

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Contents

CREDITS.....	3	Cop Talk (Interpersonal).....	32	Piggybacking.....	57
CONTENTS.....	4	Craft (Technical).....	32	Cooperation.....	58
INTRODUCTION.....	6	Credit Rating (Interpersonal).....	32	Contests, Chases, and Combat.....	58
Why This Game Exists.....	6	Cryptography (Academic).....	34	Fighting.....	60
Purist or Pulp or Both?.....	7	Cthulhu Mythos (Academic).....	34	Other Dangers.....	68
THE INVESTIGATOR.....	9	Evidence Collection (Technical).....	35	Stability, Sanity, and Madness.....	69
Occupations.....	9	Flattery (Interpersonal).....	35	Losing Stability.....	69
Alienist.....	9	Forensics (Technical).....	35	Losing Sanity.....	74
🔍 Antiquarian.....	10	Geology (Academic).....	35	Mental Illness.....	77
🔍 Archaeologist.....	11	History (Academic).....	37	Refreshing Stability During A	
🔍 Artist.....	11	Interrogation (Interpersonal).....	37	Session.....	79
🔍 Author.....	12	Intimidation (Interpersonal).....	37	Recovery.....	80
Clergy.....	12	Languages (Academic).....	37	Refreshing Investigative Ability	
Criminal.....	13	Law (Academic).....	37	Pools.....	80
🔍 Dilettante.....	13	Library Use (Academic).....	38	Refreshing General Ability Pools	80
🔍 Doctor.....	13	Locksmith (Technical).....	38	Refreshing Health.....	81
Hobo.....	14	Medicine (Academic).....	38	Refreshing Stability Between	
🔍 Journalist.....	14	Occult (Academic).....	38	Adventures.....	81
Military.....	15	Oral History (Interpersonal).....	39	Recovering Sanity.....	81
Nurse.....	15	Outdoorsman (Technical).....	39	Improving Your Investigator.....	82
Parapsychologist.....	17	Pharmacy (Technical).....	39		
Pilot.....	17	Photography (Technical).....	39		
🔍 Police Detective.....	17	Physics (Academic).....	39		
Private Investigator.....	17	Reassurance (Interpersonal).....	40	THE CTHULHU MYTHOS.....	84
🔍 Professor.....	18	Streetwise (Interpersonal).....	40	Gods and Titans.....	84
Scientist.....	18	Theology (Academic).....	40	🔍 Azathoth.....	87
Drives.....	19	General Abilities.....	40	Chaugnar Faugn.....	89
🌀 Adventure.....	19	Athletics.....	40	Cthugha.....	89
🔍 Antiquarianism.....	19	Conceal.....	40	🔍 Cthulhu.....	90
Arrogance.....	20	Disguise.....	41	Dagon.....	91
🔍 Artistic Sensitivity.....	20	Driving.....	41	Daoloth.....	92
Bad Luck.....	20	Electrical Repair.....	41	Ghatanothoa.....	93
Curiosity.....	21	Explosives.....	41	Gol-Goroth.....	93
🌀 Duty.....	21	Filch.....	42	Hastur.....	94
Ennui.....	21	Firearms.....	42	Ithaqua.....	94
Follower.....	21	First Aid.....	42	Mordiggian.....	95
🔍 In the Blood.....	22	Fleeing.....	42	Mormo.....	95
🌀 Revenge.....	22	Health.....	43	Nodens.....	96
🌀 Scholarship.....	22	🌀 Hypnosis.....	43	🔍 Nyarlathotep.....	96
🌀 Sudden Shock.....	22	Mechanical Repair.....	44	Quachil Utaus.....	98
Thirst for Knowledge.....	23	Piloting.....	44	Shub-Niggurath.....	99
Buying Abilities.....	23	Preparedness.....	45	Tsathoggua.....	99
Occupational Abilities.....	23	Psychoanalysis.....	45	Y'gonolac.....	100
How Many Points Should I Buy?.....	26	Riding.....	45	Yig.....	100
Ratings and Skill.....	27	Sanity.....	46	🔍 Yog-Sothoth.....	101
Investigative Abilities.....	28	Scuffling.....	47	Tomes and Magic.....	104
Accounting (Academic).....	28	Sense Trouble.....	47	Tomes.....	104
Anthropology (Academic).....	28	Shadowing.....	47	Spells.....	109
Archaeology (Academic).....	28	Stability.....	48	Creatures.....	125
Architecture (Academic).....	28	🌀 Sources of Stability.....	48	Health Loss for Creatures.....	125
Art (Technical).....	30	Stealth.....	48	Ability Pool Refreshment for	
Art History (Academic).....	30	Weapons.....	48	Creatures.....	125
Assess Honesty (Interpersonal).....	30	Sample Character.....	49	Creature Statistics.....	125
Astronomy (Technical).....	30	Trail of Cthulhu Character Sheet	49	As A Foulness Shall Ye Know	
Bargain (Interpersonal).....	30			Them.....	126
Biology (Academic).....	31	CLUES, TESTS AND		Alien Races.....	126
Bureaucracy (Interpersonal).....	31	CONTESTS.....	51	Byakhee.....	127
Chemistry (Technical).....	31	Clues.....	51	Colour Out of Space.....	128
		Gathering Clues.....	52	Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath.....	129
		Spends and Benefits.....	54	Deep One.....	129
		Inconspicuous Clues.....	55	Dhole.....	130
		Tests.....	56	Dimensional Shambler.....	131
		Simple Tests.....	56	Elder Thing.....	131
				Flying Polyp.....	132
				Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua.....	133



Introduction

In the mists of prehistory, alien gods and monsters fell to Earth and warred over our planet, unleashing cosmic science and inconceivable powers until continents sank and seas boiled. Exhausted or defeated, They fell into an aeons-long slumber, and the human race goes about its unknowing business over Their graves and tombs. But there are those who want to seek out the fragments of the lore They left behind. Those who want to learn the secrets of the stars, and the true names of the dimensions. Those who want the dead gods' powers. Those want to wake Them up.

You are among the few who suspect the truth – about the mad gods at the center of the universe, about the Great Old Ones who dream of clearing off the Earth, about the extra-terrestrials who use mankind in their experiments, about the ancient legends of undying evil that are all coming true. You have to make sure nobody else ever finds out – or the world will wake up screaming.

You have to keep the doors to the Outside from swinging open – no matter what the cost in life or sanity. You have to piece together the clues from books bound in human skin, from eviscerated corpses covered in ichor, and from inscriptions carved on walls built before humanity evolved. You have to go wherever the answers are, and do what needs to be done.

But do you dare to follow ... the trail of Cthulhu?

Why This Game Exists

This game exists in order to adapt the greatest RPG of all time, *Call of Cthulhu*, to a different rules set, the GUMSHOE engine. Why on Earth would we do a thing like that? First of all, part of what makes *Call of Cthulhu* so great is its theme, taken from the cosmic despair of the greatest horror writer of the 20th century, HP Lovecraft. We kept that. Second, part of what makes *Call of Cthulhu* so great is its deliberate decision to make characters increasingly vulnerable to the horrors they face, to give their bravery real meaning and force real mechanical consequences in the game. We kept that, too.

So what did we change? Let me change the subject. The greatest playwright ever is William Shakespeare. His greatest play is *King Lear*. Why would Akira Kurosawa make that play into a movie? And why would he set that movie, *Ran*, in samurai-era Japan instead of quasi-ancient Britain? Because more people want to – or can – see a movie than a play, and because transferring the story to Japan makes its themes paradoxically clearer than leaving them in the “familiar” world Shakespeare wrote. Did *Ran* improve on *King Lear*, or make it obsolete? Don't be ridiculous. Did it do something worth doing by changing *King Lear*? Absolutely.

To return to our topic, then: Another part of what makes *Call of Cthulhu* so great is its emphasis

on investigation, on gathering clues instead of treasure. We designed GUMSHOE to make that easier, clearer, and more direct. GUMSHOE exists to solve a problem that many people found with running *Call of Cthulhu* – one bad die roll can derail an adventure. You didn't find the diary, so you didn't get the spell, so either Arkham is destroyed or the Keeper has to scuttle 'round and plant the diary somewhere else. In *Trail of Cthulhu*, the GUMSHOE rules guarantee that you will find that diary. (We don't promise not to destroy Arkham.) This is not the entirety of what GUMSHOE offers, but it was the starting point for GUMSHOE's laser-like focus on investigation.

Some Keepers, and even some players, enjoyed seeing everything go pear-shaped, and reveled in the creative destruction of the adventure. Some didn't, and worked out their own ways around the problem, ways they are perfectly happy with; their own crib sheets to *King Lear*, if you will. We hope there is enough other good stuff in here for them, but *Trail of Cthulhu* is first and foremost for the Keepers and players who privilege investigation, and who want mechanics that do likewise. It's for fans of procedural shows like *House* or *CSI*, in which the mystery isn't “will the lab test come back,” but “what do the results mean”? That's not to say things won't go wrong for the players, merely that the wrongness won't be caused by an absence of

Core Concepts

Roleplaying Game: We assume you've already got this covered. If not, see any other roleplaying game book for the mandatory "What is Roleplaying" section, or ask your geek friends.

Keeper: The Game Master, or GM.

Investigators: The Player Characters, or PCs.

Investigative Abilities: Include academic, interpersonal, and technical abilities. These abilities *always* work; they are designed to gather clues.

General Abilities: The rest of the abilities, including combat abilities and "statistics" like Health, Sanity, and Stability. Using or testing them creates drama; they may fail.

Stability: A short-term measure of your Investigator's mental health. It goes down rapidly during an adventure, but usually refreshes afterward.

Sanity: A long-term measure of your Investigator's blissful ignorance of the horrible truths of the Mythos. It goes down slowly, and seldom if ever goes up again.

The Mythos: Short for Cthulhu Mythos, the body of lore created by HP Lovecraft that underlies most, or all, of the horrific events in a *Trail of Cthulhu* campaign or adventure.

HP Lovecraft: American horror writer (1890-1937). All quotes in this rulebook are from his stories and poetry.

Clue: The point of each scene is to deliver a clue to the mystery, to the Investigator with the relevant investigative ability. When the clue has been delivered, the scene can end, unless there's a really awesome fight going on. Clues are leads to other scenes; they don't have to be "true."

clues, but how they use them. It's for players who are curious about the Call, and who want to follow the Trail all the way to the end.

Purist or Pulp or Both?

The game *Trail of Cthulhu* is intended to tell stories of uncovering the occult horror mysteries of the Cthulhu Mythos. Traditionally, such games fall into one of two camps.

One is the Purist idiom or mode, which takes a subset of HP Lovecraft's later and starker works (*The Colour Out of Space*, *At the Mountains of Madness*, *The Shadow Out of Time*, *The Whisperer in Darkness*) as its

model. It intends to recreate a game of philosophical horror, in which the act of uncovering the truth dooms both active seeker and unfortunate bystander alike.

The second is the Pulp idiom or mode, which aims rather for the "desperate action" feel of Robert E Howard's Cthulhu Mythos stories (*The Thing on the Roof*, *The Fire of Asshurbanipal*, *Skull-Face*). It intends to focus on the struggle (especially the physical struggle) against the Mythos, doomed or noble as the case may be. It also privileges character survival somewhat more than does the Purist idiom.

HP Lovecraft, of course, wrote in both idioms: *The Case of Charles*

Dexter Ward, *The Dunwich Horror*, and *The Shunned House* all feature more-or-less resolute monster-hunting Investigators thwarting cosmic evil in Howardian fashion. (Robert E Howard also wrote at least one fine Purist Mythos tale, *The Black Stone*.) Many of Lovecraft's finest tales, such as *The Call of Cthulhu* (which features both neurasthenic scholars uncovering the truth and police raids on vile cults) and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (which features both a desperate chase through a ruined town and a narrative of psychological corruption) draw from both modes for their power. While it is not our job to tell you how to run your game (actually, it is, but we'll get to that in a later chapter), it seems to us that treating Cthulhoid horrors the way HP Lovecraft does would be a good idea.

However, for those who wish to emphasize one or another idiom, we have indicated those rules and game elements most suited for the Purist mode with the following symbol:



and those most suited for the Pulp mode with this one:



The Keeper may rule that some rules and elements are simply not allowed in her games in order to inculcate a specific flavor of horror, which is after all the entire point. An index of Pulp and Purist rules can be found on p 243.

DRIVES

“OUR MOTIVATION AFTER THAT IS SOMETHING I WILL LEAVE TO PSYCHOLOGISTS. WE KNEW NOW THAT SOME TERRIBLE EXTENSION OF THE CAMP HORRORS MUST HAVE CRAWLED INTO THIS NIGHTED BURIAL PLACE OF THE AEONS, HENCE COULD NOT DOUBT ANY LONGER THE EXISTENCE OF NAMELESS CONDITIONS — PRESENT OR AT LEAST RECENT JUST AHEAD. YET IN THE END WE DID LET SHEER BURNING CURIOSITY — OR ANXIETY — OR AUTOHYPNOTISM — OR VAGUE THOUGHTS OF RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD GEDNEY — OR WHAT NOT — DRIVE US ON.”

— AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

What motivates an Investigator? Why uncover blasted ruins, or delve into matters quite obviously best left alone? Because some people — perhaps not the fortunate, or even the brave — are Driven to do so. Every Investigator must have a **Drive**, a core desire that impels him to seek strange, far truths at the cost of everything he once held dear. It is quite literally something more important to you than your life or sanity. Although psychologically an Investigator may be driven by many different forces, and the player can roleplay her with such complexity, mechanically each character should only have one core Drive.

Refusing to follow an Investigator’s Drive, therefore, costs Stability. Succumbing to your Drive can temporarily blind you to the dangers of doing so, adding a thin veneer of Stability as with open but unseeing eyes you descend into the crypt (see p. 72). If your sanity is imperiled too much

List of Drives

-  Adventure
-  Antiquarianism
- Arrogance
-  Artistic Sensitivity
- Bad Luck
- Curiosity
-  Duty
- Ennui
- Follower
-  In the Blood
-  Revenge
- Scholarship
-  Sudden Shock
- Thirst for Knowledge

you lose even this dubious benefit (see p. 76).

Any Drive might impel any sort of Investigator, but some Occupations seem more naturally suited to some Drives than others. Such pairings are noted below. Some Drives, likewise, are better suited to the Pulp or Purist games, although any Drive might motivate any character in any idiom.

Adventure

“IN ALL THIS PLANNING THERE WAS MUCH THAT EXCITED MY INTEREST. THE FIGHT ITSELF PROMISED TO BE UNIQUE AND SPECTACULAR, WHILE THE THOUGHT OF THE SCENE ON THAT HOARY PILE OVERLOOKING THE ANTEDILUVIAN PLATEAU OF GIZEH ... APPEALED TO EVERY FIBRE OF IMAGINATION IN ME.”

— UNDER THE PYRAMIDS

Nothing gets you going like the promise of action, combat, and strange new experiences. You’re an adrenaline junkie and if ichor is the cure, then so be it! Turning down an adventure to “play it safe” is like admitting that your whole life was meaningless before.

Especially appropriate for: Criminal, Military, Parapsychologist, Pilot

Example: Harry Houdini in *Under the Pyramids*.

Antiquarianism

“WITH THE YEARS HIS DEVOTION TO ANCIENT THINGS INCREASED; SO THAT HISTORY, GENEALOGY, AND THE STUDY OF COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE, FURNITURE, AND CRAFTSMANSHIP AT LENGTH CROWDED EVERYTHING ELSE FROM HIS SPHERE OF INTERESTS. THESE TASTES ARE IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER IN CONSIDERING HIS MADNESS...”

— THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD

The dead past is the only place you feel truly alive. Discovering some truth about it, or simply experiencing old and beautiful houses or items, is the purpose for living at all. Neglecting the past merely because it seems unsavory is for brutish, mayfly moderns.

Especially appropriate for: Antiquarian, Archaeologist, Clergy, Professor

Examples: Charles Dexter Ward, Elihu Whipple in *The Shunned House*, and the narrator of *He*.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Investigative Abilities



gunpowder analysis of bullets or other residue

- *match samples of dirt or vegetation from a piece of evidence to a scene*
- *perform chemical document analysis on ink or paper*

Cop Talk (Interpersonal)

You know how to speak the lingo of the police, and to make them feel confident and relaxed in your presence. You may be a current or former cop, or simply the kind of person they immediately identify as a solid, trustworthy citizen. You can:

- *coolly ply cops for confidential information*
- *get excused for minor infractions*
- *imply that you are a colleague, authorized to participate in their cases*
- *tell when a cop is lying to you or holding something back*
- *call in favors from law enforcement contacts*

Craft (Technical)

You can create useful physical objects, working with materials like wood, metal, jewelry, and so forth. Although the resulting cabinets, kettles, or rings may be beautiful, your focus is utility, not art. Like the Art ability, you may focus on one craft (blacksmithing, cabinetry, coopering, etc) or diversify into many; the same rules apply.

You may be able to use your Craft ability to specific investigative ends: discover a secret drawer in a desk if you are a cabinet-maker, and so forth.

Credit Rating

(Interpersonal)

You are able to operate easily within your economic class, make purchases, mingle socially, cadge invitations or introductions, pick up rumors or call in favors from professional or social contacts, or secure a loan. Investigators with no Credit Rating score might be hoboes or drifters, they may just distrust banks, or they may have no real ability to schmooze. What counts as “your economic class”

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

BY KENNETH HITE

Player Name: *Josh*



Sanity			
0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15

Hit Threshold³ *4*

Stability			
-12	-11	-10	-9
-8	-7	-6	-5
-4	-3	-2	-1
0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15

Health			
-12	-11	-10	-9
-8	-7	-6	-5
-4	-3	-2	-1
0	1	2	3
4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15

Investigator Name: *Martin Harvesson*

Drive: *Revenge (for dead partner)*

Occupation:² *Private Investigator*

Occupational benefits: *Spend points 2-for-1 after Rolling Disguise or Shadowing*

Pillars of Sanity: *Moral Code, Loves Chicago, notion of human worth*

Build Points: *0*

Academic Abilities	Interpersonal Abilities	General Abilities
*Accounting		
Anthropology	*Assess Honesty <i>3</i>	Athletics <i>8</i>
Archaeology	Bargain	Conceal
Architecture	Bureaucracy	*Disguise ⁽¹⁾ <i>10</i>
Art History	Cop Talk <i>3</i>	*Driving <i>10</i>
Biology	Credit Rating <i>2</i>	Electrical Repair ⁽¹⁾
Cthulhu Mythos ⁴	Flattery	Explosives ⁽¹⁾
Cryptography	Interrogation	Filch
Geology	Intimidation <i>3</i>	Firearms ⁵ <i>5</i>
History	Oral History	First Aid
Languages ⁶	*Reassurance <i>3</i>	Fleeing ⁷
	Streetwise <i>3</i>	Health ⁹ <i>6</i>
		Hypnosis ⁸
		Mechanical Repair ⁽¹⁾ <i>6</i>
		Piloting
*Law <i>1</i>	Technical Abilities	Preparedness
Library Use	Art	Psychoanalysis
Medicine	Astronomy	Riding
Occult	Chemistry	Sanity ⁹ <i>10</i>
Physics	Craft	Stability ⁹ <i>8</i>
Theology	Evidence Collection <i>2</i>	*Scuffling
	Forensics <i>1</i>	Sense Trouble <i>8</i>
	*Locksmith <i>3</i>	*Shadowing <i>10</i>
	Outdoorsman	Stealth <i>8</i>
	Pharmacy	Weapons <i>2</i>
	*Photography <i>2</i>	

¹ In a Pulp game where Sanity can be recovered, mark Sanity pool loss with a line, Sanity rating loss with a cross.

² Occupational abilities are half price. Mark them with a * before assigning points.

³ Hit Threshold is 3, 4 if your Athletics is 8 or higher

⁽¹⁾ These General abilities double up as Investigative abilities

⁴ Usually, you can't start with Cthulhu Mythos. Sanity is limited to 10-Cthulhu Mythos.

⁵ In a Pulp game If your Firearms rating is 5 you can fire two pistols at once (see p. 42)

⁶ Assign one language per point, during play. Record them here.

⁷ Any Fleeing rating above twice your Athletics rating costs one point for two.

⁸ Only Alienists and Parapsychologists can buy Hypnosis, and only in a Pulp game

⁹ You start with 4 free Sanity points, 1 Health and 1 Stability point.

SOURCES OF STABILITY:

Joan (Plucky, fast-talking secretary)

Lieutenant McAllen (former partner)

CONTACTS AND NOTES

Horribly, Realistically, Lethal Firearms

You would be amazed, or perhaps you wouldn't, at the number of playtesters who complained that a single gunshot would not reliably kill their character. Firearms are chancy things, even in expert hands – there is a fully attested report of a gunfight involving three guns and thirty shots fired, that occurred *entirely inside a police car*, in which nobody was seriously injured. Every cop in the world has a story about the guy who “just wouldn't stay shot.” There is even an argument that until a character gets below 0 Health points, Health points have the same abstract function as other pools. But that said, we plead guilty to making gunfights sort of survivable in the name of continuing drama.

After all, a .38 pistol will do only 4 points per shot on average, meaning it will take two shots to knock a Health 6 target down to Hurt. Now, if that's two point-blank shots (6 points apiece), those two bullets will very likely knock that Health 6 storm trooper down to Seriously Wounded and force a Consciousness roll. It would take two maxed-out (rolling a 6 on each die) point-blank shots, 18 points total, to kill him.

So, if you want a more realistic damage result from firearms, with a possible one-shot kill, the simplest way to do it is to treat all Hurt results to humans from firearms as Seriously Wounded results. Where bruising or even hacking damage might be “shaken off,” any gunshot that drops your Health pool to 0 or below does an additional +6 points of damage. A single point-blank shot from a heavy firearm can now potentially kill your Investigator instantly, assuming her Health pool is 3 or less. Even if her Health pool is 9 or less, it could potentially force her to lose consciousness, which is probably just as bad, or even worse in some circumstances.

Monsters, especially Mythos monsters, don't suffer any such extra damage from gunshots unless the Keeper explicitly rules that they do.

Making NPCs drop dead on a bullet wound is easy – just give them 0 or less Health points. This isn't necessarily a measure of their actual fortitude, it's more likely to have narrative significance. For example, an NPC the PCs are talking to might be shot dead by a single bullet before revealing important information.

combatant taking an action, is called a **round**. When one round ends, another begins. (For speed of play, however, ranking order stays where it was at the beginning of the combat even if pool values have changed.) When called upon to act, each combatant may strike at any opponent within range of his weapons. Some supernatural creatures may strike more than once per round. They make each attack in succession, and may divide them up between opponents

within range, or concentrate all of them on a single enemy.

Once the fight has begun, if a combatant wishes to do something else besides fight – run away, jump up on the sideboard for a tactical advantage, throw a grenade – they move immediately to the last position in the ranking order as they turn to expose their vulnerable back to the foe, shake off the adrenaline, fumble for the pin, or whatever.

Creatures may choose to use their actions to deal additional damage to downed or helpless opponents rather than engage active opponents. They automatically deal once instance of damage per action. Only the most crazed and bestial human enemies engage in this behavior.

Combatants who join an affray in progress come last in order of precedence. If more than two combatants join during the same round, the Keeper determines their relative precedence using the rules above.

The fight continues until one side capitulates or flees, or all of its members are unconscious or otherwise unable to continue.

Armor

Armor may reduce the damage from certain weapon types. If you're wearing a form of armor effective against the weapon being used against you, you subtract a number of points from each instance of damage dealt to you before applying it to your Health pool.

In the 1930s, there is essentially no personal body armor available besides Great War surplus helmets. A “tin hat” reduces damage from bullets and cutting or slashing weapons by 2 points, and from clubs or blunt trauma by 1 point. It is only effective against head shots, of course.

At the Keeper's discretion, tough leather jackets, thick raccoon coats, or other heavy outer garments might reduce damage from small knives, improvised weapons, fists, or clubs by 1 point.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Stability, Sanity and Madness

Why Two Abilities?

GUMSHOE gets by just fine with Stability as a catch-all, while *Call of Cthulhu* uses Sanity to measure both Mythos-ignorance and mental health. Why separate the two? Fundamentally, it seems necessary to do it in order to model as many of Lovecraft's characters and stories as possible. The Sanity rules in *Call of Cthulhu* superbly model a Lovecraft character like Francis Thurston in *The Call of Cthulhu*, who skirts the edge of madness merely after reading a few news clippings and diaries, or Professor Nathaniel Peaslee in *The Shadow Out of Time*, who goes mad after discovering that his nightmares are actually memories and seeing his own handwriting in the ancient Yithian city of Pnakotus. It likewise suitably models characters driven mad by the traumatic shock of encountering actual Mythos entities, such as Robert Blake in *The Hunter of the Dark* or the narrator of *Dagon*.

But Lovecraft's fiction also features folks like Dr Armitage in *The Dunwich Horror*, who has read the *Necronomicon* at least twice and has a terrifying level of Cthulhu Mythos knowledge, but who remains outwardly completely stable and respectable even in the face of a Spawn of Yog-Sothoth. He has a very high Stability, even if his Sanity – his ability to believe in the pious legends of faith and science – is perilously low.

A middle case is young Danforth from *At the Mountains of Madness*, who “comes unstrung” upon seeing an onrushing shoggoth and retains a morbid fear of subways henceforth. But he is able to pull himself together to fly the plane out of Antarctica, and his “final breakdown” only comes after he reads the entire *Necronomicon* and makes horrible sense of his last sight of Kadath.

The narrator of that novel, Dyer, also saw the shoggoth (though not the final glance), and is at least familiar with some of the Cthulhu Mythos, but remains stable enough to keep his academic post. However, Dyer apparently believes that even knowledge of the Elder Things' city is almost as dangerous as the shoggoths lurking therein.

Examples from Lovecraft's fiction can be endlessly multiplied, but we decided on this as the bottom line: Although Mythos knowledge can be dangerous to your mental health, it is only by applying it to the “piecing together of dissociated knowledge” – in game terms, by using your Cthulhu Mythos ability – that the truth begins to hurt. That said, being swarmed by an army of Deep Ones or seeing the rise of Great Cthulhu will mess you up big time, no matter how you interpret it to yourself.

incidents, using the examples provided as a benchmark. Some especially overwhelming creatures, especially Mythos monsters, may impose higher than normal Stability losses when seen from a distance, seen up close, or ripping your lungs out. In adventures, when a Stability test is called for, a Stability test with a potential loss of 4 points is described as “a 4-point Stability test.”

Here's a Stability test in action:

Martin's current Stability is 8. While staking out a dismal warehouse on the outskirts of Tangier, he sees a jerky, grayish figure materialize out of

the sand and then flow toward the mountains. Since this is a djinn created by human sorcery, and not a Mythos creature, Martin's player Josh will be trying to beat a Difficulty of 4. (If it had been a Sand-Dweller, for instance, Josh would be trying to beat a Difficulty of 5.) Confident that this mere glimpse of a creature constitutes only a minor brush with destabilizing weirdness, Josh elects to spend only 1 point to bolster his roll. Alas, he rolls a 1, for a result of 2, two lower than the Difficulty Number. Having failed, Martin

suffers a Stability loss of 3. Having spent 1 point on his bonus and lost another 3 to the failure, Martin's new Stability pool value is 4.

The Keeper should cap total Stability loss for any given incident at the highest potential single Stability loss.

Martin and his friend Daniel are in the North End cemetery on a cloudy afternoon looking for genealogical data on a suspected immortal wizard. Suddenly, a small pack of rat-things bursts from an open grave and attacks them. (For dramatic purposes, the Keeper chooses to call for a single

Hastur

"THERE IS A WHOLE SECRET CULT OF EVIL MEN (A MAN OF YOUR MYSTICAL ERUDITION WILL UNDERSTAND ME WHEN I LINK THEM WITH HASTUR AND THE YELLOW SIGN) DEVOTED TO THE PURPOSE OF TRACKING THEM DOWN AND INJURING THEM ON BEHALF OF THE MONSTROUS POWERS FROM OTHER DIMENSIONS."

— THE WHISPERER IN DARKNESS

- Hastur the Unspeakable dwells near the star Aldebaran in the constellation Taurus, possibly trapped in the gravity well of a dark neutron star. He is an octopoid Great Old One similar in form to Cthulhu, with an unbearably horrific face. He has an active cult on Earth, especially among the Tcho-Tcho people and experimental artists.
- Hastur is the embodiment of entropy and decay. Just as intelligence is merely a local manifestation of higher order, Hastur is the mirror image of that, a kind of localized anti-intelligence that manifests as paranoia, despair, futility, unreason, and ennui. Whether Hastur has any "real" existence is impossible to say definitively.
- Hastur is not the god's true name, but that of one of his cult centers. He is better called the Magnum Innomindum ("the Great Unnamable") or He Who Is Not To Be Named. According to occult legend, speaking the name of the god three times summons him, with gruesome consequences.
- Hastur, the King in Yellow, is connected with the Yellow Sign, the dream-city of Carcosa (variously located in the Hyades

star cluster and in primordial Mongolia), and the mystical Lake of Hali, as well as the things that dwell therein.

- Hastur is the leader of the Great Old Ones associated with the Element of Air, and therefore with flight through outer space. His servitors, the byakhee, fly both astrally and physically between Aldebaran and Earth, and to other locations where Hastur has made his presence known.
- Hastur is a sentient (or at least self-willed) meme, or rather a viral complex of memes centered on alienation, ennui, and despair. If, say, an artist depicts futile conversations on the edge of reality, she inculcates Hastur into the belief systems of her susceptible viewers. "Seeing the Yellow Sign" is a kind of perceptual stigmata that occurs as the brain begins to become convinced of Hastur's centrality.
- Hastur, the Feaster From Afar, is a black, shriveled, manta-shaped flying entity with extensible taloned feelers. Its eyes and aura glow iridescently with no known color, and it liquefies and consumes its victim-worshippers' brains, draining them through its feelers and merging their consciousness with itself.
- Hastur's powers are greatest on high plateaus (such as Leng or Tsang) and mountaintops. His cult anciently included shepherds who feared his wrath but learned to placate him and slowly came to worship him.
- Hastur appears as a boneless,

scaly, slug-like creature bloated with fluid. Those who promise themselves to Hastur become as such creatures over time as they gain in eldritch power and knowledge.

- Hastur is an Outer God, the incarnation of (or a sentient facet of) the weak nuclear force of radioactive decay, one of the four fundamental forces within our space-time. As such, Hastur is invisible and can only be sensed psychically as a kind of crumbling pressure.
- The Not-To-Be-Named is the consort-god of Shub-Niggurath. These two deities, representing decay and fecundity, entropy and gigantism, melancholy and mania, are the historical substrate of all human religion, the Dying God and the Earth Mother. Their true worship still occurs in K'n-yan.

Ithaqua

"AND ABOVE THE NIGHTED SCREAMING OF MEN AND HORSES THAT DAEMONIC DRUMMING ROSE TO LOUDER PITCH, WHILST AN ICE-COLD WIND OF SHOCKING SENTIENCE AND DELIBERATENESS SWEEPED DOWN FROM THOSE FORBIDDEN HEIGHTS AND COILED ABOUT EACH MAN SEPARATELY, TILL ALL THE COHORT WAS STRUGGLING AND SCREAMING IN THE DARK..."

— THE VERY OLD FOLK

- The Great Old One Ithaqua, the Wind-Walker, dwells in the Arctic wastes. It abducts lone travelers or those who have attracted its unfavorable attention, carrying them off into the auroral skies. They are found weeks or months later, frozen solid in positions of great agony, missing random body parts, and partly buried in

Time: Summoning takes 30 minutes of maniacal piping; binding takes five minutes (or 4 rounds with an Art spend to play very fast).

Summon/Bind Star Vampire

May be cast only at night under a cloudless sky; may be cast indoors if the room has open windows. The caster must read the incantation (it begins: *"Tibi Magnum Innommandum, signa stellarum nigrarum et bufaniformis Sadoquae sigillum ..."*) aloud from a book. (The Enchant Item spell for this spell is a book with ink containing star vampire ichor.) The summoned star vampire floats down from the stars invisibly. It can be sent after someone of whose blood the caster has a sample, or after the bearer of a certain rune inked in star vampire ichor. If the caster does not immediately present such a sample, or gesture toward such a rune, the star vampire feasts on him instead.

An unbound star vampire resists binding with an Inertia of 12.

Stability Test Difficulty: 4

Cost: 4 Stability

Time: Ten minutes

Tikkoun Elixir

This clear fluid damages beings not native to the planet Earth, acting as a very strong acid (see p. 68) to them. Its key ingredient is water from the four sacred rivers (the Ganges, the Jordan, and two others chosen by the Keeper for inaccessibility and symbolic weight), but there are other rare and mystical essences within it as well. It must be poured or thrown onto (or through) the target entity or creature.



In a game using the elemental conception of the Mythos, it is doubly effective against Earth-aspected deities and their creatures. Some occult texts written by devout Catholic scholars claim that holy water has the same effect as, or is another name for, the Tikkoun

Elixir. They are most likely sadly mistaken, but only the Keeper knows for sure.

Stability Test Difficulty: 5 (4 with Occult spend)

Cost: 2 Stability or 4 Occult (or Theology, in some games) to