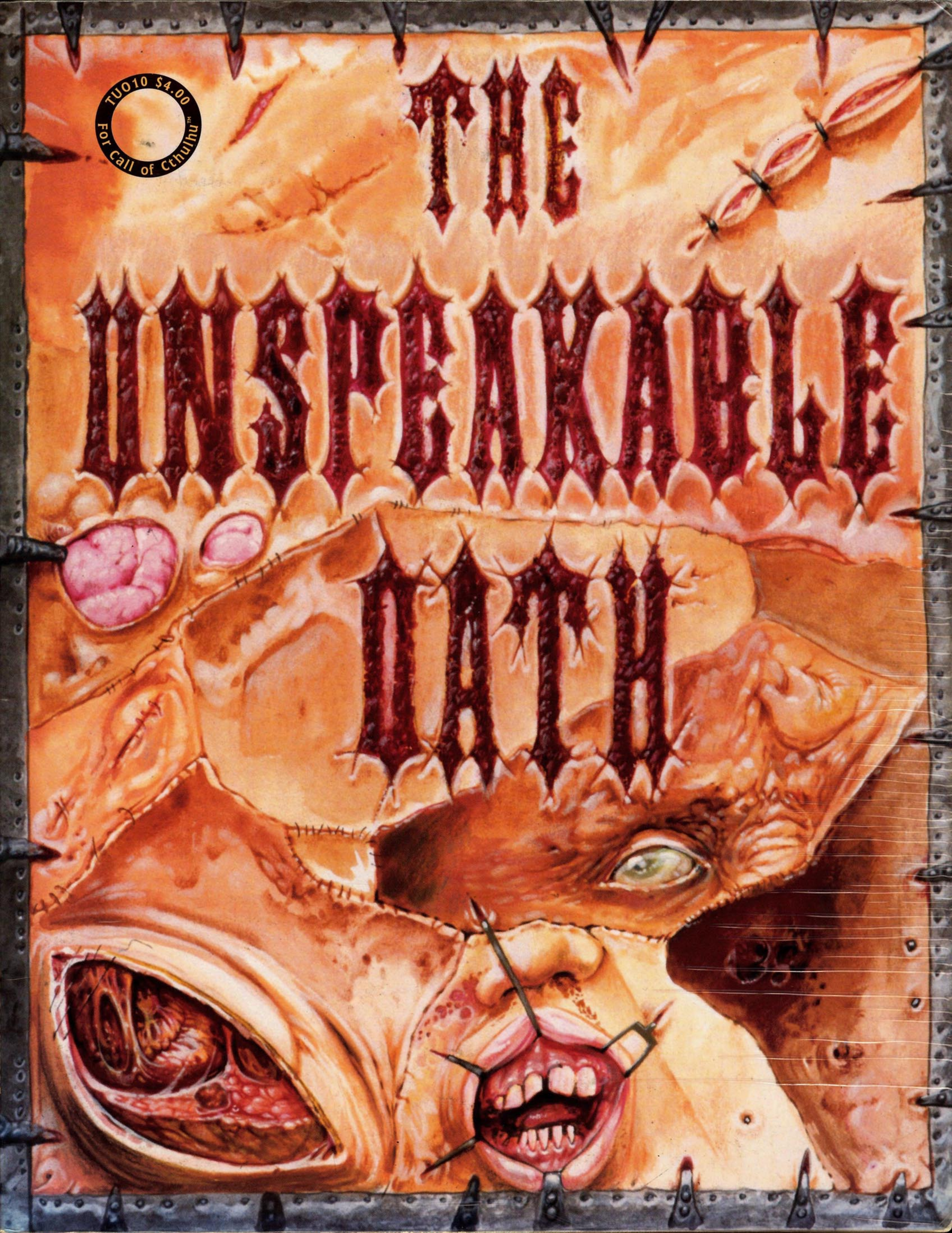


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For Call of Cthulhu



The Unspeakable Oath

COLUMNS

The Dread Page of Azathoth	1
by John Tynes	
Scream & Scream Again	2
Letters From Lunatics	
The Paranoia Files	6
by Philip Garland	
The Case of Mark Edward Morrison	8
by Penelope Love	
The Eye Of Light And Darkness	10
Reviews & Spews	
A Tale Of Terror: The Specimen	29
by Dennis Detwiller & Casey Howell	
Mysterious Manuscript: The Voynich Manuscript	30
by Michael Tice	
A Tale Of Terror: Natasha	40
by Ray Tumbleson	
Mysterious Manuscript: The Testament of Fascination & Survival	41
by Ray Tumbleson	
Message in a Bottle	64
by Karen Tynes	

INTERVIEW

Call of Cthulhu's High Priest of Fear	14
Keith Herber interviewed by Kevin Ross	

FEATURES

The Crucifix & The Crucible	19
by C.L. Werner	
Trouble in Budapest	26
by C. Raymond Lewis	
Esoterica: What The Deities Mean	34
by Dean Shomshak, with Scott Aniolowski & Kevin Ross	
Quirk Skills	42
by Duke Janus	

SCENARIOS

All Good Children	44
by Chris Klepac	
In Media Res	54
by John Tynes	

Issue Ten ☯ Fall, 1993

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About the Cover

This issue's cover is by artist Anson Maddocks and speaks for itself.

About the Column Illos

This issue's column illos (like the one at the top left of the next page) are by artist Jesper Myrfors and are probably drawn from life.

The Annotated TUO Project

Selected articles from TUO1-4 are now available for downloading (see below). Or, send a 3.5" Mac or IBM diskette with a SASE for the files on disk. If you don't have a computer, send a 9"x12" SASE and \$2 in cash, check, or money order per issue you need for a printed copy. Note that this is just the text — no illustrations, layout, etc.

America Online Notes

We're on the computer service America Online, where our email name is Pagan Pub. Our discussion folder can be found at keyword GCS (Gaming Company Support). We hold monthly live conferences and run live CoC games as well. In addition, the GCS File Library has stuff to download, including graphic files we created (GIF & PICT), the sound effects from TUO7, our catalog and writer's guidelines, and *The Annotated TUO*. To join, call 1-800-827-6364.

Internet Notes

You can send email to us at PAGANPUB@AOL.COM. We regularly participate in the alt.horror.cthulhu usenet group. *The Annotated TUO*, our catalog, and various other items are also available by anonymous FTP. The address is SODA.BERKELEY.EDU, and the files are in PUB/CHAOSIUM/PAGANPUB. Shannon Appel, editor of the weekly electronic Chaosium Digest, maintains this FTP site where you'll find other CoC/Mythos stuff as well.

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In Memorium

This issue of *The Unspeakable Oath* is dedicated to the late Vincent Price. He embodied both the dignity and the popular appeal of the horror genre, and his contributions to film thrilled and entertained millions. Good night, Dr. Phibes!

John Tynes



The Dread Page Of Azathoth

The Dread Page Of Azathoth is a regular column of notes, anecdotes & observations by the editor. Sometimes it even has something to do with gaming.

The currents of life often cut strange channels and flow in new directions. The unexpected can arise with swift surety and leave you shaken, confused, and hurt. Like the floods of this summer, events can overwhelm you, and you find yourself drifting and eventually stranded far from home and light and life.

Sometime this summer, TUO's cover artist and our good friend Blair "Shea" Reynolds made the decision to stop drawing and abandon his illustration work. As part of this decision, he also felt he had to cut off contact with us, since remaining our friend would, he wrote in a difficult letter, imply that he still had faith in his artwork — and he had none.

He gave us little explanation for this decision, though its origins are evident. With the exception of Pagan Publishing, every company Shea has worked for screwed him over. One way or another, intentionally or by accident, every assignment was a bitter disappointment.

Aware of his ongoing struggles with different companies, we tried to compensate. We offered him as much freedom as we could, offered to publish any work he might care to produce. But between the insane number of hours his regular job required and the frustrations of doing excellent work that brought only misery, Shea decided he would be better off abandoning his artwork entirely.

To our knowledge, his final work is the cover painting to our campaign *Walker in the Wastes*, which you will see this winter. It's an incredible piece. The technique and imagination on display are striking. But it's hardly fitting as a final work — rather, the potential it demonstrates looks more like the start of something new.

Into every life a little rain must fall. In Shea's case, this might be likened to a torrent, a storm front that passed over us as well. The actions of even our closest friends must at times remain inexplicable — we can't hope to know another person as well as we know ourselves, and who truly knows themselves? To paraphrase Shea's letter, when the bridges are burning all we can do is stand back and watch the flames.

Errata department: our recent book *Devil's Children* had some errors that were not caught before it went to press. A number of pages were slipped through during paste-up before our proofreader, Brian Appleton, could look them over. Please excuse the typos — they're my responsibility.

Worse, though, was a misattribution. David Conyers did the maps and handouts, not David Godley as the credits stated. Sorry, David. And — sorry, David. I'll let you figure out which is which!

We've gone through a substantial reorganization here recently — or, to put it more accurately, a substantial organization. This will become apparent after another project or so has come along, but what it amounts to is that there are now 7 people sharing the responsibility for what 2 people were doing before. We ought to be able to get a lot more accomplished this way.

For starters, as I write this we're already well along in selecting manuscripts for TUO11 and will start on TUO12 as soon as possible so we can get the magazine on a regular schedule in 1994.

Bear with us. There's good times ahead.

Among the myriad of reasons why I'm extremely pleased with this issue I would be remiss not to cite the presence of a special contributor — none other than my mother, Karen Tynes.

She has contributed an illustrated poem for this issue's "Message In A Bottle" that I hope you'll enjoy. I can't imagine many mothers being thrilled with something as peculiar and occasionally unpleasant as TUO, and so I'm pleased she's along for the ride. Pardon the cliché, but hi mom!

The mail order catalog that appeared in TUO8/9 was hopelessly optimistic. Check out the new, conservative one on the inside back cover. Or, write or email us for a free copy of our full catalog and see what we're up to. Or, for that matter, just give us a call: [314] 442-4301 for any late-breaking news about our projects.

Lunatic Letters



Scream And Scream Again

Letters to The Unspeakable Oath may be edited for clarity and brevity. All letters remain the property of the original writers. To send us a maniacal missive, write to:

Scream And Scream Again
Pagan Publishing
403 N. 8th St.
Columbia, MO 65201
USA

David Barras' comment in TUO7 ["Thirties-Something"] concerning the Falklands War cannot go without comment. To imply to others, who perhaps know little of the circumstances, that this was an invasion of an inoffensive little country is an appalling distortion of the truth.

It was the fascist Argentine government which invaded the Falklands and South Georgia in March and April 1982. Remember—this was the same government which caused over 8000 of its citizens to 'disappear' and thousands more to suffer torture and imprisonment merely for trying to exercise civil rights which the Falkland Islanders took, and thanks to the British government and armed forces continue to take, for granted. Indeed, the first act of the Argentine people was to depose General Galtieri and usher in a democratic government which survives to this day.

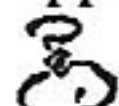
For David Barras to so misuse his position as a contributor to a type of magazine which should not be used as a forum for contentious political views is odious indeed, and disrespectful to those members of the British armed forces who lost their lives. What is even more saddening is that I see from your 'contributors' section that he is a Scot, and the Scots Guards served with distinction during the campaign.

Nigel Meek **Kent, Great Britain**
[Nigel's letter should have appeared in TUO8/9; due to an oversight, it was skipped until this issue. He refers to the following line in David's article:

"...the information herein is as American as invading inoffensive little countries (the Falkland Islands excepted)."

The comment in parentheses about the Falklands was not in David's original article; I added it during the editing process, casually and without much thought after a proofreader made a remark about the Falklands while reading the manuscript.

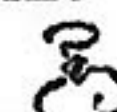
This was clearly a moronic and offensive decision. In a letter to me, David sympathized with the comment and was not offended, but my choice was a poor one and it won't happen again.]



Some corrections to G. W. Thomas's "The Arch-Nemesis." He calls REH's Fu Manchu clone "Cathulos." The name is actually "Kathulos." He also claims Kathulos is the same person as "Kuthulos" in "Delcardes's Cat." I doubt this. Kuthulos is portrayed, in this tale and "The Skull of Silence," as a scholar-slave, not a wizard or leader of men. Nor does Kathulos, in "Skull-Face," ever refer to having been in Kull's court. The most he says is that he is "Kathulos of Atlantis," and Atlantis, in Kull's time, is a land of barbarians, not scholars. Claiming that they must be the same because they came from the same place and have names differing only by a single vowel is like claiming "Mick" and "Mack" are the same name. Maybe they're related, maybe not.

One always has to be careful in dealing with Howard's names. He had this very unprofessional (from our viewpoint) habit of reusing names (Conan, Steve Costigan) for unrelated characters. Whereas we'd naturally expect that when an author writes about "John Conrad," he's writing about the same John Conrad each time, Howard (possibly because he recycled his unsold stories so often) simply had a number of names he really liked (Kirby, Cormac, Allison, etc.) and used over and over again. It sure makes life hard for us "consistent world"-ers.

Chris Jarocho-Ernst **via Internet**



I wanted to remark on Kevin Ross' review of Price's *Tales of the Lovecraft Mythos* in TUO7. While everyone has their favorites and those stories they'd rather not talk about, what I look for in a new volume of Mythos fiction is not the same old names: Lovecraft, Smith, Howard or Bloch, since I've read almost everything these guys have written. Unless it's a truly rare find, I'd rather see the obscure stuff like variant tales of writers like E. Hoffman Price, Jacobi or Russell which might not interest a newer reader. Having read over 200 Mythos (and related) stories, the pickings get slim.

I agree with Kevin about the Robert E. Howard choices. "Ashurbanipal" (in any form) and "The Thing on the Roof" are

poor choices. I would have included "The Children of the Night" along with its sequel "Dagon Manor" (which appeared in *Different Worlds* in 1986), "The Worms of the Earth" or "The Valley of the Worm" — since the contents of this book contains peripheral Mythos tales, these would all be welcome.

I'm not much on Lovecraft parodies but can recommend one story, one written by Lovecraft and associate R.H. Barlow, "The Battle That Ended the Century" (1934). Though not Mythos exactly, it does name many of the Lovecraftian pet names like D.H. Killer (David H. Keller), Frank Chimesleep Short Jr. (Frank Belknap Long Jr.), Klarkash-Ton (Clark Ashton Smith) and so on. Rather than an unkind chastisement, this story is fun to decipher.

Other tales I would recommend are some rare ones like "Satan's Servants" (1935) the only collaboration of Robert Bloch & H.P. Lovecraft, Lovecraft's "The Very Old Folk" (1927), Alan Dean Foster's "Some Notes Concerning a Green Box" (1971), Frank Belknap Long's "The Were-Snake" (1925) and "The Challenge From Beyond" (1935), a writer's jam by C.L. Moore, A. Merritt, H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, and Frank Belknap Long.

The compiling of a perfect volume of Mythos fiction is impossible since personal taste is such a factor, but single volumes of each writer should not be a problem. I do wish a publisher would attempt to do a series with well-researched introductions and surrounding material. Bloch's *Mysteries of the Worm* is about as close as we have gotten so far.

Gary Thomas Prince George, Canada
[This must be your day, Gary, because Chaosium has begun a series of paperback reprints of Mythos stories, each volume covering a single deity or area — the first one covers Hastur, and the second is a new edition of Mysteries of the Worm. These are in stores now, so start hunting!]

[Re: TUO8/9] Dennis Detwiler is a marvellous artist. Give him a raise, he is beginning to rival Blair Reynolds with his moody, nasty pictures (specifically p. 98 and 106). You've got another really good

artist on your hands. I won't complain about the art of Chris Thieke, because I'd prefer mediocre art to no art at all. Unfortunately, with Reynolds and Detwiler on staff, you're going to have trouble with people wanting all your art to be that incredible. Don't listen to them.

"Dark Harvest" is one of the better Kevin Ross pieces I've seen. It doesn't have his sometimes annoying over-cast problem ("Music of the Spheres," for example), and it was an excellent concept. I don't know how it'll play, because I have no group, but it looks *really* intense. Great work.

Kim Eastland's campaign information about the Randolph Pierce Foundation, the Last Dawn and all that continues to amaze. I don't know if I could ever use it, but the possibilities it opens up are frighteningly enormous! CoC as a large, political game was something that had never occurred to me. Really scary, and I like it that way. When is Kim coming out with a novel? She really seems to have the talent and reserves to write at least one...

Mark Edward Morrison continues to be illuminating through his case, which seems to be getting longer and longer. He adds a great deal to the issue with his essays, proving that CoC is a game for the intelligent, and that TUO is a magazine that is not just a supplement — it has a philosophy that enhances the game experience. Something this good comes around only rarely, and I'm very pleased with the quality of the product.

There were, naturally, a few things I disagreed with. I most definitely disagree with C. L. Werner's interpretation of the Frankenstein Monster. The statistics are OK, but he perceives the creature as evil, and I cannot agree with that. If one reads *Frankenstein* carefully, one will notice that the Creature is not overtly and completely evil. In fact, I have found the creature more sympathetic than Victor himself! The Creature is one of loneliness, and pain, but not maliciousness. All he wants is to find out about himself, and later to have someone with whom he can share his agony. Yes he kills, but only out of ignorance, or in retribution (of course, I

was also a Cthulhu Keeper, what does this say about my sympathies?). The Creature is not evil, but rejected by a society, and made bitter by that rejection (can you tell I was an English major?). Unfortunately, the popular concept of the Frankenstein Monster is created by the Boris Karloff movies. Perhaps the upcoming Kenneth Brannagh film will come closer to the novel.

Nor am I pleased with the new magic items. I did not think Echter's Whistle was that well thought out, and it lacks the depth that most CoC magic items should have. If the whistle is designed for a shaman to Yig, why is it basically a booby-trap? I can see the labors of the whistle being 'farmed out' to some unsuspecting cultist, but I would tend to doubt other powers associated with it.

There were, as always a few oversights, or things that were cut for space reasons, such as James Loula's ring, or, more distressingly, the statistics for *Fulcoius de Crusade!*

I liked the April Fool's stuff. If you could provide just one page of this humor once an issue, I think it might flow a little better. I laughed my ass off at "How to Be a Cultist" and "The Cthulhu Encounter Problem Solver." Great stuff.

All in all, I think *The Unspeakable Oath* 8/9 was worth more than I paid for it. You guys are doing a fantastic job, and I'll see you next time in full size!

John Goodrich **via internet**
[Here we are! Let's see...Kim Eastland is male, though I don't know if he's got any novel plans...if you're a Yig cultist, "Echter's Whistle" doesn't seem like a booby trap...Loula's ring & Fulcoius de Crusade? Oops!]

Excellent job on TUO7. The Graphology skill was an interesting addition, but the accompanying story made it great. Best of all, the story can easily be made into an evil little adventure. Very chilling...

Which can also be said for "Convergence." Brrrrr. I haven't had time to let my friends play it (that is, massacre them until they scream and rant and beg for mercy), but I did read through it. At night.

Alone. In the basement. I can't wait to spring it on some poor, unsuspecting fools. Especially good was the meaningless ramble, *take out the rble and you get am from crushed stone that is rubble. Which are is am the fragments of the whole which was the whole rock...*

Joel Patton **Travelers Rest, SC**

Anyway, I just wanted to let you know that we are enjoying "Convergence" here in Iowa City — Billy Ray Spivey and Nancy Allen have been particularly horrifying to play, and the Sheriff has been fun, too (he blew off the investigators to do some fishing on the reservoir the day after they arrived in Groverston—they got into town late Saturday night). He was also in church all that morning...heh.

If you are planning to continue the idea of CyberCthulhu in the pages of TUO, and I hope you do, what I would like to see is a set of guidelines to help Keepers make that transition to the dark, cybered-up world of 2020 from the dark, horrible word of Cthulhu Now. I envision the corporations being inextricably linked to the Great Old Ones — after all, chaos coupled with a gradual loss of humanity due to all that cyberware makes the world a place even more delicious to snatch up when the "Stars are Right," no? But, the transition isn't an easy one for Keepers to make — moving from Cthulhu Now of the 1990s to CyberCthulhu in the 2020s is a bit like running full-speed into a brick wall. So, what I'd like to see are scenarios that flesh out the time period in between, from 1999 to 2020, as the Corporations gradually spread their tentacles across the globe, and as characters find themselves being seduced more and more by the Net and by cyberware goodies.

Burnell Chadek **via internet**
[In our preparations with Prometheus Press, we kicked around the idea of doing a CyberCthulhu book sometime. Another company has beaten both of us to the punch, though; look for GURPS CyberCthulhu in the next year or so.]

Your idea of covering the time period between the two settings is interesting. We are doing something similar, actually, in the first scenario book for our after-the-stars-come-right RPG, END TIME.

Watch for more about this next issue!

I have recently heard the sad news regarding Keith Herber leaving Chaosium, and feel it right that I should voice my disapproval at such a decision. I don't know the ins and outs of the situation, (and will probably never know) but I deeply regret this.

Fair cop, all good things come to an end but I cannot dismiss such a circumstance so lightly. Alright, granted there is nothing I can do about it, but because TUO is written in the land of the free, I have a right to express an opinion, even if I'm not an American.

We are talking about probably the best *Call of Cthulhu* writer Chaosium has had, or is ever likely to have. The man was a genius. Classics like *Fungi From Yuggoth* I regard as the best scenario booklet I have ever seen. Forget about your 7 and 8 phobias, that baby got a straight ten in my book. I take my hat off to Mr. Herber. If he reads TUO, I wish him all the best and don't let the bastards get you down.

Graham R. Theobalds **England**
[Keith's departure from Chaosium's full-time staff may be news to many TUO readers. For more about Keith and what he's up to post-Chaosium, check out our interview on page 14.]

I think you're doing a great job. TUO is simply remarkable, and certainly saves me having to buy a regular role-playing games magazine which might feature CoC once in a blue moon (or when the stars are right) but would otherwise be a waste of money. TUO keeps me in touch with developments in the *Call of Cthulhu* game, especially the letters page and "Eye of Light and Darkness" (whose reviews I take very seriously when choosing which Chaosium products to buy).

I don't trust Chaosium. At the risk of sounding political, I trust them about as much as I trust the current incumbent of No. 10 Downing Street and his little band of corrupt cronies. I think that, like any big games firm (TSR being a case in point) Chaosium is subject to a marketeering impulse. They can be accused of, in some cases, subverting quality for market considerations. I am glad that Pagan Pub-

lishing can offer an alternative source of literature and publications that deal with the game but are outside the limits of the Chaosium empire.

This is not to say that Chaosium doesn't occasionally produce some good material, and have done so in the past, but whereas I used to buy everything they brought out for CoC, I don't now. I don't buy Gaslight products, and I think I'm going to be one of those to give this Lovecraft Country exercise a miss.

Now Pagan Publishing is a different matter. TUO has been consistently brilliant since I've been reading it (TUO5). The scenarios are particularly outstanding, and probably the main reason I buy TUO. I particularly enjoyed "Convergence" which has converted me to *Cthulhu Now* and cause me to rush out and buy "The Stars Are Right!"

Stuart Fieldhouse **Berkshire, UK**
[Interesting letter, Stuart. I suspect the folks at Chaosium would be very surprised to hear themselves characterized as "the Chaosium empire" and compared with the likes of TSR.]

It is a fact of life that not everyone will be happy with a given set of circumstances. Many people find greater fault with TUO than you do with Chaosium; it's a matter of preference. I don't think there's much doubt that we have a somewhat different approach to the game, but it is very much to Chaosium's credit that the game is flexible enough to handle such disparate viewpoints and that they are flexible enough to allow us to play in their sandbox, so to speak.

You may find Chaosium's future release schedule of more interest; they're changing directions in some ways, and perhaps their upcoming books will be more to your liking. Whatever the case, I strongly urge you and anyone reading this to write Chaosium with your comments, positive or negative: Chaosium, Inc. 950-A 56th St. Oakland, CA 94608 USA.]

Greetings from somewhere in the WESTern PACific. Not even Great Cthulhu dares raise his ugly mug above these roiling seas while the presence of the Nimitz and Lincoln battlegroups con-

the Nimitz and Lincoln battlegroups concentrate this amount of firepower in His neighborhood. Although many of the crew have been heard muttering of late of strange and disturbing dreams... and what are the real reasons behind the delays in Lincoln's deployment forcing a turnover in the South China Sea vice the Persian Gulf? Perhaps next week will be witness to Charles Jacot's CNN coverage of the airstrikes on R'lyeh...

Just got TUO8/9 in the parcel COD (Carrier Onboard Delivery) and it looks awesome. Now I've got something to keep me sane (?) during the transit back across The Pond.

Jim Reynolds

WESTPAC

[Long voyage, eh Jim?]



I just picked up the latest edition of "Creatures and Cultists," and I must say my first session was, well, interesting.

As I didn't have the heart to destroy TUO4, I hadn't played the game. So, when I saw it on the shelf at a local game store, I purchased it and suckered a friend, who shall remain nameless (Michael Doyle), into reading the rules and teaching me how to play.

The "Fish of Divinity" (me) squared off against the "Vorpals Bunnies (him)." It got ugly from the start, and remained that way. After several unsuccessful attempts at overthrowing the "Vorpals Bunnies," the "Fish of Divinity" regrouped and renamed. They stood as the "Fish Near Divinity."

The fish rallied and defended against several blatant attacks on their fishdom, all the while chanting, "Drown or Don't!" belligerently at the bunnies. The bunnies remained undaunted and were heard screaming, "big, nasty, pointy teeth!" as they proceeded to spooze all over the fish.

It was looking bad for the "Fish Near Divinity" when all of a sudden, it got worse. The fish had only one thug left in their first row. The "Vorpals Bunnies," thirsting for blood and favoured by the stars, cast the terrible Black Binding. Then, in a startling maneuver (well, startling to the fish), the bunnies created a gate near the fish's third row and from behind several bruised conjurers rose thuggie #3 with a Tommy Gun.

Thuggie #3 let loose with an awful cry and a spray of bullets. As he gunned down each and every one of the fish's third row, the last thuggie made a desperate attempt to lunge at the Tommy Gun. Unfortunately, he boofed and the Tommy Gun remained in the hands of the evil, thoughtless bunnies!

The bunnies then resurrected all but one of their cult. The fish's hopes remained, but were quickly dashed as a bunny drove a Big, Honkin' Truck over the fish's second row.

The "Vorpals Bunnies" chanted in victory, and, although hardly necessary after killing all of the "Fish Near Divinity," summoned their blasphemous deity as they shook their poofy tails and flaunted their numerous Fugglies.

In game points, the Vorpals Bunnies claimed victory with 51 fugglies and 1 dead cultist. The Fish Near Divinity didn't fair as well, with only 7 fugglies and no living cultists.

Creatures and Cultists is a great game. Definitely fun beyond expectation. I don't know if I'll ever play it again after the trouncing I received (ha!), but I hardily recommend it to everyone!

Jeffery Douglas

via Internet



First, I like your magazine. In the way of writing and content I can think of no other which displays such dedication to the parent material. I realize this is due to the magazine's writers; the same who are gamers. It reminds me of when *Dragon* had Gyax at the helm and when most RPG magazines were written by gamers for gamers. In short, a massive feather in your cap and a breath of fresh air for old-time gamers wallowing in an almost non-imagination TSRian world.

Second, I'd like to comment on *Alone On Halloween*. The solo fired me up! I haven't played CoC regularly for a couple of years and only when time permitted, but when I encountered the hunchback butler and the dinner guests who never drink wine, I was hooked. A good shot in the arm for a player who remembers Chaosium's *Alone Against the Dark* and *Alone Against the Wendigo*. I haven't dipped into *Halloween's* entirety yet, simply because I'm savoring what's between

the pages. But, from what I have read, it's on top as far as solos go.

Finally, a big plus to you guys at Pagan. For some strange reason I see parallels between TUO and the *Strategic Review* from years past. Hopefully, the quality coming from TUO will not turn to just quantity. Also, I'm looking forward to reading and hopefully playing *Devil's Children* and *Walker in the Wastes*. I say 'hopefully' because gamers around here, or at least the ones I've encountered, can't even shave yet. Damn shame for a guy who remembers when Ogre came in a ziplock bag!

Mike Kedziora

Huber Heights, OH



I just had the weirdest experience this afternoon. Until my new job starts, I'm babysitting for a friend. The kid, Spike, is just over two, and a pretty good kid all around. Well, I was looking for one of his sneakers today, and took about five minutes doing it. When I came out, he was standing in the kitchen, looking at my copy of TUO7. It was opened to page 40 (the one with the picture of the Hierophant), and he was saying "oooooh."

I am very glad that I will not be in this town again for a year. Very glad.

John Goodrich

Via Internet



Special Note

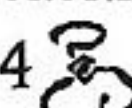
In last issue's scenario "What Goes Around, Comes Around," the stats for one NPC were deleted for space reasons. The scenario still refers to them, however, and the author has pointed out a situation in which these stats may prove important. So, in case you plan to run that scenario, here's the deleted NPC stats:

Margaret Dupres, nosy neighbor

STR	6	CON	11
SIZ	9	INT	13
DEX	7	POW	13
APP	11	EDU	12
SAN	65	HP	10

Skills: Color Hair 5%, Native Language: French 60%, Other Language: English 40%, Play Mah Jong 90%, Spot Hidden 45%

Attacks: Clubbing attacks with closed Japanese fan, 1D3-1D4





The Paranoia Files

The Paranoia Files is a regular column devoted to re-examining history and mining it for Mythos-related or simply unsettling nuggets of information.

Once more the itinerant historian moves on, now to seek out a doctoral program at some eldritch center of learning. My Lovecraftian materials were among the first things to be reshelfed when we arrived, and they beckoned me as I tried to force myself to focus on what I came here to study. What then did I seek first when I obtained my library card? Lovecraftian books, sources that I had not yet had a chance to read, or which I had read but lost years ago. Did I seek those books or did they call to me?

The variety was good. HPL, CAS, REH, Derleth, Lumley, Carter, Wilson among others. I read *Beneath the Moors* for the first time. I reacquainted myself with *The Mind Parasites*, and found dozens of short stories that I had never read before. And as I searched the shelves for more I gradually became aware of sounds and movements that should not have been there.

Before the term begins, libraries at even large schools can be almost deserted at times, and those were the times that I chose to haunt the stacks and shelves. Why then, when I pulled books off the shelves did I often hear fumbling movements on the other side of the bookcases, yet no one was there? Even worse, more than once, as I searched for something especially hard to reach, I would catch out of the corner of my eyes a glimpse of other eyes staring at mine through the shelves. I would start, look closer, and — nothing! When I searched I thought I could hear faint tittering laughter.

Fear grew, and yet I could only go on. Why were some of the books so hard to find? The computer told me where to look, told me that the books were on the shelves, yet I could not find them. Sometimes they were misplaced, sometimes I would come upon them even when I wasn't looking for any particular one, as if they were being placed near my line of sight or had moved themselves to be seen.

I found *The King in Yellow* in this manner — it was simply there when I looked up, although I had not been searching for it. (Perhaps this is the one that disappeared from your library, John). *The*

Mind Parasites was harder to locate — finally I realized that the black book with the blotched spine was the one. You could barely read the title. It's strange, for I've never seen a ruined Arkham House binding before, but something had eaten into this one. Other books I still cannot locate anywhere on the shelves. And there are some which are shelved in the bowels of the library attainable only with special permission. How long can I survive without holding *The Survivor and Others* in my hands? Though if I do, how do I let it go?

What other treasures lie in wait? Or what traps? I still hear the fumbling and tittering and catch sight of movement where no person is, but the term has begun and the library is now filled with undergraduates, noise, and clutter. The apprehension has faded into the background, and I have time for nothing other than the work I must do. Until the Christmas holidays arrive, when once again the library will quieten, the soft furtive noises will be audible, and I will once more be drawn to the books of Ultimate Knowledge.

With these resources at my disposal, I can continue my delvings into history and paranoia. Already, I have found strange information dealing with that Green (Unpleasant) Land of the far north where the Gnoph-keh roam and lost Lomar lies far beneath the ice. Or is it indeed so far down? Travellers' and explorers accounts tell of strange Inuit legends of a variety of creatures that could have come right out of a Mythos tale.

I have read, for instance, of the Tunek, which is spoken of in whispers. A being, or group of beings, two to three times human size, very conversant with sorcery. It is said that the Tunek live beneath the surface, the entrances to their habitations being covered with sod and shrubs. Is this proof of contact between Eskimos and the Gnoph-keh? The size seems right, as does the idea of the Tunek being a sorcerous being.

There are also the Inuarudligaks, dwarf people "who have taught the Europeans the art of manufacturing firearms," being

possessed of a "pointing weapon" by which men and animals may be killed "merely by aiming at them." The Inuarudligaks are highly esteemed on account of their cleanliness, having habitations as handsome as those of Europeans. This account of the Inuarudligaks comes from a Dutch writer of the nineteenth century. How did the Eskimos develop the idea of this dwarf race teaching Europeans weapons-crafting? A pointing weapon that kills just by aiming would seem to indicate some sort of beam weapon rather than a gunpowder weapon. Most non-European peoples first thought of guns as killing by sound and smoke, the most obvious byproduct. A weapon that killed by aiming indicates a silent weapon — a laser?

This advanced race brings back memories of the people living in K'n-yan. They were very scientific, using beam weapons, living in great dwellings. It would fit within the Mythos to expect a lost race in such a place. Is some remnant of Olathoe still there beneath the Greenland ice? Did the Inutos, the ancestors of the Inuit, fail to a degree in their war of conquest against the Lomarians? Have some survived to the present? After all, the Elder Things survived, albeit in suspended animation, in Antarctica. Might some remnant of

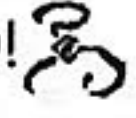
prehistoric Greenland have survived also?

The Greenland Eskimos spoke of numerous peoples dwelling around them, where white explorers saw only the Inuit themselves. According to Eskimo stories, there were cannibalistic tribes, monstrous giants, and "inland-dwellers" who were much like the Eskimos yet lived under the earth or under the ice in a very primitive manner, and who were able to cast magical spells. Greenland is not a vast barren island, but an island teeming with strange life-forms.

That brings about speculation in other directions. There are many mysteries in the Green Unpleasant Land. What happened to the Viking settlements? We know when they were founded, we know about their voyages to Vinland, but we know almost nothing about their final end. Historians have speculated in many ways — increasing cold weather, migration of the ancestors of the Eskimos, final outbreak of the Black Death. Now we must add more possibilities — death at the hands of Tuneks, or Inuarudligaks, or other Mythos beings. Why is it that the Viking settlements have been found, but no indications of the Vikings, other than those buried by their predecessors? If there had been plague, there should have been

bodies found by archaeologists lying in ruined huts, or in the streets, yet — nothing. What is the answer to the mystery here?

Closer to our favorite period of the 1920s. What are the facts behind the trip to the Greenland ice by the explorer Wegener? He set off in 1929, to return in 1931. What is up there? What did he find? An adventure in which the investigators join Wegener should make for interesting play, with all sorts of possibilities.

So what did the people of the 1920s know about Greenland? It was, of course, officially the Colony of Greenland, owned by the Danish Crown. Its population as of 1929 was 14,804 people of whom 248 were Europeans. The inhabited area at that time was about 46,740 square miles, about the size of Virginia. The actual size of the entire island is 827,300 square miles, over three times the size of Texas. There is a lot of uninhabited and unexplored Greenland. Is it uninhabited? What may be found out there? Where do these Tunek and Inuarudligak dwell, along the coast or deep inland? For the intrepid investigator, Greenland lies open for the exploring. Good luck, and keep your eyes opened (or closed if there's actually anything there)! 

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(The Facts In) The Case Of Mark Edward Morrison

The Case Of Mark Edward Morrison is a regular column looking at *Call of Cthulhu* and how to run or play or simply understand it better. The 'case' of the title is a strange old suitcase Mark discovered on a trip to the U.S. Its curious and ever-changing contents have haunted his dreams ever since.

My long-time friend and companion Mark Edward Morrison has of late become strange and erratic in his habits, spending many hours brooding over a battered leather receptacle in the privacy of his chambers. Yesterday as I was toiling late over a particularly eldritch tome of forgotten lore ('An Introduction to Stoichiometry') a horrid scream rang from this benighted vault. Rushing in I found him gone (leaving only a faint, lukewarm, impress upon the bed). The only clue was that damned valise gaping wide open upon the floor, its leathern lips seeming to sneer in a frightful grin. Where had my friend gone? I had to find out.

Where do all those friends, relatives and acquaintances of long-time Cthulhu investigators spring from? And how come generally the first time the investigator hears of them is because they/he/she/it has been foully slain or gone permanently insane (or seen someone else foully slain and then gone permanently insane)? I'll tell you why. Because that's what the "Players' Introduction" in the scenario says. Because the Keeper, in order to introduce the players to scenario after scenario, is piling up enough corpses in quaint old Arkham to fill the New York municipal dump several times over, and then muttering something about "the willing suspension of disbelief."

An example? Francesca La Monte, on a visit to Peru, finds herself assailed by a total stranger. "Fran, little Frannie" the man burbles, "Remember me, Uncle Frank? I used to dandle you on my knee when you were four." Francesca, assuming this man is attempting some particularly odious pick-up line, responds with outrage. The Keeper has to quickly plant a few choice, retrospective memories so that the scenario can continue.

Keepers should look critically at published scenario construction, particularly introductions, non-player characters and rewards. Can you take out a non-player character introduced in the scenario, and put in one the investigators already know? If a non-player character is killed, particularly a useful or likeable one, can this

death be changed to a maiming, or even a complete rescue? If a new non-player character is essential, introduce them well ahead, so they become important to the investigators, and their fate is a matter of concern. Finally, is a scenario's reward appropriate for your campaign, or would you prefer something different in order to maintain the balance of play, or to take account of your players' individual foibles?

As it happened, Fran's mother and father were already well established figures in the campaign. Her father did something or other with the stock market and always looked worried, whilst her mother dieted and had an interest in esoteric eastern religions. It would only have taken a card from Fran's mother prior to departure — "You're going to Peru dear? Do look up your Uncle Frank in Lima. Of course he's not really your uncle, he's an old flame, but he used to dandle you, etc. etc." — and a nasty jar to the comradely storytelling atmosphere could have been avoided.

If the investigators are surrounded by a family and friends of long standing, the Keeper's source of introductions to scenarios is consequently extended, and the players can be kept in a state of pleasing uncertainty, if not paranoia (why has my mother become such an important character recently? Is something going to happen to her? "Mummy, mummy dearest, I don't think you should take up yoga. No, no, I don't think you should travel to India by yourself to visit Guru Swamimanihari. It's not safe. What do you mean, I'm a fine one to talk?").

It is useful to make sure information is written down at the time of the investigator's creation. Family, friends, school, hobbies, residence, employment and contacts are noted for use in play. The Keeper should keep a copy — smile at the players and assure them that this is purely for safe-keeping, not at all for future reference. If the players are thinking about these things before they start, it is easier for them to start roleplaying their investigator. They know more about themselves. Furthermore, mutual friends are a good link between investigators. Mutual,



dead friends.

Players like to feel their intervention has some effect against the damned machinations of the Cthulhu mythos. A simple reward is the saving of a non-player character, who then becomes a useful ally. Rescued once from grisly death or disfigurement, a non-player character starts to gain that vital affection and trust of the group, and can be foully slaughtered/driven insane later. Francesca's dear and personal friends Paul LeMond and Jackson Elias both came to sticky ends. Both were characters from published scenarios, but their ends were made memorable as a result of extra interaction introduced by the Keeper.

Besides, if the friend has been foully slain, or gone permanently insane, their involvement need not end. Many scenarios are set in asylums, which gives Auntie Mavis another chance to dribble and eat bugs. An escaped, mad friend could be the next scenario's diabolical foe. The return of a dead friend is equally, er,

interesting, whether in grue-dripping reality or in less substantial form. They can give warning or advice, or provide evidence of wickedness for the investigators to uncover. And the best balm for grief over another's hideous death is a joyful reunion in the world of dreams.

Introductions pose the question that impels the investigators into mystery. Variations of this question must remain fresh and vital after many repetitions, if investigators are to retain interest in finding out the often decidedly unsafe answers, and if players are to remain attached to those figments of their imagination that propel forwards the story. Other introductions to a scenario can be considered alongside the published one. This often requires no more preparation than a bit of forethought by the Keeper, and perhaps a few notes in the margins of scenarios. And this work pays off in many and diverse ways.

Finally, it must be emphasized that the best introduction to a scenario is the one

the investigators forge themselves. For this purpose, innocuous hobbies are useful. It is surprising how often Keeper-induced change to the introduction works in favor of deepening investigator involvement, rather than the tired old, "an uncle / friend / pet cat / complete stranger suddenly and mysteriously dies." Anything can be used thus: an interest in sailing, long walks, ouija boards, trains, or collecting things, be it stamps, prosthetic limbs, or the back issues of *outré* magazines. An investigator uninterested in why Luke Farnham, town bum, was found drained of blood in the local swamp may spring to sudden attention if Ole Luke had a mint Penny Black firmly affixed to his forehead. If the Keeper then replaces the boring, tatty old copy of 'Unausprechlichen Kulten' that the scenario dictates with a priceless collection of old stamps (because the deathless sorcerer has kept every envelope of his 300 year-old correspondence) then the avid investigator has earned an appropriate reward. Just get the investigators out of themselves, and face to face with the inexplicable.

Was that a knock on the door, or the roof? My bosom buddy staggered in, his eyes dim, his ragged clothes gently steaming, as if from the voids of interstellar space.

"Hi," he said, "I just had to go out for some milk." He placed the calciferous liquid carefully upon the table, and lurched out of the room. Feeling that this did not explain either the length of time it took to make it to the corner store, or the green, faintly luminescent, goo that still dripped from his fingers, I followed him into his book-lined chamber.

He had flung himself down upon the bed. But casting my eyes about the room, I noted one significant change to the environs. At last I understood. My fears, if not groundless, were undoubtedly useless; my questions, if not answered, rendered void. There will never be any solution.

The case was closed.

Mark Morrison is very, very, very indisposed. ☞

Reviews & Spews



The Eye Of Light And Darkness

The Eye Of Light And Darkness is a review column featuring items of interest to fans of Call of Cthulhu as well as H.P. Lovecraft fans in general. Items are rated on a scale of one to ten phobias, with ten being the highest. Note that this is not an absolute scale; rather, the scale only reflects how a particular item succeeds in its goals. A card game given a rating of 8 phobias is not inherently better than a scenario book rated 6 phobias — it just means it's a very good card game. Ratings of 3 phobias or less indicate the item isn't worth purchasing; 4-6 phobias indicate an average item with notable flaws; 7-10 phobias indicate degrees of excellence

The Cosmic Horror of H.P. Lovecraft
softcover anthology of commentary
Glittering Images, \$37.50
reviewed by Mark H. Eley

I must admit that I was excited when I first spotted an ad for this "rare import" honoring Lovecraft, his fiction and his views. Included in the large 168-page volume is information on HPL, European and American Mythos-related artwork and comics, and films based on his works. Being a collector and ardent fan, I decided to shell out the rather expensive sum for this book.

Unfortunately, what the ad and the publisher neglected to mention was that this volume is almost completely written in Italian! Those fluent in the language won't mind, but others should be aware of this before purchasing.

As promised, there is an excellent introduction (in English) describing HPL's life and writings in great detail, even delving into symbolism and the intertwinings of his life and his fiction. The introduction includes several photographs as well.

Looking past the opening pages proves disappointing. Although various rare book covers, graphic art and drawings appear here, their quality doesn't even match up with what most CoC and TUO gamers are used to seeing from Nick Smith, Tom Sullivan, and the incomparable Blair Reynolds. Readers will be surprised to see a few familiar drawings and art from various CoC publications stashed in with unfamiliar works. Most of the comics reprinted are bland and uninspiring, with the few exceptions being Richard Corben's "Rats in the Walls," Berni Wrightson's "Cool Air," Jean-Michel Nicollet's *Heavy Metal* magazine pieces and several paintings by Tim White. Note that many of these comics are graphic in sex and violence.

The anthology finishes up by mentioning American and European (including many Italian) films both directly and indirectly influenced by HPL — such as *Re-Animator* and John Carpenter's remake of *The Thing*. In the bibliography

are listed various sources and authors who have written about HPL including Lin Carter, Jack Chalker, and L. Sprague DeCamp. This list of loyal followers and admirers is impressive.

In conclusion, this expensive volume proves an expensive disappointment, worth only a rating of two phobias to a fan and maybe five phobias to a die-hard collector (who also reads Italian!).

[Available from Super Graphics; P.O. Box 4489; Reading, PA 19606-4489. This volume costs \$37.50 + \$2.50 shipping and handling]

The House of the Toad
a Cthulhu Mythos novel
by Richard L. Tierney
Fedogan & Bremer, \$24
reviewed by Kevin A. Ross

New Cthulhu Mythos novels are few and far between these days: the last was probably Glenn Rahman's Roman-era *Heir of Darkness* back in '89. Now Fedogan & Bremer has published its second book of Mythos fiction in as many years (and if you didn't get F&B's *Tales of the Lovecraft Mythos* anthology yet, do so right now).

The House of the Toad is a modern-day tale of an occult conspiracy deep in the heart of — Iowa? Yes, my fellow Iowan Richard L. Tierney has set this tale along the banks of the Mississippi, where mysterious occultist J. Cornelius Wassermann has created an empire of New Age/occult publishing — with certain less-savory publications on the side.

Wassermann offers shady antiquities dealer James Kerrick an enormous sum for the strange hemispherical device he has just discovered in Mexico, enough to allow the weary Kerrick to retire from his risky trade. But there is more to Wassermann and his organization than meets the eye, and before the novel comes to a close Kerrick and a host of others will have come eye to eye with an ancient threat to humanity in the form of several different Mythos entities.

The House of the Toad is more of a spy novel than a tale of horror. The various agents at work both for and against

Wassermann include terrorists, government agents, occultists, and scholars, all of varying nationalities and temperaments. The number of such characters and their not-always-easy-to-gauge affiliations is sometimes confusing, but no more so than the typical spy thriller.

Wassermann himself so overtly resembles notorious occultist Alistair Crowley that he seems almost a caricature at times, even going so far as to quote Crowley throughout the book.

Tierney's use of the Cthulhu Mythos is of note in that it takes the Hastur sub-Mythos and fashions such a large corner for it that poor Cthulhu seems left out in the cold in terms of importance. Granted, there are quite a few deep ones here, but otherwise Cthulhu and his ilk are ignored in favor of slug-like creatures similar to that seen in Arthur Machen's "Novel of the Black Seal." And while Lovecraft's Ghatanothoa seemed to be another of those shapeless masses of tentacles and organs, here Tierney passes him off as the toad-god of the title. Another annoying wrinkle here is the alien weaponry used by the "good guys" to combat the slug-things: this unfortunately smacks of the silly techno-sorcery used in Brian Lumley's recent Dreamlands series.

Despite these caveats, *The House of the Toad* is an enjoyable read. It is written with a lightning-fast pace that recalls a James Bond film, with all the action, twists, turns, and array of characters that typify the genre. In this respect it favorably calls to mind the best elements of Lumley's earlier Necroscope novels.

In sum, if you can afford the steep cover price (keep telling yourself it's a limited edition hardcover...) and can accept some of the liberties taken with the Mythos, *The House of the Toad* is worth 5 or 6 phobias.

Once Around the Bloch:

**An Unauthorized Autobiography
autobiography of the master of horror
Tor Books, \$22.95**

reviewed by Scott David Aniolowski

I wonder how many people know that it

was Robert Bloch who wrote *Psycho*, and not Alfred Hitchcock? I wonder how many people know that Bloch corresponded with H.P. Lovecraft? And I wonder how many people know what a fascinating, down-to-earth gentleman Robert Bloch is?

The cover of *Once Around the Bloch* is a photograph of the man standing in front of that most famous of all houses — that of Norman Bates. The expression on his face is a mixed parody of crazed, sinister knowing and lighthearted silliness. Put bluntly, Bloch looks like your crazy uncle Bob — the one who shows up at all family gatherings where he regales youngsters with spooky stories.

Robert Bloch's autobiography is a fascinating read — an adventure into the life and times of America's one and true master of horror. I have always liked Bloch's work because it was written to be read: he forgoes stylish or experimental phrasing and structure, gratuitous vulgarity, megasyllabic buzz words, and wordage by the pound. Robert Bloch is more interested in telling a good story than in impressing his readers with his knowledge of obscure and "intellectual" words, artsy sentence structure, or grossly swollen word counts. True to form, *Once Around the Bloch* is an honest-to-goodness good story that makes a point and then gets to it. I read the 400+ page book in one sitting; I didn't want to put it down.

In the course of his autobiography, Bloch introduces the reader to a remarkable array of friends (famous and unknown), he gives us a look at his family, at his career, and the joys and sorrows of his life. His recollections of Lovecraft and the influence HPL had on his life are fascinating and enjoyable. I was also excited by Bloch's stories of meeting and becoming friends with Boris Karloff, Buster Keaton, Joan Crawford, Alfred Hitchcock, and others, and I felt sorrow as he told of losing so many good friends. The little glimpses into the lives of some of Hollywood's legends were fascinating: Joan Crawford, often depicted as a raving bitch by Hollywood biographers, was a dear friend of Bloch's and sent the wed-

ding cake when he remarried.

As a young man, Bloch went on a camping adventure with a group of friends. Opting to sleep in their battered jalopy instead of the tent, Bloch slept through a raging storm, even when the car was struck by lightning and ended up in a river bed! This weaver of tales horrific has a very light-hearted side, and he giggles and jokes throughout the book (just read the footnotes). And he remains the gentleman throughout his autobiography, as in all of his work — there is none of the seemingly-obligatory vulgarity and gratuitous sex in this work (although the word "fuck" does appear once, in a quote from another source — not bad for a 416-page book published in 1993!).

The author takes the reader along as he begins his career as a writer, first for *Weird Tales* and other pulps, then for a local politician, an advertising agency, and eventually Hollywood. It is a long, rough road, yet along the way there are triumphs and good friends. The sad irony of the story is that regardless of his hundreds of short stories, novels, essays, TV shows, and films, Robert Bloch is still neither truly famous nor truly wealthy. The gold and glory captured by the likes of King and Barker have managed to elude Bloch, even after a long and relatively successful career.

After completing *Once Around the Bloch*, I felt as though I really knew Robert Bloch — as though he has been a life-long friend. He really seems like crazy Uncle Bob, full of life and warmth. I have no desire to know the life and times of such literary luminaries as the verbose Mr. King or the butcherly Mr. Barker, but I'm glad to know the story of Robert Bloch.

In my opinion, Robert Bloch is the living master of horror. His life is fascinating, his personality warm, and his career impressive. His autobiography is highly recommended to anyone interested in Bloch, his career, or the genre. This is horror history, and Bloch is still making it. Ten phobias.

Adventures in Arkham Country
scenarios in the Lovecraft Country series
Chaosium Inc. \$18.95
reviewed by Kevin A. Ross

Yes, more Lovecraft Country material from Chaosium. By now most readers will have decided for themselves whether or not they're interested in what this series of source- and scenario-books has to offer. Bear in mind, however, that only one of the scenarios in this book is very firmly tied to one of the cities described in this series, and even this could be relocated with some work by the keeper.

But is it worth the effort? Mostly "yes," but a little bit "no." This is probably the weakest of the Lovecraft Country books, but that still puts it ahead of most Cthulhu releases in terms of quality. Only one of the scenarios here really fails to satisfy.

The book starts off with a bang, with Kevin Hassal's "A Happy Family" proving once and for all that it doesn't take a dozen screaming cultists, 20 or 30 deep ones, and a rampaging Great Old One to put a bunch of investigators through the ringer. This is pared-down storytelling at its best, a simple plot developed ingeniously to the smallest detail. My hat's off.

Scott Aniolowski's "Whore of Baharna" is another good story, with ties to the Dreamlands via Kingsport. While some of the ties between Kingsport and the Dreamlands are a little clumsy (eg. the scenario hook), the parts of the scenario set in either locale work well, with quite a few shocks in the Dreamlands portions. A sordid tale with a nice touch of sentimentality behind it.

Todd Woods' "Bless the Beasts and Children" continues to study the emotional ambiguities put forth in *Tales of the Miskatonic Valley's* "Freak Show" (not surprisingly, since that scenario was Woods' idea). A simple kidnapping case in Arkham leads the investigators to another moral dilemma, though this one has a more down-to-earth denouement than "Freak Show." The situations and characters are adequate here, but the plot lacks a good thrill or two somewhere along the way.

Fred Behrendt's "The Dark Wood" takes place up in Dunwich country, and fea-

tures an archaeological dig, sinister Indians, and some new technology and monsters. Like many of the scenarios we've seen in Lovecraft Country books, it's never completely clear who the reader should sympathize with: both the "archaeologist" and his Indian antagonist have their character flaws. In the end the choice becomes obvious, if not the motives of the "villain." Along the way Fred treats the investigators to a new monster with a fiendishly grisly *modus operandi*.

Finally, we come to "With Malice Aforethought," by Andrew Leman and Jamie Anderson. The general idea behind this extremely lengthy scenario is an excellent one: the investigators are framed for a murder they didn't commit, and are forced to stand trial for it. If only the plot had been executed with as much brilliance. Nearly half the book is given over to this mini-campaign, and unfortunately the space is largely wasted. From an unlikely opening (the investigators are assumed to be strangers to one another and are summoned to Arkham Sanitarium late at night), to a ridiculously complex trial session, to a murderous and often confusing final third, this scenario fails to ignite.

In the first third the investigators can do little but stumble over bodies, observe atrocities, and get arrested. The second third suggests that alternate investigators be used to seek to exonerate those arrested in part one; this middle section features much detective work, a potentially interesting "trial-via-roleplaying," and an alternate trial-by-dice that seems overly complicated. The final third introduces some ridiculous new creatures which spend most of this part of the scenario indiscriminately killing investigators; and finally a seemingly difficult-to-acquire ritual is needed to dispel the demonic menace behind the whole affair. While this scenario offers some fine ideas and details concerning the legal system and certain Arkham locations, the overall plot is a major disappointment. Enterprising keepers can nonetheless glean something from the more-useful portions.

As with many of Chaosium's recent books, the characterization and plotting of these five stories is extremely well

done. From the disturbed villain of "Happy Family," to the tortured one of "Whore," to the comparatively ambiguous foes in "Beasts" and "Wood," to the many well-drawn authority figures in "Malice," the reader gets the idea that there are real people in these tales.

Turning to the art, Stephen King (no, not *that* one) offers up a nicely-done but somehow unengaging cover painting of an eldritch roadway mishap about to occur. John T. Snyder turns in his best interior work yet, highlighted by an incredible series of pics for "Happy Family." His character studies are stronger here than in any previous Chaosium book, though perhaps not the usual horror-type stuff some folks may be slaving for. Maybe those types will dig "Dutch" instead...

How does it shape up overall? Somewhere in the respectable neighborhood of 6 phobias. If the keeper wants an excellent guide to running a murder trial, add another half-a-phobia or so.

Armed and Dangerous:

A Writer's Guide to Weapons
layman's guide to firearms use in fiction
Writer's Digest Books, \$14.95
reviewed by John H. Crowe, III

For the past few months, *Armed and Dangerous* was repeatedly recommended to me. It was described as being a simple, easy-to-understand guide to weapons geared for writers (and is part of the series that includes *Cause of Death* reviewed last issue). It sounded interesting and after some effort, I was able to acquire a copy from the library.

The author, Michael Newton, produced a 186-page book that is truly easy to comprehend. It is low impact and *seems* ideal for those not generally familiar with arms. In the first pages of the book he states, quite correctly, that many readers care whether or not firearms and combat are correctly and accurately represented in both fiction and non-fiction. He is also right when he states that there are thousands who are tired of poor representations of arms and that many go out of their way to "nit-pick" on errors.

This was a nice start. However, it plunges in an uncontrolled flaming spiral

from here. Mr. Newton, in his effort to write the book, made so many errors of fact — not to mention errors of omission — that it is utterly useless to anyone concerned with having any measure of authenticity or accuracy (this, of course, is the desired reader of the book). Scores of errors, many of them very basic, are scattered throughout. So common are they that any seemingly accurate information is immediately called into question and cannot be trusted.

Perhaps the worst crime committed by this book is the way the author rails against other authors for making mistakes. On pages three and four alone, he systematically attacks seven writers, points out specific errors in their books, then goes on to “correct” them. Unfortunately, in the process of “correcting” them, he makes errors of his own! He attacks horror writer Stephen King for daring to say there is a .45 Magnum and insists there is no such thing. Okay, so Mr. King probably meant to say “.44 Magnum.” However, it took me ten minutes using a simple arms catalog to discover three .45 Magnum handguns available today. Another example: throughout the book he insists that only one revolver in the twentieth century has a safety. It took me *thirty seconds* to find two more using a commonly-available source. True, safeties on revolvers are extremely rare, but they are not wholly unheard of. He also insists there is no such such as a Llama .38 automatic. Never mind that two such pistols are on the market and have been selling well for decades.

So what could Mr. Newton have done to avoid this? First, he tends to speak in absolutes, making sweeping generalizations that fail to stand up before even brief scrutiny. Worse, they are the kinds of statements that he himself criticizes other authors for making. Second, he apparently did not bother to consult his own sources. He lists *Small Arms of the World* in his bibliography. It is a good, quality source that I have routinely consulted in the past. Had he actually read it, he would have known that the Lewis machine gun was available in both .303 and .30-06 calibers, not just .303 as he insists.

As one who has written on this subject

in the past (and made more than my fair share of errors in the process), I understand some of the problems Mr. Newton was facing when he had to compile *Armed and Dangerous*. However, the mistakes made were so numerous, so basic, and so gross that there is absolutely no excuse for it. Few, if any were typographical and even those that were can't be excused. This combined with the utter hypocrisy of his early attacks on other writers makes this book not only an abominable source, but an insult to the reader. Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that Mr. Newton had some important and valuable things to say and obviously hoped to dispel some of the many myths concerning arms. Sadly, his efforts have met with a dismal failure and all he has succeeded in doing is creating a pile of new myths that will no doubt circulate for years among readers of this book.

My personal hope is that Writer's Digest books, the publisher of *Armed and Dangerous*, produces a corrected second edition for it would be of value to many. Unfortunately, in its current form it is worse than useless. I strongly recommend anyone who seeks a general overview of firearms, perhaps as research for a CoC scenario or a piece of fiction, to give this book a *very wide berth*. It earns absolutely no phobias and very probably deserves a negative number.

Alone in the Dark

**Lovecraftian computer game (MS-DOS)
Infogrames/I•Motion, Inc. \$59.95
reviewed by John Tynes**

It's been several years since I was really impressed by a computer adventure game. I played endless text and early graphic adventures as a kid, and was last amazed by *Ultima 6* from Origin. But “Alone in the Dark” sounded very interesting: a computer adventure game inspired by H.P. Lovecraft.

Well, I'm still not impressed. The sad thing about most computer adventures is that while graphics, sound and animation have all taken great leaps forward, almost no one has written a good story or a good *game*. Titles such as Sierra Online's *King's Quest* and this game are nothing better

than old-style text adventures dressed up. The game amounts to the same old crap: “Take the key. Unlock the door. Push the button. Retrieve the crown.” This is a story? This is an adventure?

“Alone in the Dark” is very appealing on first look. The box art is beautiful, and the graphics of the game are fantastic. The action revolves around moving your character through an old house full of traps, monsters, and items. The game's innovation is that you see the action from a variety of “camera angles,” meaning that some rooms are “shot” from a low perspective, some from a high perspective, thus adding the same kind of feel and tension many movies achieve through their camerawork. However, these different angles are all pre-determined. You can not see the same thing from different angles, which means that the thirteenth time you move through the sinister hallway the effect isn't very exciting.

The story places you in the attic of this house, trying to retrieve certain documents about the former owner's nefarious history. That's really all you need to know. The game amounts to the same tired old cheesy problem-solving — to defeat one creature, for instance, you have to find a mirror and place it in the arms of a nearby statue. This, of course, makes the creature die screaming. Huh?

Yes, that's right. It's another collection of frustrating and illogical puzzles with nothing resembling a story at work. If you've played one game like this (*King's Quest V*, another pretty-graphics yawner, is a good example), you've played them all. Somehow it was more fun when you typed GET ROCK and THROW FISH and had no pictures. Then, you were clearly solving a puzzle. Games such as “Alone in the Dark” promise an entire world to explore with lots of detail and freedom of exploration, but they fail to deliver.

Oh yeah. The game *does* have elements of Lovecraft/Mythos stuff including some familiar monsters, but they could just as easily be orcs or goblins or whatever. What a surprise!

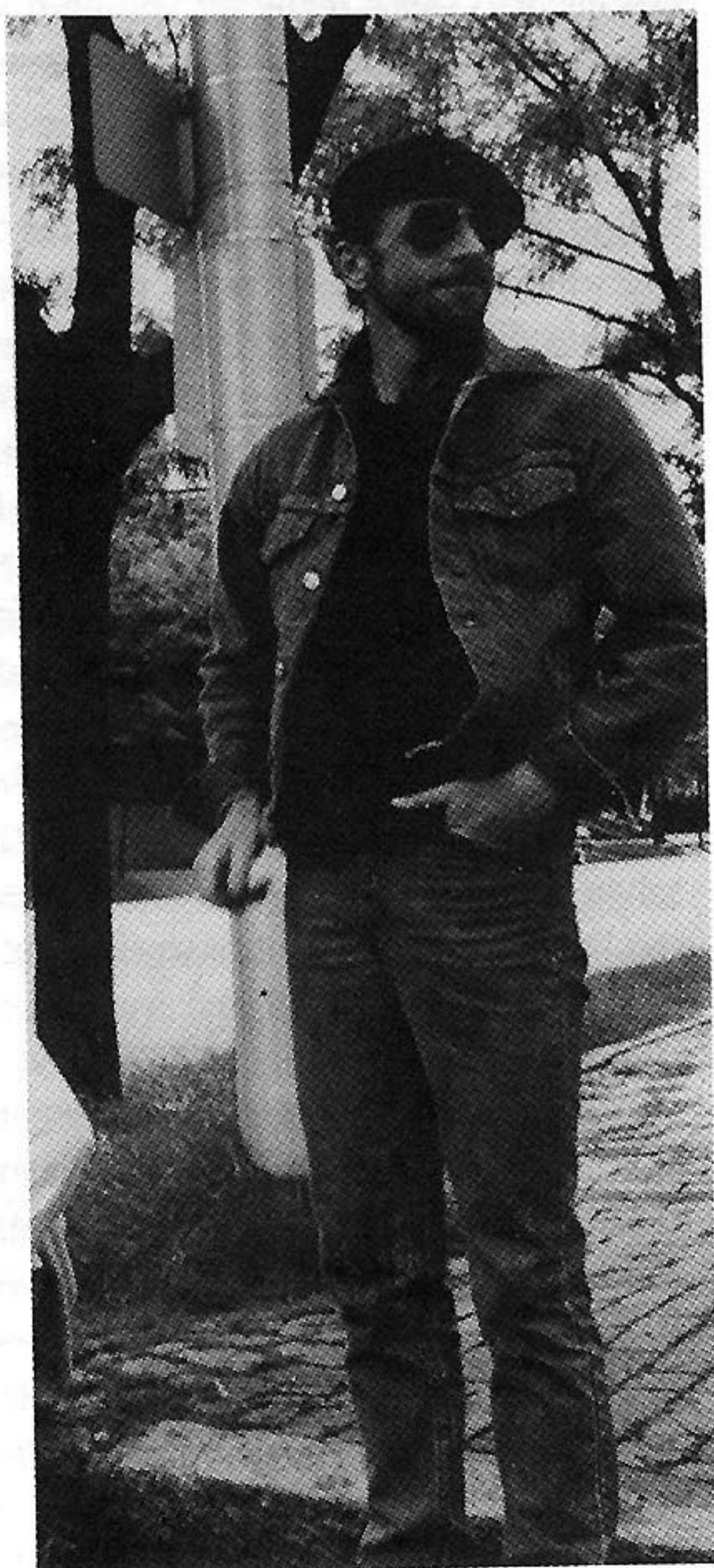
“Alone in the Dark” rates 4 phobias for its original graphics and animation, but that's all it's got going for it. Bleh.

continued on page 33

Call of Cthulhu's

high PRIEST OF FEAR

an interview with Keith Herber



Kevin A. Ross

You simply can't follow *Call of Cthulhu* and not be familiar with Keith Herber or his works. It's flat out impossible. Since his first Chaosium book was published way back in 1984, no one has written more material for the game. He has written *Fungi from Yuggoth* (reprinted with additional scenarios in *Curse of Cthulhu*), *Spawn of Azathoth*, *Trail of Tsathoggua*, *Return to Dunwich*, and the source material and scenarios for *Arkham Unveiled* (arguably the best book anyone's written for the game — period); contributed scenarios or source material for *Dreamlands*, *Cthulhu Now*, *At Your Door*, *Mansions of Madness*, *Blood Brothers*, 5th edition *Call of Cthulhu*, *Tales of the Miskatonic Valley*, the 5th edition *Keeper's Kit*, *The 1920s Investigator's Companions Volumes I and II*, and *The Keeper's Compendium*; and edited *Mansions of Madness*, *Rogue Mistress* (for Stormbringer), *Kingsport: The City in the Mists*, *Tales of the Miskatonic Valley*, *The Stars Are Right!*, *Escape from*

Innsmouth, *Adventures in Arkham Country*, *The 1920s Investigator's Companion Volumes I and II*, *The Keeper's Compendium*, and *The King of Chicago*.

But it's not just through sheer quantity that Keith Herber should be recognized. He has repeatedly shown himself to have a firm grasp of the world-view of H.P. Lovecraft. This has come through in the books he has written and, for three and a half years, in the many books he edited as Chaosium's chief editor of the *Call of Cthulhu* line.

Unfortunately, in May of 1993 the ugly spectre of "creative differences" reared its head, and Keith was fired as full-time editor. He still edits books for Chaosium in a freelance capacity, but he has other things on his mind now as well.

But who is this beret-festooned guy anyway? Well, for starters, he's 45 years old, born January 3, 1949 in Detroit, Michigan — where, according to a T-shirt I once saw at GenCon, "The weak are killed and eaten." Keith spent 40 years in Detroit and Ann Arbor, so I guess that by "T-shirt logic" he must be pretty rough around the edges. He's got a lovely wife of

24 years, Sharon, and a 21 year old son, Erik. Keith and Sharon moved to San Francisco in 1989 when Keith came aboard Chaosium as the editor of the *Call of Cthulhu* line.

I thought it was time the public heard more about the man who's been driving *Call of Cthulhu* for the past few years, and whose influence has been felt on it far longer than that. Keith and I attended NecronomiCon in Danvers, Massachusetts this past August. This conference was devoted to Lovecraft and his Mythos, and was appropriately held not far from where HPL set his fictional Arkham. We in fact stayed in Salem, in the 300+ year old Stephen Daniels House, a maddeningly complex building filled to its non-Euclidean attic with antiques.

This somehow seemed the ideal place to talk with Keith about *Call of Cthulhu*, H.P. Lovecraft, the horror genre, and the fascinating man that is Keith Herber himself. So in a shady backyard garden acrawl with affectionate cats, we had this little talk...

Ross: Okay, let's get the rough stuff outta the way first: why did Chaosium fire you?

Herber: I'm still not sure. It was rather sudden and unexpected. The last time I talked to Greg Stafford he said there was some sort of misunderstanding and we'd have to talk about it.

Ross: Is there any chance you'll be going back?

Herber: I don't think it's *that* big a misunderstanding. I seriously doubt that that's what anyone wants.

Ross: You edited *Call of Cthulhu* for three and a half years. What do you think you brought to the game? I can certainly see a difference in the quality of the books in that time, but what specific changes were you responsible for?

Herber: I think one of the things that bothered me most about the line was the lack of any sort of "roots" for the milieu. It seemed that most of the scenarios had little or no connection with one another, and that there was no real consistency to the world. Neither was the Mythos developed, nor the Lovecraft world. Too often the plots involved earth-shaking adventures. Too many "save the world"

scenarios.

The Lovecraft Country series tried to remedy this by providing a realistic New England milieu (Lovecraft-styled, of course) where smaller sorts of stories could be told. Although not marketed or promoted as well as I would have liked, I think the series provides something rather unique in gaming. There have been few series of this scope so closely inter-linked. The descriptions of Lovecraft's towns are also quite true to the fiction, I think.

At any rate, the series provided investigators with places to live and work, friends to make, and a familiar place for adventures to occur. One of Lovecraft's tenets was that horror was more effective when it suddenly intruded upon the mundane, the normal, the familiar. Lovecraft Country tried to create a homey, comfortable world where the horror was a little more personal. Aside from that, I think I tried to treat the subject seriously. Real horror is a serious subject and deserves to be treated as such. We made human values more important, I think, emphasizing the real horror of some of the situations.

Ross: I've heard you say that *Call of Cthulhu* is the only "real" horror game on the market. What do you mean? What about *Chill*, *Dark Conspiracy*, *Vampire*, and the like?

Herber: *Call of Cthulhu* is a "horror game." *Chill* and *Dark Conspiracy* are "hero" games. *Cthulhu* explores dark mysteries, and is filled with terrifying revelations about the universe around you. *Chill* and others of the ilk encourage the "hero-mentality" where players are expected to defeat the evil. *Cthulhu* tells you the evil is far bigger than you'd guessed or could even imagine, and, in the end, says that there really is no evil at all. *Vampire* does explore this dark side, but from a substantially different viewpoint. Consequently, I think that *Cthulhu* stands alone in the role-playing industry. It's the only game that does what it does.

Ross: On the topic of "dark roleplaying," one large gaming company seems to be leading a campaign against such games. Any thoughts?

Herber: You must mean TSR. I read an article by, I think, Roger Moore, some-time back, taking a swipe at *Cthulhu*,

Shadowrun, and I forget what else. I wasn't sure why *Cthulhu* was lumped in with some of the games he mentioned, and noted that after dragging it into the article, never again mentioned it—although he was quick to offer examples from all the other games he'd listed. I think that it must have something to do with corporate policy. I know that TSR had at one time put a lot of work into a horror game called *R.I.P.* Then it was suddenly canceled and this "anti-dark game" campaign instituted.

First off, I think it was ludicrous to even mention *Cthulhu* in this context. I don't think any other game on the market has offered more in the way of truly ethical choices in its scenarios and world setting. The CoC world is the real world, with the fantastic lurking off somewhere in the background. Characters don't fall into simple categories of good or evil but, like real human beings, exhibit a mixture of the two, and define themselves as they go along by their thoughts and actions. Although I know TSR likes to hold up *Dungeons & Dragons* as an example of "good, clean fun" where players are encouraged to play "good" characters, I find the idea of labeling entire races of beings "evil" then proceeding to slaughter them whenever possible somehow repugnant. Didn't Hitler operate on a similar theory? Although I doubt that this was ever TSR's intention, I don't see anything particularly enlightened about this philosophy.

Ross: Yeah, but *Call of Cthulhu* contains a fair amount of graphic gore and often worse. How do you justify what some might call "excesses"?

Herber: We've never really pushed the envelope as far as we could — but that's not the point. In the three and a half years I spent at Chaosium I don't remember ever getting a letter that complained about content being too graphic, or too horrible. Someone's mother sent back a copy of *Thieves' World*, saying she thought it was too randy for her young son, but no real complaints about *Cthulhu*.

The fact of the matter is that nothing we've published can't be outstripped by real life. In a world that routinely produces Jeffrey Dahmers and John Gacys it's hard to imagine what we could do to

offend. No author has sent me anything as frightening as some of the things I've read about in books on crime and/or human psychology. Real life is infinitely more unsettling, I'm afraid. Games and stories are only pale ghosts of the real truth.

Ross: I know your reading tastes are fairly sophisticated. You always mentioned looking for more "literary" scenarios. Time and time again horror authors urge prospective writers to read outside the genre. What do you think fledgling writers can learn from the masters?

Herber: I think writers should always be reading better material than they are currently writing. A lot of authors get by without it, but the standouts—Lovecraft, Howard, Lieber, Smith—all were voracious readers. I'm not sure what you mean by "masters." I think everyone has their own opinion on that. I don't care much for Dickens, Austen, and the like. I prefer the more psychologically oriented authors like Dostoyevsky, Camus, Steinbeck. They're probably not as polished as some, but they write with the utmost sincerity, and I think that's what really counts. But I read mostly history—of all sorts—but also psychology, crime, or damn near anything that strikes my fancy. I prefer non-fiction to fiction because real stories are infinitely more compelling than even the best fiction. It's from real life that authors draw events and connections, and then reproduce them in literary form—condensed and "highlighted" so to speak—to make their point. Hemingway felt compelled to live through his stories, but wide reading can substitute for even the most prosaic life.

Many good books are more challenging to read than the average horror story, but the exercise is good even if you have trouble making it through. The more you read Shakespeare, the easier it gets—and your writing will only improve, if only by association.

The worst shortcoming of submitting authors—in my thinking, anyway—was bad characterization. Most first submissions contain villains and protagonists of the sketchiest, most stereotypical types: innocent boobs without a clue in the world,

thick-headed and/or sadistic cops, villains lusting after "power." We discovered that CoC was one game where you could do more than this. Like I was saying, our world is a very real world, with real people, etc. The best villains—and presumably the best scenarios—are about real people faced with real problems. The only thing wrong with these people is the method they've chosen to solve their problems. We've had widowers maddened with grief trying to resurrect deceased wives, defrocked priests trying to bring about a better world through raising kidnapped children in harmony with deep ones, nuns living out vile sexual fantasies in the Dreamlands, and a host of other interesting concepts. Although the player-characters may be revolted by the activities of such characters, they empathize enough that simply blowing away the "bad guy"

"I spent only a short time on full active duty: seven months. Three court-martials, no convictions: honorable discharge. Overall, I consider it a success."

doesn't always sit right. I like scenarios without easy answers: scenarios that pose ethical and moral questions along with providing adventure and mystery.

Surprisingly enough, most authors, once encouraged, immediately respond to the idea that they can write something better. It's as though they purposely try to write badly, because that's what's expected of a roleplaying scenario. But that's part of the general negative self-image prevalent even in the industry. None of us are sure if what we're doing has any real significance or merit. Consequently, most scenario authors write in a manner that almost makes fun of their subject. It's safer than writing down what you really feel. People are hesitant to put themselves on the line a little bit. But they forget that Shakespeare, Mozart, and Dostoyevsky all wrote for the popular market. It's the fact that they really tried to say something that has made them famous, not the format or media they used.

Ross: For someone who claims to have flunked out of high school, your tastes are pretty eclectic. Perhaps you'd like to finally come clean with the ugly truth about your education.

Herber: Well, I actually did graduate from high school—but only just barely. Right up until the last minute they were threatening to flunk me in Band, keeping me from getting the credit I needed. They wanted me to do something to make up for it, but I wasn't listening. But since it was 1967, and with 400,000 men in Nam they finally decided that I was worth more as meat in Southeast Asia than I was hanging around a school any longer. They decided to graduate me anyway.

Ross: You didn't attend college?

Herber: No. I hated school. I used to flunk English regularly. Even the threat of immediate induction into the army and the war wasn't enough to convince me to stay in school any longer.

Ross: You were drafted?

Herber: No, I dodged that as well. Like our illustrious ex-vice-president, I joined the Reserves and avoided the "big green latrine." I spent only a short time on full active duty: seven months. Three court-martials, no convictions: honorable discharge. Overall, I consider it a success.

Ross: Since we're already rooting around in your seedy past, I bet most people don't know you were formerly a musician—a bass player—or that at one time you drove a taxi. Fill folks in on this and then tell us how this guy came to write for *Call of Cthulhu*.

Herber: After the Navy I started playing bass with some friends. I'd had musical training in school so I picked up the new instrument fairly quickly. There was enough work around the area that I was eventually able to quit my day job and play full time. I was never in a band that hit it real big, but worked for years in dozens of rock, blues, and jazz groups, playing electric and string bass. I got to meet and work with a few stars from time to time which, in retrospect, have to be the highlights.

Ross: Bonnie Raitt and Dr. John you've mentioned to me. And Mitch Ryder.

Herber: And Bo Diddley, Luther Allison, and some others. I also got to meet

a lot of "names" sharing the bill at concerts and festivals: John Mayall, the Temptations, Martin Mull, Big Walter Horton—a bunch of others. We toured through Detroit, Chicago, and much of the Midwest. You start crossing paths with everybody.

Dr. John was one of the most interesting. He turned me on to a book called "Holy Blood, Holy Grail" that provided me with the underlying theme for Fungi from Yuggoth. He had a hard-bound copy of the book with about a thousand book marks sticking out of it, and spent most of a day at an outdoor festival in Kalamazoo, Michigan studying it and showing me all these weird connections the book expounded.

Ross: Something I've been wondering about for a long time and never cleared up: why the nickname "Doc" Herber?

Herber: That's an old blues name. I used to work with a drummer who did a lot of talking for the band. At some point every night we'd bring it way down and he'd introduce the band, making up terrible lies about us as he went along. Martin started claiming I had a "Ph.D. in Bassology" and the "Doc" name just sort of stuck. It's only been used now and then on publications but it's the only name a good many people know me by.

Ross: In a previous interview you mentioned being inspired at an early age by genre films. Any particular ones spring to mind? You've cited Ray Harryhausen as a particular influence.

Herber: My earliest memories of movies were the weird films my Dad would take my Mother and I to see at drive-ins—big back in the 50s. I remember seeing things like *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, *Forbidden Planet*, and the original *Invasion of the Body-Snatchers* at a very early age, when the movies were in first release. Some of them scared me to death—particularly the body-snatchers—and I'd have all sorts of nightmares, but I didn't complain much about it because I wanted to go see more. I saw a lot of horror movies in those days—then Universal released all the old *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *Werewolf*, and *Mummy* movies to television. I was there to buy the first issues of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* when the

magazine debuted. I was deep into it at an early age.

Harryhausen was a particular influence. Although not horror, *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* was a real influence. I'd seen *King Kong* and been fascinated by the techniques used to animate him. Harryhausen was doing the same thing—only much better. Around the age of twelve I made several films myself, including—now that I think of it—a forerunner to *Jurassic Park* with little clay dinosaurs running around on a table-top set, eating automobiles, fighting, bleeding red Testor's model paint, and slowly melting under the hot lights. For a long time I wanted to be an animator.

Ross: Getting back to writers: Who are some of your favorites? I know you don't care much for most contemporary horror writers.

"...HPL is probably doomed to, at best, a minor niche. It's unlikely that the literary establishment will ever take him seriously..."

Herber: I mentioned some "straight" writers earlier. Lovecraft, without a doubt, is far and away my favorite horror writer. Some of Stephen King's early books seemed good at the time, as did early Clive Barker. Both seemed to lose a little bit as time went on. I still look back to HPL, Howard, and Smith for "reliable" weird fiction. I've read a number of contemporary best-sellers lately. The only one of the bunch that seemed to stand out was Thomas Harris. I thought *Silence of the Lambs* was a really good book. The movie was fun, too. I read LeCarre's *Spy Who Came In from the Cold* and thought it was really good. But I don't know what he's been doing lately. I don't know, it seems like horror writers get away with being the worst writers of the bunch.

Ross: Why did Lovecraft "stick out" and become such a strong influence on you?

Herber: Who knows? For the same reasons that he still reaches out and grabs

certain people. He knew how to push people's buttons in subtle ways. He evokes real strong feelings of attraction-repulsion. Most who read Lovecraft are not without an opinion about him. They are either fascinated and read more, or put-off by him and actively dislike him. This is the sign of an effective writer.

Lately—the last decade or so—I've been doing more serious study of Lovecraft and found more to admire about him than simply his stories. He's complex, lived a life fraught with contradictions, struggled the whole time—but never gave up trying to achieve some sort of understanding with a hostile world. His writing can be criticized but, again, he was always attempting to do something more with his stories. His reach more often exceeded his grasp. I admire the visionary, idealistic quality of that approach. Most of my favorite books—*Crime and Punishment*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, for instance—can be judged technical failures. But that's not the point. Many of the most renowned works are fragmentary or uncompleted. I'm thinking of Coleridge's *Kublai Khan*, or almost any novel by Kafka.

Ross: Considering the conference we've just attended, what effect do you think the game has had on Lovecraft's readership? The big question at the con was whether we were trivializing old HPL.

Herber: Well that was the big question that *wasn't* asked at the con, right? I think that's long been an issue—perhaps more with us than with some of the scholars. The fact of the matter is: Yes, the game does trivialize Lovecraft. But so what? So do the films, and the comic books—and both of these probably reach larger markets than the game does. But anyone who's spent some time with the game realizes that we don't deal with it lightly (well, sometimes, I suppose). The term "game" is misleading, especially to someone who's never "played." Roleplaying *Call of Cthulhu* has little or nothing to do with actual game-playing. There's no competition, and nothing to win or lose. Play is a cooperative effort and more than anything an exercise in improvisational, joint-storytelling. Storytelling is an ancient practice and modern RPG's are simply the latest way of doing it.

The fact of the matter is that HPL is probably doomed to, at best, a minor niche. It's unlikely that the literary establishment will ever take him seriously. The horror story is little regarded in these circles, and HPL's lifetime of writing for the pulps just about destroys any chance for serious recognition. I'm not saying that he's not worth serious study and attention, only that there will always be a big question mark next to his name.

Ross: Here's a loaded question for you: how much more CoC material can we expect to see from Keith Herber?

Herber: It's hard to say. Not much for a while I would guess. After fifty scenarios I'm worrying that I'm about to run stale. I think some time away from the situation would be a healthy thing. I'd like to try my hand at some other projects.

Ross: So what else are you up to? I know you've started a vampire novel for White Wolf. But there have been rumors...

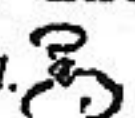
Herber: I'd like to write fiction. I really enjoy writing for *Call of Cthulhu*, but I'd like to see if I couldn't find a bigger audience. It seems that you can only reach so many people through the game. The number of people able to dedicate enough time to the game is pretty limited. There's a lot more readers out there than gamers. Like I said: it's all storytelling, it's all the same.

There's a number of other projects up in the air. I've been contracted to write the Tremere Clanbook for White Wolf's *Vampire* game and I'll probably do a San Francisco sourcebook for their World of Darkness series. Fiction plans are being kicked about, but nothing I can talk about. I have an epic trilogy set in a "swords and gunpowder" Gothic world that I'd really like to write. I might edit a complete collection of Lovecraft fiction and poetry for Chaosium, and I'm sort of bound to write an HPL biography. But then again, I might be playing bass around town again, just to make sure all the ends keep meeting. I met an old piano-player friend who just blew into town not long ago.

Ross: Even though you're no longer the editor of the CoC line, what advice would you give to authors looking to get published by Chaosium? What sorts of things did you look for?

Herber: The best advice I can give is "have patience." Even under the best of circumstances few authors get published right away. A year's time is not at all unusual — even if your first submission is accepted right off the bat. Other than that, it's really hard to say. I'm not sure what plans the company has for the future of the game or who will be editing it full-time. Most first-time authors don't realize that an editor is hired for his taste and style, and that he'll choose manuscripts that suit him and what he thinks are good for the publication. It's natural to assume that there is some sort of arbitrary, objective scale by which submissions are measured and judged as to whether they are fit for publication or not, but this isn't true. It's really a personal decision. Get in touch with the editor, find out what he's looking for, and try to supply it.



Editor Lynn Willis (whose credits include *At Your Door*, *Fatal Experiments*, and *Horror on the Orient Express*) is now responsible for the CoC line and prospective freelancers should contact him for information about writing or drawing for *Call of Cthulhu*. 

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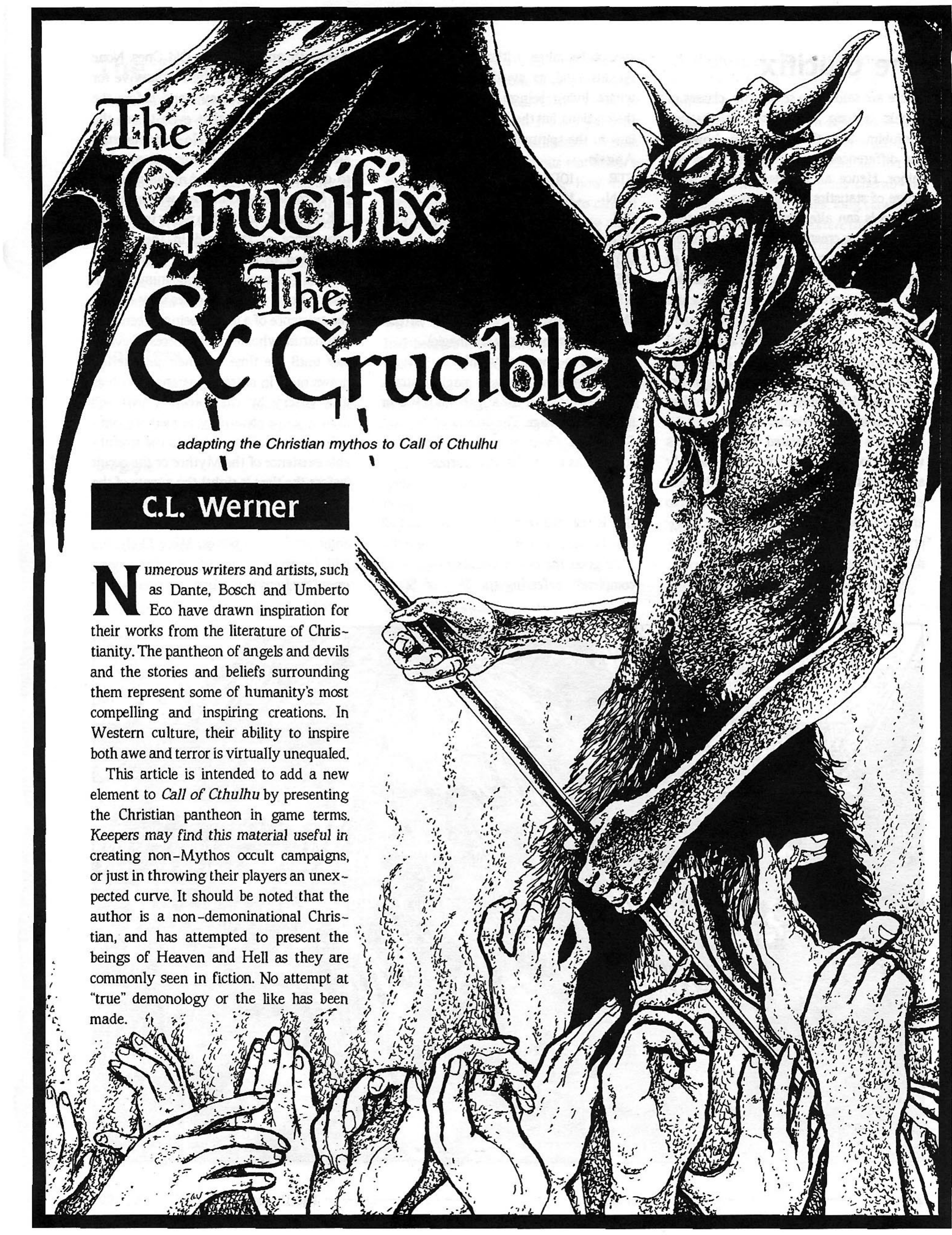
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The Crucifix & The Crucible

adapting the Christian mythos to Call of Cthulhu

C.L. Werner

Numerous writers and artists, such as Dante, Bosch and Umberto Eco have drawn inspiration for their works from the literature of Christianity. The pantheon of angels and devils and the stories and beliefs surrounding them represent some of humanity's most compelling and inspiring creations. In Western culture, their ability to inspire both awe and terror is virtually unequaled.

This article is intended to add a new element to *Call of Cthulhu* by presenting the Christian pantheon in game terms. Keepers may find this material useful in creating non-Mythos occult campaigns, or just in throwing their players an unexpected curve. It should be noted that the author is a non-demoninational Christian, and has attempted to present the beings of Heaven and Hell as they are commonly seen in fiction. No attempt at "true" demonology or the like has been made.

The Crucifix

There are said to be seven sub-classes of angels (among these are the thrones, cherubim, and the seraphim), however the differences between these types are minor. Hence all angels have the same range of statistics in the game.

Angels can alter their shape into that of any living creature or become invisible at will. In their true form, they appear as fine, pale-skinned humanoids with feathery wings sprouting from their backs and halos of light about their heads. An angel's features are at once those of a beautiful woman and a handsome man. Since they are beyond the physical world, angels are not defined in terms of their sex unless they assume a particular form.

Angels are motivated by the Lord's will and exist only to serve Him. The only angels that deviated from this motivation exist with Satan in the pits of Hell. No angel can be corrupted. While they can—on occasion—be destroyed, they are immediately reborn in Heaven.

In battle, angels employ swords that

cannot be taken without their consent. Angels tend to avoid battle on Earth where living beings might be hurt by their actions, but they are ferocious guardians in the spiritual plane.

Angels

STR 10D6+3

CON 10D6+4

SIZ 4D6

INT 10D6+20

POW *

DEX 5D6

APP 9D6

Weapons: Sword 95%, 1D10+7 (affects creatures harmed only by magic)

A armor: An angel may only be hurt by magical means. A given magical attack must deplete all of the angel's hit points or it does no damage. The attacks of demons, Great Old Ones and Outer Gods are counted as magic for this purpose.

God

God is the creator of the universe and all that is, was, or shall ever be. God is ultimate good, the only adversary capable of completely defeating the likes of Satan,

Azathoth, and the Great Old Ones. None alive are powerful enough to survive for even an instant if they stand before the Lord. Some believe that even to see the face of God is to perish. No game statistics are provided for the Lord, as it is pointless to define omnipotence. Anything which the Lord desires to happen will happen.

Keepers are advised to never include an appearance of the Lord in their game. According to tradition, the Lord works "behind the scenes," leaving humanity to find their own way. Keepers may hint at the existence of a divine being of benevolent nature who keeps the forces of evil at bay until the time for their unfettering draws nigh. In extreme instances, such as if a victory by the forces of evil will destroy game continuity, or alert the general populace of the world to the irrefutable existence of the Mythos or the occult (before the time is right), the agents of the Lord may well appear and give aid to those combatting the mad villains or even enter battle themselves. More likely, aid will be given indirectly. As the saying goes, "the Lord works in mysterious ways."



The Crucible

That saying also serves to explain why there is a much greater variety of infernal beings in literature than there are beatific ones. Where the powers of good work behind the scenes, leaving humanity to find the right path, the powers of evil are shown to involve themselves much more directly in the affairs of humans. A number of such creatures follow, beginning with earthbound monstrosities and moving onwards into the realm of the truly diabolic.

Monsters

The infernal forces include several that are mostly earthbound, and occur most frequently in supernatural literature.

Gargoyle

Description: Gargoyles range in shapes and sizes but are generally humanoid in appearance with reptilian hides, beaked mouths, horns, and clawed hands. Some may possess wings or fins. Others may have tusks or frills. Regardless of shape, all gargoyles are hard as stone and have a stony look about them.

In ages past, as the Church rose to oppose and destroy the pagan religions, Satan sent spies to watch this new threat

to evil. These spies were dæmons and they possessed the stone idols of the abandoned pagan religions. Under cover of night, they climbed to the steeples and rooftops of European cathedrals. Church officials took the mysterious statues as a sign from God and, seeing how they seemed to frighten peasants into church, had masons carve figures rather like them. These, too, were soon possessed by dæmons and so the gargoyles were born, for not even exorcisms could drive out the dæmons—they had become trapped within their stone bodies. The dæmons had become mortal and so lost much of their power, but no longer were unable to tread holy ground.

Notes: Most gargoyles dwell outside (on) churches or cathedrals, but some live in small packs in graveyards and other sinister locales.

STR 5D6
CON 5D6
SIZ 1D6-4D6
POW 4D6
INT 3D6
DEX 2D6-4D6

Move: Fly, swim, run, leap, burrow, or crawl 12"/round

Weapons: Claws 50%, 1D4; Bite 30%, 1D8

Armor: 4 points of stony hide

Spells: None

SAN: 0/1D6, or up to 1D3/1D10

Imp

Description: An imp is a small sprite-like creature given to witches and wizards by the Devil to serve as their familiar. In their true form, imps are hideous cherub-like creatures with bat-wings, long claws, and beady little eyes. More often, though, they appear as a solid black animal such as a cat or crow. Imps serve to heighten the evil and malevolence of a wizard or witch, leading their soul deeper into Hell.

When an imp is slain, it leaves only a pile of ash that reeks of human excrement. Imps are able to become invisible at will but must be visible to attack.

STR 3D6
CON 3D6
SIZ 1D6
INT 3D6
POW 2D6+6
DEX 4D6

Move: 9"/round, 10"/round while flying

Weapons: Dagger 80%, 1D4 + Poison (POT 14); Bite/Claw 35%, 1D3

Armor: None, but only enchanted weapons harm an imp.

Skills: Hide 70%, Move Quietly 90%

Spells: 1 non-Mythos spell

SAN: in natural form, 0/1D3, otherwise, none.



Hell-hound

Description: Large black dogs, often mastifs, with eyes like twin embers, hell-hounds were (are) common in Great Britain and Ireland. They would often appear singly or in packs to travelers upon the roads at night and chase them for hours. These animals are said to serve as harbingers of tragedy and woe.

STR 3D6

CON 4D6

SIZ 2D6

INT 2D6

POW 4d6

Weapons: Bite 45%, 1D6 POW drain if POW vs. POW successful

Armor: Only spells harm hell hounds

Spells: None

SAN: 1/1D10

Fiends

We now reach the dæmons and devils, the fallen angels of old. Dæmons, like ghosts and wraiths, are purely spectral beings as the hell hounds are. Dæmons may assume physical, material forms through possession and control of a living victim (if successful in a POW vs. POW struggle with the victim). Unless otherwise stated, all fiends are subject to exorcism and may be summoned by diabolists.

Lesser Dæmons

Description: These are the weakest of dæmons, not even truly fallen angels, but rather, native creatures of Hell. Dæmons have various forms, but always are man-sized or smaller. Some shapes include dis-

embodied heads, giant insects, or foul tentacled worms. These creatures are the ones most likely to be summoned when calling forth dæmons and are usually easily controlled. When exorcised, lesser dæmons are utterly destroyed, for once in a corporeal form or tied to a location or object they perish if forced to leave. They may possess a single human host for a number of minutes equal to their POW.

When not in a human host form, these troublesome fiends are usually tied to a location or object, and may cause unnerving noises a number of times per week equal to their POW (i.e. voices, footfalls, gunshots, etc.). Dæmons of this sort may change hosts with no penalties (i.e. no destruction unless they are forced out).

STR 3D6

CON 4D6

SIZ 1D6-3D6

INT 3D6

POW 2D6

DEX 3D6

Move: 6"/round, 10"/round when flying.

Weapons: Claws 70%, 1D6

Armor: Only hurt by enchanted weapons

Spells: None

SAN: 0/1D6, or up to 1/1D10

Average Dæmons

Description: These creatures constitute the hordes of Hell; the legions of fallen angels and damned souls who serve Lucifer. They have the power to appear as immaterial visible spectres. When they do appear, dæmons are usually in the form of human-like beings with black

skin, clawed toes and fingers, vicious fangs, long horns, barbed tail, and bat-like wings jutting out from their backs. These creatures are most commonly found in the company of witches and diabolists, and every coven will be under the guidance of an average dæmon.

Average dæmons may cause noises and visual manifestations at will but must spend a magic point when moving an object remotely (up to 5 lbs.). Average dæmons may become invisible at will. They may possess a human for a number of hours equal to their POW. When exorcised, they are dispatched to Hell, never to return.

The attack of an average dæmon when not hurling an object or in possession of a person (average dæmons rarely possess objects or dwellings) is a POW drain. A POW vs. POW struggle is made between the dæmon and its prey. Success for the dæmon causes the victim to lose 1D6 POW.

STR 4D6

CON 4D6

SIZ 3D6

INT 5D6

POW 5D6

DEX 4D6

Move: 6"/round, 12"/round when flying

Weapons: Small Object 60%, 1 point; Claw (incorporeal form) 60%, 1D6 POW drain; Claw (corporeal form) 60%, 1D6

Armor: only hurt by enchanted weapons

Spells: 1D3 non-Mythos spells

SAN: 1/1D8



Greater Dæmons

Description: Aside from the devils themselves, the greater dæmons are the most powerful force of the occult. These foul monsters include such terrors as Balor and Baphomet in their ranks. Some, like Zagan, Cimeries, Vuall and Gomory even command legions of average dæmons (a legion is 6666 dæmons). The dæmon Bileth is said to command as many as 85 legions.

Greater dæmons rarely possess persons and never possess objects. Rather, they dispatch average dæmons for such tasks. When they do possess human beings (up their POW in days), they always act callously and seem to draw attention to themselves, daring someone to exorcise them. When exorcised, a greater dæmon simply returns to Hell for 666 days before he can again return, as powerful as ever (though he may never possess that particular person again).

Greater dæmons appear as huge versions of average dæmons, often with the heads of wolves, goats, or toads. Greater dæmons are able to move objects up to 5 lbs., become invisible, cause apparitions, and cause noises at will. They are also able to become material for a number of rounds equal to 1/2 their POW every week of Earthly activity.

Greater dæmons drain 1D10 POW in their incorporeal claw attack if they succeed in a POW vs. POW struggle with

their victim.

STR 10D6
CON 10D10
SIZ 6D6
INT 10D6
POW 10D6
DEX 4D6

Move: 9"/round, 12"/round when flying
Weapons: Object 35%, 1 point; Claw (incorporeal form) 90%, 1D10 POW; Claw 90%, 4D6; Bite 80%, 10D6

Armor: 6 and only hurt by enchanted weapons

Spells: 2D10 non-Mythos spells

SAN: 1D3/1D20, or up to 1D10/1D100 for something like Balor

Guardian Dæmon

Description: Guardian dæmons are creatures granted to evil sorcerors and witches to protect their magic libraries and possessions. Guardian dæmons appear as small black animals such as cats or ravens. When they are needed to protect their master's possessions, however, they transform into larger versions of the animal they look like (a cat becomes a panther, a raven becomes a condor) and viciously attack the transgressor. Unlike other dæmons, these fiends are material and can be hurt by normal weapons.

Characteristics:

STR as per animal
CON as per animal
SIZ as per animal

INT 3d6

POW 3d6

DEX as per animal

Move: as per animal

Weapons: as per animal

Armor: 3 points of demonic energy

Spells: none

SAN: 0/1d3 when witnessing transformation

Devils

Description: Describing a devil is impossible as they may assume any form they wish. Devils are the aristocracy of Hell and as such usually command more of its forces than do greater dæmons. Each devil should be created separately as an individual being, but should always be superior in every way to a greater dæmon. Devils have all the abilities of greater dæmons except the ability to create a material form. They know every non-Mythos spell and typically have tablets or clay pots that hold extra magic points for them. They may use these points whenever and wherever they wish, but if the object is destroyed, the devil may never create a new one.

Cults: Devils have been worshipped throughout the ages by evil and backward cultures. Some of these cults still thrive and may be anywhere. Principal devils include: Belial, Moloch, Mammon, Bezebub, Asmodeus, Gamigin, Vine, and Barbas.



Satan

Description: Satan is the great "adversary" of mankind and commander-in-chief of Hell's legions. He is nearly as multi-formed as Nyarlathotep, indeed the two may actually be one and same (egads! -ed). Satan may appear as: an enormous snake, a beautiful angel, a grotesque creature with the legs and horns of a goat, bat wings, and barbed tail, a greater daemon monstrosity, a toad, a vulture, a great bipedal goat with bat wings, or a sinisterly handsome man dressed in black. In his guise as the werewolves' Lord of the Forest, he rides a black horse and wears blackened armor. Often the Lord of the Forest is attended by hell hounds and average daemons disguised as hunters. Whatever his form, Satan will use it to lead persons down the path of evil and sin in the hopes of snatching their soul.

Satan must be played very carefully, of course. He is the ultimate used-car salesman. When playing him, pervert every word to have a disastrous effect. Satan is, after all, the Prince of Lies.

Satan has all the abilities of greater daemons and may take physical, material form for up to six hours a day. Although he can drain POW without a struggle at a rate of 1d10/round, Satan prefers to let people damn themselves through infernal contracts and deals.

Cults: Satan has always had cults which have worshipped him. Today, in the 1920s and Victorian England, Satan is most likely to assume the guise of the Lord of the Forest (now appearing as a British fox

hunter) or a sinister man in black attire. Satan realizes that his more monstrous aspects in this day of reason will result in unwanted mass belief in him.

Characteristics:

STR	100
CON	150
SIZ	30 (for HP purposes, Satan may assume any size he wishes)
INT	150
POW	200
DEX	20
APP	18 (if human form is assumed)
HP	90

Armor: 20 points, and only hurt by good enchanted items

Spells: All non-Mythos and Mythos spells

SAN: People only lose SAN for seeing Satan if he wishes them to. When he does, the cost is 1D10/1D100.

Spells

If one is to bring devils into the game, one should have a way of summoning them...and exorcising them.

SUMMON DÆMON/DEVIL: This spell costs 1d20 san and no less than 6 magic points. A magic circle is drawn, inlaid with runes. An incantation is spoken and five candles (usually formed from human fat) are lit and placed in star fashion about the circle. Sometimes this spell must be cast only at certain times (such as midnight or St. George's Day). Whatever the limitations put upon the ritual, the result is the same: the stench of brimstone and sulfur

followed by the appearance of a random daemon. Roll on the following table to see what appears:

- 1 - 2 = Guardian Daemon
- 3 - 6 = Lesser Daemon
- 7 - 8 = Average Daemon
- 9 = Greater Daemon
- 0 = A Devil (but not *the* Devil)

A POW vs. POW struggle ensues between the summoned creature and the summoner (no Binding spells for daemons). Each magic point put into the spell over 6 results in a +1 to the summoner's roll. If the summoner succeeds, the daemon must perform three tasks for him, or, if it is a guardian daemon, it is bound to him as a slave. A devil will grant two requests of a summoner, usually dispatching daemons to perform the needs of fulfilling the requests.

If, however, the daemon or devil succeeds, it will rend the flesh of all present and return to Hell with the offender's soul. Even daemons pressed into service of a summoner will pervert its "master's" request so as to cause the most evil and have the least desired effect possible.

CONTACT SATAN: This spell also costs 1D20 SAN and 6 magic points, but there is no POW struggle and no guarantee that Satan will appear (if he does, it is at his whim). The ritual for the spell is like that to summon daemons but requires a blood sacrifice (a lamb or baby will suffice) or a burnt offering of lamb's flesh or baby fat. If Satan deigns to appear, he will grant any single wish of the summoner, but always so as to cause the most evil and



have the least desirable effect possible. The price, of course, is the summoner's soul, collectable at a set time (usually in seven years). Be careful when using Satan in this manner. Keep in mind that he serves his own purposes first and primarily, (i.e. a summoner wishes Cthulhu dead. Satan readily consents and shows the summoner Cthulhu reduced to a pulpy 0 Hit Points. Of course, the Great Old One simply reforms later and continues its slumber.) Wishes from Satan are always Monkey's Paw wishes.

EXORCISM: This spell costs 10 magic points and takes several hours to perform but costs no Sanity. Indeed, if successful, it will grant the Sanity bonus for defeating dæmon(s) to the caster. An exorcism results in a struggle between a dæmon and a power of good, represented by matching the dæmon's POW vs. the magic points spent in the spell.

If another Exorcism is attempted within 7 days of the first Exorcism attempt, ten more points are added to the struggle

against the dæmon. Another in seven days results in a 30 point struggle against the dæmon. Hence, after 21 days a dæmon would face 40 magic points if the exorcists had renewed the spell each of the three weeks following its original casting.

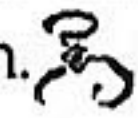
Only one exorcism may be attempted per week per possessed object or person. In the case of multiple dæmons possessing a single item, the strongest dæmon's POW must be overcome. If a human target willingly allowed himself to be possessed, the dæmon adds its human host's POW to its roll. Likewise, an unwilling human host adds his POW to the struggle against the dæmon. A bible, cross, and holy water are needed in this spell, and it must be led by an ordained Christian priest, minister, or reverend, or a Jewish Rabbi.

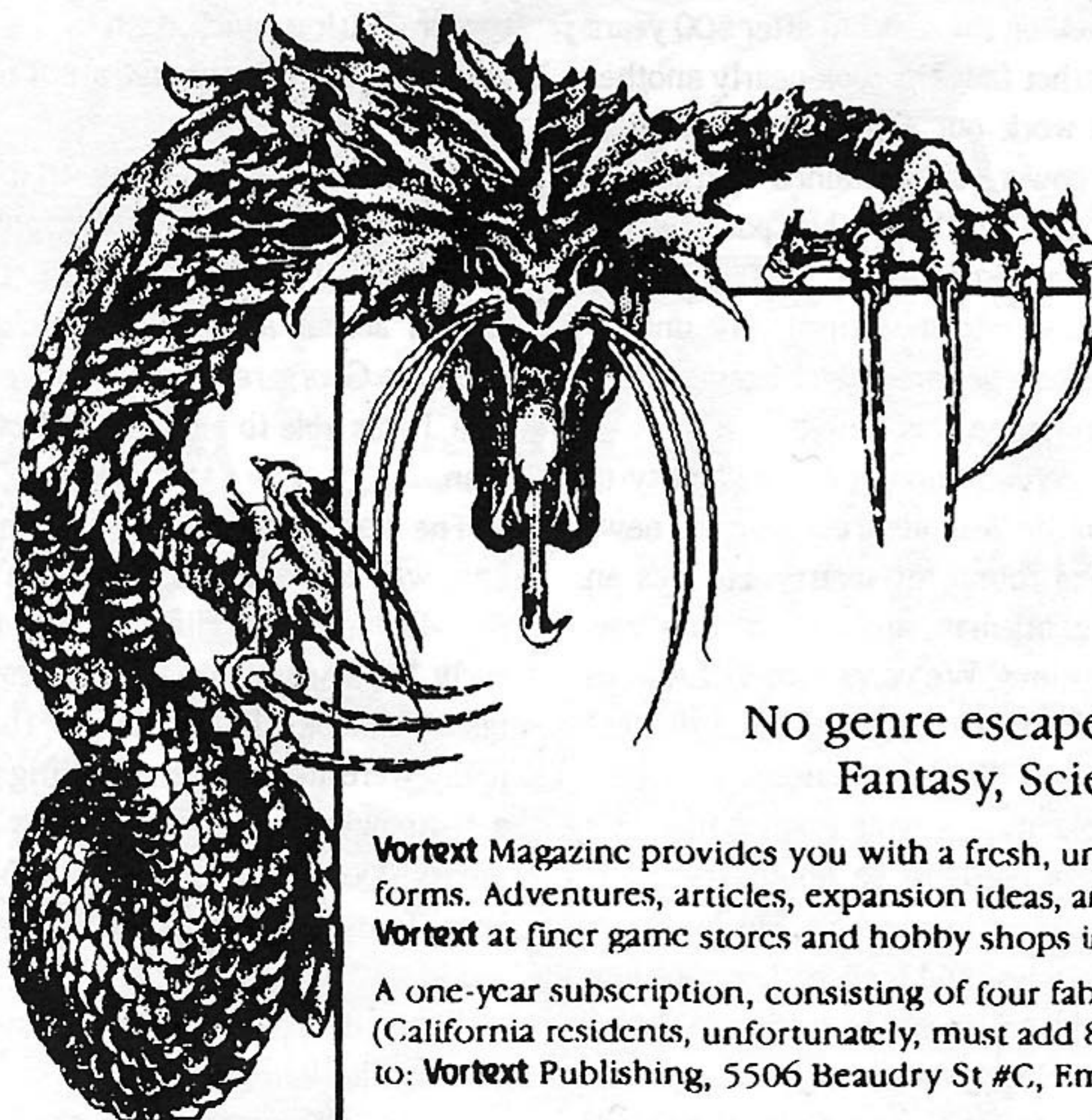
Items


Many are the ways of Mephistopheles and his minions. Many are their evils. Here is one such evil and the book of all

evils.

Wolf-skin belt: An ordinary-looking belt fashioned of hairy wolf-hide and possessed of a golden buckle, the belt is given by Satan in the guise of the Lord of the Forest to those who wish to be werewolves. The belt makes its wearer a werewolf when worn, even by day. Though the individual is like a normal werewolf in most respects, he suffers no damage while in wolf shape save from silver and the wood from an ash tree. When killed wearing the belt, the werewolf returns three nights later as a vampire. This creature may not cross running water or enter holy ground. It also has an aversion to rye, and will not pursue prey that flee into rye fields or barns with rye stored therein.

The Black Bible: Always bound in black, this volume is a blasphemous parody of the Bible. Reading the book raises the reader's Occult skill by 15%. The book costs no SAN to read but is disturbing. The spells Summon Dæmon/Devil and Contact Satan are contained within. 





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Trouble in Budapest

From the Journals of Alexander Hale, Ph.D.

C. Raymond Lewis

August 5, 1932

Budapest was ungodly hot that time of year. I was sitting in a cafe eating lunch during the hottest day of the year. In fact, it would not have surprised me if the last month had been the hottest on record.

I was not looking forward to returning to the library. Wandering among the stacks looking for a book that may or may not exist is hardly the most exciting thing I have ever done. The object of my quest was an old Jewish manuscript. Only one copy was reported to exist, and my investigations had led me here.

Even if I found it, the hardest work would be ahead of me: my Hebrew was not all that good. Fortunately, I had already made arrangements to purchase the book if I did find it, so I would be able to study it in more comfortable surroundings. Still, it would be quite a coup if I were to find the book after it had eluded scholars for centuries, and it would establish my reputation.

The book was a private study of demons done by Rabbi Benjamin Hlavek sometime during the fifteenth century. While I grinned at the thought of demons actually existing, it would fill several gaps in our knowledge of contemporary conceptions of the subject. Filling those gaps

would help historians figure out why witchcraft became such a perceived threat that it warranted the Inquisition.

After finishing my wine, I trudged back to the library. Three hours later, in a section of the library I had never been in before, I came upon a curious tome. Approximately two inches thick, one foot wide, and two feet long, it was sealed with two locks on either end, and a massive wax seal in middle. I double-checked my notes. This could be it!

I got out my magnifying glass and began to study the seal. There seemed to be a phrase on the seal, but after 500 years it was rather faded. It took nearly another hour to work out a possible translation, "Great power is contained within." I thought this a little odd, but 'power' could easily mean 'knowledge.' In fact, it had been drilled into me during my undergraduate college career (and later, as well) that knowledge was power.

I was certain enough of its identity to approach the head librarian with the news that I had found my quarry. He was an elderly gentleman, and his reaction was rather curious. We conversed in Latin as he did not speak English, and I did not speak any of the local dialects.

He told me, "If you believe that this knowledge needs to be found, then it is yours. God has a special place in His heart for the reckless and foolish." I pressed him for an explanation, but he refused to elaborate. Figuring that perhaps senility was beginning to set in, I paid him the \$1,000 and, book in hand, went back to my hotel.

Back in my hotel room, I was in a quandary. Should I unseal the book here,

or wait until I was back in the States? Though I could not take the old man at the library seriously, his warning lurked in the back of my mind. Still, after having just spent a thousand dollars, I wanted to be sure that this was indeed the book I was looking for before I went back to the States and announced my success.

While I sat and pondered my next course of action, there was a knock at my door. "Just a minute!" I shouted, and put the tome into a briefcase and stashed it in the back of the coat closet.

I went to open the door when it was smashed open by a hulking brute with a .45 caliber automatic pistol in one hand and a crowbar in the other. Behind him came two others, but for the moment I was concerned with the giant.

He stood nearly seven feet tall and looked to weigh about 300 pounds. Not much of that weight could have been fat. Judging that the odds of my successfully fighting this thug were not very good unarmed, I looked around the room for anything that could function as a weapon.

Backing across the room, the giant advancing quickly towards me, I spied my letter opener sitting on the desk in the corner. With a quick dash and a quicker prayer, it was in my hand, and I turned to face my attacker.

"Dr. Hale, I don't think that will be necessary. I am afraid Georg got a little impatient." The voice was in a clipped British accent and came from near the door. As Georg reluctantly moved to the side, I was able to examine the other two men.

The closer one, the one who had spoken, was tall and dressed in an expensive-looking suit. His hair was a rather curly brown, and his thick glasses made his eyes look slightly larger than they really were, like someone looking through a fishbowl. His companion was a short, greasy-looking tough that could have been found in almost any city in the world.

"What do you want?" I said, still brandishing the letter opener.

"I am only interested in the book," he said smoothly.

"What book?"

"Don't be coy, Dr. Hale. I want to see the

The adventures of the ever-intrepid archaeologist and investigator Dr. Alexander Hale first appeared in TUO4.

book you just found at the University."

"It isn't here."

"Must you be so difficult? You haven't left the hotel since you brought it back." The greasy tough moved over to my right. I was hemmed in by the three of them.

"Who are you, and what do you want with it?" This fellow had obviously been having me watched, and I wanted out. I slowly began to edge around to the coat closet.

"I am William Sterling, and I am a collector of unique items. I would like to purchase the book from you."

"It needs to be studied. Besides, I haven't even opened it yet. It's not for sale." I was about ten feet from the closet. So far they didn't seem to realize what I was trying to do.

The tough started to catch on and began to move in on me. It was now or never. I made a dash for the closet, but the tough was right behind me. I swung behind me with the letter opener as I reached the door, and felt it connect with something soft. He shrieked in pain behind me.

I got to the door and jerked it open. Behind me I heard Sterling yell, "Stop him!" I reached in and grabbed the case with the book in it. I was turning for the door when the world toppled and took me along for the ride. I sank drunkenly to the floor.

My head was swimming and the room was spinning, but I was able to make out Georg standing above me with the crowbar. I tried to shake it off, but the movement made my brain scream with agony. I yelled too, but I somehow made it to my feet.

Sterling approached me and picked the briefcase up off the floor. I couldn't do anything to stop him.

"What might be in here that you were willing to play the hero for?" Sterling asked with a sneer. My knees weakened, and I sank to the floor.

Sterling took the briefcase over to the desk and pulled the book out. Mumbling something to himself, he sat down and began to examine it.

The room had finally stopped spinning and I was able to regain my feet. My head

still hurt, but I could think again. "Stop. You don't know what you're doing." My voice was little more than a whisper.

Georg loomed menacingly over me, but Sterling waved him off. "Don't worry about him, he's harmless." The tough was playing with a switchblade knife, flicking the blade in and out while a dangerous grin crossed his face.

I watched with pale fear as Sterling tore the seal off.

With a nearly overwhelming stench of sulphur and an intensely bright light, I was thrown back against the wall by an unknown force. I squinted against the glare and could barely make out the book lying open on the desk. There seemed to be something climbing up out of the book. A sinister laugh sounded in the back of my mind, like some deep, dark part of me rejoicing. Impossibly, the light grew brighter, and I had to shut my eyes against this artificial sun.

Suddenly the sun winked out. Slowly, I opened my eyes to see an abomination towering above Sterling, who had been knocked out of his chair. Its head brushed



the ceiling, as did its large leathery wings. It had claws and fangs, and a tail that ended in a fork like a serpent's tongue. Its skin was a dirty shade of red, and its eyes were two pinpoints of fire.

In the back of my mind, where bone-chilling fear had not driven the scholar out, I recognized this beast to be a demon. I had seen dozens of pictures of them in various medieval manuscripts.

With an unearthly roar, he tore Sterling apart and devoured him. The tough was out the door, but Georg advanced. His pistol barked as he fired shot after shot into the beast without affect. He raised his arm to strike with the crowbar but the demon grabbed his arm and growled. I shut my eyes, but I flinched as the blood splattered me from across the room.

I opened my eyes to see him towering above me. He lifted my face with a claw

under my chin. It burned and I cried out in pain. "This is just the beginning. Welcome to Hell," he croaked.

"Oh, dear God, help me," I whispered, unconsciously crossing myself. The beast flinched. Think! I told myself. There had to be something that could counter the power of a demon.

A phrase in Hebrew came to mind, but to this day I can't remember where I learned it. I mumbled it half-remembered and the creature bellowed, "NO! I WILL NOT GO BACK! I WILL NOT LET YOU!"

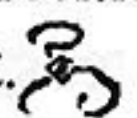
I looked up into his eyes, looked eternal damnation in the face, and shouted the phrase at the top of my voice. The burning light and the stench of sulphur returned. Shutting my eyes against the light, I heard wind rushing past my ears. Above it, I could hear the beast howling in agony.

As quickly as it had started, it was over.

The silence was that of a crypt. I opened my eyes to see the book on the table, sealed and locked. Someone was pounding on the door.

"Dr. Hale? Are you all right? It's the desk clerk!"

I picked up the book, opened the door, and rushed past the startled man. I raced down the stairs to the hotel kitchen. Shouldering aside a jabbering chef I hurled the book into the flames of the cooking fire. I heard a muffled roar as the book was consumed by the flames. With a heart heavy from the loss of the book, I took the elevator back up to deal with the clerk.

My professors had been correct: knowledge was power, but I didn't want anything to do with that kind of power. The old man was right. God must have a special place in his heart for the reckless, the foolish...and the archaeologist. 

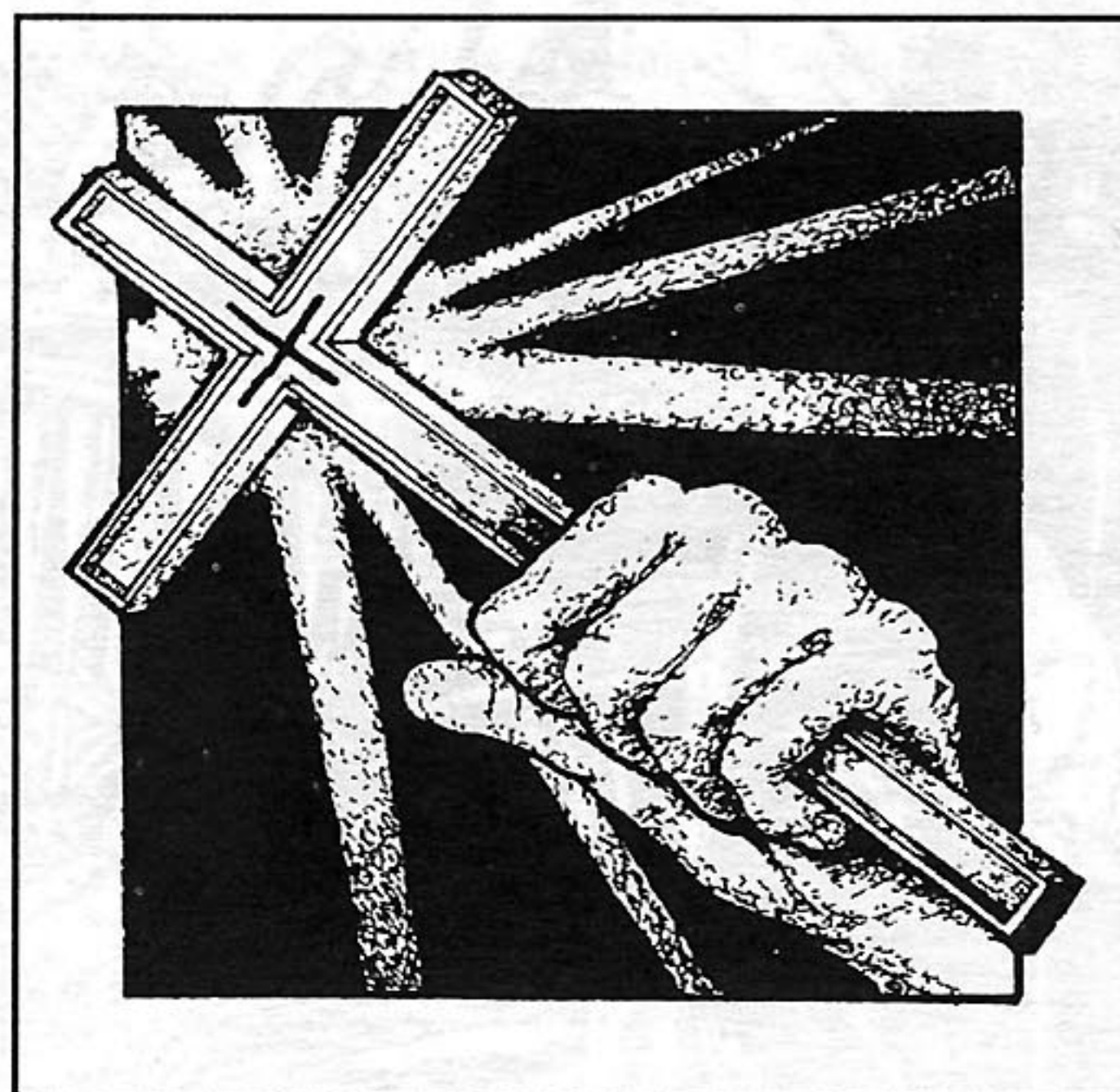
Divine Intervention for use with *Call of Cthulhu*

These rules are designed to be used with the accompanying article on demons as a balance force to the power added by including Satan and his minions in CoC. These rules are designed to work with the Judæo-Christian mythos of demons, but should work with any religion that believes in Divine Intervention. Keepers may also want to consider adding these rules to their regular campaigns to give the investigators more options to fight the fugglies without having to resort to nastier methods.

The philosophy behind the Divine Intervention rules is simple. In the modern technological age in which the investigators live, miracles are increasingly hard to identify and believe. Rather than competing with the Cult of the All-Powerful Scientist, God uses a different way to influence humanity. The result is that Divine Intervention is no longer the Biblical horde of locusts or angel of mercy. Instead, it manifests as the little things that become crucial to success. Subtlety is the name

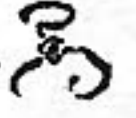
of the game.

To gain the aid of the Divine, a prayer must be made. It does not have to be intentional, as most investigators will not believe that they will get results, (at



least, not at first). A roll is made in secret by the Keeper against 1xPOW if a non-ordained believer, or 3xPOW if ordained. If a non-believer prays, there is a 5% chance that aid will be gained, however if the non-believer does not take up the

religion, aid will no longer be possible; otherwise, it will at the same chance as the non-ordained believer. With normal success, the character will be aided, but will not realize where the help came from, considering it to be 'good luck.' An Impale is obviously more powerful. The character will either gain something reusable or he will be aware somehow of where the help came from.

For example, in the preceding story, Dr. Hale (a Catholic by birth) prays and crosses himself when confronted by the demon. This is more of a habit than a direct appeal for help. The Keeper has rolled against POW and was successful; he even rolled an Impale. Not only does Dr. Hale "remember" the Hebrew phrase that will return the demon to the book, but he retains it for possible use in the future. However, he does not know where he learned the phrase, (he didn't) and does not know that it was Providence that aided him. 



A Tale Of Terror: "The Specimen"

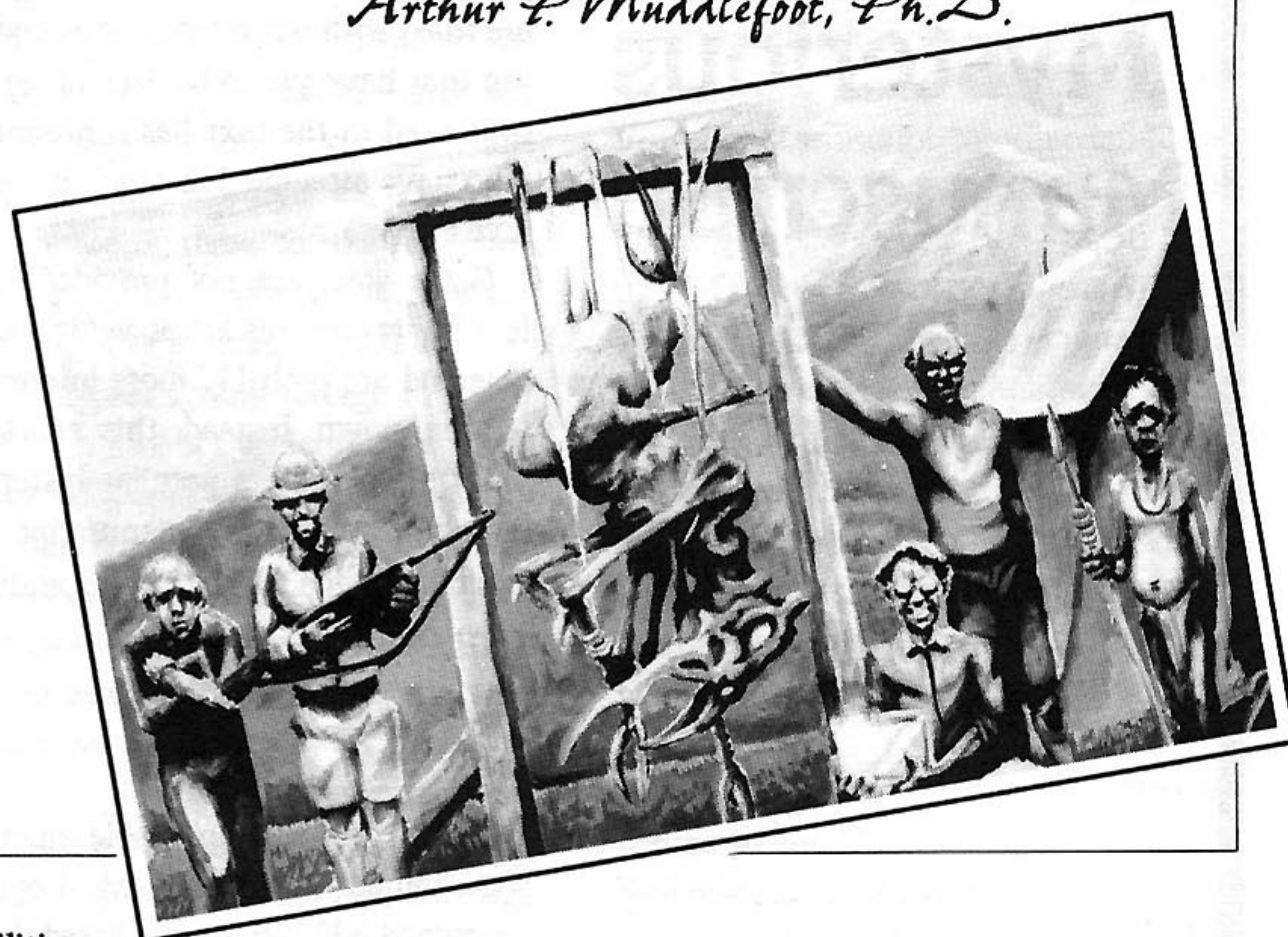
A Tale of Terror is a short plot idea with three different possibilities to use. Mixing & matching elements from different Tales is a good way to come up with a creative scenario on short notice; alternately, they make excellent diversions or sub-plots in a lengthy campaign. Mine them for ideas.

One investigator receives the following letter, along with the accompanying photograph via certified mail from Africa.

Dear Colleague,

An important discovery has recently been made! You may have seen the photograph below in one of the tattle-tale papers that have become so prevalent. The specimen in the photograph was taken by a hunter just north of Lake Victoria. It was claimed to be a species of flying dinosaur, and therefore has been written off as a hoax by most researchers. Since I was in the area on sabbatical I decided to investigate it anyway. This could confirm some of what was suspected from our past research! For now just let me say that the creature was real, and was not of prehistoric lineage. I urge you to come to Lake Victoria at once to assist me in this endeavor.

*Sincerely,
Arthur P. Muddlefoot, Ph.D.*

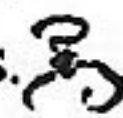


Possibilities:

1) The creature is actually a Byakhee, summoned by a local tribe's shaman, in an attempt to frighten off non-tribal members from their sacred grounds where hideous rituals are performed.

2) The great white hunter brought his bookwormish nephew on the trip with him. This nephew brought an ancient book along, which he had recently discovered in his grandparents' attic. While reading a passage early one morning he unknowingly summoned the Byakhee, which his uncle was lucky enough to dispatch quickly. Careful investigation and bargaining will net the investigators the

to the nephew has and permission to rifle the grandparents' attic (for a reasonable fee).

3) The photograph is a fake. The letter and photograph have been sent to suspected enemies of various cults. Once a fair number of investigators arrive at Lake Victoria, the cults plan a vicious ambush! Close examination of the handwriting will reveal it is not Muddlefoot's if an INTx3 roll is made. Simply reading the letter may result in the same discovery if an INTx1 roll is made. Dr. Muddlefoot is indeed at Lake Victoria, a prisoner of the cultists. 



Mysterious Manuscript: "The Voynich Manuscript"

Mysterious Manuscripts is a regular feature that examines a staple of CoC gaming: tomes of eldritch lore.

From *Call of Cthulhu Fifth Edition*, page 70, referring to different versions of the *Necronomicon*: "The 116-page medieval *Voynich Manuscript*, presently in the collection of the University of Pennsylvania, is written in Greek and Latin using Arab script."

That sentence prompted me to write this very article for two reasons. First, it is far too brief for such a bountiful topic. Second, it is entirely erroneous with the (possible) exception of the single word "medieval."

The *Voynich Manuscript*, sometimes known as "The Cipher of Roger Bacon" and "The World's Most Mysterious Manuscript," is a real-life tome of inscrutable lore that exists to this day. Its pages are filled with bizarre drawings and writing that have yet to be deciphered — the code used in the text has confounded all who have attempted to break it for hundreds of years.

Game stats are not provided for this text, as its contents are as yet indecipherable and are probably more interesting if left unknown. Instead, this article provides a look at the peculiar history of a real-life mysterious manuscript which should provide plenty of inspiration for your campaign.

History

In 1912, this indecipherable manuscript was bought by Wilfrid M. Voynich, a renowned bibliophile, who dated the tome to the late 13th Century. A few pieces of evidence scattered throughout the book give insight into its whereabouts during the intervening centuries. A letter dated 1665 from Joannes Marcus Marci to Athanasius Kircher covers one page of the book, which was given to Kircher by Marci. Marci thought Kircher, a Jesuit scholar who had written several treatises on codes and ciphers, might be able to unlock the mysteries of the manuscript. Marci also mentions that the book came from the court of Emperor Rudolph II, via a certain "Dr. Raphael," who was of the opinion that Roger Bacon had written it. Marci was the physician of King Ferdin-

and III of Bohemia, and it seems likely that "Dr. Raphael" must have been Raphael Missowsky (1580–1644), a tutor of King Ferdinand who had previously been in the court of Emperor Rudolph.

Another bit of evidence is the autograph of Jacobus de Tepenecz on one of the pages. De Tepenecz was the name taken by a scientist at his elevation to the nobility in the court of Emperor Rudolph. The elevation took place in 1608 and De Tepenecz died in 1622, fitting in very well with both the chronology and provenance suggested by Marci's letter. Rudolph, who became Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire in 1576, was a rather capricious supporter of science and alchemy who might very well have had such a text in his library. So we have a very clear picture of the book's whereabouts during the seventeenth century, but precious little about the rest of the book's history is known. Luckily, there is one good clue.

Dr. John Dee & Roger Bacon

One notable visitor to the court of Emperor Rudolph between 1584 and 1588 was Dr. John Dee, that most notable necromancer. Besides being the translator of the *Necronomicon* and the court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth, Dee was a devotee of Roger Bacon's works. Indeed, some of Bacon's works are known only because of the copies which survived from Dee's library (which, incidentally, was mostly destroyed by a vengeful mob bent on eliminating Dee's infernal knowledge). It is almost certain that Dee sold the unique work to Emperor Rudolph. Recent investigation has shown that the numbering of the leaves is in Dee's handwriting. Not only that, but Dee's diaries for the time spent in Rudolph's court mention a figure of 630 ducats, approximately the same price mentioned by Marci eighty years later.

Now we require one more tenuous link to get back to Bacon. Dee, in one catalogue of his library, had 37 of Bacon's works; where might he have gotten them? There's some evidence to suggest that he got them from an acquaintance of his, John Dudley. Dudley was in charge of the dis-

solution of the monasteries in England; his duties were essentially to loot the monasteries of all valuables. Bacon, of course, was an English Franciscan monk. But could Bacon have written the manuscript?

Bacon (and Dee) studied ciphers; consequently, it is not totally absurd to imagine him having written it. Additionally, there is one interesting work of Bacon's that has not survived to the present... unless it is the *Voynich Manuscript*. In 1265, Pope Clement requested that Bacon write down the elements of his philosophy for him. With amazing swiftness, Bacon produced the *Opus Majus*, *Opus Minus*, *Opus Tertium* and a fourth book which is no longer extant. This last volume, apparently written in code, was to be deciphered by "John," the messenger that Bacon sent along with the volumes. Despite the swiftness with which Bacon wrote, Clement died before the books reached him, and it's unclear what became of the books, although a copy of the *Opus Majus* with Bacon's autograph is in the Vatican Library. Perhaps John, who we know could read the cipher, struck off to make his own fortune with the knowledge Bacon thought important enough to write down only in code.

Modern History

Having pushed the volume's history back from Voynich, let's take it into the present. Voynich bought the manuscript at the Jesuit College of Mondragone in Frascati, Italy. Although he retained possession of the volume, he supplied photostat copies to many researchers around the world in the hopes of achieving a translation. Immediately, there was a great deal of interest in deciphering it, as there has been sporadically since. In the Twenties, the biggest news came from William Romaine Newbold, who claimed in 1921 to have deciphered it. Despite Newbold's crackpot ideas, I am indebted to him for his 1928 book *The Cipher of Roger Bacon* for most of the historical and textual information about the manuscript. The book was actually written by Newbold's friend Roland Grubb Kent from Newbold's

posthumous notes, Newbold having died in 1926. In the Forties, two other spurious translations were given by Feeley and Strong. After the deaths of Voynich and his wife, H. P. Kraus obtained the manuscript from the estate in 1962. In 1969, Kraus gave the book to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, where it remains today, labelled as MS 408. More recently, Robert Brumbaugh has come up with a slightly more convincing decipherment and William Ralph Bennet, Jr. has made interesting computer studies of the text.

Description

The volume presently consists of 204 quarto pages (about 9" by 6"), although at least 28 pages are missing. Some of the pages are larger and folded to match the others. 33 pages contain text only, while the rest combine portions of text with pictures, some of them colored. The first half of the book concerns botany, the pictures being of a variety of plants, most of which appear totally foreign to Earth. Interestingly, two of the identifiable plants seem to be New World plants, which would date the manuscript after 1500. The next 30 pages concern astronomy and astrology, with recognizable star patterns and astrological symbols. The next two sections deal with what Newbold terms "Biological" and "Pharmaceutical" figures, while the last 30 pages are those of text only. The last page contains Newbold's Key.

Contents

Apart from the botanical drawings, most of the other figures partake of the bizarre. The astrological figures are perhaps the most comprehensible; a zodiacal symbol is set in a central circle, surrounded by two rings of people. The people are mostly naked women, but some are male or clothed. In most of the drawings, each woman sits in a sort of barrel, holding a star on a short leash. The biological drawings contain more naked women, usually immersed in large pools of water (organs?) connected by pipes or vessels.

The text of the manuscript is even less

comprehensible. There are some marginal bits of sensible text, such as the autographs and gift letter. The zodiacal signs are accompanied by the appropriate month written in Spanish. There is also a tiny note in Middle High German referring to the *Herbal of Matthiolas*. As for the rest of it, some of the letter forms are familiar, while others are totally unknown. So far, all efforts to decipher it have failed (?). But, maddeningly, there seems to be some sense hidden in there. Bennet's computer studies of the manuscript have found that the letters are not placed randomly as one might expect from a bogus text. Rather, different letters have different frequencies of occurrence, and some are found in particular combinations more frequently than random chance would allow.

Comparing letter frequency in the Voynich Manuscript to other languages, Bennet found that it most resembles Polynesian languages, in that it has a simple form. If it is a cipher, and if it corresponds to a European language, then the code must be a complicated one. In some sense, the information in any coded message is stored in the actual cipher on paper and in the encipherment scheme. Since the actual cipher is less complicated than European languages, then the scheme must be correspondingly complicated.

The most convoluted scheme was invented in the first half of the 1920's by Newbold. Let's take it in steps. It all starts with the "Key" on the last page, which begins something like "MICHITON OLADABA8 ..." Newbold's first discovery was that some of the letters are actually composed of smaller penstrokes that form microscopic letters written in a form of Greek shorthand known to Bacon.

Hence, Newbold deciphers "OLADABA8" as "OLADABpqqoea," the first few letters apparently lacking any finer structures. From this point, everything must be expanded into biliteral forms, e.g. "ol-la-ad-da-ab-bp-pq-qq-qo-oe-ea". Here each letter has been consistently doubled, although Newbold was terribly inconsistent and often substituted other combinations. E.g. "tnarix" in

the Key becomes "tn-na-ri-cs". Now each pair of letters is to be identified with a single letter. Since there are far more combinations of two letters than single letters, each letter has many different pairs that correspond to it. Not only that, but Newbold allows each pair to actually stand for three or four different possible letters. After this step, "tn-na-ri-cs" becomes "t-o- u-o". At this point, Newbold applies the same scheme again and "to-uo" becomes "s-r". Now we're getting somewhere. After this process, part of the Key becomes "AUTSRQPONMLCIB-QPIQITCBABBO". It's still complete gibberish; one can only marvel at Bacon's genius. What needs to be done now, says Newbold, is to simply form anagrams of this phrase until a cogent piece of Latin appears. Needless to say, this process could turn the manuscript into *Hamlet*, proving that Shakespeare's plays were written neither by Shakespeare himself nor by Francis Bacon, but rather by Roger Bacon.

The solutions of Feeley and Strong are hardly worth mentioning. Feeley's transcriptions are more or less random strings of evocative words. Strong suggests that the author is not Bacon, but rather Anthony Ascham. Part of the text is a contraceptive concoction. Strong, however, never revealed the key to his translation and one can only surmise that it is spurious.

The 'best' solution yet offered is that of Brumbaugh. He noticed a peculiar arrangement of letters in the margin of one leaf that suggested arithmetic calculations. By assigning each symbol a numerical value from one to nine, he found that he could get correct equations. Next, he applied this scheme to the botanical

labelling of a plant that resembles a New World pepper, and found that the corresponding number sequence was 757752, just right for PEPPER.

I see two main weaknesses with his argument, although it is quite compelling at first glance. The first, which Brumbaugh plainly admits, is that a unique translation with this method is not possible. Going from twenty-some symbols to nine numerals to twenty-some Latin letters introduces a lot of freedom into the transcription. Second, Brumbaugh has not extracted any unambiguous messages. He can get plant names out of the other botanical drawings, but the names do not correspond to the depicted plants. He also catalogues a list of star-names that includes a multitude of different spellings of Ulysses (Uleses, Ulisuis, Ulesuus, Ulius, Ulesuesus). Additionally, there are several Alexanders and other classical names. His few attempts to tackle the main body of text yield uninteresting "formulas": "Liquid Syrian matter liquid matter plus Syrian Sicilian plus Syrian salt European Swedish..." Sad to say, this translation makes about as much sense as Feeley's. Another damning piece of evidence is the fact that the letters 't', 'o' and 'f' (corresponding to '6') hardly appear at all in Brumbaugh's translation. Unless Bacon was writing an alchemical lipogram, there must be another solution.

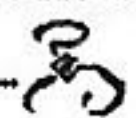
The Mythos

So what implications does the *Voynich Manuscript* hold for the Mythos?

The supposition that the Manuscript is another version of the *Necronomicon* is tenable, but there are several other possibilities. It could be the missing fourth volume written by Bacon, meticulously

encoded so that none but the Pope would receive the information. In that case, it would be a unique tome filled with secret, if not Mythos-related, information. In that case, one would only need the true Key to decipher its message. Or, it could have been written by Bacon under the influence of Mythos forces. Perhaps a member of the Great Race of Yith kept a notebook in his native script while inhabiting the body of Bacon. Perhaps Bacon copied it from the library at Celæno in the far Pleiades. Certainly the repetitious nature of the text lends itself well to Mythos chants used in obscene rituals.

Similar theories might apply if Dee is the true author, or perhaps it is all a hoax perpetrated by Dee to finance himself on the continent. If neither Dee nor Bacon wrote it, then the possibilities become even more wild. In Lovecraft's "The Haunter of the Dark," Robert Blake finds "a crumbling volume in wholly unidentifiable characters yet with certain symbols and diagrams shudderingly recognizable to the occult student" among numerous blasphemous texts in the library of the dreaded Starry Wisdom church. Later in the story, Blake deciphers the mathematical code in a related book and finds it to be written in the Aklo tongue. Perhaps the *Voynich Manuscript* is akin to the former book, which might well be written in the dark letterforms of Aklo itself. In that case, these two manuscripts could be two copies of some hitherto unsuspected Mythos tome of enormous power.

Then again, maybe Newbold was right, and the forces of the Mythos conspired in 1926 to end his life before he discovered that which Man was never meant to know. 

Select Bibliography

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The Eye Of Light & Darkness

continued from page 13

The Investigator's Handbook
1920s sourcebook for *Call of Cthulhu*
Chaosium, Inc., \$10.95
reviewed by Alan Glover

Until now, whenever I've needed info about the 1920s I've used a mixture of information sources including the 4th and 5th Ed. rulebooks, and supplementary information from the Keeper's screens. Naturally, I don't allow players access to any of these during the game.

So how good a supplement to all these various sources of information is the IC?

Well, the first thing is to put the book in its correct place. It does not contain any scenarios, nor will it be of any use to 1890s or 1990s players. It has a sole aim — to provide useful information for players running investigators in a 1920s setting.

Note that I said 'players' — this is a very important point. The book is intended for players to use. There is no Mythos information in it at all and a minimal amount of discussion of game mechanics.

It is divided into four parts: The Roaring Twenties, Research & Resources, Transport & Travel, and Equipment & Arms. Entries are generally concise and to-the-point, with sample prices in most cases. Keepers should read the book thoroughly to note the occasional rules changes and to decide whether to implement them in ongoing campaigns.

I would have liked to see a quick summary table for Keepers indicating on which page tables which could affect play are to be found. My own solution to this will be a custom bookmark, like the one included in the 5th Ed. Keeper's Kit which provides a spot index for the rule book.

A comparison between the IC and the 1920s Sourcebook (which was included with the 2nd and 3rd Ed. rules, and subsumed into the 4th Ed.) suggests that possibly more could have been lifted from the earlier publication. The earlier book has several more profiles of potential consultants such as Albert Einstein, Sigmund

Freud and H.G. Wells. Don't forget that the 1920s Sourcebook/4th Edition is no longer available though, and that only a little of its content has been brought into the 5th Ed. rulebook.

One final missing item, which I feel is a little more serious, is a bibliography of sources of information which were drawn from for the book for those who want to delve deeper.

Overall, the potential usefulness of this book to a campaign set in the 1920s cannot be denied. I believe it could be best used with the Keeper having his own copy, and encouraging the players to have at least one further copy between them. Rating: 7 Phobias — but be sure you want this info in your players' grubby hands!

Kult
dark role-playing game
Metropolis, Ltd., \$24.95
reviewed by Alan T. Grohe, Jr.

Kult is an evil game. You'll like it. Its premise bears significant resemblance to *Call of Cthulhu*: You fight against the forces of darkness, those outside as well as those within your own soul.

The world of *Kult* retains a gnostic flavor. The world has been abandoned by its demiurge creator; his dark twin Astaroth simultaneously seeks purpose in life by trying to find his lost brother and waging the Apocalypse to reassert the dark age of faith in humanity. Servants of the demiurge roam independently, joining Astaroth, or infecting the world with their own schemes.

The game takes you beyond death, dreams, madness, passions, time and space into other realms, detailing, among other things: Metropolis (the proto-city, a portion of which exists in every city, from every time), the Inferno of Astaroth, the Labyrinth, and Ktonor (the realm below, guarding the Inner Labyrinth and its unholy occupant). Each section comes complete with twisted inhabitants and additional possibilities for character interaction within its bounds.

The final two chapters deal with the creation of cults, with attendant examples, as well as the awakening which allows cultists and characters to view the lies of

reality for what they are.

I'm not going to review the game mechanics. What I am giving you instead is information about why you should buy *Kult* to steal material for your CoC games.

The character advantages & disadvantages in the game include (for instance) sexual neuroses, death wishes, and playing an unwilling medium, which are great for fleshing out twisted cultists, ex-cultist investigators, etc.

Characters have a mental balance stat like CoC's Sanity, with the additional twitch that some characters will manifest physical reactions when they fail the roll. For example, insane characters can sprout stigmata, claws, extra limbs/eyes/mouths/genitalia/tentacles.

Overall, *Kult* rates seven phobias on its own merits, while as a sourcebook of demented ideas usable in *Call of Cthulhu*, I give it 8.5 phobias.

Legions of Darkness
supplement for *Kult*
Metropolis, Ltd., \$19.95
reviewed by Alan T. Grohe, Jr.

This is the first supplement for *Kult* and details much of the background conflict within the Illusion of our world — the forces behind the forces. Included are descriptions of the ten Angels of Death serving Astaroth, the ten Archons (including the missing four), the servant Lictors, forgotten deities independent of both the Demiurge and Astaroth, the *Kult* version of Gaia, and various mortal cults. In total, *Legions of Darkness* presents 34 cults, organizations, and powers, complete with motivations, modus operandi, and example NPCs.

If you need a bizarre religious group in your campaign, you could turn to the Ordo Fratrisc Mortis — doctors who sacrifice to the Lord of Pain while operating. If you want to incorporate versions of the Judaeo-Christian myths, the Awakened Messiah and the Qumran Church will fit the bill. Many other such groups are ready-made to slot into your CoC campaign, and make this book a very attractive resource for the Keeper.

This book also rates 7 phobias on its own — but it gets 9 for use in CoC. ☸



Esoterica



What The Deities Mean

Dean Shomshak with Scott Aniolowski & Kevin Ross

Surprisingly, many of the important Great Old Ones and Outer Gods have not been used much in the *Call of Cthulhu* adventures published so far by Chaosium. Cthulhu and Yog-Sothoth, for instance, have only been a force in one adventure each. Obscure monsters such as Rhan-Tegoth have had as much exposure.

I think the reason is that despite all the thought writers have given to the meaning of the Mythos as a whole, the individual Mythos powers have not received such scrutiny. Much of the fault actually rests with Lovecraft's less-than-perceptive imitators, who saw the grotesquery in the Mythos but not the meanings Lovecraft hid behind the slime and tentacles. When August Derleth inducted Hastur into the Mythos, for instance, Hastur's only personality trait was a supposed rivalry with Cthulhu which Derleth's heroes could exploit. The picture of Hastur as a fountainhead of more artistic madness in "Tell Me, Have You Seen The Yellow Sign?" and "The Road to Hali" derives from Hastur's original source, Robert W. Chambers' stories about *The King in Yellow*.

Cthulhu, Yig, Yog-Sothoth, et al are awesomely-powerful, inhuman entities with certain powers, attributes, and styles

Esoterica is a new feature that will hopefully continue for some time. Each issue, Esoterica will feature various authors' insights into the Mythos and the themes of the game that do not deal directly with game stats, adventure ideas, etc.

(if not motivations). They are also literary constructs more or less charged with symbolic meaning. By examining both aspects in more depth, one can find clues to how the primary powers of the Mythos can be used in adventures — as arbiters of mood and emotion, even if they don't appear directly. When they do appear in person, they can do more than annihilate hapless investigators.

The notes below examine numerous Great Old Ones, Outer Gods, and a few other odds and ends thrown in for good measure. Two long-time CoC scenario authors — Scott Aniolowski and Kevin Ross — have also contributed their insights on some of the entities, and their comments follow those entries.

Great Old Ones Atlach-Nacha

A mere grotesquery: its chief interest is spinning its web over an endless gulf. The legend that when it finishes its web the world will end is merely suggestive at this point. Atlach-Nacha was created by Clark Ashton Smith as just another weird encounter for "The Seven Geases," and needs a lot more development before it may be considered to have a symbolic aspect. (The mythology of spiders may be worth exploring).

(Kevin Ross) Dean has a pretty solid argument, as far as this critter's limited usefulness, and its existence as just another weird encounter in "The Seven Geases." I would like to point out Keith Herber's excellent use of the Atlach-Nacha myths in his *Spawn of Azathoth*;

very nasty stuff, and interested keepers should take note of this type of thing in their own use of the spider-god.

Bokrug

(Scott Aniolowski) One of the least malign of the Great Old Ones, Bokrug perhaps may be seen to be a representation of patience, of vengeance, of karma. This Great Old One's wrath may take centuries to be realized, however it does eventually come to those who deserve it. Bokrug does not appear to take much notice of those who do not transgress against it. Karmatically speaking, however, those who suffer the fury of Bokrug have in some way offended the Great Old One, thus the cycle is completed.

Chaugnar Faugn

Normally, Chaugnar Faugn stays inert on its pedestal; when active, in the one story in which it appears ("The Horror from the Hills" by Frank Belknap Long) and in the CoC adventure closely modeled on the story ("The Curse of Chaugnar Faugn"), it acts as a basic bloodthirsty monster. The prophecy about Chaugnar Faugn filling the world, however, and the link between it and its "brothers" suggests some deeper and more obscure meaning.

There are also connections to modern physics. Chaugnar Faugn is defeated through a weapon based on time-affecting relativistic physics. The way Chaugnar Faugn's "brothers" mimic its actions and are dispelled when it is dispelled suggests a phenomenon something like quantum diffraction. Perhaps when finally free, Chaugnar Faugn will project more "broth-

ers" throughout the world, all extensions of its single will?

(Kevin Ross) The bit about quantum diffraction is a great observation. I've never liked that crap about C-F's near-invincibility, but this would certainly help explain it. You can't really hurt him because he's not all there — part of him is in this Brother, part in that one, etc.

Cthugha

Dwells in or near the star Formalhaut, and seems to be made of concentrated star-plasma. Perhaps a "relative" of Cthulhu whose extra-cosmic substance is even more fluid and energized.

Cthugha is usually summoned to Earth for its destructive power, as prosaically as a general might call for an air strike. When August Derleth created Cthugha, he wanted a "fire elemental" to round out a supposed classification scheme of the Great Old Ones, and that's about all Cthugha is. Any supposed meaning to

possible Cthugha cultists must rest on whatever symbolism of fire one chooses.

Cthulhu

Cthulhu is physically imprisoned, but able to send his dreams to sensitive humans. Cthulhu seems powerless at present, but once free he will be invincibly powerful. Cthulhu's own motivations are incomprehensible, but his worshippers are notable for their frenzied brutality, providing another paradoxical contrast: Cthulhu is personally superintelligent, but his worshippers represent humanity at its most ignorant and bestial.

The central event of the Cthulhu myth, his release, will bring the overthrow of the rational ego and the social order: "...for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and revelling in joy...all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy

and freedom." Id unleashed? All the world would follow the cult pattern: a few autonomous, ubermensch-like leaders who wield absolute power (with Cthulhu as supreme power), while the majority become followers and lose their identities in mob ecstasy. Both ubermensch-priests and sorcerers, and the subhuman mob group-minds are selfish and amoral, concerned only with satisfying their desires with no restrictions.

Cthulhu's invisible but omnipresent cult makes him an emblem of secret power cutting across all social strata. This is the logical extension of paranoid theories of conspiracy: a conspiracy that always existed, is totally and inhumanly malevolent (and indeed, some members are not really human), with occult powers that make it virtually invincible.

Cthulhu's mastery of dreams makes him also emblematic of the unconscious mind, particularly Jung's "collective unconscious," which includes such dismay-



ing archetypes as the Shadow.

Finally, Cthulhu's incomprehensible alien nature makes him representative of the greater mystery of the Universe itself. The Universe and the Mythos enthrall with their grandeur, but appall with their inhumanity. What does humanity matter compared to exploding galaxies and the entropic death of the universe?

(Kevin Ross) I've always assumed Cthulhu's dream-sendings were involuntary. He doesn't send them out to specific targets — they are like continuous broadcasts, but only the sensitive receive them. This is substantiated in the story "The Call of Cthulhu," where the artists are the ones who are most affected. The Send Dreams spell, as I see it, is just a way of becoming sensitive to Cthulhu's dreams — not a way of drawing yourself to his attention so that he can *send* you his dreams.

And I don't think there's any room for ubermensch in the world of a reawakened Cthulhu. Humanity will be all as one once he's back — all cattle to the Great Old Ones. Again, this stuff about the high priests hoping for power and favors when the Great Old Ones come back is silly human hubris: faithful or no, I say we're all lunch come the strange eons.

I also quibble with the statement that Cthulhu's cult is virtually invincible: LeGrasse put a stop to things in Louisiana, at least.

Cyægha

(Scott Aniolowski) Eyes are symbolic in numerous cultures, from the Egyptians' powerful Eye of Ra, to Ea, the Babylonian lord of the Sacred Eye (Ea was known as "he whom nothing escapes"). Cyægha, with its body little more than a tentacle-ringed eye, may therefore be seen to represent power, or divine scrutiny. Perhaps nothing escapes the attention of Cyægha?

Eihort

(Scott Aniolowski) As God of the Labyrinth, Eihort may be seen to represent the underworld, as did the Greek god Hades. The Christian entity known as Lucifer or Satan, the lord of hell, was obviously influenced by Hades, and Eihort's "bargain" which brings ultimate doom to

whose who accept it is similar to the notion of making a pact with the devil. By accepting Eihort's bargain, more of its children are born into the world of man, and by making a pact with the devil, more of Satan's corruption is spread through the world of man. Dealing with Eihort and Lucifer means corruption and death on a very personal, spiritual level.

Ghatanothoa

(Scott Aniolowski) Like the gorgon Medusa, Ghatanothoa has the ability to turn people to "stone." The body eternally hardened, the brain lives on, trapped within the statue-like shell of the body. Perhaps Ghatanothoa may represent the forbidden: Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt because she longed for the earthly pleasures of Sodom and Gomorrah, and turned back to look when God destroyed them. Seeking out the forbidden, the body is destroyed, leaving the mind trapped to ponder its errors.

Glaaki

(Scott Aniolowski) Glaaki is very vampiric in nature. Glaaki, like vampires, can influence victims' sleep and dreams. Glaaki, like vampires, creates minions by piercing the flesh with a part of its own body, although where a vampire extracts fluid, Glaaki injects it. Glaaki's servants, like vampires, shun the light of day as it is destructive to them. Glaaki dwells behind a trap-door, and vampires sleep within coffins. Glaaki therefore may represent the loss of humanity and immortality.

Hastur

Hastur has already been covered by John Tynes' "The Road to Hali" in TUO1, but here's a summary for those who haven't read that article.

Hastur dwells in the Lake of Hali on a world near Aldeberan or in the Hyades. (August Derleth, who contributed this part of the Cthulhu Mythos, did not know that Aldeberan and the Hyades are many light-years apart.) On the shore is the city of Carcosa. Hastur sometimes operates through a human-seeming avatar, the King in Yellow. A play called "The King in Yellow," of brilliant but somehow unwholesome artistry, brings horror and

madness to those who encounter it.

Hastur embodies intellectual despair and nihilism. Rational analysis proves that all human activity is a pointless and arbitrary game, even rationality itself. The subjectivity of art undercuts itself the same way: if anything can be believed because "it's true for me," without reference to anyone else, then there is no reason to believe one thing instead of another, or act one way instead of another. Charles Manson's as good as Mother Theresa if there are no standards, so what's the use of anything? All that's left is to bring other people into the same nihilistic state, since misery loves company.

The Yellow Sign now used in CoC adequately represents this intellectual nihilism. The Yellow Sign is as cryptic as a Rorschach inkblot, vaguely suggesting any number of possible images but none strongly enough to make it a picture of anything but itself.

Ithaqua

No known standard abode. On Earth, the Wind-Walker never goes south of the 40th parallel and usually stays North of the 60th. (Too few people have visited Antarctica to permit judgments about whether Ithaqua visits the South Polar regions too). Ithaqua controls wind and cold, is notorious for terrifying howls, and travels with an entourage of victims.

Ithaqua has strong similarities to the Wild Hunt of Celtic myth: a wild, randomly destructive force of nature which inescapably pursues its victims.

(Kevin Ross) I've always been skeptical of the belief that Ithaqua is unable to travel south of Minnesota or whatever. This particular myth just ain't true.

Well, maybe to a certain extent. You see, in the August Derleth story "Beyond the Threshold," a character is carted away by Ithaqua, only to be found months later frozen to death — on an island near Singapore. Looking at a map, you'll note that Singapore is about dead-on the equator. I quote: "this was the legend of Ithaqua, who carried his victims with him into the far places of the Earth, in time and space, before leaving them behind." Obviously, if the Wendigo-god can drop somebody off near the equator, then he is *not* limited

to the polar regions. Perhaps he can only touch certain points, places where he is or was worshipped. But it's always seemed a bit daft to me this alien being can only hang out where it's cold. So there, I believe unequivocally that he can go outside the polar regions.

That caveat aside, I did like the tie to the Wild Hunt. Very appropriate.

Nyogtha

(Scott Aniolowski) A mass of living darkness, Nyogtha may be likened to the embodiment of "powers of darkness" — the manifestation of the ideal of evil. Nyogtha carries victims off to its lair deep underground: those seduced by evil may be said to have been carried off into hell, or the underworld, etc.

Quachil Utaus

Obvious personification of the destroying power of time. Attribution as a Great Old One seems wrong; its humanoid form, personification of a cosmic property and association with beams of light from the sky (much like Hypnos) suggest an Elder God.

(Kevin Ross) Not quite powerful enough to be an Outer God, not goody-two-shoes enough to be an Elder God. That leaves Great Old One.

Rhan-Tegoth

(Scott Aniolowski) Rhan-Tegoth eternally goes through cycles of hibernation. Upon waking, the Great Old One must feed ravenously to maintain itself. The death of other life forms sustains Rhan-Tegoth, but then it falls into a sort of death-like state, itself. This minor deity, therefore, may represent cyclic patterns: the seasons, the cycles of life, etc.

Shudde-M'ell

The most powerful member of the Chthonian species, accepted as more or less a peer of Cthulhu, Tsathogghua et al. The chthonians are variously reported as spawned from Ubbo-Sothla, or as entities from a hypervolcanic alien world. They are most notable for the way they cause earthquakes. While there is no sign of organized worship of the chthonians, the Burrowers Beneath can telepathically

control weak-willed humans to work their bidding. They can also force victims to wait for the chthonians to arrive and destroy them.

Shudde-M'ell the Prime Burrower is simply the earthquake personified: sudden, unpredictable, unavoidable death and destruction.

Tsathogghua

Tsathogghua dwells underground. There is no evidence that Tsathogghua is physically restrained from leaving N'kai, but he is frequently described as a lazy god. In the CoC rules it is said that he responds to contacters through astral images. One story by Clark Ashton Smith told of a Delphi-like oracle in Roman-era Averroigne which was attributed to Tsathogghua. Finally, Tsathogghua was the patron of the Hyperborean wizard Eibon.

Underground places are always associated in myth with the unconscious mind. Secret knowledge is often obtained through more-or-less disguised underworld journeys. Tsathogghua's underground habitation, personal inaction and patronage of sorcerers suggests the trance state. Whole religions and magical theosophies, such as Yoga, are built around trances, promising some mystical gnosis through teaching the mind to sit still. Instead of Cthulhu's mob-frenzy, Tsathogghua offers dissolution of identity in trance.

(Kevin Ross) Interesting discussion here. This discussion of trances goes quite a way toward describing what a cult of Tsathogghua might be like. Very mystical, to reflect the creature's dormant periods, but undoubtedly quite bloodthirsty at times, just as their master is when he's awake.

Yig

Yig's habitation is unknown, and quite possibly this Great Old One has no fixed abode and is not bound in any way. (Old Castro said that all the Great Old Ones slept, but he didn't know everything) Yig is quite clearly said to be the prototype of Quetzalcoatl and related Native American snake gods. He could be much more: myths from around the world specify

reptile-gods, serpent-creatures, and the like (whether good or evil) as sources of wisdom and power, from the Chinese dragon to "that old serpent" Satan. Clearly, Yig has been very active in human affairs to achieve such a prominent, if disguised, place in human myth.

The Wise Serpents of myth usually bear practical knowledge and power: they control rain and rivers, let the hero understand animal speech so he can fulfill his quest, guard treasures, etc. Yig seems more a patron of practical magic power than the self-altering mysticism of Cthulhu or Tsathogghua.

Y'Golonac

A comparatively weak entity hibernating in an unknown location, manifesting through human worshippers. Cunning, but viciously secretive, only manifesting to those it deems likely worshippers, the covertly evil who try to satisfy perverted desires without harming their reputations. (Think of Dr. Jekyll, who wanted to party hearty without spoiling his image as "ever treading the upward path.")

Y'Golonac thus personifies desires which are merely disguised instead of repressed or confronted.

(Kevin Ross) Y'Golonac lies sleeping in an underground chamber (somewhere) beyond a wall, with countless unknown things crawling over him in the dark. Having just reread the appropriate passage, I've just had a thought: what if the "possessed" manifestations of Y'Golonac are only avatars, and that its true form indeed does lie in some lost subterranean place: huge, sickly-white, bloated, and as yet undiscovered.

Zhar

His dwelling place is in caverns beneath the Plateau of Leng in Southeast Asia. Zhar is persistently associated with "Lloigor," Ithaqua and (more remotely) Hastur. Zhar's standard epithet is The Twin Obscenity, and it seems to have two bodies linked by tentacles. It emits a fearsome howling and disintegrates by touch. The local Tcho-Tcho folk worship Zhar.

There's not much information about Zhar (and creator Derleth wasn't a sensitive enough writer) to pin down any sym-

bolic meaning, but here's a speculation. The two bodies suggest some kind of duality. Zhar turns organic matter into nothingness; the lloigor build bodies for themselves out of nothingness. The plateau where the Tcho-Tchos dwell, Sung and Tsang, have been said to be "waking-world extensions" of the accursed Plateau of Leng in the Dreamlands. Does Zhar mediate in some way between material and mental existence? Do Zhar's caverns connect to the caverns beneath the abhorrent monastery of Leng, as ghoultunnels reach from Dreamland to the waking world? Do Zhar and the lloigor use the same process, but in opposite directions? Perhaps the Leng-folk are the dream-versions of the Tcho-Tchos, but they can physically move between worlds through Zhar's caverns. Zhar's two bodies could be its physical, "waking" form and its dream-self, but since Zhar erases the boundaries between dream and waking worlds, there's no way to tell the difference.

(Kevin Ross) The names/entities Zhar and Lloigor were first introduced in a

Mythos story by August Derleth and Mark Schorer, called "The Lair of the Star-Spawn" (*Weird Tales*, 1932). The quote that appears for Zhar in 5th edition CoC in fact refers to Lloigor. Lloigor and Zhar are the twin obscenities: twin monsters apparently attached to each other by tangled tentacles.

Along comes Colin Wilson in 1969. He appropriates the name Lloigor and attaches it to the evil astral race introduced in his "Return of the Lloigor."

So now the Mythos — and the game — is stuck with trying to reconcile these two entities. A good argument can be made for the theory that the lloigor (race) are merely servants of Lloigor (the super-entity — not a god, remember). This would even help explain many of Dean's suggestions regarding the possible relationship between these creatures. The discussion of material and mental existence, and the complementary powers of Lloigor/Zhar and the lloigor would seem to support the negative/positive, real-world/dream-world links.

Zoth-Ommog

(Scott Aniolowski) Zoth-Ommog has the ability to manifest itself through its statues, perhaps representing immediate gratification through materialism.

The Outer Gods

Abhoth

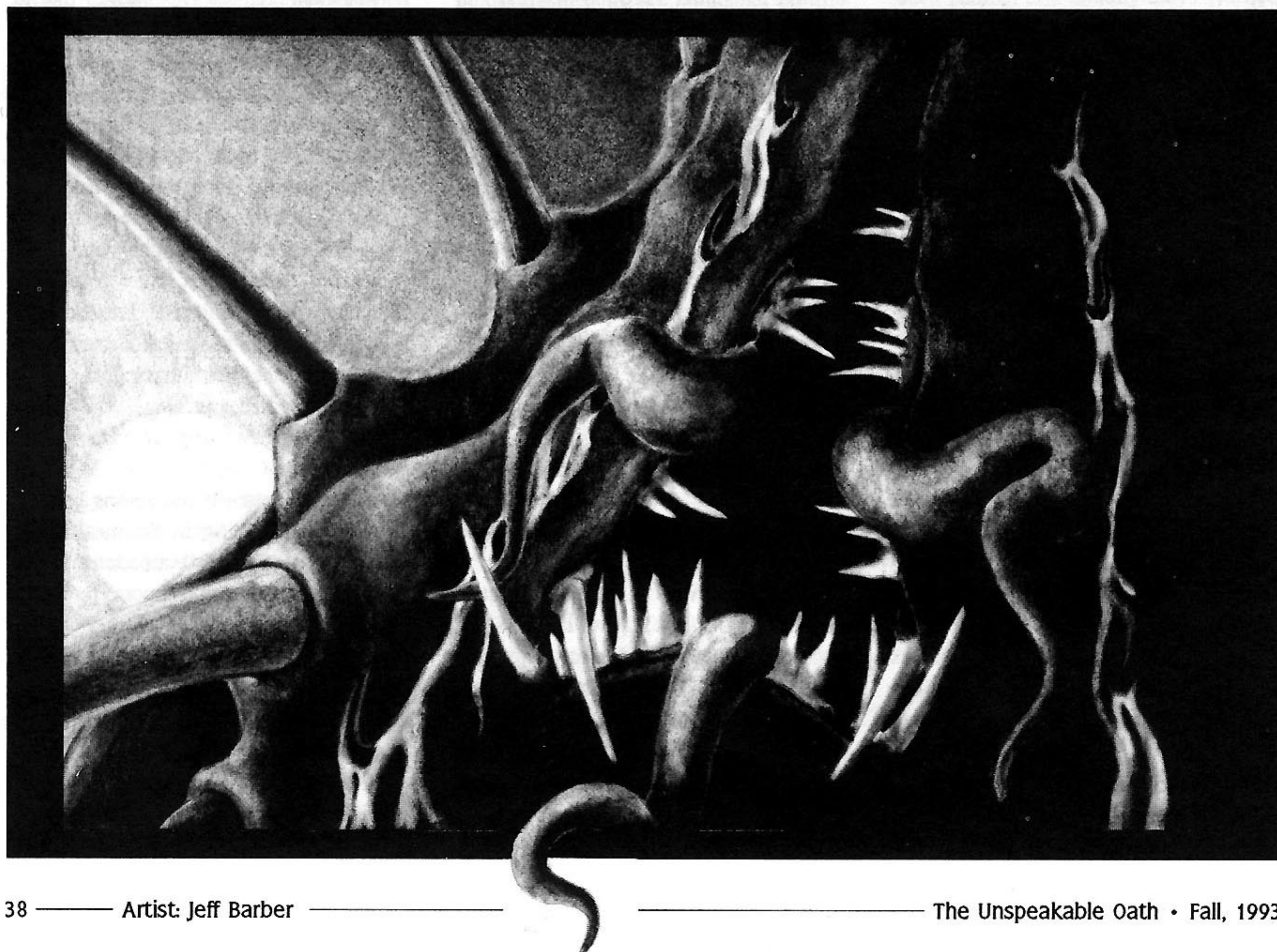
Abhoth's chief characteristic is its ceaseless propagation of spawn and monsters. It is one of the few Mythos powers recorded (in C.A. Smith's "The Seven Geases") as actually stopping to talk to humans it meets...which admittedly would be a rare event, since Abhoth dwells deep in the Earth where humans can rarely go.

Abhoth's classification as an Outer God is speculative since Abhoth permanently dwells on Earth. How did it get there?

(Kevin Ross) Keith Herber's *Return to Dunwich* offers some explanation as to how Abhoth came to Earth.

Azathoth

While comparisons with the Big Bang



are not inappropriate, Azathoth personifies something a bit more general. Put most simply, Azathoth is a mindless, chaotic creator-god for a meaningless universe where the only cause is blind chance and effects proceed by blind mechanism.

Daoloth

Daoloth has three main attributes: it is an interdimensional nexus; its interdimensional shape drives onlookers mad through its sheer incomprehensibility; and it can be supplicated to expand human perception and purge it of inaccuracy, hence its title of "The Render of the Veils."

(Kevin Ross) I'd point out that the expansion of human perception and the purging of inaccuracy is not a good thing at all, as it's described in the story. It would appear that this "opening of one's eye or mind" is quite maddening. Perhaps one is allowed to see the most minute workings of the physical world, down to the atomic level. Or maybe you're allowed to see into all the dimensions at once. Or maybe the hopelessly chaotic workings of the universe are revealed to you. In any case, Daoloth's revelations are probably the ultimate Lovecraftian nightmare: you see your own infinitesimal and inconsequential role in a universe that's even more vast than you had imagined.

Nyarlathep

The Crawling Chaos is the most popular Mythos deity, in Lovecraft's stories and CoC supplements, for an obvious reason: he's got a personality! As the Haunter of the Dark or other monstrous forms he's just a monster, but when Nyarlathep manifests in human form he is mockery incarnate, a salesman of poisoned wares. He goes on the public lecture circuit, shows everyone how absurd and horrible existence really is, and does it so stylishly that people keep coming. He explains the marvelous sunset city to Randolph Carter and loans a shantak to fly him there — but Nyarlathep's flight-plan is a trap. One story suggests he guided humanity in discovering nuclear weapons. Keziah Mason won longer life and magic power by signing her name in Nyarlathep's Book of Azathoth, but "The Dreams in the Witch-House" gives no hint that she

got much more from her power than visits to unusual places, and she still died in the end.

Nyarlathep, then, is what humans find when they seek meaning and cosmic knowledge in a meaningless universe: bafflement, madness, and/or destruction. Even the magical power gained through worship of the Outer Gods is ultimately an illusion.

(Kevin Ross) Nyarlathep is a provocateur, a bringer of dark and terrible knowledge (such as the atom-bomb), and a conniver. He prefers not to destroy something or someone outright; instead, it's more entertaining to him if he can get that person to destroy himself. There is a sense of subtlety and mockery in Nyarlathep that is often overlooked in the game (but see Mark Morrison's "Dead-Man Stomp.")

Shub-Niggurath

A cosmic fertility-goddess, interpreted the nastiest possible way. Shub-Niggurath's literal and symbolic character has already been well-explored.

(Kevin Ross) She's a tough one to deal with, since there's been very little fiction to go on. Okay, she's a fertility "goddess": who stuck the "goddess" label on her, anyway? Probably some human who didn't know how to tell the sex of an alien. So I guess it's okay if we refer to her as female, though I doubt that's entirely true.

Even though Shub-Niggurath represents fecundity, and gives birth to Dark Young and what-not, that does not make S-N a female. In all areas of mythology, gods of both sexes give birth.

What I'm trying to say here is that male/female is a human distinction, and since we're dealing with an alien entity here, that definition is irrelevant and probably inaccurate.

Shub-Niggurath's worship brings to mind very primitive sexual behavior, and perhaps a grotesque emphasis of sex/death motifs — and of course the worst things you could imagine involving childbirth...

Tulzscha

(Scott Aniolowski) There are any number of fire cults in man's mythology, however, whereas fire generally represents

power and life, Tulzscha represents the opposite — death and decay. The Green Flame does not give off warmth, but instead it radiates clamminess and death.

Ubbo-Sothla

(Scott Aniolowski) Trapped in its lair, continually and mindlessly giving "birth" to other creatures, Ubbo-Sothla might be seen to represent the most primitive aspects of fertility and randomness. While Shub-Niggurath and Abhoth are both intelligent, sentient beings, Ubbo-Sothla is a mindless entity, much like an enormous microorganism feeding, growing, and dividing oblivious to its surroundings.

Yibb-Tstll

(Scott Aniolowski) Yibb-Tstll is an omnipotent entity. This Outer God may represent knowledge, like the Egyptian god Thoth. It also has the ability to inflict great change upon others, so it may also be representative of metamorphosis — of change, itself.

Yog-Sothoth

Somehow coexistent with all space and time, "not in the spaces we know, but between them." Yog-Sothoth suggests the infinite extension of the Universe in space, time and other dimensions — the periphery to Azathoth's center-ness. Yog-Sothoth is intelligent, but its knowledge is the sort not easily communicated to mere humans. In a way, Yog-Sothoth is one symbol for the Cthulhu Mythos itself, the infinite mystery which defies solution and destroys human thought.

(Kevin Ross) From hints in "The Dunwich Horror," Yog-Sothoth appears to be a member of a race of beings somehow trapped outside our universe. Yog-Sothoth is stuck outside, but he's supposed to be the key and the gate. Why can't he unlock himself and get in? I don't get it either. Maybe there's a lock that has to be found. Or maybe someone has to turn the key to open the gate. Maybe he has access to times and places besides our own.

Yog-Sothoth's influence on time has rarely been touched upon to my knowledge — in fiction or the game. ☸



A Tale Of Terror: "Natasha"

A Tale of Terror is a short plot idea with three different possibilities to use. Mixing & matching elements from different Tales is a good way to come up with a creative scenario on short notice; alternately, they make excellent diversions or sub-plots in a lengthy campaign. Mine them for ideas.

Natasha is a creature usable in either '20s or '90s *Call of Cthulhu*, because of the parallel circumstances: in both periods, upheaval in Russia has sent exiles into adjoining lands (see NY Times, 4/17/93, p. 2). Natasha is a generic term for a young Russian, and in the '90s for a Rumanian, woman making a living in the sex trade of Istanbul.

It is also in the present instance the name of a 16-year-old Russian prostitute who has vanished from the apartment rented for her by a 55-year-old Turkish market vendor who is now confined to a psychiatric hospital, his money gone, apparently on presents bought for her, and his wife and children destitute.

A friend of the family approaches one of the investigators to ask if he would try to recover any of the money that remains and find out what broke the mind of a stolid businessman. (If the wife is interviewed, she also expresses an interest in slitting the nose of that blonde bitch.)

Possibilities:

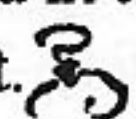
1) Achmet is just another middle-aged man who lost his marbles over a gold-digger who's now slipped back into the underworld. He never had all that much and Natasha got more clothes and accessories than cash, and what she did get was mostly the freely proffered gift of her besotted suitor. Of course, a little wheedling and the occasional small theft do go with prostitution. A sad story, really rather a Victorian melodrama, but the twentieth century hasn't quite penetrated the Middle East yet, in the '20s or the '90s.

2) Natasha is working with a syndicate of Russian mafia engaged in a smuggling operation in which Achmet was taking part. The apartment was rented for business purposes unrelated to sex, and Natasha pretended to be his girlfriend (hey, she didn't need money bad enough to sleep with that old slobberer) as a cover for their still more illicit real relationship. Needless to say, Natasha (not her real name) doesn't want to be asked questions. She's also a little older than 16, though she has a girlish face. Although not much

inclined to answer queries, however, she and her friends may be decidedly interested in putting a few of their own, most pressingly, What did Achmet do with the weapons? (In the '90s Red Army surplus bound for the hotspot of your choice; in the early '20s arms for a White Russian army, or a Balkan faction.) What happened to his money was that he a) blew it on gambling and drugs, along with what he embezzled from his partners, or b) invested it in their venture. If (b), he may have lost his marbles and the guns both by an inadvertant encounter of the Mythos kind that had no connection to Natasha. She's not going to believe any cock and bull story about monsters.

3) Natasha is a witch of a couple of centuries' standing who keeps her youth by draining lovers of power. The spell requires protracted intimacy between herself and the target, and as a side effect destroys the target's mind. She's really quite a nice person as Cthulhoid sorcerers go; that's why she picks older men who've had full lives already, so they give up only a few years to enable her to enjoy centuries of added life and youth. A very fair trade, she thinks, especially since she's so good to them.

If found (cultivating a new daddy) and told a sob story about Achmet's little ones, she'll be shocked and tearfully offer all the change in her pocket, then explain that she doesn't even know where he bought all the things, and if she did she still doubts the merchants would refund the price. Sorry. (She's grown used to being a heartless sentimentalist, after generations of prolonging her life by the exploitation of precisely that paradox.)

If the investigators contrive to meet her current protector, they may notice that he seems a bit unstable, but then you know how excitable these Levantines are. An Idea roll suggests that, like Achmet, he is close to Natasha's height; see her spell. The spell may be found in the Mysterious Manuscript at right. 



Mysterious Manuscript: "The Testament of Fascination & Survival"

Mysterious Manuscripts is a regular feature that examines a staple of CoC gaming: tomes of eldritch lore.

No crumbling vellum bound in human skin, this manuscript is a half-dozen commonplace pages densely scrawled over on both sides in a cramped cyrillic hand and, folded in thirds, tucked into an equally nondescript business envelope. (The handwriting is so small as to contain the equivalent of 20 or more typed pages.) At first it gives the impression of being a beauty-tips article from a rather strange woman's magazine, but it rapidly develops from the eccentric to the sinister and beyond. Always kept tucked into the handbag she carries everywhere, these are Natasha's notes on better living through necromancy. Natasha is not the sort of wizard who enjoys learning lots of spells that ruin and ravage things, nor is she plotting the return of the Great Old Ones in any way; she likes pretty things around her as she likes looking nice herself, and has no stomach for violence; thus this small treatise of magical lore has a somewhat limited scope.

Excerpt

"The love of man and woman can bring many things to light, or into darkness, making the soul soar and the heart know boundless happiness. What few realize is how the being in which two become one can be extended on the physical plane beyond the night's caress to an eternity of bliss in which the lover and beloved conjoin not in the transient womb but in every limb and fiber of the beloved. This exquisite sacrifice of individuality for a larger cause is the final pinnacle of love, the ultimate proof that a man really cares, and it is your job, if you want to know love beyond any other, to learn the tender touch that takes the haze of age away, that imparts his essence and sweetness to imbue in you forever, that will enable you to remember fondly what a good man he was, how giving, how trusting, centuries later. So often, love dies in a few weeks, months, or years; I have discovered an eternal love."

SAN Cost 1D6, Mythos Knowledge 1D4, Spell Multiplier x3

New Spell

THE TENDER TOUCH: The caster enacts a series of ritual motions taking several hours over the target, who may be asleep. That the target not be sensible is advisable, in fact, as sensations of terror would undermine the sense of intimacy necessary for the spell to have best effect. The final motion is for the caster to stretch himself across the target, face to face, matching hand to hand and foot to foot: at this point the target loses one point of Power permanently, and the caster becomes younger by a degree proportionate to the bond of emotional closeness that exists between the two parties. The caster must sincerely value and cherish the victim, and yet be willing to destroy him. Performing the spell on a trussed-up bum stolen from an alley would barely restore youth enough to put the caster back where he was at the spell's start. Waste the love of your life and you gain years. Thus the caster is forced to be a con man toward himself as well as others, perversely indulging in lavish emotionalism while withholding a secret cold resolution to exploit the other. The spell uses 6 magic points and costs the caster and target each 1D8 San.

Quirk Skills

Duke Janus

You've seen them before. They're those odd things that you spot on the bottom of *Call of Cthulhu* NPC skill lists: skills like "Beg for Candy 83%" or "Complain Loudly 74%." Like the Fast Talk and Persuade skills, they distill clever role playing down to a simple die roll, and are thus more than a little absurd.

Of course, absurdity is the goal. When the Keeper announces, "uh-oh, you guys are in for trouble; Black Ivan failed his 'Sing Scottish Military Dirge' skill," it usually brings a chuckle. And usually a few laughs in your game helps in making the horror more piercing.

Why are these skills only available to NPCs? Why shouldn't investigators be entitled to these odd little abilities? After all, the skills are good hooks for roleplaying, and they are usually useless in an "advance-the-plot" sense. And believe it or not, sometimes these Quirk Skills are more fun when characters are bad at them. Imagine a gas station attendant with a five percent "Give Directions" skill.

Of course, many Keepers already do give the investigators Quirk Skills. You see them most often in one-shot or tournament scenarios. So this is not by any means an original idea; I simply propose codifying these skills for PC's; laying down some ground rules for them.

Firstly, the Quirk Skill shouldn't cost the character anything. The player shouldn't be able to add either EDU or INT points to the Quirk Skill. Since they are free, avoid overburdening a character with too many quirk skills. One per character should be sufficient in most cases.

Random Quirk Skills

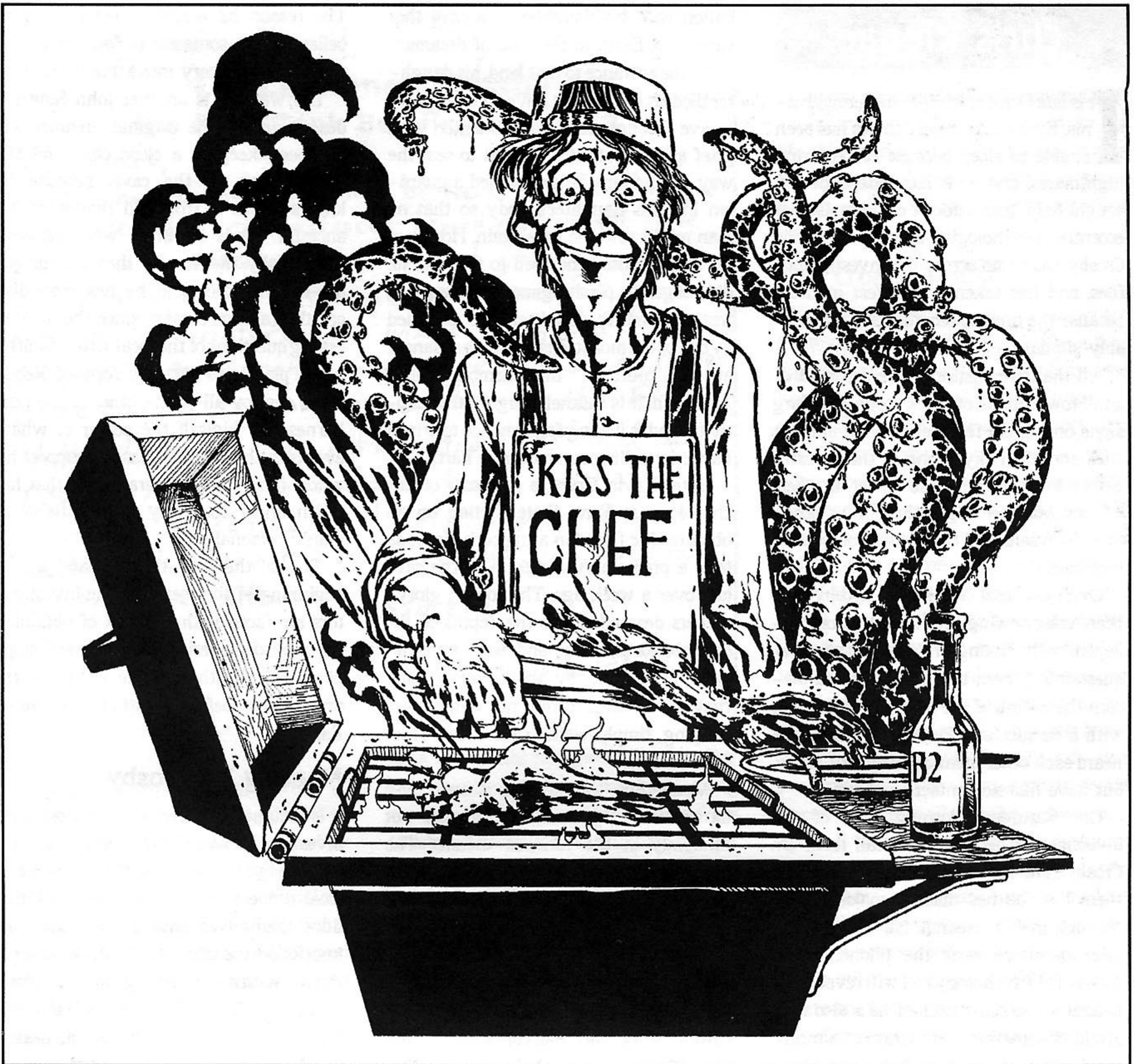
1-2	Barbecue Questionable Foods	51-52	Flirt
3-4	Train Spotting	53-54	Cut Hair
5-6	Nag	55-56	Identify Knot Type
7-8	Act Attentive	57-58	Perform Tricks With String
9-10	Belch	59-60	Overtip/Undertip
11-12	Lie Outlandishly	61-62	Complete Crossword Puzzle
13-14	Wiggle Ears	63-64	Snub
15-16	Blow Smoke Rings	65-66	Roll Cigarette
17-18	Recount Radio/Television Plot	67-68	Mouth Song Lyrics
19-20	Snore Loudly	69-70	Comb Hair
21-22	Collecting Lore (stamps, coins, ties, comics, etc.)	71-72	Perform Math Quickly
23-24	Watch Clock	73-74	Shine Shoes
25-26	Ride Unicycle	75-76	Do Housework
27-28	Mumble	77-78	Dowse For Water
29-30	Glare Menacingly	79-80	Blow Gum Bubbles
31-32	Wheedle Parents	81-82	Fly Kite
33-34	Taunt	83-84	Annoy Coworker
35-36	Know Pulp Book Plot	85-86	Use Uncommon Vocabulary
37-38	Tend Lawn	87-88	Understand Opera
39-40	Know Sports Trivia	89-90	Type
41-42	Appear Knowledgeable	91-92	Predict Weather Using Rheumatism
43-44	Make Prank Phone Call	93-94	Understand Mime
45-46	Whistle	95-96	Analyze Poetry
47-48	Tell Joke	97-98	Pick Nose
49-50	Card Tricks	99-00	Mix Drinks

The skill should probably be added to the character after it is fully fleshed out, perhaps even after the character has been played for a while. The Player Character's ability in the Quirk Skill should be randomly rolled (1D100), or simply chosen by the Keeper (pick a number). If picking, remember that both high and low values are usually more interesting than median values.

Which brings up another point about Quirk Skills. A character with a 2% Biology skill probably wouldn't consider themselves a serious Biologist. But Uncle Pete, with his 2% "Cook Breakfast" (Quirk) skill is prone to think himself a great chef, and will insist on cooking every meal.

That's the point of his having the skill in the first place. Any old character can cook breakfast: it takes Uncle Pete, with his special touch (and Quirk Skill) to make it dreadful. Of course, uncle Pete could just as likely have had a Cook Breakfast of 94%, making him a world class flapjack tosser.

It is important to give investigators Quirk Skills that are relatively useless from a functional standpoint. They shouldn't confer an advantage in either combat or normal investigating. They shouldn't usually get investigators one step closer to their goal. This presents an opportunity for the Keeper, as she or he can design a situation where a PC's Quirk




is exactly what is needed to gain something. For example, Old Man Pickens might not tell the nosy investigators about his missing dog until he is fed a home-cooked omelette. Such events should be used very sparingly, or the whole idea of Quirk Skills becomes moot.

Which brings us to experience for Quirk Skills. Normally they will not be checked off, even when they are used successfully. In this respect they are like normal skills; a character can succeed with spot hiddens every minute of game time, but he doesn't check it off until he uses it relevantly. A Quirk Skill should be checked off when

either: a) The Keeper has contrived a situation where a Quirk Skill advances the plot (as above) or, b) the player using the Quirk Skill uses it appropriately in the midst of strong roleplaying. If everyone at the table laughs, gasps or cheers (or groans) a character's actions, it's an indication of good roleplaying. The Keeper might consider granting a check.

Astute players might prefer their character's Quirk Skill kept low. They might relish the thought of playing the world's worst breakfast chef. More power to them! For this reason, experience can always be declined for Quirk Skills. Ad-

ditionally, characters probably shouldn't be granted sanity gains for achieving Quirk Skill scores above 90%, although this is left to the discretion of the Keeper.

Finally, what Quirk Skill to give? Keepers and players should be able to devise skills to fit the character's personality. Conversely, invented skills can be used to give drab characters some verve. Usually homemade quirk skills will be more appropriate than any random one might be. However, on the previous page is a list of suggestions for those who need some ideas. Many of these are lifted directly from published scenarios. 

Chris Klepac

It is late October of 199— in Pennsylvania. Each of the investigators has been unable to sleep because of recurring nightmares, and each has independently sought help from a doctor or therapist. An eccentric psychologist named Lawrence Crosby has come across the investigators' files, and has taken an interest in them because the dreams recorded are remarkably similar.

All the investigators have dreamed of a tall tower made of black stone, standing alone on a great featureless plain under a dark and alien sky. None of the investigators have entered the tower in their dreams, but each night they draw closer, and their sense of dread and foreboding increases.

Over the past week, Dr. Crosby has been interviewing the investigators independently, taking brainwave scans and questioning them under hypnosis to discern the nature of the dreams. He has met with little success. The investigators have heard each other mentioned by Dr. Crosby, but have had no contact as of yet.

One Saturday morning, each of the investigators gets a phone call from Dr. Crosby. He seems excited, and informs them that he has made a major breakthrough in his research. He will not answer questions over the phone, and a successful Psychology roll will reveal that in addition to being excited, he is also very afraid of something. He arranges a meeting between himself and the investigators at one o'clock that afternoon.

Keeper's Information

The events surrounding this scenario began in the 1700s with a young Amish man named John Smith. Smith was an experienced traveller in Earth's Dreamlands, and was soon accused of witchcraft because of the strange notions he had acquired in his adventures. He fled perse-

cution with his daughter to a cave that connected Earth to the land of dreams.

At the entrance to that land, his daughter died, as she did not have enough POW to live through the transit. Stricken with grief and rage, Smith decided to seal the way behind him: he summoned a guardian into his daughter's body so that no man might pass the gate again. However, his anger caused the spell to fail, and he did not get the passive guardian he wanted. Instead, Smith's daughter was occupied by one of the monstrous beings that dances at the court of the daemon sultan, Azathoth. It is insanely angry at its captivity, and is itching for a chance to wreak havoc by calling its master to Earth.

Enter Kevin Drum, a professor of archaeology at Penn State. Acting on an obscure clue found in a trapper's diary, he took a preliminary dig team to the cave just over a week ago. The foolish glory-seekers descended into the depths of the cave, broke the seal, and were immediately Dominated by the creature. Now they sit at their camp, not eating, not sleeping, simply waiting for orders from their master.

Meanwhile, the creature is extending its influence by sending messages out randomly in the form of dreams. The investigators caught some of these messages, as did an author of children's books named Scott Reed. After a period of "automatic writing," while Reed was in a trance-like state, he discovered that he had written a new and somewhat disturbing story. The book contained, among references to the same dreamworld that the investigators have experienced, a version of the spell Call Azathoth. When his usual publishers rejected the work, Reed had it privately printed and passed a few copies around among his friends and associates. Dr. Crosby, poking around the art and literature community for dream-references, was given a copy of the manuscript. This is the breakthrough that he tells the investigators about on the phone.

The reason he is frightened is that he believes that someone is following him, watching his every move. He is right.

The watcher is another John Smith, a descendant of the original dreamer. He has been keeping a close check on the investigation of the cave, because he knows about it from old diaries of his ancestor. He is a painter who has been haunted by the dreams that also plague the investigators, and he has been discreetly tailing Crosby since he started asking questions of the local artists. Smith's naive plan is to obtain a copy of Reed's book, destroy all of the other copies, and harness for himself the power of whatever is in the cave. He has for support his whole family, a degenerate clan that has fallen under the sway of this diabolical man's personality.

This is the way things stand at the beginning of the scenario. The investigators are faced with the task of obtaining the book, deciphering its secrets and stopping both Smith and the entity in the dream-cave before Azathoth returns to Earth.

Meeting Dr. Crosby

It is assumed that around one o'clock the investigators will all arrive at the office of Dr. Crosby, located near the campus of a local university. They are free to introduce themselves outside the office, but knocks on the door will produce no reply. Any investigator trying the door will find it open. The office is somewhat messy, but a note is clearly visible on the desk. It is printed at the top of the next page.

From this point, the investigators are free to proceed as they wish.

Searching Dr. Crosby's office is a possibility, and those who wish to do so can make Spot Hidden rolls. Two things can be found with successful rolls. The first is a crumpled sheet of paper in the wastebasket. Scrawled on it in red pen are the following words:

He is tall. Dark hair. Maybe a beard, not

All Good Children

From the desk of...

Dr. Lawrence Crosby
The Fred Cook Building, Suite 23

My friends,

I regret that I cannot be here to meet with you as promised, but circumstances beyond my control have arisen. The discovery I promised you is one of a book, a book of a strange and somewhat unwholesome nature. It will bring you a few answers, and many more questions. I have safeguarded the book in a box at the First National Bank, and left instructions that only you or myself can withdraw it. I currently fear for my safety, but am pursuing important matters elsewhere. I will contact you as soon as prudence allows.

Sincerely,

Dr. Lawrence Crosby

sure yet.

This is a description Crosby wrote of the man he thinks is following him. The other clue is a slip of paper under Crosby's Macintosh computer. It contains a long list of library call numbers. An investigator looking up the books will find that they all contain descriptions of the ritual sacrifices of the Incas. (This is not a real clue: it's just a list of books that Crosby got when he was writing his dissertation. He hasn't cleaned his office in a while).

At the Bank

Investigators traveling to the First National Bank immediately after leaving Crosby's office will get there just in time to make a Spot Hidden roll. Those making the roll will notice that a tall Amish man leaving the bank gives them a strange, suspicious look before continuing on his way. This is Toby Smith, one of John's

sons, and he has just opened the box that the investigators are headed for, using the box-holder ID number he stole from Crosby's house just a few minutes ago. He found the box empty, for Crosby thought twice about the book's safety and removed it yesterday. Crosby has compared notes with the book's author, Scott Reed, and both are on their way to the dig site.

An investigator who asks about the box is given an odd look and informed that Dr. Crosby just removed the box's contents. If pressed further, the teller will describe Dr. Crosby as the Amish man who just left the bank. The investigators know that this is *not* what Crosby looks like. If they run outside to pursue the man, they will find him gone.

It is possible that one or more of the investigators was left outside the bank, and with a successful Luck roll this investigator saw which way Smith fled.

The resulting chase can be handled by the chase rules in the CoC manual. If the investigators catch Smith, he will not speak to them unless physically intimidated, and even then only if he is afraid for his life. He carries no identification. If the investigators wish to turn him over to the police, proceed to the section on police intervention.

The Crosby House

The investigators may wish to contact Dr. Crosby at his home. Calling his house gets a continuous busy signal (the phone was knocked off the hook), so visiting him personally would be a logical next step. The Crosby home is a modern two-story white house with a well-manicured lawn. It is located in a fairly wealthy suburb of town. The property is fairly large, and the neighboring houses are a respectable distance away, through a thin line of trees. There are no lights on inside the house, and a knock on the door will send it swinging slowly inward. It is obvious that the door has been forced open. (This occurred when John and Toby Smith broke in earlier, looking for Crosby's safe-deposit number). If the investigators decide to proceed, they will find the house tomb-silent. It is in a shambles, with furniture overturned and personal items strewn about. Any investigator making an Idea roll will realize that the robbery that occurred here is probably fake: Crosby's stereo is still here, as is his TV, VCR, etc. There are several items in the house that are of interest to the investigators.

- In a desk drawer in Crosby's study there is a printout of the computer file that links the cases of the investigators. It is covered with red ink — Crosby's speculations about shared telepathy, Jungian archetypes, and other such things. On the last page there are excited, hard-to-read scrawlings that refer to the book Crosby found. He makes references to page numbers that

IN WHICH FOUL STARS SHINE IN THE LONGEST OF NIGHTS

correspond to the investigators' dreams. There is no title listed, but there is a name: Scott Reed. Reed's phone number (a local one) is also given. If the investigators search for the disk that the file came from, they will find that all of Crosby's professional files are conspicuously absent.

- Also in Crosby's study is a peculiar list: The names and addresses of 12 families located in the area. The first three names have large X's through them. These are Amish families that Crosby has located – he hopes to find out who has been following him. All of the families except Smith's are good, honest people, and play no role in this scenario. Note: A copy of the list is provided at the end of the text.
- In a folder on a table in Crosby's bedroom are pictures of certain symbols that relate to another investigation that he has been working on. They have no connection with this scenario, but may make the investigators sweat for a while. These are also reproduced at the end of the text.
- Finally, a grisly surprise awaits the investigators in Crosby's kitchen. His housekeeper came by while the break-in was in progress, and her presence startled John into opening fire. She is sprawled across the floor facedown, dead from two bullets in the stomach and one in the chest. There are no exit wounds in her back, but the kitchen walls are spattered with blood, and she is lying in a large pool of it.

Police Intervention

It is possible that the investigators will contact the police at some point, either after they find Crosby's bank box opened, after they find his house broken into, when they discover the housekeeper's body, or because of some other event later in the scenario. If they are contacted because of a minor matter, they will get the investigators' phone numbers and contact them if they unearth anything. If the investigators don't visit the Crosby house, the police will, and the investigators will

be brought to the scene to see if they can identify the body. If they contact the police only after discovering a murder, they will be detained and questioned for quite some time. The Keeper should decide how successful the police are in their inquiries based on how much information the investigators give them. However, the police should not discover very much, for it is up to the investigators to solve the mystery.

Afternoon Fire

Later that evening, any investigator out driving can make a Spot Hidden roll: if successful, he or she will observe a thick pillar of smoke rising from a central section of the city, and with a Listen roll can detect faint sirens. The fire is at the offices of Sunny Day Publishing, the printing company that Reed hired after several publishers rejected his latest book. Several members of the Smith household entered the building to steal two copies of the Reed manuscript and destroy the remaining copies. If the investigators scan the next day's paper, they can find a full report of the fire, which is suspected of being arson. Three people were killed, one of whom is Zeke Smith of the Amish clan.

Evening Dreams

At the end of the day, the investigators could be at several points. They may be well on their way to solving the mystery, or they may be stumped and clueless. In any case, they will all dream that night of the mysterious tower. Some investigators may opt to try to stay awake, and the Keeper can call for a series of CON rolls. However, at some point at least one of the investigators will fall asleep, and the following event will take place.

All of the sleeping investigators will open their eyes to find themselves on a plain of black dust, extending as far as the eye can see. For the first time, they are all together in the dream. Above them is a sky of strange constellations, and a huge violet nebula occupies a central position in the heavens. Only a few feet away is a tall windowless spire made of blackish green stone. The tower's top is visible, several hundred feet high. A large wooden door stands before the investigators, as if

defying them to enter.

If they choose not to, their range of options is somewhat limited. The investigators arrive in the dream land wearing plain black clothing of a thick canvas-like material. They have no equipment with which to scale the tower, and no provisions for a trek into the desert. Pinching themselves to wake up will have no effect, and if they do decide to wait out the dream, their hunger, thirst, and boredom will seem quite real.

The door swings open easily, and entering investigators will find themselves in a huge room, the dimensions of which far exceed the diameter of the tower. The room is somewhat like the great hall of an opulent castle, with tapestries of abstract design on the walls and many doors leading off in all directions. Light comes from torches that blaze at various points along the walls. Around the inside walls, a huge staircase winds upwards. Looking up, the investigators can see that the room is actually at the bottom of a titanic shaft that extends up as far as the eye can see. Straining their eyes, they may catch a glimpse of clouds swirling in the distance above.

On the floor is a mosaic of strange and wonderful patterns, some of which seem to change before the eyes... or maybe it's a trick of the light. Archaeology and Occult rolls will offer no clue as to the origins of these patterns, but someone impaling one of these may remember the whispered tales of eccentric professors about civilizations older than man, and hasty sketches made of the symbols of these old ones. An investigator making a successful Cthulhu Mythos roll will realize that these symbols are all ancient glyphs of protection, the central one being the Elder Sign. Because this is a dream, normal SAN losses do not apply for these disturbing sights.

If the investigators try one of the doors, it will swing easily open onto yet another disorienting vista: a stretch of Pennsylvania highway. The door is set right on the yellow meridian, and a thick forest of spruce and firs lines the side of the road. The sky here is a yellow tornado-weather hue, giving an even more surreal tone to the surroundings. If anyone steps outside to investigate, they will note a sign just

outside the limits of vision imposed by the door's frame. It reads "Welcome to Stopton, Pop. 1321."

The sign is weathered and has three bullet holes in it. If an investigator comes around to the back of the door, he or she will see an equally blank stretch of highway leading in the opposite direction. There is a door frame on the far side, and standing before it is a tall man in a shapeless garment of heavy black cloth. He wears a wide-brimmed black hat and has a jutting chin covered by a thick beard. This is the senior John Smith, the one exiled to the land of dreams so long ago. As the investigators watch, he seems to fade in and out of existence, sometimes solid, sometimes transparent. His power is limited here, in the personal dreams of the investigators. If they attack him, they will find that their arms or weapons pass through his body. If they give him a chance to, he speaks:

"You must hurry. There is very little time left. Come to this place, some on this side, some on the other. The seal is the door, the book is the key. You must stop it."

The investigators can ask Smith a few questions, and he will answer in a similarly cryptic and ambiguous fashion. A few samples:

Q: Where is this place?

A: Stopton, Pennsylvania. The place where dreams come true. North on your side, south on mine.

Q: Where is the book?

A: This flesh, these hands hold one, but it is not mine to give. The other is imprisoned by its creator.

Q: Who are you?

A: A tired old man. No more blood must be spilled in my name, please.

Q: Why us?

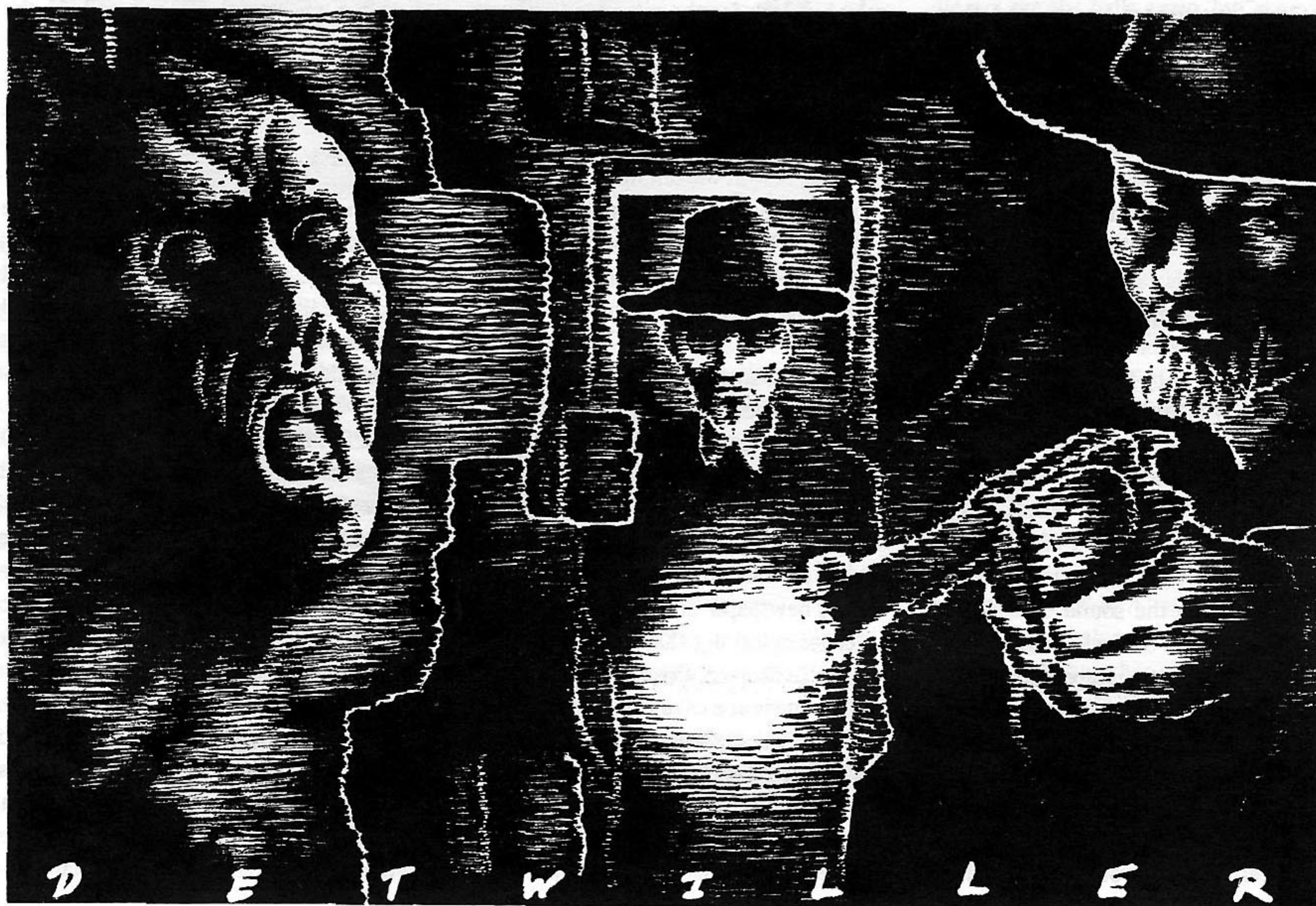
To this question, Smith will simply shake his head sadly and fade away. Shortly after he departs (after about three or four questions), a fierce gale will spring up, forcing the investigators to reenter the door or fall victim to the storm. Investigators who succeed in a Know roll will vaguely remember the name Stopton from the waking world. Anyone impaling this roll will be able to pinpoint its location, about a hundred miles north of the city.

Back in the tower, the investigators

have a couple of options. If they try more doors, the Keeper is free to improvise. Some may be locked, others may hide hallways that lead to ghoul-haunted mazes, still others may hold scenes from the Keeper's own nightmares. The investigators can travel through an intense dreamscape, or they can simply be thwarted by dead ends. The Keeper should make this decision on the basis of how much time he or she wants to devote to this section of the scenario. It should ideally last until the novelty of it has worn off, and no longer.

If the investigators attempt to venture back outside, or if they decide to take the stairs up to the top of the tower, the final event in this section will occur. One of the nearby walls will suddenly take on a rubbery, elastic texture, and out of it will bulge the unmistakable features of Lawrence Crosby.

"Help me..." he moans. As suddenly as that apparition appears, its features meld and shift until they are those of the same man that the investigators saw at the roadside (if they've been there). Anyone impaling an Idea roll will realize that



although the two men are nearly identical, this is not the same man. This is actually the younger John Smith, who is himself dreaming several miles away from the investigators. He will pull himself bodily from the wall, giving the investigators one round to take whatever actions they will. If he is not somehow stopped, he pulls a gun from within the folds of his cloak, and without a word attempts to shoot all of the investigators dead. Dead investigators wake up screaming in a cold sweat, and must make a SAN check or lose one point from the vividness and violence of the dream. If any investigators survive the encounter by somehow killing or evading Smith, they also awake, but not until the next morning. They are refreshed by sleep, and although the events of the dream are fresh in their minds, they lose no SAN.

Midnight Intruder

Another important event will take place at the same time as the dream-episode. Toby Smith will break into the home of one investigator (chosen at random). Smith will quietly search the house to find out what the investigator knows, and then (under John's orders) attempt to kill the investigator by setting fire to the house.

The investigator will have several chances to act: at one point in the dream scene, call for a Listen roll. If the investigator succeeds, he or she is awakened by a noise downstairs and may act from that point. If the roll is failed, call for another Listen roll a few minutes later.

If the investigator succeeds, he or she wakes up with Toby Smith looming over the bed. Toby is armed only with a knife, and a hardy investigator stands a good chance of defeating or evading the killer. If this Listen roll is also failed, a final chance should be given a few minutes later. An investigator making this roll will wake up to the sound of crackling flames: the room is on fire! The investigator still has time to escape the burning house, and may even pursue the fleeing Toby.

If all rolls are failed, the investigator wakes up when he or she starts taking damage from the fire. The investigator can still escape, but probably not without

serious physical injury, as determined by the Keeper.

If Toby is somehow overwhelmed, he will still not speak (if alive). At this point, he is carrying identification, and his address is listed on it.

Morning Decisions

There are a few more things that the investigators may wish to accomplish before taking the journey to Stopton and the scenario's conclusion. In fact, some of the following sections could conceivably take place on the previous day, before the dream episode. Some may not take place at all.

Scott Reed

The author/illustrator of *Tee Tok the Happy Star* is not answering his phone, but the investigators can use the phone book to determine his address. He lives in a nice, well-furnished apartment on the north side of town. The door is locked, and no one is home. By this time, the investigators may have decided that the risk of breaking into a house is outweighed by the danger posed by the enemy. Or, they may just look for the spare key, which is taped inside the porch light. In any case, if they gain entrance to the apartment they can find a few clues.

- On a chair in the dining area is an odd green sport jacket. Investigators making an Idea roll will realize that the jacket belongs to Lawrence Crosby, as they have seen him wearing it.
- On the counter in the kitchen is a hastily scrawled set of highway instructions for reaching Stopton, which the absent-minded Reed forgot to bring along.
- In a prominent place in the living room is a newspaper article detailing an archaeological dig that has recently begun in Stopton, Penn. by Kevin Drum. The site is at a cave a few miles west of town. The dig's purpose is to excavate "a cave dwelling of unknown age and origin." There is a picture of Dr. Drum standing in front of the cave's mouth. The article is about a week old.

- Reed's studio is a haphazard mess. Sketches and paintings for his children's books have been torn down, and in their place have been taped highly realistic renderings of other, stranger subjects. There is a drawing of the same black tower that the investigators visited. There is a picture of the Pennsylvania highway outside Stopton. There is a large portrait, dominating a significant portion of the wall, of a man easily recognizable as John Smith. However, it is not obvious from the drawing which John Smith it is. Also taking up a lot of wall space is a picture of a teenage girl, seated in an ornate chair. Her face is plain, but the picture is painted with such passion that she appears somehow beautiful. These two portraits have been executed with almost obsessive care.

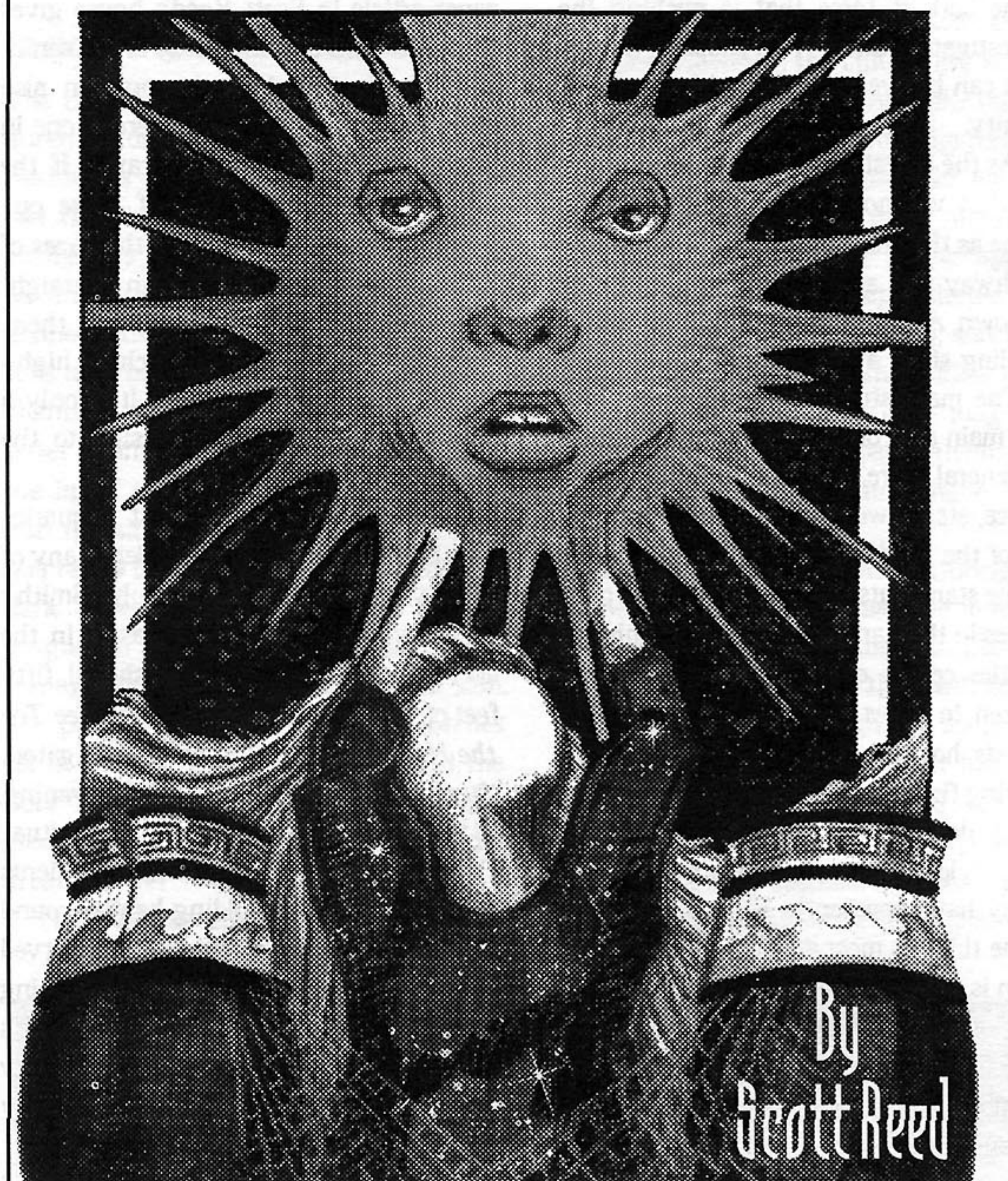
- There is a wall safe in Reed's studio. If the investigators search for the combination, they can find it taped to the underside of Reed's desk. The safe is of a lightweight metal and can be forced open in about an hour with a crowbar and a successful STRx4 roll. If the investigators penetrate the safe, they will finally have their hands on that strange and awful book.

Tee Tok the Happy Star

The investigators' first glimpse of the book should be somewhat disappointing: instead of a thick musty tome in a dead language, the book is brightly colored and reminiscent of something by Dr. Seuss. It is very thin and requires only a few minutes to read.

Briefly, it is the story of a young girl who lives alone with her father in a tall tower (the one from the investigators' dreams). She is lonely, and the stars are her only friends. One star, whom she names Tee Tok, comes out and sings to her every night. She wishes that Tee Tok would come down and play with her, but he tells her that stars must stay in the sky. However, one night she is determined to bring Tee Tok down to play, and she does a bizarre song-and-dance on her lawn, complete with strange symbols on the ground and words in some inhuman lan-

Tee Tok the Happy Star



guage. Tee Tok, thinking he sees another star on the ground, comes down to the girl's lawn, burning her village to the ground in the process. While all the villagers are burning, the girl's father comes out, and with a similar song-and-dance act, sends Tee Tok back to the sky. The star departs, but not before killing the girl's father in a huge gout of flame. The grief-stricken young girl goes to live in a cave for the rest of her days. The book's content, combined with illustrations that seem to squirm before the viewer's eyes, makes this book extremely disturbing: reading it costs 0/1 SAN. The book contains one spell, worked into the sing-song chant of the young girl: Call/Dismiss Azathoth.

Investigating Sunny Day

Travelling to the burnt-out shell of Sunny Day Publishing is a futile move for the investigators. The building has been ravaged by fire, there are no clues. It is not even possible to tell whether the fire was of natural or supernatural origin. If the investigators somehow bluff their way into the police station, or contact an officer through some sort of connection, they can find that the police report makes mention of "unusual flame behavior" that daunted police officers and fire fighters. There is also information on an eye witness, Nathan Taggart, who supposedly gave a doubtful account of the incident. No statement is recorded, as the police did not consider him a reliable witness. They had no evidence with which to arrest him, so he was released.

If the investigators attempt to locate Taggart, they can find his address in the file (he has no phone). Taggart lives in a dingy apartment in the roughest section of town. He is unemployed and is usually at home. He is a tall, gawky man with long gray hair, a grizzly beard and wide staring eyes. He won't be eager to answer questions, but if the investigators can logically persuade him (or bribe him) into telling his story, they will hear the following: Taggart was sitting on a bench across from the publishing company at around ten o'clock when he saw two men and a woman enter the building. They were wearing strange clothes and looked like "pilgrims or something."

About five minutes later Taggart saw a strange red glow behind one of the windows. Then, the window exploded outward, and a huge ball of blue-white flame flew out of the window, streaming a red trail of fire behind it. It circled the building a few times and was joined by another before crashing back in through another window. By this time the building was burning, and it was not long before the fire engines arrived. Taggart did not see the balls again, but at several points he did see long "arms" of flame shoot from windows or doors and come perilously close to incinerating nearby fire fighters. Taggart is convinced that he was a witness to malevolent UFOs.

The other item of interest in the police files is the address of one of the victims, Zeke Smith. He also has no phone.

The Smith House

At some point in the scenario, the investigators may discover the location of the elusive Smith clan, and may wish to pay them a visit. This visit could take the form of a polite knock on the door, a nighttime surveillance mission, or a raid with guns blazing. Note that since most of the Smiths are semi-orthodox Amish, the two-story house is lit only by candles and there is no television, dishwasher or other such mechanical device. Three of the Smiths, John, Toby and Eliza, are not so scrupulous, and they carry guns.

In addition, John has a car (no, not a wagon) hidden out behind the house. By the afternoon of the second day, this car

will be gone, as will be John, Toby, Jason, and Sarah. They will have driven to Stopton to prepare for the ritual that John thinks will bring him everlasting power. Except for Eliza, all of the Smiths remaining in the house are armed with Buck knives, even little Thomas. If the investigators gain entrance to the Smith house in a polite manner, they will be treated well unless recognized by John or Toby, in which case they will be attacked. If the investigators enter violently, the Smiths will respond in kind. If John is in the house during a raid, he will attempt to escape to his car, and from there go directly to Stopton. Statistics for the family are given at the end of the scenario.

If the investigators get a chance to search the house, the only items of real interest are in John's room. There are two books: one is the diary of the senior John Smith, which contains the story given in the Keeper's Information section. The other is a copy of *Tee Tok the Happy Star*. Note: this will be here even if John is not; he acquired two copies from the Sunny Day offices. John's paintings are also in his room, but they are of a very mundane nature: pastoral landscapes and portraits of his family. The paintings show little formal skill, but a great deal of talent.

Welcome to Stopton

Investigators with lots of foresight may decide to attempt to contact the Stopton Sheriff's Office or something similar before continuing. No luck here: it seems as though the entire town of Stopton is not answering its phones. If they ask, getting a useful number of police officers to accompany the investigators to Stopton will be more trouble than it's worth, especially if the investigators are embroiled in a case involving multiple murders, arson, disappearances, and children's books that drive people insane.

The drive to Stopton is easily accomplished within a couple hours, and as the investigators near it, they may notice a few things. The sky has assumed a strange mottled yellow color, as if a tornado were impending. If any investigator makes an Idea roll, he or she will realize that the amount of traffic on the highway is decreasing as the investigators near Stopton.

In fact, after the nearest town to Stopton, (about forty miles away), there are no cars at all. Also, any investigator making a POWx4 roll will be aware that there is some sort of force that is pushing the investigators away from Stopton, a force that can be overcome, but with some difficulty.

As the investigators reach the city limits, they will note that the sign is not the same as the one in the dream; the dream-highway was apparently on another side of town. As they enter the town proper, a chilling sight awaits them.

The main street of Stopton looks like the main area of any small town. There is a general store, a post office, a Sheriff's office, etc. However, the odd thing is that all of the residents of Stopton are outside. Some stand outside a store, forgotten groceries in their arms. Some stand zombified in the center of the street. Others are frozen in poses of walking. One mother stands holding her child's hand. All are staring fixedly at a single point in the sky. They do not move or speak, and do not acknowledge the investigators' arrival. They have apparently been standing for some time, as most are thin and pale. One man is even dead, apparently from dehydration. His neglected body lies in the street. If the investigators attempt to wake or move the citizens, they will meet with no success. Anyone whose eyes are taken from the spot in the sky at which they all stare will slowly return their gaze to it, like a catatonic assuming a fetal position. There is nothing visible in that northwestern quadrant of the sky, but it is the place where, if the investigators are not successful, "Tee Tok" (Azathoth) will make his long-awaited entrance. The stores are open to the investigators if they wish to stock up, and no clerk will stop them from simply taking what they need. The general store has in a case two shotguns, a rifle and shells for these, plus several boxes of pistol ammunition. The sheriff carries a .38 revolver that the investigators are free to relieve him of; there is another revolver inside the office and a shotgun under the dashboard of the sheriff's car.

The Dig Site

There are a few ways in which the investigators can locate the dig site. The newspaper article in Scott Reed's house gives the location, as does the diary of the senior John Smith. The investigators can also survey a map of the area (there is one in the general store) for local caves. If the investigators choose none of these options, they can always follow the gazes of Stopton's populace. Walking in a straight line through the woods will bring them, within an hour, to that stretch of highway they saw in the dream. It is only a mile past the bullet-ridden sign to the turn-off that leads the cave.

Down this dirt road about a quarter mile is a battered white Chrysler. If any of the investigators have seen John Smith's car, they will recognize this as it. In the (locked) trunk of the car is a shovel, fifty feet of rope, and the third copy of *Tee Tok the Happy Star*. Ideally, the investigators should reach the site in the early evening, as the Smiths are preparing for their ritual. Four Smiths and four graduate students will be in the cave, holding hands around the body of Smith's daughter (preserved by the guardian within) and beginning their chant. They are using Smith's daughter as a combination POW battery and "link" to Azathoth. This is why they are able to cast the spell underground.

Dr. Drum and the other three grad students are between the investigators and the cave. They are now mindless servants of Azathoth and will attempt to stalk and kill the investigators before they can reach the cave. Dr. Drum carries a .22 rifle, and the others have knives, hatchets, and other camp tools.

The investigators must travel down the dirt road and into a clearing which is in front of the cave mouth. In the clearing is the remains of a campsite: a few tents, some tools, the remains of a fire. Also in the clearing are two bodies, old enough that flies have started to gather around them. Investigators getting close enough (or using binoculars) will recognize these as the mutilated bodies of Lawrence Crosby and Scott Reed (if they know what Reed looks like). It costs 0/1D3 SAN to view this. These corpses are bait: the

archaeologists are hiding in the woods, and will attack as soon as at least one investigator is visible. Their stats appear at the end of the scenario.

Inside the Dream-Cave

The cave is pitch dark after only a few dozen yards, and investigators will need flashlights to penetrate further. (There is one flashlight at the campsite if the investigators have none). The cave winds on and down for some time in a long, gentle spiral. Investigators making Listen rolls may be able to discern the sounds of chanting from deep within the Earth. After a long hike, the investigators reach the lip of a pit, with stone stairs carved into the side, leading down. About fifty feet below them is a ring of eight people in dark robes, chanting in some ancient tongue. In the center of the ring sits a teenage girl, motionless on a stone slab. The pit is illuminated by a ring of torches set in fixtures around the walls, and the floor is covered with the same strange ideograms that were on the floor of the dream-tower.

There are several ways in which the

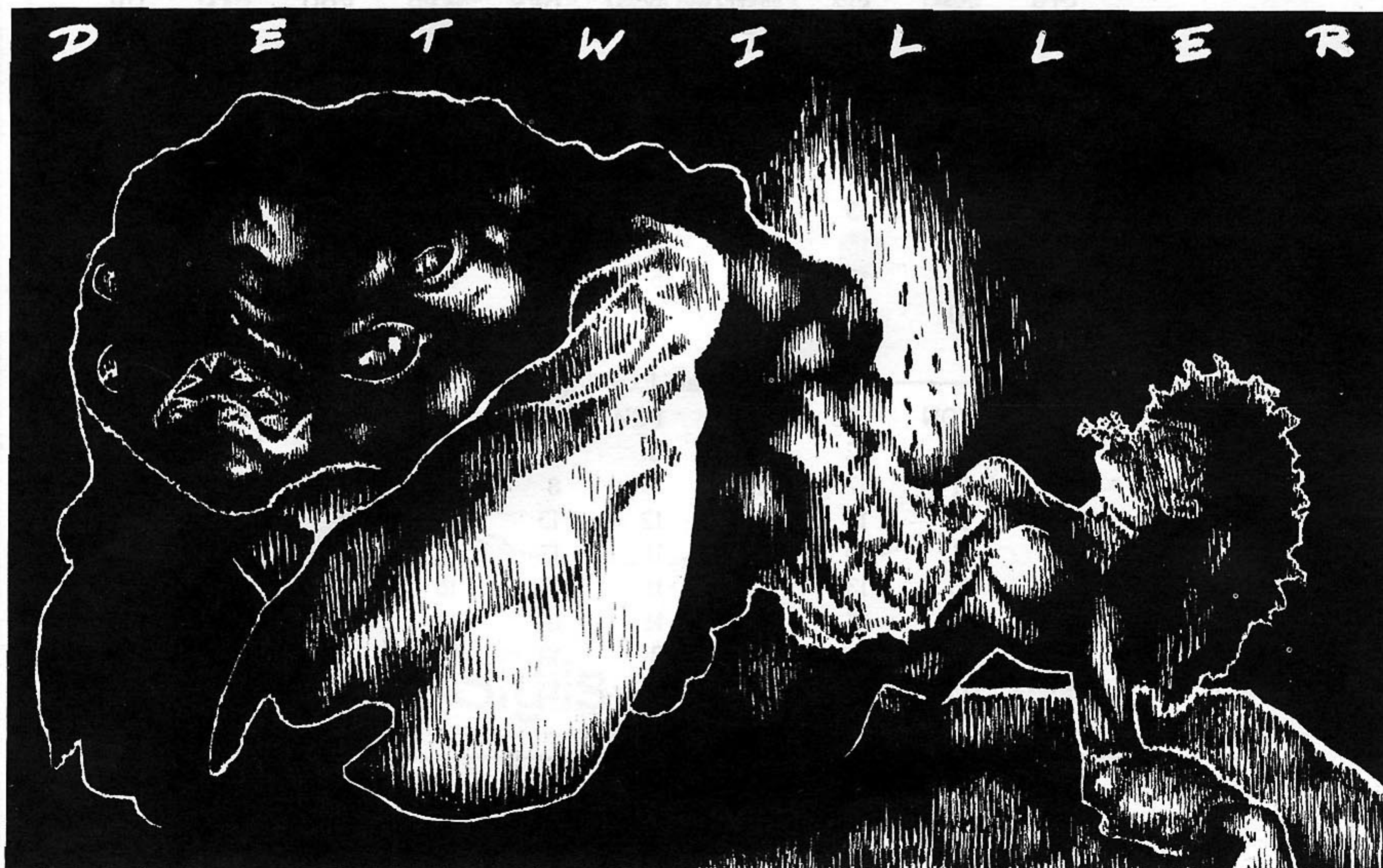
investigators can successfully complete the scenario:

Kill the cultists. If the investigators pick off the Smiths quickly enough, the spell will be broken and the cave can be resealed. However, the cultists are armed and wary, so it won't exactly be like shooting fish in a barrel. If the investigators are slow and an extended gunfight ensues, the magic power in the room might go awry, causing something *else* to appear out of the ether. The Keeper should use his or her fiendish imagination, and base the decision on how close the cultists were to completing the spell, how long the investigators take to dispatch them, and how much the investigators have suffered already.

Dismiss Azathoth. Either during or immediately after the ritual, the investigators may band together to Dismiss Azathoth. If they do so, they will feel a presence partway through the spell, and see that the Senior John Smith has appeared in their midst. He will add his POW of 16 to theirs for the purposes of this spell. If they succeed, the senior John Smith will go to do battle with the younger,

and if the investigators are still near the pit they will see the bottom open as in option three. The two Smiths will drag each other flailing into the shaft, and the same explosion will result as in the following option.

Shoot the girl. This may seem like a sensible suggestion, and it will definitely benefit humanity as a whole, but it may be hazardous to the investigators' health. Shooting the girl will release the Lesser Other God trapped inside her body. It will rip her apart from the inside and reveal itself in all its loathsome glory. At the same time, the floor of the pit will crumble, and investigators will recognize the shaft from their dream-tower. However, this time the shaft is opening downwards, as though the investigators were hanging upside down inside the tower. The cultists, and anyone on the floor of the pit will fall down the shaft, eventually hitting bottom somewhere in the underworld of Earth's dreamlands. This event will cost the investigators 1D6/1D20 SAN to behold. If the investigators kill the thing, it is dispelled back to its place at the center of the universe.



Investigators looking down into the pit at this point will see a tiny point of light that appears to be growing larger. This is a huge explosion of cosmic energy that will seal the cave for good. If the investigators run, they have just about enough time to reach the cave's mouth. If the investigators fail to kill the beast, it will exit the cave dramatically (after lunching on any hapless investigators it can get its tentacles on).

Rewards and Penalties

The penalty for failure in this scenario is obvious: if the investigators do not stop the spell, Tee Tok (Azathoth) appears on Earth. The investigators do not have to worry about their fate, but if the players have other investigators based in the Pennsylvania area, it may be time for some quick bookkeeping. In addition, the loss of mass when Azathoth is summoned away from the center of the universe causes the expansion of the uni-

verse to slow somewhat, thus advancing the death of our universe by a few hundred thousand years. Have a nice day.

If the investigators dismiss Azathoth, or stop him from showing up, they will walk outside the cave to a sky that is already returning to its normal shade of blue, and they will find the residents of Stopton standing around bewildered, as if awakened from a dream. The investigators each gain 1D20 SAN.

If the investigators release the Lesser Other God, they will have saved the world from probable extinction, but will have released an alien horror in the vicinity of Earth. They only gain 1D6 SAN, and only temporarily. The creature's presence on Earth is a good excuse for some madness and death, and investigators who read the newspapers on a daily basis should have that SAN gain slowly chipped away.

Handout #1 – Jacobs' List

~~Gruber~~
~~Johannson~~
~~Koib~~
 Miller
 Timmons
 Castle
 Smith
 Elder
 Ross
 Yager
 March
 Kreutzer

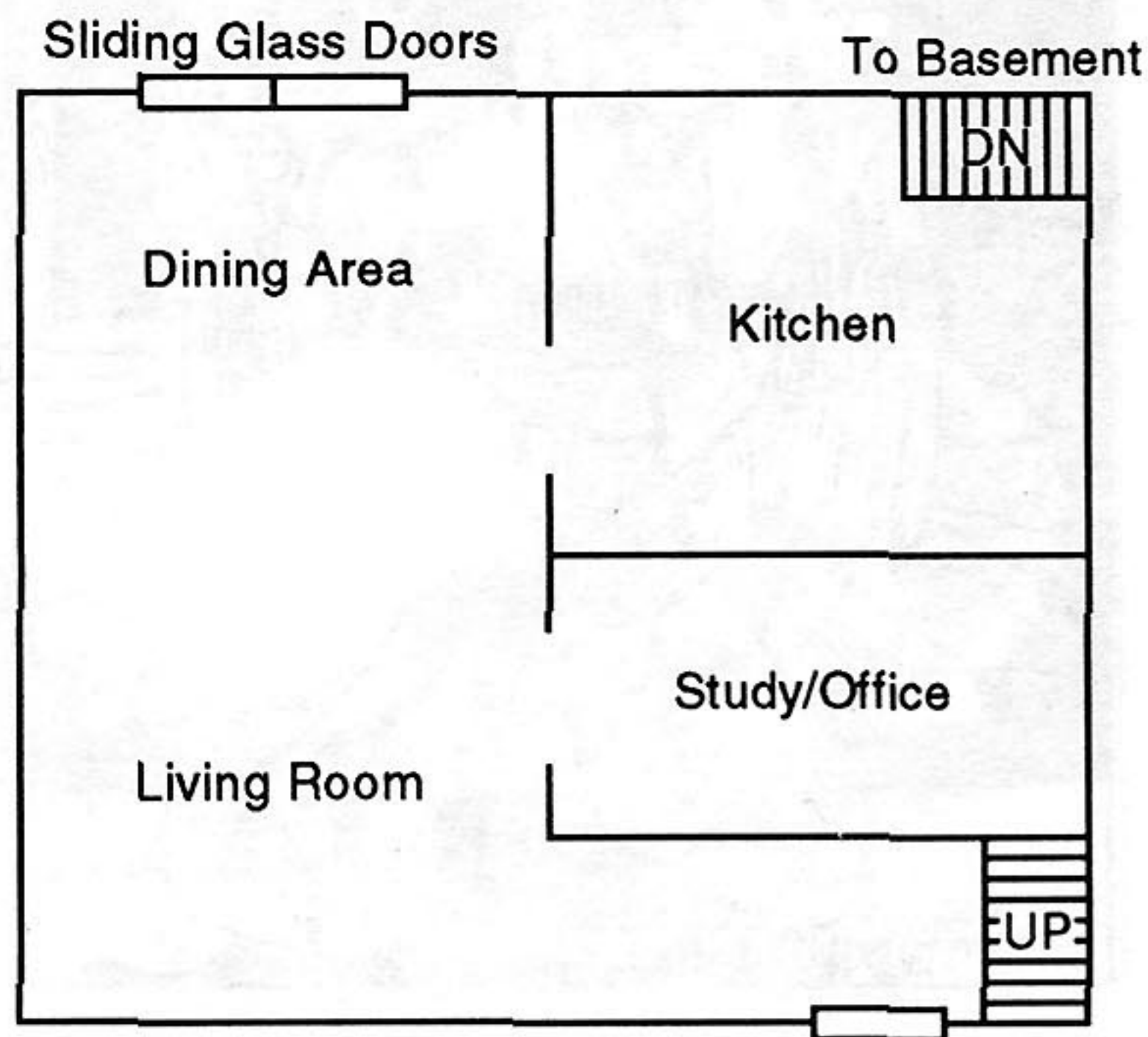
Stats

The Smith Family										
	STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	APP	EDU	SAN	HP
John	14	15	14	16	17	13	10	12	0	15
Toby	10	13	12	14	13	12	10	10	40	13
Zeke	6	14	17	10	13	7	12	10	60	16
Jason	13	7	9	12	11	12	13	9	55	8
Sarah	8	18	13	15	14	14	14	11	50	16
Eliza	9	16	13	10	6	13	8	10	60	15
Tim	13	11	15	10	9	12	13	11	45	13
Rebecca	9	11	17	15	5	12	6	12	25	14
Thomas	5	10	8	13	10	14	12	4	50	9

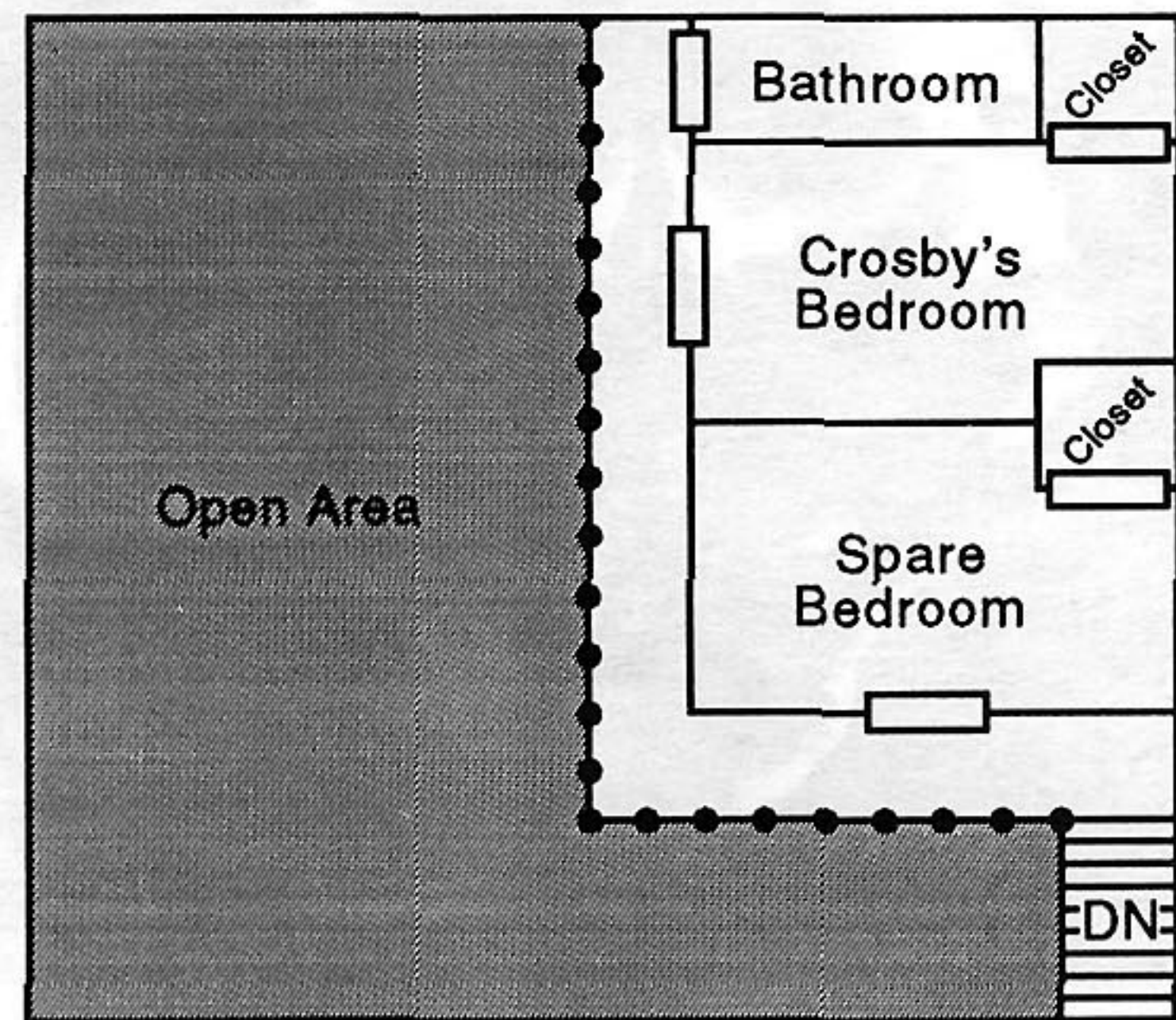
The Penn State Expedition										
	STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	APP	EDU	SAN	HP
Dr. Drum	6	10	12	16	8	13	12	18	0	11
Grad 1	5	11	17	16	15	8	13	16	0	14
Grad 2	9	11	15	8	12	13	7	15	0	13
Grad 3	9	11	10	14	11	13	16	16	0	11
Grad 4	8	10	13	11	11	15	16	16	0	12
Grad 5	5	7	13	13	11	6	13	15	0	10
Grad 6	8	9	11	13	8	12	7	15	0	10
Grad 7	10	13	14	9	11	13	17	16	0	14

The Lesser Other God										
	STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	APP	EDU	SAN	HP
	41	67	115	0	56	8	—	—	—	91

Dr. Crosby's House

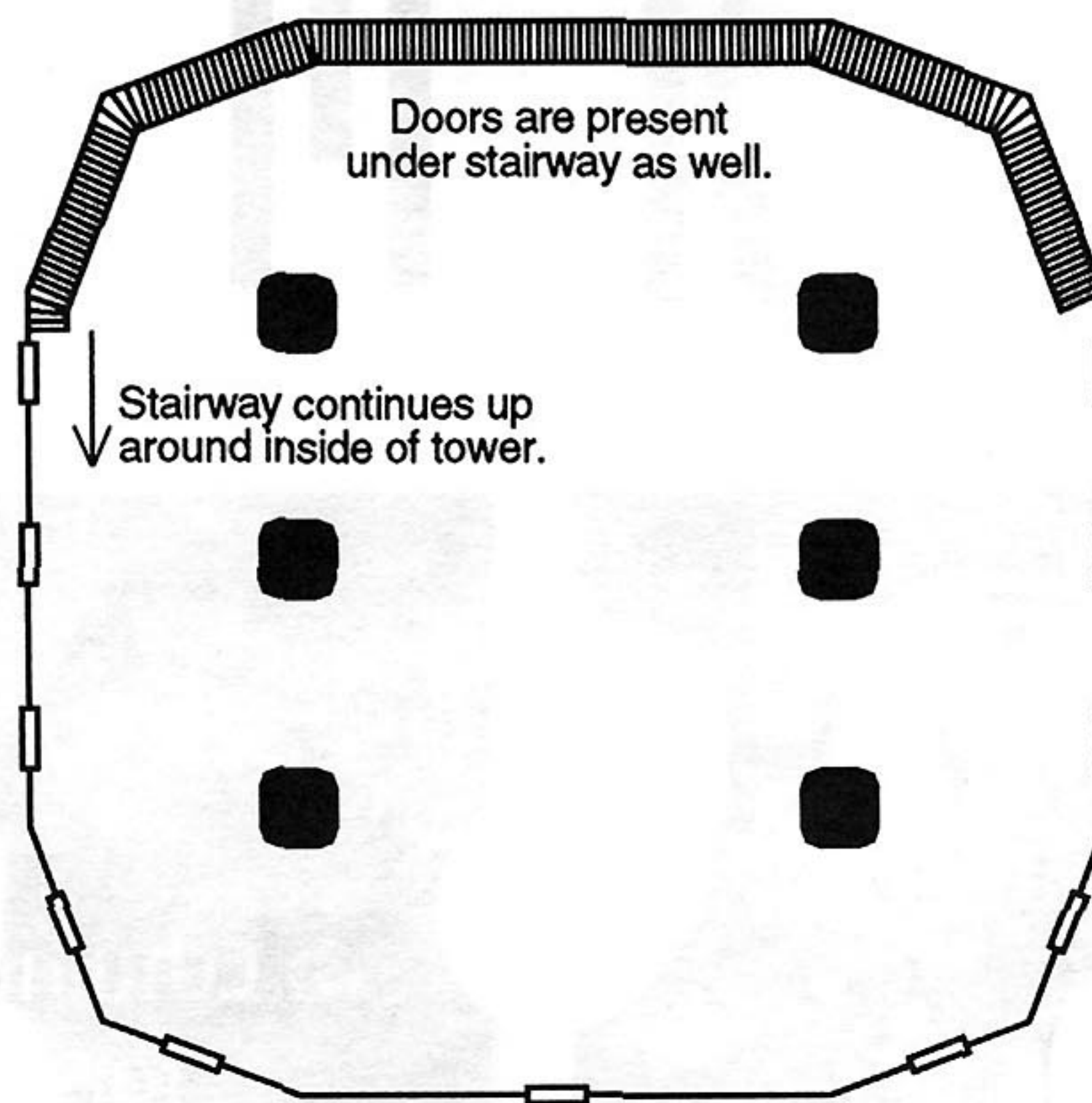


Ground Floor

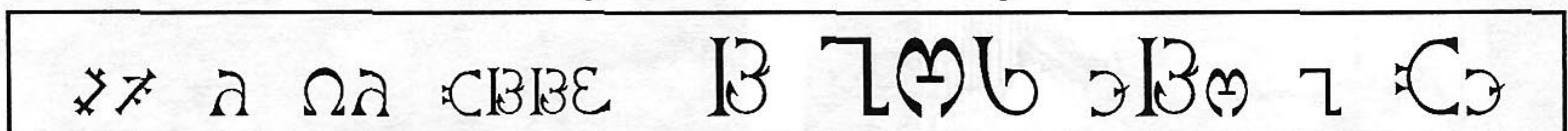


Upper Floor

The Tower



The Sigils In Crosby's File



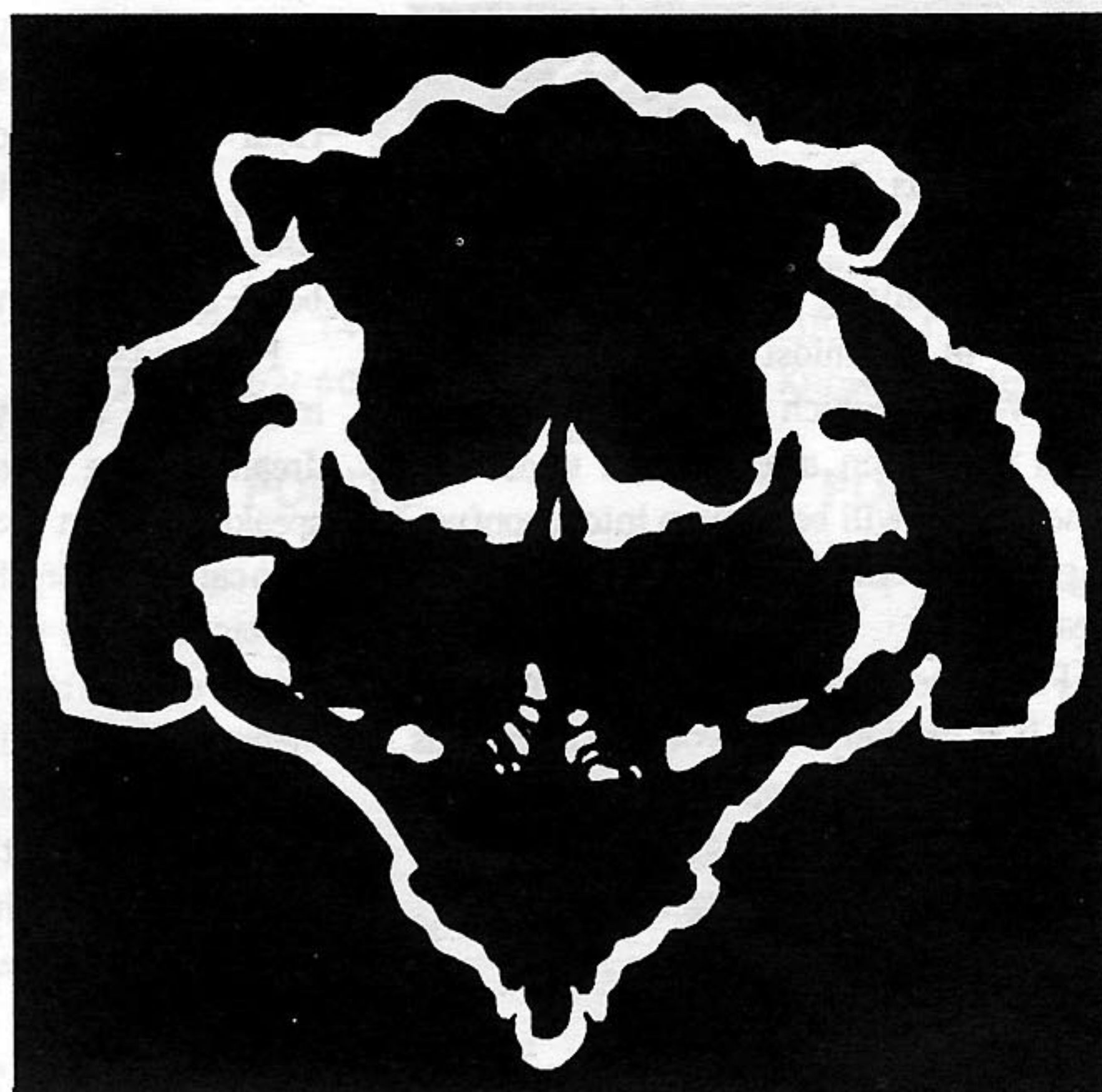


ON

MED



a Cthulhu Now thriller
for 2-4 players



I A

R E S

recommended for
mature readers



John Tynes

This is an unusual scenario designed to challenge your players' roleplaying skills. The title (which means "in the midst of things") refers to the way in which the scenario begins: with the action already well underway. The players will be thrown into a confusing and violent situation and be forced to deal with it.

Pre-generated characters are provided, and it is unlikely that you can adapt this into your regular campaign. Approach it as a one-time special game, rather than another weekly get-together.

Preparation

Before play, you need to prepare your game materials. This includes photocopying the four illustrations on pages 54–55 and cutting them apart, photocopying the Rorschach inkblot on page 59, and then photocopying and separating the character sheets and nametags on page 57.

If at all possible, take the inkblot from page 59 and bring it to a photocopy shop that can enlarge a copy onto a 18"x24" sheet of cardstock. Have them blow up the inkblot to fill as much of that size as possible. If you can't get that done, just have a photocopy of the original on hand to pass around and show it to the players when needed.

Read over those character sheets before reading the "Background" section below. It will help you to understand the characters and the story much better.

Beyond this, you may wish to dim the lights and prepare some appropriate mood music. The adventure will probably take about an hour to play (though your group may be different) and so finding a good soundtrack or constructing a suitable mix tape should not be hard. This is not essential, however, since the situation in the game should be dramatic enough that tension and mood will flow easily. Keep things moving and remain focused on the events at hand.

Background

James Gantry, Terry Douglas, Harry Morgan, and Marcell Pfeiff are all in-

mates at the Liberty Center for the Criminally Insane. The center resides in a largely rural area near fictitious Liberty, Missouri, in the south-central part of the state. The four inmates share a simple bond: all are violent, ruthless sociopaths.

For the last few weeks, these four inmates have been visited by a recurrent dream. In the dream, a shadowy being speaks to them from mists. This being, who calls himself "the Opener of the Way," invites the men to join him. He promises them freedom from incarceration, and tells them they can join him on "the other side."

Just who or what is "the Opener of the Way" is irrelevant to this scenario. An aspect of Nyarlathotep is a reasonable assumption, if it helps to have a hook to hang this on.

In their dreams, the four inmates have met each other and have been taught a powerful magical ritual by which they can open the way and pass through to join their new-found master, who promises them power and vengeance against their enemies.

The time has come. Extensive flooding throughout the Summer of 1993 has damaged vast parts of Missouri (as well as other states) and the waters have reached the Liberty Center. An emergency flood condition occurs and the inmates are hurriedly packed into prison-system buses to be shuttled elsewhere.

The bus containing the four inmates is attacked on the road by a Hunting Horror, which tears off part of the roof and sends the bus careening off the road. The four inmates escape from the wreckage unhurt with a guard in tow; they use his keys to remove their handcuffs and take off into the night.

About a mile off they stop a car containing Linda Maye Olcott and her teenage daughter Susan. The inmates and the guard pile into the car and order Olcott to drive to their farm. Pulling partway onto the long gravel drive, Harry Morgan orders Olcott to pull over. Once this is accomplished, he shoots and kills both Olcott and her daughter. The inmates stash the two bodies in the trunk and (still with the guard) sneak up to the farmhouse.

The house is empty. Olcott's husband is away with his friends on a hunting trip.

Once inside and secure, the inmates choose the dining room to perform the ritual. There they tie the guard down and then Terry Douglas cuts the guard's throat. Douglas then slices off the dead guard's face and removes his tongue.

As per their instructions, Marcell Pfeiff paints a large Rorschach blot on the wall in the guard's blood. The blot is one all-too-familiar from their therapy, and has special significance to each inmate.

Once the blot is completed, Pfeiff (who has no tongue) puts the severed tongue in his mouth and pulls the guard's face on over his own. The Opener of the Way then possesses him and instructs them in the final acts of the ritual. These begin.

The Rorschach blot will become a gate to the other side when the ritual is completed. The inmates do as they are told — and then something goes wrong.

There is a release of power that shocks the group. When they recover, the Opener is speaking a final few words through Pfeiff. But none of the group knows who they are or what they are doing there or just what in the hell is going on.

At this point the scenario begins.

First Moments

If you have the 18"x24" Rorschach blot, tape it up to the wall somewhere nearby. Have the four nametags and the four character sheets face down in front of the players' spots around the table. Try to match up each player with an appropriate character.

Before the game, take aside the player who will play the mute Marcell Pfeiff. Pfeiff begins the adventure wearing the face of the dead guard and with the dead guard's severed tongue in his mouth. Instruct the player that on cue, he should put his hands to the sides of his face and stretch his skin, to give the impression that he is wearing the flesh of the guard. The player should also, when given this cue, speak in a commanding voice the following words: "To know me is to join me. I am the Opener of the Way." Make sure they have the words memorized.

Bring the players in, point them to their spots at the table but tell them not to sit since their characters begin the game standing around a table much like this

GANTRY

STR 16 CON 14 SIZ 17
DEX 12 APP 10 POW 14
SAN N/A EDU 10 INT 12
Luck 70 Know 50 Idea 50

HIT POINTS

1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16 17 18

PERSONALITY

You don't take crap from no one. You're a big man, and you aren't afraid to use your size and strength. The only way people respect you is if they fear you. Pain is power. You don't want to be in charge, but you want to be on the strongest side, the winning side, in any situation. You have a very short temper but you don't stay angry once you've punched someone or broken their arm. You see things in terms of absolutes: either someone is with you or they're against you. If they're against you, look out. Pain is power.

DOUGLAS

STR 13 CON 12 SIZ 12
DEX 16 APP 12 POW 14
SAN N/A EDU 13 INT 14
Luck 70 Know 65 Idea 65

HIT POINTS

1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16 17 18

PERSONALITY

You've got great hands. You know you can skin a rabbit in no time flat. You're a big meat eater — right now you're hungry for a steak. Blood gets your appetite going. You don't like sudden violence because it makes you nervous. You aren't a fighter. You just like to be in control. When you have someone powerless, you can show them tricks. Take your time. Teach them who's the boss. You mutter to yourself a lot and deny any and all accusations without thinking, although you might agree or admit to something later. Ignore contradictions.

MORGAN

STR 10 CON 12 SIZ 10
DEX 14 APP 11 POW 15
SAN N/A EDU 14 INT 15
Luck 75 Know 60 Idea 75

HIT POINTS

1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16 17 18

PERSONALITY

You're a take-charge kind of guy. You've got a brain in your head and you know it. You instinctively look other people over and decide if they'll do what you tell them to. You can be very convincing. You aren't indiscriminately violent but you like the feel of a gun in your hands and you take a certain satisfaction in kacking anyone who won't be a good sheep and follow orders. You know a lot about weapons, alarms, burglaries and you're good at it but you tend to leave a bloody mess behind — it just happens.

PFEIFF

STR 13 CON 14 SIZ 14
DEX 13 APP 15 POW 16
SAN N/A EDU 11 INT 14
Luck 80 Know 55 Idea 70

HIT POINTS

1 2 3 4 5 6
7 8 9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16 17 18

PERSONALITY

You have no tongue. You understand English when spoken to you (you aren't deaf) but you can't read or write. You tend to live inside your head, spinning out red fantasies again and again. You've got a handsome face and people tend to feel sorry for you. This makes them vulnerable. You latch onto any sign of vulnerability and exploit it to ultimately violent ends. You're not sure why you have no tongue but it's been that way for a long time, you think. People give you crap about your name sometimes and you hate it.

Above: cut apart these four character sheets and hand them out. Below: cut apart the nametags for each player to wear.

GANTRY

LIBERTY CENTER FOR THE

CRIMINALLY INSANE

1077239

DOUGLAS

LIBERTY CENTER FOR THE

CRIMINALLY INSANE

1077346

MORGAN

LIBERTY CENTER FOR THE

CRIMINALLY INSANE

1077467

PFEIFF

LIBERTY CENTER FOR THE

CRIMINALLY INSANE

1077498

one.

Tell them to put on their nametags, and that their nametags represent embroidered/sewn-on patches. All wear the same clothes: greenish-blue institutional shirts and pants with low-cost sneakers. They have no wallets, checkbooks, keys, etc.

Once the above is taken care of, have them pick up their character sheets and read them briefly. Then, give the Pfeiff player his cue to stretch his face and speak the words.

Exploring the Scene

The characters are standing in the dining room of a somewhat shabby and rustic house. It is a pleasant fall evening. Cheap prints of dogs hunting quail decorate the walls. A cabinet against the wall contains "fine" china and silverware. They are wearing the aforementioned bland clothing with (apparently) their last names sewn on.

On the dining room table, a beefy man dressed in guard/police-style clothing lies tied by the wrists and ankles. His throat has been cut, and blood has sprayed and run across his chest and the table.

In addition, his face has been cut off. The cut line runs across the hairline, in front of the ears, and under the chin. He lies there, muscle and tissue exposed and eyes staring out dully with no eyelids to cover them. His tongue has been cut out.

On the wall is a large Rorschach blot painted in fresh blood. In front of it stands a man whose name-patch says "Pfeiff." He holds the guard's face over his own, and has just finished speaking in a strange voice.

Harry Morgan has the guard's .38 revolver in his pants pocket, obvious to anyone who looks. Should he check, two

bullets have been fired, and recently at that (expended on Mrs. Olcott and her daughter). Terry Douglas has a bloody paring knife on the floor just under the table, less obvious. Gantry and Pfeiff are not armed and no one has any possessions other than these.

Pfeiff is suddenly very conscious of holding warm sticky flesh over his face, and of holding a still-bleeding human tongue in his mouth. He can remove both items if he wishes. He has no tongue of his own, and the guard's no longer functions as it was apparently doing a moment ago.

Step back and let the players interact. None of them remember who they are (other than the names sewn on their shirts),

identifies him as "Dennis Gelon," a guard at the Liberty Center for the Criminally Insane of Liberty, Missouri. Third, his wallet holds \$46 and an assortment of credit cards and ID cards which the group might decide to take.

Examining the Blot: The bloody blot on the wall is curious. Anyone examining it who makes a POWx3 roll will think it moves or shifts for a moment; must have been a trick of the light. If a player asks whether or not the blot is at all familiar, tell all the players that the blot is familiar to them from half-remembered therapy sessions. They remember bored-looking men holding up cards with images like this on them, including the very one on the wall.

Exploring the House

The farmhouse in which the inmates find themselves is two stories tall, in a traditional "shot-gun" arrangement (in which a hallway runs straight through the house, from front door to back door). Each room is described below, and the house is mapped on page 60. Items of interest in each room are listed, generally focused on makeshift weapons and valu-

ables. The house has electricity and lights can be turned on or off as the inmates wish.

Dining Room. This is where the action begins and has already been described.

Kitchen. The kitchen is cozy and full. A small breakfast table and chairs sit below the windows overlooking the cellar doors, while the rest of the room is open space among the various cabinets and appliances. A microwave oven, toaster, refrigerator, gas stove, etc. are all present. Plenty of food and, for those interested, kitchen knives and flashlights are present.

Bathroom. A small, somewhat dingy



who the dead man on the table is, what the bloody blot means, where they are, or what is going on. They will doubtlessly fire questions at each other, probably afraid of accepting guilt for the dead man on the table. Note that Douglas is particularly resistant to accusations of any sort. Note also that Pfeiff understands spoken English and will nod, shake his head, pantomime, etc. but does not read or write.

Examining the Guard: The guard's body has a few important clues and items. First, his belt contains an additional 12 bullets for the .38 Morgan is carrying. Second, he wears a photo-ID on his shirt pocket that



bathroom. It could use a cleaning. Items of interest include a straight razor and various chemicals such as bleach and aerosol bug spray.

Susan's Bedroom. This is the bedroom of the Olcott's late daughter, Susan. She was 16 years old and attended school at nearby Liberty Junior High. Her room is done up in pink with a plethora of bows and stuffed animals. Her walls and dresser are covered in photos — either various stars clipped from magazines or of herself and her friends. Items of interest include a pair of scissors and an assortment of make-up good for dying hair or changing other facets of one's appearance.

Parlor. A dim glow issues from this room, the only light in the house when the game begins other than the dining room. The glow comes from the television set, which — should anyone ask — is airing a local news special report. A reporter stands in front of the wreckage of a large bus labeled "Liberty Center for the Criminally Insane," across which rescue workers clamber and scuttle. The reporter describes the accident in sketchy terms, and says that police

advise residents to stay indoors and avoid walking anywhere due to the escape of several dangerous inmates, etc. etc. Other than the television, the parlor contains a working (but not currently in use) fireplace, a couch, two armchairs, and various tacky bric-a-brac. Items of interest include a fireplace poker and assorted vases, lamps, ceramic Jesuses, etc. which could be used as weapons in a pinch.

Upstairs Bathroom. Much like its downstairs counterpart, only cleaner.

Storage. A smallish space holding boxes full of household debris — old magazines someone saved, Christmas decorations,

small pieces of furniture, etc. Numerous places to hide and things to throw.

Cedar Closet. A clothes closet for longer-term storage within walls of cedar for preservation. Winter clothes or summer clothes, coats, jackets, additional blankets, comforters, etc. can be found here and it also makes a decent hiding place. One area near the front serves as Mr. and Mrs. Olcott's own closet since their bedroom's wardrobe isn't large enough.

Guest Room. Formerly this room belonged to the Olcott's son Timothy, but he is in the Marines and has not lived here for some time. This now serves as a guest room and is sparsely furnished — nothing beyond a bed, dresser, and night-table.

23 will do it. Inside are a 22 rifle, a 20-gauge double-barrel shotgun, and a 38 revolver. Copious ammunition exists for all three. Conspicuously missing is the weapon that goes with the boxes of 30-06 ammo.

Exploring the Grounds

Outside the house are a couple things of note. First, the Olcott's car is lying in a ditch halfway along the driveway. The bodies of Linda Maye and Susan are still in the trunk, and the keys are still in the ignition. The car is not disabled, but it'll take 10-15 minutes to manhandle it back onto the road.

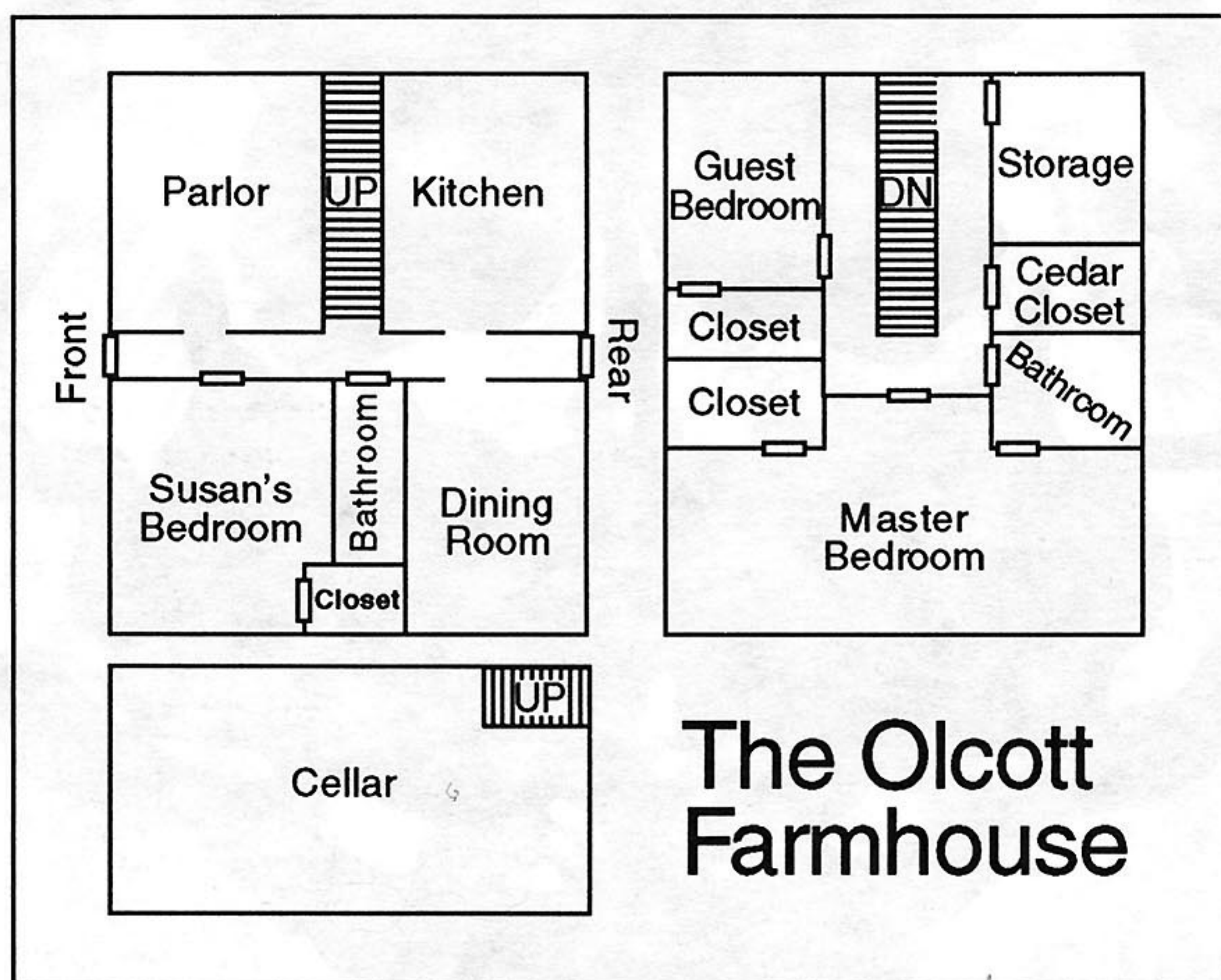
Second, there is a barn with a fenced-in yard about forty yards from the house. There are two horses in the barn. Other than the animals, the only things the inmates are likely to find of interest in the barn are the various tools such as pitchforks, spades, and shovels. There is no electricity in the barn, but there are several gas lanterns that can be lit.

Flashbacks

During the course of the adventure, each inmate will have a flashback to their

past. These can occur whenever you choose. They can be keyed to an inmate's surroundings — Morgan's flashback of a burglary could occur when he is creeping through a dark hallway of the Olcott house — or can simply happen when you choose so as to heighten the drama and tension.

The four flashbacks appear at right. As presented there, you can photocopy them and hand them out at the right time simply as handouts to be read. Alternately, you can use these as guidelines for playing out each flashback one-on-one with the player as a roleplaying exercise.



Master Bedroom. The bedroom for the Olcotts. A bit crowded, a bit messy. A large bed, two night-tables, a large wardrobe holding everyday wear, and a small bookcase with night reading materials. Mr. Olcott is a big fellow (SIZ 15) and his clothes will fit everyone but Gantry.

Cellar. Below ground, this space serves to hold the furnace, hot water heater, washer & dryer, and storage space for firewood, jars of canned preserves, etc. Of particular interest to the inmates is likely to be Darryl Olcott's gun cabinet. It's locked and sturdy, but a few minutes and a STR resistance roll against the case's STR of

SIMON DOUGLAS

Image

A smashed jack o'lantern.

Flashback

It is Halloween. Simon is 9. He has spent the entire afternoon meticulously carving a stunning jack o'lantern for this evening. Simon's father comes in, drunk and angry. He stomps around in the kitchen and accuses Simon of leaving dirty dishes in the sink. He accuses Simon of spilling soda all over the floor and cleaning it up without telling him. He accuses Simon of wanting to run away from home. He accuses and accuses and accuses. He accuses Simon of not loving his father. Finally he says "I'm the boss around this house, you little son of a bitch," and puts his fist into the carved face of the pumpkin. The final image of the smashed pumpkin resembles the shape on the wall, which now seems to pulse dimly to him only.

HARRY MORGAN

Image

A bust of Shakespeare, blood and tissue on the face.

Flashback

Harry is 14. He and a friend have broken into the house of an old man in a nearby neighborhood — it's their first robbery. His friend Terry is in the next room. Harry is in a small study with no windows and only one door. He is stuffing his backpack with a bronze bust of Shakespeare from a bookshelf when he hears voices in the hall outside. He hears Terry yell and a gunshot. Footsteps. He has no weapon other than the bust. The door opens. The old man stands there in his night-gown holding a pistol. Harry strikes with the bust and brings the old man down. The final image of the bloody Shakespeare bust resembles the shape on the wall, which now seems to pulse dimly to him only.

Photocopy and cut apart these four flashbacks if you want to hand them out to the players.

JAMES GANTRY

Image

A woman wearing leather/S&M outfit holding her arms forward. Her face is not visible.

Flashback

James is wearing a leather mask that restricts his vision. He is 12 years old. His sister Deborah, 17, has him tied up. Their foster parents are gone for the night. She is asking him questions. His answers are greeted with a slap in the face. She asks him "who do you love most in the world," "what do you like most in the world," and "what do you hate most in the world." She refutes his answers and slaps him again. Finally she draws nearer and cups his face in her hands. His field of vision has narrowed such that he can no longer see her head or legs. She asks him "what is power?" Incorrect responses get a knee in the groin. The only correct response is "pain." Whatever the response, right or wrong, the flashback ends. The final image of Deborah's torso in the leather outfit resembles the shape on the wall, which now seems to pulse dimly to him only.

MARCELL PFEIFF

Image

The large, friendly face of a St. Bernard.

Flashback

Pfeiff stands before a nice small house, just having knocked at the door. He is 19, living in a new town and working at a hardware store to pay the rent. It is a cool day but he is overdressed — long sleeves, overcoat, too-warm gloves. The door opens and a young woman about his age opens. He recognizes her as a co-worker at the hardware store. She thanks him for coming, invites him into the kitchen for lunch. She says how sorry she is for the way the other employees have treated him. Marcell knows he is supposed to be making a delivery right now. He knows he has parked the store truck in an alley four blocks away. He knows that in his coat pocket is a plastic bag containing a hammer stolen from the store. He is here to kill this woman, the first time he has killed anyone. Her dog, a friendly St. Bernard, enters and wanders over. Marcell looks down at the dog's pleasant face. He knows this is the last thing he will ever see through the eyes of a sane man. The final image of the dog's face resembles the shape on the wall, which now seems to pulse dimly to him only.

This was done in both playtests and worked well, but some of the flashbacks (such as Gantry's) work better when played out than do others (such as Pfeiff's) because they feature more interaction.

Once a given inmate has experienced his flashback, that inmate can now recall his full name and knows more of his life than before. He still cannot recall the events leading up to this evening, but is aware of his past and the person he is.

In addition, the inmate can now pass through the Rorschach blot in the dining room and reach the other side. How this can occur is discussed in "Opening the Way," later in the text.

The Hunters Return

At whatever point you think appropriate, early or late, Darryl Olcott and his three hunting buddies come home. They are in a full-size Chevy pickup truck with a camper on the back. The inmates can make Listen or Spot Hidden rolls to hear the truck's approach or see its headlights, depending on where they are when the hunters come home. The hunters have been listening to the radio and are aware of the escaped inmates, but haven't paid the news much heed.

If the car has not been moved and the bodies are still in the trunk, the pickup will pull partway into the driveway and stop. Olcott will get out, swearing, and go see why his car is in the ditch. Finding the bodies of his wife and daughter in the trunk, Olcott is stunned. He quietly tells his friends to get their weapons, and the four men approach the farmhouse stealthily, out for blood.

If the car is there but the bodies have been hidden, Olcott finds the blood in the trunk. He and his friends approach the

house armed but less determined.

If neither car nor bodies are present, the pickup pulls all the way to the front of the house and the men enter joking and unarmed.

Should the inmates attack the men outside, Olcott is in the passenger seat of the cab and his friend Billy is driving. In the camper are the other two men, Gene and Tom. There is a .22 rifle and a 12-gauge double-barrel shotgun behind the seat, with a box of ammunition for both. In the camper is a .30-06 rifle, a 20-gauge pump shotgun, and a 10-gauge double-barrel shotgun. Both slugs and buckshot are present for the shotguns, as is ammunition for the rifle.



The combat between the hunters and the inmates is likely to be bloody and confused. If the hunters get the drop on the inmates, combat will begin when Olcott fires both barrels of his 12-gauge through a window or after kicking open the front screen door. He will probably kill whoever he shoots at this first round. His friends will remain outside initially, firing through the windows. The hunters are almost as good at killing as the inmates are, and are better at stealth and ambush. Plus, they're enraged and drunk. The hunters' stats are printed on the next page.

Opening the Way

The scenario ends when each inmate has either been killed, been captured, escaped the area, or passed through to the other side by means of the Rorschach blot.

This last option, in which a particular inmate "opens the way" and passes through, can occur several different ways and it's largely up to you. First, you need to draw their attention back to the blot in the dining room once they've begun poking around and making plans to flee. To do this, have a sound from each of their flashbacks begin to emerge from the dining room and, ultimately, from within the blot. Gantry hears his sister laughing at

him; Douglas hears his father ranting; Morgan hears the old man breathing; Pfeiff hears the St. Bernard growling.

Once an inmate has returned to the dining room, it's up to him and to you to get through. In the first playtest, Gantry sat in a chair facing the blot and muttered to himself about how he'd get Deborah. Soon the image of the blot expanded to fill his vision, and when it retracted he was gone. In the second playtest, Pfeiff

charged the blot with a hammer he'd found. When he struck it there was a flash of light and he vanished.

In essence, the way to activate the gate is first to understand what it represents to you, and then to believe that the image of the blot and the image in your head are one in the same. When an inmate accepts that they are and acts accordingly (as they did in the examples above), they go through. This is largely up to your judgment, and should hinge on how well the player roleplays. The point at which they understand the character should be the point at which they pass through.

Playtest Notes

Your most difficult task may well be to prevent the inmates from fleeing at the first opportunity. You can stall them with the television news report and by stretching out their exploration of the house — act as if they could be in combat at any moment and therefore must state their actions in very certain, careful terms as they prowled about.

If you're lucky, the players will get caught up in their characters enough that their interactions will keep them in the house long enough. Otherwise, bring in the hunters as soon as possible. Then, if you still need to keep them roped in, have the police show up in force. Helicopters with spotlights, roadblocks, cruisers pulling up, etc. This latter option will set up a siege of sorts which can provide plenty of drama. If all goes well, the inmates will all pass through and the police will converge on an empty house.

In the initial playtest, Douglas was killed in the first ninety seconds of the game when he tried to grab Morgan's gun. The remaining inmates went through the house quickly and then Gantry and Morgan massacred the hunters before they could even get out of their truck. Pfeiff and Morgan fled the area not long thereafter. Only one inmate (Gantry) made it through, as he stayed in the house after the others left him staring into the blot and cursing at his sister.

In the second game, the group stayed inside for most of the session before finally venturing out to the barn to burn their uniforms. They never found the car or the bodies. Morgan went through first as he examined the blot after his flashback. Gantry heard his sister laughing at him so he fired at the blot with a rifle from the cellar, and went through. Pfeiff and Douglas were ambushed by Olcott, who killed Douglas and mortally wounded Pfeiff. Pfeiff stumbled into the dining room while Olcott was reloading and swung his hammer at the blot, passing through as he did so.

When you assign the characters, try to match them up with appropriate players. In both games Gantry sided with Morgan almost immediately, especially since Mor-

gan had the gun. Also in both games, the inmates tended to ignore or ridicule Pfeiff, who would just do his own thing and stay clear of the rest. In the second game Douglas sided with Pfeiff to some extent, although Pfeiff was planning to kill him towards the end.

The meat of this adventure will come from the players interacting and getting into their characters. The inmates have specific personality traits that should be easy to make use of in the game, and once the players are into the story you won't have to do very much to keep the action moving.

Beginning and ending the adventure abruptly is very important. It should seem like a slice from a larger story. Beginning it with this in mind isn't too hard. Cue the Pfeiff player to grimace and speak the words, then describe the scene and the inmates' lack of recall. Then step back and say nothing — force them to jump into their characters and begin conversing. Say as little as possible during the game. When an inmate goes through simply tell them in private that they are gone and that the scenario has ended for them. Answer no questions at that time. Finally, when the last inmate has died, gone through, or whatever, just say "the adventure is over" and begin packing up your stuff.

The players will want to know the story, of course, and they deserve to. After the game, outline the events that led up to their being in the farmhouse. Do not answer or speculate as to the fate of inmates who opened the way and went through; leave it to the players' imaginations.

Stats

Darryl Olcott, angry widower

STR 14 CON 16 SIZ 13
INT 9 POW 10 DEX 16
APP 12 EDU 12 HP 15

Skills: Dodge 40, First Aid 38, Hide 54, Listen 42, Natural History 20, Ride 15, Sneak 55, Spot Hidden 45, Swim 58, Track 60

Weapons: 12-gauge double-barrel shotgun 55%, 4D6

Notes: Darryl is quiet but quick to anger. He doesn't trust police officers any more than he has to and believes in personal

justice.

Billy Harrell, hunter & drunkard

STR 12 CON 14 SIZ 15
INT 11 POW 12 DEX 12
APP 13 EDU 13 HP 15

Skills: Dodge 26, Hide 38, Listen 50, Natural History 40, Sneak 35, Spot Hidden 30, Track 30

Weapons: 22 rifle 42%, 1D6+2

Notes: Billy is a nice enough guy on his own, but when he's with Darryl he just does what he's told and drinks a lot.

Gene Adams, hunter & mentor

STR 13 CON 17 SIZ 15
INT 14 POW 14 DEX 13
APP 11 EDU 15 HP 16

Skills: Dodge 30, First Aid 48, Hide 60, Listen 50, Natural History 55, Ride 35, Sneak 75, Spot Hidden 55, Swim 65, Track 70

Weapons: 30-06 rifle 65%, 2D6+4; Fist/Punch 60%, 1D3+1D4

Notes: At 50, Gene serves as a mentor to his friends, but treats Darryl as the leader.

Tom Cowen, hunter & thug

STR 16 CON 17 SIZ 17
INT 8 POW 10 DEX 15
APP 10 EDU 8 HP 17

Skills: Dodge 40, First Aid 38, Hide 54, Listen 42, Natural History 20, Ride 15, Sneak 55, Spot Hidden 45, Swim 58, Track 60

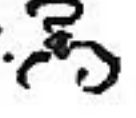
Weapons: 20-gauge pump-action shotgun 50%, 2D6; Fist/Punch 70%, 1D3+1D6; Grapple 45%, special; Kick 40%, 2D6

Notes: Tom has been in jail several times for brawling. He's a thug and a bully.

Playtesters

Special thanks to the two groups who went along with this bizarre premise and made it succeed beyond my expectations. "In Media Res" was the first adventure I'd run in many months that wasn't done electronically via America Online, and it felt good to get back in the saddle.

First group: Brian Appleton, Jeff Barber, John H. Crowe III, and Dennis Detwiller.

Second group: Lynn Fischer, Chris Jones, Robert Landrigan, and Don "Masking Tape" Shoemaker. 

Karen Tynes



Message In A Bottle

Each issue, Message In A Bottle presents a brief creative work by a writer, an artist, or both. The theme is communication and enlightenment, and the results – pleasant and unpleasant – that they can bring.

Fearfully fathered, hidden in the depths,
a tentacted terror coiled in the cold, oily dark.

Sometimes,
it trembled
and lit phosphorescent lamps
carried by serpentine currents,
upward into dreams.

Sometimes,
soundings caused it to writhe and flex,
creating tidal disturbances
in the ocean of the heart.

Sometimes,
it pulsed, messages in a leaky bottle,
written in the soul's vernacular,
and cast upon the unconscious sea.

Finally,
it breached the surface,
emerging piecemeal, not Terror,
but child-bodied, shamed and terrorized,
and at last,
voicing forgiveness for the unforgivable. ॐ



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The Unspeakable Oath

Hey howyadoin' kids? Today's special — Cultist Mad-Libs! You know the drill: sit a buddy down, read him the underlined phrases, and have him supply the answers. When you have all his responses written down, read aloud with the new words replacing the underlined phrases and let the laughs begin!

Scott David Aniolowski was walking down the street when suddenly a {Human Body Part} fell from the sky which by a strange coincidence happened to belong to **Brian Appleton** who was at that very moment proofreading a reprint copy of {Mythos Tome} and recovering from his wounds which had been inflicted by **Jeff Barber** as punishment for Brian's misspelling of the word 'Explosives' while he {Verb} and laughed maniacally while shouting {Distasteful Noun} at the top of his lungs while **John H. Crowe III** cheered him on and wondered just how much of this {Famous Person} had to put up with when he/she/it was up and coming, meanwhile, upstairs **Dennis Detwiler** was deflecting phone calls from {Gaming Company} in the hopes that **Mark H. Eley** could be set up to take the fall for him, just like in the famous {Name} Conspiracy. **Philip Garland** knew all about the conspiracy, and knew that {Religious Figure} and {Pop star} were actually behind it all so he stayed indoors, after successfully disposing of Brian's body part with the assistance of **Daniel Gelon** who besides being {Adjective} is also known as the Fastest {Distasteful Noun} in the West, while **Alan Glover** everybody knows, is the slowest, or at least the {Adjective}-est except when it comes to {Bodily Function} because then it's **Alan T. Grohe, Jr.'s** {Sport} game and **Robert Hand** who will corroborate also believes that Alan's ability is caused by his close proximity to {Deity} or **Casey Howell** who was the one who ended up with the piece of Brian, often concealed in his {Type of Clothing} or {Noun} to shield it from the piercing gaze of **Duke Janus** — who besides suffering from armpit baldness is also {Adjective} — but let's not dwell on a bad thing, let's go on to something worse like **Chris Klepac** who will shortly be touring downtown Columbia with his rock band the {Adjective/Animal} and begging for money from **C. Raymond Lewis** who has just completed his first board game, {TV Game Show} Blues. **Penelope Love** felt this was unfair because she is president of the {TV Game Show Host} fan club and promptly went to court to fight for its cause and in so doing, entered Brian's body part as evidence, while calling **Anson Maddocks** to the stand as a witness for {Fast-Food Name} which had somehow been inextricably mixed in this mess. As a protest and a show of solidarity **Jesper Myrfors** refused to eat any {Food} and decided to {Bodily Function} only while standing on his head from now on while **Kevin A. Ross** who knows nothing about the conspiracy, lawsuit, board game, or body part was caught out when it was {Verb}ed right in front of him by the man, the legend **Dean Shomshak** who may or may not be responsible for {War} or even {Famous Human Tragedy} seeing as he has had contacts with aliens who besides using mind-control are really, really pissy guys. **Michael Tice** sees them, can you? The aliens look a lot like {TV Show Star} and talk like {Comedian} and as such, they need all the fresh organs they can get, and their front man is **Ray Tumbleson** who besides booking them in Vegas once in awhile also eats their food which consists of {Plural Noun} and some {Automotive Part} on the side. **John Tynes** once ate at Ray's and was mind-controlled to coax Jeff to cut off Brian's {body part}. **Karen Tynes** after reprimanding him for being so silly and simplistic, thought to herself, "Why couldn't I have a {Family Member} like **C.L. Werner**, he really has got his {Unpleasant Noun} together."

Dennis Detwiler is responsible for this atrocity and shall be stoned for it by an angry mob of contributors.

Contributors



ANSON 93