



CATSABLANCA

A Feline Noir 1940s
Mythos Mystery Adventure

By SanityFree Adventures



Catsablanca: A Feline Noir 1940s Mythos Mystery Adventure

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For 2-6 players for approximately 3 hours of play.

Cathulhu: Velvet Paws on Cthulhu's Trail © 2014-2024, Ingo Ahrens and Henry Reeder & Daniel Harms and others, and Sixtystone Press Limited. *Cathulhu* is a supplement for the *Call of Cthulhu* game and requires the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook published by Chaosium, Inc. to play. Chaosium's *H.P. Lovecraft's Dreamlands* and the *Grand Grimoire* may also be of use.

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While this scenario is intentionally inspired by real people and places filming one of the greatest movies of all time, this work is complete fiction. This adventure was created by a fan of *Casablanca* (1942) and the *Cathulhu* roleplaying game for enjoyment by other fans of those works.

Duplication of handouts is permitted for personal use.

Spoiler Warning

This work is written for game masters running roleplaying adventures. Do not read this if you are a player.

Trigger Warnings

Violence. Harm to people and animals.

Play Testers

With thanks to John Ackley, Joshua Beeman, Jonathan Evans, Don Mann, Mike Mann, Greg Posey, Matthew Posey, Jonathan Seitz, and Christopher Trueman.

Dedication

To Harry and Ron, who are both inspirations, in that they are both the worst.

If you enjoy this work, consider buying and leaving reviews for my *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios or maps on DriveThruRPG. Visit sanityfree.com to learn more.

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Synopsis

It's the golden age of Hollywood and, behind the glitz and glamor, studios crank out movies at a breakneck pace. It's exciting to some, but only vaguely interesting to you. Why? Because you're a cat, the best kind of animal there is or ever was. Maybe you're the pet of a movie star, companion to one of the crew, or just a stray mouser that prowls the studio lot. Life is good, and nine lives are better. That is, until uncanny and mysterious forces turn easy living into a deadly game of cat and ... something. Furry feline, intrepid investigator, you may be just one cat nap away from the big sleep!

Prerequisites

Game masters running this scenario should understand and use the rules for the setting, skills, and tricks described in the official *Cathulhu* role playing game from Sixtystone Press. The players in that system are all cats. What the investigators can do and how they behave, interact, and confront Mythos terrors is somewhat different compared to how humans handle horrors in *Call of Cthulhu*. Could you use this scenario idea with another system? Yes, that's a great idea.

The game master will enjoy the scenario more and be able to run it better for having seen the classic film *Casablanca* (1942), during the filming of which this adventure is set. Players conversant with the film, either by viewing or through popular culture, are likely to appreciate the references within better.

For the Keeper's Eyes Only

The *Catsablanca* scenario takes place on the **Warner Bros. Studio lot** in late June and early July of 1942. **The player characters are cats** whose lives revolve around prowling the studio, getting scraps and snacks from the human can-openers, and typically spectating on filming activities — whether the action is behind the camera or in front of it, it's all a show to our feline friends.

However, the cats' lives are disrupted by **three strange occurrences**. One of the movie actors lays down for a nap and is next found comatose and must be taken away by an ambulance. Some studio windows that are usually kept shut are found open. Also, the strangely mutilated corpses of several birds and rats are left out in the open, their organs burning in the hot California sun.

The investigator cats will discover clues that these eerie occurrences are all tied to a hidden, lurking monster called **The Stealer of Breath**. The Stealer of Breath kills cats and humans alike by suffocating its victims and depleting their life energy. It

resembles a set of black, feather-covered lung lobes joined at the center by writhing, sharp, red tendrils. The creature is drawn to the studio based on the liveliness, vitality, and strong emotions of the cast and crew participating in such an active production. One feline resident of the studio, its mind broken by an encounter with the thing, will liken it to a black butterfly, although it is a larger, more distorted, and more horrifying. The creature leaves behind no footprints as it travels by graceful but silent floating. A scent of rotten honey lingers where it has passed. The monster's origin is unknown, but knowledge of its horrific methods of destruction is known even as far as the mythical **Dreamlands**, a realm to which the investigators might travel for insight.

To solve the mystery, the feline sleuths must search for clues, avoid attracting the attention of or interference from humans, and find the creature's hiding place. If they do not find and defeat it, their next sleep may be their last.

Introduction

Before your game, share the handouts "**Warner Bros. and the Studio System**" and "**What It Was Like On Set**" with the investigators to orient them.

At game start, read the following aloud to the investigators.

Calling a conclave is not done lightly, mostly because the caller knows the odds are that only half the local cats will show up. Luckily, boredom won out, which is how you found yourself sitting at early light in a hot and dry alleyway in some shade behind a dumpster and some crates. A multicolored tabby named Rocky is standing on an apple box and calling for attention. Anyone grooming just keeps doing it. Rocky has a little blue collar with a gold, pointy shape in the center. He thinks the collar makes him special. You think his name is what does it. It tells everyone around him exactly how stable he is.

"Listen, you mugs. We're going to have to get some stuff straight. First of all, one of youse is a messy eater. Two rats and three birds missing their guts were left out in the open. The Big Boss's secretary screamed blue murder when she saw one. So, no more leftovers, killers. If your eyes are too big for your stomachs, take the remains to the edge of the studio, and maybe a coyote will help you out."

Rocky pauses, his eyes dart around, but then he's back to business. "Sorry, thought it was a squirrel." He continues. "Second, everyone's to keep an eye out for suspicious characters. A few dressing room windows have been found jiggled open. Nothing's missing, but the boss is worried about the Leading Lady's jewelry."



"And, finally," said Rocky, and you hope it's final, "Owl Eyes got rolled out of his dressing room on a stretcher. They were pretty much done with him on the film set, and he went to have a lie down. The Man in Charge called for one more take after a while and sent a lackey for him. Owl Eyes wasn't waking up, but he wasn't dead — he passed the sniff test — so the director said to heck with it, then they wheeled the guy away, and he got driven off in the whee-ooh whee-ooh mobile. I was on the scene with my can-opener. I saw old Tripod in the alley nearby, and he seemed crazed, at least more than usual, and darted off even though I called after him."

Ah, Tripod, that three-legged rascal. He was a cat who had gotten a tough break but came out the other side a champ. He was everybody's pal. The camera operators loved him. He was constantly being thrown scraps, and he shared them freely with everyone. "I checked his nest, but no dice. If anyone sees him, I've got questions for him." Tripod wouldn't be missing for long. You'd make sure of that.

"I'm telling you all this," says Rocky, "because I've never seen a shoot like this. Everyone is on edge, and some of the can-openers are bone tired and irritable. Keep your eyes open and don't cause any trouble."

Investigators, Rocky's about to say, break it up. There are enough unusual things happening all at once that he thought it worth dragging you all into the alley to jawbone at you. The studio is waking up all around you, and a day of energetic filming awaits all the can-openers. You, of course, are at leisure. What do you do?

Dramatis Personae

The Man in Charge — The director (Michael Curtiz)

The Pencil Men — Two writers (Julius and Philip Epstein)

The Tough Guy — An actor (Humphrey Bogart)

The Leading Lady — An actress (Ingrid Bergman)

The Hero — Another actor (Paul Henreid)

Fancy Man — Another actor in a uniform (Claude Rains)

Owl Eyes — A supporting actor (Peter Lorre)

Hawkeye — A studio security guard, ineffectual

Rocky — Watchcat, whose can-opener is a studio security guard

Wild Wilhelm — Cantankerous old-timer, feline fume addict

Tripod — Everyone's best friend, three-legged, skittish, and missing

The Sleek One — A courtier of Bast

Other human actors and studio workers as needed

Scenes

The Alley

The informal headquarters of the cats. There are broken chairs, a dumpster, and random debris and baubles that have been collected over the course of the filming. Rocky calls a conclave of the studio cats to describe strange happenings.

Studio 7

The main sets where most of the filming takes place appear to be a bar, café, casino, and several offices. The investigators should mostly avoid getting in the way or sit quietly if they wish to observe some scenes. The studio is climate controlled and three sides of the building have no windows. One side, where the makeup and dressing rooms are, does have windows. Most studio doors are closed, so following the investigators' curiosity will be easier with the **Open Doors** or **Cat Burglar** tricks. **Spot** from inside or outside the dressing room where Owl Eyes was last seen to find evidence of sharp marks that show the window lock was tampered with by a long, thin instrument. **Scent** will reveal a *disturbing smell of rotten honey* around the window ledge. **Scent** (or a hard **Track** roll) will lead up a drainpipe outside the studio building. Follow with a hard **success with Jump** or **Climb**. Or, if trying to find another path to the roof, prowling around near an out of the way second-floor room used for temporary storage will reveal a member of the film crew napping beneath open windows. No matter what the investigators do, this person cannot be roused. (**SEN 0/1**) The rotten honey smell is particularly strong on the rooftop, indicating that its source lingered there for some time. Back in a nearby dressing room, if the timing is right and a successful **Cuteness** roll keeps the investigator from getting kicked out, a cat who understands **Human Language** may hear Hero recounting what happened to Owl Eyes to Leading Lady during a break. This may validate or embellish what Rocky described earlier. If the feline investigators are there on the right day, they will get to observe a boisterous scene being filmed; see handout "**The Song Day**."

Warner Café and the Commissary

Tripod regularly roams this area and usually naps near or under a dumpster. All his feline friends know this. While he does go missing due to a fit of mania, he will eventually return and try to hide here where he is most comfortable. Locate him with a successful **Track** roll, or perhaps **Yowl** nearby to get his attention and catch a glimpse of him. If the investigators successfully soothe him, he will explain that he was taking a nap in one of the dressing rooms and saw a "**black butterfly**" silently hovering over Owl Eyes and stealing his life away, which frightened Tripod so much

that he hobbled away in terror. Tripod may pass out from the stress of recounting his story.

Motion Picture Imaging

Wild Wilhelm, an older cat, loiters in or around the building where he can enjoy the fumes of film development. He may be found outside lolling on the grass when the editors are on a break. He's met all studio cats before and how he treats the investigators can be determined by **Luck**. If the investigators ask him about strange occurrences, he will have no information. However, he may offer some creative ideas about seeking an answer to their conundrums via the Dreamlands.

The Studio Grounds

Prowling around the studio (with successful **Spot** or **Scent** rolls) will reveal 1d6-1d12 dead birds, rats, and/or other commonly found animals. All have incisions in their torsos and the lungs have been thrown on the ground. The pattern of the dead animals may seem random. Particularly insightful investigators (perhaps with a successful hard **Intelligence** roll) will realize that the rough center between the killings is Studio 16.

The Dreamlands

One or more of the investigators might use the **Dreaming** skill to venture into the Dreamlands for insight into the mystery that surrounds them. With the right focus as they drift off, they can arrive on a peak where they can consult The Sleek One, a courtier of Bast, for clues and advice. Share, read aloud, or have one of the players read aloud handout "*To Sleep, Perchance to Dream; Journeying to the Dreamlands*" on the journey. Share or read aloud handout "*Visions of the Sleek One*" in response to questions from or dialogue with the investigators. (Optional **SEN 0/1** roll upon learning about The Stealer of Breath.)

Studio 16

A large, expansive film set which has been dressed for the movie's finale. It is built up to appear like an airplane hanger looking out on to an airfield. It contains the wooden shells of two movie prop airplanes, one nearby next to an office area with desk and phone and one farther away toward the back of the studio. Cats call airplanes "**metal birds**," the closest analogy that makes sense to them. The set is typically empty of crew unless the filming has reached its final days. Scent will reveal that rotten honey lingers in this studio and leads toward the farthest metal bird. A successful **Sense Danger** roll will confirm to the investigators that the monster is near. It has made a nest at the back of the farthest airplane. An approach with **Stealth** may offer advantage. If the investigators confront the Stealer of Breath,

it will take a toll. (SEN 1d3/1d5.) However, they are likely to see something even more horrific than the monster itself. While searching around the studio on a standard patrol, Hawkeye, the security guard, has been killed by the Stealer of Breath. The organs in his torso will have been pulled out and the investigators will watch as the creature folds itself into Hawkeye's chest cavity. It will then use its tendrils to pull the wound shut and Hawkeye, now a zombie puppet mastered by the monster, will lurch toward the investigators on the attack. (SEN 1d5/1d8.) They will be in for the fight of their lives against it and must stop it from killing again. If any investigators survive and they can bear it, they can return to this set for the final day of filming — see handout “*The Metal Bird Day*.”

Resolving the Scenario

There is no prescribed ending to the adventure, and it may take whatever path is guided by the players' actions and suits the Keeper. Possible endings to anticipate include:

- The creature may escape, possibly never to be seen again. It could rush off on its own or possess the body of an animal, an NPC, or even a dead investigator. The remaining cats may always feel a sense of paranoia in wondering if it will return to the large studio grounds where it can lurk and seek fresh victims.
- The investigators may battle the creature and succeed, rending it to pieces before or while it inhabits the body of Hawkeye.
- If the battle with the creature is particularly challenging and the Keeper wishes, or through a successful **Luck** roll, the other studio cats — Rocky, Tripod, and Wild Wilhelm — may rush in to add their claws and fangs to the fray. Although **Deadly Cat Attack** is a swarming move only available in the Dreamlands, perhaps all the cats working together in the real world can have a dramatic and dangerous effect.
- Or, consider that one of the NPC cats may be in league with the monster for a reward, perhaps a tenth life or infinite lives, and will join the battle alongside the antagonist.
- The investigators may all die, but the show will go on at the studio. (Death for all is the least likely if any or all still have any of their **Nine Lives** remaining.)
- Remember that, no matter what happens, the studio and its officials will likely engage in any kind of cover-up necessary to finish the production.