

INVESTIGATOR WEAPONS

FOR USE WITH *CALL OF CTHULHU* IN THE MODERN DAY

BY HANS-CHRISTIAN VORTISCH

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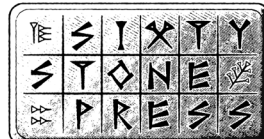
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This book would not have been possible without the Mythos Seven:

- ▲ H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937)
- ▲ Robert E. Howard (1906-1936)
- ▲ August Derleth (1909-1971)
- ▲ Arthur Machen (1863-1947)
- ▲ Robert Bloch (1917-1994)
- ▲ Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961)
- ▲ Frank Belknap Long (1901-1994)

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THE ARMED INVESTIGATOR

*It is difficult to explain, hard even to remember, the response I had to seeing them. They were **visibly** insults to nature. Just to see one was to desire its destruction. My pistol was a .32 and I was accurate, even in the dim and with the ship moving. Every shot hit. If it bled, it was slow and difficult to see against their black flesh ... I fled.*

— Greg Stolze, *Mask of the Other* (2012)

WEAPONS ARE A CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC IN MODERN SOCIETIES. The social contract in many countries puts weapons predominantly or even exclusively in the hands of state organizations like the police and military. Civilians are often denied the right to arm themselves, with the major exception of the USA. In many other countries, access to weapons is tightly controlled, and not just firearms, but often also concealable knives, martial arts weapons like nunchakus, and self-defence sprays. Even if access is allowed, most jurisdictions curtail the type and use of weaponry, specifying restrictions as to when, where, and how they can be deployed, usually limiting legal use to sport or hunting, but not self-defence. To a certain extent, this makes sense – weapons are potentially dangerous objects, and oversight is justifiable for the same reasons that modern societies control the use of automobiles. Then again, though the state asserts that it guards the individual against evil men or worse, it is impossible for the police to provide protection to every citizen at every moment, leaving many defenceless in their hour of need.

Leaving aside the legal and moral controversies, many investigators of the Unknown are not “ordinary” people – they are often members of the police or military, and as such are generally armed. Sometimes they are state-sponsored or at least state-licensed, such as private eyes or security contractors. These are often authorized to carry weapons. Those investigators who are ordinary people are certainly not in ordinary situations. Unravelling horrific secrets will lead them either to fear for their lives or to want to take decisive action against

whom- or whatever is behind those secrets. One of the most natural decisions in such a situation is to arm oneself. People do not like feeling helpless. Ignoring worldly defences like guns, knives, or pepper spray means ignoring human nature. Investigators should not be faulted for falling back on tools that they know and understand. Whether those tools help is a different question entirely ... More than one investigator had to eventually resort to a 9-mm retirement plan.

As it says in *Cthulhu Now*: “... firepower alone is capable of solving few investigatorial problems.” That is certainly true. However, over the course of an investigation, some problems can often only be solved with superior firepower, or at least it helps a lot. *Call of Cthulhu* wisely observes that “if gangsters and foreign spies are common features in a campaign, all the investigators probably carry concealed weapons for self-defence. The number of devastating weapons floating about ... practically demands sidearms.” It would be foolish indeed to attend “A Night at the Opera” unarmed. Obtaining armaments, even heavy weaponry, against an ordinary or supernatural threat is a recurring feature in horror literature and films – in some of H.P. Lovecraft’s stories, even the professors take up arms!

This book aims to aid the Keeper in providing combat-related realism. It examines and expands the rules for the use of firearms and other weapons. In a few instances, this means ignoring rules found in official books, but in general the optional rules described here are based on published material, gathering them together and improving realism. Just like detailing politics or

police procedures can help to immerse the players into the setting, so can detailing the kind of weapons that their investigators carry and how to use them. There is a lot of detail on the use and proliferation of many guns and gadgets, allowing the Keeper to arm investigators (and their opponents) in a realistic way – whether they are ordinary men stumbling upon a local Horror, private eyes following a suspicious trail to the Unspeakable, or government agents unravelling a terrible Secret.



REALISM

By approaching the weird narrative with extreme realism, the indispensable framework of credibility is more likely to be achieved, for if everything in the story appears to be natural and believable, the unnatural event will tend to be perceived as a departure from expected reality occurring in a real world. This sort of tale is bound to be more disturbing psychologically ...

– Dirk Mosig, "Lovecraft: The Dissonance Factor in Imaginative Literature" (1979)

Call of Cthulhu games set in the modern day profit particularly from a high level of realism or, more accurately, plausible verisimilitude. Unlike the comforting distance of historic settings, the world of today is so much closer and realer to the *players*. The more realistic the world is in which the investigators struggle towards their often untimely and horrible end, the more unreal and thus terrifying and sanity-threatening will be their encounters with the Unknown. Nevertheless some players insist that realism complicates the game and thus threatens the atmosphere. This is not necessarily so. Used effectively, realism *can* be the Keeper's friend.

This certainly applies to combat as one of the predominant ways to model action and conflict in *Call of Cthulhu*. Unlike the carefully choreographed fights in cinema, *real* combat is confusing, frightening, and often deadly. Investigators are likely to be stunned by naked violence, to cower in fear behind cover, to overcome their panic through training and sheer courage, to suffer gruesome injuries, and even to die – sometimes in vain, sometimes by gloriously giving their lives for others, often needlessly and even haphazardly. Those who survive are likely to be scarred for life, physically and mentally.

PAGE REFERENCES

It's just as well for the Librarian ... he might have ended up a thousand pages thick and crammed with weapons specifications.

– Terry Pratchett, *The Last Continent* (1998)

This book has been written as a companion to Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu, Sixth Edition* (2005), but will work with other editions. Frequent reference is made to the *1920s Investigator's Companion* (2007) and the *1990s Handbook* (1995), as well as the *Keeper's Companion* (2000) and *Keeper's Companion 2* (2002). Various other supplements are also referenced, in particular *Delta Green* (1997), *Delta Green: Countdown* (1999), *Delta Green: Eyes Only* (2007), *Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity* (2010), *The Laundry* (2010), and *The Laundry: Agent's Handbook* (2011). Some of these books were written for older editions of the basic rules, which occasionally make adjustments necessary.

Referenced films marked with a delta (Δ) feature Mythos content, or at least some occult or supernatural theme.

Confusion

All this data presents a curious picture to those who are unfamiliar either with the psychological realities of a gunfight or with firearms. It shows that although the vast majority of officer-involved shootings take place at extreme close range – often within the length of the officer's arm – the majority of shots will miss their target.

– Chris McNab, *Deadly Force* (2009)

Combat is chaotic. Unless caught in the open in the unlikely event of a *High Noon*-style pistol duel, the participants will often find it difficult to even locate their opponent due to darkness, adrenaline-induced tunnel vision, or concealed ambushers. Gunshots are extremely loud, making communication difficult or impossible. Adrenaline reduces fine motor skills, causing an investigator to drop his pistol while drawing it, fumble with reloading his shotgun, or prevent him from hitting anything even though he is a good shot on a quiet range.

The Keeper can enforce this confusion by employing the rules to their maximum:

▲ Investigators will often be caught by surprise or will try to surprise others. Typical situations include a shot from a pistol hidden in a coat pocket, a sniper shot from a concealed position, a burst of submachine gun fire from a passing automobile, a military ambush using an emplaced machine gun, etc. Employ a **Resistance Table** roll between the surprising attacker's **Conceal**, **Hide**, or **Sneak** (as applicable), and the surprised defender's **Listen** or **Spot Hidden**, to find out whether the surprise works. Divide the skills by 5 (rounding up), to get the active and passive characteristics. If the roll fails, apply the penalties outlined under "Surprise" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 59) to the defender.

▲ Require **Spot Hidden** rolls to locate opponents, especially in broken terrain such as woods and jungles, but also in many urban situations where shooters can snipe from cellars, upper-story windows, automobiles, etc. Enemies that cannot be located cannot be attacked.

▲ Most fights, even those *not* involving creatures of the night, occur in low-light conditions. These will make the **Spot Hidden** rolls noted above even more difficult. See "Shooting in Darkness" (p. 22) for the problems and solutions.

▲ Once the fighting starts, many participants experience perceptual distortions like tunnel vision and auditory exclusion. The Keeper could halve all **Spot Hidden** and **Listen** rolls that are *not* related to the opponent(s) identified by the investigator prior to starting combat. This does not impede his combat skills, but makes it difficult to notice anything else going on around him. This could even work to the investigator's advantage, in having him ignore something that might otherwise require a **SAN** check, at least for the duration of the fight ...

▲ Taking cover in a firefight is both natural instinct and a sound tactic. In contrast to the statements under "Partial Concealment" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 60), it matters a lot whether an opponent is partially hidden. The smaller the (visible) target, the more difficult it is to hit him. The Keeper should at least halve the attacker's **firearms skill** roll if the target is partially concealed – but note that many firearms will blast right *through* cover, including furniture, doors, walls, and automobiles (p. 26). If such a halved roll misses, the shooter can make a **Luck** roll to see whether the shot hit the target through the cover – if it penetrates the **Armour Value**. A similar solution is offered by "Cover" (*The Laundry*, p. 59). For a different approach that specifies how much of the target is covered, see "Taking Cover" (*Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity*, p. 291).



▲ Many shooters lose their cool in a shootout and shoot faster and more often than is required or even advantageous. Reasons for this include excitement, adrenaline, fear, lack of training, limited visibility, etc. In combat, it is quite difficult to keep track of the number of shots fired, and it is often hard to assess the results of the shots – whether the target was hit at all or whether a hit has the desired effect. The Keeper could rule that unless the investigator is a "gunfighter" who is "good to go," he will always fire the maximum number of shots allowed by his "Rate of Fire" (p. 49). At the beginning of an engagement, the Keeper could even require a **POW*5** roll for shooters to keep their heads. Failure means a shooter fires "Unaimed Shots" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 63) at twice his ROF but 1/5 his **firearms skill** – until the fight ends, he runs out of ammunition, or he succeeds with a halved **POW*5** roll to get himself under control again, at which point he resumes shooting normally. He can repeat the roll once per combat round. This has the realistic result that many investigators will quickly expend their ammunition, likely without hitting much. The definition of "gunfighter" includes anyone who has taken part in at least a couple of real shootouts. Combat veterans count, as might untested, but highly-trained SWAT officers or special ops soldiers; but most police officers or ordinary military personnel probably do not – let alone civilians, including many criminals. Keeper and player should decide on this while creating the investigator as part of his "Deep Background" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 50).

▲ All these rules and penalties do not only apply to the investigators, but to their opponents as well! Untrained cultists will ineffectively spray bullets, hardened criminals will strike in a moment of surprise, and enemy special forces will take advantage of the cover of darkness.

Fright

*Fear of death and injury is **not** the only, or even the major, cause of psychiatric casualties in combat. That is not to say that there is not some wisdom in this common understanding of battle, but the whole truth is far more complex and horrible. This is also not to suggest that the carnage and death of battle are not horrible and that the fear of violent death and injury is not a traumatic thing ... There are deeper underlying causes for the psychiatric casualties suffered by soldiers in combat. Resistance to overt aggressive confrontation, in addition to the fear of death and injury, is responsible for much of the trauma and stress on the battlefield.*

– Dave Grossman, *On Killing* (1995)

Seeing people getting injured can be traumatic. It is not even necessary for anybody to get hurt – the sheer shock of having to fight for your life can be enough. There is good argument for requiring a SAN roll every time an investigator takes part in a real fight – which can certainly be defined as an unnerving or horrifying situation (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 75).

The SAN cost for combat can be set at 0/1 if nothing happens except for the adrenaline rush and a lot of shots being fired, up to 0/1D6 for seeing a friend killed. For suggestions of the SAN costs for killing people, see “Murder” (*Delta Green: Eyes Only*, p. 138). Failure typically indicates the investigator freezes up, an occurrence that is common in people unprepared for combat – even soldiers and police officers, who are ostensibly trained for combat, can suffer from paralysis, fainting, panic, etc. See “Short Temporary Insanity” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 83).

The rules under “Getting Used to Awfulness” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 78) certainly apply. There are several ways to use this callousness in the game:



- ▲ A soldier, policeman, or criminal who has “been there, done that,” and is used to violence does not have to roll unless a reasonable interval has passed between incidents. See “1920s Occupations: Special” (*1920s Investigator’s Companion*, p. 19).
- ▲ If the Keeper does not want to give out such an advantage for free, any investigator who is supposed to have gotten used to violence prior to play (at the creation of the investigator) should deduct the maximum amount of SAN cost from such experiences (e.g., -1 SAN for combat, -4 SAN for having killed in self-defence, -6 SAN for having seen a friend killed, etc.). The player should decide on the details of the situation as part of his “Deep Background” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 50). This is particularly fitting for war veterans or police officers who have been involved in shooting incidents.
- ▲ More flexibly, the Keeper could not allow investigators to get used to violence at all, and instead require a SAN check from all investigators, but allow them to add half of their highest combat skill increase over Base Chance to the SAN roll (round up). Suitably trained and motivated fighters are often less affected. This has no effect on Mythos-related SAN rolls!

EXAMPLE: *Karl Knight has SAN 60 and Handgun 75% (increased by +55 skill points). He can add $55 / 2 = 28$ to his SAN roll, for $60 + 28 = 88$.*

A failed SAN check can result in temporary or permanent psychological damage. This is called a “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) or “combat stress reaction” (CSR). Statistically, one in five participants in violent encounters of any kind eventually suffer from psychological problems, ranging from instantaneous breakdown to nightmares that only manifest years later. Acknowledging this, many militaries and law enforcement agencies have trauma management programmes. For example, FBI agents are encouraged to take up to 5 days administrative leave after a shooting, and can request to be reassigned to a different squad; the Bureau’s behavioural science unit is constantly developing means to make this easier on agents.

See “Mental Disorders” (*Call of Cthulhu*, pp. 128-132) for applicable afflictions. For a detailed description of common issues and treatments of trauma as well as self-medications, see “Stress Disorders” (*Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity*, pp. 295-299). Common consequences of stress disorders are “Addictions (Substance-Related Disorders)” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 130). Of course, mixing guns and alcohol (or other drugs) is a recipe for disaster. The Keeper should always assign appropriate skill penalties to intoxicated investigators (*Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity*, pp. 298-299).