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Issue 1
October 2018

Bayt al Azif

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Maria Nguyen's cover was derived from HP Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu*.

She was inspired to create her illustration from the idea of Great Old Ones living among people...

...whether they know it or not.

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New issues of *Bayt al Azif* are published when the stars are right.

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for

John Scott Tynes

who knew the gate first

"It was the first issue, so I had to write a lot of it myself, okay?"

- JST, 1993

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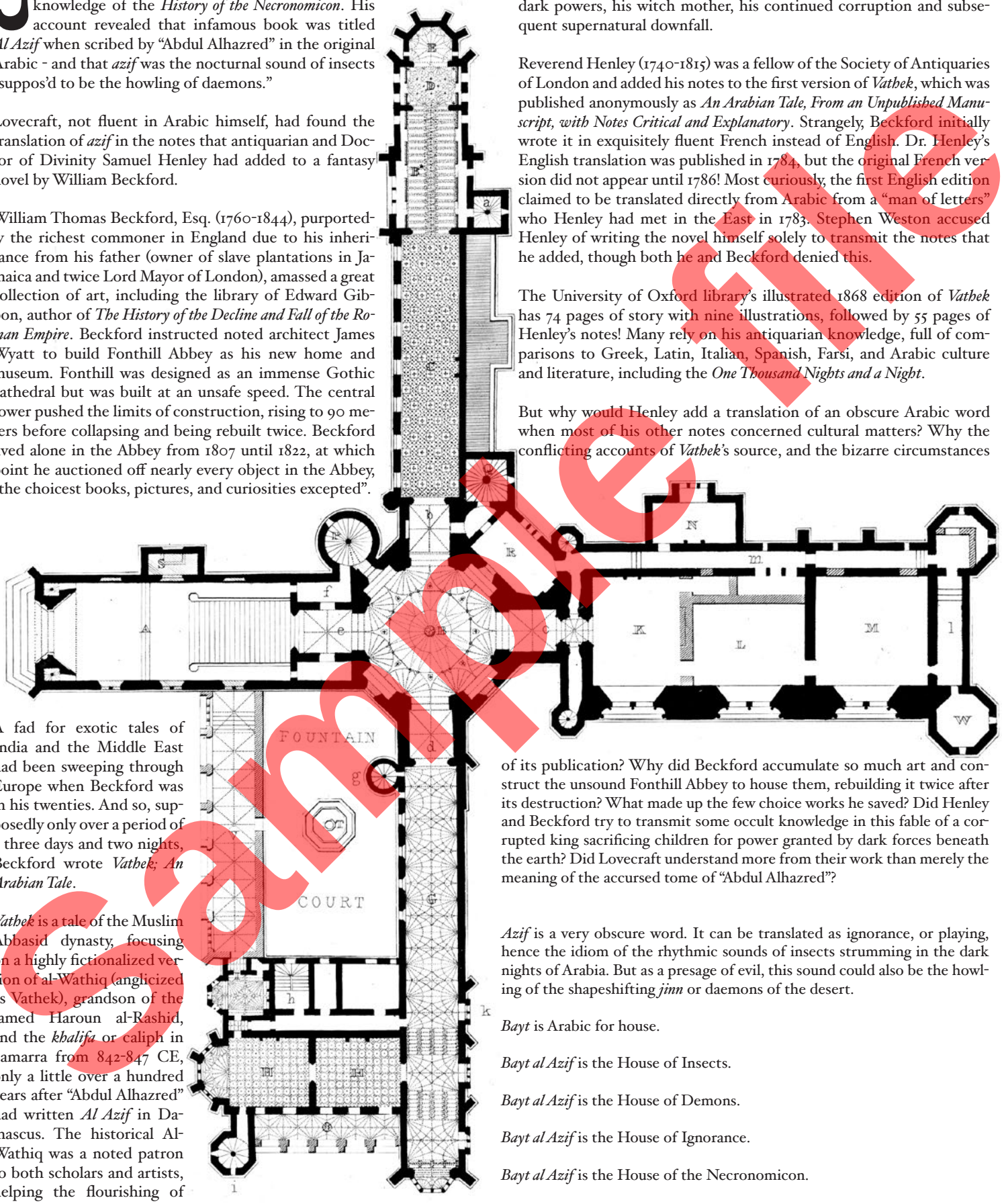
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Houses of the Unholy

In 1927, H.P. Lovecraft finally put to paper his knowledge of the *History of the Necronomicon*. His account revealed that infamous book was titled *Al Azif* when scribed by "Abdul Alhazred" in the original Arabic - and that *azif* was the nocturnal sound of insects "suppos'd to be the howling of daemons."

Lovecraft, not fluent in Arabic himself, had found the translation of *azif* in the notes that antiquarian and Doctor of Divinity Samuel Henley had added to a fantasy novel by William Beckford.

William Thomas Beckford, Esq. (1760-1844), purportedly the richest commoner in England due to his inheritance from his father (owner of slave plantations in Jamaica and twice Lord Mayor of London), amassed a great collection of art, including the library of Edward Gibbon, author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Beckford instructed noted architect James Wyatt to build Fonthill Abbey as his new home and museum. Fonthill was designed as an immense Gothic cathedral but was built at an unsafe speed. The central tower pushed the limits of construction, rising to 90 meters before collapsing and being rebuilt twice. Beckford lived alone in the Abbey from 1807 until 1822, at which point he auctioned off nearly every object in the Abbey, "the choicest books, pictures, and curiosities excepted".



A fad for exotic tales of India and the Middle East had been sweeping through Europe when Beckford was in his twenties. And so, supposedly only over a period of a three days and two nights, Beckford wrote *Vathek; An Arabian Tale*.

Vathek is a tale of the Muslim Abbasid dynasty, focusing on a highly fictionalized version of al-Wathiq (anglicized as Vathek), grandson of the famed Haroun al-Rashid, and the *khalifa* or caliph in Samarra from 842-847 CE, only a little over a hundred years after "Abdul Alhazred" had written *Al Azif* in Damascus. The historical Al-Wathiq was a noted patron to both scholars and artists, helping the flourishing of the arts under the Abbasids.

Beckford's fictional version of Vathek instead describes his pact with dark powers, his witch mother, his continued corruption and subsequent supernatural downfall.

Reverend Henley (1740-1815) was a fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London and added his notes to the first version of *Vathek*, which was published anonymously as *An Arabian Tale, From an Unpublished Manuscript, with Notes Critical and Explanatory*. Strangely, Beckford initially wrote it in exquisitely fluent French instead of English. Dr. Henley's English translation was published in 1784, but the original French version did not appear until 1786! Most curiously, the first English edition claimed to be translated directly from Arabic from a "man of letters" who Henley had met in the East in 1783. Stephen Weston accused Henley of writing the novel himself solely to transmit the notes that he added, though both he and Beckford denied this.

The University of Oxford library's illustrated 1868 edition of *Vathek* has 74 pages of story with nine illustrations, followed by 55 pages of Henley's notes! Many rely on his antiquarian knowledge, full of comparisons to Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, Farsi, and Arabic culture and literature, including the *One Thousand Nights and a Night*.

But why would Henley add a translation of an obscure Arabic word when most of his other notes concerned cultural matters? Why the conflicting accounts of *Vathek*'s source, and the bizarre circumstances of its publication? Why did Beckford accumulate so much art and construct the unsound Fonthill Abbey to house them, rebuilding it twice after its destruction? What made up the few choice works he saved? Did Henley and Beckford try to transmit some occult knowledge in this fable of a corrupted king sacrificing children for power granted by dark forces beneath the earth? Did Lovecraft understand more from their work than merely the meaning of the accursed tome of "Abdul Alhazred"?

Azif is a very obscure word. It can be translated as ignorance, or playing, hence the idiom of the rhythmic sounds of insects strumming in the dark nights of Arabia. But as a presage of evil, this sound could also be the howling of the shapeshifting *jinn* or daemons of the desert.

Bayt is Arabic for house.

Bayt al Azif is the House of Insects.

Bayt al Azif is the House of Demons.

Bayt al Azif is the House of Ignorance.

Bayt al Azif is the House of the Necronomicon.

Welcome, friends.

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Sacrifices

Welcome everyone! I'm Jared, the editor. It's a real pleasure to present the first issue of Bayt al Azif *to you! This has been a dream of mine for a long time. We really hope you enjoy this issue, and we would love to hear from you, both what you think and what you want to see in future issues. What did you like in this issue? Is there something you want to see more of?*

We'd also like to know two things from our dear readers: do you like the idea of shorter issues coming out more often, or bigger issues infrequently? And what era or eras of Cthulhu are your favorite (and that you'd like to see more scenarios or information about)?

We are also open to submissions for issue 2, so send your comments and thoughts to sacrifices@baytalazif.com *or*

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We sent previews of this issue out to a few folks to get their reactions. Here are some of their responses.



Fonthill Abbey, View of the West, & North Fronts. From the End of the Clerk's Walk by John Rutter

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I enjoyed Zach Howard's article on the history of the Cthulhu mythos in an early *Deities & Demigods*. It's always interesting to learn more about the history of our hobby, and I'd like to see more articles like this in the future. Also, kudos to Maria Nguyen for the beautiful cover art.

Brian

Thanks Brian, Maria's other art is equally astounding, her website dtnart.com has more. I was particularly struck by her use of color. Plus she has released some zines about horror manga which keep selling out. Print more Maria!

There's been a real growth of research on the early days of roleplaying games from a historical perspective, too. If you haven't read them yet, I recommend the dense but astoundingly thorough Playing at the World *by Jon Peterson (Unreason Press) for just how roleplaying games developed, and* Designers & Dragons *by Shannon Appelcline (Evil Hat Productions) for the decade by decade history of the companies behind it all. A recent update to the history of Chaosium was just posted online by Shannon.*

Dear Jared:
Thanks for sharing an advance copy of the first issue of *Bayt al Azif*! I found the solo adventure, "Overdue," a fun diversion from my own library researches into my genealogy.

One of the things I've learned, through correspondence with various amateur historians and volunteer archivists, is that my mother's family owns an old farm outside Pawtuxet! I'm going up there to check it out next week, and plan to bring a printed, bound copy of the magazine so I have something to read. I won't be bringing my phone, so the bullies from "Double Dare" won't be able to text me while I'm there!

Best regards,

Charles D. Ward
Providence, RI

Thanks Charles, I'm glad you had time to check out the PDF, but I hope you enjoy the print version even more. It's pretty cool when you have a vacation and can combine some good gaming with it, I've heard of several groups who make gaming getaways like that. I think Cthulhu RPGs can be especially enjoyable with the setting of a remote camping trip, for example. Good reading material is always a must though, you can only relax doing nothing for so long before some games should be started! I know "Overdue" isn't quite accurate to the layout of Miskatonic's library but I'm glad you enjoyed it while working.

Jared et al,

Congratulations on an informative and beautiful first issue of *Bayt al Azif*! As a casual Cthultist, I particularly enjoyed your "How to Play" piece with advice as to how to get started playing *Call of Cthulhu*. My own introduction was very informal, having been thrown in (dragged? led blindly down a dark path?) as a first-timer to a one-off home-brew scenario at a gaming convention some years ago. Despite my lack of preparation, I found that my previous RPG experience – primarily in the world of online MUDs – was enough to let me quickly adapt to the system. As an individual whose real-life work commitments prohibit participation in an ongoing campaign, I appreciate that the system emphasizes story and flavor over competition and statistics. Familiarity with the Lovecraftian universe is not strictly necessary for players with excellent imaginations, but your advice to read at least some Cthulhu lore is excellent for engendering a unified sense of dread among players encountering the supernatural during a scenario.

Catherine Ramen's article "Rebooting Campaigns with a Modern Sensibility" also struck a chord. Today's gaming group is increasingly and joyously diverse in terms of gender, race, and sexuality. Adhering to Lovecraft canon can be particularly problematic in such a group owing to inherent racism as well as tropes and stereotypes typical of the era in which he wrote his stories. In my own gaming group this year, several women almost quit a scenario because of glaring sexism underlying the creation of the female roles for that game. In the process, the Keepers were able to identify their male-centered attitudes and to make appro-

Sample file

priate adjustments based on our feedback. It was a difficult exchange and I am proud of our group for having worked through it. The resulting scenario was rich and full of unexpected twists owing to this collaboration and, as they say, good times were had by all.

Looking forward to your next issue!

Tara
Rocky River, Ohio

Thanks Tara! Most Cthulhu RPGs run well as generic horror, but it is important to have some sort of mutual idea on the inspiration for all this, or at least the game you are playing. (I was in one game that totally fell apart because a few characters didn't match the style of the others.) There is a lot to be gained from reading some set of Cthulhu lore as a group, but I know that Lovecraft is problematic to a lot of readers. I'd also recommend some modern takes on the mythos, especially Lovecraft Country *by Matt Ruff (Harper) and* The Ballad of Black Tom *by Victor LaValle (Tor), and on the RPG side of things,* Harlem Unbound *by Chris Spivey (Darker Hue Studios). Catherine's recounting of her* Post-Modern Masks of Nyarlathotep *is really worthwhile in that regard too. But I think you identified the real crux of it, most gamers are good people, and everyone working together can always make your game, and gaming in general, better. Really glad to hear it turned out so well for your group!*

I agree that Cthulhu RPGs work really well for both beginners and more serious roleplayers compared to many other games, due to the classic tropes of horror, and the simplicity of the rule concepts, which I think allows for more roleplaying. We'll try to get the next issue to you soon!

I found her in college. Her name was Madeleine Emerson. She was a linguistics professor, equally capable with a dusty tome or a derringer. I was nervous, inexperienced, unsure of the rules but ready to play. Despite our connection, nothing ever came of us, and yet, all these years later, I still think of what could have been.

Almost two decades later, Diana Starr came into my life. She had been a Olympic-level gymnast whose career had been cut short by an unknown malady. The rumor rags touted stories ranging from addiction and rehab to mental breakdowns and suicide watches. Only one source, a Massachusetts high school newspaper, reported the true story: Diana's bloodline birthright had emerged, and she had been banned from the sport for wielding her psychic powers against her competitors. After years of honing her powers and her public image, she re-emerged on the regional talk show circuit with former bodybuilder Maxx Power, her co-star on Starr/Power!, the hit sensation that blended sex appeal, fitness, and new-age philosophy. Diana had potential that I was ready to tap, but again, something kept us apart.

Role-playing games have always appealed to me, but I never really found an outlet for that passion until I got married and became a part of my husband's gaming group. Our home circle has blossomed over the years, and we've experimented with many systems--*Pathfinder*, various versions of *D&D*, *Exalted*, *Savage Worlds*, *Through the Breach*, and others. However, we never really took a chance on *Call of Cthulhu*, in part because the horror aspect held little appeal for the majority of our group.

Then, in the summer of 2012, fate stepped in and changed my life. My gaming group made plans to travel to Columbus, Ohio for Origins. As I scanned the RPG options, I found what had tantalized me for years, what I had longed for and never quite managed to play: *Call of Cthulhu* and Rogue Cthulhu... or as my friends now call them, Cheater Game. So I enjoy the campaigns I play with my group throughout the year, knowing that I'll spend five days every summer cheating on them in a dark room filled with strangers who have now become friends through the years.

In the past I had made characters for various *CoC* games, but these campaigns never got off the ground, leaving these women to languish in my mind. At Origins, however, scores of Rogue Cthulhu scenarios and characters beckoned me with their come-hither looks. Initially, I only registered for a few games, but soon I found myself spending almost every session in that darkly-lit room, waiting to see where and with whom I'd end up next.

With Rogue Cthulhu, I've rarely been disappointed. There is always something that will satisfy me. I've experienced so many different people--a geeky computer programmer, an orphan from the Baltimore streets, a nurse and multiple patients in mental institutions, a Wild West deputy, a Miskatonic University professor, and a producer of a hit television series, just to name a few. I've lost my mind a few times, including a 99 Sanity roll at a crucial moment in a session of Angela Souder's *After the Prom* which left me a raving lunatic. I've even died some glorious deaths. [Point of interest--I was one of the four who fell to their deaths in Byron Wingate's scenario *End of the Stair*!]

Reading the first issue of *Bayt al Azif* has opened my eyes to the larger world of Lovecraftian role-playing, and I fear that my desires may no longer be fulfilled by my summer fling with Cheater Game. I think I want a more serious relationship with *Call of Cthulhu*.

I hope my husband's okay with that.

Chantel K. (to protect my anonymity)
Saltsburg, PA

Managing your relationship with gaming is a treacherous course, for they always seem to demand more. It is interesting which games appeal to different groups. My regular group doesn't often play Cthulhu games, but right around Halloween the mood is always ripe enough to catch their interest for a single adventure, and it's now become somewhat of a tradition. Sounds like you need to run your gaming group through a Cthulhu adventure yourself! Maybe Emerson and Starr could make their triumphant returns as pre-generated characters for your friends to run. Then you can drag them all to Origins...

It was real pleasure to interview the Rogue Cthulhu crew, as they really did welcome me into the Cthulhu circuit at conventions. I hope in future issues we can interview some of the other fan groups that run the ever-popular (and often sold out) Cthulhu games at other conventions.

Sir—
I was pleased to find a copy of *Bayt al Azif* waiting for me upon my Return from a long and distant Voyage. The Curiosities and Amusements inside were well worth the ten Dollars advertised upon the cover — even though a Merchant, with any small Skill in Brokering, may purchase many Stone of Nut-meg, or any quantity of Essential Saltes of the highest Provenance, for such a Price!

I prithee send all subsequent Issues of your Magazine to me by Post with all Haste.

Charles D. Ward
Pawtuxet, RI

Thanks again Charles! I'm really glad you liked the print version too, that was a big part of my interest in starting this magazine, I miss the good old days of print gaming magazines showing up every month or so, especially in the mail! I don't currently foresee that we'll do a subscription service as you requested, since I'm not sure of the frequency that new issues will come out, but they will always be available to order on a case by case basis. Also, you can get Bayt al Azif *in several formats depending on price, from cheaper digital PDFs to a nice hardcover if you want to put it in with the highlights of your personal library.*

Finally, I'd like to thank all our contributors and playtasters. Enjoy the rest of the issue and please let us know what you think!

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The Whisperers by William Acheson

How to Play

by Jared Smith

Okay. Let's be upfront here. These are just *my* "suggestions" on how to learn to play Cthulhu RPGs (for free, even). If you disagree, or have better ideas, send them in for the next issue! (Contact info is in **Sacrifices** on page 3.) But the whole reason I'm writing this is that newcomers to Cthulhu RPGs seem to ask the same questions:

1. How should the game be run?
2. What scenario should we start with?

First, background is important to understand both the inspirations for the game and its tone, which can be very different from other RPGs. The person running the game *and* the players should read some Cthulhian horror stories. The titular *The Call of Cthulhu* by HP Lovecraft isn't the best for these purposes, I'd recommend trying some of Lovecraft's others instead:

- *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, following a lone protagonist discovering secrets in a small town
- *The Dunwich Horror*, where a group of professors and doctors investigate a strange backwoods family
- *At the Mountains of Madness*, about a team of researchers venturing into the unexplored parts of Antarctica

There are many other great stories from other writers, but these are a good start.

The themes that are important to take away from these stories for Cthulhu RPG play include:

- Discovering the secret "true" history of the world
- The horrific supernatural that is hidden around us
- Good preparation and research can help survive encounters with those supernatural things
- The confrontation of the human mind with some awful truths can be too much for their sanity to take
- Sometimes people die or are driven insane by these truths

These are the foundations of good Cthulhu RPGs. Make sure everyone agrees this is what they want to play. Just one person treating the premise like a joke or being disinterested can ruin it for everyone else.

The original game for Cthulhu RPGs is *Call of Cthulhu*, first published in 1981 by Chaosium, and now out in a revised 7th edition. There have since been many other Cthulhu RPGs, many of which introduce clever additions or revisions to the original concepts that can make a better game, including *Trail of Cthulhu* from Pelgrane Press (more focus on character motivation and mystery investigation), and *Delta Green* from Arc Dream Publishing (dark paranoid government agencies in the mode of *The X-Files*), but start with *Call of Cthulhu* from Chaosium. The new edition is really well put together, and it's still the most popular version so it's a good entry point to find players and likeminded enthusiasts.

For learning actual gameplay, first download the free scenario *Alone Against the Flames* from chaosium.com It's a solo adventure that one player can enjoy by simply choosing options as you go through the book. It also elegantly introduces aspects of the game rules for Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu RPG* in small sections as you read, so it is not overwhelming with too much information. I think it's a pretty fun introduction to the tone of adventures in the 1920s too, as well as some good Cthulhu horror ideas. Since it's a solo adventure, every player and the game master can try it out on their own too.

After everyone has tried that, there is a free download of *Call of Cthulhu 7th Edition - Quick-Start* rules on chaosium.com This book has the basic rules and concepts.

Once it's time to play as a group, start with a short, stand-alone, published scenario. There are literally hundreds of scenarios available from over the years, including some famous ones that are more ambitious, but a short, simple one that covers the themes above is the best place to start. The *Quick-Start* that you downloaded includes a classic one, *The Haunting*. Start with this scenario, which includes several "handouts" - literally things you print out and hand to the players at the appropriate moment. This includes newspaper articles the players might read, and strange symbols they might find. This is another aspect of Cthulhu RPGs that set them apart from other games. Handouts are not necessary to play the game, but a good set of handouts engages the players (not just their characters), and helps keep visual reminders of clues found during investigations. Plus they are awesome!

The Haunting has been around for a long time, so it has a lot of support from the community. Plus afterwards you will be able to compare your experience with many other players. There are several groups to join if you want to discuss the games, but first go to yog-sothoth.com - this fan website has free downloads of the handouts for *The Haunting* that look like real newspaper clippings.

Six pre-generated characters for *The Haunting* can be downloaded on our website. The *Quick-Start* has the rules to make your own characters too. Another difference to Cthulhu RPGs is that character creation is fast. If you need to make a new character due to your previous character resting in a sanitarium or a morgue, it won't take long to get back in the game.

Running the scenario itself should not get too caught up in the rules, which can be quite simple in the basics. The important things to remember are:

- Investigation and clue gathering is a major part of the game, especially at the beginning of a scenario
- Scares and horror will test the sanity of the characters
- Roll percentile dice equal to or less than skills, characteristics, and Sanity to succeed, roll above and fail
- The characters are normal people, not superheroes or tough warriors as in fantasy RPGs, so combat should be avoided until absolutely necessary, and injuries can incapacitate or kill characters very quickly
- Creepiness that affects the *players* will affect the actions of the characters too! Mood is very important to the game
- Sometimes going insane or failing to stop a monster can be more fun than defeating it!

Now that you have finished *The Haunting*, discuss what you want to do next. Players may wish to make new characters now that they realize what is important for this style of RPGs, or everyone might want to try adventures set in a different time. The 1920s and 1930s are a popular time frame for Cthulhu games, but a modern setting removes some unfamiliarity with what technology and such was around. (Lovecraft himself set most of his stories in his current times as "modern" stories, he just lived in the 1920s!) Or you can continue on with the survivors of *The Haunting*, with scarred characters who now know the horrific supernatural is real!

If you want to keep playing the *Call of Cthulhu* rules, pick up the *Call of Cthulhu: Keeper Rulebook* to learn the rest of the rules. This has all the rules you need to play, the *Investigator Handbook* has more options for players but isn't necessary. There are lots of other game systems and specific era settings from both Chaosium and lots of other publishers if you want to play in a different style. There are even *two* versions of the game where you can play as cats!

I hope this quick overview of how to play helps some new players out. I'd love to hear which of my suggestions helped, or what other advice new players found most useful. Good luck with your Sanity rolls!

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CthuReview 2017

by Dean Engelhardt

Editor's Note: The explosion in Cthulhu mythos roleplaying game material is both heartening and overwhelming. Luckily for us, the list of yearly releases has been compiled and commented on by Dean Engelhardt, of the excellent Cthulhu Reborn site that formats old free scenarios in a nice format, as well as Convicts & Cthulhu*, Lovecraftian horror set during the early penal days of Australia. Thanks for letting us share your review, Dean! Check out his work at CthulhuReborn.com*

So, normally at the end of each year I like to look back over the previous 12 months and reflect on all the things that have happened in the world of Lovecraftian tabletop RPGs — all the new products, Kickstarters, and so on. Looking back over 2017... there were a *lot* of things that happened in the Cthulhu gaming world. First, I'd like to try to sum up 2017 events relating to People and Companies (in particular licensees).

Cthulhu's People

In a community as small and tight-knit as the Lovecraftian gaming world, the most important element is people — and in particular the personalities whose passion for Lovecraftian games drives thing forward. And while 2017 was, generally a great year for drawing some of the most experienced Call of Cthulhu writers of the game's "golden era" back into print, it was also a year marked by some sad news.



In November, the passing of Carl T. Ford — the founder and long-time publisher of the *Dagon* Fanzine — was announced. While those new to the hobby may never have heard of *Dagon* or of Carl, I think it is fair to say that the Lovecraftian RPG world owes a huge debt to both of them. At the very beginning of *Call of Cthulhu*'s success, there really was no forum for fans to discuss the game, to publish their own scenarios and thoughts about rules, and to generally hone their skills as producers of game material. Semi-professional magazines like "*The Unspeakable Oath*" were still a glimmer in the eye of a few young fans, and even the concept of online discussion forums or communities was something akin to science-fiction. In that environment, the *Dagon* fanzine — an amateur publication, mimeographed and mailed out to subscribers — provided some extremely valuable "glue" to bind a nascent community together. If you've never skimmed an issue of this (now highly-collectible) mag, but are curious about what it contained, there are summaries of each of its 25 issues (1982-1990) available at yog-sothoth.com Several of the big names who went on to become major writers for *Call of Cthulhu* in the 1990s, first published in the pages of *Dagon*... and so its legacy as a fanzine cannot be underestimated. And neither can the importance of Carl's passion and dedication to tirelessly producing it, and bringing the *Call of Cthulhu* writing and playing world closer together. He will be missed by many.

Leaving aside the sad news about Carl Ford, 2017 was generally a very happy year when it comes to famous creators of *Call of Cthulhu* material — no less than four legends of the game all published new scenarios for the first time in many years. Perhaps the most notable of these was Kevin Ross, whose "old west" setting for *Call of Cthulhu — Down Darker Trails* — has been long in the making, and eagerly awaited by all those who knew of its existence. Here's hoping that Chaosium pushes forward quickly with the publication of the two follow-up books of scenarios and mini-campaigns that are still sitting in the shed. Ironically, Kevin's classic-era writing also seems to have received some renewed attention in 2017, with the highly-successful Sentinel Hill Press Kickstarter to re-publish his 1980s-era scenario "*The Dare*". So, who knows, perhaps we are on the brink of a (much-welcomed) Kevin Ross avalanche.

In a similar vein, Scott David Aniolowski, a close cohort of Kevin's and another extremely well-accomplished writer from the 1980s and 1990s had one of his older (yet previously unpublished) pieces released as part of a Kickstarter. The campaign, run by Golden Goblin Press, funded not only the release Scott's scenario *Cold Warning* but a few others as well (although those unlocked scenarios have yet to be released).

A surprising publication from Chaosium in 2017 was *Reign of Terror*, a French Revolution-era off-shoot of the *Horror on the Orient Express* 2e campaign. This was notable because it represents the first new writing for *Call of Cthulhu* by Mark Morrison, one of the most popular writers of the "golden age" of Chaosium's line, in many years.

Finally, Sandy Petersen, primary writer of the first few editions of the *Call of Cthulhu* rules also returned to the world of scenario writing thanks to *Petersen's Abominations*, a volume that was co-written by Mike Mason (based largely on the sketch notes Sandy had created to run these scenarios at conventions).

Companies

Perhaps the biggest single change that occurred in the world of Lovecraftian RPGs in 2017 came about as a result of Chaosium's radical re-writing of the landscape surrounding licensed *Call of Cthulhu* products. Hunter S. Thompson once wrote "When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro"... and the sentiment behind that quotation seem to resonate strongly with the changes that have reshaped Chaosium as a company in 2017.

To set some context: throughout most of its lifetime, the *Call of Cthulhu* line has supported some level of licensee model. This is basically a way for other companies to legally publish material for the game and even make some use of the core intellectual property contained within the game rules. Historically, Chaosium have approached licensing in a fairly laid-back way with most licenses giving the publishers freedom to create whatever they wanted within some pre-defined limits (usually this was a fixed number of product releases per year, to avoid any one company saturating the market). Because small publishers are typically cash-strapped, Chaosium introduced the notion that the "license fee" for using the Call of Cthulhu name could be paid in product — that is, a certain percentage of the print run would be supplied to Chaosium for them to sell via their web store. Licensee contracts usually allowed individual publishers to retain copyright in the material they had produced, providing they continued to pay the license fee (in books).

Fast forward to 2015, and Chaosium as a company found themselves on the brink of financial collapse (again)... and also heavily committed to deliver on not one, but two very large and expansive Kickstarter campaigns. To save the company — and also complete the Kickstarters — required an outside party to pretty much "buy out" Chaosium and its debts. That company was Moon Design, who to all intents-and-purposes are the "New Chaosium".

For the first year or two following the Chaosium buy-out, the new management focussed very heavily on finishing up the wayward Kickstarter campaigns, and to their credit they delivered to the satisfaction of most

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backers (eventually). With those heavy millstones lifted from their necks in late 2016, they started planning for how the company — and its licensees — should operate moving forward. This planning has lead to a few different announcements, and some knock-on effects.

The biggest single change has been the replacement of the previous (relatively "hands off") licensing model with one that has three different tiers:

- Larger companies can still secure a **full commercial license**; this allows them to publish books by paying a fixed % of profits (not product) to Chaosium. Such publishers are also permitted to run Kickstarter campaigns;
- Smaller companies can secure a **"Small Publisher" license** which has some hard limits on the maximum income that can be earned, a % profit payable to Chaosium, and a limited period for which the publisher can make money from their creation. Small publishers can't run Kickstarters;
- Individuals can create their own content and publish using a **"fan license"**, as long as they do not charge money and include a boiler-plate paragraph. Fans can't run Kickstarters.

For commercial licenses, the previously permissive approach to copyright, line management, and other moral rights has been significantly rewritten, with a focus on control and ownership falling to Chaosium. The notion of paying a licensee fee by product is no longer really viable or desirable for anyone (in part because of rising shipping costs), so has been dropped altogether.



To further complicate the picture (or, alternatively, to give people even more options), Chaosium also announced in December an entirely separate community for publishing original *Call of Cthulhu* material — the Miskatonic Repository. This community is based on similar successful online publication portals such as the "DM's Guild" for D&D5, and has its own set of terms and conditions.

Overall, the longer term impacts of these changes — whether good or ill — have largely yet to be felt. We've already written on our blog about some of the complexities that the new Chaosium licenses pose for smaller operators (so we won't rehash that here), but we were also very interested to see announcements in early December that Cubicle 7 (by far the most prolific of the current *Call of Cthulhu* licensees) has decided to not renew its licenses with Chaosium for both *Call of Cthulhu* and *Basic Roleplaying*. Other publishers, conversely, seem to be thriving under the new rules, including smaller operators like Stygian Fox, Weird 8, and Sentinel Hill Press. There have even been a couple of brand new smaller publishers that have popped up during 2017. This, coupled with a reasonable volume of material available on launch of the Miskatonic Repository, suggests that overall the revamping of licensing is largely delivering Chaosium the desired outcome. Though, only time will tell...

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Now we'll turn our attention to the products that were released in 2017... or at least those which made some reference or use of Chaosium's venerable-and-much-loved game, *Call of Cthulhu*. As we will see below, this is only part of the story — recent years has seen a steady increase in the number of releases that aim to deliver Lovecraftian horrors using other game systems.

But, even considering the list of *Call of Cthulhu*-related products released in 2017 is not a small task. In a typical year, Chaosium and its licensees has historically released somewhere between 10 and 17 books for the game — in 2017 that number was 17. Additionally there were a few notable products that technically saw release in 2016 but finally emerged in print during 2017. And then there are the seven "launch titles" in the Miskatonic Repository that snuck out just before Christmas. So... a lot to cover.

Chaosium

As creators of the *Call of Cthulhu* game, and the largest publishing company currently producing for the line, it's not surprising that Chaosium's output in 2017 was the largest of any single producer: some 6 or 7 titles (depending on how you count it).

Probably the most significant Chaosium release for 2017 was ***Down Darker Trails***, the "old west" setting that we already mentioned above in this review (since it also marks a much-welcomed return by industry veteran Kevin Ross). It's not very often that Chaosium releases a fully-fledged and detailed new setting for playing *Call of Cthulhu* investigative horror, so it's a bit surprising that they didn't make a little more fanfare when this fine book came out. Delicately balancing historical realism with a pulpy sensibility appropriate to the western genre, *DDT* is a great addition to the game — and one that can be played with either *CoC 7e* or *Pulp Cthulhu* (for an even more two-fisted style). The book makes mention of two further books of scenarios/mini-campaigns that Kevin has already written/co-ordinated — here's hoping that Chaosium has plans to get those out quickly to build a growing sub-line of western-themed *Call of Cthulhu* titles!

Another pulp-fuelled release from Chaosium in 2017 was the globe-trotting campaign ***The Two-Headed Serpent***, which is intended to be a supplement to their 2016 release of the much-delayed *Pulp Cthulhu* setting book. This campaign definitely ticks a lot of the right boxes for a lengthy tale of two-fisted (not-really-investigation-based) battles against Mythos foes in numerous 4-colour locations around the world (and beyond).

On the rules-side of things, Chaosium also released a large hardcover book detailing literally hundreds of spells and magical-effects which have appeared in previously published *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios/rules, all updated to 7th Edition. This book, ***The Grand Grimoire of Cthulhu Mythos Magic***, is a nice counterpoint to the core *7th Edition Call of Cthulhu* rules. For reasons of space, the core rules needed to cut back heavily on the space allocated to spell descriptions — previous editions had steadily grown this section of the rules each edition, bringing in material from scenario books and the like. This necessary trimming left a small gap: folks playing scenarios written for previous editions of the game might run into occasional spells (like the ubiquitous but absent "Change Weather") that aren't described in the rules. Although not a particularly serious problem — and not one I've heard anyone complain about — having an encyclopedic and complete set of 7th edition spell rules is nice (even if it does require the Gamemaster to carry around another hardcover).

A surprise release from Chaosium in 2017 was ***Reign of Terror***, a two-part scenario by the illustrious Mark Morrison set around the time of the French Revolution. This release has quite an odd provenance, beginning life as a (final) add-on to the sprawly and mega-Kickstarter for *Horror on the Orient Express 2nd Edition*. As part of the KS campaign, a few backers were treated to an exclusive scenario written by Mark and run personally for them at GenCon. While this rare and exclusive scenario could have ended there, a decision was made by the uber-backers that this great material shouldn't be locked away, but shared with all backers. Based on that, Mark brushed up the manuscript to become a free backer-only PDF that dove-tailed nicely with *HotOE 2e*. Somewhere along the line the development of this freebie kicked up a gear and a set of additional historical, rules-related and setting material relevant to the rather unorthodox setting was written. All of this was packaged into two

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(somewhat-confusing) versions of the product — one being a free PDF with just the scenario text by Mark plus some basic formatting and illustration, and the other being a fully-fledged hardback book. The latter consists of everything that's in the free version, re-typeset in Chaosium's full-colour trade dress and re-illustrated with a lot more colour. Content-wise, it adds perhaps 20 pages of new material.

Another slightly surprising release was a book of modern-day scenarios by Sandy Petersen, the guy who was the primary writer for the first few editions of *Call of Cthulhu* (but who has largely been absent from the Chaosium line for the past few decades). The book, entitled ***Petersen's Abominations***, compiles five scenarios which are co-written by Sandy and Mike Mason. These all began life as convention notes for sessions that Sandy had run over the years — most famously fulfilling player's wishes to be "killed by Sandy Petersen" (yes, really). One of the scenarios in this book, *The Derelict*, previously saw light-of-day as Chaosium's "Free RPG Day" release for 2016 but everything else is new.

Rounding out the 2017 *Call of Cthulhu* game releases by Chaosium is a revamped edition of the classic solo scenario ***Alone Against The Dark***. This new version is substantially the same scenario as the originally, but upgraded for *CoC 7e* and re-illustrated.

In addition to these six titles, Chaosium also released a novelty item ***Call of Cthulhu: The Coloring Book*** which is arguably part of the company's game line (although it has no particular use in the game).



Although not released by Chaosium themselves, there were a few notable licensed items released by others in 2017 that tie-in directly to older Chaosium titles. The most impressive and exciting of these is the Audio Adventure "***Brotherhood of the Beast***" released by the H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society as part of the Dark Adventure Radio Theater line. The HPLHS have been working tirelessly over the past several years to create some amazing "30s style radio drama" adaptations of classic H.P. Lovecraft stories. In the last year or so they've been getting a lot more creative and diverse with their releases, and this title is their first foray into the world of adapting a classic-era Chaosium *CoC* campaign (the Keith Herber campaign variously called "Fungi from Yuggoth" or "Brotherhood of the Beast") to audio. Spread over 3 CDs and featuring four different optional endings, it's a great adaptation. But what makes this release particularly remarkable is the deluxe version which adds a huge satchel full of physical props (see the picture above; and yes it really does look just like that).

Another series of Chaosium-related physical props that were created in 2017 came from the two successful Kickstarter campaigns run by Delphes Desvoivres which produced beautiful prop-quality artefacts for chapters of *Masks of Nyarlathotep*.

Cubicle 7

Aside from Chaosium, the only company to produce two brand-new *Call of Cthulhu* titles in 2017 was Cubicle 7 who continue to impress with the high-quality items delivered as part of their *World War Cthulhu: Cold War* Kickstarter. While the 1970s espionage setting is not an obvious one for Lovecraftian investigation, the previous work done in establishing a format for *World War Cthulhu* (in the WWII era) means that the format largely works. In 2017, Cubicle 7 was originally intending to release the final THREE books promised to backers of the Cold War Kickstarter, but due to a set of unfortunate circumstances the campaign book "*Yesterday's Men*" was ultimately cancelled after two different writing teams both failed to deliver. Backers were given credit for the undelivered book.

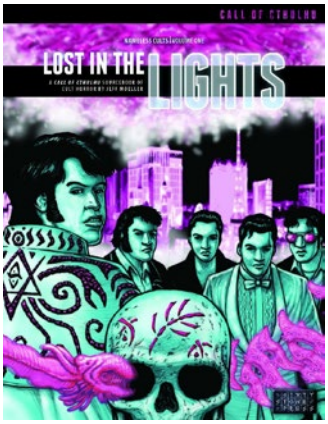
The two titles that did see release are ***Covert Actions*** and ***Our American Cousins***. The former is a book of six standalone scenarios (or missions) which see players travel to a range of different 1970s political hotspots on the trail of the Cthulhu Mythos. The second book is a kind of add-on to the core "World War Cthulhu: Cold War" book, which itself takes a British-centric focus to Cold War spying. The new book counteracts that a little, by providing information about US operations around the globe, as well as an additional scenario.

In addition to producing these two new books, Cubicle 7 also successfully closed out the very last parts of their earlier Kickstarter for the ***Cthulhu Britannica: London*** box. Although most items were delivered long ago, there remained two sets of cards to be delivered for backers — one set of **Postcards** (lots of period London-themed postcards with scenario hooks attached), and another set called "**Cards from the Smoke**" (a deck of threats and encounters which can be used for chases or improvised scenario building).

Sadly, none of the Cubicle 7 items mentioned above are available any more, due to their decision to terminate their license for *Call of Cthulhu*.

Sixtystone Press

Although Sixtystone did not publish any new products in 2017, they did achieve a couple of notable things — the first being the shipment of backer copies of the doorstop-sized "***Masks of Nyarlathotep Companion***". This encyclopedic reference had been available to backers as a PDF for some time, but production problems had several times delayed its physical release. Finally, 2017 saw the end to this long (and, no doubt very painful, production process).



Also during 2017, Sixtystone released physical versions of the modern-day scenario "***Lost in the Lights***" which was released in PDF (for *CoC 6e*) back in 2013 but never saw print at the time due to a variety of problems plaguing some of the creators. Updated to 7th Edition, this new full-colour print looks very spiffy indeed — and the Las Vegas-based scenario by Jeff Moeller is about as bonkers as you'd expect.

Smaller Licensees

As mentioned above, changes with Chaosium's licensing model for *Call of Cthulhu* had some impacts in 2017 on smaller publishers. For a few it meant the opportunity to produce books under license for the very first time — all-in-all there were four brand-new licensees in 2017 (Dark Cult Games, Darker Hue Studios, Trepan, and Weird 8). Here's a quick round-up of the products they released:

- Weird 8 released "***Sun Spots***", a 1920s scenario by Dave Sokolowski which has an interesting history. It was originally planned for a cancelled Miskatonic River Press book of scenarios about Lovecraftian god-like entities, and as such had been edited by the (now sadly departed) legend of the game, Keith Herber. Dave ran a very successful Kickstarter to revise and release this scenario as a self-published book.
- Darker Hues Studio released "***Harlem Unbound***", which is an in-

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teresting counterpoint to the traditional Lovecraftian tropes of all-white investigators plunging headlong into danger amid a society filled with (historical) racism. Chris Spivey ran a successful Kickstarter to publish a remarkable and unique sourcebook which focusses on the vibrant black society of 1920s Harlem and challenges players to take on the roles of black people who are the subject — as opposed to the perpetrators — of racism. An interesting book. Also interesting is the decision by Darker Hues to make the book a dual-statted release with both *Call of Cthulhu* and Gumshoe (*Trail of Cthulhu*) statistics.

- Trepan released "***The Haunted Clubhouse***", a smallish PDF-only release by Melbourne-based writer, Leigh Carr. It features a modern-day scenario set in New Hampshire (although sadly I've yet to read it).
- Dark Cult Games released a sandbox-style scenario called "***The Star on the Shore***" before (somewhat confusingly) changing their company name to New Comet Games. The scenario is well-illustrated.

In addition to these four brand-new publishers, there were also another five established producers who also released one title in 2017. They are:

- Stygian Fox released "***Hudson & Brand***", a setting/organisation book for Gaslight-era London. This rather beautifully laid-out book describes the Hudson & Brand Inquiry Agency, an established private investigation service that can either be a source of work for player characters or a source of baffling cases. The book also includes a couple of scenarios. Currently available to backers only.
- As mentioned earlier, a notable publication in 2017 was the Golden Goblin resurrection of a "lost gem" by Scott David Aniolowsi, "***Cold Warning***." This 30 page scenario was the product of a rather unusual Kickstarter campaign that only ran for one week (but was still highly successful). Scott's scenario is a great example of a "classic era" type scenario brought up to modern production and writing standards.
- The illustrious Sentinel Hill Press re-released Issue 1 of their *Arkham Gazette* magazine, dedicated to the town of Arkham and its inhabitants.
- Somewhat of a surprise, Modiphius released part 3 of the "Zero Point" campaign for *Achtung! Cthulhu* — the first part of this multi-book campaign by Sarah Newton came out right at the beginning of *Achtung! Cthulhu*'s publication history ... though this third chapter, "***Code of Honour***" (set in Istanbul 1942), has been much delayed for some reason. Looks nice but I haven't yet had a chance to read it.
- Also somewhat surprising from Modiphius is the release of an Audio drama set in the *Achtung! Cthulhu* world.
- Finally Skirmisher, publishers of *Cthulhu Live* (which is technically a variant of *Call of Cthulhu*) produced a new LARP script called "***The Return of Cyris Crane***" (or more accurately an update of an earlier script with a slightly different name).



The MiskRepo

As mentioned in first part of this article, Chaosium launched the Miskatonic Repository, its community publication vehicle shortly before Christmas 2017. I haven't yet read any of the titles available for sale... but here is a list of the seven that were made available prior to the end of 2017:

- "The Scales of Time" by Michael Nagel
- "The Trail of the Monolith" by Michael Nagel
- "Terror Itself" by James Coquillat and David Naylor
- "Plague" by Matt Ryan and Noah Lloyd
- "Isle of Madness" by Edward Possing
- "Jasper St. Jones Got The Prettiest Bones" by Tristan Jusola-Sanders
- "The Idol of Thoth" by Joe Trier

Phew... that was a lot of *Call of Cthulhu* stuff to describe. But that is only half the story for Lovecraftian RPG material produced in 2017.

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So far, we have focused mainly on the squamous ecosphere that exists around Chaosium and its venerable *Call of Cthulhu RPG*. While this is where the idea of Lovecraftian roleplaying started, it's certainly not true that Chaosium has a monopoly on the creations of HPL and others — and as such it is unsurprising that numerous other games release material that feature those dread horrors, sometimes in familiar context and other times in quite radically-different ways. This trend towards more and more non-*CoC* supplements featuring investigative horror scenarios and resources inspired by Lovecraft, has kicked into high gear over the last decade or so. Hence it's hardly surprising that 2017 saw quite a number of new Lovecraftian RPG products that target non-Chaosium game systems.

This summary is, by necessity, going to probably be incomplete. There's a lot of stuff out there and only some of it drifts across my consciousness — if you know of something important that I've missed, get in touch and I'll try to remediate the oversight later.

Cthulhu Dark

One of the titles I've most looked forward to in recent months is the re-published (super-deluxe) hardback for ***Cthulhu Dark***, Graham Walmsley's minimalist RPG of Lovecraftian terror. Those who have previously encountered *Cthulhu Dark* will know that it is extremely lean when it comes to mechanics — in fact the basic rules can be written down in just 2 or 3 pages of a book. So, you might be wondering how Graham's highly successful Kickstarter could possibly take that super-simple system and turn it into a 192-page hardback book.

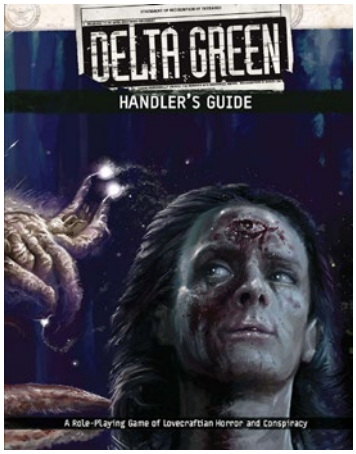
As it turns out, the answer is... very easily. The deluxe edition of *Cthulhu Dark* still features (slightly tweaked versions of) the same ultra-streamlined rules that has been published for free elsewhere. But it also includes a slightly more expansive explanation of those same rules and then a mountain of helpful resources and scenarios for the Gamemaster's eyes. The rules themselves take up only the first 20 or so pages of the beautifully-illustrated book. The next 40 or so pages are given over to general advice about how to write compelling mysteries featuring Lovecraft's creations (and more importantly his thematic elements). The remainder of the book is taken up by setting and scenario information. In order to promote diversity, Graham has chosen to not just support the traditional "Arkham 1920s with stodgy old white professors" type of setting, either. Yes, you can certainly play *Cthulhu Dark* that way... but the settings described in the rulebook are much more unorthodox than that. There is a Gaslight setting which focuses on players taking on the roles of mudlarks rather than gentlemen; there's an Arkham 1692 setting (by Kathryn Jenkins); there's a modern-day setting in a fictional African nation (by Helen Gould); and there's a Cyberpunk Mumbai setting. For each of these there is a scenario included in the book. All up that makes for a pretty full book.

Because the rules part of the *Cthulhu Dark* rulebook are so brief, it's also very tempting to think of this book as much as a source of ideas for other Lovecraftian games — it would be quite easy to pick up any of the elements described in its pages and repurpose them for *Call of Cthulhu*, or any other system.

In addition to the printed book, the *Cthulhu Dark* Kickstarter unlocked two other PDF-only supplements as well. One of these is a 1930s "Dust Bowl" scenario by Mo Holkar; the other is a WWI scenario featuring African-American soldiers (by Chris Spivey of *Harlem Unbound* fame).

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Delta Green RPG



Ever since Pagan Publishing first created *Delta Green* as a modern-day conspiracy-style horror setting for *Call of Cthulhu* (in the mid-90s), it has occupied a unique place in the world of Lovecraftian RPGs. Much-beloved by a loyal cadre of fans and almost blatant in its efforts to strike out on a different type of route for modern horror than the "default" *Call of Cthulhu* setting for modern-day, *Delta Green* has been continuously developed and detailed as a setting through a series of books sporadically published first by Pagan and then as joint ventures between Pagan Publishing and Arc Dream.

In 2015, the creative forces behind Delta Green surprised the *Call of Cthulhu* world with the announcement of a Kickstarter for a new "rebooted" edition of the setting. The surprise came not so much from the fact that the setting was being radically overhauled (to bring the pre-Millennial sensibilities of the original *DG* into the post-9/11 age) ... but from the announcement that the future *Delta Green* would *not* be a sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu*, but have its own rule system, somewhat reminiscent of *BRP* but independent of it. Furthermore, the rule system developed for the new game (although not the *DG* setting itself) would also be released under the OGL, meaning that anyone could use it freely as part of a different game as long as the terms of the OGL license were honoured.

The first book release by Arc Dream's hugely successful Kickstarter — the ***Agent's Handbook*** — came out in 2016, and detailed the basic rules for the game. But it was in 2017 when the bulk of the books began to see the light of day. The biggest DG release during the year was the ***Handler's Guide***, a massive (370 page) book which outlines the past and present shape of the DG conspiracy, the forces of the Cthulhu Mythos, and a range of other things that a Gamemaster needs to know to run games using the setting.

In addition to this major milestone, Arc Dream have also slowly been drip-feeding the release of scenarios for the new game system, all of which are available for free to Kickstarter backers as PDF but also available as Print-on-Demand softcover books. In a generous move, Arc Dream have provided KS backers with discount vouchers on the print versions of the books. During 2017 six scenarios were released in this way:

- *Music From A Darkened Room* (34 pages, updated)
- *Extremophilia* (38 pages)
- *Kali Ghati* (36 pages)
- *Observer Effect* (40 pages)
- *The Star Chamber* (40 pages)
- *Viscid* (32 pages)

There were also several other Kickstarter-backer-only PDF releases during 2017 — so it was certainly the year that the "rubber hit the road" for the *Delta Green RPG*.

GUMSHOE / Trail of Cthulhu

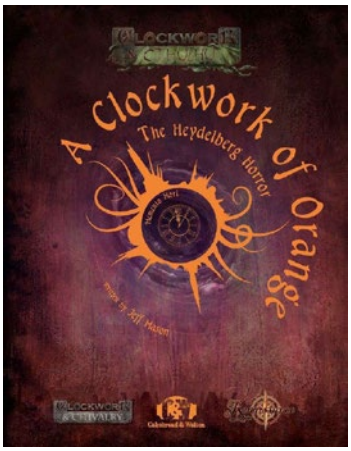
Pelgrane Press have carved out a very enviable niche for themselves in the Lovecraftian and Horror RPG domain — they are kind of the folks whose experiments with form and structure continue to delight (and also keep winning ENnie Awards!). This probably shouldn't be surprising since the company has a couple of the most prolific and accomplished writers in the industry working on their books... and is also the most professionally run of any of the companies producing Cthulhu-related material (and nice to work for as well).

The main organ for Pelgrane's forays into the Cthulhu publishing world has, til now, been the *Trail of Cthulhu* game — an adaptation of the GUMSHOE rules to the genre of Lovecraftian investigative horror. While the game system isn't necessarily to everyone's taste, I've always thought that the quality of the writing that Pelgrane brings to this line more than justifies picking up most of its releases... even if just as examples of alternative ways that the genre can work.

In 2017, there were two releases for *Trail of Cthulhu* — "***Out of the Woods***" and "***Cthulhu City***". The first of these is a scenario anthology which weighs in at five scenarios spanning 168 pages. The theme binding all these tales together is the primeval ancient fear of the archetypal "deep, dark forest" and the opportunities for nasty Lovecraft-inspired horrors to lurk in such places. The second volume, "*Cthulhu City*" is something much stranger. Written by the always-impressive Gareth Ryder-Hanrahan this book offers a somewhat surrealistic alternative depiction of the town of Arkham which takes Lovecraft's geography and twists it into a nightmarish world where cyclopean skyscrapers stand side-by-side with baroque ruined buildings... It all sounds weird and evocative (and since I haven't yet read it, I can't really say anything more).

Technically not part of the *Trail of Cthulhu* line, but a pioneer release of a new line called GUMSHOE One-2-One, ***Cthulhu Confidential*** is the other big Lovecraftian release by Pelgrane during 2017. The idea behind the One-2-One line is that it is an adaptation of GUMSHOE that's especially designed for running games with one Gamemaster and one player. The *Cthulhu Confidential* setting is a hard-boiled "film noir" setting which plunges players into either the seedy underbelly of 1930s Los Angeles, or other similarly grimy American settings (the core book also includes a noir depiction of 1930s NYC, and a Washington, DC setting as well).

Clockwork & Cthulhu / Rennaisance



For reasons described in mid-2017 blog postings on Cthulhu Reborn, we have recently been very actively looking around at other game systems that provide convenient (and license free) vehicles for publishing Lovecraftian material. Perhaps the biggest surprise to emerge from that survey of game systems was the (re-)discovery of the excellent work that has been done in recent years by Cakebread & Walton to create and support various Lovecraftian adaptations of their BRP-clone *Renaissance* system. In 2017, there was one notable release for this line — "***The Heydelberg Horror***". This scenario, set in Europe of the early 17th Century, is the first part in an ongoing campaign called "A Clockwork of Orange" which promises to take investigative agents across Europe and into the heart of the Holy Roman Empire.

Systemless

One of the stranger Cthulhu-related tabletop RPG Kickstarters to be run in 2017 was the campaign to fund a systemless scenario called "***Pax Cthuliana***", written by a couple of Norwegian guys. The approach taken to the challenge of avoiding all game mechanics — and thereby making the scenario equally playable (or non-playable, depending on your perspective) with any game system, make it a noteworthy experiment. Having recently received the print copy of the Kickstarter book it's easy to see that a lot of work went into this book, which has some great art. The scenario also has its own musical soundtrack. Without having read the scenario itself I can't really comment on whether it achieves its goal of making a fully-playable game without reference to specific rules. The idea certainly has promise, though.

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Other Games

As well as the products mentioned above, there were a number of other game products released in 2017 that had ties to Cthulhu and Lovecraft in some way, shape, or form:

- The "***Leagues of Cthulhu***" Kickstarter by Triple Ace Games (which brings Lovecraftian gaming to the Ubiquity game system) delivered its final PDFs in 2017 (although print copies are still pending).
- The long-delayed "***Raiders of R'lyeh***", which had previously released early PDF versions of their d100-inspired system in previous years. In 2017 they released a final version of the rules (although print copies are still pending).
- Another huge 2016 Kickstarter was one to create a guidebook outlining game statistics of Cthulhu Mythos horrors for the *Pathfinder* system. Drawing heavily on artwork created for *Cthulhu Wars*, this monstrously-huge (500+ page book) finally saw light of day in 2017. Titled (somewhat inaccurately) ***Sandy Petersen's Cthulhu Mythos***, it includes game information relevant to all the standard open-source Cthulhu Mythos gods and monsters, as well as a handful of original creations designed for the *Cthulhu Wars* miniatures game.
- Lurking at the borderlands of being an "RPG product" is Cubicle 7's boxed storytelling game "***Cthulhu Tales***", also funded as a Kickstarter which delivered in 2017. This game features a deck of "story cards" and "hazard cards" and challenges players to each spin a tale using them (the central conceit of the game being that everyone is a patient in an asylum flashing back to the horrific situation that brought them there).

To round out the review (and bring it to a much-awaited close), I thought I'd include a quick roundup of Cthulhu-related RPG Kickstarter campaigns that were run in 2017 but haven't yet delivered products — these are "leading indicators" of some of the cool products that will emerge in 2018 (or maybe 2019, or 2020, or ... :)). I also thought I'd briefly mention some amateur-press publications that came out in 2017.

Kickstarters of Doom

In March 2017, Stygian Fox completed their second successful Lovecraft-related Kickstarter campaign, for the creation of a book of short one-night modern-day scenarios. The book is called "***Fear's Sharp Little Needles***". This comes hot on the heels of the previous Stygian Fox modern-day *Call of Cthulhu* book which was an incredible collection of scenarios which went on to win a (much deserved) gold ENnie. "*Fear's Sharp Little Needles*" went into layout in January.

Also in March 2017, Golden Goblin Press ran a successful Kickstarter campaign to fund the publication of their reboot of the ***Cthulhu Invictus*** setting for *Call of Cthulhu 7th Edition*. This project is the first of many Roman-era books planned by the Goblin, who has received a license from Chaosium to be the "official" source of all things Invictus. The goals of this campaign seem mostly to involve rewriting the Cthulhu Invictus setting from the ground-up, which seems a little strange since the previous editions seem mostly to have been well-received by those who've run games set in Ancient Rome. I can only assume that it's some kind of rights thing, where GGP do not have a license to reuse the text of the earlier versions. Either way it will be interesting to see how this project goes — it's probably the most ambitious thing attempted yet by Golden Goblin, but they have a solid track record on delivering Kickstarters (albeit one that has gotten steadily more shaky as projects have gotten larger and larger).

In April 2017, Cubicle 7 & Make Believe Games (a company founded by Mark Rein-Hagen) jointly ran a Kickstarter to fund the creation of ***Unspeakable Sigil & Sign***, a tabletop roleplaying game in which players take on the roles of Mythos cultists. It makes use of the *Axiom* system created by MBG for its games, which uses a special deck of cards as the primary game mechanic. Target delivery date of March 2018.

In July 2017, Pelgrane Press ran what proved to be the biggest and most expansive Lovecraft-related Kickstarter of the year, a monumental campaign to fund the launch of ***The Yellow King RPG***. Written by industry-veteran Robin D. Laws, this new gaming adaptation of the works of Robert W. Chambers isn't strictly "Lovecraftian" but is probably of interest to many of the same crowd. *The Yellow King RPG* is another game fuelled by the Gumshoe system, and aims to provide four separate but inter-related "worlds" in which to set weird and surreal tales of terror. An interesting feature of the Kickstarter campaign — which also featured an insane number of small stretch goals — was the fact that Pelgrane released a text-only early draft of Robin's text for all four books immediately after the campaign closed. So, despite the fact that the game won't ship until December 2018, it's easy to get some kind of idea about what it will cover.

In August 2017, Atomic Overmind Press ran a Kickstarter campaign to create a sequel to an earlier book of essays by Kenneth Hite about Lovecraft's fiction. This new book, ***Tour de Lovecraft — The Destinations***, focuses less on the stories of HPL and more on the places (real and fictional) that they describe. Although not pitched as a gaming book per se, anyone who has read Kenneth Hite's previous Lovecraft essays will know that pretty much any time he sets pen to page it produces something that could inspire a game scenario (or ten).

In the frightful month of October, there were two Lovecraft RPG-related Kickstarters run. The first was by Sentinel Hill Press, for the publication of a revised version of a scenario written by Kevin Ross back in the 1980s (and previously published in a long-out-of-print-and-impossible-to-find book by Triad). The scenario, titled simply ***The Dare***, is unusual in that it places players in the roles of teenagers who are faced with a range of horrors as they explore a "haunted house." Given the recent pop-culture sensation that is Netflix's *Stranger Things*, this seems pretty fertile territory to explore for *Call of Cthulhu*, so a reboot / rewrite of this classic-era scenario seems well worthwhile.

The second Kickstarter of October 2017 was the campaign by New Comet Games (the new name of the company formerly known as Dark Cult Games) for a new 1920s "sandbox style" Call of Cthulhu scenario called ***Devil's Swamp***.

The final Cthulhu-related Kickstarter run in 2017 was a campaign by Delphes Desvoivres to fund the creation of ***The Idol of Cthulhu***. This is (I believe) the fourth Kickstarter by Delphes, but differs from previous installments in that it ventures beyond just providing physical props for use in previously-published *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios. This campaign (primarily to create a version of the Cthulhu Idol described by HPL in "The Call of Cthulhu") also funded the publication of a brand new game scenario by Matthew Sanderson, ostensibly a sequel to Lovecraft's tale.

Small End of Town

As well as being a great year for professionally-published material, 2017 also saw a good crop of amateur publications for *Call of Cthulhu* and related games. A couple of highlights were:

- ***Hypergraphia Magazine***: a new fanzine-style (physical print) magazine launched at Necronomicon 2017
- ***Dark Times Fanzine***: while this free PDF mag is notionally aimed at the *Dark Conspiracy RPG*, its first few releases have featured a fair bit of Lovecraft-related material

And last, but (hopefully) not least, it's probably worth a quick summary of what we at Cthulhu Reborn have managed to publish in 2017. It has actually been a record year for us, releasing 7 PDF products. Six of them have been supplements to our surprisingly-successful *Convicts & Cthulhu* product line. The other one is a free "Scenario Upgrade" pack (prop/handouts and 7th Edition stats) for the older Chaosium anthology of modern-day scenarios titled "*The Stars are Right*." All of those PDFs are available over on RPGNow.com as either free downloads or "Pay What You Want." Some are also available via the Download page on the Cthulhu Reborn blog.

Sample file

A Conspiracy in Damascus

(8th century scenario)

by Jared Smith



Damascus—Distant View from the Mountain Side. by William Henry Bartlett

Sample file

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate, it has been 91 years since the faithful swept from the Arabian deserts to bring down the Sassanid Empire and push back the edge of the Roman Empire toward Constantinople. Now the caliphate of Hisham ibn Abd-al-Malik stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus River. Its new capital lies in ancient Damascus, while the caliph has moved his palace north to Resafa to be closer to the battle lines with the Romans.

Controlling such a far flung caliphate is helped by the courier network that carries official messages and reports back and forth. The couriers also serve as spies of the caliph, watching the distant governors and newly conquered people of the caliphate to insure that corruption and rebellion does not gain hold.

You have been recruited from across the caliphate to serve as members of a secret group within the courier network, agents to preserve the community.

Now your team of agents has been summoned back to Damascus itself, where your spy chief suspects a merchant of smuggling something strange into the city.

But what if the merchant does not work alone? What if the conspiracy goes deep? The City of Jasmine is one of the oldest cities in the world, ruled through the ages by Arameans, Assyrians, Babylonians, Alexander the Great, and the Romans. What if something unnatural lurks beneath its aged stone walls?

Only God knows all things...

Author's note: I was lucky enough to travel through Syria in 2010 right before the civil war began. A truly astonishing country, layered with history upon repurposed history upon buried history. I hope this scenario conveys a bit of my love for the country, and I hope its people find peace and justice.

This adventure is set in Damascus, capital of the Ummayad caliphate or empire, in the year 725 CE. The players are government spies who must investigate a suspicious merchant who is connected to a Cthulhu cult. The cult has recently smuggled a reptilian humanoid sorcerer from a race called the masqut into the underground aquaduct system of Damascus where it plans to conduct a destructive ritual. The players must defeat the masqut and the cult leader without being murdered by the Demon of the Wastes that is enslaved to the cult leader.

A Conspiracy in Damascus is a medieval/Dark Ages scenario. Stats are shown as **Call of Cthulhu** [**GUMSHOE**].

Background

Two years ago, an opium addict in Damascus named Kyriakos had a frightful dream, filled with sensations of drowning and a dark, foreboding city beneath the seas. This was his first contact with the nightmares transmitted by Cthulhu, who lies dead but still dreaming, deep under the Pacific Ocean in the sunken city of R'lyeh. Kyriakos began to receive more and more dream visions from Cthulhu, until the mental disturbances caused by them became more addictive than even the smoke of opium. During the hours of the day, Kyriakos wandered in a drugged daze, trying to achieve the dreamstate of his Cthulhu visions by greater and greater use of opium. His actions to sustain his addiction became more and more depraved, theft and burglary finally leading to murder.

Then one night, Kyriakos awoke from his most terrible dream yet to



The Nameless City by Jensine Eckwall

find a man standing over him. The man called Kyriakos by name and said he had come to lead him on the next step in receiving the blessings of Cthulhu. The man spoke with the accent of someone who was from Yemen, far across Arabia on the edge of the Indian Ocean. In a daze, Kyriakos followed the mysterious stranger through the dark streets of Damascus until they came to a building.

The door opened as they approached, and the stranger led them inside. After a strange gesture, the man spoke words that burned the ears of Kyriakos, and the stones of the floor lifted up to reveal a dark space below. He led Kyriakos downward into the darkness, through a space covered in strange carvings of monsters, to an even deeper tunnel into the rock. A foul odor rose from the tunnel and Kyriakos nearly fainted from the stench. The man urged Kyriakos onward, and as Kyriakos stumbled deeper, his head began to pound with the painful sensations he suffered after awaking from a Cthulhu dream.

At last they came out into a massive chamber where the noxious vapors poured out of a black pit. Perched above the pit was an outcropping of stone carved into a loathsome depiction of dread Cthulhu himself. At the sight, Kyriakos fell prostrate in awed horror at his dream made reality. The stranger explained that this was an ancient place where Cthulhu had once been worshipped freely but had been buried and forgotten. The fumes came from the deep places of the earth and would enhance the mind-altering messages of Cthulhu to greater heights of ecstasy.

With the guidance of the stranger known only as al-Yamani, or "the man from Yemen", Kyriakos began recruiting other addicts into the cult where they worshipped Cthulhu in a drugged haze of increasingly debauched violence, soon sacrificing victims to terrible monstrous beasts that would crawl up from the bottomless pit at the height of their rituals. Al-Yamani then left Damascus for over a year, only returning four months ago to inform the cult that they would need to prepare for the arrival of a inhuman sorcerer called a masqut, an ancient reptilian race that once ruled the area eons ago when the deserts were fertile. From the ruins of their Nameless City deep under the Arabian desert sands, the masqut plot for the day when they can regain their power. The masqut hope to open a portal in the Cthulhu temple to the oceans around sunken R'lyeh and flood Damascus with poisonous salt water that will destroy its viability for humans but provide them a place to expand into.

But for now, al-Yamani has left Damascus on a mysterious mission, leaving the fulfillment of the plan in the hands of Kyriakos. Before he left, the cult summoned a jinni called the Demon of the Wastes to serve Kyriakos. This Demon of the Wastes must obey Kyriakos' orders but hates his enslavement. Just two days ago, the masqut sorcerer finally arrived in Damascus, smuggled through the gates by the front man for the cult, a slimy merchant named Majd al-Din. The cultists intensified their preparations under the masqut's guidance for the ritual that would destroy the city and open a portal to their terrible god, Cthulhu.

Unfortunately for the cult, the strange activities of Majd al-Din have been detected by the secret spy service of the government, which has assembled a team of the Player Characters to investigate. Their investigation of Majd al-Din will hopefully lead them to uncover the secret location of the ritual under Kyriakos' house, and interrupt it before the entire city is rendered uninhabitable. This will require them to circumvent, free, or kill the magical being called the Demon of the Wastes that serves as bodyguard and servant to Kyriakos. Tomorrow night, the ritual will begin...

Sample file

Timeline of Events

- 2 years ago, 723 CE, 105 on the Islamic calendar: A Mythos sorcerer known only as al-Yamani, "the man from Yemen", approaches Kyriakos in Damascus and shows him the underground Cthulhu cult site beneath the city. Kyriakos pledges his assistance and begins recruiting members into his opium-enhanced Cthulhu dream cult. Kyriakos moves into the building above the Cthulhu cult site, **The House with the Copper Door**. The cultist Zubair uses funds provided by al-Yamani to also purchase a building to recruit new members through their drug experiences, **The Den of Smoke**. Al-Yamani leaves Damascus.
- Present year: 725 CE, 107 on the Islamic calendar
- 4 months ago: Al-Yamani returns and tells Kyriakos that a creature of great power called a masqut will be coming to the city. Al-Yamani and the cultists summon and bind the Demon of the Wastes to the service of Kyriakos in **The House with the Copper Door**. Al-Yamani again leaves Damascus for unknown reasons.
- 3 months ago: The cult calls on merchant Majd al-Din to be the front man for their new commercial requirements. Majd al-Din rents space in **The Warehouse**.
- 11 weeks ago: Majd al-Din rents the house above **The Lair** for the cult. The cultists immediately begin excavating the basement to break into the aquaducts beneath the nymphaeum fountain.
- 2 weeks ago: Kyriakos sends Majd al-Din into the desert to retrieve the Ark of the Masqut.
- 1 week ago: Majd al-Din meets a group of strange Bedouin and retrieves the Ark.
- 2 days ago: Majd al-Din returns to Damascus and bribes his way into the city without the Ark being inspected. The Ark is delivered to **The Lair** where the cultists revive the masqut. The masqut begins instructing the cultists to prepare for the ritual.
- 1 day ago: Spy chief Marwan Abd-al-Aziz discovers the bribed gate guard.
- Today in the afternoon: Marwan Abd-al-Aziz meets the Player Characters at **The Mosque** and orders them to investigate Majd al-Din.
- Tomorrow night: The cultists perform their ritual at the Cthulhu cult site beneath **the House with the Copper Door**.

KEEPER NOTE: There are two important points early on to help the adventure go well.

- Make sure the Player Characters get enough clues in **The Warehouse** to reveal the three points of investigation: Zubair (**The Swordsmith**), the rented house on Mustaqim Street (**The Lair**), and the house of Alcmene and Mereruka (**The Den of Smoke**). Any two of these points can combine to lead the Player Characters to the **House with the Copper Door**, and the finale of the investigation.
- The Demon of the Wastes should appear at the end of investigating **The Warehouse**. He is a complicated NPC, but will show a potential solution to the investigation, offer some clues, and limit the Player Characters from simply calling in outside help. This is a vital interaction, so consider carefully how you will play it out!

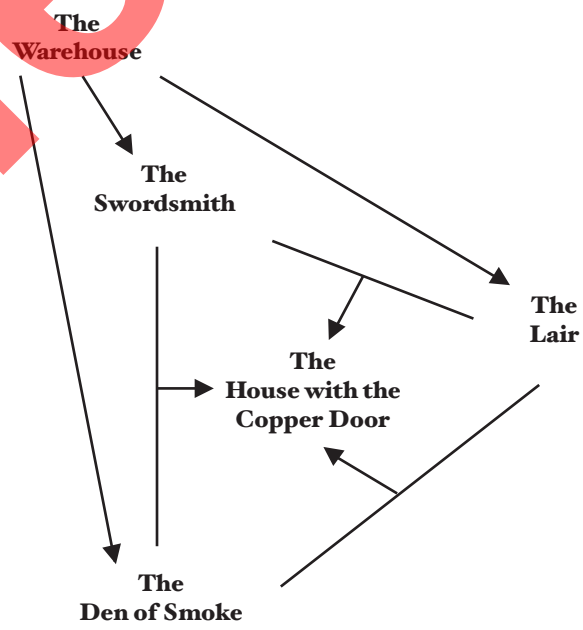
The Clue Flowchart

The investigation of this scenario is organized around six physical locations. The clues in the first location, **The Warehouse**, leads to three middle locations: **The Swordsmith**, **The Den of Smoke**, and **The Lair**. These middle locations each have sets of partial clues. The information gained from combining any two clues from two of the three middle locations should lead clever investigators to the final location, **The House with the Copper Door**. The sixth location is **The Sage**, who can help with magical clues and language translations. These clues will be listed at the end of each location as "Clue Flowchart". On the other hand, the NPCs will react to the actions of the investigators. You can use their decisions to either help the Player Characters if they missed some vital clues, or to hamper their actions if things are going too easily.

Be sure to communicate that the clues found are partial, or require an extra step, to prevent player confusion or frustration. For example, if they find the design of a copper door at The Swordsmith, you could say, "The door sounds so unique it would be instantly recognizable, but it will take over a day to ask throughout the whole city. If you knew what area to search, you would probably be able to find it very quickly."

The investigators can discover the House with the Copper Door more directly if they follow escaping cultists or something else clever, but they have a greater chance of succeeding in stopping the ritual if they obtain clues from most of the locations. If they choose to immediately confront the cultists at the House with the Copper Door, that is on them!

The locations with clues are set up as follows:



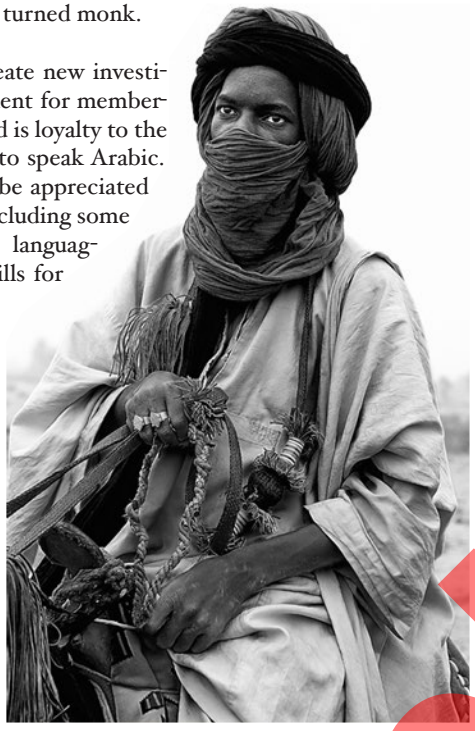
Sanity Checks

2/1D4+2 [5 **Stability**] – See the Demon of the Wastes appear from nowhere in an indoor sandstorm and brutally murder Majd al-Din
1/1D4 [1 **Stability**] – See the carnage of Majd al-Din's murder (only if they didn't see the murder first hand!)
0/1D3 [2 **Stability**] – Realize the Demon of the Wastes is somehow communicating in a way that sounds like everyone's native tongue
0/1D3 [2 **Stability**] – See the Demon of the Wastes is impervious to mortal weapons
1/1D6 [5 **Stability**] – Kill somone to activate a *Blade of Unending Torment*
0/1D3 [1 **Stability**] – Witness the Cthulhu dreamers in the cavern
0/1D6 [4 **Stability**] – See the masqut
0/1D3 [4 **Stability**] – See the Demon of the Wastes change shape

Sample file

Introducing the Player Characters

Pre-generated characters are available as downloads. They represent a cross-section of the caliphate. All speak Arabic but are a variety of ethnic backgrounds and religions and skillsets. They were recruited by the Diwan al-Barid for exactly this reason, as they can interact with a variety of people in the caliphate and have a complementary set of knowledge. The pre-generated characters include a charming merchant, an educated scribe, an alchemist/astronomer, a soldier of the frontier, a tough blacksmith, and a former thief turned monk.



If the players wish to create new investigators, the only requirement for membership in the Diwan al-Barid is loyalty to the caliphate and the ability to speak Arabic. A variety of skills would be appreciated by the Diwan al-Barid, including some combat ability, multiple languages, and good personal skills for gathering information.

Possible occupations that might catch the eye of Diwan al-Barid recruiters include:
Book Dealer, Burglar, Forger, Lawyer, Librarian, Member of the Clergy, Rabbi, Sailor, Soldier, Spy, [Clergy, Criminal, Military, Private Investigator].

Start

(to be read to the Player Characters)

You are all members of the Diwan al-Barid, the courier service of the Muslim caliphate. The Diwan al-Barid runs messages from the capital in Damascus to the edges of the caliphate, west across the coast of Africa to al-Andulus on the Atlantic Ocean, to the southern tip of Arabia on the Indian Ocean, to the east to the Indus River, and north to the caliph himself, Hisham ibn Abd-al-Malik, where he leads the fight against the Roman Empire of Constantinople. But the Diwan al-Barid also serves as the eyes and ears of the caliph throughout the vast expanses of the caliphate, with local postmasters watching both the restless conquered population for rebellion and the distant governors for corruption.

You report to Marwan Abd-al-Aziz, the spy chief of Diwan al-Barid. He assembled your diverse group from across the caliphate to deal with peculiar problems that required a special touch. He has told you to gather in the grand courtyard of the Great Mosque of Damascus, one hour after the afternoon prayer, for your briefing.

The Mosque

The Great Mosque of Damascus is rather quiet after afternoon prayer, as the rest of the city goes about their day in the baking heat. The central courtyard is surrounded by beautiful mosaics on all the walls that show a wonderful vision of verdant greenery, but the marble floor is hot to the touch. The pillared arches of the colonnade around the courtyard provide a welcome bit of shade during the day. A few stragglers from the afternoon prayer still linger about the courtyard, talking or studying the Quran.

Underneath one of the arches sits a beggar in a tattered robe, which you recognize as one of Marwan Abd-al-Aziz's favorite disguises. He gestures you all to sit around him.

"One week ago, at an oasis east of the city, a group of Bedouin from an unknown tribe led a camel caravan out of the desert. The camels carried a massive object but the Bedouin kept to themselves. The few words they said had a strange accent.

"A few days later they returned through the oasis but the camels no longer were carrying anything.

"Two days ago, a merchant named Majd al-Din entered Damascus with a large train of goods, but bribed his way inside the city without a proper inspection. Majd al-Din's goods included a covered object large enough to be whatever the Bedouin had carried, and the path of their travel could have easily crossed each other. The bribed guard spent some of the money from Majd al-Din and we got one of the coins."

Marwan Abd-al-Aziz flips a silver coin in the air, catches it, then hands it to you to be examined. "I took the coin to the souq to get it identified. Moneychangers agreed it was real, but could not identify it. I finally spoke to an old woman named Lavinia in the Book Bazaar just outside the mosque. She says the symbols on this are ancient Persian, and it is a silver siglos from the Empire of Cyrus the Great. This coin is over 1000 years old.

"I need you to enter Majd al-Din's warehouse tonight and find out what was worth transporting so far, and why it had to be smuggled inside."



The Great Mosque of Damascus viewed from the south, with a cemetary and the oasis beyond the city walls

Sample file