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From Chris Spivey

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To the people playing the game — your willingness to engage in imaginary worlds makes this possible.



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THE BOG WOMAN

The old woman wandered the land for the last time while pondering possibilities. Her ancestors were among the early settlers in the region, fleeing the Salem witch panic rather than yielding their existence to it. Recent events forced her to seek new lodging; the ancestral homestead would become a casualty of supposed progress. Before her family occupied the land, it hosted a small colonial settlement that was preceded by a Penacook village.

According to the family records, she descended from residents of both villages, the offspring of Indigenous Nations and white colonizer pairing.

Heavy rains caused artifacts of these settlements to emerge from the soft, damp soil near the bog and she cherished each moldering treasure. Experts from the state told her the pristine bog's rarity and the ancient archaeological sites on the land would stave off attempts to supplant her — but, in the end, corrupt officials do what they always do, this time under the auspices of economic development. She knew a similar fate had befallen some in the city, but until now the oldest families of the region were spared.

Her mood darkened as she realized nothing would save the land. She passed through the aged family burial ground one last time, whispering final farewells and hearing faint sibilant susurrations in return. Then ambled to the bog, she explored as a girl, cataloging the various inhabitants. She recalled taking a small raft into the deeper waters in the center of the bog where, on certain nights, she saw a green glow emanate from below the surface. In recent weeks that glow had returned and seemed stronger than before; where once visible only on the darkest of nights, it was now strong and visible even when the moon was full. She had believed it to be a portent of something, but now thought it must have been a trick of an aging mind. She knew this land like no other had before; she and the land were one.

Continuing her trek along the edge of the bog, she wove among the trees and shrubs, hoping to find something of significance that would stave off the impending takeover. It was then that she stumbled across a strange, green stone about the size of a newborn child. Elated to find one last artifact, she knelt to wipe away the mud and saw it was a carving. Looking closer, she marveled over the stone that must have lain just beneath the surface for centuries. Understanding immediately that this piece of statuary shared her connection to the land, she began to clean the wide-mouthed, lizard-like face and saw the bulging eyes emit a familiar green light. A strange name came unbidden into her mind and she knew she would have help saving the land.

Her eyes began to glow a brilliant green as she proclaimed,
"Bokrug, I am yours!"

INTRODUCTION

THE MYTHOS VS. LOVECRAFT

Sample file

“What lay behind our joint love of shadows and marvels was, no doubt, the ancient, mouldering, and subtly fearsome town in which we live—witch-cursed, legend-haunted Arkham, whose huddled, sagging gambrel roofs and crumbling Georgian balustrades brood out the centuries beside the darkly muttering Miskatonic.”

— H.P. Lovecraft, “The Thing on the Doorstep”

The Cthulhu Mythos and Howard Phillips Lovecraft are interchangeable in the minds of many, stemming from pop-culture references and newer literature. That interchangeability is not quite right, as the Mythos has expanded well beyond the man who penned his first Mythos story in 1897, which sat unpublished until 1916. There is an intergalactic creation full of Gods, monsters, and beings beyond any existing definition that dwell outside the realm of humanity. Some may be familiar. Phrases like “Outer Gods,” “Elder Things,” and “Great Old Ones” are a bit more obscure but have found their way outside of their niche. There has been a wave of Cthulhu fandom, from Victor LaValle’s novella to Alan Moore’s comic books to T-shirts to “Cthulhu-For-President” bumper stickers.

Let’s take a minute to discuss the man himself. Lovecraft, for those who don’t know, was an ardent racist, anti-Semite, misogynist, and held a slew of other backward beliefs. He was so racist for his time that some of his contemporaries, of whom a few were also racist, wrote to him about being *too* racist and misogynistic. There is no defending the man, his beliefs, actions, or hatred. The core of Lovecraft’s work is tied into his own beliefs under a thin layer of cosmic horror.

In reality, his writing, while the foundation of this universe, represents a small percentage of Mythos writings. For all his faults, he believed in allowing others to help shape the Mythos and collaborated with other white writers. He did not want the Mythos contained to one person or company and believed additional ideas made it better. However, his explicit, self-expressed racism and xenophobia shaped the world he saw and created the Mythos.

We don’t intend to ignore this reality; we intend to take it back. We’re not giving lip service but informing you, the reader, of our mission statement upfront. Lovecraft’s fear made him the writer he was. **Masks of the Mythos** builds on the world he only offered to white writers a century ago and takes the Mythos as our own. The world he created continued long past him and has been expanded on and reshaped by over 100 writers and artists, many of whom are precisely the people who would have been the target of Lovecraft’s prejudices. That’s how change happens; it’s not something that just occurs. It comes from people confronting it head on.

The Mythos is changing with each generation to reflect the modern era and the actual diversity the world has always had, even if it was not reflected in the work. The state of the modern world has prompted some to say Lovecraft’s legacy received the most fitting retribution possible: He lost. White ascendancy ended while immigration and diversity continued.

The world today appears far more tolerant than his, and that would surely have made Lovecraft weep and faint like his protagonists. If the last decade in the United States has proven anything, it is that hate is alive and well and far too often living down the street from each of us. It turned from the violent, deadly force of 1920s lynchings to a more invasive one of redlining and an unbalanced prison system, and now in the 2020s, a merger of terrible aspects of both.

It is clearly not so much that Lovecraft’s vision of the world did not triumph but has simply shifted. Like Lovecraft, many people are afraid of losing and constantly blame “the other” for an impending downfall. There’s been an increase in hate crimes and violent attacks against people of color, queer and trans people, and marginalized houses of worship. Threats and name calling make our communities feel hostile, and the outside world seems even worse.

In **Masks of the Mythos**, there is an attempt at making it better. **Masks** shines a light on this legacy of hate that extends back to Lovecraft and beyond him. It holds it up and dare it to reflect at us the worst of who we are so we may create a Mythos that reflects the world we wish to see. Every word is a testament to a world full of patience, tolerance, inclusion, and most importantly, the interconnectedness that binds other to other: the hope for a better future for humanity. A future that looks as little like Lovecraft’s world as we can muster and one where he and his kind have truly lost.

THE MYTHOS

What is the Mythos? In short, it is a loose association of alien entities beyond comprehension, and its very existence alters The World. These beings are neither Gods nor Titans. In **Masks of the Mythos**, they exist in another dimension. That otherness, that distortion, swirls around them and expresses on the divine wavelength.

At first glance, it seems this Mythos world has little meaning. It is full of beings, Gods, and Old Ones that do not require worshipers and are generally uninterested in humans, the plight of humanity or any of its related affairs — aside from an active few. The crux of Mythos stories involves regular folks encountering things beyond their keen and struggling against them, regardless of the cost, which is frequently madness. Lovecraft created a literary version of madness that is not reflective of real-world mental illness and other pain real people suffer. We've taken the root of that idea and altered it. The impact of strangeness still remains. This otherness, while not of their own doing, causes the creatures and those touched by the Mythos to disrupt our universe, breaking the natural order and laws of reality. Think of it as a clash between matter and anti-matter with fewer explosions and more unpredictable side effects. This creates the ability to find meaning in everything, and one's place inside it.

The Mythos is not an evil or enemy pantheon to be battled by bastions of the light, but rather a traveler into this dimension and these planets. Its creatures are boundless. Their Scions' otherness disrupts non-Mythos Scions by destroying the very Fate that fuels their actions. What makes a hero? The legend, the tales woven into history about them, or the actual acts? Mythos Scions illuminate that moral quandary.

THEMES

Masks of the Mythos, much like the rest of the books in the **Scion** series, depicts humans touched by something greater and more powerful than they are. They have been gifted, cursed, or born into a mythology waiting for them to make their own paths. While the core **Scion** game focuses on bonding these humans into a group and sweeping others up into their legend; **Masks of the Mythos** is about the otherness of power.

MOOD

An atmosphere of uneasiness, eeriness, and menace should loom over games that include elements of the Mythos. Scions and mortals grappling with these forces walk a knife's edge between the poles of awe and fear, disruption and resistance, wonder and dread. Despite this flavor, Mythos forces do not negate the heroic, mythic storytelling established in the world of **Scion**. Scions who are aware of Mythos entities must grapple with the knowledge that humanity's niche in the universe is tenuous, a fragile mote swirling in a sea of overwhelming power. But heroism is not fearlessness. Courage does not dismiss or ignore threats; it stands against them despite fear and horror. In this way, Scions touched by the Mythos have the singular opportunity to show unfathomable heroism and sacrifice in the face

of unfathomable odds. They embrace the hard work of defending and thwarting and confronting threats from humans and their Gods, steadfast against the weight of a perilous cosmos.

Storyguides should use these alien entities to add a layer of complexity to the Scions' journeys, a contorted lens through which they can look, and a specific atmospheric flavor of otherworldly challenges with which Scions must contend. Unusual or conflicting descriptions can help evoke this sense of otherness. Words that mask or obfuscate the horrors are often more effective than a picture painted in full vivid color. Put details just out of reach: Shadows passing a window, the sound of scuttling in a closet, or a whiff of something tenebrous and foul are unsettling than a full-frame wide shot of some writhing monstrosity. Reveal horrors slowly and indirectly. Engage the senses in unusual, illogical ways. Try using synesthesia in description; a smell that is frothy, a color that is coarse, or a sound that casts shadows. Lean into the vastness of space and fallibility of the senses.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Masks of the Mythos is a sourcebook for **Scion: Origin** and **Scion: Hero**. While the majority of **Scion** focuses on real-world mythologies and religions, **Masks of the Mythos** is a step off that path into a more fictitious World. The material presented here is as canonical to an ongoing **Scion** campaign as every individual Storyguide and group wish it to be.

The book includes the information needed to create Mythos Scions and dive into the dread-soaked cursed towns that thrive under the insidious nature of the Mythos. It's possible for Scions of other deities to fall under the sway of the Mythos and serve their alien needs. The threats and encounters in this book have been balanced to challenge those seeking Demigod-hood, and the Mythos Scions themselves seeking transcendence.

MEDIA

There is a huge volume of possible media to dive into for a Mythos game. The below are some touchstones for a fuller understanding of the Mythos, and they can illustrate how to change it and apply it to your own **Scion** game.

The Ballad of Black Tom, by Victor LaValle

This novella follows a Black protagonist during the Harlem Renaissance as he struggles to get by while caring for his ailing father, enduring racism, and getting swept up into the Mythos. What choice will he make

under the weight of it all? The story explores the racism and horror tropes from “The Horror at Red Hook.”

Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth by Headfirst Productions with Bethesda Softworks

This video game is one of the best adaptations of classic Mythos stories in this format. You play as a lone investigator exploring the town of Innsmouth. During the exploration and discovery of the Mythos, they must come face to face with reality and their place in it. It is not a matter of survival but doing the best one can before the end. The game is known for its difficulty and actual suspense.

Cthulhusattva: Tales of the Black Gnosis by Ruthanna Emrys

This anthology is about enlightenment through the Mythos and the madness it brings. The book highlights the concept as viewed through the eyes of those experiencing it rather than combating it. Focus on the mysticism and how it changes a person.

Get Out by Jordan Peele

This masterful horror film is about racism and objectification. It explores the journey of a Black man who stumbles into a cult of white suburbanites stealing the bodies of Black people through weird science.

Hellboy by Mike Mignola

The long-running comic book features a half-demon summoned to Earth from hell as a weapon by Nazis.

Hellboy, rather than wreaking havoc on the world, becomes a paranormal investigator who aids humanity despite being an outsider. He frequently works with a group of other outsiders who face Mythos horrors, pulp adventures, and folklore.

Lovecraft Country by Matt Ruff

An anthology of stories that revolves around Black characters, touching on different aspects of the Mythos and race, and how they intersect. It highlights the area in which Lovecraft's work frequently occurs.

The Works of H. P. Lovecraft by Howard Phillip Lovecraft

The originator of what we call the Cthulhu Mythos. Content warning for readers.

Twin Peaks by Mark Frost and David Lynch

A soap-opera drama about the impact and investigation of a murder in a small town. It is an example of how small-town life can move a story forward with a constant building undercurrent of the weird. The focus is not on the weird itself but the impact because of it.

Winter Tide by Ruthanna Emrys

A novel about being a descendant from the Mythos, living among the unawakened world only to be drawn back in. It plays with the established tropes and subverts them creating an engaging tale.



CHAPTER ONE

MYTHOS PANTHEONS

“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.”

— Harriet Tubman

The Great Old Ones are beyond the linear concepts of time, and their origins cannot be grasped by humanity. Some walk-through time: created after humanity and witnessing the birth of the universe at the same instant. Some exist at every moment and place in the multiverse: substantial and insubstantial all at once.

This “pantheon,” as humans have labeled and gendered it, is neither God nor Titan but comprises extradimensional aliens whose horrific otherness warps everything it encounters. Their movements were traced and linked by humans believing them to be Gods in the form of others. These aliens do not have defined locations such as other Gods’ realms. Some reside in Azathoth’s court, listening to the maddening music; others walk the Earth, while some lie eternally asleep but never dying.

PRINCIPAL MEMBERS

The Great Old Ones are eternal and can forever lay dreaming. Their Calling is like a tide that seeps in around the fringes of one’s reality until they are drowning. They care little for right or wrong, only their own machinations. The mad Azathoth reigns supreme with its servant Nyarlathotep, executing countless plans in its name as it slumbers. The Great Old Ones act through their Scions by forcing their will upon them or offering more power for small, undefinable tasks.

ALBTRAUM

Aliases: The Slumbering One, The Caller in the Wave, The Terror from Below

Albtraum sleeps deep in the south Atlantic Ocean, in a city hewn directly from the valley floor covered in Hellenistic friezes, marble pillars, and pristine cobble paths. This city, often called Atlantis, but possibly a reflection of R’lyeh, is Albtraum’s home and lair. Few know what Albtraum looks like, save for those who have

entered her toothy maw, for she most resembles a grand and terrible version of the anglerfish complete with soft, phosphorescent glow. Though her temple is carved with the visage of a strong and athletic youth crowned with laurel, the bacchanalian statues surrounding the temple belie his trickster nature.

In the times before, Albtraum was one of the lesser Old Ones of R’lyeh, serving under Azathoth. Her voracious appetite for all things unknown eventually saw her visit The World. But Fatebinding was a powerful deterrent for spending too much time around humans. So, she sought solace and to learn about The World from the bottom of the sea to protect herself during dormancy. From here she learned about The World, but she could not learn about the land dwellers, so she decided to bring them to her domain. Albtraum created hundreds of ivory statues of her likeness out of her own bones and scattered them to the currents. She always knows where these pieces of herself are, and if someone touches one, she forges a connection immediately.

In this way, she learned everything she needed to know about humanity. Now, when she grows lonely — or hungry — she sends dreams through the talismans to their owners, drawing them to her. And when they enter the water, she sends dolphins to guide their way and protect their voyage until the person is firmly in her grasp. By the time they make the voyage, they are completely under her sway, and any with the will to resist are crushed to dust or turned to statues to decorate his temple. Those who come quickly and beg for mercy earn a place in the city dwelling forever in the depths — or a place in his vast stomach.

Albtraum does not grace the land and left the other Mythos Gods long ago. But he reigns free in his underwater city. Scions of Albtraum are beautiful, intelligent, and obedient — always chosen from those who heed his call after finding a talisman. Scions from other pantheons may find themselves under Albtraum’s protection after encountering such a talisman, without ever meeting him in the flesh.



Callings: Corruptor, Liminal, Trickster

Purviews: Artistry (sculpture), Beasts (dolphins), Beauty, Water

AZATHOTH

Aliases: Nuclear Firestorm, The Eye of Madness

At the center of infinity, a twisted God slumbers, creating bits of reality from its dreams and destroying them when it wakes. This is Azathoth, the Demon Sultan of Chaos, head of the pantheon, dwelling with its court outside time and space. Manifesting as a voracious black hole, Azathoth is a God who knows only sensation and hunger, gobbling up anything around it unless placated by a court of musicians, who beat drums and play airy pipes to soothe Azathoth's unrest. When Azathoth begins to awaken, its attention is attracted to places where the walls between the Outside and reality are thin, which often manifest as some sort of opening wherein the viewer can see the eternity of space and hear the infernal piping of Azathoth's court.

Azathoth is head of pantheon not because it is adored, but because it is the most powerful. Universes are born and destroyed as side effects of its dreams. Azathoth is the embodiment of the chaotic and destructive nature of the universe but is also the music of the spheres. Scions of Azathoth are creative and destructive. They might be experimental musicians exploring new forms of aural expression. Other Scions emulate Azathoth by being powerful and destructive influences at the centers of vast organizations. Unable to sate their appetite for power and chaos, these amoral Scions act on instinct rather than reason and can manage to rise to positions of power and influence to the detriment of everyone around them. Like Azathoth, they surround themselves with toadying courts of followers who protect the rest of society by placating the Scion.

Among mortals, there are musicians who live in obscurity and squalor who are gifted by Azathoth's power with the ability to compose and play exquisitely chaotic music that at once attracts and placates Azathoth. One such musician was the cellist Erich Zann, who, according to a firsthand account, would play wild music that was at once magnetizing and loathsome. From the single window in Zann's attic apartment, the witness saw outside reality and realized it was Zann's wild playing that kept the beings who lived in this place at bay. The power of Zann's drive was so great that he continued to play beyond death. Such musicians exist in the present, playing in small clubs and dive bars to eke out a living while composing and playing music that saves humanity during the hours of darkness.

Callings: Adversary, Destroyer, Liminal

Purviews: Artistry (Music), Chaos, Epic Stamina, Stars, Sun

BOKRUG

Aliases: The Great Water Lizard and The Lord of Monsters

Bokrug was the God of the people of Ib, a race of voiceless humanoids characterized by their bloated, green-skinned flesh; bulging eyes; wide, flapping mouths; and small, oddly shaped ears. In prehistoric times, the people of Ib were butchered, their city was destroyed, and their lands were taken by the humans. The occupiers built a new city called Sarnath where Ib once stood and prospered over the next 1,000 years. At first, the people of Sarnath honored Bokrug, but through the passing centuries Bokrug's memory became more of a humorous jest as people passed on the street. Still, Bokrug gave the occasional reminder of its presence by causing the waters of the lake that lay adjacent to Sarnath to emit a strange glow on the anniversary of Ib's destruction.

The Great Water Lizard is a being in tune with and inhabiting lands dedicated to it. These lands always contain a swampy body of water and somewhere on or beneath these lands can be found an idol depicting the God. Bokrug manifests through these idols when it is time for the God to rise. It is characterized by the desire to enact vengeance on behalf of worshipers who fall victim to those who would take their land, but also possesses great patience in taking this vengeance. It sometimes allow many generations to pass before acting against interlopers, but when vengeance comes it is swift and complete. Strange lights glowing from beneath the waters in its territories are a sign of Bokrug's growing wrath and, when these lights are strongest, it is ready to strike.

Within the Miskatonic Hollow, the deity was believed to have been venerated among Indigenous people as a spirit of the land. Few European settlers made the connection between legends about Bokrug from the Old World to the New and themselves venerated this little-known deity. Knowledge of Bokrug is scarce and worship of The Great Lizard even rarer. Still, Bokrug has affinity for those who are attuned to places once dedicated to it and may choose to manifest through them to enact vengeance on those who would corrupt these once-sacred spaces. Scions of Bokrug are avid protectors of the places they call home and all who dwell there eventually lose their humanity as the power of Bokrug grows within them. Over time, they take on a reptilian appearance, with wide mouths, bulging eyes, and small ears. The most powerful of Bokrug's Scions can no longer speak any human tongue and become alien even to those who knew them.

Callings: Guardian, Judge, Leader