

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Being a pamphlet of useful analysis, advice and additions
to the Trail of Cthulhu ruleset.





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Advice for Players

EXPLAINING THE USE OF INVESTIGATIVE ABILITIES TO PLAYERS ©

Imagine watching the TV show CSI — the team go to a crime scene and find a chemical spill. They send a sample to the lab and it comes back with a report saying, "We don't know what it was." It's the end of the show, the credits roll...a pretty boring episode.

In *Trail of Cthulhu* players have Investigative Abilities to prevent this roadblock from happening. There are three ways of using them; applying these ways to the above example:

1. When the players find the chemical spill, the first thing they can do is use the Investigative Ability *Chemistry* to find a clue and because it's, what GUMSHOE calls, a Core Clue, it doesn't cost any *Chemistry* pool points to obtain; the players just have to be in the right place and have the right ability (and not necessarily have any pool points remaining in that ability). They'll learn that there are two factories that make this stuff. Those are two important leads for the investigators to follow — one or both of which will allow the players to move forward in the adventure. Core Clues are always concerned with providing the players with further avenues to pursue their investigations.
2. If the players want more information about the chemical, that's called a Non-Core Clue. It doesn't tell them where or what to investigate next, but provides a better idea of what they're up against or hints at the reasons or motivations behind the mystery afoot. Non-Core Clues usually cost pool points to obtain (some require no pool points). So, in this example, if one of the players spends a pool point of *Chemistry* they'll find out what the chemical is used for (maybe making bombs or hallucinogenic drugs). For a further *Chemistry* pool point spend, they might get some information on previous cases involving these chemicals. For a pool point of *Streetwise* spent they might learn which local criminals habitually use it. In summary, the second use of Investigative Abilities is to buy Non-Core Clues by spending pool points.
3. The third way to use Investigative Abilities is called a Benefit. This doesn't give a lead or extra information, but something else useful. Benefit purchases are usually initiated by the players; a player describes what they would like to happen and offers to spend an amount of pool points in a relevant ability in exchange. The Keeper should, more often than not, grant the player's request unless they deem it unrealistic in relation to the constraints of the scenario. Keepers can also propose Benefits that they can offer to the players for purchase if they so wish.

In the example above, the players might spend a pool point of *Chemistry* to prove their credentials to get a job in one of the factories, or to know a chemist who works there who might be persuaded to snoop for them. Perhaps they could spend a pool point to be able to bulk order some of the chemical to do some testing on it and spend a further pool point to speed up the testing process if they're in a hurry.

Keepers should give players something useful if they're spending pool points for a Benefit — not something that's dull or useless. However, some negotiation between the Keeper and player may be necessary to fine-tune the result of the Benefit spend so as not to unbalance or derail the scenario by granting a particularly unlikely or powerful Benefit request.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

ENCOURAGING PLAYERS NOT TO HOARD ABILITY POOL POINTS ①

Investigators do not become literally worse in their abilities as their **pool points** are spent. Ability **ratings** remain unchanged even when their **pool points** diminish. **Pool point**-spending is something players do around the game table, not something that happens to the investigators in the game universe.

If an investigator's *Athletics* **rating** is 8, she is better overall at performing physical tasks than a team mate with an *Athletics* **rating** of 4. When making a direct comparison always use **ratings**, not **pools**.

However, if the first investigator has already spent 4 **pool points** and her team mate has spent none, both now have a roughly equal chance of successfully performing *Athletics*-related tasks until the next **pool point** refresh occurs. However the first investigator will likely have some *Athletics* successes under her belt in this adventure, whilst the second probably hasn't done anything yet to demonstrate his physical skills.

Investigators get X chances to shine per adventure, where X is a somewhat fuzzy and unpredictable number, but unless players spend their **pool points** the likelihood of success and standout story moments for their investigators diminishes.

HOW PLAYERS OBTAIN GUMSHOE CLUES ②

Gathering clues is simple. All the players have to do is:

- a) get their investigator into a scene where relevant information can be gathered,
- b) have the right ability to discover the clue, and
- c) tell the Keeper that they're using it.

As long as they do these three things, they will never fail to gain a necessary piece of information (a Core Clue). It is *never* dependent on a die roll. If they ask for it, they will get it.

When using an ability the player could specify exactly what they intend to achieve: e.g. "I use *Chemistry* to test the blood sample for silver."

Or the player could engage in a more general information-fishing expedition: e.g. "I use *Evidence Collection* to search the alley," or "I use *Art History* to check out the portrait."

Or the player could convey a much wider speculation: e.g. "I use *Oral History* to find a respected priest in the village who's worried about the disappearances," (in this case the player has guessed that the town is harbouring a supernatural kidnapper, but doesn't want to waste time roleplaying interviewing scores of NPCs trying to read the Keeper's mind to figure out which specific NPC to interact with to advance the plot – nor should they have to). Here, the Keeper had planned on having the police chief provide the clue; at this point she can either change the clue's source NPC to be the local priest, or use this as an opportunity to bring the police chief into the game – *Keeper*: "Before you find the priest, a nervous fat man in uniform pulls up in a patrol car and asks to talk with you. He's very concerned about the mysterious new religious society in town and eager to get your help with them."

If any of the above suggested actions corresponds to unearthing a Core Clue in the scenario notes, the Keeper provides the player with the information arising from the clue without the player having to do anything else.

Example Styles of Clue Discovery in Play

During a game session some investigators are following a car that has snatched a fellow stalwart off the streets of Paris. Tracing it to a garage in Montreuil, they enter cautiously:

Keeper: “The floor of this garage looks strange, not your standard concrete pour job.”

Player: “Strange, huh? I draw on my knowledge of *Architecture* to see if I can tell anything about it from its style of construction.”

Keeper: “From the characteristic slab floors and protruding line of eroded limestone along the southern edge, you suspect it sits on the remains of a medieval building: possibly Romanesque, maybe 12th century.”

The example above illustrates the method of clue gathering that GUMSHOE labels ‘active’ due to the *player initiating the process* (i.e. when they asked the Keeper if their *Architecture* ability could tell them anything about the scene).

Conversely, some clues would be obvious to an investigator immediately upon entering a scene. These are labelled ‘passive’ clues and are provided by the Keeper *without prompting from the player* e.g. *Keeper:* “As you approach the car, you spot droplets of what looks like blood on the floor nearby.”

Be clear that ‘active’ and ‘passive’ refer to the *mode of clue delivery* in play. Do not confuse these terms with GUMSHOE clue *types* (Core, Inconspicuous, Simple-Search, etc.) which differentiate the *mechanisms of obtaining* the clue i.e. whether a specific Investigative Ability or **pool point** spend is required to obtain the clue. The various types of clue can be delivered either actively or passively (for more information on this, see the section UNDERSTANDING GUMSHOE CLUE TYPES AND DELIVERY MODES later).

With novice GUMSHOE players or on a night when the players are finding the scenario hard going, the garage clue, above, might instead be run in a passive style by the *Keeper alerting the players* to the opportunity for an ability use within the scene that they may wish to take up:

Keeper: “The floor of this garage looks strange, not your standard concrete pour job. Does anyone want to use their *Architecture* ability?”

Player: “I will.”

Keeper: [Addressing that player directly] “From the characteristic slab floors and protruding line of eroded limestone along the southern edge, you suspect it sits on the remains of a medieval building: possibly Romanesque, maybe 12th century.”

A scenario’s design notes may suggest which clues are delivered passively and which actively, but the Keeper should adjust this in play depending on how much guidance the players seem to be needing. On a night when the players are excelling, the Keeper could sit back and let them prompt her for passive clues. Whereas if they are floundering, she may decide to indicate to the players the opportunities for ability use and **pool point** spends for the active clues.

A sleeker variant of the passive style of play, for groups preferring to hide the game mechanics to enhance story immersion, has the Keeper using an *Investigative Ability Worksheet* (see pg. 234 of the *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook). The worksheet is a record of each investigator’s current ability **ratings** and **pool points** and allows the Keeper to supply clues passively without stopping to ask the players which investigator has which particular ability. However this method does preclude giving the player the choice of whether or not to spend their Investigative Ability **pool points**, since the Keeper is making the decision for them. Given a choice between multiple investigators who each have the ability associated with the clue, the Keeper picks either the character who hasn’t had the spotlight lately, or the one with the highest **pool points** in the relevant ability. Investigators who are directly present at a scene should always take precedence over those not present (or those only present via telephone or other remote communication).

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Using this style of play, the garage example would play out like this:

Keeper: “The floor of this garage looks strange, not your standard concrete pour job.”

[She checks her *Investigative Ability Worksheet* seeing that, of the investigators present in this scene, Claude (played by Dave) has the highest current *Architecture pool points*].

Addressing Dave directly, she says: “From the characteristic slab floors and protruding line of eroded limestone along the southern edge, you suspect it sits on the remains of a medieval building: possibly Romanesque, maybe 12th century.”

The exact give-and-take between the players and Keeper surrounding the provision of clues will vary based on the situation both in the scenario and around the actual game table. Typically the Keeper should let the players try to take the lead (i.e. active), subtly oiling the process as needed (i.e. passive).



PLAYERS DEFEATING OPPONENTS ③

An NPC or creature reaching zero *Health pool points* has been ‘defeated’. In game terms this can mean many things. Usually it means death, but it could be unconsciousness, surrender, supernatural dispersal or any other state of helplessness the Keeper wants.

So to model the investigators wrestling a madman to the ground, for example, track the madman’s *Health pool points* until they reach zero, at which point he has been secured.

If the players’ characters do something that narratively/realistically helps them make progress towards ‘defeating’ their opponent, but which the game system doesn’t really model well (or at all), then chip away at the opponent’s *Health pool points* (even if the players’ actions had nothing to do with reducing *Health pool points* per se via the game mechanics).

AN EXAMPLE OF COMBAT ④

How to manage a fight between three investigators with guns and a ghoul. Which one acts first and the rest of the fight round by round.

A single ghoul won't stand much chance against three investigators, but might take one of them down. We'll assume it's Pulp rules rather than Purist

Page references are to the *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook.

Dramatis Personae

The brash Tag Hunter (played by Tina)

Health 13, *Firearms* 10, *Weapons* 8, *Scuffling* 2, [no **rating** in *First Aid*]

Weapon: Remington M32 double barrelled shotgun +1 (+2 when used point blank, +1 when both barrels are fired simultaneously) and a machete +0

Hit Threshold: 4 (Tag's *Athletics* is 8 or greater, see pg. 61)

The zesty Anabelle Swift (played by Andrew)

Health 10, *Firearms* 8, *Weapons* 4, *Scuffling* 6, [no **rating** in *First Aid*]

Weapon: Twin Colt revolvers +0 (you can use two revolvers simultaneously in a Pulp game if your *Firearms rating* is 5 or greater see pg. 42) and a hat pin -1.

Hit Threshold: 3

The consumptive Professor Oberon Lankwiller (played by Dave)

Health 5, [no **rating** in *Firearms*], [no **rating** in *Weapons*], *Scuffling* 4, *First Aid* 1

Weapon: Webley revolver +0

Hit Threshold: 3

The Ghoul (played by the Keeper)

Health 7, [no **rating** in *Firearms*], [no **rating** in *Weapons*], *Scuffling* 9

Weapon: two claws +1 and a bite +0. (Two bites in a row means it latches on for double damage pg. 133).

Armour bonus: Only suffers half damage from firearms and projectiles (pg. 133).

Hit Threshold: 4 (5 when underground)

The Scene

The investigators are cautiously exploring a tunnel which runs under the Arkham municipal burial ground. They disturb a ghoul which is sucking the marrow from some cracked bones, partially concealed behind a stone slab.

They must all make a 4 point *Stability* test when they see the ghoul (you see a supernatural creature up close pg. 71). After *Stability* rolls, a combat ensues...

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Combat Order

The order of action is determined at the beginning of combat, just once, according to the characters' ability **ratings** in their chosen method of combat (an official GUMSHOE rule change since the First Edition of the *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook was published). This gives us:

- 1st Tag (10 – *Firearms*)
- 2nd The Ghoul (9 – *Scuffling*)
- 3rd Anabelle (4 – *Weapons*)
- 4th The Prof (0 – *Firearms*) Having no *Firearms rating* the Prof has to decide in advance of the combat round what to do. He chooses "shoot the ghoul."

Round 1

Tag: He gives the ghoul both barrels at point-blank range.

It has partial cover, so that's +0 modifier to *Hit Threshold* against **only Firearms** attacks (see pg. 64) so the ghoul has a current *Hit Threshold* of 5 (it's underground). Tina spends four **pool points** from Tag's *Firearms* ability to ensure a hit. She rolls a 2 for damage, +4 for the double-barrelled shotgun fired at pointblank range but the 6 total is halved to 3 because of the ghoul's armour bonus rule of half damage from firearms.

The ghoul's *Health* tumbles to (7-3) 4.

Tag has (10-4) 6 *Firearms pool points* left.

The Ghoul: It launches itself at Tag, and makes three consecutive attacks.

The Keeper spends 2 **pool points** from *Scuffling* on the first claw attack and rolls a 3 making 5 which is a hit vs. Tag's *Hit Threshold* of 4. The Keeper rolls 3 for damage which becomes 4 with the +1 claw bonus.

Tag is now on (13-4) 9 *Health*.

The Keeper spends 2 *Scuffling pool points* on the second claw attack and rolls 5; another hit. He rolls 4 for damage which becomes 5 with the +1 claw bonus.

Tag's *Health* is now (9-5) 4.

Then it's a bite. A 2 **pool point** *Scuffling* spend gives a success with a roll of 2 and the Keeper rolls 5 damage with no modifier for the bite attack this time.

Tag's *Health* is now (4-5) -1 i.e. *hurt* (pg. 63). In theory, Tag must make a *Consciousness Test* but the difficulty is 1 which is an automatic success.

The ghoul's *Scuffling* is now (9-6) 3.

Anabelle: She wants to distract the creature from its feast, so she jabs it with her hat pin, spending all of her 4 *Weapons pool points* to ensure a hit against the ghoul's *Hit Threshold* of 5. She rolls a 2 for the damage roll causing 1 point of damage due to the -1 hat pin modifier (you can effectively miss or do no damage with lesser weapons or fists).

The ghoul now has (4-1) 3 *Health pool points* left.

Anabelle now has no *Weapons pool points* left but has not spent any *Firearms pool points* yet.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

The Prof: He closes his eyes and squeezes the trigger of the unfamiliar Webley. He has no *Firearms rating*, and unfortunately rolls a 1. The Keeper decides that he shoots himself in the foot (see pg. 60 sidebar). He rolls a 3 for damage but this is modified by -2 because of his unfamiliarity with firearms giving a final damage result of -1.

The Professor now has (5-1) 4 *Health pool points* remaining.

Round 2

Tag: He frantically wrestles with the ghoul, trying to hold its festering mouth away from his face. That's *Scuffling*. He spends all his remaining 2 *Scuffling pool points* on his roll. The difficulty is the ghoul's *Hit Threshold* (5) plus 1 because Tag is *hurt* (pg. 63). He needs a 6. He rolls a 2 plus the 2 for his *Scuffling pool point* spend gives a 4 which is not enough. It's not looking good for Tag.

The Ghoul: The Keeper decides to spend 2 *Scuffling pool points* on a ghoul claw attack roll to finish off Tag. He rolls a 1, making a total of 3 with the *pool point* spend. This is a miss against Tag's *Hit Threshold* of 4.

He spends 0 *Scuffling pool points* on the next claw attack roll and gets 1 again; another miss. Maybe Tag will make it after all.

The Keeper spends the ghoul's final 1 *Scuffling pool point* on the bite attack and rolls a 6. Since this is the second successful bite attack it does double damage (see pg. 133 under 'Ghoul'). The Keeper rolls a 3 for a total of 6.

Tag's *Health* tumbles to (-1-6) -7. He is *seriously wounded* (pg. 63) and must make another *Consciousness Test*. To stand a chance of passing the roll Tina must give up at least 1 *Health pool point* for Tag, and even then Tina would have to roll a 6. She chooses not to do this, so Tag automatically fails the roll and falls into merciful oblivion. He is *seriously wounded* and requires *First Aid* to stabilise his wounds and, if he survives, hospitalisation to recover.

Anabelle: She opts to fire both pistols at the creature (Pulp rule pg. 42). She must spend 1 *Firearms pool point* just to do this. She spends 3 further *pool points* on each test roll (since they are simultaneous Andrew needs to decide both amounts before rolling any dice) which gives a total *Firearms* spend of (1+3+3) 7, and she rolls 6 and 2. So, with the +3 bonus to each, both shots are successful against the ghoul's *Hit Threshold* of 5. She rolls 3 and 1 for the damage from the two shots. Both are independent and therefore both are independently halved and rounded up, then added together which gives (2+1) 3 damage.

The ghoul only had three *pool points* of *Health* left, so the Keeper decides it is dead (a Keeper chooses how a creature with 0 *Health pool points* is 'defeated').

Anabelle only has (8-7) 1 *Firearms pool point* left. Hopefully nothing else nasty is waiting in the wings down there.

The Prof: Dave opts to have the Professor try to stabilise Tag. He must make a successful *First Aid* test against difficulty 3 (an official GUMSHOE rule change since the First Edition of the *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook was published). The Professor only has 1 *pool point* of *First Aid* to spend so Dave must roll 2 or better.

If the investigators can stabilise Tag and get him out of the crypt he will need to spend 7 days in hospital recuperating (pg. 63).

NEW DRIVES

Many new *Drives* have appeared in Pelgrane Press' *Trail of Cthulhu* publications and on internet fora. Here is a list that players may wish to consider for their investigators:

Addiction 0

Something about exploration and danger satisfies a deeply felt physical need. You become restless without the prickling of goosebumps and a pumping heart.

Especially appropriate for: Hobo, Military, Pilot, Private Investigator.

Aesthete 1

You maintain an interest in the decadent works of the new generation. You revel in poetry that plumbs the depths of the human soul, paintings depicting the weird as well as the beautiful. One day you will show the world your own verse, and crack open your own doors of perception. But first you must write some verse, yes? And to do that, you must look into shadowed corners, where others dare not glimpse.

Especially appropriate for: Alienist, Artist, Author, Dilettante.

Ambition 2

DYER BETTER KICK HIMSELF FOR HAVING TRIED TO STOP MY WESTWARD TRIP. FIRST THE WORLD'S GREATEST MOUNTAINS, AND THEN THIS. IF THIS LAST ISN'T THE HIGH SPOT OF THE EXPEDITION, I DON'T KNOW WHAT IS. WE'RE MADE SCIENTIFICALLY.

- AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

Your job is a low rung on the ladder of success, and you're ready to start climbing. You strive not out of a sense of *Duty*, for a *Mentor*, or in contrast to a *Rival*, but for more personal reasons. A comfortable salary, a better social circle, public recognition: any of these rewards could be worth outlasting the drudgery of your current position. Or you may want to prove your worth – many would be happy just to be employed, but you know you could do more with more.

Especially appropriate for: Doctor, Journalist, Nurse, Scientist.

Examples: Percy Lake in *At the Mountains of Madness*, Herbert West, Sir Arthur Jermyn.

Challenge 3

DON'T DARE TRY REALLY TALL PEAKS IN PRESENT WEATHER, BUT SHALL LATER. FRIGHTFUL WORK CLIMBING, AND HARD GOING AT THIS ALTITUDE, BUT WORTH IT.

- AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

Why are there soaring mountains, trackless deserts, and sweltering jungles? For intrepid men to best them! Every year, the world gets smaller, and there are fewer expeditions to carve up what's left. This is more than the lure of *Adventure*; a chance to prove your worth, and be remembered on a map or with others who dared great things.

Especially appropriate for: Archaeologist, Dilettante, Military, Pilot.

Champion of Order 1

History comprises an eternal struggle between chaos and order. As anarchy embroils Europe, you remain vigilant to its symptoms here, in the United States. The blood you and others shed in the Great War must not have been shed in vain. Wherever disorder looms, you will be there to tamp it down.

Especially appropriate for: Clergy, Military, Police Detective.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Destiny ③

WAS, INDEED, FATE PRESERVING MY REASON ONLY TO DRAW ME IRRESISTIBLY TO AN END MORE HORRIBLE AND UNTHINKABLE THAN ANY MAN HAS DREAMED OF?

- THE TEMPLE

You have been put on this earth for a definite reason. What little you do know may have been uttered by a fortune-teller or revealed at a relative's deathbed. Though the details are sketchy, there are momentous times ahead during which you will play a decisive role. Everything you endure turns up unavoidable clues that the conclusion may be just around the corner.

Especially appropriate for: any occupation.

Examples: The narrator of *The Fungi from Yuggoth*; in Lovecraft's horror, fate is more often grimly ironic, like the dead scientists in *At the Mountains of Madness*, or George Birch in *In the Vault*.

Fellowship ①

As you learned while fighting in the Great War, there is no greater virtue than comradeship. If your friends are in danger, you must follow them, boldly and heartily.

Especially appropriate for: Doctor, Hobo, Military, Pilot.

Fraternity ④

Man is born to serve his fellow man, an effort best carried out through collective action. This service sometimes draws one into danger, which is the price one pays for the advancement of universal freedom. This truth remains constant no matter whether the threat comes from the thuggish forces of fascism or capitalism, or malign entities beyond the standard dialectic. For what are such entities as Cthulhu or Yog-Sothoth, if not antihuman forces determined to keep our minds ignorant and shackled? They will remain eternally in power, unless comrades from around the world join together in global solidarity to put them down. Starting with you.

Especially appropriate for: Clergy, Hobo, Journalist, Nurse.

Friendship ②

WHEN, ON A MEMORABLE JOINT FURLOUGH, THE LEARNED YOUNG CREOLE HAD TAKEN THE WISTFUL BOSTON DREAMER TO BAYONNE, IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE, AND HAD SHEWN HIM CERTAIN TERRIBLE SECRETS IN THE NIGHTED AND IMMEMORIAL CRYPTS THAT BURROW BENEATH THAT BROODING, AEON-WEIGHTED CITY, THE FRIENDSHIP WAS FOREVER SEALED.

- THROUGH THE GATES OF THE SILVER KEY

You were blessed with someone whom you hold as dear as family, and if he thinks a job is worth doing, you will help. This person may be a member of your organisation, but loyalty and shared sacrifice make you more than a mere *Follower*: he has your back as well. If he is not present, perhaps you've promised to fulfill his dying wish, or taken up his mantle after his disappearance. It is certainly appropriate for two members of a group to share this drive; if something happens to one of them, however, his fate should weigh heavily on the survivor.

Especially appropriate for: any occupation.

Examples: Daniel Upton and Edward Pickman Derby in *The Thing on the Doorstep*, the narrator and St. John in *The Hound*.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Greed 5

BUT BUSINESS IS BUSINESS, AND TO A ROBBER WHOSE SOUL IS IN HIS PROFESSION, THERE IS A LURE AND A CHALLENGE ABOUT A VERY OLD AND VERY FEEBLE MAN WHO HAS NO ACCOUNT AT THE BANK, AND WHO PAYS FOR HIS FEW NECESSITIES AT THE VILLAGE STORE WITH SPANISH GOLD AND SILVER MINTED TWO CENTURIES AGO.

- THE TERRIBLE OLD MAN

You know what's wrong with poverty? Everything. You will do anything to stay out of the gutter, especially including shoving someone else into it. It's hard times, my friend, and they're only getting harder for the soft. If you can see a chance at the ready, you'd best grab it before some other gutter rat snatches it away and leaves you on the pavement.

Especially appropriate for: Antiquarian, Archaeologist, Criminal, Dilettante, Hobo.

Examples: Ricci, Czaneck, and Silva in *The Terrible Old Man*, and Obed Marsh in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.

Guilt 2

IN WRITING OF THESE THINGS IN HIS DIARY, BLAKE EXPRESSES A CURIOUS KIND OF REMORSE, AND TALKS OF THE DUTY OF BURYING THE SHINING TRAPEZOHEDRON AND OF BANISHING WHAT HE HAD EVOKED BY LETTING DAYLIGHT INTO THE HIDEOUS JUTTING SPIRE.

- THE HAUNTER OF THE DARK

Because of you, mistakes were made, and people suffered. Is it common knowledge? Then your enemies, or the public at large, may mock you openly, and even some comrades still worry that history will repeat itself. Or perhaps your failure is a secret buried deep in your memory, waiting for the right place to recur – or be exposed. Either way, you have to master your incompetence, or seek the opportunity to right the wrong you caused.

Especially appropriate for: Doctor, Journalist, Military, Nurse, Police Detective.

Examples: Randolph Carter in his eponymous statement, George Birch in *In the Vault*. The narrators of *The Lurking Fear* and *At the Mountains of Madness* both exhibit signs of survivor's guilt – which is likely a common malady among investigators.

Haunted 3

THE GHOST OF NEZAHUALPILLI TOLD ME THAT ON THE SACRED MOUNTAIN.

- THE ELECTRIC EXECUTIONER

Though it's your first time in these ruins, you swear you've seen them before. And a minute later, you awoke with their clammy aura still lingering in your mind. Or maybe a phantasm has beckoned you here in a fevered dream. How else can you explain why you know so much about this place?

Especially appropriate for: Alienist, Antiquarian, Archaeologist, Parapsychologist.

Examples: The citizens of Binger, Oklahoma in *The Mound*, Walter Gilman in *The Dreams in the Witch-House*.

Impeccable Breeding 1

You are not one to seek out danger. However, as an able-bodied fellow of unimpeachable family connections, you understand that it is your duty to protect society, including your social inferiors, when it is threatened. To shirk this would cast a shadow on the family name. There is no worse failure than that.

Especially appropriate for: Antiquarian, Archaeologist, Clergy, Dilettante, Professor.

Leveraged ③

HE BEGAN TO MINGLE IN THE MORE 'ADVANCED' COLLEGE SET DESPITE HIS MIDDLE AGE, AND WAS PRESENT AT SOME EXTREMELY WILD DOINGS — ON ONE OCCASION PAYING HEAVY BLACKMAIL (WHICH HE BORROWED OF ME) TO KEEP HIS PRESENCE AT A CERTAIN AFFAIR FROM HIS FATHER'S NOTICE.

- THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP

Even something as mundane as the past can haunt a man. An unscrupulous witness saw you commit a crime, or discovered you in a compromising situation. And the price for silence may not be cheap or even payable in money at all. This is *Guilt* taken to one logical conclusion, and — depending on your temperament and the particulars — just as dangerous to the extorter as it is to the extorted.

Especially appropriate for: any occupation.

Mentor ②

SO AS I DROVE THE CROWD AWAY I TOLD HIM HE MUST COME HOME WITH ME AND BE MY TEACHER AND LEADER IN UNFATHOMED MYSTERIES, AND HE ASSENTED WITHOUT SPEAKING A WORD.

- HYPNOS

You are the protégé of someone higher up in your organisation, and if he requires aid, you're one of the first to volunteer. Unlike the *Follower* drive, such an arrangement tends to benefit both persons — the mentor imparts wisdom or furthers his legacy while you fill out your resumé or climb the agency ranks. Some mentors find you through family or social ties, while others act out of altruism or the desire to groom a successor. The mentor should be a prominently recurring NPC, but need not be the leader of every expedition (unless the Keeper thinks his death might be a significant campaign event). Of course, if his motivations are ever revealed to be at cross purposes to the group, you will have an interesting decision to make.

Especially appropriate for: Artist, Criminal, Journalist, Military, Nurse, Scientist.

Examples: Rice and Morgan in *The Dunwich Horror*, the associate students in *At the Mountains of Madness*.

Power ⑥

The Mythos is the greatest source of power you know. Surely these rituals, these monsters, can be harnessed for your own ends? Where others have failed, you will succeed, and use this immense power to attain unimaginable authority.

Especially appropriate for: Criminal, Military, Professor, Scientist.

Protection ④

Your only interest in danger, of the occult or any other variety, is in keeping one or more loved ones out of it. A sensible person wouldn't be drawn to trouble, but, sadly, you are driven by another overriding reason to keep a less-than-sensible person out of harm's way. This person is either another player's character, or an NPC you have to keep rescuing.

Specify that reason, which might be as simple and pure as love, or as ambiguous as the avaricious desire to keep your meal ticket safe, sound, and productive. Note it in parentheses on your character sheet, after listing *Protection* as your drive. For example: *Protection (Love)* or *Protection (Avarice)*.

Especially appropriate for: any occupation.

Remorse ④

You made a terrible mistake once – perhaps more than once – foolishly toying with forces too immense to comprehend. Only when it was too late did you realise the extent of the darkness you called into the world. As the one responsible for it, you must now fight that darkness, hoping against hope that you may one day reverse it. And to do that, you must understand it, and to understand it, you must continue to traffick in the nightmare world... Though aware of the paradox, you can only pray that what you do to earn your redemption does not instead destroy all hope of it.

Especially appropriate for: Clergy, Parapsychologist, Professor, Scientist.

Rivalry ②

WEST, YOUNG DESPITE HIS MARVELLOUS SCIENTIFIC ACQUIREMENTS, HAD SCANT PATIENCE WITH GOOD DR. HALSEY AND HIS ERUDITE COLLEAGUES; AND NURSED AN INCREASING RESENTMENT, COUPLED WITH A DESIRE TO PROVE HIS THEORIES TO THESE OBTUSE WORTHIES IN SOME STRIKING AND DRAMATIC FASHION.

- HERBERT WEST – REANIMATOR

You tend to define success in comparison with someone in a position similar to your own. This may be the result of common circumstances and shared experiences, a long history stretching back to the old neighbourhood, or a recent reward that could have been yours. *Rivalry* differs from *Revenge* in that your competitor hasn't harmed you directly, unless you count receiving accolades for things you do regularly with humble stoicism. In fact, the other may be a trusted companion (though a poor *Source of Stability*) and frequent NPC. You keep an eye open for chances to shine when he can't – and if he dies trying to keep up, you can always switch to *Guilt*.

Especially appropriate for: Artist, Author, Journalist, Professor, Scientist.

Examples: Herbert West in *Herbert West – Reanimator*.

Vow ③

TEN MINUTES LATER OUR STUNNED GROUP TOOK AN OATH OF SECRECY WHICH ONLY SUCH GUARDED DOCUMENTS AS THIS MANUSCRIPT WILL EVER MODIFY.

- OUT OF THE AEONS

You have made a promise which you will do anything in your power to fulfill. A vow is more general than *Revenge* or other drives where the deed itself is important. This is about keeping one's word – a question of honour more than *Duty*. It doesn't matter whether you whispered it to a dying comrade or proclaimed it to the leaders of your community.

Especially appropriate for: any occupation.

Examples: The museum staff in *Out of the Aeons*, the raiders in *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

HOUSE RULE — NO GUARANTEED SUCCESS FOR TEST ROLLS

Keepers or players who prefer the thrill of a chance of failure for tests, even when enough **pool points** have been added to the die roll to ensure success, could try either of the following rules:

Version 1 ⑤

Even if enough **pool points** are spent on a test roll to ensure automatic success (e.g. spend 4 **pool points** on a difficulty 5 test) a roll of 1 on the test die may still mean failure.

When that happens roll the die again; a roll of 1 or 2 means failure (statistically about 5½% of the time), 3 or above is, indeed, success for the test.

A failure however does get all or half the **pool points** spent refunded to the player; divide the number of **pool points** spent by the number shown on the second die roll (round up or down at the Keeper's discretion) and award these back to the player as compensation.

Version 2 ⑥

Only the first two **pool points** spent give a bonus to any test die roll; any further **pool points** spent instead allow the player to roll an extra die for the test for each **pool point** spent beyond the first two e.g. Spending 4 **pool points** gives a +2 bonus to the test roll and the player rolls an extra 2 dice as well as the standard test die.

The highest single number from the multiple dice rolled is used as the number to calculate the test result (add +2 from the **pool point** spend and any further relevant bonuses or penalties to it).

This method only ensures success for tests of difficulty 3 or less; tests of higher difficulties have greater and greater chances of failure. The following tables show the chances of success of this proposed method versus the standard GUMSHOE method:

Pool Points Spent	Test Difficulty								Percent Chance Success of Standard GUMSHOE Method
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
0	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%	33.333%	16.667%	0.000%	0.000%		
1	100.000%	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%	33.333%	16.667%	0.000%		
2	100.000%	100.000%	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%	33.333%	16.667%		
3	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%	33.333%		
4	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%		
5	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	83.333%	66.667%		
6	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	83.333%		
7	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%	100.000%		

Pool Points Spent	Test Difficulty								Percent Chance Success of Proposed New Method
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
0	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%	33.333%	16.667%	0.000%	0.000%		
1	100.000%	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%	33.333%	16.667%	0.000%		
2	100.000%	100.000%	83.333%	66.667%	50.000%	33.333%	16.667%		
3	100.000%	100.000%	97.222%	88.889%	75.000%	55.556%	30.556%		
4	100.000%	100.000%	99.537%	96.296%	87.500%	70.370%	42.130%		
5	100.000%	100.000%	99.923%	98.765%	93.750%	80.247%	51.775%		
6	100.000%	100.000%	99.987%	99.588%	96.875%	86.831%	59.812%		
7	100.000%	100.000%	99.998%	99.863%	98.438%	91.221%	66.510%		

HOUSE RULE — ABILITY CHERRIES ⑦

In all GUMSHOE games there's an advantage for having a **rating** of 8 or more in *Athletics* — your *Hit Threshold* rises by 1. *Night's Black Agents* expanded this to *all* General Abilities, so if you invest enough of your build points in a particular ability to get a **rating** of 8 or higher, you get a cherry on top — a special ability that shows off your mastery in that field.

So, for your high-octane Pulp games, here's a bunch of *Trail of Cthulhu* cherries that don't overlap with the various occupation special abilities:

Conceal: Trap Sense

You may spend *Conceal* **pool points** to add to a *Sense Trouble* test if the potential threat is a concealed trap or other hidden environmental peril, like an overgrown pit or impending cave-in.

Disguise: Alternate Identity

You've established a whole other life for yourself, complete with friends, possessions, documentation — possibly even a home and family. This alternate persona must have a lower *Credit Rating* than your main identity (unless you've been masquerading as someone else since the start of the campaign). A *Disguise* **rating** of 8 or more gets you one alternate identity; you can purchase more for 4 experience points each.

Driving: Drive-By Shootout

You're adept at lining up shots for your passengers when they're shooting out the window. You may transfer up to 4 of your *Driving* **pool points** to your passenger's *Firearms* **pools** at the start of a car chase. Unspent points are lost when the chase ends.

Electrical Repair: Alien Insight

Your intuitive understanding of electricity and magnetism gives you an insight into devices far beyond the paltry technology of humanity. You may spend 4 *Electrical Repair* **pool points** to activate an alien device, like a Mi-Go brain cylinder or Yithian lightning gun. You only guess at how to turn the thing on, not what it does or how to properly control it.

Explosives: One Last Stick

You can spend *Explosive* **pool points** on *Preparedness* tests to obtain dynamite or similar explosives.

Filch: Here's One I Stole Earlier

With a *Filch* **rating** of 8 or more, once per investigation, you may declare you stole something retroactively from a previous scene. You need to get into the mansion's boathouse to flee the rampaging shoggoth? Well, it just so happens that you picked the groundskeeper's pockets earlier on, and here's the very key you need. You still need to make a *Filch* test to actually acquire whatever you want to unexpectedly produce.

Firearms: Nerves of Steel

Difficulty numbers for your *Firearms* tests aren't affected by being *shaken*.

First Aid: Sawbones

A *First Aid* **rating** of 8 or more gives 1 free **pool point** in either *Medicine* or *Pharmacy*, (player's choice).

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Fleeing: Blackout

Once per adventure, when you fail a *Fleeing* test or are about to be consumed by some other horror, you may declare that you black out. When you wake up, you're somewhere safe. You have no idea how you escaped or where you are now, and may have dropped items or abandoned fellow investigators to some horrible fate. But you're alive, and that's something.

Hypnosis: Mesmerise

You may attempt to use hypnotism on subjects who aren't actively willing to be hypnotised. Your subject must still be somewhat open to your influence — you could hypnotise someone that you're in conversation with, or the doorman at a club, but you couldn't hypnotise the mugger who's about to rob you, or the cultist who's intent on sacrificing you to some alien god. Increase the difficulty of any hypnotism tests using this ability by +2 (so, putting someone into a trance without their co-operation is difficulty 5; planting false memories is difficulty 7).

Mechanical Repair: Give It A Kick

Once per adventure, you may declare one *Mechanical Repair* test an instant success. You could kick a plane's engine back to life as it falls from the sky, or unjam a machine gun with one solid whack.

Piloting: There's Always A Plane

Once per adventure, you may ask the Keeper to introduce an aircraft of some description that you can fly with this ability. Maybe it's your own plane, and you've flown it out or had it shipped out. Maybe it's someone else's aircraft you can borrow, or a crashed plane that's repairable. Maybe the cultists have a Zeppelin-temple. In any event, there's always a plane nearby that you can use/borrow/steal over the course of the adventure.



TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Preparedness: Expedition Planning

If you have time to prepare and pack for any sort of expedition, then you bring enough for everyone. When you succeed at a *Preparedness* test to obtain an item, you may spend one extra point to have one of those items for everyone in the group. For example, if you use *Preparedness* to declare you've got an electric lamp, then you can spend an extra point to give everyone else a similar lamp too.

Psychoanalysis: Insight

A *Psychoanalysis* rating of 8 or more gives one free **pool point** in *Reassurance* or *Assess Honesty* (player's choice).

Riding: Ride the Flying Polyp

You can ride anything, including Mythos mounts like shantaks. Even better, if a creature is introduced to you as a mount and you only use it for riding, then any *Stability* losses for seeing the creature are reduced by 2.

Scuffling: The Old One Two

You may make an extra *Scuffling* attack per round, as long as you hit with your first attack. To make the second attack you must pay a number of *Scuffling* **pool points** equal to the result of the damage die from the first attack (so, if you roll damage of 2, you must pay 2 *Scuffling* **pool points** for another swing).

Sense Trouble: Quick Reflexes

If you overspend on a successful *Sense Trouble* test, you get the excess **pool points** back, but they can only be spent on *Athletics*, *Fleeing*, *Firearms*, *Scuffling* or *Weapons* tests in the first round of combat or in tests immediately related to the trouble you sensed. e.g. say the difficulty to sense a lurking Deep One is 5 and you spend 3 *Sense Trouble* and roll a 4, for a total of 7, beating the difficulty by 2; you get 2 **pool points** back that you must spend immediately on attacking or escaping the monster.

The maximum size of the refund **pool** can not be more than the number of *Sense Trouble* **pool points** spent i.e. if you'd rolled a 6 in the example above, you'd have beaten the difficulty by 4, but you'd still only get 3 **pool points** back because you only spent 3 to add to the test die roll.

Shadowing: In Over Your Head

Whenever you make a successful *Shadowing* test while shadowing someone, you gain 2 **pool points** that can be spent on *Evidence Collection*, *Locksmith*, *Disguise*, *Filch* or *Stealth*. You lose any unspent points in this **pool** when you stop shadowing the target and turn back, or are discovered.

Stealth: Stay Here

As long as someone follows your explicit instructions, they can piggyback (as per the rules on page 57 of the *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook) on your *Stealth* tests even when you're not present. So, if you tell a fellow investigator to hide in the undergrowth and keep crawling until they reach the road, they can piggyback on your *Stealth* tests if they do exactly what you told them to do.

Weapons: Favourite Weapon

Pick your favourite melee weapon. You draw strength and courage from its familiar heft in your hand. Once per adventure, you may gain 4 *Stability* from drawing or brandishing your weapon. With this sword by your side, there's nothing you can't handle.

HOUSE RULE — CORRESPONDENCE ABILITY ⑧

Night's Black Agents has the General Ability *Network*, which lets you whistle up contacts and allies as needed; you can call up that Iranian arms dealer who owes you a favour, or have an agent in place inside the Smithsonian. In *Trail of Cthulhu*, with its slower pace of communication and emphasis on creeping horror, *Network* becomes *Correspondence*.

When creating your investigator, you buy *Correspondence* **rating points** from your General Ability build point set; possessing even 1 **rating point** of *Correspondence* means you've got a wide circle of friends and colleagues that you regularly correspond with through letter, telegram, and even the occasional phone call or in person meeting. You don't need to specify who these friends are until you call on them in the game.

At any point, you may allocate a **pool point** of *Correspondence* to create a new NPC Correspondent. Each **pool point** you spend gives that NPC two **pool points** to assign to any Investigative Abilities you wish. Note the Correspondent's name, location and ability **pools** down on your character sheet. **Pool points** you spend to create a Correspondent do not refresh at the end of the adventure. If you want to keep your *Correspondence* **pool points** topped up, you'll need to spend experience points on them.

The Correspondents you create are, by default, in some distant city. They're not around to help you directly, but you can write to them and ask them for their advice (in other words, you can spend their Investigative Ability **pool points** to get clues or Benefits) but you'll need to wait some time for their reply to come back.

For example: Willoughby Boothroyd just discovered a curious idol in a cellar, but lacks the *Anthropology* ability needed to understand its significance. His player permanently spends two **pool points** of *Correspondence* and declares that Boothroyd's cousin, Cecil, is a noted archaeologist and ethnographer. Those two spent points of *Correspondence* translate into four Investigative Ability **points** for Cecil; he's now got 3 **points** of *Anthropology* and 1 of *Archaeology*. Boothroyd's player notes down 'Cousin Cecil — *Anthropology 3, Archaeology 1*' as a Correspondent on his character sheet. Boothroyd stuffs the idol into a packing crate and sends it off to Cecil. A few days later, he receives Cecil's report on the idol in the post which contains the clues obtainable with a 2-**point** *Anthropology* spend. Boothroyd's player should adjust Cecil's entry to say; 'Cousin Cecil — *Anthropology 1, Archaeology 1*' and will need to spend more *Correspondence* **pool points** on Cecil if he wishes to replenish his *Anthropology* **pool**.

Correspondents can be assumed to be trustworthy, reliable people — they might not share your belief in the supernatural, but they won't dismiss your requests for information out of hand. At the very least, they'll humour you; more likely, they'll be drawn into the mystery of the Mythos themselves.

Correspondents & Core Clues

A beneficent Keeper might allow a player to get a Core Clue from an ability he doesn't possess but one of his Correspondents does.

Example: Willoughby doesn't have *Physics*, but a Correspondent he created in a previous scenario does (Basil — an old friend who is now a professor of physics at Cambridge). The symbols Willoughby has found scrawled in the witch's cottage remind him of some diagrams he was once shown by Basil — something about folds in space and time? Perhaps he should contact him at Cambridge and see if he can shed some light on the mystery. If he does, Basil's *Physics* **pool points** will be unaffected because this is a Core Clue.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Spending Correspondence

In addition to creating contacts with the *Correspondence* ability, you may also spend *Correspondence* **pool points** for some extra Benefits:

- Spend 1 **pool point** to get a reply to a request as fast as is humanly possible (by telegraph, telephone, or return of post).
- Spend 2 **pool points** (or 1 **point** of *Correspondence* and 1 **point** from an Interpersonal Ability like *Credit Rating* or *Flattery*) to have your Correspondent come to visit you in person and put their skills at your disposal.
- If you're about to die horribly, you can spend 1 **pool point** of *Correspondence* to declare that you sent a copy of your notes, or your diary, or some other documentation to one of your Correspondents retroactively before you went on this last investigation. Your Correspondent becomes your next player character, and starts with a *Cthulhu Mythos* **rating** of 1 thanks to your final revelation.

Correspondence **pool points** spent for Benefits *do* refresh at the end of the adventure.

Dead Correspondents

This being *Trail of Cthulhu*, your Correspondents are going to delve into matters that man was not meant to know...and die horribly. If the Keeper eliminates one of your existing Correspondents as a plot hook, then the *Correspondence* **pool points** used to create that NPC are refunded. On the other hand, if *you* get one of your Correspondents killed (either by bringing them directly into the adventure, or inadvertently sending them a radioactive idol like poor cousin Cecil), then the **pool points** are lost permanently and, what is worse, you lose one **rating point** of *Stability* to boot.



HOUSE RULE — OUTDOOR HIKING ☉

Often investigators have to travel across vast outdoor areas (hills, moors, deserts, plains, jungles, etc.) in search of the Mythos and how long such a feat takes, related to character abilities, needs to be determined:

Naismith's Rule can be used to estimate most walks for an average person carrying a medium weight pack (about 15 kg):

Allow 1 hour for:

- 5 km easy going
- 3 km easy scrambling
- 1½ km of extremely rough country

The fitter your investigator is, their walk time should decrease. So using the above values as a baseline for a reasonably fit character (*Health rating* 8 or greater) with a medium pack of about 15 kg gives:

Health rating 8 and above in 1 hour covers:

- 5 km easy going
- 3 km easy scrambling
- 1½ km of extremely rough country

Health rating of 5 to 7 in 1 hour covers:

- 4 km easy going
- 2 km easy scrambling
- ½ km of extremely rough country

Health rating 4 or less in 1 hour covers:

- 2 km easy going
- 1 km easy scrambling
- 0 km of extremely rough country (you ain't goin' nowhere)

In each case allow for fatigue by adding an extra hour to the journey time for every five hours.

For each case add 1 hour for:

- every 500 metres terrain change up
- every 1000 metres terrain change down

Having the *Outdoorsman* ability negates these height-change time penalties (no *pool point* spend required).

An *Athletics* spend of 1 *pool point* per hour can add a kilometre to the distance travelled during that hour.

Packs over 15 kg up to 25 kg result in another 1 km off the distance travelled each hour but an *Athletics* spend of 1 *pool point* per day obviates this penalty.

Packs with more than 25 kg would be unusable without a further 1 *pool point* spend of *Athletics* per day.

This all assumes moderate weather conditions.

Advice for Keepers

UNDERSTANDING GUMSHOE CLUE TYPES AND DELIVERY MODES 08

GUMSHOE clues fall into the following types distinguished by the mechanism required by players to uncover them:

- **Core Clues** – clues which are associated with one or more particular abilities but cost the player no **pool points** to obtain. However the player must have a non-zero **rating** for the ability the clue is associated with and choose to engage that ability in the scene to get the clue. Core Clues steer the players from each key scene to the next so it is imperative that players obtain these clues. Keepers should therefore be flexible in deciding which ability players need to engage in the scene to be awarded the clue and avoid making Core Clues available only with the use of obscure Investigative Abilities.
- **Zero-Point Clues*** – Non-Core Clues that are associated with a particular ability but cost the player no **pool points** to obtain. However the player must have a non-zero **rating** for the ability the clue is associated with and choose to engage that ability in the scene to get the clue. The information provided by a Zero-Point Clue is usually concerned with evoking atmosphere within the scenario or providing interesting detail, rather than uncovering hard facts relating to the ongoing investigation.
- **Point-Spend Clues*** – Non-Core Clues that require the player to hand over 1 or more **pool points** in a particular ability and require the player to state they are using that ability. The information provided by a Point-Spend Clue will be relevant to the investigation at hand. The more useful the information, the higher the **pool point** spend required will be.
- **Inconspicuous Clues** – a clue that requires no **pool points** to obtain but does require a non-zero **rating** for the ability the clue is associated with. However the investigator will be awarded the clue if they are just present at the scene *without* having to state they are using the ability. An example would be a player passing through a hotel lobby noticing a spot of blood on the carpet because the blood spot is associated with the *Evidence Collection* ability which the player possesses.
- **Simple-Search Clues** – clues that require no **pool point** spend and are not associated with any particular ability but which will be given to any player who states they are searching a particular scene or object that holds the clue. An example would be finding an envelope taped underneath a table in a room subjected to a search.

When creating clues for your own scenarios, or converting an existing *Call of Cthulhu* scenario to the GUMSHOE mechanic, the following questions should be asked in order:

1. Should this be a Core Clue?
2. If it needn't be, then how is it found – is it a Simple-Search Clue?
3. If it isn't, then is it an Inconspicuous Clue?
4. If it isn't, then it must be a Zero-Point or Point-Spend Clue; the **pool point** spend amount (0, 1, 2, etc.) depends on how illuminating the information provided by the clue is.

* Since the publication of the First Edition *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook, the GUMSHOE rules have been updated to subdivide Non-Core Clues into Zero-Point Clues and Point-Spend Clues

Active or Passive Mode?

Of the GUMSHOE clue types, Core Clues, Zero-Point Clues, Point-Spend Clues and Simple-Search Clues require that a player performs an action in order to obtain them. This mode of clue delivery is termed 'active' since the player has to actively begin the process by either (a) stating they are using an Investigative Ability at the scene, or (b) physically searching an object (or the whole scene).

The remaining type, Inconspicuous Clues, are given to a player as soon as they enter the scene; the player is not actively invoking a particular Investigative Ability themselves – they just happen to be in the right place, at the right time, with the right Investigative Ability. So this method of delivery is labelled 'passive'.

Which mode of delivery the Keeper wishes to use to deliver a clue can vary. Usually clues which require Interpersonal Abilities are nearly always delivered actively – waiting for the player to interact with the NPC using the appropriate Interpersonal Ability. If you see that the players are hesitant about how to approach an interaction with an NPC, give the player with the relevant ability a hint that his character can sense what will work here.

For example: the investigators have the Interpersonal Abilities *Intimidation*, *Flattery* and *Reassurance* between them and are trying to get a gangster's moll to cooperate. The Keeper could flag up any of the players' three useful abilities by saying one of the following:

[Intimidation] "You get the feeling that this girl will crack if you lean on her a little."

[Flattery] "She seems kind of smitten by you."

[Reassurance] "She seems very nervous when she hears a nearby squad car siren."

Active clues that are associated with Technical or Academic Abilities may be more difficult for the players to realise (a) that they exist in the scene, and (b) which ability to call upon. If your players are having difficulty finding some active clues you may wish to deliver these passively instead.

One heavy-handed passive way is to effectively override the player's agency temporarily:

Keeper: "Your *Forensics* experience leads you to check inside her mouth, where you find a strange parasitic infestation."

A slightly subtler passive method is to offer up the clue for any player to take (or purchase):

Keeper: "Does anyone want to use their *Forensics* ability here?"

However, a more satisfying method for the players, rather than overriding player agency or blatantly flagging an opportunity for ability use, is to hint strongly at a suitable action:

Keeper: "The colour of the corpse's lips isn't the blue you'd expect and her cheeks appear puffed out – this isn't the aftermath of a 'normal' asphyxiation."

Player: "I'll check the corpse over thoroughly with *Forensics*."

Keeper: "When you check inside her mouth you find a strange parasitic infestation."

Although you might expect the players to regard this as an unsubtle shove in the right direction, many players are not only content to receive hints like this, but still feel a sense of accomplishment simply for going on to fill in the obvious next action. The more frustrated a group becomes the greater the emotional reward for pouncing on a hint and, what is more, the clue still managed to be delivered actively. The extent to which you usher the players along is also a pacing issue. What seems intrusive and 'railroad' in the middle of a game session may feel satisfyingly efficient when experiencing a time-crunch towards the end, but try to allow the players enough time to take active measures before you start hinting them in a fruitful direction or changing the clue delivery mode to passive.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

This idea can be spun in the opposite direction; if your players are especially proactive, you can reward their initiative by converting passive clues into active ones. For example:

Keeper: “The wall inside the burial chamber is covered in old hieroglyphics.”

Player: “Aha! Are they phonetic or logographic?” [using *Archaeology* ability]

Keeper: “Neither. They’re gibberish – modern forgeries.”

Players are thus more able to show off their characters’ brilliance in areas they are themselves acquainted with.

All in all, the degree of effort players must go through to accumulate clues is a matter for constant and sensitive adjustment during play; based on factors including session pacing, the group’s concentration or tiredness levels, and the players’ personal knowledge of their character abilities. However, clues that a player gets actively will usually result in that player enjoying their spotlight time more and having a sense of ‘ownership’ over the clue. The converse is that if you are always relying on your players to obtain clues actively, but they often fail to do so, then your players will consider your gaming style as obtuse, difficult and therefore unenjoyable.

The default delivery modes suggested by a scenario’s write-up are no substitute for a Keeper’s judgement and attention. Knowing when to push and when to let the players push you is an essential component of the Keeper’s craft. You are probably already doing it, unconsciously, but by paying more attention to it, you can further sharpen your presentation.

In summary then, the following table shows the way **pool point** spends, ability requirements, and who initiates the clue-finding process, all relate to the different GUMSHOE clue types:

	<i>Specific Ability Required</i>	<i>Pool Point Spend Required</i>	<i>Player Active Ability Use</i>
<i>Core Clue</i>	Sort Of ¹	No	Yes ²
<i>Zero-Point Clue</i>	Yes	No	Yes ²
<i>Point-Spend Clue</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes ²
<i>Inconspicuous Clue</i>	Yes	No	No
<i>Simple-Search Clue</i>	No	No	Yes ³

¹ Core Clues should be made available via *any* ability use the investigators have access to that the Keeper deems *appropriate* to the scene.

² Keepers may wish to give a hint to players that clues which require active ability use are available in a scene. How to hint is left open to interpretation by the Keeper. If the players are still stumped the Keeper may wish to resort to a passive mode of clue delivery.

³ A player only has to state their investigator is ‘searching’ the object or area which will yield the Simple-Search Clue rather than actually invoking a particular ability.

IMMERSIVE PLAY USING THE KEEPER'S INVESTIGATIVE ABILITY WORKSHEET ❶

For those Keepers and players who prefer deep immersion in the scenario and want to keep the game mechanics in the background a passive method of clue-gathering using the *Investigative Ability Worksheet* is described earlier in the section **HOW PLAYERS OBTAIN GUMSHOE CLUES**.

Using this technique, a situation where a player is trying to determine the honesty of an NPC witness would play out something like this:

Player: “Does he seem to be lying?”

Keeper: [looks at the *Investigative Ability Worksheet*, sees that the player’s character has *Assess Honesty*] “His eyes dart wildly as he speaks, so yeah, you get the feeling he’s trying to put one over on you.”

If you have a mixed mindset of players at the table, where some feel that this method is too ‘spoonfeedy’ and deprives them of the mental work required to apply the correct ability to the situation, you can continue to call for ability selections from them. Then switch back to the passive/worksheet method for those players seeking the immersive experience.

Even when using the worksheet method, you can still ask for clarification from a player on the ability being used, without calling for a direct ability citation. For example:

Player: “I ask the old geezer sitting by the well whether he’s seen anything suspicious.”

Keeper: [in character, playing him as anxious, craning his neck around to see who’s watching] “You don’t seem to be from around these parts, young feller. Why should I talk to you?”

Player: “Listen, you old bag of bones. I ain’t got the patience for any nonsense from you. Cough up what you know or you’ll wish you had.”

You don’t need to ask whether this player is using *Intimidation*, because he’s doing what any good roleplayer does – showing instead of telling. Assuming his investigator has that ability, you then proceed to spill what the old man knows. However, if you check the worksheet and see that his character doesn’t have the ability, you may be tempted to break immersion and say something like:

Keeper: “You’re using *Intimidate* but Professor Haskins doesn’t actually have that ability. Dave’s character does, though.”

However you can maintain immersion and tackle this problem, still keeping the rules behind the curtain, by saying something like:

Keeper: “The geezer laughs to see all five foot six of you, in your tweedy jacket and your reedy New England accent, trying to pull a tough guy act. You look over at McCracken and figure leaning on witnesses is maybe more his department.”

Requests for information by the players can also transform into moments that flesh out their characters’ backstories through immersion:

Player: “How old does this rock carving look?”

Keeper: “What is your prior experience with rock carvings?”

Player: “I studied petroglyphs with the Robertson Expedition of 1927, in the deepest woods of Algonquin Park.”

Here you are prompting the player for an in-world description more interesting than simply stating, “I have 1 [pool point](#) in *Archaeology*.”

One drawback of using this very immersive approach, *because* it is richer and more descriptive, is that constantly coming up with phrasings that hide the rules can be mentally taxing. When we reference rule constructs, it is not just because we need them to determine what happens; they also function as a shorthand to collapse our communications, getting to the meat of a scene faster.

In most game groups, you'll find yourself and the players seamlessly dropping in and out of direct rules reference without paying attention to the ongoing micro-shifts in perspective this entails. If your games are going fine already, don't mess them up by thinking too hard about this. Just keep on doing what you're doing.

OPTIONAL RULE: NO-SPEND INVESTIGATIVE SPENDS ②

Some players may find that the need to ask for Investigative Ability spends for Point-Spend Clues intrudes too much on immersion in the fictional reality, or makes it too obvious that there are certain actions they ought to take during particular scenes. For those players, here's an optional method of providing those clues. However, using it will mean that the Keeper takes on a greater bookkeeping burden in exchange for making the system more transparent to her players.

Before play begins, the Keeper checks all character sheets for Investigative Abilities with a **rating** of 1 or more. She compiles a master list, arranged per ability, ranking the characters in order of their **ratings**. Here is an example with three investigators:

Gareth McNulty has a *Streetwise* **rating** of 4. Clementine Heidegger of 3, and Arno Black just 1. The *Streetwise* entry in the Keeper's master ability list looks like this:

Streetwise

Gareth 4

Clementine 3

Arno 1

Players alert the Keeper whenever they improve their Investigative Ability **ratings**, so she can keep the master list up to date.

Whenever the investigators enter a scene in which a Point-Spend Clue is available, the Keeper checks the master list against the appropriate ability to see which, if any of them, could afford to make the spend compared to their **rating**. Of those that can, the investigator with the fewest tick marks next to their name is chosen (ties are broken by choosing the investigator with the highest **rating**). The Keeper then puts a number of ticks next to the chosen investigator's name equal to the size of the **pool point** spend required for the clue and proceeds to roleplay dispensing the clue to that investigator's player. During subsequent scenes in which a spend can be made in the same ability, the Keeper repeats the process. The tick marks do not represent **pool point** expenditures — under this system it is possible for an investigator with only 2 **points** in a particular ability to get multiple 2-**point** clues, if no one else in the group qualifies to earn them.

Continuing the example: the investigators are interviewing a witness — a wharf rat named Lou. A 1-**point** *Streetwise* clue is available concerning the tattoo Lou sports on his left forearm. You, the Keeper, check your master list and see that no spends have been made against *Streetwise* yet in this scenario. So the highest-ranked investigator with the least tick marks is Gareth. Therefore you tell Gareth's player: "The tattoo indicates that he's a follower of *The Church of the New Seas* — a bogus faith, run by con artists fleecing their followers," and place a single tick mark next to the entry for Gareth in the *Streetwise* list.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Several scenes later, another *Streetwise* spend clue comes up, but this is for a 2-point spend. You check the list, which now looks like this:

Streetwise

Gareth 4 ✓
Clementine 3
Arno 1

Because this is a 2-point spend only Gareth's and Clementine's ratings make them eligible. Gareth already has a tick next to his name, so Clementine gets this clue. You then put two tick marks next to her name (because this was a 2-point spend clue):

Streetwise

Gareth 4 ✓
Clementine 3 ✓✓
Arno 1

If a 1-point *Streetwise* clue became available later, Arno's rating allows him to be in the running again with Gareth and Clementine and, because he has no tick marks, he would get the clue.

This method shares out the Point-Spend Clues in a way that favours the investigator with the highest rating in any given ability, whilst attempting to balance spotlight time amongst all investigators with that ability.



TROUBLESHOOTING PLAYERS' INVESTIGATIONS ②

Q: What if the players come up with a different way to get the information than the scenario specifies?

A: Give it to them. *Trail of Cthulhu* always provides at least one way to get clues into the players' hands. Reward player creativity when they find others. Disallow this only where it:

- a) pushes aside another player who ought to be able to use an ability he's heavily invested in to get the info, and who would be upset to see his spotlight stolen.
- b) makes no sense whatsoever.

In the latter case, work with the player to suggest a more plausible means of using the proposed ability to acquire the clue in question.

In some cases, an unorthodox ability use might require a spend or trigger some negative consequence in the story. In general though, *Trail of Cthulhu* is about allowing access to information, not disallowing it.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Q: What if the players' actions suggest a clue that isn't in the written scenario?

A: This will happen a lot. No scenario, no matter how tightly written, can provide every answer to the questions players will use their abilities to ask. When it does happen use your knowledge of the scenario's backstory to come up with the most logical answer to the question.

Bear two points in mind before proceeding:

- Make sure that your answer doesn't contradict the facts needed to supply the solution to the ultimate mystery, or any of the Core Clues along the way. If it does, rethink your answer to fit the rest of the mystery.
- Supplying your improvised information might lead to new scenes and alternate ways of gathering the Core Clues. You may need to improvise even more to keep up with the players going off-piste further down the line.

Q: How hard should I hint if the players are floundering?

A: As much as you have to, and ideally no more.

The barrier we traditionally erect between player autonomy and Keeper intervention is like any other roleplaying technique – it's useful only insofar as it makes our games more enjoyable. Frustrated players are generally happy to be nudged back on track, even if you use techniques that would otherwise seem intrusive. Hint as unobtrusively as you can, but hint all the same. Where possible, disguise your hinting by using the mechanisms the game provides you. In this case, use your Keeper *Investigative Ability Worksheet* to find an ability that would logically provide the insight needed to see past the current roadblock. Then narrate it as if the character who has the ability has had a hunch or breakthrough:

[*Accounting*] "Suddenly you remember the phrase your Forensic Accounting professor kept hammering into you – follow the money!"

[*Architecture*] "Maybe it's the engineer in you, but you can't help thinking there's something about that schematic you missed the first time around."

[*Interrogation*] "It occurs to you that maybe it's time to take somebody into custody and ask a few tough questions."

Q: What are the common causes of player floundering?

A: Stopping to ask why players are stuck is the first step to guiding them out of their conceptual paralysis. A few common syndromes lie behind most floundering incidents:

Problem: Someone already came up with the correct answer, but it was dismissed or forgotten.

Solution: Tell the group that they've already considered and dismissed the right answer.

Problem: The group is stuck in endless speculation mode.

Solution: They need more information. Remind them of this basic investigative principle.

Problem: The group knows what to do, but is too risk-averse to proceed.

Solution: Tell them to nut up – do they *want* Cthulhu to destroy the earth? Certain *Drives* might be useful to force them to consider proceeding too.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

Q: What if players over-investigate every little detail?

A: Expect players to surprise you by applying their Investigative Abilities to tangential descriptive details. For example: as the players explore a Tudor mansion in Merrie Olde England, you might mention that a medieval tapestry hangs over a wooden throne. The Core Clue is a residue of eerie protoplasm at the base of the throne; you mentioned the tapestry simply to add another evocative detail. Now your players are asking you what's on the tapestry, whether it dates from the period, and whether the star pattern shown in its embroidered sky looks 'right'.

A useful clue that dovetails with the episode's central mystery might occur to you here. If not, you can still treat this as more than a null moment to be quickly dismissed. Instead, treat tangential queries as opportunities to underline the investigator's competence, while at the same time signalling that they have no great relevance to the case at hand. Do this simply with a 'no big deal' tone of voice and body language whilst you spell it out explicitly:

[*History*] "The image depicts an idealised image of Henry VIII – exactly what you'd expect from someone who didn't bother to research the actual period."

[*Chemistry*] "It's made of synthetic fibres – it can't be an antique."

[*Astronomy*] "You can recall scores of star systems from memory, and can say right away that this pattern is just an arbitrary design chosen by the artist."

NOVEL REWARDS FOR INVESTIGATIVE SPENDS ③

Here are some suggested methods of rewarding players for spending Investigative Ability [pool points](#) but not specifically for clue purchase:

Gain A Trusted Contact

Any certainty is welcome in a mystery game. Telling a player, "You know this guy and can trust him," is immensely reassuring. If a player asks, "Do I know any X?" (where X might be astronomers, doctors, people who'll help me move a body) then suggest to the player they can make a spend from a suitable Investigative Ability and they'll retroactively know someone whom they can trust and rely on – ideally someone who provides access to another Investigative Ability. For every [pool point](#) they spend to 'know' their 'buddy', let them assign twice this amount to ability [pools](#) for their confidant.

Some examples of spending from three particular abilities might be:

[*Art History*] A local dealer in fine art. She's got lots of *Credit Rating* and can get you an invite to the Ambassador's party.

[*Geology*] Your old university lecturer is also an expert in *Chemistry*.

[*Cop Talk*] Your buddy on the force can open doors for you that would normally require *Bureaucracy*.

Compare this idea to the [HOUSE RULE – CORRESPONDENCE ABILITY](#) described earlier.

Repurpose Pool Point Spends

If a player asks to do something with an Investigative Ability spend that's really better phrased as a General Ability test, then instead offer 3 **pool points** in that General Ability. A couple of examples are:

- **Player:** "Can I make acid with *Chemistry* and melt the door?" Offer 3 **pool points** in *Explosives*.
- **Player:** "I use *Bargain* on the shopkeeper. What does he have for sale that I can buy cheap?" Offer 3 **pool points** of *Preparedness*, and later on you can say that whatever item you gain from the *Preparedness* test you bought here from the shopkeeper.

If they make a wild spend for information when you've no idea what extra details or clues to give them, offer 1 or 2 **pool points** of Investigative Abilities. Define it as a floating **pool** instead of a bonus to a particular ability in order to give the player more agency, and to allow for satisfying narrative callbacks whenever the player uses the **pool**. An example:

- **Player:** "I spend a point of *Library Use* to research everything!"
Keeper: "OK. You read everything in the library related to the case. You don't find anything that seems immediately relevant, but you can have one **pool point** that you can turn into any Academic **pool point** later on, as long as it relates to the case you just researched."
 Later on in the adventure the player discovers an ancient sacrificial dagger on which they decide to use their floating Academic **pool point** as a point of *Archaeology* as if the information they gain was recalled from reading it during the library research.

Tangential Flashbacks

If you're totally stuck for how an Investigative Ability spend could possibly apply to the scene, but the player is adamant that they want to try, consider improvising a brief flashback scene that relates to the spend, which uncovers the clue or indicates how it can be uncovered. You can also use such little scenes to drop tangentially-related but spookily Lovecraftian foreshadowing or hints. Examples:

- **Player:** "I spend a **point** of *Astronomy* and look out at the stars while the others are talking to the terrible old man!"
Keeper: "The stars out the window are oddly different – it must be some trick of the light, or a trick of the clouds. Maybe it's unusually clear here, so you can see more stars. Anyway, you remember one night a few months ago when you came out to a hill near the old man's shack to do some observations with a portable telescope. Now that you think of it, you remember seeing a fire burning that night – and that fire might have been right here, in his back yard. What was he burning that night?" (Hints that *Evidence Collection* or *Archaeology* might find something in the back garden.)
- **Player:** "I examine the plants in the garden. Do I get anything for spending a **point** of *Biology*?"
Keeper: "You recall a biology paper you read at university that contained a cross-reference to a strange publication concerning the occult properties of certain plants. Out of curiosity you looked up the cross-reference, and there you learned that the plants in this garden – Sorghum – are associated with a tradition called the Benandanti; a 16th century occult group who claimed to be able to astrally project." (Substitutes for *Occult* ability)

- *Player*: “I spend a **point** of *Craft* while examining the table.”

Keeper: “OK...er...well, you know that the table is...er...it’s made from a hardwood that grows locally...in a forest. And...er...you remember in woodcraft shop they talked about this particular forest’s wood. Yeah...they said there were mines running underneath parts of the forest, and you’ve heard stories about weird stuff there...and dead miners...buried alive! The roots of the trees there must have fed on human marrow-fat and bone. And now they’re in this table. Phew!” (There’s another scene in the scenario that points to this old mine, and you’re wildly scrabbling to find anything useful to say. Nobody said being a Keeper was easy.)

ASSESS HONESTY VS. RED HERRINGS ④

Trail of Cthulhu’s lie-noticing ability, *Assess Honesty*, can raise a rather sticky problem for Keepers – how do you give characters in a mystery story the ability to tell when people are lying without short circuiting the plot?

First, let’s be clear about what *Assess Honesty* does and, more importantly, what it *doesn’t* do. *Assess Honesty* allows the investigator to get a sense that the person they’re talking to isn’t telling the truth. It gives its users hunches, at best, from a reading of the subject’s tells (e.g. frequent face touching, breaking direct eye contact at the end of sentences, licking lips). What it doesn’t do is tell the investigator what the truth actually is – *Assess Honesty* is not a psychic power.

When an investigator uses *Assess Honesty*, they’ll get one of three answers from the Keeper:

1. He’s lying. This answer *will* be true – the subject *believes* he is lying. Even if the investigator is sure the subject is lying that doesn’t *prove* they are lying, nor does it cause them to reveal the truth.
2. No reading. You can’t tell for sure – *Assess Honesty* does not give a clear answer. Perhaps the subject is too impassive to tell, or could just be nervous. Maybe they are concealing something, holding something back or not telling the complete truth.
3. He’s telling the truth. This answer *will* be true – the subject *believes* he is telling the truth (the truth as he understands it to be, which may even be different to the real truth).

Because investigators have to be able to rely on their Investigative Abilities, *Assess Honesty* will *never* give a false positive (i.e. the impression the subject is lying when they really believe they are being truthful) or a false negative (i.e. an impression of truth when the subject knows they are being deceitful).

So...Red Herrings

Firstly, do you really want red herrings in your adventure? Players of investigative roleplaying games spend so much time speculating wildly, and connecting dots that aren’t there, that they often create enough red herrings by themselves. Adding your own can lead to overly long game sessions and cause even more confusion for the poor saps.

If you are going to sow some red herrings, at least make them interesting by giving them a purpose. Red herrings that are boring or dead ends provide no satisfaction for players when they discover they have been sidetracked for no reason. One type of good red herring is one that ticks...it makes time slip away for an investigator under a deadline.

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

Enchiridion of Elucidation

When an investigator using *Assess Honesty* senses that a subject is being deceptive it doesn't necessarily tell him or her what's really going on. In some cases, the Keeper might choose to supply the player with an intuition of the truth on an *Assess Honesty* **pool point** spend. In general you only really want to do this when the real truth is a red herring.

For red herrings, do not make a **pool point** spend an absolutely reliable way of finding the real truth. If you do, then when a **point** spend doesn't yield the real truth, the players can use negative inference to conclude that they're not facing a red herring and this person is a hot potato for sure. However, if you do let an *Assess Honesty* **point** spend eliminate red herring deceptions about half the time, players will still feel that the ability is useful and that the **point** spend was worth doing.

In the red herring instance, you don't always have to yield the real truth on an *Assess Honesty* **pool point** spend either. Instead you could try to provide some other Benefit for the spend or, as a last resort, decline to take the spend.

Here is an example of a ticking red herring: Tommy Polk, an L.A. police detective, is trying to figure out who assassinated his main lead on a cultist he is trying to locate. The lead was shot at an outdoor café and Tommy is asking a stockbroker, who was present at the scene, if he saw anything.

The stockbroker, Rufus Ziolkowski, says he was preoccupied reading account ledgers the whole time and didn't notice anything until the victim's waitress started screaming. As a standard *Zero-Point Assess Honesty* Clue (no spend required), this seems an untruth to Tommy.

According to your notes, Rufus' lie is a red herring; he didn't see anything Tommy can use to hunt the killer that he can't get from another, more helpful witness. Rufus just doesn't want to involve himself, and lies in hopes of cutting short his interaction with the police. You've added this detail to test the player's focus on forward momentum since the cultist is searching for Tommy's apartment. The longer Tommy spends on false leads, the greater the chance of his nemesis finding and murdering an ex-cultist Tommy is protecting there.

This makes red herring chasing an important exercise, with true stakes, instead of a time-waster. As with any ticking clock, it instils suspense only if the protagonists know that it's ticking; Tommy is trying to find the bad guys on his terms, before the bad guys find him.



Rufus has only one reason for lying to investigators, which could be any of the following:

1. He's too busy to get involved with a police investigation. (The most likely answer for a frenetically busy wheeler-dealer.)
2. He was at the café to meet a married lover who happens to be a local celebrity, and knows that the cops around here sell that sort of juicy information to tabloid journalists.
3. He was here to meet a partner in a shady business deal, completely unrelated to the cult, and fears any kind of police inquiry into his affairs.
4. He fears stepping forward as a witness against what he thinks could be a mob hit.

In any of these cases, a **I-point** spend could provide Tommy a suggested motivation for Rufus' evasion, one that establishes it as an irrelevant side matter. So as Keeper you might make a general statement applicable to the case at hand. "You get the sense he's not being forthcoming..."

1. "...he strikes you as one of those Type-A sorts who view any intrusion on their time as a threat to be immediately shot down."
2. "...he probably has a secret he doesn't want the cops to leak to the tabloid press. That happens a lot here."
3. "...he's holding his ledgers protectively, like he's afraid you'll look into them. They might be incriminating, even if they don't relate to the cult."
4. "...ordinary people hate to become witnesses in mob cases, and they're not wrong."

Each of these suggests a separate tack that Tommy might take to get past the lie:

1. *Interrogation*: "I'm under the gun here. Not telling me what you know will waste more of your time than spilling it."
2. *Reassurance*: "If this is about some personal thing you don't want getting out, trust me. I hate reporters more than you do."
3. *Intimidation*: "You'd better spill what you know, or I'll suddenly get very interested in the contents of those ledgers. And they'd better not be related, or you're toast."
4. *Cop Talk*: "This isn't a mob hit. It will never see a courtroom, and you'll never need to testify."

Any of these could also apply in a case where the witness *does* have useful information to impart, and the investigators need to overcome his resistance.

If the witness has no useful information, and the investigators aren't racing against the clock to eliminate false leads quickly, you might let the spend itself indicate that the witness is lying but has nothing useful to say anyhow. "You get him to admit that he did see the hit, but..."

1. "...wanted to ditch the scene as quickly as possible so he could get to a meeting."
2. "...was about to meet his mistress, and was afraid you'd tip off the tabloids."
3. "...thought that you'd turn him over to the fraud squad, based on the contents of his ledgers."
4. "...feared getting whacked if he testified."

"However, when you do break through his resistance, his account matches the other witnesses. By lying, all he did was waste your time — time that cultist is surely glad to have."

NPCs RENEGING ON DEALS 5

When an investigator uses the *Bargain* Interpersonal Ability to make a deal with an NPC the result can either be immediate or delayed.

When the result is immediate the interaction is clear-cut; the investigator gets what he wants and the NPC gets what they want. If the NPC handed over a Core Clue or some information that did not particularly help explain or solve the mystery afoot, then the player would be charged zero *Bargain* pool points. However, if the NPC supplied a Point-Spend Clue or Benefit during the deal, then the player would have to have handed over a certain amount of *Bargain* pool points.

Things become more complicated if the result of the deal is not immediate i.e. the negotiated exchange will take place in a future scene (maybe even off camera) e.g. the investigator has used *Bargain* to bribe the NPC to sedate a security guard work-colleague so that the investigator can sneak into a warehouse, unhindered, later on. Because the result of the deal is not enacted with the investigator present, there is always the possibility of betrayal by the NPC.

If players are always meant to be able to rely on their Investigative Abilities then how does the Keeper model this standard genre situation of, what is essentially, an Investigative Ability 'malfunctioning'?

During the negotiation scene, alert the player to the possible treachery of the NPC by mentioning something along the lines of, "You can see the wheels turning in the backs of his eyes. Trusting him might be a crapshoot," and ask the player how many *Bargain* pool points they wish to spend on the deal.

As Keeper you will know, at the point of the bargain being struck, whether this NPC is *certain* to renege on the deal or if betrayal is only a *possibility*. If just a possibility, assign a difficulty level to retaining this NPC's loyalty. Then have the player roll a die and add the amount of *Bargain* pool points they spent to see if they match or exceed the difficulty number (you have effectively turned the Investigative Ability spend into a General Ability test for the fealty of the NPC).

Once any treachery comes to light, to prevent your players being upset that their pool point spend got them less than nothing, refund their spent points. If playing under Purist rules perhaps only refund half (rounded down) or none (but surely only the most coldhearted of Keepers would do such a thing).

This uncertainty principle could extend to other Interpersonal Ability spends, adding suspense to the proceedings. Some examples:

- The investigator senses that a 1-point *Reassurance* spend might or might not keep the scared maid from staying put while they go off to find the ghoul.
- The recipient of a 1-point *Cop Talk* might agree not to record the investigator's interaction in his notebook.



ISSUES CONCERNING COMBAT

Zero Combat Damage ⑥⑨

When investigators perform *Scuffling* or *Weapons* attacks with no, or weak, hand weapons the damage modifiers of -1 and -2 can mean, even on a successful attack test, the adjusted damage rolled can be zero. If you or your players are uncomfortable with this, try any of the following house rules:

- If the player spent some General Ability **pool points** for the test roll to succeed then damage should be a minimum of 1.
- If they have zero **rating** in the General Ability then they can screw up even with a successful test roll and still roll zero damage. Characters with a non-zero **rating** do minimum damage of 1.
- Pulp = minimum 1 damage, Purist = minimum zero damage.

Clarification About Consciousness Tests

Consciousness Tests are performed only when a character crosses into the *hurt* state (0 to -5 **Health pool points**) from having positive **Health pool points** and again when they cross into the *seriously wounded* state (-6 to -11 **Health pool points**).

A second *Consciousness Test* is *not* performed if an already *hurt* character receives more damage, the amount of which still leaves them in the *hurt* range. Only when a character goes from *hurt* to *seriously wounded* would another *Consciousness Test* be required. Similarly, an already *seriously wounded* character will not have to undergo another *Consciousness Test* when they receive further damage.

An exception to this, is when an attacker has declared a 'Non-Lethal Damage' attack (pg. 65 of the *Trail of Cthulhu* rulebook). This *will* inflict another *Consciousness Test* as long as the attack is successful and causes the victim's **Health pool points** to fall into the range -1 to -11.

The above rules do not apply to the *Consciousness Test* called for when a *hurt* investigator wishes to spend Investigative Ability **pool points**; the failure of which will not result in the investigator passing out, but does mean that they can not make the Investigative spend.

Pool Point Attack Spends by Investigator Adversaries ⑦

For Keepers unsure how many combat **pool points** to spend on attack tests of opponents (either human or inhuman) to investigators, consider using an *Attack Pattern*.

This is an optional game statistic suggesting how the opponent might spend its combat **pool points** from round to round in a fight. Keepers should always consider story logic and dramatic needs first and resort to the *Attack Pattern* second.

Opponents who are angry or fearful will spend what they need to guarantee a hit. Others will spend cautiously, saving their points for later. An *Attack Pattern* is a fallback if you can't decide how the opponent would spend, or are uncomfortable choosing to spend enough to guarantee a hit each time. An example would be:

You define a cultist with *Scuffling*: 8 having an *Attack Pattern*: +3/+3/+2

When you do use an *Attack Pattern*, increase the spend after each miss until the opponent either starts to hit, or runs out of **pool points**. Once engaged, intelligent opponents figure out how hard the investigators are to hit, and adjust their efforts accordingly.

SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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With great thanks to...

Robin Laws

- ① See Page XX - More Songs About Ratings and Pools
- ① The Repairer of Reputations
- ④ Dreamhounds of Paris
- ① See Page XX - Give a Clue
- ① See Page XX - Seamless GUMSHOE
- ② See Page XX - GUMSHOE GM Troubleshooting
- ④ See Page XX - Lies as Red Herrings
- ⑤ See Page XX - When Bribery Doesn't Stick

Kenneth Hite

- ② Nights Black Agents (page 44)
- ⑤ Bookhounds of London

Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan

- ⑦ See Page XX - The Plain People of Gaming: Cthulhu Ctherries
- ⑧ See Page XX - Correspondents in Trail of Cthulhu
- ③ See Page XX - Investigative Spends in Demo Scenarios

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- ① Yog-Sothoth.com thread - Custom Drives
- ④ Yog-Sothoth.com thread - Interacting With Villains
- ⑥ Yog-Sothoth.com thread - [Combat] Minimal Damage?
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TRAIL OF CTHULHU

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- ⑥ [The Dying of St Margaret's](#)

Yog-Sothoth Member 'ReverendBayes'

- ⑤ [Yog-Sothoth.com thread - Variant for Trail of Cthulhu: Crits](#)

Joshua Kronengold

- ⑥ [monkeyed with by Tony Williams Labcats RPG Blog Entry - Fixing GUMSHOE](#)

Greg O. - Yog-Sothoth Member 'groakes'

- ⑨ [Yog-Sothoth.com thread - Naismith's Rules \(Hiking Times\)](#)

and my good self...Tony Williams

- ⑧ [See Page XX - The Keeper of the Clues](#)
- ⑨ [Yog-Sothoth.com thread - Negative damage from fist and kick?](#)

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

I had been following the *Trail of Cthulhu* for months and when I found that tome of unspeakable lore in a rotting New England mausoleum a week ago I was elated at discovering the hidden mysteries of our true masters.

But now I was frustrated. Frustrated with my lack of understanding... frustrated with my failure to grasp the nuances of the blasphemous text and frustrated with my lack of progress in harnessing its power. Disillusioned, I went for a walk to consider my failures.

Somehow the bookshop called to me; I had never seen it before — was it new to the area? I could not resist its siren pull and went inside. Hundreds of dusty volumes were displayed in row upon row of lavish cases and shelves, but one single book was picked out by a shaft of light from a murky window on high...
The Enchiridion of Elucidation.

I broke open the thick leather cover and immediately knew this was the missing piece to my own impenetrable puzzle. Page after page of guidance and notes on how to keep the forbidden practices of the Great Old Ones! The book had to be mine...now!

“Can I help you?” The voice of the establishment’s owner startled me from my reverie. “Yes, I think you probably can,” I replied, unsheathing the oft-bloodied knife from my pocket.

GUMSHOE



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