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Chapter One

Introduction

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

—H.P. Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu"



Introduction



Welcome to the *Call of Cthulhu Investigator Handbook*!

Call of Cthulhu is a game full of secrets, mysteries, and horror. Playing the role of a steadfast investigator, you will travel to strange and dangerous places, uncover foul plots, and stand against the terrors of the night. You will encounter sanity-blasting entities, monsters, and insane cultists. Within strange and forgotten tomes of lore you will find secrets that man was not meant to know.

You and your companions may very well decide the fate of the world...

Call of Cthulhu is a horror roleplaying game based on the writings of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. Lovecraft penned a tremendous body of work during the 1920s and 1930s concerning both horrors from beyond and from within. Following his death in 1937, Lovecraft's stories of cosmic horror have grown in reputation and stature, and today he is recognized as a major American horror story writer of the twentieth century, influencing numerous authors, film directors, and amassing a huge following of devoted fans. Indeed Lovecraft himself could now be considered a cult figure in his own right. Lovecraft's fiction ranges from science fiction to gothic horror and into nihilistic cosmic terror—perfect material on which to base a roleplaying game.

Lovecraft's most famous invention has become known as the Cthulhu Mythos, a series of stories sharing common plot elements such as certain mythical books of arcane lore and alien godlike entities. The Cthulhu Mythos fired the imagination of other authors, mostly protégés and friends of Lovecraft, and soon they were adding to this complex

mythology, further advancing its concepts and constituent parts. Today "Cthulhu" stories are still being written (and filmed) by the heirs to Lovecraft's literary legacy.

Do not be concerned if you've never read one of Lovecraft's stories or don't know anything about the Cthulhu Mythos; such information will unfold during the game. A lot of the fun is to be found in discovering secrets and unraveling the mysteries set up by the Keeper of Arcane Lore, who "referees" the game.

About this Book

This book has been written for people who will be playing the roles of investigators in *Call of Cthulhu* games, and contains rules for creating investigator characters and a guide to playing, which includes information for games set in the era of H.P. Lovecraft's stories—the 1920s—as well as contemporary settings.

As well as this book, you will need gaming dice, pencils, notepaper, and some friends—one person must have the *Call of Cthulhu Keeper Rulebook* and act as the Keeper of Arcane Lore for the game.

Purpose of the Game

The aim of playing *Call of Cthulhu* is to have fun with your friends as you explore and create a Lovecraftian story. Players take the role of intrepid investigators of the unknown ("investigators"), attempting to seek out, understand, and eventually destroy the horrors, mysteries, and secrets of the Cthulhu Mythos. A game moderator, known as the Keeper of Arcane Lore ("Keeper"), is necessary for this game, and his or her role is, within the rules of the game, to set up situations for the players to confront.

The investigators need not be anything at all like the people who play them. Indeed, it is often more rewarding and enjoyable for players to create characters entirely unlike themselves: tough private eyes, rude taxi drivers, or sinisterly genteel occultists.

Most of the play is a verbal exchange. The Keeper sets the scene, describing the environment, the individuals, and encounters to the players. The players tell the Keeper what they intend their investigators to do. The Keeper then tells them whether they can do it, and, if not, what happens instead. In play the game takes the form of a group conversation with many twists and turns and fun on the way.

The game rules use dice to determine if an action succeeds or fails when a dramatic conflict presents itself; for example, whether your investigators are able to leap out of the way of giant statue that is about to crash down upon their heads! The rules describe how to decide the outcome of such conflicts.

Read Me First— How to Use this Book

If you are new to *Call of Cthulhu*, we recommend you read this Introduction all the way through (especially the **Example of Play** on pages 13—15), followed by *The Dunwich Horror* story by H.P. Lovecraft (page 18), before reading through the rest of the book. However, if you are already familiar with H.P. Lovecraft and previous versions of the *Call of Cthulhu* game, you will probably want to jump straight in at **Chapter 3: Creating Investigators** and read on from there.

Cooperation and Competition

Gaming is a social pastime. If you want to use your imagination alone, you could simply read a book. However, be warned! When a number of people get together cooperatively, they build a communal fantasy far more interesting and imaginative than a single person could—and the joint effort results in an extremely fun and satisfying experience for all involved. Together you create and develop a story in which each of your investigators plays a leading role!

Whether or not investigators cooperate, the players should. Investigators may be played as nice people, as devious brutes, or however the players wish. Most of the entertainment of the game can be found in the ingenuity of players' roleplaying and in-character conversations.

Working cooperatively together, along with the Keeper, builds an enjoyable and understandable game world within which to play. The rewards of cooperation are great. Remember, the object of all of this is to have fun!

Winners and Losers

In *Call of Cthulhu*, there are no winners and losers in the standard competitive sense. Play is usually cooperative, the participants working together to attain a common goal—usually to discover and foil some nefarious plot being perpetrated by the minions of some dark cult or secret society. The opposition that the investigators face will often be alien or hostile—controlled by an impartial Keeper. It's the Keeper's job to run the game and they will have prepared a scenario (either a published adventure or one written by the Keeper) for you and the other players to play through.

Winning in such a situation depends on whether the investigators succeed in their goal. Losing is what happens if they fail to achieve their goal (though they may be able to try again later). During the game investigators may become injured, suffer sanity-shattering experiences, or even die! However, someone has to make a stand against the cosmic horrors of the universe, and the death of a single investigator matters little if it means repulsing Cthulhu's master plan to enslave the Earth!

Investigators who survive will gain power from arcane volumes of forgotten lore, knowledge of horrendous monsters, and advancement in their skills as they become more experienced. Thus the players' investigators will continue to progress, until their demise or retirement—whichever comes first.

Example of Play

If you've never played a roleplaying game before, you might still be wondering just how it all works. The following example of play provides an illustration of a typical gaming session. Don't worry about some of the terms used, as you'll become better acquainted with them as you begin to play the game.

Paula, Joe, Cathy, and Arnold are the players, each of them controlling an investigator. Garrie is in the role of Keeper and is running the game (leading the story and controlling the non-player characters and monsters in the game). Notice that though the players have different ways of referring to their characters, Garrie the Keeper easily sorts out their statements and feels no need for consistency. We join the game in mid-session...

(GARRIE) KEEPER: You have arrived just before closing time at the library. There's hardly anyone around. In fact everyone seems to be leaving. You notice that a female librarian is sitting behind the checking desk. Well guys, what's your plan?

PAULA: I want to speak to the librarian. I think the rest of you should wait here.

All the investigators agree to Paula's plan.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: You make your way to the desk. The woman behind it appears to be stamping a pile of books. She is middle-aged, wears large spectacles, and has an annoyed look on her face.

PAULA: Err, ahem. I clear my throat to get her attention and give her a winning smile.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: She looks up at you with an even more annoyed look on her face. She stares at you and says, "It's closing time you know."

PAULA: "I'm very sorry, but I wonder if you can help me," Paula asks in a polite tone, with smile on her lips. "Can you direct me to the local history section? It really is most urgent."

JOE: Okay, while Paula's investigator is talking to the woman at the desk, I'm going to look for the section on occult books.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Just hang on a moment Joe; I'll get to you in a second. Paula, she winces and points her hand to the big stack of shelves two rows down. She then says, "Down there. You've got ten minutes and then I'm locking up for the night."

Right Joe, you look about at the signs and see that there is a section called "Mysteries and the Supernatural" down the aisle. You want to go look?



In Call of Cthulhu, the players play investigators

JOE: Sure I do!

CATHY: My private eye, Jake, is going to wait near the main entrance and keep an eye out.

ARNOLD: I'm going with Joe.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Paula, you get to the local history section. What do you want to look for?

PAULA: I want to see if I can find anything on the Cult of the Green Flame, and also if there's a history of incidents at the local graveyard.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Okay. Can you give me a Library Use roll?

PAULA: Right. *Paula rolls two ten-sided dice.* I rolled 34, under my Library Use skill of 40. What did I find?

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Cool. You search over the shelves and come across a book called "Local Legends and Ghosts." It looks like it has a whole chapter on Burke's Cemetery. You'll need to check it out soon as your ten minutes are nearly up.

JOE: So have me and Arnold found anything? Shall we make rolls?

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Well, just as you arrive at the mysteries section you see a strange-looking man in a trench coat. He appears to

be examining an old book. He suddenly notices you and quickly disappears down the end of the stack.

ARNOLD: He's up to something! Did I recognize him from the bar we visited last night?

(GARRIE) KEEPER: It's hard to say as you didn't get a good look at him. However you probably think there's some resemblance.

ARNOLD: Right, I'm sure it's the guy that's been following us! I'm running after him!

JOE: Yes! Off we go!

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Okay. I'm going to cut to Paula and then back to you guys. Paula, are you heading to the checkout desk?

PAULA: Yes I want the librarian to issue me the book.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Fine. Arnold and Joe, you run round the back of the shelves and the man is waiting for you. He's holding the old book and there's a twinkle in his eye, and a sort of grin on his face.

ARNOLD: I didn't expect that. I hold up and look at the man. What's he doing with the book?

JOE: Can I make a Psychology roll to see if I understand his intent?

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Yes, make the roll. Arnold, he's just holding the book firmly in both hands.

JOE: I made it; I rolled under half my Psychology skill.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Well he looks like he wants to say something to you. He gestures with the book for you to come closer.

JOE: Okay, I move towards him, "How can I help you?"

ARNOLD: I'm waiting back to see what happens.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Cut to Paula. The librarian checks out your book and pointedly asks you and your friends to leave as she's locking up now.

PAULA: Fine. I go to look for Joe and Arnold.

CATHY: Is Jake aware of what's going on with Arnold and Joe?

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Not really. You do see Paula's investigator go off in the direction they went.

CATHY: I'm going to follow Paula.

(GARRIE) KEEPER: Right, Joe. As you edge closer to the man you begin to notice a fishy smell. He looks at you with his big watery eyes and says, *(the Keeper drops his voice here)* "I saw you last night asking questions that don't concern you. I advise you to stop poking your noses into places they don't belong."

JOE: "Urgh! I'm not scared by you! What's it to you who we talk to anyway?"



What are you doing in the restricted section!?