

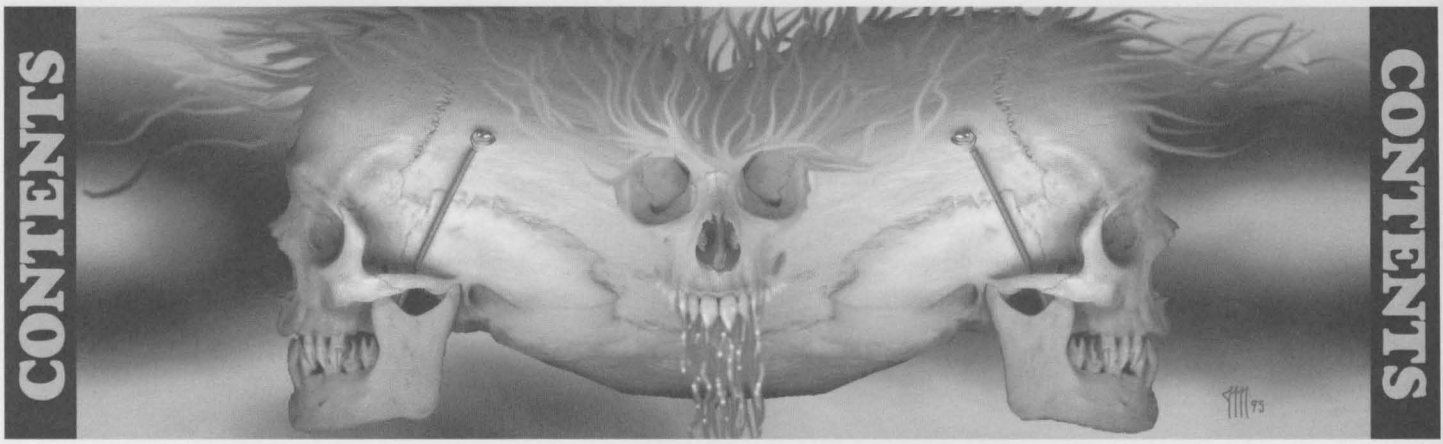
THE UNSPEAKABLE OATH

FOR CALL OF CTHULHU • ISSUE THIRTEEN • FIVE DOLLARS



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THE DREAD PAGE OF AZATHOTH

As I write these first nervous words, it's fast approaching midnight on the evening of Sunday, August 20, 1995. I'm sitting in near-total darkness among the stone markers and obelisks of Swan Point Cemetery in Providence, Rhode Island. Today is H.P. Lovecraft's birthday, and with pen in hand I sit on the cool grass with my back against the base of the Phillips family monument. Before me, just a few feet away, lies the humble marker I've spent the last hour contemplating—and there also lie whatever remains still endure of the late H.P. Lovecraft.

The second NecronomiCon convention ended just a few hours before in nearby Danvers. I took a rental car from there to Providence, and spent the afternoon and evening exploring the town. It's easy to see why Lovecraft loved it so. The view from the hill on which Brown University sits is beautiful, and the narrow streets and old houses still retain the aged character—by and large, I presume—that fascinated HPL. Walking up the steep slopes past the arched doorways, always (it seemed) with one or more cats slinking around the street, I could almost imagine that I was HPL, stalking about at night and taking it all in.

Sitting here now I stare at the tombstone, glowing dimly in the overcast moonlight. The inscription below his name and the bookends of his years does not read "R.I.P." nor does it quote a bible verse. It simply says: "I AM PROVIDENCE." Having seen something of the town HPL knew and loved, and having gained at least a slight comprehension of what it would be like to grow up amidst the old neighborhoods, I can well understand this silent comment.

Getting here has been a long journey. I don't just mean the flight from Seattle to Boston, or the delightful but tiring convention, or the painful navigation of the traffic from the airport to Providence (abetted, I must say, by two superb audiotape readings of HPL stories released by Necronomicon Press), or my hours-long rambling walk about central Providence, or the long, long walk out to Swan Point, or my illicit entry into the cemetery after closing time, or the nerve-tingling trip through the dark, dark graveyard. I mean instead the fact that I'd choose to be here at all—and that I made it. I mean the journey of years that has led to this point.

I grew up in a happy family, with two wonderful parents. Though major traumas were few and far between, they came to me as they do to most. By junior high school I tended to be reclusive, neurotic, and thought very little of myself. I was often depressed and daydreamed about dramatic suicides and other teenage angst-wishings. With the aid of a few good friends made during that time I started giving a damn about myself and others, and by the time I graduated high school I

felt like I might do something worthwhile with my life.

College was, of course, a learning experience on every level. But I feel now that everything up to a certain point had merely been preparation, and it was from that point forward that my real life began.

That point consisted of reading Robert W. Chambers' collection of short stories, *The King in Yellow*. This occurred some while after I had begun reading Lovecraft and playing *Call of Cthulhu*. It occurred while I was putting together the first issue of *The Unspeakable Oath*, and also while I was falling in love for the first time.

This was the fall of my sophomore year, and it was a heady time...but it was also very strange. For reasons relating to the above circumstances, and to other things best left unmentioned, I started going a little crazy that fall. It shows, I think, in TUOI's article "The Road to Hali." It's blatantly obvious in the private journal I kept for that year (it was the only time I've done so), and in the notes and ideas I had for a CoC campaign based on Chambers' work.

For a time, I almost believed that the King in Yellow was a real being, and that I was working in his service. For a time, I took to cutting intricate (but meaningless) designs into my arms with a razor blade. For a time, I drank heavily and slipped deeper into a bad sort of craziness—but it was one that brought forth fruits. The creative work I did then was so intensive and so exciting that, four years later, I still haven't finished mining the vein I first opened back then. Though it drove me mad for a little while, when I came back I at least had something worth going mad for.

And come back I did. Though the years since have not passed without times of trouble or episodes of mental duress, I've managed to carve a better life for myself than—were it described to me back in junior high school—I would have had any reason to expect. I've stumbled on a global network of people united in their love for Lovecraft's work, and for the passion of engaging in creative work they would not have done otherwise; in addition, I've found thousands of people willing to make it economically feasible to bring these works into print. That means you, and you, and you.

Thanks to all of you, for giving me a reason to live. I have other reasons in my life, happily, but this is the one that inspires and challenges me like no other.

Though Chambers was the trigger that launched me on this strange journey, it was HPL who first took my hand and said "Listen—all is not what it seems."

Tonight I sit, alone in a graveyard, and I thank him, too.

—John Tynes, Editor-in-Chief



SCREAM AND

I just got through TUO12, and as usual it was an outstanding issue. I won't go into details about the articles as somebody has probably beaten me to that particular punch. I will say, however that the *Oath* is the only gaming mag I buy which, like an excellent book, keeps me turning the pages.

First, regarding the imminent hike in price: As I was in the process of purchasing TUO12, the salesman and I were having some problem finding the cover price (I'm too dull to remember and I couldn't take my eyes off Jason Voss's cover...). I knew that it was more than reasonably priced, so I offered: "I think it's \$4.95." Fortunately the clerk didn't take me up on my offer. At any rate, your so-called price hike will do nothing more than make me pay what I was already willing to pay. Given the utility I get out of each issue compared to other similarly sized RPG supplements you could double the price and I'd still come back!

Second, regarding the change in structure: Hey, a rose by any other name still costs the same SAN!

Finally, regarding John's editorial: Speaking as a contributor to TUO, Pagan's vision has afforded two perquisites. As was mentioned, we have been afforded the luxury of pursuing our own ideas, without being forced into a particular mold (square pegs into round holes, as it were). Personally, I have also been given the support to pursue those ideas through feedback (both positive and negative), but with the understanding that I would have the final say. Having dealt with several other gaming magazines, I can confidently say that Pagan has been the only publisher to offer that kind of ethic. Yeah, my SAN's at 0...I've become a cultist to the *Oath*!

Mike Nagel

via internet

[Mike's *Tale of Terror*, "The Urge to Purge," appears on p. 12. He also has scenarios in some upcoming book projects.]



I thought you would want to know that I used one of my favorite pictures from TUO as a writing assignment for the summer classes I taught. There's a picture of the Last Dawn's Hierophant [in TUO7] that I've made it a practice to use. I just plop it down in front of the students and tell them to take twenty minutes to

Letters to *The Unspeakable Oath* are welcomed from readers and lunatics alike, by email or post office. They will usually be edited for brevity and clarity prior to publication. See the inside back cover for our address.

describe it in writing. It's a fairly effective assignment, since most of the kids have fairly strong reactions to it. In addition, it's not something they can all pigeonhole like the standard drawing of Satan or anything like that. And there's always the look when they discover that you can turn it over and there are still more faces—these kids have never had an assignment like that before, I'll bet!

John Goodrich

via internet

[Readers may recall a letter from Goodrich in TUO10 in which he used the same piece of artwork to corrupt other young minds. Is this man still walking the streets?]



What follows is a true story. Yesterday I entered my room, which I have a tendency to do on a regular basis. Sitting down upon my chair which resides near my computer desk, something on the floor caught my eye. Peering down upon the cream carpeting, behold—it was a ruddy spot. I began to notice that this dark crimson stain was not singular. Indeed, a trail of these apparently small footprints left in blood was left across my carpeting. Immediately the only possible culprit came to mind: the wretched feline who resides in our apartment! Seeking out this cowardly animal, I found him in the living room where he was happily rending to pieces a roll of paper towels. Seizing him (much to his dismay) I examined his paws. Sure enough, one of his hind paws was stained dark with the tell-tale color. After bandaging his limb—all the while with the beast howling as if I was surely taking its very life—I returned to the scene of the crime. Following the trail of bloody paw-prints like the expert sleuth, I came upon the instrument of his laceration. I held it aloft in grief and shocked understanding. The still-drying blood staining its very pages, it was none other than my new *Walker in the Wastes* campaign!

I have sworn the above is true under polygraph examination, having passed without doubt. Yet, the physicians who console me still refuse to release me from my dank padded cell. Days blur into nights and I begin to slip away. My pitiful sobbing can still be heard, echoing down the dreary institution halls: "The book! It is evil and must be stopped, for it will kill again!"

David L. Villa

via internet

[Oh, man. Call the lawyers—quick!]



Canadian material is making a strong showing at Pagan, with *Walker in the Wastes* and TUO11's "Cold War," and now "The Revival" in TUO12. I am gratified to see such a level of interest,

SCREAM AGAIN

even macabre interest, in my homeland. Canada is a much-neglected but fascinating country with many good settings for investigations. That is why I hesitate slightly to complain about certain technical errors that struck me when reading "The Revival." I do not wish to discourage anyone from setting further adventures in Canada, but I do suggest that a small investment of time in some research could avoid some embarrassing errors.

First, there is the matter of law enforcement in Canada. In any small town in the North West Territories, law enforcement will be the responsibility of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Surely, if you are going to place an adventure in Canada, you would want to have the Mounties put in at least a brief appearance. It would be one of the fastest ways to remind people that they are in Canada, as they are almost an icon for this country. However, please avoid stereotypes like Dudley Doright or Renfrew of the Mounted. The RCMP have been one of the finest police forces in the world since their inception. So let's replace the sheriff and his deputy with a corporal and a constable of the RCMP; two smart, modern, scientific police officers who are out of their depth dealing with a supernatural killing.

Second, there is the rather natural mistake about Coppermine having a copper mine. There has never been any commercial mining in Coppermine—the name is an arctic joke. There are natural deposits of copper in the region, but not in economically useful quantities. The aboriginal peoples used to gather natural lumps of metallic copper to make knives and other tools. (Yellowknife, the territorial capital, was named after such knives. The Copper Inuit were so-called for their tools.) Reports of nuggets of yellow metal caused many early explorers to believe that they were close to tremendous wealth in gold.

Thirdly, while we're in Coppermine, there is not and never has been a railway to this settlement. Coppermine, like many other arctic settlements, had at that time only very limited communications with the outside world. Air transport was very new and only beginning to be used in the 1920s; by the 1930s there was a booming air transport industry. Once a year, during the brief ice-free season, a supply ship would come in. If the ice conditions were too bad, then they might miss a year. (This kind of extreme isolation could be very useful for the correct scenario.)

All things considered, it might be best to move the mine to a completely fictitious community at the end of

a fictitious railway spur line from Echo Bay.

Fourth, on the topic of names again, there is Echo Bay. Apparently the writers consulted a modern map of the North West Territories. Until recently, the community now called Echo Bay was known as Port Radium. It was renamed when anything related to the nuclear industry fell into disrepute. It is important to use old maps of the region for names since many other communities have recently had their English names replaced by aboriginal ones. Port Radium was established in 1932 after pitchblende was discovered there in 1930.

Fifth, there is the notion of a city buried under snow and ice in the Canadian arctic. The arctic has very little snow cover even in the depth of winter. It is a cold desert. The only permanent snow and ice cover is found in a few glaciers in high mountain regions in the islands of the arctic archipelago or in the Rocky Mountains. You can't get to the islands by train. The Rocky Mountain glaciers are found in the Yukon Territory, British Columbia, and Alberta, not the North West Territories. This image of Canada as being perpetually shrouded in snow is one of the most irritating misconceptions that outsiders have about my country.

If you want to have a buried city in the north, then you will have to drown it in muskeg. Then Ithaqua could be working to raise it to the surface by changing the water flow or by heaving it up with the action of the permafrost. It would take years to bring it up, so there could be lots of opportunities for spin-off adventures.

If I have sounded too harsh, then I apologise. I do not wish to offend or discourage those who want to write adventures set in Canada. Please consider how you would react if these kinds of errors were made by someone writing about your own country. Some are laughable, others are annoying, all of them detract from the verisimilitude of the adventure. I know that reference books about Canada are hard to find abroad, but any good library should have a few—or get on the net and find a Canadian who is willing to help out.

So, I encourage everyone to keep investigating in the Great White North. But please do a little research before you strap on your snowshoes!

Ian Gorlick via internet
[The authors of "The Revival" are residents of Norway where I suspect period info on Canada is scarce. Still, it's unfortunate. Research isn't just important to a scenario, it's critical; it also need not be boring, as even a little research will turn up good ideas you wouldn't have thought of. As for our Canadian readers: we're sorry, eh?] ☞

THE EYE OF LIGHT

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FINN

Lovecraftian comics mini-series

Written by Pat Mills & Tony Skinner

Art by Jim Elston & Kevin Wicks

Four issues, by SPQ, Inc./Fleetway Quality

\$2.95 per issue

reviewed by Kim Eastland

Imagine a combination of Cthulhuoid creatures and gods, spiced with Lovecraftian plot webs in a futuristic techno-Earth setting, sprinkled with some of the best satirical humor ever aimed at both genres, and mixed in a pot of totally irreverential logic. This is the wonderful recipe that makes the four-issue comic book stew/story called FINN. It is one of the most unique approaches to modern horror, *Cthulhu Now* style, yet attempted and one of the most refreshing looks at how the eldritch gods could have interfered with Earth's ancient past to create the chaotic mess we are in now.

The hero, Finn, is sort of an average cab-driving joe who moonlights as the gun- and magic-wielding enforcer for what passes as the good gals trying to save the world. The bad guys are the type of successful authority figure our society tells us to admire. The gods, and the equivalent of their servitor alien races, are using both groups to further their own ends, all in such a way that is oh-so-familiar to CoC game players, yet still innovative.

Though no one actually uses the proper Cthulhu Mythos names and creatures in this work, the heavy

Lovecraft influences are obvious and quite enjoyable. I know this all sounds a bit vague, but to tell the truth I don't want to give a sentence more of the plot away than I have to because it really is quite fun when you are reading to keep saying "What the heck is going on?" and then find out!

Oh, and another thing. To say that this is a "comic book" is like saying CoC is just a monster game. It is a panorama of beautiful color set in an art style that, while being quite mature, still is fun and does not take itself too seriously (unlike far too many comics nowadays). All of this gorgeous art is printed on lovely heavy stock paper and an even heavier cover, so the \$2.95 can easily be justified when compared to many other comics in that price range today.

Even if you aren't normally into comics I strongly suggest you pick this series up, or at least try to borrow it from someone for a good read. I have to admit the ending was a bit of a letdown, but I really don't think it detracts too much from the overall enjoyment a CoC lover, especially a *Cthulhu Now* lover, will discover in these action-packed, creative, often hilarious pages (the "hello, sailor" handshake and cult member uniform will beg to enter your CoC game somehow).

My sanity meter reads 7 to 10 phobias, depending on what kind of Cthulhu maniac you are and how much you love the "illustrated story" medium.



The Book of Iod

a collection of Henry Kuttner's Mythos tales

edited by Robert M. Price

Chaosium, Inc. \$10.95

reviewed by C.L. Werner

The Book of Iod is a volume which all Cthulhu-heads should go out and procure. There are many Kuttner stories herein that are rare and seldom reprinted, which makes for an interesting (if occasionally redundant) read. The introduction and brief story notes by Robert M. Price are entertaining and insightful, quite reminiscent of *Crypt of Cthulhu* at its best. Among the stories reprinted are "The Frog" and Robert Bloch's "The Black Kiss," two extremely entertaining and occasionally terrifying romps in familiar Mythos territory.

However, there are some problems with *The Book of Iod*, as well. Foremost among these is the fact that the book appears padded with paragraph separations which are just a bit too large. This, doubtlessly, sounds quite nit-picky but when one purchases the book, one will

Items reviewed are rated on a scale of 1–10:

1–3: *Not worth purchasing.*

4–6: *An average item with notable flaws.*

7–10: *Degrees of excellence.*

AND DARKNESS

swiftly note whereof I speak. This must stem from the fact that Chaosium saw fit to keep a \$10.95 price tag on a volume much smaller than *The Azathoth Cycle* or any of the other Cycle books, for that matter.

I also have problems with Price's decision to include stories by authors other than Henry Kuttner. While Bloch's "The Black Kiss" was printed as a collaboration between Kuttner and Bloch and hence may actually deserve a place in this collection, the tales by Price and Lin Carter lack even this justification. While both stories do draw upon characters and elements from Kuttner's stories, I find their inclusion in what should ostensibly be a collection of Kuttner's fiction questionable. If the book needed to be fleshed out, Price should have included Kuttner's "The Graveyard Rats," which is noticeable in its absence.

All told, however, this is a good book. It's a must for all Mythos fans, even if its \$10.95 price is unwarranted. I give *The Book of Iod* seven and a half phobias.



Nameless Places

horror anthology

edited by Gerald W. Page

Arkham House, \$10.00

reviewed by Daniel Harms

It seems that in recent years Arkham House has disassociated itself from the Cthulhu Mythos. Now, don't misunderstand me; its hardback editions of H. P. Lovecraft are wonderful, as was the anthology *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*, which was reprinted just a few years ago. Yet no new books of the Mythos, whether anthologies, short story collections, or novels, have come out of Sauk City for quite some time. Though other publishers have filled in the gap, the publisher which brought us Lumley's *The Caller of the Black*, Derleth's *The Trail of Cthulhu*, and Campbell's *The Inhabitant of the Lake* has moved on to other things. Sigh.

Some of Arkham House's former splendor for the Mythos fan may still be seen, though, in the short story collection *Nameless Places*, printed twenty years ago but still available from the publisher. Though it would be misleading to say that this is an anthology of Cthulhu Mythos stories, eight of the stories within do connect up with The Big Green One. Just so you know what you're getting into, here's a few notes on each.

The collection begins with "Glimpses" by A. A. Attanasio, a story with some interesting insights into the nature of two of the Mythos pantheon's most popular

figures. Gary Myers presents a strong tale of Lovecraft's Dreamlands in "The Gods of Earth," which seems almost to be a sequel to "The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath"—if that story had been told from the gods' perspective. If Aniolowski's inclusion of the Roman god Summanus in *Ye Booke of Monstres* puzzled you, check out Brian Lumley's "What Dark God?" to see what all the fuss is about. "Forringer's Fortune" by Joseph Payne Brennan is the tale of a pawnbroker and his unsavory ways of making money; its closing line, though not entirely effective, might be echoed by any seasoned *Call of Cthulhu* investigator. Next, for Dreamlands fans who weren't satisfied by Myers' story, Page has provided us with Walter DeBill's "In 'Ygiroth," in which a certain figure clad in yellow features significantly.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of you have heard others complain about Lin Carter's Mythos fiction, and have wondered what all the fuss is about. Gerald Page has thoughtfully provided us with two selections by Lin Carter: "Out of the Ages," a tale from his "Xothic-cycle" of stories, and "In the Vale of Pnath," which describes an adventure of the wizard Eibon. The last Mythos story in the collection is "Chameleon Town" by Carl Jacobi; four men visit a familiar Lovecraftian location, with surprising results.

As I said, this isn't a Mythos story collection, but the other twenty tales in this book aren't that bad either. There are selections from Ramsey Campbell, David Drake, and E. Hoffman Price, among others. The quality of these works is uneven, but the subject matter spans the fantasy, science fiction, and horror genres, making it certain that you'll find something of interest.

If you've been wanting to buy a Mythos fiction book but have been put off by the price, this may be the one for you. From its contents alone, the book would get six phobias, but the combination of a low price, hardcover binding, and the Arkham House name raises my appraisal to eight phobias. Arkham may have boxes upon boxes of this one in their warehouse, but if I were you I wouldn't take a chance on missing it.



Glimpses of Other Nations Cthulhu Mythos "novel"

by Tani Jantsang and others

P. Marsh, \$13

reviewed by Daniel Harms

Continued on p. 58

FROM BEYOND

The Gentle Art of Slaughtering Investigators

by John Goodrich

The deaths of investigators are hard to avoid. Even the best-laid plans of mortals can be disrupted, or even worse, go wrong. Sometimes it isn't even the investigator's fault. Even the most intelligent, perceptive and best prepared of investigators can hit a snag in their plans, and even a tiny flaw can be fatal. It can be something as careless as a bad assumption on which the plan is based (such as casting Bind Dimensional Shambler on a Nightgaunt) to a simple clue overlooked. Sometimes the players have taken what should all be reasonable precautions, but they haven't figured out exactly what's going on. In such cases, most Keepers tend to be a bit lenient—allowing the players extra time to escape, or decreasing the deadliness of the monsters they face. After all, it's not really the investigator's fault that they missed one skill roll or single overlooked clue, right?

I think this is entirely inappropriate for *Call of Cthulhu*.

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not for demoralizing character-mashing just for the sadistic pleasure of it, although there is nothing like a little blood-letting to keep investigators on their toes. But neither would I ever coddle the players. The best CoC campaigns are the ones in which the Keeper walks the line between too harsh and too easy. Very few people want to play a game where everyone is slaughtered in less time than it takes to create a character. On the other hand, playing the "horror" game where there is no threat to life and limb can be just as stultifying.

So the question often arises: when to kill investigators? It's a difficult question for many. Some Keepers I have spoken with will only kill the investigators if they're being stupid. This is easy in a game where the players regularly square off against superhuman monsters. Some see this as a sort of punishment, or perhaps 'just deserts.' Others will kill only if the character's death will have a meaning. A noble or meaningful death is less of a blow to the player, the reasoning goes. It lessens the sting if the character did not die in vain. But I believe that both of these views are contrary to the unique nature of *Call of Cthulhu*.

This is an opinion column, open to anyone who wants to write on matters concerned with *Call of Cthulhu* and the Cthulhu Mythos. Opinions expressed are those of the writer, not the publisher.

Anyone who has read the works of Lovecraft knows the deep nihilism that permeates his works. According to Lovecraft, mankind is as insignificant as the insects that run by our boots. The little lives and deaths of *Homo sapiens* will ultimately have no effect on the universe at large. No amount of struggling will allow the human race to triumph over the vastly superior intelligences of the Great Old Ones. Perhaps we may make them uncomfortable for a little while, but mankind is ultimately doomed, its end already known in prophecy. Mankind isn't prepared to deal with such minor races as the Fungi from Yuggoth, let alone the potency of the Great Race of Yith or the Hounds of Tindalos. Against such awesome entities, humans are just about as effective and important as your average cheese cracker. This is a major part of the horror of Lovecraft: mankind's insignificance in the universe.

To reproduce this concept in a game setting, the Keeper must not be afraid to kill investigators mercilessly. Investigators are involved in an intricate and complex puzzle with their lives at stake. They are matching wits with incredibly intelligent, evil, and thoroughly ruthless monsters who will kill them without a second thought. As the Keeper, it is your job to make sure that the players never forget this. This isn't a game to the characters. It's a desperate battle for life and sanity. Everything they hold dear is affected by that they do. And if they screw up, someone gets killed. Maybe a lot of somebodies.

As Keepers, it is our job to make sure that the characters feel very threatened. If we menace and fail to follow through, then the fright is less. Shadows may loom, but it isn't the shadows themselves that threaten: it's what is in them. Every time the investigators feel the Mythos moving, they should be sure that if they don't stop it, they will be engulfed. Perhaps not now. Perhaps not soon, but it will surely happen. The use of the Mythos, like many aspects of science, has an uncanny ability to pervert, fester, and explode. Sure that kid is only using that Byakhee to steal crayons for now—but what's he going to do when he runs out of surfaces to color? The Byakhee will have a suggestion or two, and they will probably involve those nosy grownups who were poking around.

Never miss an opportunity to show the investigators the unmitigated evil of the Mythos. On a basic level, let them stumble on some horribly mutilated bodies.

Show them what awaits them if they mess up. And don't be chary of making balloon animals out of their intestines should the opportunity arise. Sooner or later they'll slip up, and the jaws will close.

But you can't go gunning for investigators. They're going to have enough difficulties as it is without you trying to kill them. Let the dice do the deciding.

It's rather nasty to let the investigators' lives and sanity hang on the roll of a gambling implement, but *Call of Cthulhu* is supposed to be a very cold game. As the Keeper, you are the embodiment of the unfeeling, uncaring Lovecraftian universe—yet this is impossible. Every human has feelings: likes, dislikes, moods, and loves. To show the players the uncaring randomness of the universe, as represented by the Mythos, it is perfectly appropriate to turn the job of uncaring fate over to the dice. In fact, it can be quite effective to have all the Keeper's die rolls out in the open, just to emphasize the fickleness of fate. Who does the monster attack first? Point to players, count off, and roll a die they can see. This guarantees that whoever gets glorked didn't really

deserve it, and that all the players know it. Being killed for no apparent reason is significantly more horrible than being killed for a reason. If the creature singled out a character for death, then we know that person is significant. If the player dies just because he happened to be in the wrong county, then it could have happened to anyone. The longest-lived characters in CoC campaigns should have only two things going for them: good research skills (forewarned is half an octopus) and sheer blind luck. I've even found it effective to occasionally apologize to the players when a particularly interesting investigator meets a sticky end. In some strange way, you should not be the Keeper, but a conduit allowing the menace to flow through you. Like the *Call of Cthulhu* rules, make yourself a transparent mechanism for the story.

On the other hand, if the players are being stupid, let them die. They won't require any help from you. What are they doing up on that eighty-foot cliff with no experience or climbing equipment? If they fall off, and you feel generous, roll a die for some hit point loss and



consider it a warning. Feel free to kill them if they continue their folly. Think reality. Plenty of real people die climbing steep cliffs, so why not the investigators? The situation is slightly different if the climbing is required by a scenario. If this is the case, you have two options. One: drop a hint. If the investigators see the bad guy buying a hundred feet of rope and pitons, they may get a clue. If they don't, let 'em hang. Two: make the problem non-fatal. Instead of requiring a Climb roll versus death, just lay on one to four points of damage, a loud attention-drawing scream, and an extra twenty minutes' climbing time.

The dramatic possibilities of maiming should not be overlooked. Even horrible deaths can get routine, and sometimes it's not in the best interests of the campaign for a PC or NPC to be permanently removed from the campaign. Maiming and crippling can be even more horrible, since the character wakes to the reminder of what was done to him or her every day. *Cthulhu Now* has a section of hit location tables that require only one additional die roll. This can be very handy, since it can save investigators' lives and make the mayhem that much more real. Which is more horrible, "You took ten points of damage," or "With a horrible wrench, the thing pulls your arm off. You begin to run around in panic, painting the room bright red..."? I thought so.

Scarring is also handy. Most Cthulhoid critters are not very concerned about their personal hygiene and their claws, teeth, and spines are probably filthy. Huge claws and fiery immolation can leave very ugly marks that can take months or years to heal completely. A person who loses eleven out of twelve hit points due to a Fire Vampire attack is going to take months to recover in the burn room—and they are certainly not going to be pretty when they get out. Additionally, many investigators find their scars interesting conversational pieces. It gives them character.

Having said all that, I will now contradict myself. Always let someone escape. The problem with a role-playing game is that some sort of continuity is required. Most players require some sort of reason to be in the story. To quote the actor's cliché: "What's my motivation in this scene?" Someone always must survive to go back and gather reinforcements to re-assault the pit of darkness that they so recently fled. Think of Ishmael from *Moby Dick*. This point is moot if you are ending the campaign, but otherwise rebuilding your campaign from scratch is very often a lot of work.

The escape is often a difficult thing. It cannot be obvious, or the campaign's credibility will suffer. Perhaps the Hunting Horror has that last investigator it ate caught in its throat. Maybe the injured ghouls will let the rest of the investigators go because they won't need

any more munchies for a while. Maybe this Gug is going to be conscientious and chew that delicious morsel before going after the main meal. Mythos entities are often essentially indifferent to the small doings of the investigators. Revenge, anger, and retribution are all human emotions and qualities. Perhaps the monsters have more important things to do than hunt down every bothersome investigator. Maybe the investigators don't taste good. Whatever the reason, impress on the players the fact that with a small change of the wind, they all could have ended as Shoggoth chow. Of course, the creature could always be saving them for later.

If there is a blood bath, don't let the survivors off scot-free. Mess with their minds. Make sure they carry scars of shame to remind them of their cowardice and how they abandoned their companions to die. They should have already suffered, but it's not enough. Give them nightmares every night for a month. What if fiancés drop by to ask how a particular investigator died? Really lay it on, and the poor survivor may wish that he was dead with the rest of the investigators. This is a common real life reaction: many Vietnam veterans and survivors of terrorist attacks hold incredible amounts of guilt because they lived, and other people who deserved to live were killed.

An alternate way to lessen the sting of investigator death is to let them plan their own funerals. Chaosium character sheets used to include a small section for a will. Wills can include special arrangements for burial, cremation, or whatever. Wills also allow the player one last piece of character action to allot their worldly possessions, and sometimes send a last special message to their dearly beloved companions (perhaps reading, "You bastards!").

What will all this serve? First of all, the occasional senselessly-butchered investigator keeps the horror on a razor's edge. The game is more terrifying if the players are aware that no one is safe, and even doing your best sometimes isn't enough to keep you from harm. This is what the players are involved in *CoC* for anyway. If they wanted to be heroes, they could choose any other game system. Additionally, this approach will make the accomplishments of the investigators that much greater when they do succeed. That which we gain easily, we deem worth little. A victory at high price is much more precious than an easy one. If the investigators' lives are in danger whenever they face a Mythos entity or a cultist, they'll often be happy to be alive at the end of the adventure. Suddenly, no victory is small—each time the investigators are able to successfully defend the lives of humans, or even the life of a single human, that becomes a significant achievement. And that's what the gentle art of slaughtering investigators is all about. ☞

BLOOD & GUTS

by Mark Eley

As discussed in this issue's *From Beyond* column ("The Gentle Art of Slaughtering Investigators," p. 6) one effective way of keeping *Call of Cthulhu* from becoming un-horrific is to inflict scars and other disfiguring injuries on investigators when they are wounded. It makes sense, actually—if you're injured, you're not just going to bounce right back without some nice scar tissue. Given the frequency with which investigators in CoC greet danger and suffer for it, the following information on how to handle various types of injuries should come in handy. Although this is a fairly realistic treatment (the author is a paramedic), it should be clear that the principal value of this information is for dramatic purposes rather than some simulation of violence. The opportunities provided by disfigurement, speech or motor impairments, and other such horrors inflicted on investigators are vast and waiting to be mined.

In CoC, it is common to run into unusual problems during melee combat, car crashes, house fires, etc. and the brief CoC rulebook doesn't cover it all. This article will describe specific injuries without trying to be invasive. Keepers should feel free to use or ignore any information they please. This information can also be used on semi-humanoids such as Deep Ones, werewolves, serpent men, etc.

Facial Injuries

Any major blow or injury to the face, such as a gunshot blast, fiery explosion, sledgehammer blow, raking talon, or a headfirst motion into a windshield which does a third of the victim's hit points in damage requires the person to make two Luck rolls. If one is failed, the victim has lost an eye, halving all Spot Hidden rolls which can then never increase above 60%. Two failed rolls indicate complete blindness, reducing all Spot Hidden and Read Languages to 0%.

If over half of a victim's hit points in damage are delivered to a victim's face, a third Luck roll (along with the original two) is required. Failure indicates ID3 lost APP points and a severe airway problem developing from broken teeth, bleeding gums, broken nose, and lacerated tongue. The victim begins taking ID4 points of

damage per round from suffocation and bleeding until the victim dies or receives a First Aid or Medicine roll, which stops the bleeding.

If an attacker targets the victim's eye(s) or mouth on a facial attack, an Impale roll (one fifth of what is normally needed to hit) indicates a strike. Obviously, the weapon must be a smaller cutting or pointed weapon used in close quarters. A hit does normal damage and the victim is only allowed a POWx1 roll to prevent either a lost eye or airway problem. Note that firearm attacks only work this way at very close range unless determined otherwise by the Keeper.

Head & Ear Injuries

Any time a victim takes over half of their original hit points directly to the head from a crushing blow, fall,



car accident, etc. the victim must roll their CONx5 or less or suffer a severe brain injury causing unconsciousness for 1D3 hours, nausea, blurred vision, and eventual coma 6 - 11 hours later from brain swelling. This requires immediate medical attention and surgery. No medical treatment warrants death, while delayed treatment (over 24 hours) causes 1D6 INT loss per half day. If INT is lowered below 8, the victim is mentally handicapped. If exactly 0, the victim is a vegetable and below that, they are dead. Even if the roll is successful, the subject will be dazed for 1D6 rounds from a significant head injury.

Ear injuries occur from direct attacks or loud explosive blasts. If a person is extremely close to an explosion (distance is Keeper's option) they may be required to make two Luck rolls. One failed roll indicates an ear is temporarily or permanently deafened, reducing Listen rolls to half their normal amount and thereafter never increasing above 60%. Two failed rolls indicate total deafness, reducing Listen rolls and all subsequently-learned Speak Language scores to 0%. Striking at a victim's ear requires very close contact, a small edged or pointed weapon, and an Impale roll. If failed, the damage done is the barest minimum. A hit requires the victim to roll their POWx1 or be deafened permanently.

One last unique attack on the head of a victim is scalping. This attack can only be performed on a restrained or grappled victim, removing the scalp with an edged weapon. This attack requires the attacker to roll half or less of their normal chance to hit in order to remove the scalp cleanly. If successful, this inflicts 1D4 points damage, lowers APP to 3 or 4 and if not immediately treated, can lead to deadly infection.

Neck & Spinal Injury

Victims falling from over 20', being hit or thrown from an automobile going over 30 mph or taking half of their total hit points directly to the back or neck must attempt a CONx5 roll or have a broken back. Victims falling head first only receive a CONx3 roll due to the danger of this activity. A feet-first fall indicates a back injury only and if failed, the victim is paralyzed from either the waist down (1 - 4) or the shoulders down (5 - 6 on 1D6). After 6 weeks, one POWx3 roll is allowed to see if the victim will walk again with many months of therapy or if the damage is permanent. Auto wrecks, head-first falls, or direct attacks to the neck can be deadly. A failed neck roll requires a Luck roll and if failed, the spinal cord is completely severed and the victim dies of heart and respiratory failure. If only the first roll was failed, the victim is unable to move from the neck down, but is allowed a POWx3 roll (exactly as the back injury dis-

cussed earlier) after six weeks of therapy.

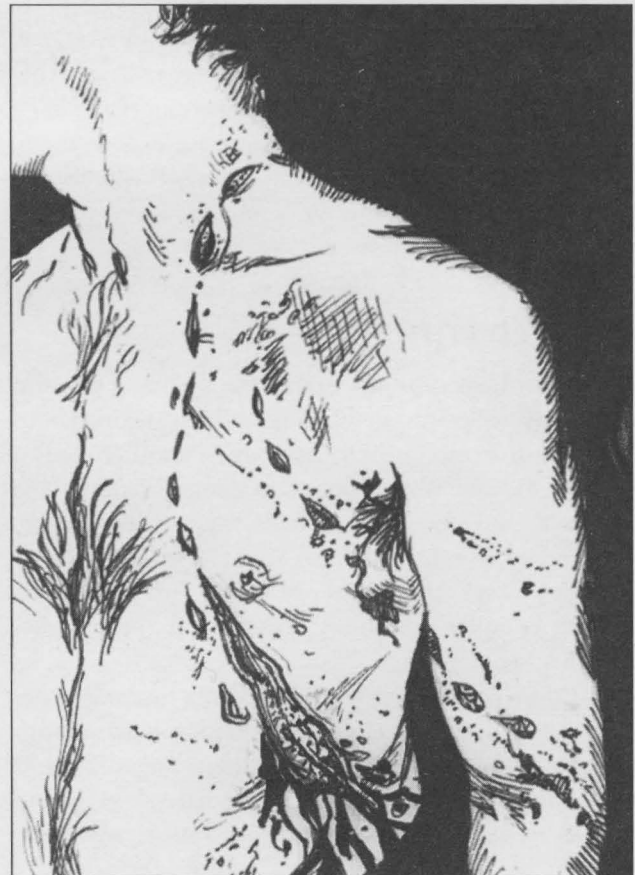
Another deadly attack is to cut a victim's throat, causing death by rapid bleeding. If a victim is restrained, this attack only requires a normal hit. If grappling a victim or when within very close range with an edged weapon, it is necessary to roll two Impale rolls in a row to make this attack. If successful, the victim's throat is slit, causing 1D6 damage immediately followed by 2D6 on the second round, 3D6 on the third, etc. until the victim is either dead from hemorrhage or somehow magically saved. If either Impale roll is failed, only the neck's fatty tissue and flesh is cut and damage is the barest minimum.

Torso & Abdominal Injury

Victims who receive massive sudden damage (at least three fourths of their total hit points) to their chest or abdomen from a car wreck, being struck by a rolling boulder or car, or some other type of blunt trauma must roll their CONx5 or receive a life-threatening injury as determined by the area hit and a 1D4 die roll:

Chest Injury

1. Punctured lungs and sucking chest wound: Victim



begins taking 1D2 damage per round from suffocation until a Medicine roll is made, which temporarily corrects the problem.

2. Heavy bleeding into lungs: Victim starts taking 1D6 points of bleeding damage per half hour until hospitalization and surgery correct the condition.

3. Bruised heart: Victim takes damage as above from bleeding, and their STR is temporarily reduced by 1D3 points per half hour until dead or until surgery is performed.

4. Large vessel/aortic artery tear: If a Luck roll is successful, as 3 above. If failed, rapid internal hemorrhage is the same as a severed neck as discussed earlier.

Abdominal Injury

1. Liver bruised: The victim needs surgery to correct a loss of 1D3 damage every half hour from bleeding.

2. Kidney/Spleen injury: As above, with 1D2 bleeding damage every 30 minutes.

3. Large vessel/aortic tear: See same on chest injury table.

4. Intestinal rupture: 1D2 damage per 30 minutes plus severe infection in 24 hours if not treated.

Two other attacks in these categories include direct heart puncture and intestinal evisceration. Attackers who



attempt to directly stab a victim through the heart must be within close range, have an appropriate weapon, and make two impaled rolls in a row. Success results in the victim's spurting heart doing damage equal to a severed neck until dead or somehow corrected through spells. If either roll is failed, normal damage is taken and the attacker's weapon is now harmlessly stuck fast through a rib. To eviscerate an opponent, the attacker first must roll half or less of his normal chance to hit followed by an impale roll with a sharp weapon. Damage is only 1D6 damage despite the graphic appearance of the injury, but further abdominal attacks require a victim to make Luck rolls or receive a severed aortic artery, with damage as discussed earlier. Victims require surgery later or deadly infection sets in.

Arm & Leg Injury

Any severe blunt or crushing injury to an arm or leg doing half the victim's original hit points breaks a limb unless a CONx5 roll is made. Broken arms reduce all related hand skills to half for that extremity until healed many weeks later. Likewise, a broken leg reduces speed by three-fourths while two broken legs prevent all movement until healed. Likewise, all Swim, Jump, Operate Heavy Machinery, etc. are impossible.

If the total number of hit points of a victim is directed at an extremity only, that extremity is severed. A lost arm or leg equals roughly 8 HP to a victim and lowers CON by 1D3 permanently plus possible SAN due to the trauma involved. Skills lost are as above. If an attacker wishes to sever a victim's hand or foot, two-thirds of the victim's total points must be inflicted. A lost hand or foot equals 4 HP and obviously affects all hand and foot related skills as determined by the Keeper. Note that to strike a limb, hand, or foot for any purpose, requires a roll of a quarter or less than the attacker's normal chance to hit.

Lastly, minor injuries (burns, broken glass, wounds, etc.) reduce all hand and foot-related skills for 1D3 days.

Get a Doctor!

In conclusion, this article should make it apparent how valuable an investigator with medical knowledge and skills are to the game. Since horrible monsters, reckless spells, dangerous exploring, gun-toting cultists and brutal traps are all in a day's work, so are gory (and often deadly) injuries. Keepers don't always have to use all the rules and information provided, but it might come in handy when the mad scientist decides to saw off the top of the investigator's head or an arrogant character gets his leg bit off by a Shantak. Good luck! ☞

A TALE OF TERROR

The Urge to Purge
by Michael P. Nagel

LOSE WEIGHT NOW, ASK ME HOW is written in large, bold lettering on hundreds of flyers attached to public bulletin boards, kiosks, and telephone-poles citywide, along with the phone number 555-THIN. In this 1990s ToT, desperately obese people are looking for a quick cure for their burdensome curse. Unfortunately, many of them have been losing more than just their weight!

A rash of inexplicable deaths have been occurring recently. Amongst the normal level of run-of-the-mill shootings and stabbings, these deaths stand out primarily due to the required process of victim identification. On many occasions, the deceased's friends and family have failed to identify their loved ones, as they easily recall them to have been considerably larger. Often up to 200lbs larger...less than a week prior to their death!

Some small amount of sleuthing reveals that each victim began to attend Dr. Flavio Nongordo's weight reduction clinic (source of the 555-THIN flyers) a few weeks prior to their deaths. Nongordo is a fully-licensed doctor, specializing in nutrition and weight problems, and has been contracted by many of the major diet program providers to distribute their products. He is well respected and recognized as a leader in the field of weight loss, and cannot fathom (if approached and asked) what has been happening to his patients.

Possibilities

1. Dr. Nongordo has been doing a little illicit chemical work on the side. Given his great sympathy for his patients and the need to rid them of their misery as soon as possible, he has come up with a quick fix. In his lab, he has created a chemical compound which, once ingested, speeds up the patient's metabolism to help burn up those unwanted calories and fatty deposits. Unlike the athlete who works hard for the same re-

sults, one of Dr. Nongordo's patients can lose weight by sitting on the sofa and gorging on pizza. Unfortunately, a factor in the process was over-looked, and after a seemingly random level of chemical is ingested, the effect begins to run wild and the patient's body almost literally consumes itself...fat, organs, everything!

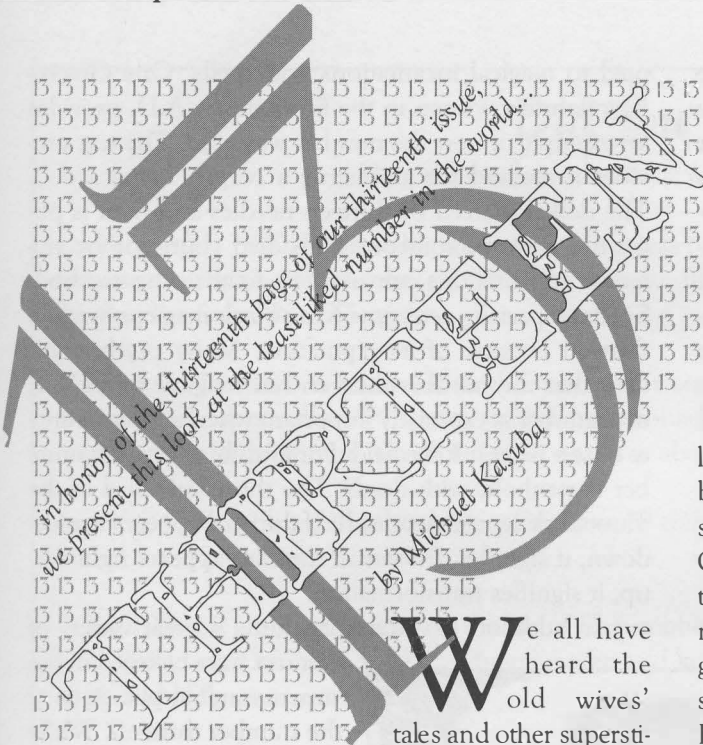
2. Dr. Nongordo is not only a doctor, but an expert in the occult. While taking a holiday in Egypt, he was fortunate to be invited on an archaeological expedition by an old school chum. There, he uncovered an ancient scroll bearing a combination of hieroglyphs which he had never seen before. Taking a photograph of the scroll home with him, he endeavored over a period of months to translate it. He finally succeeded, and managed to unknowingly summon a Star Vampire—which is now lurking nearby his clinic. Nongordo's hefty patients will continue to make tasty morsels until the creature can be bound and sent back.

3. Dr. Nongordo is not only a doctor, but also completely insane. After having found and read *The King in Yellow* (several times...it seems to him to be the only book worth reading anymore...), he discovered the truth

behind our normal perception of reality. Through troubled dreams he has gained strange magical powers and is attempting to open a gate to show the common man who their real masters are.

In order to do this, he has created a magical amulet which drains the life-essence of those who come in contact with it, and stores their power for future use. He has been using hypnosis on his patients, and then subjecting them to the magic of the amulet. Once Nongordo has accumulated enough raw power, he will use the amulet to free his imprisoned masters from beyond the gate. ☞





in honor of the thirteenth issue
 we present this look at the least liked number in the world
 by Michael Kasuba

We all have heard the old wives' tales and other superstitions that are prevalent even today. Although in this modern age, superstition about black cats and broken mirrors certainly does not provoke the kind of fear that they once must have, many people still believe in these phenomena. One superstition that has not died in today's society is that surrounding the number thirteen. The number

is notorious for being connected with unluckiness and evil, even in today's society. Evidence is found every Friday the 13th when the United States loses a billion dollars in absenteeism, train and plane cancellations, and reduced commerce. Just think of the amount of horror movies that open on Friday the 13th and one will understand how thirteen is perceived in everyday life. How did the number thirteen acquire such a reputation? The fact of the matter is that the number thirteen has a rich history dating back to the earliest of times.

Before discussing the history of the number thirteen, one must understand how numbers became symbolized to mean certain things. In the earliest of times, numbers and counting were considered magical and secret. Ancients of various cultures believed that numbers were an important part of their universe. Because numbers and counting held such high status, they were employed in religious activities. Some numbers were easy to use because they could be divided into by many numbers, others were difficult to use because they were indivisible. As numbers were used in this manner, each gained defining characteristics that have lasted even into modern society.

Fascinating systems of interpreting numbers were

developed during ancient times. *Arithomancy* or divination by interpreting numbers was an extremely popular form of divination that was practiced by the Hebrews, Greeks, and Arabs. Pythagoras of Greece was the founder of *numerology*, a form of divination. Numerology in theory held that the universe is conceived by a mathematical pattern and that all life in the universe can be expressed in numbers. All words and numbers in one's life—such as name, birthdate, or birthplace—could be broken down mathematically and in doing so could tell someone's future. Similar to numerology is *Gematria*. *Gematria* is a Kabbalistic system of interpreting the scriptures and the hidden all-powerful names of God. The numerical values of the letters of words are added together and then interpreted according to other words of similar values. This system was not only used by the Hebrews, but was also used by the Greeks, Persians, and Gnostics.

The History of 13

The origin or root of thirteen's connotation with evil and unluckiness is obscure. Many believe that the taboo towards the number can be traced as far back as when primitive man first began to count. Using ten digits from his hands as well as his two feet, he was able to arrive at the number twelve. Because twelve was the end of the line, thirteen was one beyond and thus mysterious. This quality made man fear the numeral and render it hateful. In addition, early man realized that twelve can be divided into by many different numbers, while thirteen remained indivisible. Twelve came to be known as the number of completeness, while thirteen became symbolic with unluckiness and evil. This original association has never died.

Because twelve was considered the number of completeness, many early cultures used it to develop important concepts related to religion and mythology. Meanwhile, thirteen continued to be considered unlucky and evil. In Mesopotamia, for instance, the twelve signs of the zodiac were conceived and defined (and only recently a 13th sign was discovered, the dreaded serpent). Also, twelve was used in a variety of other measures and myths such as twelve hours in a day, twelve tribes of ancient Israel, twelve months in a year, twelve gods of Olympus, twelve labors of Hercules, twelve apostles of Jesus, twelve days of Christmas, and so on. A German scholar named Ernst Boklen studied the notorious number in 1913 and found that throughout history in stories and myths, groups of thirteen were comprised of a

12 + 1 pattern. Usually in the 12 + 1 pattern, the one beyond the twelve is the recipient of death. Probably the most popular story using this pattern is the Last Supper and the subsequent death of Jesus. Similar stories also can be found in Greek, Babylonian, and Norse mythologies.

In Western culture, the story of Jesus and the Last Supper has had the most significant impact on the number thirteen. Already shunned by many cultures, the number thirteen became more notorious when it was connected with the story. Through the centuries and into the Middle Ages, the number continued to be avoided. During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic church associated the number with witchcraft and devilry, thus defining it as evil. The number and its reputation became so feared in the Middle Ages that bakers named their bulk products a "baker's dozen" instead of using the number thirteen. In modern society, thirteen is often avoided in the labeling of house or apartment addresses, as well as hospital rooms and the floors of high-rise buildings. Through the ages and through a number of cultures, the number thirteen has garnered an unsavory reputation.

13 and the Supernatural

Because of the unfortunate history of the number thirteen, cultures have assumed that the number is supernatural and evil in origin. In Western culture, the number was especially tied to evil because of the Last Supper. It is often regarded as the "devil's dozen" because of its ties to heretics. Since the witchcraft hysteria began in Europe, the number thirteen is considered to be the correct number for a coven of witches. It is assumed that the coven has twelve members and one leader. The leader was considered to be the devil, or had the ability to shape change. Similarly when the Black Mass became popular in the Middle Ages, the ceremony consisted of thirteen followers of Black magic. Both the coven and the Black Mass used the number to make a mockery of the Catholic Church and the Last Supper. The association with Satanism made the number thirteen even more shunned.

Like witchcraft, the number thirteen is also attrib-

uted to magical incantations and spells. One Graeco-Egyptian text written in the first century A.D. provides an example of how the number was used. The text provides a method for animating a corpse, using a doll. The doll is pierced by thirteen needles and then is put on the grave of someone who died young or by violence. Incantations are used to finalize the method. Spells, especially ones involving black magic, often use thirteen because of its reputation. Many psychics believe that the number thirteen has magical properties; the number is especially important when a group wants to raise a psychic force field. For fortune tellers, the number is symbolic with death. The thirteenth card of the Tarot deck represents death. If the card appears upside-down, it signifies disaster. If the card appears rightside-up, it signifies transformation.

In addition to Western culture, a great variety of cultures have believed in the supernatural implications of the number thirteen. While most believe the number is connected with death, a few important cultures believe that it brings good luck. Three that believed the number represented good luck were Egypt, Hebrews, and the Maya.

Egypt

To the Egyptians, thirteen was a number of extreme holiness. It was considered to be the final step in the ladder of eternal life. When

one reached the thirteenth or the last step, their earthly existence was over and a spiritual transformation would take place. The Egyptians believed that the spiritual transformation was from life to the afterlife. Additionally, the Egyptians realized that the phases of the moon occurred thirteen times a year. The Egyptians relied on the moons in order to keep track of time and thus held the number in high regard. The final or thirteenth moon was aptly named the "blue moon" because the color was the favorite of the Egyptians.

Hebrews

In the Jewish faith, thirteen was one of the numbers that represented God because the name 'Yahweh' could be divided up through numerology to have a value of thirteen. Similar numeric systems used by the Hebrews



Did you know?

Here are some unusual facts about the number thirteen:

On August 21, 1930, Princess Margaret of England was born. However, palace officials did not record the birth because the registration number was thirteen. Instead, they waited until another baby was born and assigned the number fourteen to Margaret.

The Apollo 13 mission was perhaps the most notorious space flight in history. Disaster was only narrowly averted, and supposedly UFOs were sighted by astronauts. More concretely, the flight was launched at 1313 hours from pad thirty-nine (thrice thirteen), and was aborted on the 13th of April.

In 1965, Queen Elizabeth visited West Germany by train. At the station, her platform number was changed from 13 to 12A to avert disaster.

In the 1950s, a group of experts on the life of Christopher Columbus concluded that he actually landed in the New World on October 13, 1492. The man who had kept Columbus' log changed the date to October 12 to avoid bad luck.

The number thirteen could actually be considered lucky to the United States. First, there are the original thirteen colonies. Second, on the one dollar bill, the number thirteen is everywhere: the pyramid on the back contains thirteen steps, the olive branch has thirteen leaves and berries and the eagle holds thirteen arrows. Imagine what the triskaidekaphobic would do if he or she found out about this!

including Gematria produced the numerical value of thirteen to mean "one," "love," and "unity." In addition, different passages in Hebrew literature including the Old Testament, the Kabala, and the Zohar mention thirteen divine qualities, thirteen heavenly fountains, thirteen gates of mercy, and thirteen paths of kinds of love. Want to guess what age a boy must be for his Bar Mitzvah?

Maya

Similar to the Egyptians, the Maya embraced the number thirteen largely because of the thirteen phases of the moon. The Maya also used the number in their religion. They believed that there were thirteen heavens, each ruled by a deity. The Maya constructed a special calendar using the thirteen deities to be used as a prognosticator for the future. Evidence for the Maya's reverence of the number thirteen can be found in their architecture: often in their temples and pyramids the number is used to signify its holiness.

Friday the 13th

Perhaps the best-known superstition regarding the number thirteen is this ominous day. The origin of its reputation comes again from the story of Jesus. Friday the 13th is doubly bad, because not only were there thirteen at the Last Supper, but Christ was killed on a Fri-

day. In addition to Christ's death, it is said that Adam and Eve fell from grace on a Friday, that the great flood started on a Friday, and that the Temple of Solomon fell on a Friday. The day has garnered additional reputation in the last century because of stock market crashes known as "Black Friday." In times past, Friday was also the day criminals were hanged: it was nicknamed "Hangman's Day." It has been said that the day Friday itself is the preferred day to hold ceremonies of black magic. The story of Friday the 13th has been passed on from generation to generation until modern times. The popularity and reputation of the day has reached its peak in the last half of the 20th century, when the *Friday the 13th* movies became popular and added further to its reputation. Finally, there is a study that was conducted by a thirteen-year-old boy who found empirical evidence that the 13th day of each month falls on a Friday more often than it falls on other days. Sound hard to believe? Check it out for yourself—it's fascinating reading. (Baxter, S. R. (1969). "To prove that the 13th day of the month is more likely to be Friday than any other day of the week." *The Mathematical Gazette* 53, 127–129.)

The 13th Guest

A second popular superstition involves dining with thirteen people at a table. Again, the story of Jesus and the Last Supper heavily influences this superstition. There

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is evidence of this superstition elsewhere, however, including the Babylonian and Norse cultures. In Babylon during religious feasts, the thirteenth person at the gathering was often put to death as a sacrifice after the ceremonies. In Norse mythology, twelve gods once dined at a table. Loki, the thirteenth guest, arrived unannounced and this subsequently led to the death of Balder. Believe it or not, this superstition is considered very serious to some people. In France, an actual occupation is that of a "quatorzieme" or professional 14th guest. This person is hired on short notice when the dinner party count is thirteen. Among the famous people who believed in this superstition are Napoleon, J. Paul Getty, Herbert Hoover, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In fact, FDR used his secretary when the emergency of thirteen guests at a dinner party occurred. There are different versions of this superstition depending on the culture. Most believe that the first person to rise from the table will die before the year is out. One solution to the problem of sitting at a table with thirteen persons is to all join hands and arise as one. Some believe, however, that if all rise as one, all will perish—there seems to be no way of escaping the curse of 13!

Triskaidekaphobia

Yes, this is the official phobia for the fear of the number thirteen. Those who suffer from it will do their best to veer away from this number as much as possible. They will avoid anything marked thirteen, and may even avoid saying the number or counting up the number. In fact,

if a person who has this phobia is at a store and the amount adds up to \$13.00, they may believe they are cursed by the number's bad luck and evil. The name itself comes from the Greek "triskaidekaphobes." While it is not known how many have a major case of triskaidekaphobia, there are many superstitious people that have varying degrees of it.

Thirteen Clubs

These clubs were formed to counteract the fear of the number thirteen. The original club was formed in 1882 in New York City. At the founding meeting, thirteen men meet on Friday the 13th, in room thirteen, from thirteen minutes past eight to the 13th hour. Lifetime membership was \$13.00 and the club met on the 13th of each month. The Thirteen Club also used notorious decorations. They used salt shakers shaped like coffins, badges with coffins and skeletons on them, and the knives and forks at each setting were purposely crossed. At the meetings, members of the club freely broke mirrors, walked under ladders, and spilled salt. At its peak, club's membership was at thirteen hundred. The emphasis of the club was to dispel the fears people had about superstition. They were able to free Friday from the slur "Hangman's Day" by writing to judges and congressmen. The club was also able to convince Maria Christina, queen of Spain, to christen her son Alfonso XIII despite the pleas of her advisors.

It's too bad Alfonso had to step down as king later in life because of unpopularity... ☞

MYSTERIOUS MANUSCRIPTS

The Swarner Virus

by John J. Wick

SAN: Special; **Mythos:** Special; **Spell Multiplier:** x1

This mysterious manuscript is a very curious one indeed. It is, perhaps, the first time that Mythos lore has ever been gathered together to be used with such a sinister purpose in mind. For this manuscript's purpose is nothing less than corruption, insanity, and murder.

It was put together just one year ago by a man named Stavros Swarner. Mister Swarner is an electrical engineer who runs a very successful computer Bulletin Board System (BBS) called *Horror Incorporated*. Many fans of the macabre subscribe to *HI*, including a small circle of young horror authors.

Subscribers to the BBS will sooner or later pick up the virus that's running around the system. The more information they download from the BBS, the more susceptible their own computers are to the virus. However, there is nothing mundane about this virus. It's a complicated ritual combining technology and sorcery that will creep into a computer with the stealth of spiders.

When a computer is first infected, it will affect the system in very subtle ways. The user will be typing along and words like "Nyarlathotep," "Shub-Niggurath" and "Hastur" will show up for no reason. Likewise, when

printing, these words will show up in the middle of sentences without showing up on the screen.

Then, just when they think that the glitches have gotten out of their system, they'll start to find files that they never knew existed in their System Folders, root directories, etc. These files will have names that sound strangely familiar, such as "Nyarlathotep," "Shub-Niggurath," and "Hastur." The files contain cryptic messages regarding many of the Mythos entities, and may also contain vivid and sanity-crippling images. Any self-respecting horror genre fan will find them fascinating. In fact, they cannot help but be fascinated by them. By the time the files have shown up, the subliminal messages that have been flashing on the screen will have hypnotized them to be receptive to the images.

At this point, the victim has been losing Sanity at a slow but very steady rate. Every month that the virus remains on the computer, the user will lose 1 Sanity and gain 1 point of Cthulhu Mythos. There will be no explanation available, and by the time the files start getting noticed it will be too late.

Clever investigators will catch on to what's happening rather quickly. But try as they might, they will not be able to clear the computer of the virus. It takes a special cleansing ritual that only Swarner knows. ☞



CTHULHU LIVES

Live-Action
Lovecraftian
Roleplaying

by
Sean
Branney
&
Andrew
Leman



Sam and I looked up at the wall of sand in front of us. Surely we could not go on foot into the trackless wastes of the Great Sand Sea west of Farafra and expect to survive. Similarly awestruck, Kravat, Allison, and Flo stared up at a 400-foot dune which stretched upward before us. Our Egyptian guide, Ansep Me Se, his robes whipping in the wind, was already ascending the tower of sand. I adjusted my pack, and with my heart pounding at the thought of what lay beyond, I began to climb into the desert. Ever since Sam's screams had shattered my peace of mind the previous night, and in view of Richard's death and Sir Wallis Budge's descent into madness, my spirit was sick with fear.

Sure, it could be an excerpt from any *Call of Cthulhu* narrative: brave investigators storming off into the Egyp-

tian sands to unravel an ancient mystery. The key difference is, it really happened. A real group of flesh and blood investigators trekked off into actual sand, desperately pursuing the man who held the key to the strange sequence of events which had brought them to the desert. No, it wasn't Egypt and it wasn't 1924, but as the weary investigators sipped water from their canteens and looked out at the vast expanse of dunes, it may as well have been. But if it wasn't imaginary and it wasn't quite real, what was it? It was *Cthulhu Lives*.

Cthulhu Lives is the name given to a particular style of live-action Lovecraftian roleplaying created in Colorado in 1984. *Cthulhu Lives* is a blend between the notions of free-form make-believe and the carefully planned excitement of roleplaying games. An outgrowth of Chaosium's CoC, *Cthulhu Lives* allows players to actually be investigators probing into strange dark myster-

PHOTOGRAPH NOTES

Above: From **EGYPT**, 1986. This photo, taken by Judy Ruha (as Allison Morgan), is one of the few pictures ever taken of a game in progress. This is not a staged re-enactment, but a view of the actual trek across the vast sand dunes of the Sahara. From left to right, the characters (players) are: Harry Tuttle (Stef Nicovich), Ansep Ma Sa (Phil Bell), Digby Dolmen (Andrew Leman), Johnson Kravat (Ken Robertson), Flo Denison (Peggy Cope) & Sam Buchanan (Darrel Tyler). The game was played in the Great Sand Dunes National Monument in southern Colorado.

Upper Right: From **SOME WORDS WITH A MUMMY**, 1985. No one knows at exactly what point in the game this picture was taken. Pictured, from left to right, are: J.D. Titan (Andrew Leman), Melanie Forrester (Liz Stanton), Priscilla Darby (Jenny Weins), Suzie Author (Jackie Ritz), Victoria Chesfleur (Anne Dillon) and Al Neville (Phil Bell).

ies. Rather than sitting around a table discussing breathtaking adventures and sanity-wrenching terrors, *Cthulhu Lives* players actually experience them, or, at least, convincingly realistic simulations of them. A game might feature translating documents from ancient Greek, but if it does, don't count on your skill roll to help you: you have to really know Greek, or find a real person who can really help you. You might have a meeting with a creepy gardener in an abandoned boathouse: if you do, be prepared to really hoist yourself into the rafters of the old structure to find some concealed clues. You might have a horrific encounter with a Lovecraftian monstrosity: if so, don't be surprised when an entity 18 feet tall moves inexorably toward you. *Cthulhu Lives* players really travel to the different locations, speak with actors playing the parts of NPCs (non-player characters), and if or when monsters rear their ugly heads, the players really run away. The desert trek described during this article took place in the Great Sand Dunes National Monument in southern Colorado, a vast expanse of sand, in May of 1986. As far as we were concerned, it was Egypt.

We had gone for more than seven hours overland, each towering dune giving way to another beyond it. For every three steps forward, we slipped two steps back. The wind-driven sand stung. I was glad I had brought my goggles—without them I'd have been blind. I was nearly overwhelmed by exhaustion, the pitiless heat and the relentless pace set by our guide, and was immensely grateful when we stopped to rest and quench our thirst. Flo spoke quiet words of encouragement, sensing that I was on the verge of giving up. As we drank, Tuttle scanned the horizon with his binoculars. He shouted as he spotted something on a dune several hundred yards away. This time it was not a stray clump of dry grass, it was the body of a person, lying motionless in the sand. For the first time, Ansep Me Se looked genuinely troubled.

Origins

In 1984 Sean Branney, a high school student in Denver, Colorado, invited a group of his friends to play a game they'd never heard of: *Call of Cthulhu*. They quickly became hooked and regularly gathered to play. Among these friends was Andrew Leman.

Sean and Andrew had met while doing a high-school play, and both planned to continue to study theatre in college. Knowing the power of real physical roleplaying, one day they discussed how much fun it would be to play a live-action version of their favorite game. They decided then and there to give it a try. Sean would write the first game with his friend Darrell Tutchton, and An-



drew would organize the players. They decided to call their live-action version *Cthulhu Lives*. That's how it all got started.

You can't buy *Cthulhu Lives* in a store. There is no published rule book. Although there are certain guidelines established by tradition, and certain techniques that have proven with experience to be effective, each *Cthulhu Lives* adventure is a unique experience, with its own problems, solutions, and approaches. That is, perhaps, one of the most exciting things about it. Each game is an original creation by the people who play it, and, with very few exceptions, adventures are played only once. Each one is created for the people who play it and for the place where it is played: it is very difficult to replay it with different people or in a different location.

Cthulhu Lives is the embodiment of the word play in all its senses. It is structured, complex, layered, mind-bending, and fun. At its best it is a mental, emotional, and physical challenge. It has evolved over the years, growing from a lighthearted adaptation of a commercial game into something quite new and independent; something which is not easily categorized as a hobby, or as entertainment, or as a form of art. It is without question an extremely potent medium for intellectual and psychological exploration, in which its players constantly find new sources of terror, and joy, and wonder.

We sat in a tight circle at the top of the dune as our guide rummaged through his bag. He produced some dry, leathery crackers, baked by his wife, and a melon. Without warning, he drew one of the scimitars he kept in the elaborate double scabbard on his back and, in an instant, the melon shattered into hunks. I greedily ate my slightly sandy piece of melon, much relieved that the enigmatic Ansep Me Se saved his swordplay for the fruit.

Basic Structure

Although *Cthulhu Lives* is in every way a game, it is not competitive: there are neither winners nor losers. The game is played for its own sake. As in many roleplaying games, play is monitored by a game master, a guiding hand who creates the adventure, drives it forward, ensures fair play, makes things as safe as possible, and who ultimately controls the world of the game. This person is the Keeper.

The Keeper is the person (or persons) who conceives of a (more or less) original plot, almost always involving some kind of mystery or bizarre situation with Lovecraftian elements. The Keeper writes the plot of the adventure, fabricates evidence that will help solve the mystery (in the form of artifacts, documents, and other kinds of physical clues), creates monsters or other manifestations if the story requires them, and is responsible for finding locations to play in, and overseeing the conduct of the game experience. The Keeper usually also plays some NPC (often more than one) in the game. The Keeper enlists friends, and other people with special skills to offer, to play other non-player characters required by the story, and to help make props and find locations. The NPCs have some foreknowledge of the game's plot, planned events, and the truth behind the mystery. Being the Keeper is quite a large job: having good NPCs is a real blessing.

The other group is made up of the investigators. These are the people who will enter the mysterious situation created by the Keeper with no foreknowledge of what is to happen, and will roleplay their way through the situation in character. Although sometimes the Keeper will ask them to portray certain specific characters, usually the players are responsible for creating their own characters. Wise Keepers communicate with their players, learn what sorts of characters they will be playing, and then work that information into the plot of the game, taking advantage of the strengths and weaknesses of the investigators who will be participating. Whether playing his/her own, or a character assigned by the Keeper, each player must flesh out the bare details and create as complete a characterization as possible. It requires a little more "acting" than standard roleplaying, but it's not a "performance." Experienced roleplayers with good imaginations and a little commitment are more than qualified. Each investigator is responsible for his or her own costume and personal things, which can be

a challenge, since our games are set in the 1920s. Players frequently haunt vintage and thrift stores, looking for period clothes and accessories. Although it might seem like the Keeper is doing most of the work and the investigators are having most of the fun, being an investigator is in its own way just as demanding a job. A game, after all, is nothing without players, and a game of *Cthulhu Lives* only works well when the investigators are giving it their all.

Sam and I had been through dangerous situations before, but as we huddled together for warmth that night in the desert, we knew this adventure could well be our last. In the cold night air I unlaced my gaiters, emptied the sand from my shoes, and crumpled my jacket into a sad parody of a pillow. As I leaned back and rested my aching muscles, I was overwhelmed by the night sky: even my years as an astronomer did not prepare me for the spectacular view of the stars wheeling overhead. I tried to keep up morale by pointing out various cheerful constellations, until our guide screamed out that the moon was in the position of G'harne and it was time we must take action against the Seti.

Game Preparation

Preparing a game of *Cthulhu Lives* is a painstaking process—depending on the scope and complexity of the plot it can take months of work. The backstory of the adventure must be created. Plot ideas can come from many sources: in earlier years, many came directly from Mythos fiction, but recently Keepers have developed their own ideas, or expanded on themes and situations from previous *Cthulhu Lives* games. Often a Keeper will build a story around a particular location, prop, or effect. Some Keepers like to collaborate to develop their plots, and some playtest their ideas in a more traditional CoC-style format with the people who will play their NPCs, to explore options that might come up in live-action play. Once the backstory has taken shape, the Keeper must break the game into a sequence of scenarios: self-contained episodes of playable action, usually revolving around an event, a certain place or object, or a person.

The Keeper must create all of the clues and pieces of physical evidence which the investigators will need to propel them from one scenario to the next. Much of the evidence is often in the form of documents: old letters, photographs, ancient books and scrolls.... Keepers use

PHOTOGRAPH NOTES

At Right: From **THE SENTENCE**, 1991. This photograph was taken by the investigators during the actual scenario in which the mangled corpse of Bob Hibdin was discovered floating in his bathtub. It is among the few pictures ever taken during a game in progress. Pictured is poor Uncle Bob Hibdin, played by Andrew Leman, slowly slipping into rigor mortis as the investigators merrily chat away, leaving the soaking wet body to freeze on the bathroom floor.

whatever materials and techniques will give them the result they desire. Some of the props are more complicated: magical items, bizarre machines, human skeletons, livestock, that kind of thing. Keepers make do as their budgets, schedules, and abilities allow, but all devote considerable resources to the creation of exciting and elaborate props. Sometimes special effects need to be engineered: special makeup, the appearance of a monster, the disappearance of an investigator, the manifestation of a gateway to another dimension.... Beside their own ingenuity, Keepers make use of time-honored theatrical traditions, borrowed from classic stage magic, Japanese Kabuki theatre, and other sources. Some Keepers have relied on high-technology to produce some effects, schlepping elaborate sound systems and lighting equipment into remote locations, or communicating with assistants via CB radio. And sometimes there is simply no way to safely and convincingly simulate the desired effect, in which case sometimes the Keeper can establish a game "convention" which he or she explains to the players beforehand. (One time, for example, to simulate a "force field," one Keeper put up a fence of strings



around an object, and told the players in advance that when they saw string they could approach no closer.)

The Keeper needs to find and make arrangements to use suitable locations. The Keeper bears the vital responsibility of ensuring legality and safety for all of the participants as well as innocent bystanders of a scenario. If public places are to be used, and the playing is likely to generate suspicion or screams, sometimes the police have to be notified in advance, so that no one becomes unduly alarmed. Private locations tend to be more desirable, but it is imperative that the Keeper obtain permission to use a location: failure to do so can have unpleasant consequences. If the terrain is difficult, the conditions uncomfortable, or the action dangerous, then the Keeper is honor-bound to do a live trial run to test the action: Keepers never ask players to do something that they have not done themselves. This is particularly important when the consequences of untested actions could be life-threatening: e.g. rappelling, scuba diving.... Another *Cthulhu Lives* maxim that has developed is: "The Keeper cannot require the players actually to commit an illegal act (e.g. trespassing, speeding, theft, extortion...)" Characters must sometimes resort to criminal activity, but when such activity is required by the plot of the game, a legal way of simulating the action is devised.

The Keeper needs to brief the NPCs very thoroughly, discussing the characters, plot and anticipated turn of events, and giving them some ideas for what to do in the likely event that things don't go as planned. And security is always a concern. (The Keeper doesn't want his potential investigators to get any hints about what he or she might be planning: nasty surprises should be surprising, after all.) Good logistical planning is also important; in most instances, everyone should be supplied with good maps to locations, and punctuality is essential. Many times NPCs have sat in miserable conditions (tied to a tree, lying in a creek bed, buried under 6" of dirt...) waiting for players who stopped to get a Coke on the way. The game is much more fun when everyone can find the locations and arrive on time.

Under the moonlight, I removed the Fragments of Celaeno from my backpack. Following the obscure instructions, we laid out huge lengths of rope to form the glyph prescribed by the aged parchment. As the Seti loomed on the horizon, we assumed our positions at the points of an Elder Sign, two hundred feet across. We had each rehearsed the words of the ceremony silently to ourselves, to prepare for this moment. Our heads bowed in fear and humility, we intoned the verses of the ritual to summon Nodens, an elder god. Please, don't let me forget them now! "Yesh shir uma yalkey..."

Game Play

Once everything is ready, the game can begin. The Keeper organizes the schedules of all the people involved in the game and sets a time and place for the initial scenario. All of the players gather in character, for some purpose dictated by the plot (the investigators might be summoned by a prospective employer, for example, or get a call for help from an old friend...) and the events are set in motion. The investigators are presented with a situation, and must roleplay their way through it with no knowledge of what is to come. Each action they take leads to development of the case. They can conduct the investigation as they see fit, although the Keeper will have worked hard to anticipate their likely choices and prepare for them. It's possible, even probable, that the investigators will want to do something that the Keeper has not expected, in which case he or she will have to improvise to accommodate them. (Despite the most careful planning in the world, *Cthulhu Lives* games are one-shot, spontaneous creations, mutually constructed by all participants. Things invariably go wrong: some things work better than planned, others fail miserably. Players have learned to roll with the punches.)

Different adventures have different structures. Some are designed to last only a few hours and take place in a single session of play; others are sweeping epics that can take many weeks' worth of individual scenarios to play through. The average game consists of several scenarios taking place over the course of two or three days, frequently culminating in a big finale. The most effective games have involved long weekends spent in isolated locations devoted exclusively to playing (one such game featured more than 40 hours of continuous play: the investigators even slept in character). Some go exactly according to plan, but many are changed on the fly even as they are being played. The give and take between the NPCs and the investigators can never be completely predicted. It creates a balance of power; the investigators must respond to the Keeper and the Keeper must respond to the investigators. Familiarity, trust and respect between all players are key elements of success.

We have never used skill rolls: either you can really do what's needed or you can't. In some special cases the Keeper has allowed an investigator to use a skill he or she does not possess in life (psychic ability and lock picking are the two that leap to mind), but usually this



serves the Keeper as much as the players, and in such cases the Keeper and the player in question make arrangements in advance.

In some adventures, magic use has been extremely important, and in others completely irrelevant. When a spell is used, it is usually an integral part of the plot, and is well-prepared for. Casual magic use is very rare. Different Keepers have handled magic in different ways depending on their needs: there is no established procedure.

Although sanity is a major issue in CoC, its impact is perhaps more subtle in *Cthulhu Lives*. Without resorting to Sanity rolls, it's hard to judge what impact reading a few pages of the *Revelations of Glaaki* or seeing a relative being dragged to sea by a Deep One will have. Players with some experience, who appreciate the mind-altering power of the forces at work in a game, are trusted to choose for themselves when their characters go mad; sometimes they choose to go insane slowly and sometimes in an instant, whichever seems more fun to them. On other occasions, the Keeper may privately instruct a player that after her encounter with Shub Niggurath, for example, she develops an overwhelming fear of trees. Again, a sense of "fair play" between the Keeper and the players has managed to keep sanity an exciting part of the game. (And sometimes sanity loss is self-evident. In the first game of *Cthulhu Lives* ever played, the investigators discovered the disfigured corpse of a policeman in a hidden room. After the game was over, one player reported that, upon seeing the body, he could physically **feel** what he judged to be about five points' worth of sanity draining out of him. When your character loses sanity in a game of *Cthulhu Lives*, you don't

PHOTOGRAPH NOTES

Above: From **THE CHALICE OF LAGGASH**, 1993. This is a posed portrait of the four investigators from this game, taken before they were all thrown in jail. From left to right, the characters (players) are: Henry Blackwood (Jamie Anderson), Lillian Blackwood (Katia Herbst), Alexandra Stark Brown (Gail Stern), and Dr. Barnum Brown (Andrew Leman). Gail Stern won the Black Tentacle award as best investigator for her play in this game.

At Right: From **THE SENTENCE**, 1991. A close-up of the aforementioned Uncle Bob Hibdin. Note that rigor mortis was well along by the time of this picture.

need to roll any dice: you know it. The game has the power to really scare the crap out of you in a way that CoC can't.)

Combat is a tricky issue in any sort of live roleplaying. Obviously, the chief concern is for the safety of the participants. The Keeper can best protect everyone by minimizing the number of situations where combat is the only means to an end. Gun battles are usually handled with cap guns; rulings on hits and misses fall under the sole jurisdiction of the Keeper. Squirt guns and even paint-ball guns have been used in some situations. Water balloons make excellent bombs or hand grenades. Hand to hand combat is more difficult to manage. Staged fights are accidents waiting to happen, except in the rare instances where the participants are certified Stage Combatants. Although some realism must be sacrificed, prop weapons and guns should always be made of soft and/or brightly colored materials. (Nothing is worse than having a passing policeman mistake your cap gun for the real thing, as once happened to us.) One way to have successful combat is simply to imagine it: by having NPCs say things to players like, "Me and Rocko here just beat you up." Play can then safely resume with the investigator writhing in pain in the aftermath of his or her beating. As always, games will go much better when they are uninterrupted by visits to the Emergency Room. In ten years of play, we have never had a single serious injury that was the direct result of *Cthulhu Lives* activity.

Although it is a live-action game, not every single moment of the story is necessarily played out physically. There are moments in every adventure when the Keeper and players use their imaginations only: when the action in question is simply too dangerous to play live, when the investigators want to do something which the Keeper has not anticipated and cannot arrange to play live, or when the action involves magic or entities that simply cannot be satisfactorily simulated without spending thousands of dollars. Keepers try to structure their games so that live, in-character roleplaying is as continuous as possible, but sometimes everyone must break out of character long enough to get a Keeper ruling or make transitions to purely imaginary sections of play. And inves-

tigators are free to break out of character at any time if they feel the need to. Even in purely imaginary sections, however, we still don't use skill rolls. Common sense and the Keeper are the arbiters of success and failure.

The Keeper is usually personally present at all times during play, even if only as a shadowy figure in the background keeping a watchful eye on things. But sometimes the Keeper has to let his or her NPCs handle a scenario on their own, and sometimes the investigators retreat to their own territory (a car, a hotel room...) to inspect their evidence and make their plans, in which case the Keeper is not present. To handle such situations, the Keeper needs to establish a system for communication between the investigators and the Keeper. One of the most common is what has been called "Keeper Central," which consists mostly of making sure the investigators have the Keeper's phone number, and making sure that there is always someone to answer the phone while the game is in progress. Many times Keepers have turned their answering machines into *Cthulhu Lives* information clearinghouses. (People not involved in the game have gotten some inexplicably strange recorded greetings.)

This gives you an idea of some of the technical concerns, but actually playing *Cthulhu Lives* is far more than the sum of all these parts. To completely describe what it's like is impossible: it is so fundamentally experiential in nature that the only way to really understand it is to play it yourself. It always operates on at least two levels of reality simultaneously: the "real" world and the world of the game. Keepers can use this to challenge their players by exploring real-life issues in an imaginary context. As a vehicle for metaphorical expression, this two-level



structure has a power that no other form of literature or entertainment can match. The levels merge in a fascinating, perception-bending way: when you read descriptions of games we've played in the past, it is pointless to try to separate what "really" happened from what was only imaginary or pretend. It's all both.

At the end of every game, usually immediately following the final scenario, when the investigators are flushed with victory (or defeat) and the NPCs are covered in mud, or blood or slime or something, all the players and the Keeper have a postmortem debriefing. This usually takes place at a Denny's or similar restaurant (chocolate shakes and onion rings are the traditional victory snack). During the postmortem, all participants relax and share their perceptions of what occurred during the game, and delight in retelling the story from their own points of view. Keepers get a chance to tell the investigators about all the subtle and brilliantly-placed clues that they missed, investigators get to tell everyone how it felt to see the monster, or the cultists, or whatever, and what they were thinking when they did such-and-such, and the NPCs get to tell the investigators how scared they looked when they were running away, or doing the spell, or realizing some hideous truth. Besides being enormously fun in their own right, these sessions help refine the gaming skills of Keepers and investigators alike.

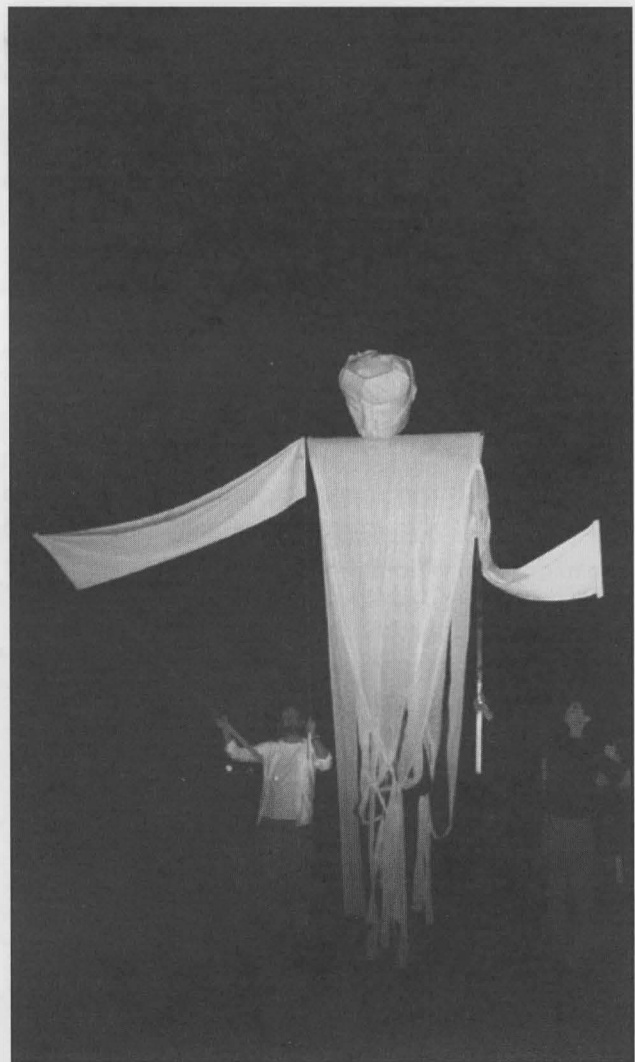
I didn't hear, so much as feel, the presence of the entity. The silence there in the desert was terrifying: even the wind seemed to have stopped blowing. It was cold, but that's not why I was shivering. I heard Allison gasp as the thing moved past her. What had it done? I could not open my eyes. Suddenly, I could feel it moving towards me.

"Cthulhu Lives" Organizations

In its first years (1984-1987), the players of *Cthulhu Lives* did not have a name or formal structure. It was simply an association of friends who created and developed their own unique form of live-action roleplaying, based on a commercial roleplaying game. The name of the game was informal, and mostly just for fun.

In January of 1987 the group opted to formally create an organization, called The H.P. Lovecraft Histori-

cal Society. Sean Branney served as President, while Andrew Leman and Philip Bell served as Co-Vice Presidents. The HPLHS began publication of a monthly newsletter entitled *Strange Eons*, edited by Andrew Leman and Philip Bell, which continued for over two years. The Society also founded the HPLHS Press, which published very limited editions of books of interest to the membership. Game activities continued under the auspices of the new organization, whose membership quickly grew to approximately 80 persons across America and in several other countries, including England, Australia, Germany, Canada, and Italy. *Cthulhu Lives* games were produced in the United States and in England. The HPLHS Press subsequently issued hard-bound sets of the first two volumes of *Strange Eons*. Under the direction of Andrew Leman, the HPLHS also produced



PHOTOGRAPH NOTES

Above: From **THE MASTER RACE**, 1988. This giant (15 feet tall) but primitive puppet was the first of several large-scale manifestations used in *Cthulhu Lives*. Designed in four sections, the pieces coalesced at the end of a cult ritual to form an apparition of the god Nodens, who then descended upon the terrified investigators. They fled across a field of cacti, with minor injuries to players and Keeper alike. Pictured operating the Nodens puppet from left to right are Keeper Andrew Leman and NPC Sam Bacon.

a short film adaptation of a Lovecraft story in the summer of 1987, entitled *The Testimony of Randolph Carter*.

The HPLHS went into mothballs in the early 1990s when its three executive officers all moved to different cities, making organized work nearly impossible. Although game activity continued in separate locations, regular publication of the newsletter was discontinued, and membership fees were no longer collected. Presently, the HPLHS is not dead, but dreaming...

Although the HPLHS fell into dormancy, *Cthulhu Lives* activity continued to flourish. Between 1988-1991, many games were centered in Southern California, where Sean Branney was pursuing his professional theatre career. Sean was able to take advantage of Hollywood resources in the creation of some very memorable Cthulhoid moments.

A large group of eager players also formed at the University of Illinois, where Andrew Leman attended graduate school. In early 1992, Andrew, based in Chicago, and Jamie Anderson formally named the Revisionist Historical Society as an organization for *Cthulhu Lives* activity in the Midwest. Since its founding, the RHS has been the most active group of *Cthulhu Lives* players in the country. The games of the RHS, while still drawing on Lovecraft for inspiration, have tended also to explore historical themes and involve notable historical characters and events.

Each year since 1985, usually at the end of the summer, the diehard *Cthulhu Lives* players gather for the annual Black Tentacle Awards ceremony, to eat good food, reminisce about adventures past, and honor the brave souls who have fought the forces of the Mythos in the games of the past year. Originally there were eight Black Tentacle Award categories, because Sean Branney made the trophies from an old toy octopus. These days the categories have expanded to eleven, with a few special awards thrown in as deemed suitable. The trophies are made in a new style each year. Ceremonies in the past have included musical numbers, film screenings, dramatic readings, and other special events.

Sam and Tuttle seemed to have them on the run. I checked to make sure the women were all right—Allison and Flo were probably handling the onslaught better than I was. I saw the dark shapes silhouetted in the moonlight as they reached the crest of the dune. I pulled out my revolver and aimed, but it was useless. Despite all the precautions I had taken, sand clogged every crevice. I started to run after them. "Sam!" I shouted. "Kravat! Tuttle!" I struggled up the side of the dune. Without my shoes on, it was even slower going than before. "It's all right, Digby," Sam's familiar voice drifted down from above. "They're gone."

In the ten years since *Cthulhu Lives* was first created, its players have produced 62 original live-action adventures, involving a total well over 300 people as active participants. The games have been as small as a one-evening dinner party, and as large as a three-part epic lasting for eight months that involved, among other things, a mummified corpse in a hidden basement, 35 live rats, rooting around a mountaintop cemetery, and the midnight banishment of a very powerful deity. Some games have been simple and straightforward, others have involved elaborate special effects, sets, props and costumes, and even (in one notable case) a herd of horses. Games have been played in diverse locations: ghost towns of the Colorado Rockies, the Great Sand Dunes, Death Valley, the Pacific Ocean, a Gothic Mansion in Iowa, the British Museum in London, and on the campus of Cambridge University. Investigators have witnessed the full-scale manifestations of Nodens, Mi-Go, Hounds of Tindalos, Deep Ones, Ghouls, a Yithian, Shub Niggurath, and several avatars of Nyarlathotep. They've met Aleister Crowley, John Dee, Rasputin, Harry Houdini, John Wilkes Booth, and an entire village of Native Americans. Investigators have travelled to the Dreamlands, Egypt, the Gobi Desert, Russia, England, and medieval France, not to mention the halls of Miskatonic University. They've jumped off roofs, plummeted through dimensional gateways, escaped from asylums, exhumed corpses, crawled down mine shafts, explored tunnels, waded into seaside caves, climbed cathedral towers, dredged lakes, broken into secret vaults, scaled mountains, sailed in ghostly boats, battled some congregations of cultists, and run like hell from others. All for real.

The motto of the HPLHS and the RHS is *Ludo Fore Putavimus*: a Latin phrase meaning "We thought it would be fun." And it is.

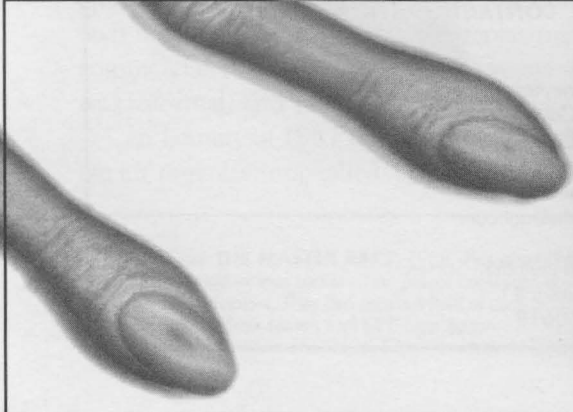
The authors invite questions and commentary. We know other groups have explored this realm: we'd be very curious to hear about the experiences of anyone else who enjoys Lovecraftian roleplaying in a live-action format, and we'd be happy to tell the tales of some of our many adventures. ☞

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CTHULHU LIVES: PROPS, ET CETERA

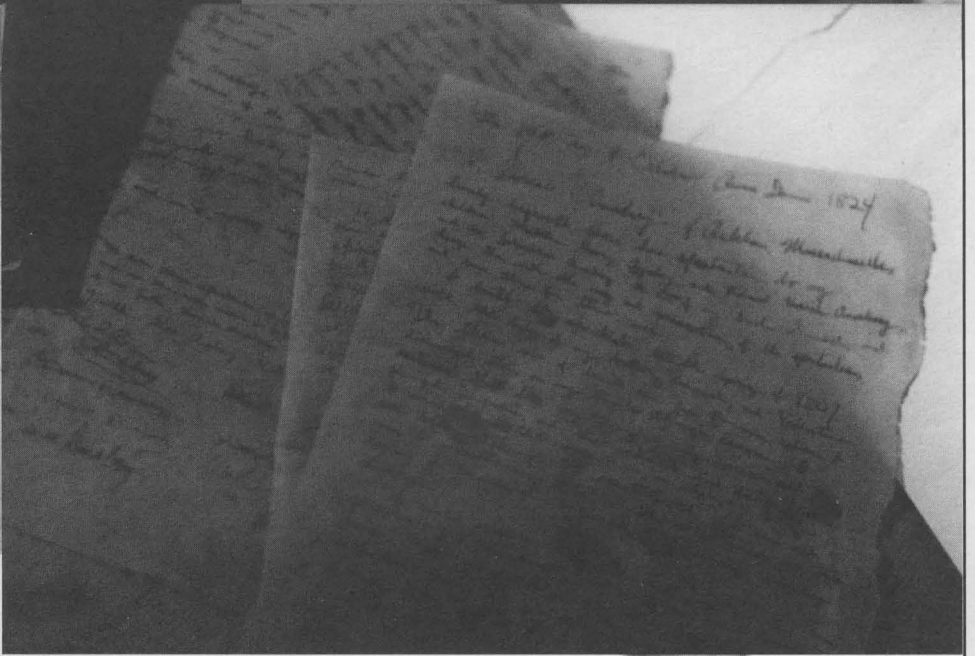
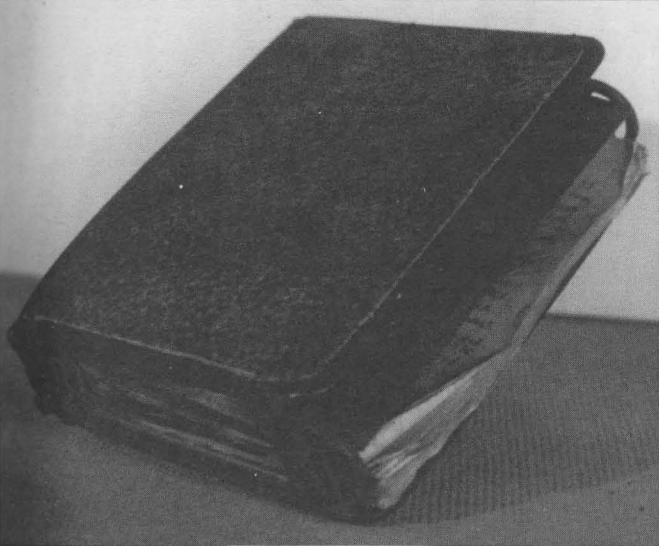


DEATH AND FUNERAL NOTICES

ANGER

SPRAN

REMANNA MORTUARY



A TALE OF TERROR

Fungus

by Steve Hatherley

The item at right appears briefly in the newspapers and science journals, even making a couple of appearances on the popular television science shows. The tabloids exaggerate the story briefly, but like all tabloid stories it is quickly forgotten. The investigators can seek out Dr. Chiltern at Yale if they wish to learn more.

Dr. Samuel Chiltern

Dr. Samuel Christian Chiltern is a driven mycologist and brilliant in his field. Unfortunately he is so wrapped up in his work that he does not easily interact socially with the real world—Chiltern is rather shy and doesn't take well to strangers. While discussing mycology he is fluent and clear, but as soon as conversation strays from his field he develops nervous twitches and uncomfortable mannerisms. However, his worst trait is his failure to admit to being wrong.

Chiltern is happy to talk to the investigators about his new discovery. He explains that his studies have proven, beyond all doubt, that the samples he took in the three states all came from the same plant. However, he is at a loss of how to describe it, as the fungus does not behave anything like other fungi. He has a specimen in his laboratory should the investigators show an interest.

The fungus has taken over one corner of a workbench. Thin tendrils reach out from a large glass tank filled with soggy leaves. The tendrils have spread out, dangling onto the floor. One of them has reached a phone book and is feeding from that, reducing the directory to a pulpy mass covered in pale fur.

Chiltern uses a spatula to push aside the decaying leaf litter to reveal a fleshy lump the size of his fist. Thin tendrils sprout from this, and he explains that there are other lumps, or nodes, in the tank. Chiltern is particularly interested in the nodes as he hasn't discovered any in the field to date. He is still examining the fungus and has yet to form any theories.

If the investigators ask about Dr. Meredith, his ex-

Largest Organism? A Big Fungus

Most people generally consider the largest single organism on earth to be the Blue Whale, growing up to 30 meters in length and weighing more than 150 tons. With a little thought, others consider the Californian Redwood, the world's tallest tree. But recent discoveries in Alaska, Montana and West Virginia by Doctor Samuel Chiltern are set to change all that.

Dr Chiltern, a mycologist at Yale University, has evidence that samples taken from each of the three states come from the same fungus. He contends that a single 'superfungus' stretches from West Virginia, across the United States and Canada to Alaska. He estimates that this fungus covers an area of over 10 million square kilometers, and weighs more than 10 thousand tons!

According to Chiltern, 39, the fungus belongs to a family including leaf mould and dry rot. If his claims are correct, it means that the record books will need to be rewritten.

Dr Chiltern's discovery has not met with widespread approval in the scientific community. Dr Carol Meredith of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology contends that Dr Chiltern's claims are the result of coincidence and poor field work.

"While Dr Chiltern may have discovered a new species," said Dr Meredith, "I find it unlikely that he has discovered a new superfungus covering half of North America."

Dr Meredith and Dr Chiltern were married in 1980 and divorced in 1987. They have a twelve year old son, Adam, who lives his mother.

wife, Chiltern scowls nervously. He worshipped the ground she walked on, and she treated him by divorcing him—he isn't even allowed to see his son. He is still emotionally scarred, and it is a subject best avoided.

Dr Samuel Chiltern, Age 39, Mycologist

| | | | |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| STR 9 | CON 10 | SIZ 12 | INT 18 |
| POW 14 | DEX 10 | APP 11 | EDU 21 |
| SAN 70 | HP 11 | | |

Skills: Biology 92%, Chemistry 56%, Computer Use 41%, Diagnose Disease 54%, First Aid 43%, Fidget Nervously 82%, Geology 57%, Library Use 78%, Mycology 94%, Natural History 61%, Persuade 47%, Pharmacy 39%, Photography 42%, Physics 34%.

A Tale of Terror is a short scenario premise, with three different possibilities for what's really going on. Keepers can mine them for ideas, taking that which appeals and discarding that which does not.

Possibilities

1) The God-Mushroom

The fungus is concentrated around the nodes which are greatly dispersed in the wild. The nodes themselves are about the size of a three-storey house, growing in large subterranean caverns which glow eerily with a weak phosphorescent light. Land around the fungus is rich in mutated flora and fauna. Trees suffer attacks from fungi of myriad colours, and the area is generally damp and unhealthy.

There is also an effect on communities drinking untreated water drawn from wells tainted by the fungus. Such communities become isolationist and secretive. Inbreeding is common, as are wine-stain birthmarks. Such communities have even been known to practice cannibalism. As a side effect, such people are susceptible to the temptations offered by the Outer Gods—and temples to blasphemous creatures can sometimes be encountered in such communities.

The fungus' most visible symptom during an investigation is the large proportion of cultists with wine-stain birthmarks. Simply destroying the cultists will not be enough—the fungus must be destroyed as well. (At the very least, the water supply needs purifying.) The sheer scale of the fungus may become apparent when investigators encounter different cults worshipping different gods in different parts of the country all displaying the same wine-stain birthmarks...

2) The Mi-Go Artifact

The fungus is a huge Mi-Go supercomputer wrapped around the globe. Each node is, in human terms, a processing center and may grow to the size of a small house. The fungus may be found in all locations that the Mi-Go have been known to frequent.

Each node (the exact number of which is known

only to the Mi-Go, but it is believed to be no more than three dozen or so) is carefully monitored by the Mi-Go. The Fungi from Yuggoth themselves (often through their human agents) watch over the nodes to ensure that each operates undisturbed. The nodes are usually located in isolated areas, but there is a chance that construction activities will disturb one. When a node is threatened, the Mi-Go will act—preferably using government agents and legal means, but with direct force if absolutely necessary.

The computer's purpose is unknown—although it has been suggested that its existence is the reason that the Mi-Go remain on Earth. Whether the Mi-Go serve the computer or whether it serves them is a subject open to debate. Certain Serpent People texts uncovered at Borobodur, Java, suggest that the Mi-Go act on the computer's behalf. For what reason, the texts do not disclose.



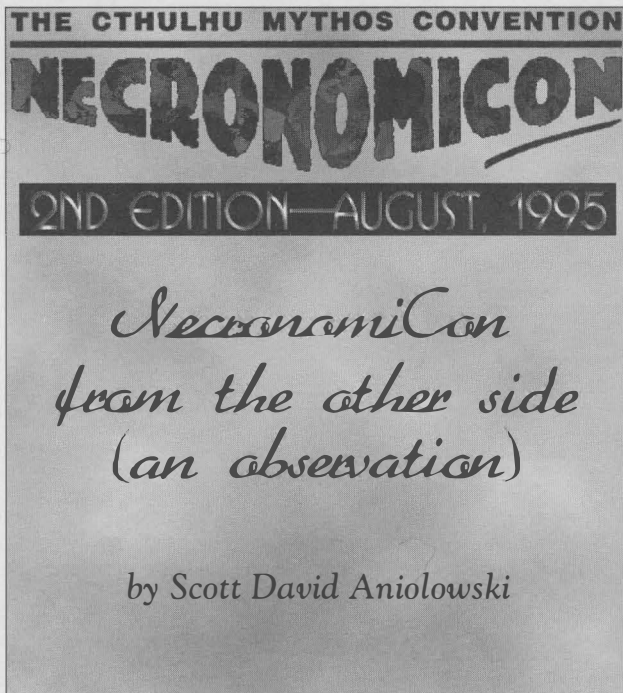
3) The Space Seeds

The fungus is not of terrestrial origin. In 1908 a comet fragment collided with the earth over the Siberian wastes. The comet was mostly rock and ice, but also carried a Mi-Go fungus. From its cataclysmic arrival, the fungus buried into the soil and spread across the globe.

The fungus is engineered to provide a climate on Earth similar to Yuggoth. Once the fungus

has infiltrated an area it attacks the native flora, killing it and replacing it with a new ecosystem. The fleshy nodes (which grow no larger than a soccer ball) contain the genetic information for a variety of fungoid forms. At present the fungus has only colonized several subterranean caverns. Where active, the Mi-Go have encouraged the fungus' growth, achieving toe-holds in remote areas.

Elsewhere, the fungus slowly creeps around the globe, burrowing invisibly through the earth's crust. Once this phase is complete, it will move toward the surface and smother the planet in a thick, fungal embrace. ☞

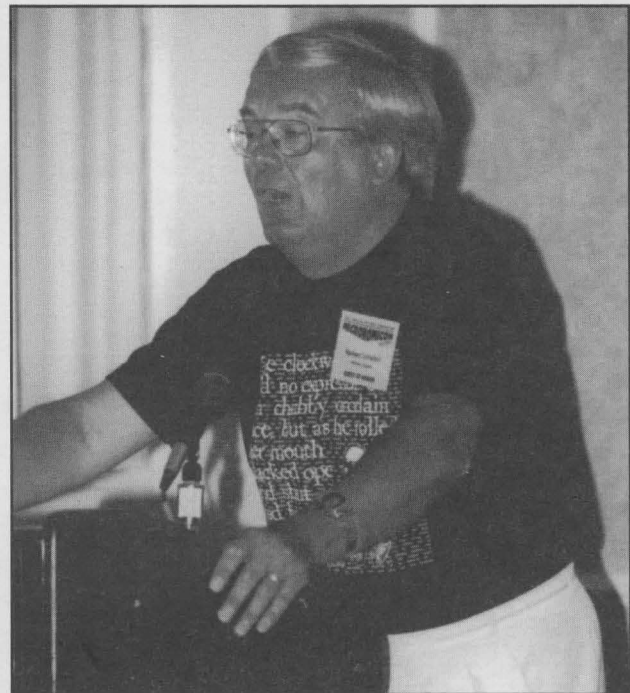


NecronomiCon, 2nd Edition, was held this year from August 18-20 at the Tara Ferncroft Hotel in Danvers, Mass. Like the first NecronomiCon, the guest list this year was again impressive. It was a veritable who's who of the Lovecraft world: S.T. Joshi, Bob Price, Don and Mollie Burleson, Jason Eckhardt, Robert Knox, Will Murray, Don D'Amassa, Peter Cannon, Darrell Schweitzer, etc. In all there were 28 guests, along with special guests L. Sprague and Catherine Crook deCamp, and guest of honor Ramsey Campbell.

I first bumped into guest of honor Campbell on Friday afternoon when I happened upon him sitting alone in the hotel lobby. Although Ramsey and I have corresponded off and on for a few years, I was still very nervous about finally meeting him face to face. He was



Story-time with Ramsey!



Ramsey Campbell wearing, yes, a Clockwork Child t-shirt.

very warm and cordial and eager to spend time chatting with anyone who showed an interest in him and his work. He was also quite funny, which I had fully expected from the contents of some of his *Necrofile* columns.

Friday night featured an informal reception where all the guests were introduced. There was much schmoozing and mingling done, and I spent most of the night chatting with Don and Mollie Burleson. There was much talk about a rumored appearance by Gahan Wilson, but alas he never appeared. After the reception we all gathered round while Campbell read his latest offering in the Cthulhu Mythos cannon, "The Horror Under Warrendown" (from the new Chaosium anthology *Made in Goatswood*). Campbell had to compete against a lively Dixieland Band from the hotel restaurant, but finally won. Perched on a high-back chair in front of an enormous fireplace in the grand living room of the Tara, Campbell read to us his latest deadtime story.

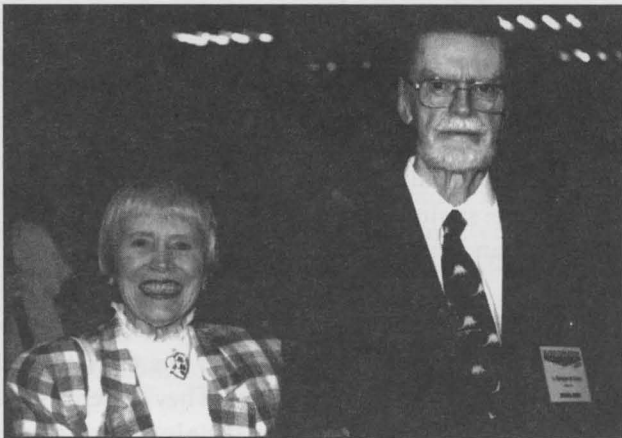
Saturday offered the widest selection of panel discussions, including "The Early Works of Ramsey Campbell" and "The Later Works of Ramsey Campbell." I moderated the former panel, where Stefan Dziemianowicz and Donald Burleson and I discussed Campbell's early *Inhabitant of the Lake* and *Demons by Daylight* period. Ramsey was in the audience for the panel, occasionally chiming in to add to the discussion and to make sure we got it right (if we made any mistakes he was gracious enough not to mention them!).

Saturday afternoon Don Burleson gave a reading of four of his stories ("Blue Luke," "Walkie Talkie," "Mel-

ons," and one other tale) and was very well received by those in attendance. One of the audience suggested that Burleson perhaps should seek professional help! Later there was an interview with Campbell given by Stefan Dziemianowicz (subbing for Peter Atkins who was unable to make it to the con).

Sunday morning was another of the now-infamous Cthulhu Prayer Breakfasts. Ramsey presented L. Sprague and Catherine Crook deCamp with the Robert Bloch Award for lifetime achievements in the field. Sprague said that the award was "a horrible thing!" (Referring to its appearance—a dark little thing created especially for NecronomiCon by sculptor Bob Murch of RAFM), and

Catherine Crook and L. Sprague deCamp.



suggested that their other awards would flee in terror from it, thus making room for it on their long-crowded wall of awards. Catherine gave a wonderful short speech about Lovecraft (as the day was his birthday), and Sprague spoke about his early years and about Lord Dunsany. After the awards and speeches it was time for another of Bob Price's sermons, which he gave replete with Deep One tiara and staff! After a rousing hymn by Price and his Cthulhu Prayer Breakfast chorus, he and a gilled friend led us all though the Three Oaths of Dagon.

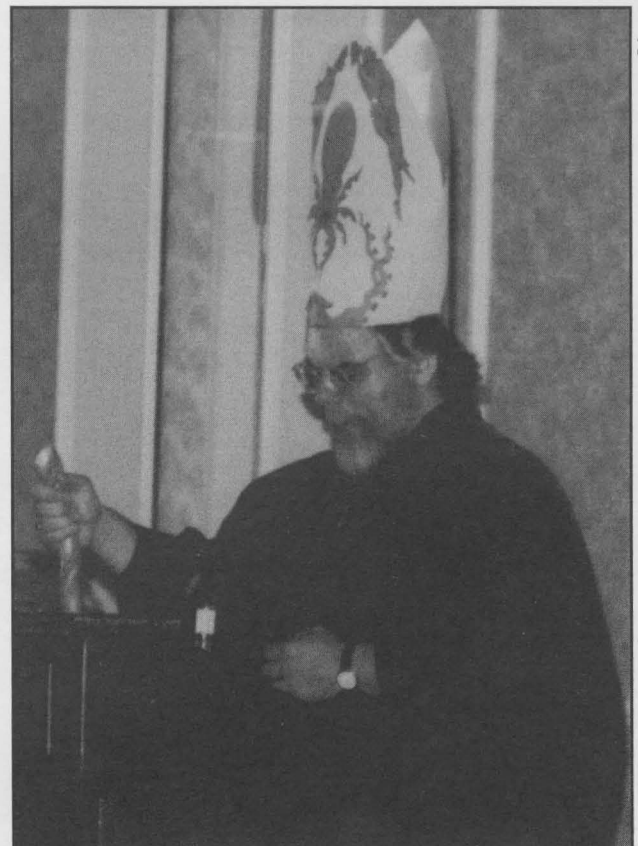
The dealers' room/art gallery was small but impressive. There were not one but two, count 'em two copies of the first edition Arkham House book, *The Outsider* for sale. I also found two copies of one of the few books I was still searching for, Michael Shea's *Polyphemus*, on a dealer's table. Most any Arkham House book was there for sale...for the right price. Someone had a signed copy of the original edition of Bloch's *Mysteries of the Worm* for \$200 (this for a paperback!). There were also t-shirts, audio and video tapes, *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game material, etc. Chaosium released their latest fiction anthology, *Made in Goatswood*, at the convention and it was the hottest-selling item there (Lynn Willis of Chaosium told me that he'd sold about 25% of what he had brought on the first day). Both Allen Koszowski

and Robert Knox had displays of their artwork, much of which was available for sale as prints.

For those interested in the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game, several scenarios were presented by Gary Sumpter, Fred Behrendt, and others. I understand that all of the game slots filled quickly. I sat on a panel with Sumpter and Behrendt about "How to Write for *Call of Cthulhu*," which was well received. And although I never went into the audio-video room, the con organizers had an impressive film line-up, including the latest Carpenter film *In the Mouth of Madness*. Also presented was a Tim Burton short featuring the voice of Vincent Price, and a fine short film adaptation of "The Music of Erich Zann."

There were no conversational fireworks this year as the con organizers didn't put HPL scholar S.T. Joshi and *Crypt of Cthulhu* editor Robert Price on any panels together. There also didn't seem to be any of last con's "scholars vs. gamers" attitudes this time out—it was more of a feeling of a united community. Despite the lack of such excitement, the convention went over well and was thoroughly enjoyable. I was on fewer panels this year, and so got to see and do a lot more this time out.

Convention organizers are already hard at work planning NecronomiCon 3rd edition, to be held in Providence in 1997. The next guest of honor will be Brian Lumley. ☞



Crypt of Cthulhu editor Bob Price leads the Cthulhu Prayer Breakfast.

All photos courtesy of Necronomicon Press.

W I N D I G O

P S Y C H O S I S

a look at a chilling form of madness by Daniel Harms

This article is intended as a supplement to the material in Pagan Publishing's campaign *Walker in the Wastes*, though it may be useful in any adventure involving Ithaqua and his spawn.

In the mythology of the Cree and Ojibwa people of Canada and the northern United States, the windigo (also spelled whitiko, wendigo, weetigo, and a number of other ways) are ice spirits who live in the woods. Some accounts say that they are gigantic, while others report a smaller, man-sized creature. These spirits are eaters of human flesh, and the local tribes live in dread of them, sometimes even leaving human sacrifices to placate the windigo.

One aspect of the windigo myth sets it apart from the innumerable stories of evil spirits from around the globe. Some individuals, for reasons which remain unclear, become convinced that they are undergoing a transformation into a wendigo. Although this affliction affects both sexes, it is most common among men, especially those who have hunted unsuccessfully and alone for extended periods. Old, powerful shamans are also vulnerable to this illness, as magic for ill intentions causes a backlash against the user. No outsider has ever been recorded as being affected by this disorder.

There are several ways in which a person may become a windigo. Those who, due to starvation, consume human flesh may become affected. Others may be contacted as they are dreaming by evil spirits in disguise; if the visitors can convince the person to eat human flesh in their dream, he or she is doomed to become a windigo. In either case, the person perceives that a windigo has taken possession of their body.

The onset of windigo psychosis may be rapid, or in other cases appear over a great length of time, with the affected individual showing great cunning to conceal their

"Such I am told are the sentiments of these people in General. I look upon this as a sort of mania, or fever, a distemper of the brain. Their eyes...are wild and uncommonly clear—they seem as if they glistened. It seems to me to lodge in the Head. They are generally rational except at short, sudden intervals when the paroxysms cease (*sic*) them: their motions then are various and diametrically contrary at one time to what they are the next—Sullen, thoughtful, wild look and perfectly mute: staring, in sudden convulsions, wild incoherent and extravagant language."

— from the letter-journal of George Nelson, in *"The Orders of the Dreamed"*

condition. Such a person may appear to be merely depressed at first, but soon they seem distracted and refuse all normal food. The victim then becomes obsessed with eating human flesh, especially that of their family members, possibly even hallucinating that those around them are animals. After time, the person loses their ability to speak, ceases to care for their appearance, and may even chew on their fingers and lips. They undergo wild

mood swings, and may claim that their inner organs are freezing over. While some "windigos" maintain some control over their actions early in their condition, later they must be restrained and carefully watched so that they do not attack their kin and neighbors. During lucid spells, the person pleads for his captors to kill him to end his suffering, a sad fate which in the past was visited upon many of the afflicted.

A number of traditional cures for windigo psychosis exist. The heart of a victim of windigo psychosis is considered to be made of ice. Thus, native cures for this condition include forcing the victim to eat hot bear fat or to drink large quantities of alcohol while sitting next to a fire. Both of these techniques may be useful in melting the icy heart of the afflicted. Ritual purification in a sweat lodge and chanting may also have a beneficial effect. On the other hand, often there is nothing that can be done for the victim other than execution, especially if he or she has already eaten human flesh. This is usually done with an axe, after which the heart of the victim is cast into a fire to melt it—without these precautions being taken, the windigo may return.

Psychologists and folklorists have advanced several theories for the origin of windigo psychosis. Some believe that the sufferers are overcome with the pressures of providing their families with game during the winter months. Others assert that the disorder does not exist,

and is used as an excuse to eliminate undesired elements from the community in the manner of the European witchcraft trials. Neither of these explanations, however, entirely accounts for the fact that tribes neighboring the Cree and Ojibwa do not exhibit the same behavior.

Windigo Psychosis in CoC

For gaming purposes, it can be assumed that windigo psychosis may be the result of contact with Ithaqua or his minions. As such, it may afflict both outsiders and natives, though it should be more common in the latter group. This insanity is best reserved for those who have been unhinged by an occurrence which causes them to identify with the windigo. For example, merely seeing Ithaqua would not be sufficient cause, but voluntarily participating in a ritual to the Wind-walker or encountering a Child of the Wendigo who used to be a person known to the investigator might. In any case, this disorder should be used only as an indefinite insanity, and should only appear once or twice in any given campaign.

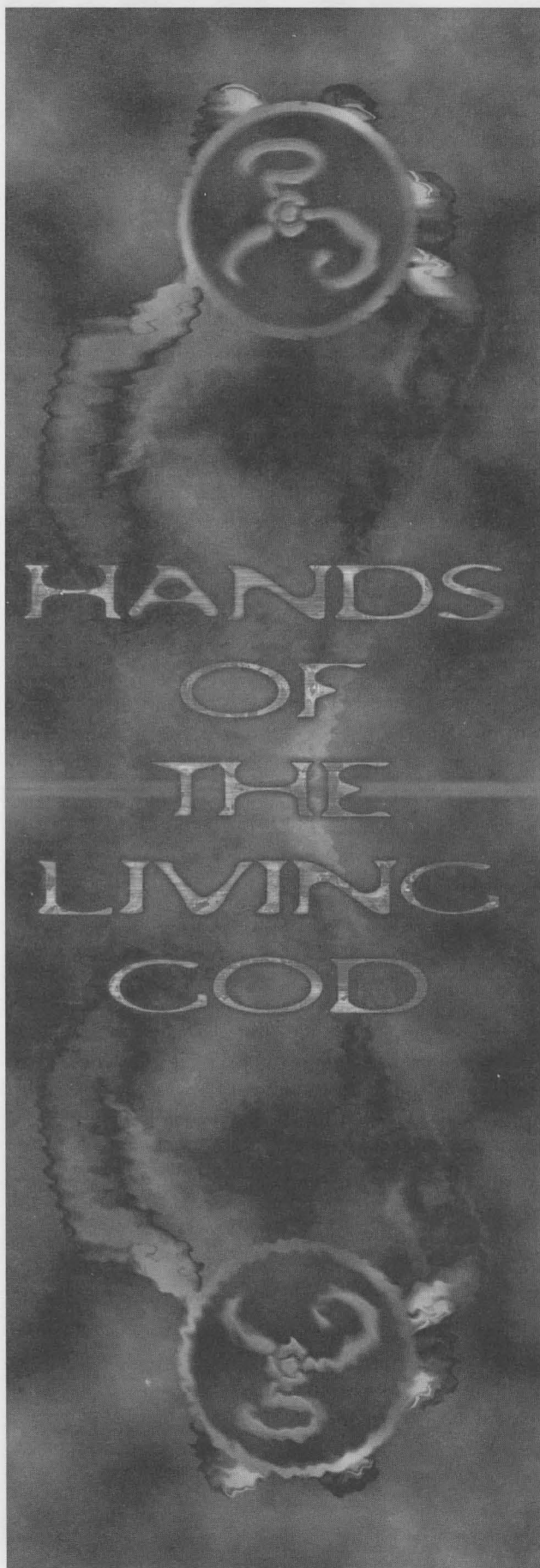
Walker in the Wastes details the Children of the Wendigo, who are humans transformed by Ithaqua to become his servitors. This makes windigo psychosis even more troubling for the investigators; is their friend truly

undergoing a transformation into a windigo, or should they be treated for a psychological disorder? And what if a series of killings like those encountered on your group's last trip to Canada begins in their home town, far south of Ithaqua's area of influence? The effectiveness of any of the cures given before should probably depend more on the victim's belief in their worth than any actual curative effect—but will modern medicine be any better?

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*in which a lone investigator
faces a dismal fate*

by Daniel Harms

“Then I sank into the depths, and I heard the King in Yellow whispering to my soul: “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”

— “In the Court of the Dragon,”

Robert W. Chambers

This scenario is intended for one player and one GM (who is not called the Keeper in this scenario for reasons which will soon be obvious), using either a new or experienced character. The scenario can be run with more than one investigator, but this set-up is not recommended. It has been set near present-day Arkham, but can be adapted to any part of America during the Twenties or the modern era. The only important consideration is that the investigator must be a scholarly type.

The GM should keep careful track of time while the character is travelling and searching for clues. If a period for a given action is not given in the text, the GM should make one up. Make no effort to disguise the timekeeping from the player; though the climax can occur at any time the GM desires, the relentless passage of time will serve to put the player on edge.

Due to the absence of a large pool of investigators whose skills may be called upon, this scenario uses a “double-time” rule in regard to certain clues. For instance, a thirty-minute search may allow one Library Use roll; if this is failed, another search of the same duration will turn up the information automatically. Though this may seem unfair, the limited time available for investigation should balance this out.

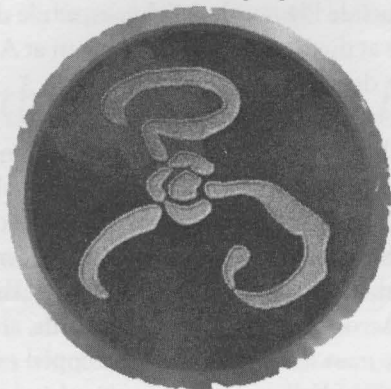
This scenario is loosely based on Robert W. Chambers’ short story, “The Yellow Sign,” which may be found in his book *The King in Yellow* or the Chaosium fiction collection *The Hastur Cycle*. Familiarity with this story is suggested for the GM, but is not necessary. On the other hand, the knowledge contained therein will not help players unduly.

Introduction

Last night was a restless one for the investigator; when sleep did come, it was filled with unpleasant dreams which left the investigator feeling somewhat emotionally drained. (If asked for specific details, the GM should say that they are unable to remember their visions, but that they seem to have had something to do with events

in the recent past). No time to worry about that now, though. It's 9:00 on Saturday morning, and there's cleaning to do and letters to write. If the character has a family or investigator friends nearby, they are gone for the weekend (visiting relatives, on another investigation); for the rest of the scenario, the investigator is alone.

Ask the player what they intend for the character to do; play it out, whether this consists of prosaic domestic concerns or searching the house with gun drawn for assassins. No matter what the character does, the mail arrives at 9:30. Aside from the normal Publisher's Clearinghouse flyers and assorted bills, the character will find a small box (3x3x5 inches) and a letter, both from Matthew Beamshie, a colleague and close personal friend. The letter is reproduced in Player Handout #1, while the box contains the Yellow Sign pendant:



Handout 1: Letter from Matthew Beamshie to the investigator

Friday

Dear friend,

Sorry you haven't seen me in the past week, but I've caught some sort of bug and haven't been able to lecture all week. During this time, though, I've come upon a little mystery which I hope you can help me.

The box which accompanies this letter contains a strange artifact which I received from Professor Peter Kelley from the History Department, who in turn received it from a local hermit who had found it on his land, in a place he called Puddock's Grove. The man thought it might be of some historical significance, so he turned it over to Professor Kelley. Peter had no idea as to what it was (though he speculates it's a remnant of the colonial period), and I can't find anything like it in the linguistic literature. I've sent it on to you to see whether it falls within your own area of expertise. When you're finished with your study, just bring it by my office on Monday or later, the doctor says I should be ready to return to work by then. Good luck!

Your friend,

Matthew Beamshie

P. S. If you happen to meet Peter, don't mention this to him. I wasn't supposed to lend the pendant out, but it was just too big a mystery for me to pass up.

Keeper's Information

Ezekiel Phelps was a man who lived to the southwest of Arkham in the years of that town's foundation. During the time of the witch-trials, when many of the area's most powerful wizards were put to death, Mr. Phelps managed to keep a low profile and continue in his magical delvings unmolested. To this end, he was aided by a renegade shaman of the Misqat Indians, who taught him to make the Unspeakable Promise to Hastur and gave him the Yellow Sign clasp found by the investigators.

One night, Mr. Black and his sons, neighbors of Ezekiel, were poaching on Phelps' land when they came upon him engaged in rites to Hastur. Fearful not only of Ezekiel's magic but also of the law, they killed the wizard and buried his body in the glade in Puddock's Grove where he had practiced his magic.

Three hundred years later, Lawrence "Rocky" Vale, a local hermit, found the bones of Ezekiel on his property, along with the wizard's Yellow Sign. Intrigued by this find, he contacted Professor Kelley at the history department of Miskatonic University. Kelley realized that the Sign was unique, and gave it to Professor Beamshie for further linguistic study. Beamshie himself is baffled, and gives it to the investigator to gain another perspective on the matter.

What is unknown is that those who come into possession of the Sign for an hour or more are targeted by a being known as the Keeper of the Yellow Sign, who has been charged by Hastur with keeping pendants such as this out of the hands of the profane. Due to his special ties to Hastur, Ezekiel was not affected by this creature; the investigator and their friends are not so lucky. The Keeper stalks and kills each person who has possessed the Sign in order. Vale and Kelley have already been killed, and Beamshie will follow shortly. The investigator has until tonight to discover a way to overcome the Keeper.

The Letter

Both Beamshie and Kelley are friends of the investigator (and may possibly be replaced by individuals in academia already known to the investigator). There is nothing out of the ordinary about Beamshie's caution to the investigator, as Kelley's temper is notorious.

The Yellow Sign

This version of the Yellow Sign is cast in gold and set into a shiny black piece of onyx (identifiable with a Geology roll) with a corroded metal clasp on the back. With a successful Know roll, the character will establish that the sign on the pendant does not appear in any known alphabet. History, Archaeology, and Occult rolls may also be made, though if the investigator succeeds they know that nothing like this has been recorded in the given field. A Cthulhu Mythos roll establishes that the character is a Yellow Sign; a second successful roll indicates that it is connected with the King in Yellow, while a third makes it clear that the King is an avatar of Hastur. If the character has previous experience with the cult of the Yellow Sign, no identification rolls are necessary.

(For GM Only:) This particular Yellow Sign is a more powerful version of those normally associated with the cult of Hastur. It may be used only by those who have made the Unspeakable Promise, in which case it provides a +10% bonus in all incantations dealing with Hastur and his minions. Such items are only given to those of the highest power in the Great Old One's cult.

For those not so singularly blessed (i.e. non-cultists), the amulet has a much different effect. First, it will summon the Keeper of the Yellow Sign to retrieve the item and destroy its owner. The other result occurs when the character interacts with others. He or she now seems to see the base emotions—such as anger, jealousy, and lust—of all those around him or her. At first it is only a flashing glimpse now and again, but later these feelings are clearly reflected in their faces at all times. For the

character, the masks of our demeanors have fallen away; whether this is a true depiction of the soul or merely a misleading illusion created by the Sign, who can say? The investigator will lose 0/1D2 SAN each day that he or she sees even one human being other than him or herself. This will continue even if he or she casts the Sign away, unless it is disposed of in the manner explained later in this scenario.

The Radio Announcement

At 10:30 AM (or just before the investigator heads out the door to do some hunting/fishing/painting), the program on their favorite radio station is halted for a special bulletin—Doctor Peter Kelley, an associate professor at Miskatonic University, has been killed in an auto accident outside Plymouth, Michigan, while driving to a conference at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. No further details are forthcoming.

Further information can be gained after an hour's worth of long-distance calls to the Wayne County Sheriff's Department and a successful Fast Talk roll. Deputy Dennis Woodruff informs the investigator that Professor Kelley was driving westbound from his hotel in Plymouth along State Highway 41 when the accident occurred. According to eyewitness accounts, around 8:00 AM a large man in a gray overcoat stepped out into the road. Professor Kelley swerved to miss him, ran off the road, and hit a telephone pole. The man responsible has not yet been found.

Calling Peter Kelley

A player who decides to do this should be reminded beforehand by the GM of Kelley's fiery nature. If contacted before 10:15, they will reach Kelley's answering machine; the message states that Professor Kelley is gone to a conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, over the weekend. After 10:15, a neighbor will pick up the phone—Mrs. Kelley called her over as soon as she was informed of the news of her husband's death. The conversation will be kept short, as the neighbor is awaiting further information.

Calling Matthew Beamshie

Beamshie should live a good distance away from the investigator (at least the other side of town), so the character may want to call him first. The call will only be answered after the ninth ring (the GM should count out the rings slowly, giving the character the opportunity to hang up after each ring). When Beamshie picks up the phone, he seems calm, but is actually covering

up great grief and anxiety (Psychology roll to detect). He explains that he has been receiving some mysterious phone calls lately from a caller who repeats something unintelligible in a deep, guttural voice before hanging up. He has heard of Kelley's death, but has not connected it with the Sign. He will be interested in hearing what the investigator says, as long as it is not too unbelievable, and will invite them over to his house to come up with a solution.

The GM should give the impression that Matthew Beamshie is a helpful character placed in the scenario to be the investigator's companion, though this is not the case. Beamshie can be reached by phone up until the investigator decides to visit his house, so more than one phone call can possibly be made. Before the character meets him in person, however, Matthew Beamshie will receive a visit from the Keeper of the Yellow Sign.

Matthew Beamshie's House

Beamshie lives in a small five-room house surrounded by a badly-kept lawn in one of Arkham's less-reputable suburbs. The shades are drawn, and knocking on the door brings no response. Two successful Locksmith rolls will unlock the door, but a successful Mechanical Repair roll is also necessary for the chain on the inside. Characters who lack mechanical skills or patience should be allowed to break a window to enter, or enter via the unlocked back door, if they so desire; if the character does not state they are going around to the back to do this, a fumbled Sneak roll results in a neighbor seeing the break-in and calling the police.

No floorplan of the house is given, so the GM should make up one as they see fit. The only room of any note is a dining room which Beamshie has converted into a study. It is lined with bookshelves on three sides, and has a sturdy table in the center carrying a typewriter and several sheaves of manuscript. The table has been overturned, the ceiling lamp has been shattered, and one of the bookshelves has fallen over. An arm and part of a shoulder protrude from beneath the scattered books. This is, of course, Beamshie, who is plainly dead (SAN 0/1D3 for those not used to seeing dead bodies).

Though this may seem to be a simple domestic accident, a Spot Hidden roll indicates otherwise. Broken fragments of wire and studs in the wall behind the bookshelf indicate that it was firmly supported, and should not have collapsed on the professor. In truth, this is the work of the Keeper of the Yellow Sign, who entered the house, struggled with Beamshie, then pushed over the bookcase on top of him.

If the character decides to report this event to the

police, they should spend an hour being questioned and then released. On the other hand, Beamshie's death will be discovered a few hours later by a neighbor if the investigator does not inform the authorities. An investigator who did not take proper housebreaking precautions (wearing gloves, entering from the back, etc.) may be apprehended by the police later in the day. Though a character pursued by the Keeper may welcome the chance to spend the night in jail, the Keeper's coming will not be checked — and the Yellow Sign will be in a locked box in another room just when the investigator needs it most.

Peter Kelley's House

Mrs. Prather, a neighbor of the Kelleys, will answer the door. Mrs. Kelley is distraught over her husband's death, and has been given a sedative. The protective Mrs. Prather prevents the investigator from questioning Mrs. Kelley about anything.

At least one clue does exist at the house, though. Investigators who want to look through Kelley's papers for clues should come up with a plausible excuse for doing so. This situation calls for ingenuity; if the player fails to come up with a believable reason, only a halved Fast Talk roll will convince Mrs. Prather to allow the character to search Kelley's rooms.

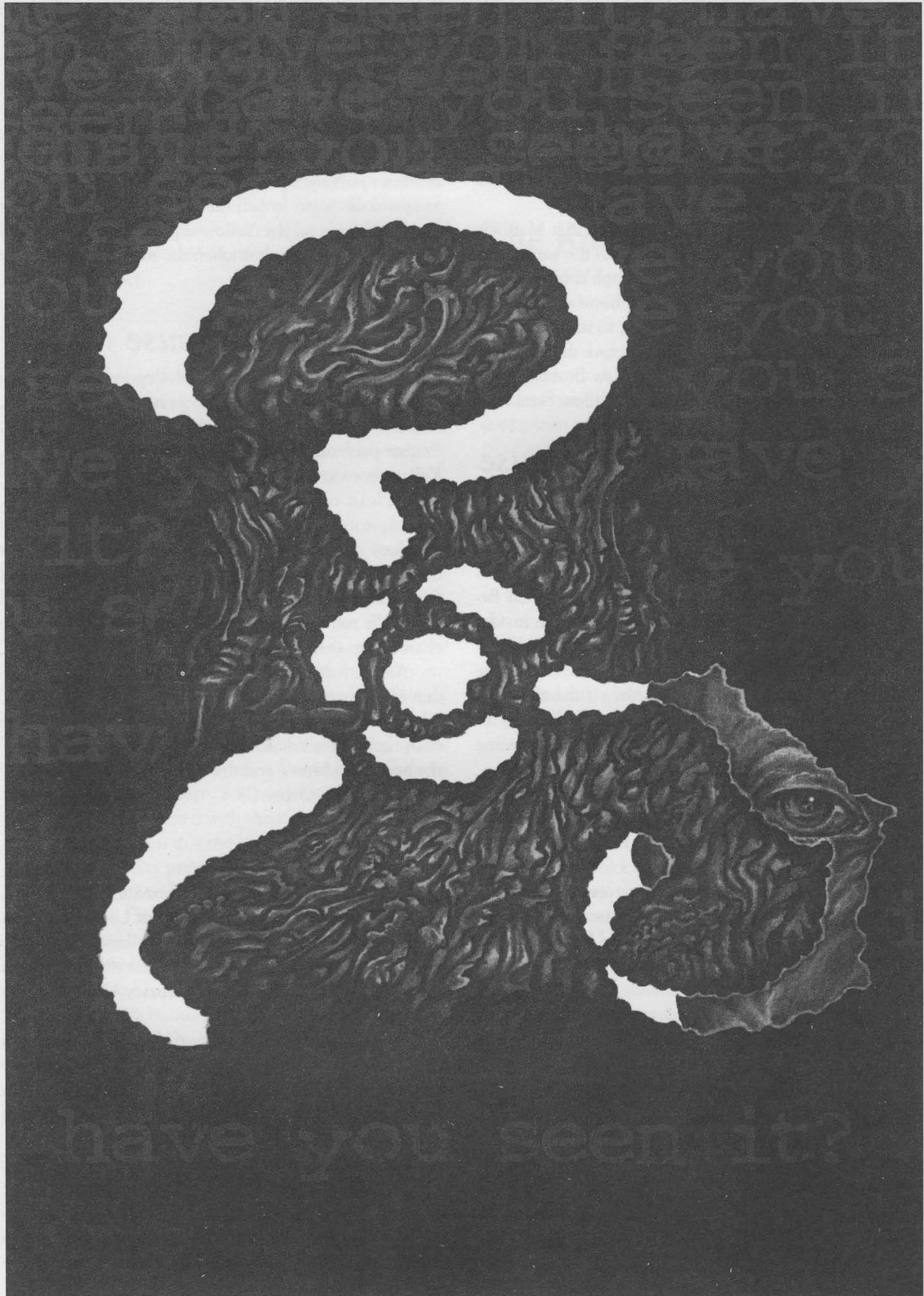
After a half-hour search and a successful Spot Hidden roll (or an additional half-hour if the roll is failed), the investigator will find a small scrap of paper on the floor near Kelley's desk. It bears the name "Rocky Vale," the hermit's address, and the cryptic statement, "Jewelry near Puddock's Grove (?)"

Research

If the investigator desires more information on the Sign, he or she will probably go to Miskatonic University (open 9 am-9 pm). Those researching the Yellow Sign (if they know nothing about its Mythos nature) will find one of the following, after a successful Library Use roll and a half-hour search:

1) In *An Illustrated History of Voodoo*: A photo of a modern-day voodoo practitioner somewhere in New Orleans (no specific location given). The Sign has been painted on a gourd which hangs among other materials of the craft from the porch of the man's house.

2) In a back issue of *New Biblical Archaeology* magazine: a Yellow Sign-like piece of graffiti found in the ruins of Chorazin, on the Lake of Galilee. A History roll or a five-minute search will disclose that Chorazin was one of the cities decried in the Gospels for its blasphemous practices.



have you seen it?

3) An article in *Newsweek*, a few years old, describing the capture of a small cult of drug-dealers and paid killers in Thailand. The ceremonial robes of its members bear a design very similar to that on the pendant.

Those who desire to look through the Mythos tomes in the restricted section of the library must have a specific book in mind and make either a Persuade or Credit Rating roll (+20% if the investigator is on the faculty of Miskatonic). Even under these circumstances, the investigator will not be allowed to see any book with a Mythos bonus over +10%; these require special permission from the head librarian, who is gone today. Scanning one of these books takes at least half an hour, and costs one-fourth of the SAN cost to actually read the book (this is assuming that the investigator is only scanning the illustrations). There is a (book's Cthulhu Mythos) \times 5% chance that the connection between the Yellow Sign, the King in Yellow, and Hastur is found in that particular book. No information on the Keeper or his dismissal is included.

Some crafty players will consider looking for *The King in Yellow* at the Miskatonic University Library. This is understandable if the character has had prior experience with the book; in this case, the volume is either at the bindery or lost. On the other hand, if the player's knowledge seems to be intruding unduly upon the game, they should be rewarded (after a successful Library Use roll) with Robert W. Chambers' short story collection (no Cthulhu Mythos or sanity loss). In this copy, the story "The Yellow Sign" has been torn out.

As the character exits the library, they catch a piece of clothing on the security gate. Turning to untangle it, the character notices the librarian behind the desk coolly appraise them before returning to his work. If confronted, this individual will deny doing any such thing.

Researching the Grove

An investigator may decide to find out more about Puddock's Grove, the place in which the Sign was found. A Library Use roll indicates that some pertinent information is contained in Reverend Ward Phillips' *Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New-English Canaan*. This book is also held in the restricted section; if the character is unable to gain access to this area, the helpful librarian points out that another copy is held at the Historical Society (open Saturdays noon-5 pm). Following forty-five minutes and a successful Read English roll, the player should be given Handout #2. A successful Library Use roll and half-hour search (or hour-long if the roll is failed) will provide the location of the exact area in which Ezekiel Phelps lived.

Handout 2: From Thaumaturgical Prodigies in the New-English Canaan, Chapter IV ("The Arkham Witch-Trials"):

But even in those times when the Face of Evil hath made its Presence known to all, there will be those who will abuse their Holy Charge to accuse those with whom they have had past Grievances. One such instance is the case of Ezekiel Phelps, a man of good Character who dwelt far to the west of Arkham. It was of common knowledge that this man had a dispute with his neighbor, Lucas Black, over the boundaries of the two men's respective properties. In the fall of 1695, Mr. Black and his two Sons came before Magistrate Cooper and related a fascinating Tale. It seems that the three of them had been journeying through the wood known as Puddock's Grove when they came upon the aforementioned Phelps in a glade, discoursing with a Voice from the Air. Being possessed of a Righteous Fervor (or so didst the thresome claim), they fell upon the hapless Phelps, killing him and burying him in that very place. Following this Deed, they had come to Arkham to confess their Action, as they were of clean Conscience about the matter.

The good Magistrate Cooper, upon hearing their confession, was disinclined to accept it, since he knew of the dispute between Mr. Phelps and Mr. Black, as well as that Mr. Phelps had often petition'd the Court to hold his neighbor on charges of Trespassing for the purpose of Hunting on Mr. Phelps' property. He took their statement and then requested that Mr. Phelps and his sons return to the Court the next day. That night, however, Mr. Phelps and his family did leave their home secretly, bearing away all their Possessions with them to a ship bound for England, rather than face the Wrath of the Authorities.

Arkham Events

At some point while the character is in Arkham, the GM should ask the player for a Spot Hidden roll. A successful result means that the character spots a large, pale-faced man in a threadbare grey coat watching him in a nearby alley. A Psychology roll may show that the figure is intent on watching the investigator, but gives no insight into his motives. Any attempt to catch this figure will fail; the individual seems to turn a corner and vanish into thin air. A fumbled roll indicates that

the character believes an innocent youngster on a tricycle is eyeing him in a curious manner.

“Rocky” Vale’s House

Vale’s trailer is located an hour’s drive into the hill-country west of town, past the reservoir. The roads in this area are cracked and pot-holed, and the myriad twists and turns of the road require an Idea roll to find the correct address. Otherwise, the character must stop to ask for directions. The locals are helpful, but after they give their instructions they turn away and mumble to themselves. Ask for a Listen roll; no matter what the result, the character heard the words, “Have you found the Yellow Sign?”

Rocky’s house lies on a small plot of land off a little-used gravel road, and has three large “No Trespassing” signs posted on trees alongside the dirt-covered driveway. Rocky’s pickup, a rusting old Chevy with peeling yellow-orange paint, sits next to the trailer.

A mangy border collie sits chained to a post, too exhausted to do anything but wag its tail feebly; an investigator who gets closer and makes an Idea roll sees that the dog has been neither fed nor watered for the past few days. If the character decides to take the dog with him or her, it comes willingly, but is of no use in the adventure, other than possibly scaring the investigator by wandering about and making spooky noises.

An investigator who enters the house finds it dark and musty, with tall piles of newspapers and beer cans on all sides. A successful Spot Hidden, though, will notice books such as Schliemann’s *Troy and its Remains* and Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* on an out-of-the-way shelf in a corner.

Rocky Vale may be found in the bedroom, with a sheet tied around his throat. He appears to have hanged himself from a light fixture which later broke under the strain, but the character may have other suspicions. A Medicine roll shows that Vale has been dead for over three days. SAN loss is 0/1d6.

With a halved Idea roll, the investigator notices that Rocky may have been facing the window of his bedroom when he died. A glance outside shows heavy, booted footprints in the ground outside. If the investigator makes a Track roll, they can follow the prints for a few dozen yards, after which they vanish entirely.

The character may search the house if they desire. After half an hour’s search, allow a Spot Hidden roll; if this fails, another half-hour turns up the clue as well. On the floor of Rocky’s living room rests a topographical map, showing the land around his home. About a mile and a half to the east is a patch of forest circled and labelled “Puddock’s Grove.”

Puddock’s Grove

The grove and Rocky’s house are a thirty minute walk apart; the time can be cut if the investigator has a suitable off-road vehicle, but dense undergrowth will force them to enter the grove itself on foot.

Puddock’s Grove is a large clump of pines surrounded by open field. As soon as the investigator enters, the boughs close over their head, blocking out much of the light. The cushion of needles beneath the investigator’s feet blocks out the sound of their footfalls, and they may find themselves making noises in order to dispel the silence that engulfs them.

At the center of the grove is a small clearing, covered by stunted weeds with areas of bare earth and rock here and there. At one end, next to a large rock, the investigator can see a bright blue tarpaulin, held in place by stakes and a few small stones. Beneath the tarpaulin lies a skeleton still wearing a tattered suit of an earlier era, obviously uncovered by erosion. An Anthropology roll establishes him as an old man of European ancestry. An Archaeology or Medicine roll reveals that the bones appear to be unweathered and untouched by any sort of scavenger. A bullet has penetrated the right side of the skull, and three fingers from the left hand are missing.

If the character lifts the large rock next to the tarpaulin (make a resistance roll of STR vs. the rock’s SIZ of 6, each attempt takes two minutes), they will find a hollowed-out area in which lies a bundle wrapped in oilskin. This is the diary of the wizard Ezekiel Phelps: Though it (like the skeleton of its owner) is free of corruption, water seeping under the rock has ruined a good deal of it. Decipherable fragments are in Handout #3.

The Return

Whenever the investigator leaves Vale’s cabin, the weather takes a turn for the worse. Rain sluices down from the overcast skies, seeping inside the frame of the character’s car and leaving them cold and wet. Every so often, the moon breaks through the clouds; it bears a curious irregular haze about it, as if it were dripping with spray. As they continue on their way, they pass a line of school children wearing yellow rain-slickers playing Follow-the-Leader in the gutter. A familiar yellow glyph shines in the sky ahead, but when they get closer it resolves itself into a sign for a popular fast-food chain. The Keeper may be seen on the slope of a nearby hill, quietly watching its target. If the investigator stops, everyone they encounter seems unaccountably angry, nervous, depressed, or lustful, though these impulses are not acted upon.

Optional: The Masquerade

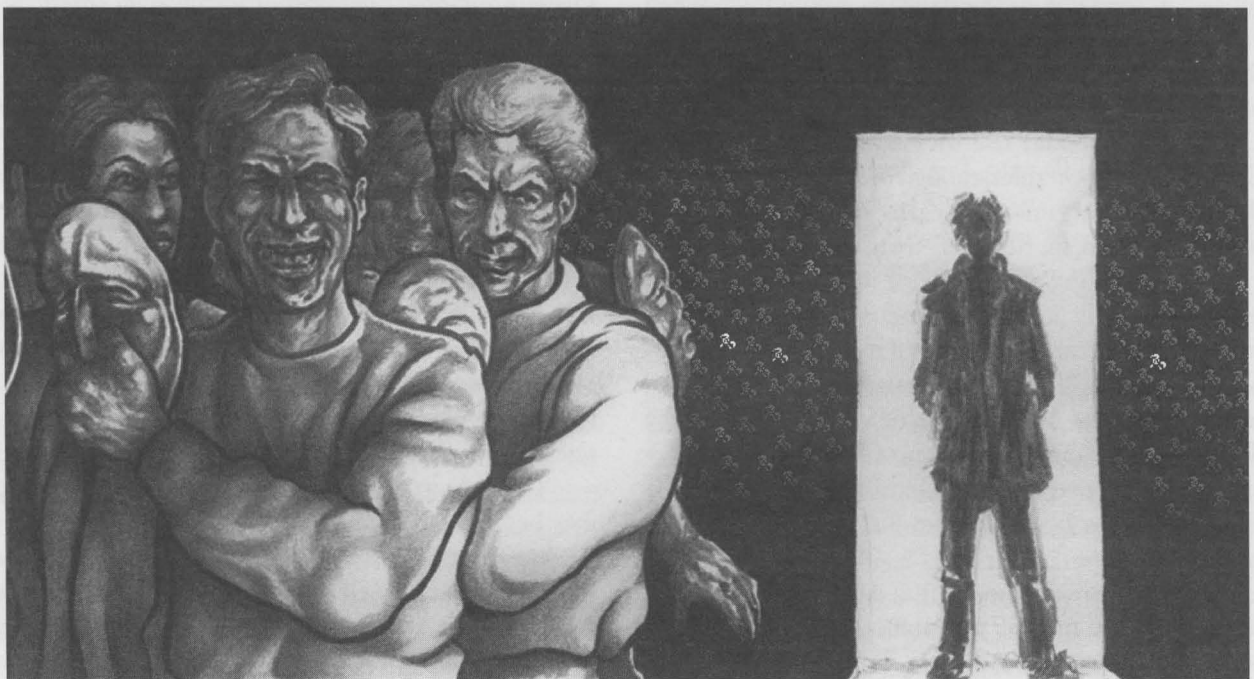
This encounter takes the form of a dream which the investigator has, having fallen asleep momentarily from exhaustion. The best way to use it would be when the investigator is returning home. As they unlock the door and enter their house, the place seems very quiet, yet there is the sound of movement in the background. If the investigator has a weapon out, it is suddenly knocked out of their hand. The lights come up, they hear a shout of, "Surprise!", and are surrounded by family, friends, and neighbors, who have come to give the investigator a party for whatever plausible reason the GM can come up with (recent achievement or promotion, to cheer them up after a disappointment). None of the people bear any signs of the bestiality shown by the Yellow Sign, and if the player checks for the Yellow Sign, it has vanished. Keep up this illusion of meeting with friends from far away, handing out food and drink, and being asked to give toasts until the player has (grudgingly) accepted it.

After a while, the character notices Matthew Beamshie in one corner of the room, very much alive. Matthew excuses himself from the conversation he is in and walks toward an exit. Any investigator worth their salt will not neglect this chance to find out what's going on. As they near their friend and a clock hidden somewhere strikes the midnight hour, he turns and speaks to the crowd. "Ladies and gentlemen, the time has come to unmask!"

In an instant, shadows fall over the room as the lights dim, allowing tiny, glowing Yellow Signs on every surface in the room to show their presence. The happy, vibrant crowd's faces become twisted into pictures of fury and suffering. If the character is near a window, they notice the tall, black towers of a city in the distance, with a large, sickly moon rising in front of one of the tallest structures. SAN loss for the situation is 0/1D4. As the party-goers turn toward the character, he or she notices the face of the Keeper in the center of the room (further SAN loss as appropriate).

One person steps forward from the crowd and addresses the investigator: "You, sir, should unmask." If the investigator seems confused or insists that they wear no mask, another person in the audience speaks: "Indeed it's time. We have all laid aside disguise but you." A character who tries to shape his face into one like those of the crowd may do so, but then a cry comes from the back of the room: "'Tis true! He wears no mask!" No matter what the investigator's decision, whispers of "No mask?" can be heard throughout the room. The people continue to mutter and glare menacingly as they step aside to let the Keeper approach. When the Keeper is almost upon them, the character hears Matthew Beamshie whisper in their ear, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

The character then awakens. If any SAN loss occurred in the dream, return all but one point of lost Sanity back to the investigator.



Handout 3: Fragments from the diary of Ezekiel Phelps

...didst attempt to converse with the Yr-Nhngz daemons, who counseled that I consult the Unspeakable One...
 ...for then the Swimmers in the Lake are at the Frothing, and at those times it is unwise to gaze thereon...
 ...and that Shaman of the Misgat Tribe told me that He is known as the Keeper of the Yellowe Signe, who cometh forth
 when the Sacred Sigil falleth into the Hands of the Profane...
 ...By one who has made the Promise to the Unspeakable One, the Sign may bestow upon him the greatest Power...
 ...the Keeper desireth two things, the profaned Signe and the Profaner himself, though a portion will satisfy his Hunger...
 ...I go to see my Master this night. Black is praying, but his actions should be of little consequence.

The King in Yellow

If the GM so desires, a copy of the play *The King in Yellow* may fall into the investigator's hands as the investigation draws to a climax. This should not occur as a result of investigator search; rather, the book falls into their hands in an unexpected manner. Perhaps they are reading over an occult book for clues, and suddenly realize that they have been reading the play, which has taken the place of the text, for quite some time. It may appear on the table or their shelves before them when they are not looking directly at a certain spot. Its arrival always remains a mystery, and the character cannot be sure that the book was not there all along.

The GM should use the statistics in the *Call of Cthulhu* 5th edition rules, though the character will probably not read long enough to gain any appreciable benefits. As they do so, however, their surroundings seem to take on a feeling of decay; what was once reality now seems to be only an illusion, and objects the character has owned for years now feel as if they were stage props (lose 0/1D2 SAN). In the distance, behind the wind and the rain, the investigator thinks they can hear the cloud-waves break on the shores of Hali. No answer for their problems may be found within, and whenever the GM desires, the book vanishes just as unexpectedly as it arrived.

By now it should be nearing dark, and the investigator should be making preparations to confront their doom. The Keeper comes after dark, preferably when the investigator is alone. The traditional time for such

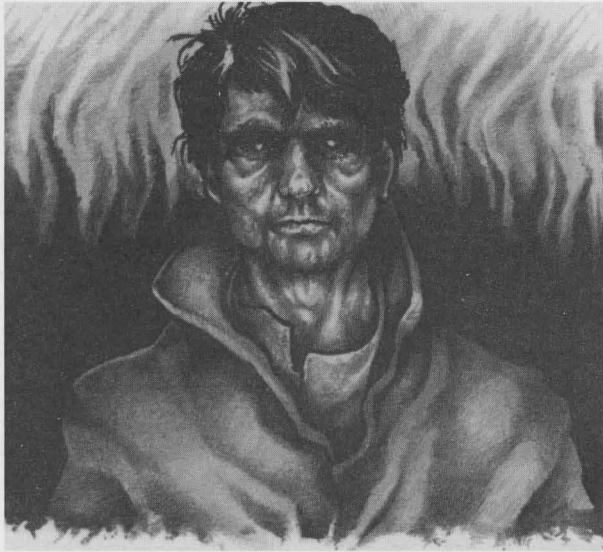
visitations is midnight, but the Keeper is a creature of the stars and is not bound by such earthly conventions. It glides forward, no material barriers causing it any discomfort, until it has attained its goal.

Escape

Throughout the scenario, the GM should stress the isolation of the investigator. Any attempts for help or flight should be met with endless answering machine messages, unhelpful operators, inexplicable absences of friends and loved ones, non-comprehending police officers, and overbooked flights. Calling the attention of others to their plight is met only with disbelief and mockery. The character must face their foe alone.

As it should be clear already, casting the Sign away or giving it to another will not ward off either the Keeper or the Sign's insanity-causing effects. Killing the Keeper is one solution (and returns 1D8 SAN), but the Sign will continue to drive the character insane unless they choose to live in solitude for the rest of their lives. Another way out of the problem may be found later, but in the meantime the investigator will continue to deteriorate, possibly becoming a danger to himself and others.

The only true answer to the investigator's problem may be found in the fragments of Ezekiel Phelps' diary. An investigator must bind together the Sign and a "portion" of him or her self and then give this to the Keeper. A lock of hair will suffice for this purpose, though the investigator does not know this; a GM should assess whatever SAN loss seems necessary for characters who



**Keeper of the Yellow Sign,
Hastur-affiliated entity**

STR 25 CON 25 SIZ 17 INT 9 POW 15
DEX 8 HP 25 Move 8

Attacks: Arm flail, 50%, D 2D6+fever (if failing to match their CON against the Keeper's POW, victim loses 1 point from all characteristics per day until dead)

Armor: Firearms do minimum damage. The Keeper regenerates at a rate of 1 hit point per hour.

SAN Loss: 0/1D2 for those who do not know of the Keeper's supernatural nature; 1/1D8 otherwise.

The Keeper is a servant of Hastur dedicated to keeping the Yellow Sign out of the hands of the profane. This seems to extend only to the special Yellow Sign pendants worn by high-ranking members of Hastur's cult. To fulfill its purpose, the messenger usually possesses the body of a large, recently dead human. It then follows and kills the first non-priest of Hastur who keeps the Sign for any length of time over an hour. If the Sign was still in the possession of this person at the time of death, the Keeper obtains it and leaves its body to return to Hastur. On the other hand, if the Sign has been passed on to others for any length of time, the Keeper can automatically sense the next

person in the chain, and move on to them. If two or more people were to pass the Sign back and forth between them, the Keeper would kill all of them in the order they held it, leaving the current bearer for last. The only way the chain may be broken is if one of the bearers dies before the Keeper can reach him, thus frustrating the messenger's attempt. Upon killing the last victim, the Keeper will cause the Yellow Sign to vanish and then return to Hastur, leaving behind the empty, putrefied corpse it inhabited.

While the Keeper is not as intelligent as the average human, it possesses a rudimentary cunning; it will not attack its victims in broad daylight, or if many people are near, unless this becomes absolutely necessary.

Among the Keeper's powers are the following:

Dream-sendings: Dreams of impending doom are often sent by the Keeper to its victims. One example is given; if others are desired, the GM should tailor them for the investigator, with relevant phobias, etc., being taken into account.

Teleportation: This power is used to transport the Keeper to its next victim, or to escape pursuit. The ability is not exact, and will transport the Keeper within a few miles of its intended destination.

Possession: Under dire circumstances, such as a battalion of police surrounding its intended victim, the Keeper can leave its body and possess another one which is closer to the victim. The Keeper can sense which of those closest to its target possesses the lowest POW, and its attempt will be focused upon that individual. If the individual succeeds in a POW vs. POW contest, they have maintained their mind, and the Keeper's consciousness must return to Hastur. Otherwise, the Keeper takes up residence in this new body, which then bloats and gains all of the Keeper's statistics and abilities. This process always leaves the body dead after the Keeper departs. No past or present bearer of the Yellow Sign pendant may be affected in this manner.

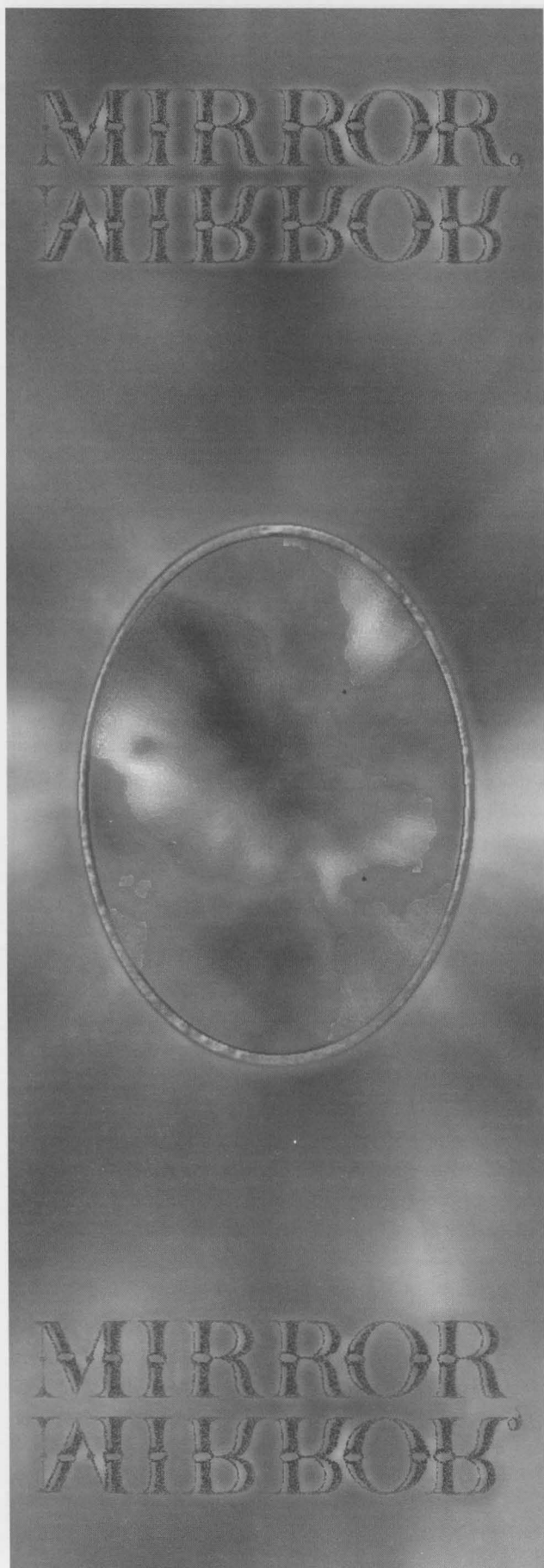
do something drastic to get the needed component.

Once this has been done and the Sign has been presented (held out, thrown, etc.) to the Keeper, the pursuer will stop, hold the Sign in its arms, and cause it to vanish in a discharge of plasma. Then the Keeper's knees will buckle, and as it sinks to the ground the body will putrefy at an unbelievable rate. In the end it will revert to a mass of crumbling bone, liquefying flesh, and ravenous maggots (SAN loss 1/1D6). The investigator will regain 1D10+2 SAN for this solution.

Even if this attempt meets with success, the investigator will have a few loose ends to clear up. The corpse of a long-dead man lies nearby, possibly within their house; how will they dispose of it? Will they inform anyone as to the true fates of their colleagues? Have the police taken an interest in their activities? And what of the worldwide cult based around the Sign which may still exist elsewhere? ☞

Daniel Harms playtesters: Paul Harms, David Raybould

Brian Appleton playtesters: John Crowe, John Tynes



*in which a house full of mirrors
offers a grim reflection*

by Dean Shomshak

This is an introductory *Call of Cthulhu* adventure designed for brand-new investigators. It gives the investigators a reason for knowing each other, and introduces them to the dreadful secrets of the Cthulhu Mythos by way of a locked-room mystery. Experienced investigators can also take a crack at this scenario, and while they'll be more likely to search for supernatural explanations, the situation at hand should still be a surprise to them.

Keeper's Information

An antique mirror started it all. A merchant, Abram Jarndyce, brought the mirror from China in the 19th century. Mirrors obsessed Jarndyce: he thought they held the key to seeing the fourth dimension. He even made several strange mirrors of his own. This "Chinese" mirror, however, was very much older than Jarndyce ever dreamed, and is so much more than just a mirror. It also acts as a portal to an extradimensional space holding a strange crystalline monster, the Void Stalker. Normally this monster can't leave the mirror, but it can be called out—deliberately or by accident—for short times. People who call it out by accident regret doing so. The mirror-space also now holds Abram Jarndyce, trapped by a miscast spell and now quite mad.

It is 1920, and a dilettante now owns the mirror. He has put it in a guest room of his house (a house that used to belong to Jarndyce). The dilettante invites several of his friends—the investigators, plus an NPC victim-to-be—to visit. (The dilettante could also be an investigator if that fits your campaign better.) The NPC guest gets the room with the magic mirror; during the night he accidentally calls out the void stalker and gets munched, leaving the police and the investigators with a locked-room mystery. Clues in the house will suggest that the mirror played a role in the disappearance.

While the investigators search, however, the Void Stalker becomes hungry again—and for a few days, it can leave the mirror at will. Eventually it will drag another victim into the mirror, forcing the investigators to follow it into the extradimensional zone before it can kill their friend. There they must confront Jarndyce and the Void Stalker. Unfortunately, Jarndyce thinks that he can free himself from the mirror by sacrificing one of the investigators to Yog-Sothoth. Or maybe two of them. A third, if that doesn't work...

Investigator's Information

The investigators meet because they are all invited to a housewarming party by their mutual friend Daniel Radley, a wealthy dilettante. (If any of the investigators is a dilettante, have it be his house and party instead.) There's also one NPC guest, whom the Keeper can invent. (Guess who's going to die?) There'll be dinner, and Radley will put the investigators up for the night.

Getting There

A winding dirt road through the woods leads to Radley's house outside town. Radley greets each investigator at the door. Outside, Radley's handyman Mr. Stanich is scraping old paint off a section of the house's walls.

The nearest other home is nearly half a mile away. Investigators may drive their own car or cars, or take the train to the town and then hire a car at the station to take them to the house. One may then call from the house to get a cab back to town—if the phone lines haven't been disconnected. Radley has a car of his own.

The First Disappearance

The investigators enjoy a fine dinner: Mrs. Stanich, the live-in cook and housekeeper, is a good cook. An hour after everyone has retired to their rooms for the night, however, there's banging from the NPC guest's room, shouting, and then silence.

This is Guest Room #5 on the map of the house. The victim has locked his door from the inside; the door and lock are STR 18.

Once the investigators get the door open, they will find the room empty except for the furniture: the bed, with the bedclothes torn and ripped halfway off, the dresser, the lamp (now knocked onto the floor), and a freestanding, bluish mirror in an ornate frame of gilded bronze, likewise tipped onto the floor. The windows are all latched and the latches are firmly rusted shut (STR 15 resistance).

There's only one unobvious clue in the room, located by a Spot Hidden or a deliberate and exhaustive search. Under the bed there is a small chunk of whitish, slightly sparkling rock with a yellowish core running through it. An investigator who makes an Idea Roll will notice that this broken pebble looks very much like a fingertip, if a fingertip could somehow be turned to stone. Of course that's unthinkable—thinking it causes a 0/1D3 SAN Loss.

(What happened: the victim got interested in the mirror. Staring at it, he unwittingly activated the dimensional portal. The Void Stalker came out, turned him to

stone, and pulled him into the mirror-space. One finger broke off in the process.)

Calling the Police

As everyone knows, proper procedure under the circumstance is to call the police right away and touch nothing in the room. Assuming the investigators call them in, the police will take statements, poke around the room a little, and tell everyone not to leave town. (To the Keeper: invent a suitable police officer to ask questions while his assistant searches the room, or use Lieutenant Smith, described in the NPC section.)

The police won't notice the strange "pebble" under the bed in their desultory initial search. Even once Lt. Smith sees it he will ignore it because he can't see how it could be relevant. Investigators can be more imaginative.

Lt. Smith won't charge anyone in the disappearance, but will tell everyone to stay in town for further questioning and tell the police where they are staying. The Lieutenant bluntly says he would like them to stay together for now.

If the investigators don't call the police, they are very naughty; this should get them in trouble later as they are the last people known to have seen the vanished man. They can investigate the house and Jarndyce's past without official interruption for one day. Then they get a call the next evening from the vanished man's wife or some other relative, wondering where he is. The relative will ask hard questions. The relative will set the police on the case on the next day, and the police will treat Radley and the investigators as the prime suspects.

Investigation

At this point, the investigators have a mysterious and motiveless disappearance. The police have all but ordered them to stick around; only a willfully obtuse investigator would leave town at this point. The investigators will realize that there is more to the disappearance than the police can conceive; if for no other reason, someone can receive a Luck or Idea to "feel an intuition." They have several avenues to explore.

What the Owner Already Knows

Radley knows that a local businessman named Abram Jarndyce built the house about 30 years ago. It stood vacant for many years while Jarndyce's heirs fought in probate court over who would inherit it. A guy named Olsen finally won the house, but had to sell it to pay the property taxes and his legal costs. That's when Radley

bought the place.

Gerald Olsen still lives in the city. He's a shortish, middle-aged man with thinning blonde hair and a sour expression, and a minor official with the Port Authority (or some such bureaucracy). He's rather bitter over the house: although he doesn't need persuasion to talk, his answers will be curt and he'll soon find a reason to excuse himself.

What Olsen knows is that his uncle Abram Jarndyce had inherited a 30% interest in a shipping company engaged in the China trade, which gave him plenty of money to indulge his eccentricities. Olsen heard from his mother (Jarndyce's sister) that Jarndyce was interested in Spiritualism. Soon after Jarndyce built the house, Jarndyce became a virtual recluse. Olsen only met Jarndyce a few times, long ago. Olsen never noticed Jarndyce's mirror fixation.

City Records

Investigators can access city records with a Library Use, Persuade, or Credit Rating roll at x1.5. Jarndyce built the house in 1891. There are no irregularities in its construction.

Jarndyce's Disappearance

A Library Use roll at the public library or local newspaper will locate articles on Jarndyce's mysterious disappearance on October 20, 1894, at the age of 53. There had obviously been a struggle, but no ransom note was ever received. Jarndyce's cook and housekeeper, Mrs. Alice Dorritt, discovered Jarndyce's disappearance when she came to the house on the 21st. Although lots of furniture had been tossed around, she swore the house had been locked up tight when she arrived.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Dorritt cannot help the investigators: she died in the 1918 flu epidemic. (Library Use to find her obituary. She is survived by two daughters, both married, neither of whom know anything relevant.)

Jarndyce's Books

The house's library holds the most important information. It has lots of books about spiritualism, Oriental art, glassworking and optics. Library Use reveals that Jarndyce's interest in spiritualism focused on the Fourth Dimension.

(Anyone with even the slightest Occult skill rating can explain this. One popular Spiritualist theory was that ghosts existed on a fourth spacial dimension—a direction like length, width and breadth, but perpendicu-

lar to them all. Humans, being only three-dimensional, could not physically perceive the Fourth Dimension, but the soul was four-dimensional and so could sometimes receive impressions from this other realm.)

Transcendental Physics: One of the most heavily-used books is Zollner's *Transcendental Physics*, a German physicist's defense of the celebrated medium Henry Slade. Slade seemed to perform feats like tying knots in closed loops of rope; he claimed he did this by passing objects through the fourth dimension.

A New Era Of Thought: C. H. Hinton's *A New Era of Thought* also has lots of heavy underlining and margin notes. This book about four-dimensional geometry includes mental exercises for developing four-dimensional spacial reasoning.

(This and Zollner's book are real, by the way. If the Keeper wishes, studying Hinton's book can give a bonus to any attempt to employ magic gates or other hypergeometric phenomena.)

Scrapbooks

Jarndyce also filled scrapbooks with newspaper stories about lights in the sky, mysterious disappearances, rains of improbable objects, etc.—the sort of thing Mr. Charles Fort has recently gained some small notoriety for collecting and publishing. Anyone who makes a Read English roll can decipher enough of Jarndyce's marginal notes to understand that he thought these events were all related: specifically, that entities came to Earth from the Fourth Dimension and caused these mysterious events.

Jarndyce's Diary

Finally, a Spot Hidden roll made while searching the bookcases locates Jarndyce's diary, jammed inside a larger volume. Most of the entries are commonplace notes about Jarndyce's day-to-day life. Jarndyce also writes about his belief that the "astral plane" where ghosts dwell is the Fourth Dimension, and that "Through some geometrical arrangement rightly understood—through some refraction of the ether—it must be possible to see into the Astral Realm." He even speculates on the possibility of physically entering the fourth dimension.

Jarndyce also makes several notes about the "Chinese mirror" he purchased on a visit to the Orient, and seems to think it holds some occult significance. The rest is mostly notes on his experiments at making mirrors to see through the fourth dimension (which is how he thinks crystal-gazing works). He had especially high



Jarndyce's Diary Excerpts

(Keepers can fill in whatever dates fit their campaigns.)

1/1 Bought Peabody's latest find. Mirror is truly magnificent, even if the frame is corroded. Tang? Oval, 62" x 38 3/8". Remarkable shimmering depth to glass.

1/1 Can't find characters on Chinese mirror's base in Cheswick. Mailed copies to Van Brant, Anufieva and Mills.

1/1 This mirror fascinates me. It is like gazing into the infinite sky. Sometimes I feel I will drown in it. Even the striations seem less like flaws than a cryptographic sign.

hopes for the three movable angled mirrors. (A few typical diary entries about the mirror appear above.)

Night of the Stalker

The night after the investigators learn that Jarndyce tried to experiment with the fourth dimension through his mirrors—if possible, while they are discussing the fruits of their inquiries—the Void Stalker comes out of the Chinese mirror. It is hungry again. The exact circumstances of the Stalker's emergence depends on the investigators' actions. (If the investigators have failed to discover the clues about Jarndyce's interest in the fourth dimension, stage this event whenever you like.)

- If the investigators leave the Chinese mirror alone, the Stalker emerges whenever the Keeper pleases. Since it can walk through walls, it doesn't matter if the mirror is in a locked room.
- If the investigators post a watch on the mirror, the Stalker emerges at a moment when nobody's looking. (Go on, invent an excuse, no matter how suspicious of the mirror the investigators are. Even if they set watch on it, the investigator on guard will doze off or briefly leave to go to the bathroom.)
- What if the investigators decide to break the Chinese mirror before the Stalker emerges? In this case, the first blow just causes a few cracks, no matter how much damage the player rolls for the attack. The Stalker emerges from the mirror before anyone can strike a second blow, bowls everyone over, and escapes into the house. Nobody sees it clearly, just getting vague impressions of angular crystal and many legs, so nobody has to make SAN rolls—yet. Then, of course, the investigators have something more urgent than the mirror to deal with, as they hear Mrs. Stanich scream from her glimpse of the Stalker.

- Finally, if the investigators decide to simply evacuate the house, they certainly may. Two days later they will see a news story about a girl's disappearance when she was playing in the woods. Her family lives in the house nearest to Radley's. Everyone loses ID4 SAN from realizing the consequences of their inaction.

One way or another, the investigators end up with the Void Stalker in the house—and they don't know where it is.

At first the Stalker just watches the investigators from hiding. It only attacks people who are alone. Remember, there are more people than the investigators in the house. There is also Radley and Mr. and Mrs. Stanich.

The Hunt Begins

At first let a single investigator catch a glimpse of the Stalker, thanks to a timely Spot Hidden roll as it ducks around a corner or through a doorway. (Remember, the Stalker is quite transparent. No SAN rolls are called for yet since the investigator didn't get a good look at whatever it was. Naturally, anyone who tries running after the mysterious, half visible Thing finds nothing when they search. It has gone. If the other investigators leave the searcher, however, it may come back...

Things Get Dark

After an inconclusive attack and sighting or two, the Stalker cuts the power line to the house while walking across the roof. (Actually it was tasting the cable, but the investigators may ascribe more sinister motives.)

Host Daniel Radley has just one flashlight in the house. Unless an investigator previously said they always keep a flashlight in their car, Radley's flashlight and some candles are all the light they have!

The Stalker Attacks

Eventually the Void Stalker finds a lone victim and attacks. Since the Stalker can see in the dark, it starts attacking more boldly. In the dark, the Stalker is even more difficult to see. Even without its phasing power, it seems to appear from nowhere when it attacks. It can hide behind easy chairs and tables, drop from the ceiling, leap down a flight of stairs or just phase through a wall.

The Stalker should not attack an investigator who is truly on his own and helpless. Instead, its optimal victim (for the Keeper's purposes) is an investigator who cannot defend himself very well, but whom the other investigators can reach quickly—either to rescue him, or to see him get carried off by the Stalker.

If the investigators are truly cautious and never go anywhere alone, the Stalker will settle for attacking the smallest group it can find. It will rush the group, trying to knock everyone down so it can grab one victim to carry off.

(If the Keeper wants a longer buildup of mystery and suspense, have the Stalker attack one of the servants or the dilettante host. Everyone hears the scream, but the first investigator to arrive finds the victim stupefied, partly mineralized, and quite alone; the Stalker heard the investigators coming and fled.)

Fighting Back

The investigators have few weapons to use against the Stalker. Very few people go to dinner parties toting rifles and shotguns, and Radley doesn't keep an arsenal. The investigators must scavenge for weapons. If they split up, they become easy prey for the Stalker. (The Keeper, however, should have the Stalker attack an investigator who is not totally isolated. Other investigators should arrive at least in time to see their comrade's capture.)

Radley has one .32 pistol and a box of 13 shells which he hasn't unpacked yet: they are still in the lumber room, and he's not sure where. (If he and the investigators rummage through boxes looking for the gun, it would be a great time for the Stalker to attack.) He'll gladly loan it to any investigator who claims to be a good shot; he contents himself with the fireplace poker. There's a wood axe, shovel, hoe and other landscaping tools in the wood room. The kitchen furnishes one butcher knife, several small knives, a rolling pin and three frying pans (count as small clubs). The investigators might think of other weapons they can improvise.

The Stalker's goal is to grab someone to eat. (This is straight combat.) Once it succeeds, it heads back to the mirror to eat its new meal undisturbed. This time,

however, the Keeper can let the investigators see it clearly (and lose SAN). Since the Stalker avoids phasing with its cargo more than absolutely necessary, the investigators can easily follow it, catching up just in time to see it jump into the mirror. Whether the investigators can make it drop its prey depends on how well the investigators fight and how merciful the Keeper feels. Remember, though, the Stalker can walk on the ceiling and through walls if necessary. The optimum conclusion to this phase is the Stalker carrying a still-living victim into the blue mirror.

Into the Mirror

Once the investigators really and truly know that the blue mirror is also a portal of some sort, they can easily find how to operate it: an Occult or combination of Idea and Luck rolls will do. All one must do is meditate for a few minutes on the shimmering, fuzzy lines visible in the glass, and make an Idea roll. Success means the lines seem first to extend back much further than the half-inch thickness of the glass, and then to bend in a direction one's eyes can't follow. One magic point and 1 SAN are automatically lost, and the lucky investigator sees the mirror become a shining tunnel. All one has to do is step into the tunnel, and one will instantly be...elsewhere. One can lead any number of other people through as well, all holding hands, all automatically losing 1 magic point and 1 SAN from the trip.

Hive of the Stalker

The space beyond the mirror-tunnel is an irregular bubble of pale blue glass, ridged and lumpy. The investigators stand at the bottom of the bubble. The wall behind them holds an oval, glass-shielded window into the room of Radley's house where they left the mirror. There are also two round openings, one in the wall, one near the apex of the bubble. The upper opening leads to another blue glass bubble. The lower opening is a twisting tunnel; it would be easy for a human to crawl through, but walking upright would be impossible.

Bits of whitish and yellowish rock (more body fragments) and some torn-up pajamas from the first victim lie on the floor and stick to one of the inward-sloping walls.

Clever players may guess from the fragments on the wall that gravity is funny in the chamber. They can in fact walk on the walls here, making both openings accessible.

There are at least a dozen such bubbles, connected by round openings and tunnels. Each is connected to 2-4 of its fellows. Investigators quickly lose all sense of

direction. (There is no map provided. The three dimensional structure of the bubbles and tunnels would be nearly impossible to represent on paper in any comprehensible way, and it really doesn't matter.)

Five of the bubbles bear oval windows in their sides. Each looks onto a different strange vista.

If anybody thinks to check, everybody's watch has stopped.

As the investigators crawl though the tunnels and try to avoid getting completely lost, they will hear skittering, scratching noises echoing from the distance. Does anyone need an Idea roll to guess what's making them? They will also hear intermittent, distorted echoes of a voice that might be human. It's impossible to make out any of the words, if words they be.

Mr. Jarndyce, I Presume

Eventually the investigators enter a bubble that's already occupied. One person is the Stalker's current victim. He or she has not been harmed any more than before. The other person is a gray-haired, fiftiesh man in clothing decades out of date. Anyone who saw the portrait in the lumber room will recognize the man. It's Abram Jarndyce, who has prevented the Stalker from mineraliz-

ing its victim any further. Jarndyce is quite amiably chatting with the captured investigator (or NPC), asking very ordinary questions about his life and work. The Void Stalker is nowhere to be seen.

Unless the investigators attack as soon as they see him, Jarndyce will be visibly and volubly glad to see them. He introduces himself at once. Jarndyce hasn't had any company but the Void Stalker (whom he humorously calls "Fido") for...well, entirely too long. He doesn't know the year, but won't be surprised at learning that more than 20 years have passed. He feared he might have been here for centuries!

Jarndyce's Story

If the investigators ask Jarndyce why he's stuck in this crystal labyrinth, Jarndyce will explain that he found a Chinese scroll in a secret compartment of the blue Chinese mirror. When he translated it, he found it was a sort of spell book. One spell told how to summon and bind to service a peculiar entity whose name translates, more or less, as "Void Stalker." He tried the spell, and was astonished by Fido coming out of the mirror. He can only guess what Fido was doing there.

The Void Stalker grabbed Jarndyce and carried him



into the mirror even as Jarndyce was trying to cast the binding portion of the spell. He succeeded and put the Void Stalker under his control, but somehow—perhaps because the spell was cast in this peculiar place—now both he and Fido are bound to the labyrinth. He hasn't had to eat or do other necessary biological functions, and doesn't think he's aged, but it's a boring sort of immortality.

Fido was able to leave the vault for a short time after his binding, which is how Jarndyce retrieved the Chinese scroll and his notes, but Jarndyce himself cannot leave at all. He knows, because the first thing he tried after finding he couldn't leave by himself was to order Fido to carry him out! Evidently when someone opens the mirror-portal from outside, it remains permeable for a while and Fido can wander off again.

But now his long imprisonment will end, thanks to the investigators. Jarndyce weeps and hugs them. At long last he can go home, thanks to their sacrifice.

Umm...sacrifice?

Why, yes. The scroll also told of a mighty power called Yog-Sothoth, who had absolute mastery of space, time, and the dimensions. All Jarndyce has to do is summon Yog-Sothoth, and the Guardian of the Gate will set him free. "And it'll only take one of you to bring him here. Maybe two. But 'Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friends.' And you are my friends, surely, to have come here, braving the dread Unknown to rescue me!"

Final Fight

Jarndyce will not take no for an answer. The investigators can try to reason with him for a while, but Jarndyce is quite crazy by now and has a short fuse to boot. Pretty soon he will whistle for Fido. The Void Stalker phases right out of the wall and leaps on the investigators. Jarndyce himself attacks with his Shrivelling and Deflect Harm spells. He dies like a normal man.

Just running away is not an option. Fido moves faster than the investigators and phases through walls freely: it does not need to expend Magic Points to pass through the crystal. At most, the investigators can retreat while fighting—assuming they left some trail such as lipstick smears or bread crumbs—to find their way back. Mercifully, Fido cannot attack while actually phasing, so the investigators are not helpless when they crawl through tunnels. If the investigators can reach the mirror-window, they can escape back to Earth and smash the Chinese mirror just as Fido comes through, cutting the Void Stalker in half and killing it.

As for Jarndyce's plan? Assuming he can capture the investigators (or one nobly volunteers to die) Jarndyce will cut his victim's heart out while chanting lots of gibberish. Onlookers lose 1/1D6 SAN and...nothing happens. The victim dies, that's all. Jarndyce can't really call Yog-Sothoth, he just thinks he can. He's crazy, remember?

Aftermath

If Jarndyce and Fido are killed (or at least incapacitated), returning home is easy. It's just a matter of the investigators finding their way back to the mirror-window to Earth and going through it again, losing another Magic Point and SAN.

The police will continue their inquiry into the NPC guest's disappearance, and add any investigator disappearances to the case. They will never solve any of the disappearances. Some of the cops will want to blame the first disappearance on any vanished investigators (i.e. any who were killed fighting Jarndyce and left in the mirror), but Lt. Smith is too honest for that. The case will remain open. Smith will suspect the investigators of having some involvement, but will never find any reason to arrest anyone—unless the investigators themselves drop the evidence he needs.

While the city cops aren't very sophisticated, they are thorough and Smith has a pretty good Psychology skill: lying to him is dangerous in the long run. Any attempt to tell the cops the real story, however, makes Smith think the investigators are trying to play him for a fool, and will therefore make him more suspicious.

SAN Rewards

Each survivor gets 1D6 SAN if they killed either Jarndyce or the Void Stalker, and 1D8 SAN if both are killed (or at least sealed in the crystal vault so they can't hurt anyone else on Earth). The reward is cut in half, however, if anybody got sacrificed. The Keeper might award a further 1D3 SAN to the first (if any) investigator to spontaneously express regret for poor, mad Jarndyce.

If the investigators defeat Jarndyce, they can take his copy of the Scroll of the Stalker (see below) with his partial English translation, and a weird-looking talisman that stores Magic Points. Jarndyce found the talisman in the crystal labyrinth and has no idea of its origin. The investigators can learn the talisman's function from Jarndyce's last few notes. (Jarndyce had Fido bring in a pencil with the notes. The investigators will find the pencil in a corner, worn down to a useless nub.)

NPCs

Abram Jarndyce, Mad Prisoner, age "53"

STR 6 CON 10 SIZ 12 INT 15
POW 12 DEX 9 APP 8 EDU 15
SAN 0 HP 11

Attacks: .32 Revolver 20%, 1D8, 3 shots left

Skills: Anthropology 50%, Astronomy 20%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%, History 60%, Library Use 25%, Mathematics 30%, Occult 65%, Psychology 35%

Languages: English 75%, Latin 40%, Chinese 30%

Spells: Summon/Bind Void Stalker, Deflect Harm, Shrivelling

Abram Jarndyce was once a harmless eccentric. Now he's an obsessive, demented eccentric. He genuinely thinks that investigators who won't let him sacrifice them to Yog-Sothoth are selfish meanies.

Fido the Void Stalker

STR 20 CON 13 SIZ 16 INT 9
POW 13 DEX 11 HP 15

Move 12

Armor: 5 points crystalline body

Attacks: Pincer 42%, 1D6; Tentacle (x2) 55%, Grapple to immobilize or squeeze for 1D6; Overbear 55%, Grapple to knock down & trample for 1D6/round

Skills: Hide 50%, Sneak 60%, Track 70%

Spells: Transmute Victim, Stun Flash, Walk Through Walls

Sanity Loss: 0/1d6

After decades with Jarndyce and repeated Binding spells, "Fido" has learned to recognize many commands in English and has acquired a dog-like loyalty to Jarndyce. Without Jarndyce present, its chief interest is food.

Daniel Radley, Sample Dilettante, age 32

STR 13 CON 11 SIZ 14 INT 13
POW 10 DEX 9 APP 12 EDU 18
SAN 50 HP 13

Attacks: Fist 75%, 1D3 (2D3 with Martial Arts); Club 50%, as weapon type; Handgun 40%, as weapon type

Skills: Anthropology 40%, Bargain 40%, Credit Rating 60%, French 60%, Law 40%, Martial Arts 50%, Play Guitar 40%, Ride 70%, Swim 60%

Languages: English 90%, French 60%

Daniel Radley's father became a millionaire during the Alaskan gold rush by selling supplies to the miners and would-be prospectors. He insisted on his son earning a law degree, but Daniel spent more time in athletics than in study. Daniel got his degree, but just barely, and never passed the bar exam. Instead, he travelled and generally

goofed off. Since his father died a few years ago, Daniel came home and took over the reins of the family business. Hired managers handle most of the day-to-day administration. When Daniel has to get personally involved, the skills he learned in Arab bazaars compensate somewhat for his lack of formal business training.

Daniel is still an excellent boxer, horseman and swimmer. While he's a fair shot with a pistol, he's never actually tried to shoot a living thing and hopes he'll never have to.

Lieutenant Smith, Sample Police Officer

STR 8 CON 14 SIZ 11 INT 14
POW 13 DEX 12 APP 11 EDU 13
SAN 59 HP 13

Attacks: .45 Revolver 60%, 1D10+2

Skills: Bargain 40%, Fast Talk 80%, Law 30%, Persuade 40%, Psychology 70%, Spot Hidden 30%

Languages: English 65%

Lt. Smith is a small but intense man whose dark eyes glitter beneath a shock of iron-gray hair. He has trouble staying still: he rarely sits down, preferring instead to pace the floor while he interrogates the investigators. Although unimaginative, he is quite intelligent, very persistent and virtually immune to Fast Talk. He's seen many grisly things in his years as a policeman, and will not believe stories of things so horrible they drive one mad: that may happen to nervy, ivory-tower intellectuals or artsy types, but not to hard-headed cops like him!

New Spell

SUMMON/BIND VOID STALKER: This spell requires a chime or gong which the caster taps and strokes in the course of casting the spell. The chime or gong varies in thickness and bears a few incised lines so that it generates weird, overtone-laden rings and moans. Different chimes and gongs are interchangeable. The chime or gong may be enchanted with POW, each point of POW raising the chance of successfully casting the spell by 10%. The spell may be cast at any time and in any place that is separated from the sky by less than 6 inches of solid matter. The Void Stalker drops out of the sky.

New Tome

Scroll of the Stalker: A nameless scroll in Chinese, telling about the wonders of the vast deeps of space, including the cosmic spirit Yog-Sothoth who is Guardian of the Ultimate Gate. +1% Cthulhu Mythos, x3 Spell Multiplier, -0/1D3 SAN loss. Its only spell is Summon/Bind Void Stalker.

New Artifacts

The Talisman: A scalene triangle of an iridescent greenish metal that neither the investigators nor any metallurgist have ever seen before, set with a deep blue cabochon gem something like a moonstone (but with other traits more like quartz), engraved with weird runes. It can store 10 Magic Points for up to 3 days. These can only be used by the person who put them in the talisman.

The Black Mirror: Anyone who meditates on this mirror and makes a Luck roll will lose 1 Magic Point and see the vague clouds of light and shadow in the mirror coalesce into a vision of blurry shapes twitching and circling around a central blob. For a moment, the vision becomes clear as the viewer loses 4 more MP: it is actually Azathoth, surrounded by the dancing Outer Gods in the ultimate void beyond space and time. Seeing the court of Azathoth the Daemon Sultan (albeit in miniature) costs 1/2D4 SAN.

The Blue Chinese Mirror: It's possible, after all, that the investigators might kill both the Stalker and Jarndyce, and so be able to keep the portal mirror. The other 4 "windows" in the Stalker's lair lead to dangerous, alien

places the investigators probably won't want to visit, but the mirror could make a useful hideaway if the investigators don't mind losing 1 SAN every time they use it. At the Keeper's option, some of the other windows could lead to locations for adventures. Here are a few suggestions for mirror-window scenes:

Carcosa: An eerie, non-Euclidean city on a world circling a double star in the Hyades. A pair of warped pillars bound the view. Off to one side, a lake of clouds rolls. Over a dozen little ochre moons wander at random through a white sky flecked with black stars. Across the lake the spires of an incredible palace rise on the horizon. On close examination, one of the moons passes in front of the spires! Lose 0/ID4 SAN.

The Shining Darkness: At first this just looks like blackness. A closer look shows, however, that there are different shades of blackness. As the investigator's eyes adjust, he can see a zone of immense warped planes, stark geometrical spires turned every which way, and amorphous things oozing and floating about. Lose 0/ID3 SAN.

Asteroid Belt: The window shows an ice-frosted rocky surface that drops off sharply. A few irregular chunks of rock hang in the impossibly bright starry sky. Shadows are absolutely sharp and black. Anyone with



any Astronomy skill, or anyone who makes a Know roll, can tell that this window looks on an asteroid belt. There's no guarantee the scene is within our solar system. As the investigators watch, a Void Stalker strolls past the window: 0/1D6 SAN.

(If the Keeper chooses this as one of the mirror windows, Fido emerged from the mirror in response to Jarndyce's summoning because it used the mirror-space as a shortcut to reach him.)

Slimy Cave: Oblique view of a stalactite-hung cavern streaked with glistening slime. A yellow-green light illuminates the scene, but its source lies outside the frame

of the window. The trails are left by foot-long slugs, but these blend in with the cave walls so it takes a Spot Hidden to notice them. Anyone who watches for a few minutes will see a huge tentacle, dripping with luminous yellow-green fluid, reach across the view and peel a foot-long slug off the cavern wall: 0/1D4 SAN.

Dean Shomshak playtesters: Greg Ewing, Scott Haley, Jeff Skagen, Wade Yamauchi

John Crowe playtesters: Brian Appleton, Dennis Detwiller, Bob Kruger, John Tynes

Void Stalkers (Lesser Independent Race)

Characteristics Average

STR 5D6 17-18

CON 3D6 10-11

SIZ 3D6+6 17-18

INT 2D6 7

POW 2D6+6 13

DEX 2D6+6 13

Hit Points 13-14

Move 12 DB +1D6

Attacks: Pincer 50%, 1D6+1D6; Tentacle (x2) 65%, Grapple to immobilize/squeeze for 1D6; Overbear 65%, Grapple to knock down, trample for 1D6 per round

Armor: 4 points crystalline body

Spells: POWx5 special abilities (see below)

SAN: Seeing a Void Stalker costs the viewer 1D6 SAN, unless a successful SAN Roll is made. In that case, the viewer takes no SAN loss.

Description: A Void Stalker looks something like a hybrid between a giant, irregular crab and an octopus, only made of angular crystal. In addition to several differently-sized, oddly-placed legs, each Void Stalker has 1-3 arms ending in large pincers, and 4-7 many-jointed tentacles.

Although their crystalline bodies are quite tough they are mostly transparent, with a glassy or translucent metallic sheen depending on the lighting. In the right conditions, (such as underwater), a Void Stalker can be nearly invisible. A Void Stalker's "face" consists of nothing more than a set of grinding mouth-parts which are not used in combat. Void Stalkers are blind, using senses other than sight to follow their prey.

Despite their rigid and irregular appearance, Void Stalkers move swiftly and with sinister grace. They are not bothered by broken ground, and can even run up and down vertical surfaces or walk on ceilings.

Notes: Void Stalkers originate in the timeless Outer Void of Azathoth and the Outer Gods, and may have been spawned by them. From there they can "fall into"

the space-time continua created by the Outer Gods' mindless dancing. Void Stalkers can live in a wide range of environments, but in our universe they prefer interstellar and interplanetary space, where they feed off starlight, asteroidal rock and cometary ice.

Void Stalkers can also live on many planetary surfaces, but seldom go there unless summoned. It costs them a lot of energy to escape from major gravity wells (such as the Earth's) so they avoid planets. In deep space they can travel at hyperlight speeds, just like the byakhee or star vampires. They cannot freely return to the Outer Void.

Most Void Stalkers live independently, but a few become bound to lesser Outer Gods as servitors.

Combat: Void Stalkers have 3 normal ways to attack: by snapping with a pincer, grabbing with their tentacles, or leaping bodily onto a victim in an attempt to knock it down. Pincer attacks do 1D6 base damage, plus the damage bonus. Tentacles grapple and may squeeze for damage equal to the damage bonus (typically 1D6). More importantly, tentacles hold opponents in place so pincer attacks are sure to succeed. A Void Stalker can attack with 2 tentacles every round. The overbearing grapple knocks the opponent down if it succeeds. On subsequent rounds the Void Stalker tramples the victim with its sharply-pointed legs, again doing damage equal to its damage bonus.

Magic: Void Stalkers never know spells in the normal sense, but each Stalker has at least one special ability it can use. A Void Stalker has POW/5 special abilities, (rounding to the nearest integer). It is certain to have the first ability, "Walk Through Walls." Other abilities can be selected at random.

Walk Through Walls: Because Void Stalkers are not native to Earth's universe and its laws, by expending 1 magic point they can pass through barriers like a ghost. Only very dense metals, such as gold or lead, can block them. A Void Stalker can pass through an inch or so of

iron, a foot of brick, stone or concrete and at least two feet of wood.

Blur Form: This power is a consequence of Stalkers' not really being of this universe. At a cost of 1 magic point per round, the Stalker seems to waver and flicker like a bad TV picture. This halves any opponent's attack percentage.

Power Drain: As per the spell, the Stalker pits its magic points against its opponent's. If it wins, it steals 1D6 magic points from the target. Unlike the spell, if the Stalker loses the resistance struggle it only loses 1 magic point. The Stalker must touch its target with a tentacle.

Stun Flash: By expending three magic points, the Stalker radiates a blinding pulse of light. Anyone within 2 yards who isn't looking away or wearing welder's goggles will be blinded and stunned for 1D3 rounds, and have partially obscured vision for 2D3 rounds after that. While vision is obscured, all sight-related skills (including combat) are halved. People from 2-4 yards from a flashing Void Stalker merely suffer 1D3 rounds of ob-

scured vision. The Void Stalker must wait at least six rounds before using this power again.

Transmute Victim: For every magic point used, the Void Stalker converts 1D6 SIZ points of its opponent into unearthly crystalline matter like itself. The converted flash still "lives" after a fashion, but is far more rigid: for each 1/4 of the victim's SIZ converted, DEX and all DEX-related skills (including combat and movement) are reduced by 1D4. The Stalker must grab its opponent to use this power. Experiencing transmutation causes 1D6 SAN loss if a SAN roll fails, and 1 point SAN loss even if the roll succeeds. Seeing a Stalker transmute a victim costs 0/1D3 SAN loss.

Once an opponent stops resisting (from total conversion or death) the Stalker will want to eat the unfortunate fellow. (Void Stalkers consider bone a tasty treat.) A partially converted victim changes back at a rate of 1 SIZ/day, although a few insignificant patches might stay mineralized as a "souvenir." A fully converted victim is a statue forever (barring exotic magical intervention) and loses SAN like victims of the spell *Curse of Ghatanathoa*.

The House

Keepers should familiarize themselves with the house and its furnishings. The house itself has clues to the mystery. Then the investigators will be charging back and forth through it, chasing and being chased by the Void Stalker. Finally, the house contains some curious items which the Keeper may use to add color and mystery to this adventure, or as the seeds of future adventures.

Exterior

The house is a boxy Victorian structure chiefly built of tan sandstone, trimmed at the basement and corners with red granite. The wooden mansard roof has been painted light brown, with cedarwood shingles. Light gray molded concrete ornaments the door and window frames, while the roof trim is wood painted a matching light gray. About a third of the house still has to be scraped clean and repainted.

Tall, gloomy firs and mossy old maples press close around the house, squeezing straggly, unkempt rhododendrons up against the walls. The shrubs have been pruned recently, but other signs of neglect remain.

Interior

Except in the basement, the walls and ceilings bear aging Victorian wallpaper. Floors are of varnished wood, again except for the basement, where they are bare con-

crete. Most rooms have carpets. The house has been converted to electric lighting by putting electric fixtures in the old wall-mounted oil lamps. The house has running water thanks to a well and an oil-fueled pump and heater.

The furnishings are mostly 20-30 years old. The lush, art nouveau patterned fabrics have faded somewhat, and the brasswork could still use a polish. The friend says, "I'm not sure whether to have them restored or replace them with new furniture." Anybody who thinks to check will notice there are an awful lot of mirrors.

First Floor

The beige wallpaper bears a complex pattern of pink and white flowers and gold-accented red scrollwork—very Victorian. The new carpeting, in contrast, is austere modern: a diagonal grid of beige lines. Every room has at least one mirror, from yard-wide mirrors in gilt scrollwork frames to tiny, neo-Colonial bullseye mirrors.

Dining Room: The dining room has a wooden table with massive carved legs and eight Bentwood chairs, with a magnificent imitation Persian carpet on the floor. The fireplace's mantelpiece holds a fine black marble clock. An oblong, bevelled mirror hangs to either side of the clock.

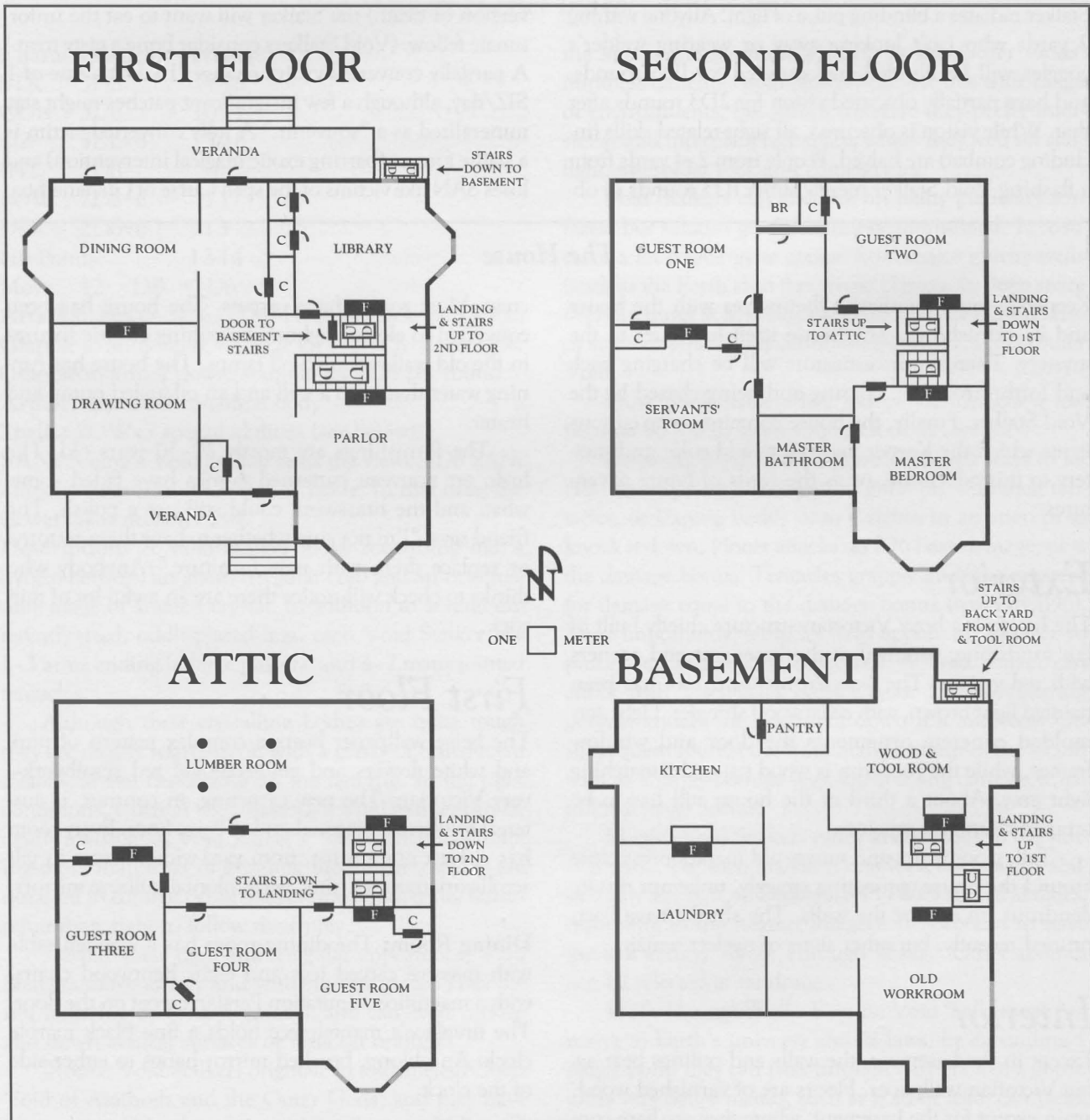
Drawing Room: The drawing room only holds the carpet and one of the ubiquitous mirrors. This rectangular, slightly-domed mirror has an odd pinkish-lavender cast and a plain wooden frame. "It used to be a work-room," the new owner explains. "There was a bench with woodworking tools, old pots of glue, stuff like that. I threw it all out." The new owner plans to install more furniture sometime later.

Library: The library has a pair of comfortably overstuffed armchairs (one brown leather, one green velvet), three moveable brass floor-lamps, and a bust of Galileo on the right-hand bookshelf.

Parlor: The parlor now has a modern Philco cabinet radio in addition to a sofa and a pair of painfully-normal old armchairs.

Second Floor

This is the residential floor. The wallpaper on the walls is plain beige up to 9" below the ceiling, where there is a border of richly patterned beige, red, and gold. Ceilings are the same as the first floor. Some of the carpet is new, some is old. The walls hold fewer mirrors: they used to hold more, but Radley took most of them down. He plans to get rid of them, after getting them appraised.



Bathroom: Radley made sure that this room is fully modern, with a tub, toilet and sink.

Guest Rooms: Guest rooms #1 and #2 have double beds. Each bedroom has a dresser with an ordinary mirror, a wardrobe, a corner ledge with a basin and ewer, a small table, chair, ornamental lamp and an ordinary, bland landscape painting on the walls. All the doors and windows lock from inside the room. The window locks have rusted shut over the years. Locked doors are STR 18, the window locks STR 15. Guest Room #2 is the NPC victim's room. It holds the Chinese mirror.

Landing: The landing of the main stairs features a round, slightly concave mirror with a greenish cast which makes people reflected in it seem to have a slight glow around them. (Spot Hidden or deliberate checking to notice that non-living objects lack this glow. Live plants and animals, however, show this aura around their reflected image.) This mirror has the unusual property of reflecting immaterial, normally invisible entities such as ghosts and lloigor, by showing their aura. (Jarndyce made this mirror. He never discovered its properties.)

Master Bedroom: The master bedroom has an iron double bed. The master bedroom is, of course, where Radley sleeps.

Servants' Room: This is the Stanichs' room. It too has an iron double bed, and is just as nice as the rest of the house.

Attic Floor

This floor, the friend can report, needed some work since the roof had leaked. The wallpaper in the guest rooms has a modern Art Deco design and the carpet is a solid, warm brown. A bare stairway leads up to the widow's-walk on the roof.

Guest Rooms: Guest rooms #3, #4, and #5 each have a single bed, dresser and an ordinary landscape or still-life painting. Some of the rooms have spare ornamental lamps and whatever other mundane furnishings seem appropriate. #5 also has a full-length mirror (quite ordinary). Like guest rooms #1 and #2, the doors lock (STR 18) and the window locks have rusted shut (STR 15). If necessary, the Keeper can add a sixth guest room using space from the lumber room.

Lumber Room: This large room holds things like a wardrobe with a loose door, boxes of books that Radley hasn't had time to unpack, a coat rack missing an arm, and (of course) lumber. It's cluttered enough to make it a good hiding place, and a dangerous place to run through: DEX x 3 each round or fall. No lights have been installed. Right in front of the door is a painting of Abram Jarndyce, tossed on a pile of cardboard boxes.

This room also has nine mirrors, hung on the walls or dumped on boxes, which the new owner collected from other rooms in the house. All have colored glass, rippled or bevelled in odd ways. Jarndyce made them. For instance, an oval mirror of green glass with slight vertical ripples leans against a steamer trunk, while a pentagon of yellow glass with a circular bevel lies on the trunk's lid.

Two mirrors are especially notable. One is actually three thick, prismatic mirrors on a hinged frame so their angles to each other can be changed; it looks strange but has no unusual abilities. Another is a concave, rounded triangle of violet-black glass; this mirror is magical, and provides glimpses of the Outer Void (see "The Black Mirror," on p. 53).

Basement Floor


Unlike the floors above, the basement has concrete floors and tan-painted plasterboard walls and ceilings. The windows are low, arched and set five feet up the wall. Mrs. Stanich spends a lot of her time here, cooking in the kitchen or doing laundry.

Kitchen: This kitchen is quite ordinary, if old-fashioned. Radley has not yet replaced the old wood-burning stove.

Laundry: The laundry only holds a water heater, tubs and clotheslines strung from wall to wall.

Old Workroom: This room still holds a workbench, a pair of crucibles, a small acetylene furnace, bags of sand and other powders, and other tools of the glazier's craft. Jarndyce made his mirrors here.

Pantry: The shelves are still mostly bare, but there is a fair variety of food in cans, jars and boxes. The pantry is poorly lit at the best of times by one small, bare bulb.

Wood & Tool Room: In addition to split and stacked wood and kindling for the kitchen stove, this room holds most of Mr. Stanich's tools. A door leads to a small room under the veranda and stairs up to the outside. 

Continued from p. 5

Let's face it: Mythos fiction is hard to come by. If you don't live in a city, your chances of coming across even the Chaosium series of books is minimal; I wrote one of the damn things, and the local bookstore won't carry it because it's not in *Books in Print*. For the most part, the publishers that produce these books are very small and obscure. They reach their new customers primarily through the few Mythos magazines on the market and word of mouth. I always cringe inwardly whenever I order something from a new publisher because I haven't seen any books they've put out before and have no idea of the quality of what I'm ordering. Usually it turns out to be good, sometimes it doesn't. Today I'll deal with one of these small-publisher offerings, the novel *Glimpses of Other Nations*.

This "book" isn't technically a book. Rather, it is a pile of photocopies placed between two sheets of heavier, colored paper and stapled along one side. Its pages appear to have been typed manually, and it strongly resembles a high school term paper more than anything else. I don't know about you, but I'd appreciate a little more in terms of binding for my money.

To call this a "novel" would also be incorrect. It is in fact a series of short stories, mostly by Tani Jantsang but with some assistance from others. Each story even has its own page numeration, suggesting that these stories are not truly as connected as the compiler would have us believe.

The first three stories, "A New Beginning," "The Colors of Cthulhu's Minions," and "My Brains or My Body," are short pieces—unremarkable in themselves—which depict the encounters of three individuals with the Deep Ones (this is obvious from the first page of the book, so I'm not giving anything away). The fourth tale, "The Narrative of Nph'Yth-kla," consists of a short, rambling letter to a Ms. Clara Boyd; while somewhat unsettling, it is not entirely effective.

The collection ends with "A Private Inquiry into the Possible Whereabouts of Clara Boyd," which is longer than all of the other tales put together. It consists of a series of letters sent to a detective agency in response to a request for information regarding a missing person. The reader is cast in the role, as it were, of the investigator examining this information, and must make his or her own deductions about what happened to Clara Boyd. This tale is probably the best of the book, but it does have its flaws. At times, the author digresses to conversations and monologues which the detective would have no reason to hear; though these provide important

clues, they break with the basic structure of the tale. Elements from other Mythos tales are included frequently, and those who haven't read either Derleth's long-out-of-print *The Trail of Cthulhu* or Carter's Xothic cycle of short stories might find it rough going when the names and events from these stories crop up. Still, this tale is quite impressive.

One of the reasons I like this book is that it maintains the ambivalence about the deep ones which also turns up in Lovecraft's "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and Lumley's "The Return of the Deep Ones," along with some of Chaosium's recent adventures. Sure, the deep ones are nasty Cthulhu-worshipers, but out of all the minions of the Great Old Ones they are the closest to us, both in terms of ancestry and outlook on life. Though their culture and motivations may seem alien to us, they are our (distant) brothers and sisters and deserve to be treated as such—maybe.

This book gets 5 phobias, with a higher rating for those of you who are fans of the deep ones. It's available for \$13.00 from P. Marsh, P. O. Box 534, Captiva Island, FL 33924.



Masque of the Red Death: Terror in the 1890s
Ravenloft campaign expansion
 by William W. Connors and others
 TSR. Inc \$25
 reviewed by John Kovalic

Masque of the Red Death is TSR's attempt to stretch its Ravenloft campaign (vaguely medieval horror: it's not Frankenstein's Monster, dammit, it's a "Flesh Golem") to the 1890s. Whatever the reasons behind the move, it certainly seemed like a good idea—especially as far as cross-over material for *Cthulhu by Gaslight* was concerned. A few more Victorian villains to play with: what a grand thought. And Frankenstein's Monster can even be mentioned by name!

Unfortunately, as far as *Call of Cthulhu* is concerned, *Masque of the Red Death* offers tantalizing tidbits of what could have been a great resource. Take the map of the world in the 1890's, for example. While a tad garish for my taste (I'd have preferred something drawn in a more refined, period style), it nevertheless looked like a wonderful reference work. It certainly had me salivating for a second or two.

But behind the basic political boundaries and a few rail lines, the map offers far less than it promises. Which is pretty much the problem with the whole boxed set. "A Guide to Gothic Earth," the package's primary sourcebook, appears at first to be chock-full of tid-bits of information on Victorian horror. But a closer inspection reveals little that is truly useful, and less that is actually

vital.

For instance, the half of the book that's not taken up with AD&D stats and info (which we cannot fault them for) seems at first glance a gold mine of esoterica: the history of Gothic Earth contains a couple of passages that could form the root of a real neat adventure or two, and a few skills—er, sorry, Proficiencies—make great add-ons to Gaslight's list ("Electricity": the study and understanding of this newfangled technology).

But for hard-and-fast information, the book is skimpy indeed. Eight pages on money and equipment leave you begging for more—and the only reply you'll get is to go buy a replica period catalog. Spells are referenced to their AD&D originals. The "Atlas" section gives only a cursory glance to major areas of supernatural activity. A page on London, a paragraph on Africa. Not exactly the Encyclopedia of Forbidden Lore.

Three short adventures are the best part of the package, although it takes some tinkering to convert them to *Call of Cthulhu*. And TSR should have taken a leaf from Chaosium's page when it came to player handouts: there are none here.

It's not only hard to see how much use *Masque of the Red Death* could really be in a *Cthulhu by Gaslight* campaign, it's hard to see how much a Ravenloft player would even get out of it. By focusing on characters and combat at the expense of setting, mood and plot, TSR missed a big, big point. For *Call of Cthulhu*, *Masque of the Red Death* rates two and a half phobias.



GURPS CthulhuPunk
futuristic Cthulhu Mythos setting for GURPS
by Chris W. McCubbin
Steve Jackson Games, \$17.95
reviewed by Chris Murray

Cthulhu and cyberpunk were a genre mix waiting to happen. In fact, I know people who haven't waited and did it on their own. Now it's officially published, in this 128-page GURPS sourcebook, licensed by the people at Chaosium as an adaptation of *Call of Cthulhu*.

The book looks pretty good, the cover says it all, and Dan Smith's interior illustrations are generally of good quality. The presentation is fairly standard GURPS fare, which is to say well-organised and well-presented, with a maximum of background material and a minimum of rules-speak. The author writes well, and does an excellent job of summarizing the Mythos and the cyberpunk setting, and for the most part the rules conversions seem to work.

However, I found this book an overall disappointment. It's not that it isn't a wonderful idea—it is. But I feel it just wasn't taken far enough. There are certainly

reasons for that, but I think it's nonetheless detrimental.

First of all, if GURPS is your bag, you're going to need *GURPS Cyberpunk*, because that's where all the rules are for cyber-stuff. Further, the world background is based directly on that of *GURPS Cyberworld* (by Paul Hume), though of a slightly lower technological level, and the details of the timeline are likewise taken from there. Having *Cyberworld* is a must for GMs who don't want to fill in the rules blanks themselves. The author doesn't waste unnecessary space, giving the minimum needed for understanding, and moving on the crunchy part: the Mythos.

On the whole, the Mythos seems to work fairly well in GURPS terms, and the author covered all the major bases (including a useful section on how to deal with munitions-heavy GURPS PCs trying to nuke Cthulhu). The sections on character creation are all well-thought-out, and there's a whole chapter full of useful advice on how to set up a CthulhuPunk campaign.

The only two grating bits, as CoC players might anticipate, are Sanity and Power. For Sanity, the author has adapted the GURPS Fright Check system, with hapless PCs suffering a variety of mental breakdowns as a result of Mythos confrontations, and accumulating "Psych. Disad." points like runaway slot machines. This is fine as far as it goes, but has no provisions for hitting zero SAN, leaving me wondering about the logistics of NPC baddies like cult leaders and evil sorcerers.

Power is converted into levels of the Strong/Weak will Disadvantage, a solution not entirely satisfying (PCs with magic better get used to a bouncing point-total), but I can't think of what else might have been done within the GURPS system.

Alas, the resource material on the Mythos (history, cultists, magic, a bestiary—everything you'd expect) is essentially a repeat of already-published *Call of Cthulhu* material, converted into GURPS rules and grafted onto the setting with a minimum of effort at blending the two. This is where the book really falls down. With CoC in one hand and cyberpunk in the other, all sorts of monstrous hybrids rise up to tantalise the imagination. This certainly seems to have been the case with the illustrator here who gives us some wonderful images, like the woman with the insect arm on p. 121. However, there are no rules for creating such characters in the book.

Basically, it's the standard CoC setting, except instead of lurking behind the scenes in the 1920s or 1990s, it's lurking behind the scenes in the mid-21st century. It's still hidden, and the PCs are still among the few who discover the Awful Truth.

This of course may well have been the author's in-

tion: a faithful adaptation of the Mythos, with a mere added twist of updating it to the near-future setting (hey, "CthulhuPunk" is a neat title). Unfortunately, the end result leaves me wondering, "why bother?"

If you're a CoC player, there's no reason to get this book. The Chaosium books you already have contain all the info in CthulhuPunk and much more. Though there are a few pages of interesting adventure ideas and background details, the only thing CoC players might find really useful is the reprint in the back of an article from Steve Jackson's now-defunct *Roleplayer* magazine by David Ellis Dickerson that lists rules conversions from *Call of Cthulhu* to GURPS. Two pages isn't much for your money, though. If you want to add GURPS-style cyber to your game, just go out and buy GURPS *Cyberpunk* and run from there.

If you're a GURPS player, and already have *Cyberpunk* and/or *Cyberworld*, the Cthulhoid material is definitely useful but again, if you don't mind doing the conversions yourself (or hunting up the *Roleplayer* article), it might better to just go out and buy *Call of Cthulhu*. You'd get far more cool stuff for your money, especially since you'd need to go out and buy *Cyberworld* anyway to get all the GURPS rules you'll need!

Ultimately, this book's great flaw is that it adds nothing new to either genre: it just takes abbreviated versions of both, places them side-by-side, and draws a few connections. It does it quite well, but the end result is nothing more than mildly interesting. For GURPS cyberfans looking to add a little Mythos-style horror to their game without really getting into it, I'd give *CthulhuPunk* four-and-a-half out of ten steaming vats of Space Mead. For CoC fans, or GURPS folk who want to go all the way, this book rates only one steaming vat of Space Mead. There are better ways to invest your money.



Kult GM Screen

game master accessories for the Kult RPG
Metropolis Ltd., \$9.95

Taroticum: Where London Meets Inferno

London campaign for the Kult RPG

by Gunilla Jonsson and Michael Petersen

Metropolis Ltd., \$14.95

reviewed by Allan T. Grohe, Jr.

The *Kult GM Screen* and *Taroticum* were the newest products for *Kult* until the release of the *Metropolis Sourcebook* at GenCon this summer (review to appear soon). The *GM Screen* reprints key tables from the *Kult* rulebook, focusing on general action summaries, combat variables (wound and armor effects, hit locations, range and situational modifiers), and ego throw modifications (ef-

fects of shock and physical changes). While the information presented is clearly important to maintaining the flow of game play, and worth including on the screen, the weapons, accidents, poisons, and sedatives tables—of at least equal use to the above materials—do not appear on the screen itself: while reprinted in the booklet, the failure to include that information on the screen is a noticeable lack. Combat can be needlessly slowed as participants seek necessary stats, a search that the *GM Screen* could have considerably sped up, especially given that the player-facing side of the screen reprints no information whatsoever (though it does feature a nice reproduction of the scissored bondage angel from the rulebook cover).

The booklet packaged with the *GM Screen* purports to contain Errata, though I found none: the weaponry, etc. tables (which were my last hope for discovering such) remain identical to those in the rulebook. In addition to these reprints, the booklet contains a four page, expanded character sheet, able to hold primary character information, as well as character skills, possessions and background, and lore knowledge. The sheets are well-detailed, and customizable by character: four variant skill pages are offered and provide the player with a general sheet (skills, combat, miscellaneous areas), a general sheet with powers and limitations, a martial arts combat sheet, and an academic sheet with little combat focus. The sheets are the best aspect of the product, despite their lackluster appearance and a minor stat typo (ACOM for COM). Minor editing problems occur in the rest of the booklet as well.

The included adventure "Unto Death" bears many similarities to *Taroticum*, and I review these two products together in part because my criticisms of the two adventures stem from similar complaints. "Unto Death" is a hideously constraining, linear adventure in which the characters act out an ancient, repeating 30-year cycle of familial vengeance set in New York City (note that it could also be dropped into *Fallen Angels* if so desired, though it's not specifically set in *Fallen Angels'* framework). The action in "Unto Death" moves from event to event, taking into account no deviation from the scripted outline: should the PCs fail to contact a certain NPC who knows the methods for breaking the repeating cycle, they will die; should they choose an option other than those offered by that NPC, they will probably die as there is not enough information upon which to base other outcomes (the fact that you can and should create them is somewhat irrelevant to a published adventure which should contain the relevant information).

"Unto Death" is, however, only 17 pages long (which probably equals about 13 pages or so, given the use of the wide page margins), and as such cannot be expected to offer the scope and exploration of a cam-

paign-length scenario. *Taroticum*, however, is just such an adventure and it suffers from the same problems. Unlike *Fallen Angels*, which details enough of New York to allow the GM to extrapolate material when PCs wander off the detailed path, *Taroticum* limits its exploration of London to the areas that directly relate to the main plot, in which the PCs are saddled with an unknown past that overrides their autonomy—which in turn frustrates and angers the players. Such tactics work in a limited, one-shot style scenario, as in “Unto Death” or Pagan Publishing’s *Devil’s Children*, but not in a long-term campaign. The players for whom I ran *Taroticum* often deviated from the directed path and in so doing caused themselves grief that would have been avoided had they simply followed the script...

To be fair, *Taroticum* is not all bad: while it is almost impossible to review the adventure in full without revealing too many key elements and surprises in the storyline, *Taroticum* does offer a glimpse into the nature of the realities (Inferno, the Realm of the Dead) that surround the Illusion; it incorporates the Tarot, as the title suggests, into the world of *Kult*, though it does not develop the ideas presented as thoroughly as it might; spin-offs from the main plotline may grow into entire campaigns if the GM develops the material further; and the turn-of-the-century sanitarium is a nice setting. As a whole, however, it lacks the depth necessary and expected from campaign settings in today’s market.

I rate the GM Screen with 5½ phobias, and *Taroticum* with 4.

Nightspawn
horror roleplaying game
by C.J. Carella
Palladium Books \$19.95
reviewed by John Kovalic

Drawn in by a lovely cover, I found *Nightspawn*, Palladium’s new horror roleplaying game, an interesting philosophical contrast to *Call of Cthulhu*.

CoC’s Lovecraftian horrors are, of course, well-known entities. Unfortunately, that applies both to the Keeper and the investigators. Even the best roleplayer is going to know just which frisky, fertile Great Old One is lurking around the corner when he or she sees the cloven hoof marks in the snow. You spot some webbing? Run from the Deep Ones!

New monstrosities (it seems to me) have to be created with loving care by Keepers to fill very special niches in their own sick universes. You can’t come up with an effective Greater Servitor Race at the drop of a hat, though. Could you imagine a Random Outer God Table leaping at you from the pages of the *Miskatonic Univer-*

sity Sourcebook? Unthinkable!

The Nightspawn, however, are truly creatures of the die roll. From the “Unearthly Beauty Table” to the (I am not making this up) “Equine/Bovine/Deer Table,” this is one major paradigm shift. But it’s far from ridiculous. Some of the random creatures are as frightful as they are wretched. Not all of the tables are inspired (were-birds, were-rats, were-arachnids, were-reptiles, etc., litter the lists like so much were-refuse). But there are a couple of gems scattered around here. And the ghoulish concepts are matched by some frighteningly vivid illustrations that really drive the points home. Some of the interior art alone has the makings of many plot seeds. Though a few pieces are sub-standard, the plentiful drawings that dot the book are frequently creepy and almost always captivating.

As a handy reference to come up with new creatures and cults, *Nightspawn* is in a league of its own. But do you really need such an aid? Well, it’s sure not essential. “Hey—let’s have someone worship a Deity that’s a Corpse-Like (the “Stigmata Table”) Spider/Scorpion Centauroid (the “Arachnid Table”) with Extra Eyes (the “Unusual Facial Features” table).”

Yes, it sounds silly, and no, I don’t think I’ll respect myself in the morning, but still...at least a half-dozen really hideously breathtaking creature and cult ideas started rolling around my head on my first flip-through of the book.

On the minus side, I wasn’t convinced by the game’s dark near-future background, and few of the de rigueur new monsters listed towards the end of the book ignited many neurons. And \$19.95 is a lot to pay for a few tables, fun though some may be.

So overall, *Nightspawn* is definitely no must-have for *Call of Cthulhu*. But nor is it a terrible tome to flick through if you’ve got a mental block, or are just in a Deep One rut.

I’ll admit it: the next cult leader my investigators run up against is making one massive die roll on the “Unusual Facial Features Table” before they glimpse what lies behind his pallid mask. And as such, *Nightspawn* deserves five phobias out of ten.

Rapture: The Second Coming
“A Roleplaying Game of Theological Terror”
by William Spencer-Hale, Dave Newton, et al.
Quintessential Mercy Studios, \$25.00
reviewed by Allan T. Grohe, Jr.

Rapture: The Second Coming, the first product to appear from Quintessential Mercy Studios, was one of the few major releases at GenCon this year. Given Spencer-Hale’s White Wolf roots, I expected a game similar to

Vampire or *Werewolf* in scope, mood, and setting. To my surprise, I found that *Rapture* offers the mature RPGer less than *White Wolf's World of Darkness*.

Aspects of *Rapture* are very engaging. The background, set on Earth after the breaking of the Fourth Seal, is based on Biblical apocalyptic lore and offers a unique role-playing environment (though it ignores much of the non-*Revelations* apocalyptic literature, such as *Matthew* or Apocryphal texts). While some aspects of world history should perhaps have been ignored in the interest of good taste (the Holocaust becomes a ploy of the Anti-Christ), on the whole the background is well-written and a pleasure to read. It develops the game world within a historical conspiracy at work since the Garden of Eden, and, in true Illuminati fashion, interweaves the esoteric (The Knights Templar) and mundane (The Knights of Columbus) with felicity.

In general, *Rapture* offers simple d10-based mechanics that do not impede the flow of character interaction. The combat system, while realistically deadly, remains sufficiently flexible to handle antagonists that could potentially range from diseased beggars to saints to demons. Elsewhere, the character generation system layers skills and powers in an accretive process that fleshes out character background through ties to the supernatural organizations fighting for Creation.

Despite these strengths, *Rapture* fails, on the whole, as a horror RPG. While the background is interesting and the system straightforward, neither suffices to alter the basic premise of the game: that the beginning of The End is at hand, and you'd better pick the right side. The situations that the characters will get into, as presented in the rulebook, seem to inevitably lead to physical conflict with the opposition (*Rapture* allows you to portray the damned as well as the saved), and while such is expected, there is little to no spiritual equivalent: characters can kill off angels or demons with uzis, but other than the rules for possession and banishment, they have no ability to fight the spiritual battle, an aspect of the Apocalypse that should logically find some prominence in a game of "theological" terror.

The dichotomies explored in *Rapture*—Evil vs. Good, Doubt vs. Faith, Deception vs. Truth—are not only foregrounded as the game's primary focus, but they define the reality of the setting. That is, there are no gray areas: you are for God or against Him, you are saved or you are damned. While it's not that cut and dry in play—the status of a character's soul will probably fluctuate with actions in the world—the underlying determinism can stifle character exploration and the development of the world: why bother, it's all going to end after the Seventh Seal, right? Unlike the unknowingly doomed PCs of *Call of Cthulhu*, the characters in *Rapture* suffer

in a world that they cannot save, a world for which they will die as martyrs, fighting to no avail. The suspense and uncertainty necessary to a successful horror game are negated by the preordained outcome of events, the lack of the characters' ability to alter the future looming nearer with each passing day. To quote HPL: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." In *Rapture*, the characters begin play having already read the end of the story. I give *Rapture* 6 phobias.



Darkest Hours
disaster encyclopedia
 by Jay Robert Nash
 Nelson-Hall, \$39.95
 reviewed by Kim Eastland

This "narrative encyclopedia of worldwide disasters from ancient times to the present" is a great reference work for the most discriminating and creative Keepers. The edition I have, published in 1976, contains over 800 pages of information and photos covering the most appalling examples on record of droughts, floods, storms, and earthquakes; mine, aviation, railway, and marine disasters; fires & explosions; plagues, epidemics, and famines; and miscellaneous traffic disasters.

Most entries are quite detailed. They are listed alphabetically by location or by the title by which they are best known, along with the type of disaster and exact date, followed by a brief background paragraph (if the entry is extensive), then anywhere from a paragraph to multiple pages full of information on the disaster. This information usually contains estimated deaths and injuries plus the actual causes, if known, and those causes suspected at the time. While this may sound dry and boring, the entries often are quite fascinating because of the added tales of heroism, cowardice, weirdness, and unbelievable luck which the author relates.

These accounts usually give the reader a fantastic "feel" of the events, primarily because Nash's writing style is that of traditional journalism, not the "infotainment" crap that normally passes for journalism today. The stories are not sappy or maudlin, nor do they read like a teletype printout. They're simple, compelling, and informative, which should be the key qualities of a good historical reference work.

These stories are wonderful inspirations for CoC adventures, either as a starting point from which the investigators can begin their work or as the climax to an adventure that is building. Take, for example, the incineration in 1960 of the Guatemala City Insane Asylum. Believed to be started by either an electrical short circuit or a devotional candle in front of a religious statue fall-

ing over (an interesting option), in minutes the building was a raging inferno. Amazingly, the President of Guatemala was visiting at the time and helped patients get out. (Was this a political assassination attempt? Did someone actually switch places with President Fuentes in the confusion?)

Imagine the scene in which the investigators confront the pyrotechnical cultists. Berserk patients are fighting firemen, police, Boy Scouts, and other rescuers. Hundreds of caged women (believed to be murderously dangerous) are screaming to death while they roast alive. Firemen slam a bulldozer through a wall so that patients can escape. This is a scene from hell, but it actually happened. And what of the escapees? Of the top fifty violent inmates who got away, only two were recaptured. For years, violence and arson persisted in the city, thought to be perpetrated by the former inmates. Possibly some mad god set them free as a curse upon the location?

There is even a chronological index of the major disasters by type, so you can create a string of, say, earthquakes, throughout your game's timeline so investigators can find interlinking clues.

So check out your libraries and old book stores for this great reference work. It will leave you shaking your head in amazement and wondering if there really isn't someone or something out there trying to destroy mankind after all. I give it 8 phobias for history fans of "the times that try men's souls," and 10 phobias for brilliant Keepers who love to tie their games into the real past.



**The R'lyeh Text: Hidden Leaves
from the Necronomicon**

Magical (?) work

edited by Robert Turner

introduced by Colin Wilson

Skoob Esoterica, \$11.99

reviewed by Daniel Harms

The *R'lyeh Text* is the long-promised sequel to the *Necronomicon*. (I don't mean Simon's popular Avon *Necronomicon* here, but the brown-covered George Hay edition that mysteriously materialized in American bookstores just after I spent so much time and money to order a copy from England.) For those of you who don't know the story, Colin Wilson supposedly discovered an enciphered manuscript of the *Necronomicon* at the British Museum Library and then used computerized techniques to find the hidden messages within. That's what he said, anyway.

Kevin Chua has said that one of the problems with the original Hay *Necronomicon* was that there were only


a few pages of *Necronomicon* within, the better part of the book having been taken up by essays on Lovecraft. I agree entirely; when I buy the *Necronomicon* or *R'lyeh Text*, I want to get a tome of forbidden lore, not an anthology of literary criticism. Unfortunately, Wilson, Hay, and Turner haven't learned from their mistakes.

In the first essay, Hay discusses the fall of the West and what a significant volume this book is—much like the Simon *Necronomicon*'s introduction, only more scholarly-seeming. The two articles at the end (one on witchcraft and the other on philosophy) do have a few interesting points, but their inclusion still seems inappropriate. Turner's two selections at the beginning and end of the Logaeth material are probably the best in the book, but still take up more room than necessary.

Then, to top it all off, we have Colin Wilson's introduction. For fifty-seven pages, Wilson discusses a (presumably) failed film project in which he was involved and manages to touch on Atlantis, Sirius, poltergeists, and every occult topic under the sun. Lovecraft is mentioned often, but little is really said about him, except when Wilson attempts to fit him into his pet hypotheses (I for one can't see Lovecraft acknowledging his influence on *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). Don't get me wrong—this introduction is fascinating (as a character study of Colin Wilson if nothing else), but it doesn't really have much to do with the book itself. Advice to future Lovecraft anthology editors: Don't have someone who once compared Lovecraft to a serial killer write your introduction, and if you do, tell them to stick to the topic.

Having waded through this, you can finally arrive at the one-seventh of the book that the *R'lyeh Text* itself takes up. It's much like the material from medieval grimoires, but nonetheless it isn't all that noteworthy. The prose passages have some Lovecraftian flavor but aren't very shuddersome, and the spells have more to do with dream communication and speaking to the dead than the Great Old Ones. The only one that really caught my attention was the "Rite of Transfiguration," and even that couldn't make up for the rest of the book.

For those of you who are asking, "Is it real?" rest assured that it is not. Despite Turner and Wilson's impassioned protests in the *R'lyeh Text*, you should know that Wilson has confessed in *Crypt of Cthulhu* magazine that the Hay *Necronomicon* is a hoax, thinking that none of us idiots would read that article and not buy the book because of it. There is no evidence that Lovecraft saw anything called the *Necronomicon*, and the book itself is not a decipherment of that document. Feel better now?

Unless you have a desire to read long, seemingly pointless essays, I don't recommend this book at all. It's interesting at points, though, so I give it 3 phobias. 

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

by Paul Giguere

In April of 1984, I took a new job as an overnight staff person at a residential home for developmentally disabled (mentally retarded) adults in Lowell, Massachusetts, to help me work my way through college. This type of work usually entailed working alone, drinking lots of coffee, and jumping at every unusual sound.

The house itself had been built in 1680 and was one of the first permanent homes built in Lowell. It stood atop a large hill that affords a view of the Merrimack River and the city of Lowell proper. The house had a strange and unique history, as do all old houses. The usual plethora of insanity, murder, and revenge stories permeated the history of the house as well as stories of spectral apparitions, strange eerie sounds, and the inexplicable disappearances of previous inhabitants. It was an angry house that did not rest and gave no respite to those who worked and lived there.

The current residents of this house tried to live as normal lives as society would allow. Work in the morning, home in the evening, the usual mix of recreational activities and chores was the societal blueprint by which someone who was diagnosed as mentally retarded lived by. The sometimes-unusual behavior exhibited by these individuals in some strange way seemed to fit the house. It was as if they had been made for each other.

A particular resident of the house had been diagnosed two years earlier as having a personality disorder that could manifest in bizarre ways. This particular resident—I will call him David—eventually developed an alter ego which manifested itself through a two foot piece of clothesline rope that David kept with him at all times. David would fray both ends of the rope and tie them together in a knot. David's alter ego, Mr. Rope as it was eventually named, told David when to eat, when to go to bed, and how to behave. Basically, all of David's actions and thoughts were performed with the help of Mr. Rope.

David's method of communication with Mr. Rope involved methodically shaking it until the frayed ends seemed to dance. Then Mr. Rope would seemingly speak through David in a deep, baritone voice with David responding in his own voice. David's stuttering problem also seemed to disappear when Mr. Rope spoke.

One day, David stole a knife from the dinner table

when the staff weren't watching. The next morning the clothesline out in back of the house had been cut and the knife was found in David's bed. When David confessed that Mr. Rope had told him to steal the knife and take the clothesline rope, the staff decided it would be best for Mr. Rope to be taken from David and hung on the inside of the cellar door entrance, the only locked area, for safe keeping until a psychologist could be consulted. A staff search for the clothesline rope proved to be futile however, and when I came on the overnight shift I was informed of the incident.

During the night my mind drifted and though I was not sleeping, I felt a heavy inclination to do so. Images passed through my conscious mind similar to those that might be present during an actual dream. My virtual slumber was shattered when I heard a pounding on the cellar door.

My first thought was that David had come downstairs from his bedroom and was trying to retrieve Mr. Rope. As I made my way through the living room, I heard David's voice from his upstairs bedroom. He was alternately talking in his Mr. Rope voice and then in his normal voice. It seemed like he was having a heated argument with himself, each voice getting louder and more argumentative.

The pounding continued at the cellar door. Had another resident come downstairs? I continued through the kitchen where the cellar door was located to find that there was no one there. The pounding, however, increased in volume to the point that I thought surely the door would fly off its hinges at any moment.

I immediately reached for my keys and as I inserted the keys into the lock, everything fell dead silent: the pounding had stopped and David was no longer arguing with himself upstairs. I quickly opened the door to find that no one was there and that Mr. Rope was hanging where the staff had said it would be.

My thoughts immediately turned towards David. I made my way up the stairwell towards David's bedroom as fast as I could only to find one end of the clothesline rope that had been missing earlier tied to David's bedpost. The other end of the rope led outside the window and at its end dangled David, his argument with Mr. Rope apparently lost. ☞



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