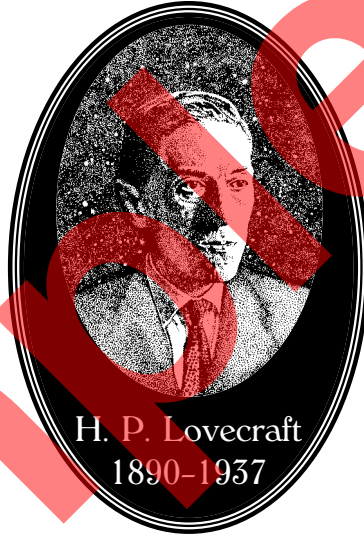


Sample file



H. P. Lovecraft  
1890-1937

# Unseen Masters

Modern Struggles against Hidden Powers

by **Bruce Ballou**

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Chaosium Inc.

2000

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# Dedication

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This book is dedicated to  
Robert Bloch & Richard Matheson,  
Masters of Terror

Special thanks to  
My supportive wife Anna,  
My should-have-been-brother Sean,  
and  
Lynn Willis, for letting me create this blasphemous tome



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Sample File

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# Foreword

*“Who is among us? Who? I cannot utter a blessing while he is here. I cannot feel one. Where he treads, the earth is parched! Where he breathes, the air is fire! Where he feeds, the food is poison! Where he turns, his glance is lightning! Who is among us? Who?”*

Melmoth the Wanderer

**D**ark forces have existed from before the coming of man, and shall exist long after mankind is but dust. These forces are here now, but are unseen. Invisible, yet coexisting with our world, They have watched and waited.

Abd al-Azrad warned us of these Unseen Masters in his terrible forbidden book, the *Necronomicon*:

*Not in the spaces we know, but between them, They walk serene and primal, undimensioned and to us unseen.*

*As a foulness shall ye know Them. Their hand is at your throats, yet ye see Them not; and Their habitation is even one with your guarded threshold.*

It is now the present. Mankind is beset with all forms of disasters. The horrors range from genocidal wars to epidemics of incurable diseases to poverty and famine. From the chaos, self-proclaimed messiahs and prophets of oblivion appear, spreading the word that the apocalypse is upon us. They are dismissed as madmen.

Worse, the unseen forces are no longer quiescent. Ancient evils no longer hide in forgotten tombs, blasted heaths, and fabled cities no, they have come into the hearts of our cities, in through the walls of our homes, and invaded our very minds.

Why?

The madmen are right. The End Times are upon us. The Unseen Masters no longer wait. They have come to take what was theirs.

\* \* \*

The adventures in this book pit investigators against deadly foes who are Unseen Masters of evil incarnate. They have lurked off-stage in separate invisible realms, crafting diabolical

designs for Earth. These villains include wolfish extra-dimensional entities which strive to break into our world to feast on human souls; a demon lord from the fevered imagination of a schizophrenic’s world; and a monster from a dimension of ultimate chaos and darkness, clothed in the guiltless flesh of an unwilling host.

These adventures were designed more as mini-campaigns than short scenarios. Each can be expanded upon to create many nights of play. They have also been made for experienced players, to create new and unexpected challenges for them. Keepers should be experienced as well, as the scenarios are complex and full of colorful NPCs.

Statistics for each scenario are found at the end of the scenario.

## THE WILD HUNT

A serial killer is loose in the city of New York. He seems unstoppable. The investigators are put in charge of a task force with the entire city’s resources. But they face more than a lone killer, they face They Who Hunger, who have waited eons for the time of the Wild Hunt. If the investigators can stick to the trail of hard evidence and ignore wild irrelevant chases, they may have just enough time to prevent a bloody massacre.

## THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE

What is Truth? When does imagination cease and reality begin? Who can say the mad do not see into realms the sane cannot perceive? One investigator will stumble onto the Truth. However, the Truth is a psychotic delusion. That hero will attempt to dispel the veil of illusion that evil forces have woven, even if it kills everyone around him.

## COMING OF AGE

The prophecies of Armageddon are soon to be fulfilled. The Dark Messiah shall rise out of the darkness of twenty-seven centuries. It comes not as a monster, but as an innocent child: the friendly, lovable son of an investigator. The Haunter of the Dark has returned to finish what it began – the destruction of the world.

Bruce Ballon

# INTRODUCTION

*Background information on the setting and new skills.*

The settings for the adventures within this book are not forgotten tombs, crumbling mansions, or decaying backwoods towns. The horrors showcased mostly occur in the heart of one of the most famous metropolitan areas in the world—New York City.

Keepers are encouraged to add in the dark texture of decay and rot that lies under the city's glitzy façade. The scenarios' themes underscore that outward appearance, wherein simple truths are but the surfaces of secrets filled with madness and despair.

Contrast the false safety of the brightly lit city streets to its shadowy dangerous alleys. The concrete jungle exists, filled with its own predators such as robbers, rapists and racists. Scattered in the dark are the homeless, young and old, trying to find solace through begging, drugs, and criminal activities. The sex trade exploits many of the helpless into becoming flesh for freaks in exchange for a needle of chemical dreams. Sickness and hunger loom in the night. Young exiles return to ancient tribal ways, forming gangs answerable only to themselves.

With the horrors of death, hunger, hate, and sickness, one would think the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had arrived. Indeed, in a sense, they have. But there are more heralds of doom—there is the dreariness of suburbia, the mass consumerism engendered by sex-tinged media, the confusion of innumerable cultures and clashing generations, and the heaps of pollution swept into the corners of the globe.

Keepers who weave such thematic elements into their games can induce a mounting sense of spectral presences rotting away the foundations of humanity. The demonic punch line the investigators will uncover is that the Unseen Masters are catalysts for the end, but that humanity has itself to blame for beating a pathway to Hell.

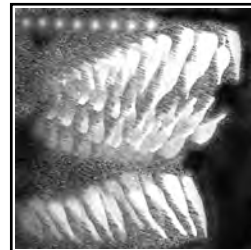
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These adventures are designed for experienced keepers and players. They are the result of trying to create fresh, unexpected, and offbeat scenarios for my players, who have been

playing *Call of Cthulhu* since the game was released. If this is the first time you are running a *Cthulhu* scenario, I suggest trying the adventures in the rule book first, or you will end up with many dead or insane investigators.

As a stickler for consistency, I have attempted to incorporate diverse backgrounds from Mythos stories and scenario supplements (ranging from *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth* to *Last Rites*). Of course, such undertakings are made difficult by the many different points of view and interpretations of Mythos history. I try to identify most of the plots I weave in, leaving some small zingers for old-time veterans to chuckle over when they recognize the sources. Do not worry—all the information needed to run the adventures is within this book. However, the referred-to books will allow keepers to expand upon and further texturize the scenarios as they see fit. Because I attempted to include extensive background materials, there also may be minor to moderate spoilers for some published scenarios.

One thing that may not be to everyone's tastes is the nature of the conclusions to the adventures. The climaxes are often extremely deadly, and are more gateways to darker mysteries of the Cthulhu Mythos than simple pat conclusions. However, the opportunities to thwart some of the machinations of the Unseen Masters are there, even if they cost the lives and sanities of investigators.



# Disciplines of the Mind

The plots in *Unseen Masters* revolve around themes of mental illness. Therefore, a better understanding of certain skills useful to the player characters is in order.

This brief section summarizes relationships between the skills of Medicine, Psychology, Psychoanalysis, Hypnosis, and two new skills—Psychiatry and Psychotherapy. Some applications for these skills are also provided. Any summary will fail to detail the scope of these disciplines, but lengthy explanations would read like a textbook and add little to the game experience. The summaries below may add realism, demystify some myths, and provide better role-playing opportunities.

## The Origins of Psychiatry and Psychology

Compared to medical science as a whole, psychiatry and psychology are young. They have been around for only a century. However, they were built upon older concepts, ranging from neurology to Eastern philosophies.

By the nineteenth century, medical science had begun to explain the ailments of the soul as illnesses of the brain. “Demonic possession” had eventually been seen as psychotic illness, “black bile melancholia” as depressive mood disorder, and so on.

Many early pioneers originally trained as neurologists, as did Freud. These people put forth theories of the mind in order to understand the process of thought. Central to their discussions was the mind/body dichotomy, which was often debated in terms of which element was the more important to focus on. As it would be proven, these concepts were not mutually exclusive, but rather highly related. The artificial polarization lingered for decades. Today, most people who practice in the field of mental health realize that one has to deal with the entire person—including biological, psychological, and social factors—to truly help. This includes dealing with stresses such as homelessness, medical problems such as chronic pain syndrome, psychological and physiological addictions, and other problems.

A brief, oversimplified definition of psychology would be the scientific study of behavior and its underlying emotional states and mental processes. Psychology has many different branches, however, and thus psychologists apply their knowledge to various fields. Among these are medical science research, social sciences, economics, philosophy, linguistics, education, mathematics, mass media, statistics, and computer sciences. Clinical psychologists treat psychopathology but are not licensed to deal with medical aspects of a condition.

Psychiatry is a medical specialty requiring medical schooling and degrees with special training in the diagnosis and treatment of psychopathology or mental disorders—an M.D. and a specialist degree. Psychiatrists need to understand medical ailments, as they can often create or masquerade as psychiatric symptoms—for instance, hypothyroidism can induce depression. As medical doctors, psychiatrists are licensed to prescribe medications, administer electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) and chemical treatments, and sometimes perform surgery. Psychiatrists are also trained to do different types of psychotherapies. The well-trained psychiatrist is adept at using the biopsychosocial model for guiding treatments for patients.

For a more detailed account of the history of the psychological disciplines, please see the Chaosium supplement *Taint of Madness*.

## Skills Connected with the Mind

### HYPNOSIS (05%)

Hypnosis is a complex mental phenomenon that has been defined as a state of heightened focal concentration and receptivity to the suggestions of another person. There is no known physiological basis for hypnosis, as there is for sleep. Anton Mesmer originated modern hypnosis in the late eighteenth century. A skill common among alienists of the 1890s and psychiatrists of the 1920s, in the present day it is not taught to psychologists or psychiatrists as part of their basic training. Some practitioners do train in it as an extra modality for treatment. Many hypnotherapists have no other training beyond this ability. Also, nightclub magicians and professional hypnotists employ this skill to amaze audiences for entertainment.

With this skill one can calm an individual, plant suggestions, help somewhat to control eating habits and addictions, or help cope with chronic pain. Those who do not wish to be hypnotized can resist its induction. People with basic mistrust of others such as paranoiacs are bad candidates. Also, unethical hypnotists can sometimes have those in a trance perform actions they may later regret—to do this, the hypnotist must make a Psychology skill roll to convince the entranced person that the action is something he or she would do. There is controversy as to whether patients will perform acts during a trance that they would otherwise find repugnant or contrary to their moral code.

### MEDICINE (05%)

Although psychiatry grew out of neurology, the Medicine skill usually applies to tangible medical problems such as infections, physical trauma, the circulation of the blood, etc. In earlier eras, most physicians’ medical training ignored consideration of psychiatric or psychological knowledge. In the present day, medical schools include some training in psychiatry. Medical specialists such as surgeons, radiologists, etc. often do not make the effort to retain psychiatric learning, focusing mostly on their own disciplines. Nonetheless, general practitioners and family doctors often end up dealing with mental health issues. Base Psychiatry

## 12 – Unseen Masters

skill for individual general practitioners is about half their Medicine skill level, or as the keeper determines.

### PSYCHIATRY (01%)

Psychiatry allows a character to diagnose and treat mental illness. For treatment and restoration of Sanity points, substitute Psychiatry for Psychoanalysis. The skill may have to be used multiple times over days or weeks to treat symptoms. At 20%, a skill-holder will know the basic diagnostic criteria for common psychiatric conditions, the protocol and knowledge of how to commit someone who meets danger criteria, the basic available treatments, and when to consult other specialists for aid.

This skill also reflects the ability to:

- Conduct a psychiatric interview for determining diagnosis and treatment planning.
- Know basic psychological and psychodynamic theories of the mind (very similar to Psychology skill, and either can be used for this function).
- Diagnose medical conditions masquerading as or inducing mental illnesses (e.g., pancreatic cancer often causes clinical depression).
- Administer the proper medications and other biological treatments of the era, tailoring its effects to the symptoms of the patient. See the *Call of Cthulhu* rule book for timelines of treatments. For instance, ECT was not available until the mid-1930s, and antipsychotic medication not until the 1960s.
- Provide psychotherapy treatment (this has been delegated under the Psychotherapy skill (psychiatrists can have a base Psychotherapy skill at their Psychiatry skill)).
- Create a subspecialty, such as Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Addiction, Schizophrenia, etc.
- Know the current psychiatric research literature.

### PSYCHOANALYSIS (01%)

Currently this skill is used as “mental first aid” in the game. This is only one form of psychotherapy, although it is the earliest form. Freud developed the technique; it involves the concept of free associations in a safe setting with frequent sessions, allowing patients to experience an emotional catharsis that alleviates psychiatric symptoms. Freud turned to this technique after abandoning hypnosis, in which he found that patients would substitute new symptoms after hypnosis had gotten rid of the old complaints.

This therapy delves deeply into the subconscious, and usually requires 4-5 hourly sessions a week. It is not recommended for those with mental illnesses that impair their perception of reality, or for those who cannot tolerate strong emotional experiences. (In such individuals, the therapy can intensify their symptoms.) Psychoanalysis usually takes a few years to work, as it is used to change deep-rooted character traits, or at least allow the patient to

better understand himself or herself, to try to change maladaptive patterns.

This skill is available in all three time periods, although in modern times most therapists employ one of a host of other types of psychotherapies. Psychoanalytic institutes allow training for psychiatrists, psychologists, and anyone in the mental health field they deem would be a good candidate. Such candidates need to undergo psychoanalysis themselves, to make sure they are capable of handling this therapeutic modality. In game terms, each month a character attends regular sessions with an analyst, he or she can make an Idea roll which will increase Sanity by 1 point, up to his or her maximum. If the patient makes a critical success with his or her Idea roll, it counts as if he or she won a POW struggle, and has the same chances of having POW increase by 1 (up to a maximum of 21).

### PSYCHOLOGY (05%)

As mentioned before, Psychology has numerous branches. In many scenarios, it is used almost exclusively to detect lies, but it can be used in many other ways.

- To know who's who in the field of psychology, know the current scientific literature, distinguish normal from abnormal psychology and behaviors, etc.
- To understand people so that one can motivate another person's behavior. This can act as a modifying bonus to communication skills at the keeper's discretion, for it is easier to Persuade someone who feels complimented and understood. This can also include techniques like reverse psychology and rewarding desired behaviors.
- To perform certain forms of Psychotherapy (these individuals can have a base Psychotherapy skill at half their Psychology skill level).
- To profile or predict a person's behavior. This may allow one character to locate another by understanding where they hang out, whom they would contact for help, etc. This works for humans, not Mythos monsters!
- To administer and understand methods and systems of psychological measurement i.e., to score IQ tests, determine learning strengths, identify personality patterns, and so forth.
- To perform a psychological autopsy, i.e., guess a person's state of mind just before they committed suicide.

### PSYCHOTHERAPY (01%)

At present, a host of psychotherapies exist: cognitive behavioral therapy, group therapy, interpersonal therapy, dialectal behavioral therapy, core conflictual relationship therapy, family therapy, couple therapy, play therapy, psychodynamic psychotherapy, good old psychoanalysis, and many, many more. As mentioned above, psychoanalysis is actually not a great choice for crisis intervention. Psychiatrists and other crisis staff who work in hospital ERs often pick up *Crisis Therapy* skill. Substitute this skill for the

function of “mental first aid” that Psychoanalysis served in previous eras. With a successful Idea roll, someone attending regular sessions in one of these therapies can increase 1 Sanity point every month toward a specific Sanity point loss. A character can only engage in one such focus at a time. For example, Harvey Walters Jr. is coming for twice-weekly psychodynamic psychotherapy with Dr. Kurt N. Peter. The focus is on Harvey’s experience of witnessing the murder of his friend, for which Harvey lost 4 Sanity points. This therapy can restore only those 4 lost points, and no more.

Keepers may decide that Sanity point loss from Mythos experiences cannot be completely recovered from, and leave 1 or 2 points lost no matter how much treatment the patient gets. A rule of thumb may be that the minimum loss for a creature or book read is the amount of permanently lost SAN.

### Psychiatrist Template, Present Era

Biology, Credit Rating, First Aid, Medicine, Pharmacy, Psychiatry, Psychology, Psychotherapy, plus two of: Forensics, Hypnosis, Law, Occult, or Psychoanalysis. ■

## Other Useful Skills

### FORENSICS (01%)

*Optional skill, to be allowed at the keeper’s discretion.* This skill allows one to analyze physical evidence from crimes and crime scenes. Since this skill can be subdivided into different branches, keepers should decide what the skill means to each investigator who has it. For example, physicians trained in this skill are mostly adept at performing autopsies to deduce the cause of death, the source of injuries, the presence of poison in the victim’s body, etc. Law enforcement scientists are more adept at running ballistic tests, determining a method of entry in a robbery scene, etc. To others, this skill may be the ability to detect/find fingerprints and other spoor of a person at a crime scene. In the aforementioned

examples, the skills should be listed in character descriptions as Forensics (Medicine), Forensics (Ballistics), and Forensics (Crime Scene Technician), respectively. Most experts will know a little from other areas of forensics outside their specialty. Keepers can combine other skill rolls with Forensics for various instances: i.e. Pharmacy to detect a rare poison, Occult to recognize a ritual cult murder, or Archaeology to perform a systematic analysis of the crime scene. Forensic Psychiatry falls under the Psychiatry skill as a subspecialty—it is the branch of medicine that deals with disorders of the mind and their relationship to legal principles. (For more information about forensic science, see *The Keeper’s Companion, Volume 1.*)

At the keeper’s discretion, a character with Forensics can attempt to analyze something outside of their specialty by rolling at half their normal percentile rating. For instance, a keeper might rule that an investigator with Forensics (Medicine) 60% has a 30% chance of figuring out that a strange rune carved into a murder victim’s forehead is an occult symbol used in a string of ritualistic serial killings. (The investigator might have autopsied other bodies with the same rune, or read autopsy reports about similar cases.)

### MATHEMATICS (EDU x2%)

This skill reflects the ability to perform mathematical operations. Mathematics is a companion skill to Physics. At 20%, the person can do algebra, high school physics equations, and so on. At 40%, the person can analyze calculus and linear algebra equations. At 60%, the person is a mathematician capable of teaching university level courses, computing fuel consumption ratios for spacecraft, etc. At 85% or more, he or she is a mathematical genius who can derive equations reflecting the principles of alternate dimensions. An investigator can increase his chances of understanding Mythos spells, which are often based on hyperdimensional principles, or learn a spell more quickly if the player rolls one-fifth his or her Mathematics rating or less. However, with greater understanding comes the loss of extra sanity; at the keeper’s discretion, the investigator loses an additional 1D3 SAN from studying a Mythos text, up to the maximum Sanity point loss the tome could inflict. ■

