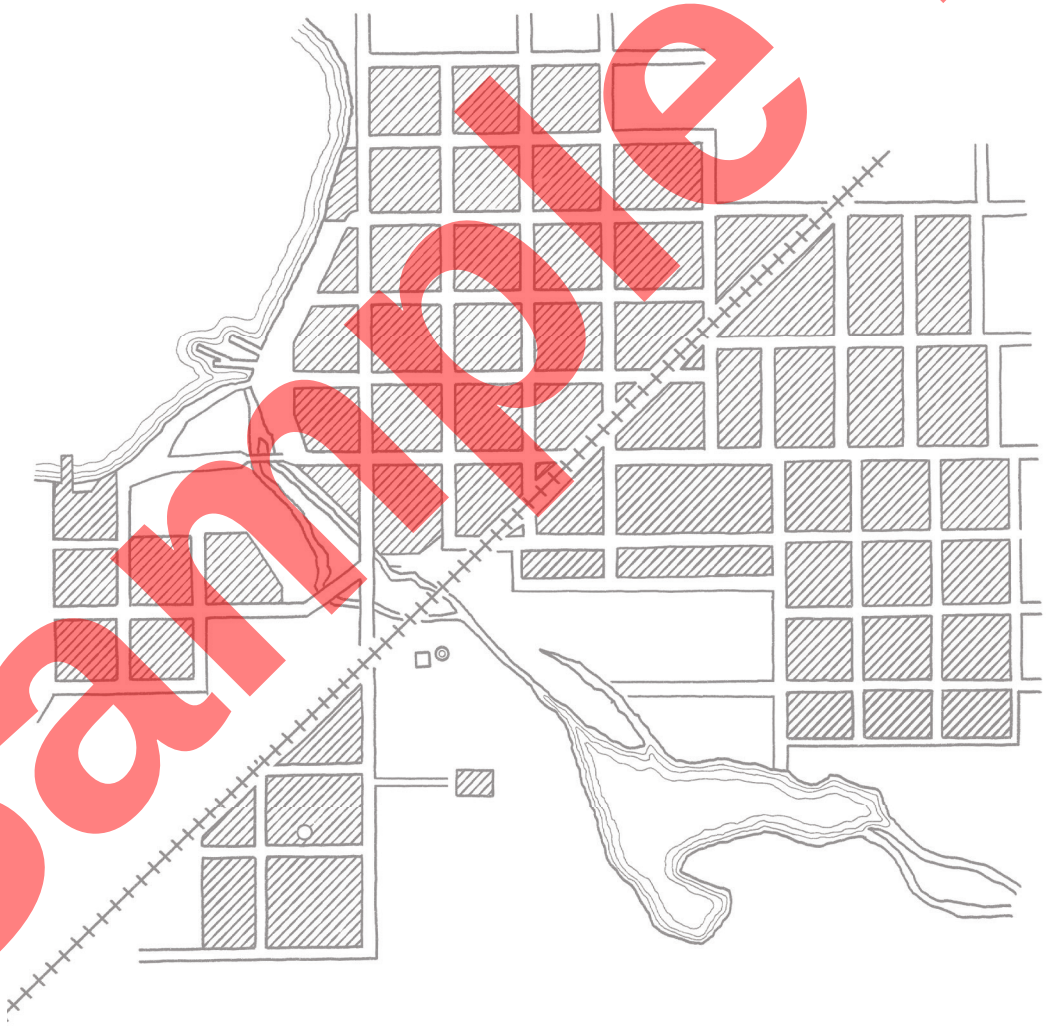

GARY CON® PRESENTS
MADNESS
AT GENEVA LAKE
A CALL OF CTHULHU ADVENTURE
LUKE GYGAX • ALYSSA FADEN
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MADNESS
AT GENEVA LAKE

A DREAD TALE



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Skeeter, you hero.

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This supplement is best used with the Call of Cthulhu (7th Edition) roleplaying game, available separately.

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This year, 2025, marks the 50th anniversary of one of the most influential pioneers in tabletop roleplaying, Chaosium. Greg Stafford formed the company in 1975 in order to publish *White Bear and Red Moon*, a game set in his fantasy world of Glorantha. The company went on to publish many games including *RuneQuest* and *Pendragon*, however the first Chaosium game I ever played was *Call of Cthulhu* in 1981 at an Autumn Revel at the American Legion Hall in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin if memory serves me correctly.

The game immediately captured my interest because of how different it was from the RPGs I was familiar with, such as *Dungeons & Dragons* (D&D), *Metamorphosis Alpha/Gamma World* and *Traveller*. I played the game in the dimly lit basement of the Legion Hall which helped create the right atmosphere to make 11 year old me on the edge of my seat as the Keeper described the horrific scene of slimy tentacled fishfolk and other terrors. My investigator tried to fight, like a hero from the TTRPGs I was used to playing, and that didn't go so well. I lost my sanity and got killed by the otherworldly beasts. That didn't lessen my enjoyment of the game, as it was a great change of paradigm from heroic RPGs. The game highlighted skills, investigation and prudent risk taking which I hadn't really experienced previously.

In the years between 1981 and today I have had the good fortune to befriend many great authors, designers and artists including both Rick Meints and Jeff Richard the President and Creative Director of Chaosium respectively. When I was thinking of ways to celebrate their 50th anniversary I decided I needed to create a *Call of Cthulhu* scenario set in Lake Geneva for play at Gary Con. I reached out to the talented and enthusiastic Alyssa Faden who I know has a passion for the game. Together we developed the work you have in your possession now, *Madness at Geneva Lake*!

Gary Con is a memorial convention that celebrates my father's legacy and the enduring passion of the gaming community he helped create through *Dungeons & Dragons*. This year's partnership with Chaosium as the Premier Sponsor of Gary Con feels like a convergence of history and creativity, bringing together two pillars of the RPG world to honor their shared dedication to immersive storytelling and imagination.The concept for this special *Call of Cthulhu* scenario quickly took shape with a few calls and emails. It is a great story that weaves in a few little known facts from gaming's past.

Madness at Geneva Lake takes place in December of 1891 in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. The story begins at Oakwood Spring Sanatarium, which is a nod to the actual sanitarium whose ruins my father explored as a lad. The dark corridors, partially collapsed floors and strange creaks, shuffles and other unidentifiable sounds fueled his imagination. A paddle steamer named *Lucius Newberry* is central to the investigation and adds a unique thread to this tapestry. The ill-fated ship caught fire and sank December 19, 1891. Few know that TSR funded a local salvage effort in 1982 attempting to recover artifacts from the wreckage of the *Lucius Newberry* hundreds of feet below at the bottom of Lake Geneva. This scenario brilliantly weaves this little-known chapter of TSR's history into a tale of cosmic horror, blending Chaosium's mastery of Lovecraftian storytelling with Lake Geneva's rich roleplaying legacy. These little touches have exponentially increased my enjoyment working on this project.

Whether you're a seasoned investigator delving into Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* for the first time, or a nostalgic gamer visiting the birthplace of *Dungeons & Dragons*, this scenario invites you to explore the depths of mystery and madness in this intriguing scenario. It's a testament to how gaming continues to evolve, connecting past and present, and to how the stories we craft at the table can transcend time. I'm proud to see this collaboration come to life at Gary Con XVII and continue to a myriad of conventions, gatherings and home campaigns, as we honor the past and embrace the future of roleplaying together.

Cheers,

Luke Gygax

Luke Gygax, 2025

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You hold in your hands Madness at Geneva Lake, a wonderful Call of Cthulhu adventure written specifically for Gary Con XVII. This is a great adventure to be played and enjoyed, and that is what is truly important about all roleplaying games - they exist for your enjoyment!

Of course there's more to the story behind the scenes. Luke and I have had plenty of chats around the idea of doing something special together at Gary Con in 2025; you see, this year is the 50th anniversary of the founding of Chaosium.

Chaosium was founded by Greg Stafford back in 1975, less than three years after Gary Gygax founded TSR. Fantasy gaming was in its infancy and nobody knew what they were doing. Chaosium was established for the same reason TSR was - Greg had a vision of publishing a fantasy game, in this case a board game called "White Bear, Red Moon" and realized he needed to self-publish it. "Chaosium" was a portmanteau - a combination of two words. "Chaos" - well for anyone who worked with Greg that was easy to figure out - plus "Coliseum," as Greg lived right by the Oakland Coliseum. With that Stafford's Chaosium was born.

Then came out a string of releases that, combined with what TSR was doing with Dungeons & Dragons at the same time, still largely defines the roleplaying games we play today. RuneQuest (dedicated to Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson for being the first to open "Pandora" Box") in 1978, Basic Roleplaying in 1980, and Call of Cthulhu in 1982. In 1985, Greg came out with his masterpiece of game design, Pendragon. I'd be remiss without paying tribute to Steve Perrin, Sandy Petersen, Keith Herbert, Larry DiTillio, Mark Morrison, Reid Hoffman, Ken Rolston, Jennell Jaquays, and so many others - they all helped make Chaosium what it is today.

And here we are in 2025. Chaosium is still around, and all of those games are still actively played, and Chaosium continues developing new releases for all of them. Sadly Greg is no longer with us, and so with too many of his original collaborators.

Gary Con is a celebration of Gary Gygax and the art form, hobby, and community that he played an oversized role in bringing to life. We are all here because of Gary. However, I think it entirely proper that we take the opportunity to also celebrate Greg Stafford and the Chaosium for their role in what we are all gathered here for. If Gary gave life to roleplaying games, Greg gave them their spirit. Over the last 50 years, those creative energies have commingled and inspired countless others.

That's the long version of what you hold in your hands. A celebration of both Gary Gygax and Greg Stafford, but also a ripping fun game! Enjoy it!

Jeff Richard

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MADNESS AT GENEVA LAKE

Where Shadows Rise, Forgotten Truths Drown

INTRODUCTION

Madness at Geneva Lake is a short investigative scenario for *Call of Cthulhu* set in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin during 1891, suitable to play with both the standard game and Cthulhu by Gaslight. It involves the investigators being checked into the local Oakwood Spring Sanitarium with no recollection of how they got there, why, or even who they are.

The investigators piece together the clues of their own identities and objectives, revealing the rising *Dread* in Lake Geneva itself and putting themselves on a collision course with the evil gripping the town.

Originally written for Gary Con XVII, *Madness at Geneva Lake* is intended to be used in two different ways. Firstly, as a stand-alone adventure with the quirky characters included herein; each has goals and personalities guaranteed to propel the story forward to its aquatic and fiery conclusion. Alternatively, *Madness at Geneva Lake* works equally well as a side adventure within an ongoing campaign, where investigators have chosen to take a little time out for recuperation in one of the many mental retreats available around Lake Geneva at the time.

The scenario, while focused and brief, can be … threatening. For an ongoing campaign, Keepers may wish to focus the ravages of deep ones and *The Dread* onto hapless non-player characters (NPCs) who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. But as a one-off game: pull no punches … or perhaps more accurately: tentacles.

This scenario is intended for use with groups of five to six investigators, but pure manpower is not going to make the difference in a win or lose situation, so feel free to run with more or less investigators and adjust encounters accordingly as you deem appropriate.

Any investigator occupations are acceptable, particularly because the scenario begins with everyone being in a state of amnesia.

You may wish to lean into this, particularly if inserting *Madness at Geneva Lake* into an ongoing campaign, by having the amnesiac patients have versions of their investigator sheets that are representative of who they were … with some holes; perhaps the professor is not quite as learned in the fields of science and medicine, social skills are not quite as sharp, and credit rating is irrelevant until such a time that influence, social connections, and access to bank accounts can be restored.

MATURE CONTENT WARNING

This scenario contains encounters where the characters are required to confront potentially graphic scenes and situations involving horror, mental trauma, PTSD, and adult themes. Please confirm with your players that they understand the potentially distressing nature of some scenes and situations, and that this scenario is suitable for all your players. Scale any descriptions to meet the needs and requests of your players, respecting their boundaries. This scenario is designed for mature gamers, so please be aware of everyone's comfort level and aim to make this an enjoyable experience for all.

KEEPER'S INFORMATION

It is December 1891, and the quaint town of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin is preparing for the Holidays. Recent years have been kind to this lakeside town, and there is a rise in prosperity and popularity as it has become the defacto vacation destination for the rich and elite of Chicago.

Tremendous mansions are appearing on the shorelines as big-business money seek refuge from the Great Chicago Fire. This, in turn, has become a game of one-upmanship as each mansion becomes more and more extravagant.

Among this boom, health retreats – such as Oakwood Springs, founded in 1885 – offer cutting edge mental and physical recuperation with the latest in hydrotherapy, rest cures, and alternative medicines.

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To all intents, this is an idyllic scene of popularism, wealth, crisp snow, gentle mist on the lake, and warm fires in the surrounding homes and town.

But within the lake depths lies trapped an ancient and malevolent evil.

Well known to the Potawatomi peoples indigenous to the region, a fell spirit known as ***The Great Eye*** (sometimes referred to as simply ***The Dread***) is imprisoned behind a series of wards and seals within the lake itself. *See page 38 The Dread from Geneva Lake for further information.*

But as the Potawatomi faced displacement and disruption, and summer retreats and homes encroach on every acre of the lake shore, so knowledge of this evil has faded from the lips of those living in the area, and protective wards are broken and sold into museum or private collections.

These are the very things holding *The Dread* in its prison, and as the seal weakens, so has a growing unease – and transformation –crept amongst Lake Geneva residents.

Over the last few decades, freshwater deep ones in servitude to *The Dread* have begun to infiltrate the local community. Empowered by the weakening of the Potawatomi seal, they were subtle at first, and their integration insidious. But by marrying into local families, they have established bloodlines deep into Lake Geneva's control and authority, and the their influence over social and economic circles has strengthened over the years. Now deep one descendants hold key positions across local businesses and government positions all across the city.

> In 1890 the *Lucius Newberry* was renamed to *City of Lake Geneva*, but for the purposes of this scenario we refer to her as the *"Lucius Newberry"* throughout.

One of these is John Wilson, a local born businessman and deep one hybrid. John purchased one of the largest and most exquisite passenger paddleboats on the lake, the *Lucius Newberry*, and under the guise of making her stronger and more luxurious, a bow to



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stern refit introduced extra-planar wood, mystical carvings, and magical devices, all designed to finalize the shattering of the last remnants of the Potawatomi seal holding *The Dread* at bay.

Now, every time the *Lucius Newberry* sails, and every time her bell rings, unwitting passengers fuel this dark and unholy rite, inching *The Dread* ever closer to freedom.

Unsurprisingly, mental disorders, troubling dreams, and unease grips Lake Geneva, as every passenger onboard the *Lucius Newberry* loses a little bit of their mind, sanity, humanity, and even soul. Sanitariums and health resorts burgeon to overcapacity, which is great for business, but terrible for Lake Geneva.

Cultists and Deep Ones oh my!

In Lake Geneva the imprisoned *Great Eye, "The Dread of Lake Geneva"*, (see page 38 later in this module for details) is represented by the cult of ***"The Covenant of the Drowned Eye"***. Predominantly deep one in nature, this cult is the cause and will behind deep one integration into the town's populace and leadership. Deep ones, deep one hybrids, and human-looking variants all regard themselves as equal and pivotal in the grand scheme *of The Dread's* release. Human cultists are involved as well, motivated through a hope for salvation, the dream of power, or simply madness.

There are, however, opposing forces.

The ***Devout of the Abyss*** are a faction of deep ones, hybrids and humans who revere the ancient sea god *Dagon* as their one true deity. Unlike the *Covenant of the Drowned Eye*, the *Devout of the Abyss* believe that releasing *The Dread* would be a grave sacrilege against *Dagon* and view the *Eye* as a corrupt and alien power, unworthy of their worship and incompatible with the sacred oceanic depths that *Dagon* commands.

The *Devout of the Abyss* are doing everything they can to thwart the plans of *The Covenant of the Drowned Eye* and the investigators may find assistance, at least temporarily, in this unlikely ally faction.



Clara Alden

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Clara Alden - Sanitarium Attendant

Alden is a member of the *Devout of the Abyss*, and they gained employment in Oakwood Springs in order to get closer to Dr. Oscar Augustus King and determine what *The Covenant's* plans are for the creature within Lake Geneva.

Alden does not know the pivotal role the *Lucius Newberry* plays in the release of *The Dread*, but is keen to leverage the opportunity the investigators have afforded them now that they are here. Alden believes, particularly during the chaos at the beginning of the scenario, that this is the opportunity to release the investigators and guide them towards their belongings, true identifies, and ultimately Dr King's offices and records.

Alden's motivation is to reveal *The Covenant's* plans and ensure that they fail, leveraging all resources available. They are a sympathetic NPC who will assist and guide the investigators during their escape.

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