CHR 10 (x1) impressive and intimidating but also 'ornery'.

SP 12 (x1) Height x3.5 long (x1.5 tall) Weight x66 (about 5 tonnes)

Starting Age: 3d+10 Old at: 70

A big elephant such as a bull African Savannah elephant. Were elephants do exist but are well beyond the realm of starting player characters.



CONSOLE GAME REVIEW: DWARFS

by Matt Lindus

Website: <http://dwarfs-game.com/>

I hadn't heard of this game at all until it was on a Steam ad as Free to Play (F2P), so I grabbed it and had a look. What I found was a wonderful little mining game, with increasing risk over time to the survival of the Dwarvern population.

In the F2P form of the game, you are restricted to the Easy and Normal difficulty of Arcade mode (the main game form), and the Tutorial and Challenges. I bought the full version after completing the Normal difficulty on the 60 minute setting when I saw it as part of the Steam Sales. \$4 got me the Hard and Hardcore difficulties, and a bunch of skirmish modes and a Base Defend game (Tower Defense...). Money well spent in my view.

The basic Arcade version of the game starts with a single Warrior and a single miner and a base building. As the game goes on, your base building continues to generate miners for you and generally, they're pretty mindless and just wander and mine the surrounds automatically. They can be controlled by laying arrows down that they will follow, but the arrows stay for a while as they degrade and can direct multiple miners and warriors if they happen to wander over the arrow. They will run across some mineral deposits which are better than just mining the dirt area. The miners will be attracted to this so will mine all of the minerals before wandering onwards to continue mining the dirt.

They will also find undiscovered caves which can be very rewarding treasure caves, empty, or dangerous and deadly. They can have water or lava which will flow and kill any dwarves that they come across. Their flow can be delayed or stopped by placing some walls or dropping some dynamite and having someone suicide on it to make a hole. The water and lava can be prevented from being re-released by solidifying the surrounding dirt. Somewhat less controllable, and varying in levels of danger, are the minions and bosses that can be found. These are best handled with your warriors, which while your base can provide some for you, you will need more, so placing outposts at appropriate locations will be very helpful. They also can provide training for some warriors and some more miners if you need or want them.

The Skirmish games vary from an endless version of the arcade game, one where the caves are completely hidden, rather than just darkened areas. There is also a fun little carnival game where you are a dwarf that tosses axes at moving targets much like a target shooting gallery. The tower defense game is nice and simple, but as a fan of tower defense games, it is playable, but not much to it.

Overall, the Free version is an absolute must play. Nice and light, simple game play, and most of all, fun. Can be a short 5 minute game, or a whole hour. Always great to have the ability to play the game properly before buying it also. Try it, and if you like it, buy yourself a copy and have fun with the harder difficulties.



www.dwarfs-game.com

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MOVIE REVIEW: VHS

by Andrew Moshos

dirs: Matt Bettinelli-Olpin, David Bruckner, Tyler Gillett, Justin Martinez, Glenn McQuaid, Joe Swanberg, Chad Villella, Ti West, Adam Wingard

This promo picture is scarier than this movie

Blah. Terrible. An anthology of horror flicks as horrible as the media storage format they replaced.

There is something creepy about video footage, yes, granted. None of that, none of it improves any of the flicks or the framing device used to situate these short, mostly pointless flicks. The graininess of the footage doesn't add to the atmosphere at all, it doesn't improve the terrible framing device, and it also doesn't make that much sense, honestly.



As this 'movie' starts, a bunch of creepy frat boy criminal types commit various crimes and film themselves as they're committing them. They're real scumbags, which, in the context of the horror genre, is not a bad thing, because we know that they'll get theirs in hell, so to speak. These shitbirds are hired by someone to break into a house and steal a video tape, in order to give context and meaning to their constant filming of everything they do.

When they get into the house and start creeping around, they find an old guy dead in front of a bunch of televisions, and stacks of tapes around the house. One moron at a time pops a tape into the VCR and starts watching.

The further conceit is that the movies on the tapes that the shmendricks watch, when we're the ones really watching the short movies, are 'real', as in, found footage. Oh look, I'm not saying these things actually happened; these individual short flicks were 'directed' by most of the guys pretending to be scumbags at the beginning of the flick. But the conceit is that the movies were 'filmed' by the people to whom these awful things happened.

Most of them are not that good. Some of them have somewhat interesting ideas, but they're all so deliberately badly filmed (in order to conform with the theme, the aesthetic, or because the people involved were just that incompetent) that whatever inspiration they had is squashed by the production values, or lack thereof.

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The first one, *Amateur Night*, has a bunch of frat guys, one of whom is wearing glasses with a tiny digital camera in the frame, are out on the prowl. They want to meet some ladies, get them drunk and then do nasty things to them. Being arseholes in a horror film, though, guarantees that the horrible stuff will of course happen to them instead. As relieved as I am by that, it's incredibly hard to watch, not because of any of the content, but because the camera seems like it was in a spin dryer as it was filming what was allegedly going on.

The guy who was watching this first found footage film in the old dead guy's house disappears, and a different moron comes into the room and pops another tape in, this time being *Second Honeymoon*. A very boring couple, probably the most boring couple in all of the continental United States, film themselves as they go on the most boring road trip in American history until thankfully one of them gets horribly murdered. It's literally 99% of boredom, 1% amusing resolution, which doesn't equal interesting via any mathematics I can think of.

It is, compared to the other ones, better filmed, at least, and didn't give me whiplash of the eyes. It's a miniscule consolation.

The third one, *Tuesday the 17th*, seems like it's the only one out of the five that could exist as anything other than a short, crappy horror flick in an even worse anthology, even though it's probably one of the worst of the lot. A bunch of college douchebags go up to a secluded lake where mayhem ensues, and yet even when these awful things start happening to these frat arseholes and sorority drips, someone keeps filming instead of running the fuck away. Also, and this is only a reference that could make any sense to someone who's been in Melbourne and seen these particular ads the state government ran to convince people not to fare evade on public transport.

This poster campaign featured an image of a form of public transport, with a superimposed scribbled out guy, as if to say that an awful person who doesn't pay for the trams and trains of this fair city is less than scum, they're just a scribble, a shitty piece of graffiti, a non-person.

Well, it appears that the next part of their campaign, if I can imagine for a moment that the Victorian government kicked a few bucks into this anthology's production, thirty, forty bucks at most, is that the Scribble Guy has achieved sentience, and he's going to be killing people who aren't using their Myki cards properly or who fare evade without a care in the world.

The biggest problem with *Tuesday the 17th* is that it's crap, it's predictable, it looks like crap, and none of these kinds of slasher parodies / homages are ever necessary since *Cabin in the Woods* came out. Stop making them, I'm never going to appreciate them again, on any level, even the ironic hipster one.

The Sick Thing That Happened to Emily When She Was Younger is probably the best of the lot, because it features actual actors, and not people who would fail as extras in a Godzilla movie. Emily (Helen Rogers) keeps skypping her boyfriend, and their chats somehow have been recorded onto a VHS cassette tape, but no matter. She is freaked out by some stuff going on in her apartment, and enlists her boyfriend's distant aid in figuring out what's going on. What's going on is not what appears to be going on, at all, and is far nastier than I could have predicted, with a nasty and ironic denouement, especially as it implies that the nastiness will continue.

Sure, it doesn't make sense, like any of them, that people would be recording any of this shit happening, but we're meant to accept that the ubiquity of cameras these days, and our seeming obsession with filming every goddamn thing that we see inevitably leads to such outcomes. Maybe the whole enterprise is a heartfelt cry, a cri de coeur against filming everything, relying on our memories instead.

Not bloody likely. The last one, *10/31/98*, has the funniest premise, in that the way these Halloween-celebrating chumps accidentally run into more trouble than they deserve was bloody hilarious, but the way everything is filmed is nonsense, and the ending kind of undercuts the point, if there was one.

In case I haven't made it clear, I did not enjoy this horror anthology *V/H/S* very much, though I respect what they were trying to do. Some of these directors are paying homage to their own memories of watching these horrifying and blood-draining movies back before the digital purity of DVDs and such, whether they were taped off the telly or from degraded copies of copies of copies, where the horror of the visuals was slightly more horrifying because of the snowy grain that made it even harder to see what was going on.

That's all well and good, but the immature douchiness of the framing device, the douchiness of the various directors acting like idiots, the shittiness of the camerawork, and the weakness of most of the stories doesn't get enhanced with that overall signature, faulty, deliberately defective look. In fact, it made something fairly mediocre a fair bit worse. If the same bits had been recorded properly, without the 'found footage' conceit, it wouldn't have detracted at all, and it never makes sense anyway since who could 'really' have filmed the digital footage on whatever modern device and then recorded it onto these shitty tapes from the 1980s even within the context of the film? No-one, that's who.

The best example of why I didn't like this film is the following: at the beginning of the flick, the criminal aspiring filmmakers assault a random woman in a car park, raising her jumper to expose her breasts to the camera as she screams. Sure, you can argue that, in the context of a flick where a dozen or so characters are brutally murdered, singling that out as being beyond the pale is a bit rich or PC. But the thing is, I don't have a problem with the fact that they're pretending to sexually assault someone, nor am I being PC about it. They're lovely breasts after all, and despite the fact that it's filmed in the middle of the day, and the woman, obviously an actor, wasn't into it in the slightest, clearly she was asking for it. I mean, just look at the sensible way she was dressed.

The problem is one of ugly, dumb immaturity, compounded when the same goddamn footage is repeated and repeated, and then, at the end of the flick, in case we missed what profound douchebags were involved in the making of it, they show the same woman being assaulted in rapid edits something like another thirty goddamn times! We get it, you fuckwads, you're terrible people and worse filmmakers. We understand, for fuck's sake. You, sirs, are truly shitty people, and I look forward to your next contributions just so I can rip the shit out of them.

3 times some of these directors should use this flick as their calling card so that they never get to work again out of 10

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"You're all going to fucking die." – well, aren't we all, but you don't have to call attention to the fact, since it reminds us that we shouldn't waste our lives watching shitty movies – *V/H/S*

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF RPG REVIEW

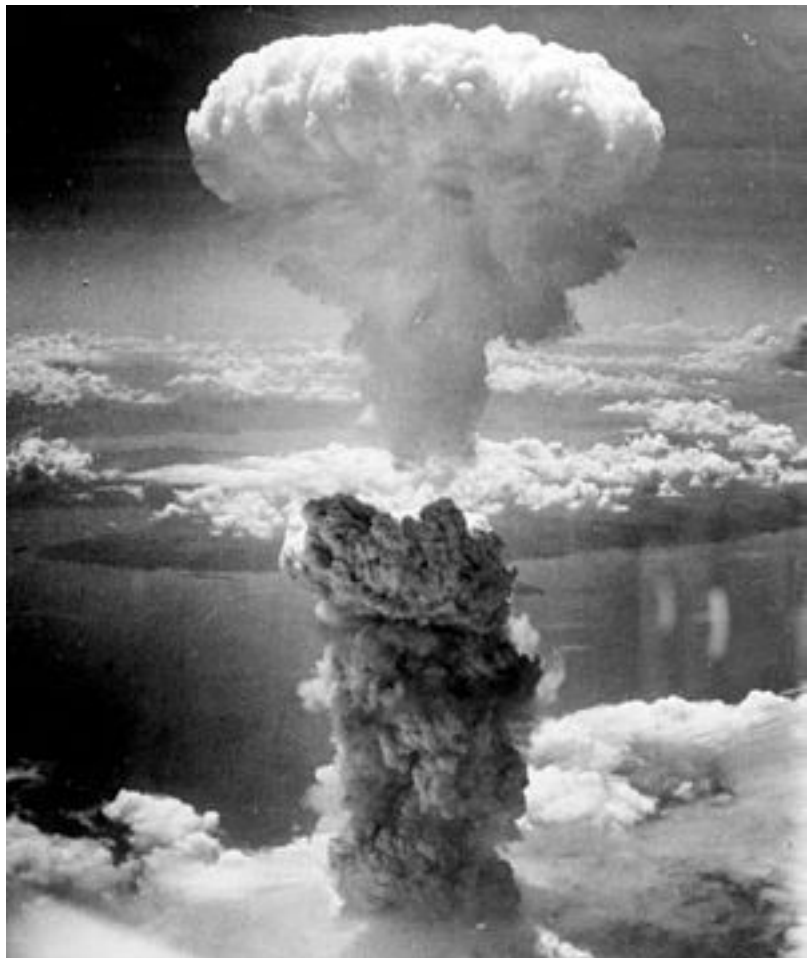
Apocalypse!

***The End
Times and
After ...
Aftermath! ...
Twilight 2000***

....

***Shadowrun ...
Savage
Worlds ...
Eclipse Phase
... Legend ...
D20***

***Apocalypse ...
After The
Bomb ...
GURPS
Atomic***



Horror .. and more!