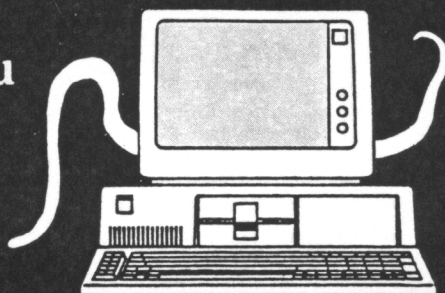




Call Of Cthulhu in the EIGHTIES

By Michael Szymanski



IT IS the 1980's, and the nightmare battle rages on; humanity is still locked in mortal struggle against the dark forces of the Cthulhu Mythos, but several important changes have taken place which are bound to add some new spices to the flavor of the game. Mankind has grown more knowledgeable, more inventive and powerful in its own right, and these factors will obviously affect any scenario played out in the present day.

Let's begin with simple brute force. In the 1920's, going up against a Hunting Horror with a handgun or even a shotgun would be a terrifying and danger-fraught undertaking, yet that same confrontation can hardly seem as frightening if one is armed with an M16 firing ten shots a round and causing about 1D10+6 points of damage per shot. Fire seems to be the favorite weapon of any era, so imagine what havoc investigators would wreak with napalm, incendiary grenades, or even a flame thrower.

This sort of firepower seriously reduces the effectiveness of such lower order Mythos creatures as zombies, ghouls, Nightgaunts, and Byakhee, and puts a sizable crimp in the style of many of the independent races. Sure, the Mi-Go are fundamentally more advanced than humankind in all areas of science, but how well can they hold up against a stiff spray of fungicide?

Basically, humanity of the eighties has attained a level of advancement at which it can challenge the Outer Gods themselves with an even chance of success. The weapons are at hand, yet not all of them were designed for destruction.

By far the most invaluable of such weapons is technology. We have split the atom and looked in on other galaxies, learning more with each passing day. In more recent Mythos tales (*The Burrowers Beneath* and *The Transition of Titus Crow* by Brian Lumley, DAW Books) it was shown that Shudde M'ell and the Cthonians are susceptible to low-level doses of radiation, and can be dissolved by large quantities of water. In these same stories it was also shown that such creatures could, when small, be captured and placed under

scientific observation, the better to seek out their weaknesses. What new discoveries would be forthcoming if the same techniques were applied to Shoggoths, Dholes, or Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath?

For such discoveries to come about there must be some sort of organization dedicated to the downfall of the Outer Gods. Again, literature provides us an example. As early as the fifties the Wilmarth Foundation was already making great strides in its study of the Mythos, challenging the minions of Cthulhu and his ilk in every corner of the world, and winning. Modern investigators would gravitate to such an organization, whose greatest attraction would be protection through knowledge. And where better to store such knowledge than in the tool of the eighties—the computer.

A centralized storehouse of data including reports on past encounters, a continuous updating of suspected Mythos-related occurrences and, most importantly, what would amount to a 99% Mythos Knowledge stored safely away in a memory bank. Specific data could be instantly retrieved, and spells could be learned while preserving Sanity for more direct confrontations. New theories could be tested without risk to the researcher, and there is a chance that new and more powerful spells might be developed as well.

All of this will tend to make the modern investigator more technology-oriented, so the standard professions of such a scenario would most likely be Professor, Scientist, or Parapsychologist. The other character types would be represented in a smaller way, for anyone may have the misfortune of stumbling upon the Mythos, and

even a Hobo could be a psychic, one of the most valuable of weapons against the Outer Gods.

Government involvement would add Politician and Military Officer to that list. By the eighties it's certain that a handful of governments would be taking active measures against the Outer Gods; as early as the 1920's the U.S. government was instrumental in putting an end to certain nefarious goings-on in the town of Innsmouth, so they can hardly be unaware of the situation.

So, modern investigators could have the resources of the American armed forces at their disposal; with all this, they would seem to be just about invincible. But there is another side to the coin.

Though the Outer Gods need not adapt to our modern world, their servants must surely do so if their darksome plottings are to continue. In fact, the greatest danger will come, ironically enough, from those Mythos beings most closely resembling the human race. It was fairly easy to recognize the enemy in the 1920's—it was usually black, slimy, and had a lot of tentacles. But now that enemy isn't going to be so obligingly easy to identify, especially if they look like you or me—and I'm not so sure about you. . . .

The Deep Ones are the best example of this, and will probably prove to be the most dangerous of these races. In human form they are able to move about freely in normal society, using their knowledge, power, and tainted gold to attain positions of authority and influence. Estates could be created and passed along as each successor completes that final transformation. By such means the Mythos minions could worm their way into the very heart of humanity's defenses without the slightest fear of detection.

Knowledge, unfortunately, is in this case a double-edged weapon; what works for us will also work for them. In game terms this is good, for it puts the odds into a more proper balance; for the world at large, though, this is a very nasty development indeed.

The servants of the evil ones can be—and have been—very well organized; just ask any member of the Starry Wisdom Cult or the Order of Dagon. They are perfectly capable of gaining access to human technology when necessary and as to weaponry, it is perfectly logical to assume they will be

armed with the best and most deadly of modern munitions. But how will these new generation minions conduct their foul operations?

With the greatest of subtlety, rest assured. No more unaccountably missing persons, no strange phenomenon to be seen and commented upon, no damning letters to be left behind to reveal the plot, and a carefully staged 'accident' for those who venture too near the truth. Secrecy rules supreme in the modern day, with ceremonies taking place deep underground, using sacrifices abducted from other towns, or even other states.

Boats and ships lost at-sea, plane crashes in inaccessible locations; these may be the clues to Mythos activity in the eighties. Supposedly natural disasters can be generated to cover a multitude of sins; who can say what horrors the eruption of Mount St. Helens was meant to conceal? A killer tornado strikes in Texas; was there an investigator down there who was about to uncover a plot by worshipers of Ithaqua? A nuclear power plant nearly goes into meltdown; could someone have been attempting to use the incident to mask a summoning of Aza-

thoth? The Keeper of a present-day adventure must be constantly on the lookout for just these sort of disasters for use as possible plotlines—in the world of Cthulhu, even the most mundane occurrence can take on a darkly sinister aspect.

The ultimate goal of the Mythos minions is the downfall of humanity and the destruction of all its relics, for mankind itself is the only true barrier to the dreadful success of the Outer Gods. Those beings will sabotage vital research, and even incite world wars to achieve their goals. Who knows how much of the senseless violence and terrorism plaguing our world today has been generated by the dream sendings of Great Cthulhu? Did Einstein invent the atomic bomb on his own, or was the nuclear seed planted in his mind by the servants of Azathoth?

It could very well be that the beings of the Mythos are feeding us our technology of destruction, while at the same time nudging us subtly nearer the brink of a cataclysmic war. Wouldn't it be ironic if after all these years of resistance, we ourselves did the Outer Gods' dirty work for them?

At first glance, then, it seems as though a modern Cthulhu adventure

will resemble something out of an espionage role-playing game, and in essence, that is correct—it's the price we have to pay for progress. This situation will call for far more imagination and resourcefulness on the part of the Keeper, but the stretch shouldn't be that difficult.

If handled correctly, and in strict accordance with the rules, that lone Hunting Horror mentioned earlier can still be a formidable opponent. Indirect attacks can be most effective; how can one respond to a Shriving spell if the caster doesn't reveal him/her/itself? And it doesn't really matter how many M16 slugs you pump into a Dark Young—they're still only going to take minimum damage. An ambush, by either man or monster, can prove very deadly to at least one investigator, and many Mythos minions are known for their stealth.

Be assured then that the nature of *Call Of Cthulhu* will remain unaltered in the eighties, and scenarios played out in the present should be just as exciting in their own way as those of the twenties. After all, that Hunting Horror can still bite a man in half, and investigators with guns have been known to miss. . . . □

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