



# *Uncounted Worlds*

*Issue Two, Winter 2010*



# Uncounted Worlds

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*Uncounted Worlds* is a fan magazine publishing material for role playing using Chaosium Inc's *Basic Role Playing*.

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"I walk a road, horizons change  
The tournaments begun."

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## *Publisher's Musings*

It's been a far longer, harder road getting this issue done than I hoped or expected – I won't bore you with the litany of personal and professional crises that have dogged me over the last two years, but the revised format (in what Lulu.com call US Trade size) is one of a number of changes I've made to hopefully speed up production of future issues and make access to the print editions easier – we'll see.

I still intend to carry on with *Uncounted Worlds* and as ever that can **only** happen if I get submissions so please get in touch if you have material!

This issue was produced using NeOffice 3.1.2 and uses Apple Chancery and Palatino fonts.

# Uncounted Worlds

## an editorial

Chaosium's *Basic Role Playing* is by far my favourite RPG – from the heady days of first playing and running *RuneQuest* with a battered copy of the RQI rulebook I bought from a friend onwards I've always loved the game engine. But equally, the settings Chaosium used the rules in appealed enormously. As a young teenager, heavily influenced by the book collection of my brother (my elder by five years), I was a voracious reader of Michael Moorcock's *Eternal Champion* stories. Whilst I was never a fan of horror fiction per se, a friend persuaded me to play this new Chaosium game called *Call of Cthulhu* and within a week of first wandering in to "The Haunted House" I was hooked and scouring 2nd hand book shops for collections of Lovecraft stories.

But RPG's are **not** prose fiction: the structural details and features that make a good short story or novel are different to those that make a compelling scenario or campaign. Some RPG writers never fully grasp this, and others prefer to use RPG writing as a spring board to develop their fiction writing skills (RPG writing is after all far less financially rewarding). But some writers not only grasp the distinction, but understand how to exploit it, and move easily between the two forms. Keith "Doc" Herber, who tragically died early last year, was one of those who understood fiction and RPG writing. He wrote and edited some of the greatest *Call of Cthulhu* material ever published – not just great campaigns like *Spawn of Azathoth* and *Fungi from Yuggoth* but also supplements like the *Investigator's Companions* and the *Keeper's Compendium*, not to mention the sublime *Arkham Unveiled*, still one of the greatest examples of a location source-book for ANY RPG, and the foundation stone of the seminal "Lovecraft Country" series of supplements. He was also the

primary architect and editor of *Rogue Mistress*, the *Stormbringer* campaign that lifted that game out of the shadow of its source fiction and showcased just how easily the game could both embrace the core themes of the Eternal Champion stories AND exciting and original adventures. "Ghosts in the Machines" (by Lawrence Whitaker, a writer well known in BRP, *HeroQuest* and Gloranthan circles) and Doc's own "Dark of the Sun" remain two of my favourite BRP scenarios.

It was a terrible shame that for many years Doc didn't write for *Call of Cthulhu*, and a bitter tragedy that he passed away just as his new venture Miskatonic River Press ( see here: <http://www.miskatonicriverpress.com/> ) launched. *New Tales of the Miskatonic Valley*, in particular Doc's own "Proof of Life", demonstrates that he had lost none of his flair for writing and editing material for *Call of Cthulhu*. So, in honour of the man who wrote and edited such fondly remembered works, I'm going to bend my own rules this issue and widen the remit of *Uncounted Worlds* to cover stuff beyond the normal tight focus on BRP. In particular I've included a couple of articles about playing *Call of Cthulhu* in different genres: because I can; because taking the game to new places, looking at things from a fresh perspective will enhance people's *Call of Cthulhu* games and equally might suggest ways of using elements from *Call of Cthulhu* in people's BRP games.

And in memory of Keith 'Doc' Herber.

Nick Middleton

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Winter '10

PS: This issue is also dedicated to my eldest daughter Meg, who turned 18 on the 28<sup>th</sup> September this year, and who a month later fell ill with meningococcal meningitis, nearly died and is currently tetraplegic and relying on a ventilator for her breathing. The cover is a picture she drew a couple of years ago.

# BRP Stress Rules

by Ben Monroe and Nick Middleton

*Inspired by existing BRP mechanics from various sources*

Since the initial publication of *Call of Cthulhu*, the Sanity rules therein have acted as the default mechanic for measuring tests of fear, madness and despair in the face of horrors unnatural. While the Sanity mechanic works quite well for the mind-blasting horrors of the Cthulhu mythos, often GMs of BRP games wish for something less permanently debilitating. To this end, we present a new mechanic for measuring the “stress” PCs face in their lives as adventurers.

The rules below are slightly more ‘cinematic’, for lack of a better term. They were designed to model the sort of psychological breakdown you see in characters in survival horror films such as *Dawn of the Dead*, *28 Days Later*, *the Thing*, and *the Blair Witch Project*. These rules present a system where characters reach debilitating levels of psychological shock fairly quickly, but recover faster, and with fewer permanent scars.

It is recommended that, if used, these optional Stress rules *replace* the Sanity rules as an optional system. The two systems should not be used in unison.

## **Stress**

Characters in horror stories are constantly presented with stressful situations. The threat of death lurks in every dank basement, in every passing stranger. As horrific events build in the lives of these characters, they begin to take their toll on the minds of those experiencing the events; as a game mechanic this process is called “Stress.”

To rate this, all characters have a Stress Points statistic which is equal to current POW+CON. There are three related values to be noted: the Stress Roll, Maximum Stress, and Current Stress.

## **The Stress Roll**

The "Stress Roll" equals a character's current Maximum Stress x2. When a character encounters a "Stressful" situation (explained below) he rolls against this number or less on a d100. A successful roll means no, or minimal, Stress Point damage occurs. A failure means more Stress Point damage, explained below.

## **Maximum Stress**

Maximum Stress equals a character's POW+CON. As explained below, "Maximum Stress" can be lowered, but only in extreme circumstances.

## **Current Stress**

Current Stress starts equal to Maximum Stress. As the character experiences stressful situations, this value is reduced.

## **Making a Stress Check**

When a character encounters a horrific scene or monster, or does something 'awful' (e.g.: commits murder), the player must make a Stress Check. The player rolls d100 against the character's Stress Roll score: if successful, the character takes minimal damage to his Stress Points; if it fails, he takes more. A Critical success always means the character takes no Stress Point

damage; likewise, on a fumbled Stress Check, the character takes the maximum possible Stress Point damage.

See the table for examples of 'stressful' situations.

### **Chart One – Stress Point damages**

<b>SP lost (success / fail Stress Roll)</b>	<b>Unnerving or Horrific Situation</b>
0/1	Suffer a shock or extreme surprise
0/1D2	Surprised to find mangled animal carcass
0/1D3	Surprised to find human corpse
0/1D3	Having a close brush with death (near fall, car crash, etc)
0/1D3	Surprised to find severed body part
0/1D4	Seeing a stream flow with blood
0/1D4	Unintentionally cause the death of another
1/1D4+1	Finding a mangled human corpse
0/1D6	Awakening trapped in a coffin
0/1D6	Witnessing a friend's violent death
0/1D6	Committing wilful murder
0/1D6	Seeing a monster*
0/1D6	Seeing something supernatural or patently impossible*
1/1D6+1	Meeting someone you know to be dead
0/1D10	Undergoing severe torture
1/1D10+1	Seeing a corpse rise from its grave
2/2D10+1	Seeing a gigantic severed head fall from the sky
1D10/1D100	Seeing a primordial god of Chaos in monstrous form

### **Effects of Stress Damage**

As a character takes damage to his Stress Points, he loses the ability to function normally. His hands start to shake, his heart races, and his attention is constantly distracted, looking for the next horrible event around the corner.

There are four Stress levels: *calm*, *shaken*, *traumatised*, *fractured*.

## **Calm**

A *calm* character is one whose Stress Points are at a positive level. A *calm* character takes no Stress-related penalties.

## **Shaken**

A character is functional until their Current Stress becomes negative, when they become *shaken*. For every negative point of Stress, characters lose a percentile from *any* d100-based rolls they make, until their Stress Points return to a positive level. This penalty affects future stress tests as well!

Apply any negative Stress Points as a penalty to any skill or characteristic roll. E.g. Brandon normally has 86% with Automatic Combat Rifle and a DEX of 14, but after failing a few Stress Rolls he has a current stress of -8: his effective ACR skill is 78%, and his DEX x 5 roll is 62%.

## **Traumatised**

Once a character's Current Stress is negative, and exceeds double Maximum Stress (e.g.: a PC with Maximum Stress 25 loses more than 50 points, going to -26 SP or fewer) they are *traumatised* and suffer a psychotic episode of some sort.

The following chart shows possible outcomes of a *traumatised* state. GMs may either roll a random effect, or choose one which seems appropriate.

## Chart Two - Stress Induced Reactions

Roll	Result
1	Screaming fit or the PC faints.
2	The PC flees in blind panic.
3	Physical hysterics or other emotional outburst (laughing, crying, etc.)
4	Babbling, incoherent rapid speech, or logorrhea (an uncontrollable torrent of coherent speech).
5	Intense phobia, which may root the PC to the spot.
6	Homicidal or suicidal mania.
7	Hallucinations or delusions.
8	Echopraxia or echolalia (the PC does/says what others nearby do/say).
9	Stupor (the PC is awake and can stand but has no will or interest; may be led or forced into simple actions but takes no independent action).
10	Catatonia (the PC assumes foetal position, and is oblivious to all events).

The character's Maximum Stress is permanently reduced by one and the player should roll on the Stress Induced Reactions chart below to determine the effect of the trauma. To determine the length of time the character remains in a traumatic state, roll 1D10+4; this is the number of rounds the PC is Traumatized. At the end of that period, the player rolls POW x5 (applying the negative Stress modifier!); if successful, the PC returns to a Shaken state, and his Stress Points are raised to exactly 1d6+1 points above the level that would put him in a *traumatized* state again.

## Fractured

There are two ways for a PC to become *fractured*: if he fumbles his POWx5 roll to recover from a *traumatized* state, or if his Stress Points ever go so low that they exceed a negative score equal to twice his Maximum Stress (IE: a PC with a Max Stress of 25 hits -50).

If either of these events occurs, roll on the Stress Induced Reactions chart again.

Characters who have become *fractured* are at first completely erratic and unpredictable. Remove them from player control (i.e. they become NPCs) until qualified treatment can aid their recovery.

Assuming the PC survives this episode and gets to a stress free environment, the GM may require a further stress test (possibly with penalties, or bonuses for appropriate skill applications) to avoid the character acquiring permanent psychological damage in the form of some sort of mental disorder. See the chart below.

### Chart Three - Mental Disorders

D100 roll	Disorder
01-05	Addiction
06-15	Amnesia
16-20	Catatonia
21-25	Criminal Psychosis
26-30	Fetish
31-35	Hysterical Disability
36-40	Megalomania
41-45	Multiple Personalities
46-50	Obsession
51-55	Panzaism
56-65	Paranoia
66-75	Phobia
76-80	Quixotism
81-90	Schizophrenia
91-95	Stupefaction
96-00	Tremors/Physical Symptoms

Characters who have become *fractured* are at first completely erratic and unpredictable. Remove them from player control (i.e.

they become NPCs) until qualified treatment can aid their recovery.

## **Recovery**

Stress 'damage' returns at a rate of 1/24th of Maximum Stress per hour the character is completely removed from any stressful situation. For example, if they are trapped in a farmhouse surrounded by zombies, it makes no difference if they can see them or not, because they can hear them banging away at the doors and windows. It's not until the characters escape the location to a completely zombie-free zone that they can start regaining Stress Points.

*Traumatised* characters must first be removed from the stressful environment (as above) and their Stress Points returned to a positive level. Their traumatic state may then be alleviated if another PC or friendly NPC makes a successful Psychology roll (individual GMs may choose to use a different roll based on the setting of their game).

*Fractured* characters can only be healed of their severe disorders if they are institutionalised, or turned over to a qualified therapist NPC. Recovery of these characters is best left to the GM, and should be based on the individual circumstances of the trauma which triggered the fracture.

# Enhancing Your Game

## Part One: Skill Augmentation

by Sarah Newton

*The first of a series of articles that look at some of the ways you can use BRP's Optional Rules to take advantage of some of the play style developments introduced by games such as Issaries Inc's HeroQuest and the FATE system. First up - making use of BRP's optional Complimentary and Cooperative skill rules.*

I've long admired the "Augmentations" rules from the splendid *HeroQuest* game by Issaries, Inc, and the "Manoeuvres" rules from the marvellous *FATE* system. This article discusses how you can use Augmentations and Manoeuvres with the existing *Basic Role Playing* rules, and add an extra dimension to your play.

### **What is Augmentation?**

At its simplest, augmentation is using one skill to enhance another. You might possess both skills yourself, or you may be using one of your skills to help someone else. The *Basic Role Playing* rules already have two Optional Rules for "Complimentary Skills" (BRP page 50) and "Cooperative Skill Rolls" (BRP page 172); let's look at some of the things you can do with them.

### **Using Complimentary Skills**

The example of Complimentary Skill use in the *Basic Role Playing* rules is pretty obvious: you use 1/5 of your Science skill to compliment your Medicine skill. But let's get a bit more adventurous: how about if you're using Personality Traits? Let's

say you've got a Trait called "Brave 50%"; now, what can you do with that?

Imagine you're trying to jump across a bottomless pit filled with noxious fumes and a thin ribbon of lava at the bottom. If you fall in, you're going to be toast; it's a terrifying prospect. But - hang on! - my character is Brave (50%), he's not going to balk! He girds his loins, sets his fearless jaw, and flings himself across the pit, getting a +10% Complimentary bonus from his Brave Trait, added to his Jump roll.

Let's take another example. My character's a doughty priest of the Death God with a singular hatred of vampires, and is trying to use a "Turn Undead" divine power (let's treat it as a sorcery spell) against Morbius the Vampire Lord. Normally it's a POW vs POW roll - against the powerful Morbius, my character only has a 50% chance of success. But wait! My character also has an Allegiance to the Death God of 60% (he's a religious fanatic), and so calls upon the Death God's anti-vampire powers to help him, getting a +12% Complimentary skill bonus to his POW vs POW roll.

See how this opens up the game to a new style of play? If you can make a case for using one of your skills, or even a trait or an allegiance, to compliment the skill you're using in your main action, then you get a Complimentary skill bonus. Suddenly, the way you narrate your character's actions starts to have a real effect on the numbers. If you can't narrate how your Greedy (75%) is going to help you find the hidden gold (Spot roll), then you don't get the bonus - but that shouldn't stop you trying!

So what are the consequences of using Complimentary skill bonuses like this? Well, firstly, it means that most rolls are going to be higher - people will always be trying for a bonus. Jump skill to compliment my Martial Arts? Status skill to compliment my Persuade? So, you'll have to factor that into your game - skill rolls are going to be that bit easier. Also, a good GM is going to use these rolls with the bad guys, too: your Slobbering

Chaos Monster is going to use its Horrifying (50%) Trait to compliment its attack roll every time - it's just so damn scary!

Secondly, it means your game is going to be a little "looser" with regard to the rules. If a player can narrate something cool, the GM's default answer should be "sure, go for it!" rather than "I don't think so", otherwise players are going to feel frustrated pretty fast. Using Complimentary Skill bonuses widely really encourages the players to get heavily involved in helping narrate the game, and the GM needs to develop a cooperative approach to that, rather than an oppositional one.

Last - well, you can tweak the Complimentary Skill rules a bit for some awesome effects. At the moment, you can only compliment with one skill at a time. But what if you change that? Maybe if you get surprise, or you're doing an Ambush, you get an extra round for complimenting, so you can compliment twice? Or, say, you can compliment once with a Skill, once with a Trait, and once with an Allegiance? Now you've got some serious reason to develop your Allegiance (Loyalty to the Good Queen), and dash into combat crying "For Queen Vivienne and the Crown!" Complimentary skill bonuses can change things a lot.

## **Using Cooperative Skills**

The Complimentary Skill rules refer to skills you have yourself. However, you can also use BRP's "Cooperative Skill Rolls" rule (page 172) to give a bonus to somebody else's skill roll. This uses a mechanic similar to the "Manoeuvre" rules from the well-known *FATE* system (exemplified in games like Evil Hat's *Spirit of the Century* and Cubicle 7's *Starblazer Adventures*). I'm indebted to those games for my discussion here.

So, the basic BRP rule is this: if you want to help someone else with one of your skills, you have to explain why your skill is appropriate, then make a skill roll. A success gives the person

you're helping a +10% bonus; you can up this to +15% on a Special success and a +20% on a Critical success. It's up to the GM how many people can assist someone in this way, but you can never provide a Cooperative skill bonus in excess of the active character's own skill. So, if you've got a 25% Climb skill, no amount of help from others (even if it's an entire platoon cheering you on!) is going to increase your skill above 50%.

Now, like we did with Complimentary Skills, let's get creative. Let's say we can use Traits and Allegiance as well as Skills, and that as long as we can make a good narrative case for it, the GM is going to let us try. What does that do to our game?

It does a lot. Let's say your character is trying to Persuade the merchant to sell us the war pegasi at a good price so we can raid the Cloud Giant's Lair. Now you've only got Persuade 50%, and the merchant's probably going to oppose that with his Fast Talk 75%. But - blare of trumpets! - suddenly Scarface Hargabrand is at your side, nonchalantly carrying his bloody war axe and growling softly, bringing his Intimidating 75% Trait to bear; whilst on your other side, Curvaceous Mina (APP roll of 90%!) is winking and nodding suggestively at the merchant and definitely ruining his argument! There's a potential +33% total bonus to your Persuade roll there!

Here's the rub: Cooperative skill bonuses aren't automatic. You have to make a roll. In the *FATE* system, this sort of thing is called a "manoeuvre", so we'll use the same term. Each character giving the bonus has to describe what they're doing to provide it: growling, licking their lips lasciviously and murmuring forbidden pleasures, etc. In some cases the manoeuvre roll may even be opposed (imagine if the merchant above has the "Misogyny 60%" trait, or - heaven forfend - has Allegiance (God of Abstinence) 95%!). But, if you come up with a good description, you can make your skill roll for the manoeuvre, and if you succeed you can provide that Cooperative bonus.

## **Conclusion**

So, what have the above tweaks done to our BRP game? Well, they've "loosened" it up considerably, and put a lot more emphasis on the players and GM working together to decide if a given skill bonus makes sense. Given the nature of these bonuses, there's definitely no way you can codify a table of what skills and traits can be used to augment what other skills and traits - it's really a question of ingenuity and narrative skill.

Bear in mind this might not be to your taste, especially if you're running a game where everything depends very closely on the letter of the rules, with little room for "soft" game play. But, if you're willing to let go a little of the reins of narrative control, these rules can add a completely new dimension to your game play. In my experience, they can inject a freshness and a freedom into your game, where character personality and flashy cinematics suddenly assume real importance in the dice rolls you make. Why not have a go?

*Coming next: Making the Most of Opposed Rolls; More on Personality Traits and Allegiance; and Using Fate Points.*

# Qì

*some notes towards an oriental flavour for BRP*

*by Gianni Vacca*

Qì (also *ch'i* in Wade-Giles, *ki* in Japanese and Korean, *khí* in Vietnamese) is one of the key concepts of Chinese cosmology and philosophy.

The Chinese character used to write 'qì': 氣 shows a lid over steaming rice, thus carrying the idea of an invisible force capable of moving a heavy object. Hence qì is first and foremost thought of as the driving force behind all movement and all change in the universe. If a man is ill, his qì must not be flowing correctly. If a country is not being governed properly, the qì of the land must be upset. Conversely, if a man has an excess of qì flowing in him, he is strong, a country with an excess of qì is prosperous.

Each Chinese school of thought had its own peculiar ideas on what kind of influence qì had on men's lives, and what must be done with it. For Daoism, the only way a man could realise himself, develop his potential, preserve his equilibrium, was to manage the fusion of his qì with the qì of the universe. This is the sole aim of the many strange Daoist practices: shadow boxing, special diets, having sex without releasing one's semen, wǔshù combat, and inner alchemy. For Confucianism, the qì of the universe had to be propitiated by strictly observing the rites, and by reading and studying the Classics; later on, Neo-Confucianism went so far as to think that men could model the qì to suit their own needs. For Buddhism, on the contrary, one's qì and the qì of the universe were one and the same; and the belief that men could have an influence on the qì of the universe

was mere illusion. Beyond these schools of thought, one may consider that in actually all Chinese fields of research: medicine, alchemy, geomancy, martial arts, there was but one aim: the mastery of qì.

If qì is so important in all ways of life for all people of the Sinitic world, then the obvious conclusion is that this importance must be rendered through the game mechanics of games set in such settings. I must confess I have never found any satisfactory rendering of qì in past implementations of BRP-based 'Oriental' role-games, i.e., *Land of Ninja* or *Secrets of Japan*.

In *Land of Ninja*, ki (Japanese for qì) is a character's 'inner power', and there are 'two types of magic in Nihon': one derived from the myriad gods and kami, and one tapping from ki. This is obviously in total contradiction with Chinese thought: magic is the ability to master / modify the qì of the universe, be it by mere humans or by gods, so one can't possibly oppose these two types of magic. The mechanism of the skill is rather better rendered than its conceptual premise: ki skills are the ones in which the character has reached mastery (>90%), and whenever the player has rolled below the ki level of the skill, the effect of the skill is improved (admittedly an oversimplification, but at the core, this is the idea). Well... the *Basic Role-Playing* system already has criticals and specials, so why add this new mechanism? Just to give local flavour to a role game set in a fantasy Japan? I strongly suspect that was the idea...

In *Secrets of Japan*, 'ki is simply another name for magic points'. The only innovation is that an investigator adds one's ki (i.e., magic points) to his current Sanity score as a bonus. I can understand where this comes from: if qì is indeed one's link to the universe, then it is understandable that it should be helpful when one is losing ground with reality. However, I feel the concept is not used to its potential.

In my games, I have simply introduced a new derived characteristic, Qì, used through Qì POINTS. Qì Points (QP) are

the same as *Fate Points* in the way they are used, but not in the way they are computed: a character's QÌ does not depend only on POW, but also on STR and CON:

POW	STR	CON	QÌ
13-14	16-17	15-16	+5
15-16	18-19	17-18	+10
17	20+	19-20	+15
18+	-	21+	+20

Thus an above-average character with POW 18, STR 16, and CON 17 has QÌ 35 (about double what he would have in terms of standard Fate Points per the *Basic Role Playing* rules). An average character with POW 16, STR 14, and CON 12 has QÌ 10 (much less than what he would have in terms of standard Fate Points). A weak character with POW 13, STR 13, and CON 12 has QÌ 5 (a fraction of what he would have in terms of standard Fate Points). This system yields big differences in terms of QÌ depending on the values of the PCs' characteristics, because it is based on the assumption that only 'bigger than life' characters can accomplish incredible feats. For a more even distribution of QÌ, the gamemaster may use the following formula:

$$QÌ = (2 \times \text{POW} + \text{STR} + \text{CON}) / 4$$

Using the formula above, the above-average character with POW 18, STR 16, and CON 17 has QÌ 17. The average character with POW 16, STR 14, and CON 12 has QÌ 15. The weak character with POW 13, STR 13, and CON 12 has QÌ 13. Now the values are less scattered and closer to the characters' characteristics, but we lose the 'bigger than life' effect.

Qì; some notes towards an oriental flavour for BRP

## Starting Qì Points

The PCs are given Qì +15 as their initial QP. The main villains in a campaign should also receive this boost. Again, this is true to the spirit of *wǔxiá* novels or films, in which the heroes easily dispatch mooks and goons until the final and much harder confrontation with their nemesis.

## Increasing Qì Points

A character's Qì Points may be improved during the course of play whenever a character acts in an altruistic and/or heroic manner. Killing a tiger for killing's sake or for increasing one's prestige is not such an action, whereas killing a tiger to save an unconscious peasant is. Such actions may increase the character's QP, which may then be used as per page 176 of the *Basic Role Playing* rules. The gamemaster decides the amount of QP thus gained – which should always be in the 1-5 QP range.

## Using Qì Points

As explained above, this is as per page 176 of the *Basic Role Playing* rules.

## Qì Point Recovery

Another major difference between Fate Points and Qì Points, beyond the way they are computed, lies in the way they are recovered. A character tops up his or her Qì Points up to their initial value, but never beyond it: the supplementary QP must be earned anew through heroic behaviour.

## **Qì as a flowing force**

Centuries before the West developed the idea of positive and negative spin for electrons, the Chinese had already developed the idea of yīn (negative flow of the cosmic qì) and of yáng (positive flow of the cosmic qì). The Chinese also believed that there must be places where this force flew more strongly than in others: these ley lines were called the 'veins of the Dragon' (lóngmài). In gaming terms, whenever a spell casting character stands above a yáng lóngmài, he only need spend half of the necessary magic points of the spell, the other half being provided by the qì of the land. Whenever he stands above a yīn lóngmài, he must spend double.

## **Qì in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)**

Almost all illnesses are seen in TCM as resulting from a disturbance of the flow of the patient's qì. As a consequence, the gamemaster may allow a character to cure himself or herself by spending 3-10 QP through a beneficial modification of his or her qì.

# Expert Skills In BRP

by Bo Rosén

## Introduction

The list of skills in BRP covers much of what a character could know, but for some games you may want to define some of them in finer detail. Is your zoologist more knowledgeable about freshwater fish than marsupials? Does your historian specialise in the American Revolution or the Three Kingdoms period of China? These are the kinds of distinctions this rule is meant to address and thus help players distinguish characters with similar skill sets from each other. It allows you to define what your character knows, without having to pick long lists of narrowly defined specialised skills. Skills that may not see more than occasional use in play and thus see little improvement.

Expert skills work best with the various Knowledge and Science skills, all of which can cover huge amounts of information but some Craft skills are also good candidates. Your carpenter may be especially skilled in building furniture and your locksmith in creating amazing toys. The number of possible expert skills is obviously too vast to list and different genres and campaigns will likely have different requirements. How narrowly you want the expert skills to be defined is mostly a matter of taste and genre, a swashbuckling space pirate game would probably not need an expert skill in Middle Egyptian Hieroglyphics while it would make more sense in a game where the investigation into ancient mysteries plays an important part.

## How it Works

An expert skill does not act like a separate skill but instead functions as a bonus to a governing skill by adding 1/5 of the governing skill rating as a bonus when the GM allows it. The mechanics are similar to the Complementary Skills option on page 50 of the *Basic Role Playing* core book.

Tara Loft has Archaeology 50% with the expert skill of Egyptian. She would have an effective skill of 60% ( $50 + (50 \times 0.2 = 10) = 60$ ) when examining a newly found statue on a recent dig near Giza.

The rules for learning a new expert skill are similar to those for normal skills beginning on p182 of the core rulebook with a few exceptions. Use those rules for determining cost, time spent and so on dependent on the method of learning, i.e skill training or research. When a successful experience or teach roll has been made, do not roll for the amount of skill increase, instead you gain the expert skill. There are no extra benefits for special or critical rolls. Note the new expert skill on your character sheet in a way that makes it clear it is an expert skill, and not a normal skill.

An expert skill cannot be raised independently of its governing skill as it only acts as a bonus to it.

## Some Notes

It is suggested that for every 25% a character has in a skill, he or she may learn one expert skill (1-25% = 1 expert skill, 26-50% = 2 expert skills etc...). Other ratios may suit your game better, but it's probably best to avoid too many or characters may end up with what in effect amounts to a permanent bonus to the skill, covering almost every situation.

If you use the optional rule of skill ratings over 100%, the bonus from an expert skill can get quite high over time. To counter this type of skill inflation, if it becomes a problem, it may be a good idea to make liberal use of the suggested limit of +30% for situational bonuses on p. 177 of the *Basic Roleplaying* core rules and instead make the skill roll one level easier.

# End of Days

## Post-apocalyptic Call of Cthulhu

by Jason Durall

*'I don't remember much from the time before the End... I was a child. They say the skies blackened, and on that terrible day the Earth was in the shadow of the evil one. Dread Cthulhu, raised from his watery tomb. The lands flooded and storms tore the world apart, and then the armies of the deep rose.*

*'Millions... billions... no, tens of billions perished.'*

*'Now our cities are in ruins, and we hide in the cracks of the world that used to be. At night they come for us, and we move and hide again. We scavenge food from old stores, pry weapons from dead hands... whatever we can do to survive and fight back.*

*'This morning, one of our scouts saw a clutch of their fliers in the sky near our camp. The membrane-winged horrors will be back again, and with them will come the scaled ones. Our leaders argue whether we should flee or fight, though it's clear we have no further places to go. If we fall, we may be the last of the human tribes left. I say we have little choice... we must remind them who kept them down for so long.'*

*'Tonight, we fight for the memory of all mankind, and we will welcome what new dawn may come!'*

*End of Days* is an alternate campaign setting for *Call of Cthulhu* involving survival in a post-apocalyptic world. In this setting, some faction of the Mythos has overthrown humanity and dominated the Earth. This setting allows for a grittier, more

action-oriented style of play, with a harsher and less hopeful vision than normal *Call of Cthulhu*. In an *End of Days* campaign, one of the Great Old Ones has triumphed. There is unlikely to be any salvation in the form of banishment, or a ritual that will prevent the coming apocalypse. The final battle is over and the 'bad guys' won... now the Investigators must pick up the pieces.

## **The End of the World as We Know It**

An *End of Days* campaign begins several years (or decades) after a deity from the Mythos ended the domination of humankind over the Earth. Now humanity is at the brink of extinction, living day-to-day in secluded places, far from the eyes of monsters. Every day survived is a victory.

To compound the horror, humanity has turned on itself. Some humans, driven mad, seek to inflict madness and pain on others. The creatures of the Mythos had human allies before the apocalypse, and there will always be those willing to sell out their brethren for scraps of power. Other humans prey upon one another for less abstract principles, simply taking what they need for survival from those weaker.

It is a dark and terrible world of monsters that move openly in the night, where the earth shakes beneath the clawed feet of evil gods, and where the bones of the dead are gnawed into shards.

## **The Nature of the Catastrophe**

The most important question the Keeper must determine for an *End of Days* campaign is the identity of the Great Old One, Elder God, or Outer God that has risen and now rules the Earth. It should be a deity whose past endeavors have been towards conquest (rather than outright destruction), with servitors and/or worshippers amongst humankind. Following are

suggestions for this principal conqueror; the Keeper can easily devise others:

- **Cthulhu** – With the rise of R'lyeh, Cthulhu's reign of terror began with the oceans swelling and sinking much of the Earth. Now the continents are fractions of their former size. Father Dagon and Mother Hydra lead armies of Deep Ones against the remaining humans who do not serve them, and Star-Spawn march or fly across the skies, hunting out the last bastions of civilisation.
- **Nyarlatheptep** – The herald of the Outer Gods has brought about the end of the Earth. Aided by the Brotherhood of the Black Pharaoh, the Brotherhood of the Beast, the Cult of the Bloody Tongue, and others, the Haunter of the Dark now rules humanity from a blood-soaked throne. The skies are black with hunting horrors and shantaks, while the ground is slimed by servitors of the Outer Gods. Sadly, humanity's best chance is with Nyarlatheptep, for he alone has walked amongst humankind and has enjoyed the virtues of civilisation.
- **Atlach-Nacha** – The arachnid Great Old One has emerged from beneath its dwelling under South America, and its web has ensnared the Earth. From the smallest of spiders to the immense Leng Spiders (called from the Dreamlands), all of Atlach-Nacha's arachnids have overrun the cities of men, and now ruined cities and skyscrapers are spun with great webs. Colin Wilson's *Spider World* books describe such a future.
- **Shub-Niggurath** – Her soil soaked in blood, the Earth is now the domain of the Black Goat of the Woods With a Thousand Young, the primeval fertility god Shub-Niggurath. This boiling, formless mass is deep within the jungles of South America, and Earth's temperature has

risen to become a vast greenhouse, her oceans muddied and ice caps melted. The Dark Young are transforming forests and jungles of the world into vast and horrible expanses of twisted foliage and ghastly fauna.

- Ithaqua – Earth is frozen, gripped in a perpetual winter. The sun’s light no longer warms the planet, and now the Great Old One known as the Wind-Walker roams free. Humanity has delved deep under the surface of the Earth in search of warmth, and strange beasts of old Hyperborea such as the Gnoph-Keh roam the wintry wastelands in search of victims.

Each of these deities has been assigned suitable servitors in the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook. Additionally, many other Mythos-based creatures may be encountered in an *End of Days* setting, regardless of the ruling deity.

The Keeper may choose to link a modern-era *Call of Cthulhu* campaign with an *End of Days* campaign if modern Investigators do not succeed in stopping some ritual, or thwarting the designs of a Mythos deity. After such a failure, the Keeper may choose to leap forward several years, even decades, ageing the Investigators and letting them continue the battle in the post-apocalyptic world. Alternately, an *End of Days* session can be interspersed in the midst of a regular campaign, letting Investigators know the consequences should they fail.

## **Changes to Character Creation**

Because investigation is no longer a focus of the game, Investigators are now ‘Survivors’. This emphasises the driving force of their existence in the post-apocalyptic world. Survivors can be drawn from any profession, though the decreased utility of some previously crucial skills makes some professions less

useful than others. However, the nature of catastrophe is such that people must struggle to overcome their lack of preparedness, and must move on despite the lack of optimal skills, training, or resources.

Depending on how long ago the apocalypse occurred, the Keeper should either require players pick from the standard professions, allowing for the processes of natural selection to be assumed (an antiquarian might not have made it through the *End of Days*, while a police officer may have survived with only moderate difficulty), or can allow players to pick Survivors to be created as per custom professions, assuming that prior to the calamity, they were either people of no particular skill, or young enough that the majority of their skills have been forged in the post-apocalyptic world. In this latter case, the Keeper is encouraged to disallow additional skill points from advanced age.

## **Changes to Skills**

Many of the professional or knowledge-based skills are of little use in the post-apocalyptic world. Conversely, others that are not tremendously useful in the modern world will become essential for continued existence. One suggestion is to have Survivors first spend their professional skill points as if for a modern-era *Call of Cthulhu* campaign. Then, personal skill points can be spent on any skills, with the setting in mind. Depending on how long ago the Cthulhoid catastrophe occurred, the Keeper should double the number of skill points earned from additional age: life past the *End of Days* is extremely perilous. Survivors have had to learn fast how to survive.

The following skills will likely see regular use in an *End of Days* campaign: *Bargain, Climb, Conceal, Craft, Cthulhu Mythos, Dodge, Drive Auto, Electrical Repair, Fast Talk, First Aid, Handgun, Hide, Jump, Listen, Locksmith, Machine Gun, Mechanical Repair, Medicine, Navigate, Operate*

*End of Days: Post-apocalyptic Call of Cthulhu*

*Heavy Machine, Other Language, Own Language, Persuade, Pharmacy, Psychology, Ride, Rifle, Shotgun, Sneak, Spot Hidden, Submachine Gun, Swim, Throw, Track.*

Skills that are of use depending on the setting and the way they are utilised are: *Astronomy, Chemistry, Computer Use, Credit Rating, Disguise, Electronics, Library Use, Martial Arts, Occult, Pilot, Psychoanalysis.*

Survivors will be hard-pressed to utilise the following skills in day-to-day existence: *Accounting, Anthropology, Archaeology, Art, Biology, Geology, History, Law, Natural History, Photography, Physics.*

## **Changes to the Sanity Rules**

For the most part, the Sanity rules remain unchanged. However, the lack of proper psychiatric facilities and time for psychoanalysis will quickly leave most Survivors irreparably damaged. One means of circumventing this is to assume that Survivors have become hardier than modern folk, and that the constant exposure to horrific experience has made it somewhat easier to deal with the constant array of violence and metaterrene threats. Sometimes, a Survivor finds it easier to blot out the past and move on, despite the lessons that might have been learned from an encounter with the terrible forces of the Mythos (or an equivalent horrific episode).

When a skill would be increased through experience, the Keeper may allow a Survivor, with a successful Idea roll, to take the skill points that would be earned (usually 1D6 skill percentile points) and apply them to his current SAN score instead. This transfer must be determined after a skill increase is determined but before the skill increase amount is rolled, so the process is:

- Pick a checked skill that was used successfully during an encounter that cost the Survivor some current SAN.

- Roll to see if the skill increases through experience. If successful, continue.
- Make an Idea roll (INTx5%) to see if the Survivor can rationalise the notion of 'forgetting' an encounter that earned the experience. If successful, continue.
- Roll 1D6 and apply that total to current SAN points instead of the skill.

This can only be done once successfully whenever experience would be determined at the end of or between sessions. The Keeper should be the ultimate arbiter of whether a skill is applicable to be transferred to SAN. Note that this will not immediately 'undo' any psychiatric conditions (insanities) that the Survivor is currently suffering from. It will just make the Survivor a little less likely to lose any more SAN in the next horrific encounter.

### **Each Day is Precious**

Obviously, adventuring in an *End of Days* campaign will focus on survival—finding food and weapons, seeking allies, and securing safe refuge—instead of delving into cryptic letters from distant relatives, or poking into unusual behaviour in the deserted house up the street. The necessity of continuing day-to-day existence should dwarf any other concerns. Each session should enforce the ultimate importance of what is at stake, and hammer it home that humanity is on the ropes *but not down for the count*. That's right. It's not over *yet*.

Though the fight is seemingly hopeless, Earth is not entirely lost. Unless the Keeper would like to run a seemingly endless campaign that ends when the Survivors are entirely dead or insane, there should be the opportunity for winning. Those old grimoires full of ancient knowledge can still be found in ruined libraries, and much of the international arsenal remained

unused, as the world's leaders had no idea how to fight the supernatural forces of the Mythos. Survivors may be the key to saving the Earth, seeking out the knowledge and the tools with which to strike a decisive blow against the alien god that holds their world in thrall. This shouldn't be evident from the first scenario, but can emerge almost if by chance, such as a simple raid for supplies uncovering a hidden missile silo, its megaton-delivering warhead intact. Or perhaps the Survivors discover a half-submerged library deep in a catacomb beneath London where a mouldering tome contains the arcane ritual of banishment that may provide the key to humanity's survival.

## Resources

A wealth of post-apocalyptic fiction, films, and other media exists for the Keeper to draw inspiration from. The first post-apocalyptic novel was *The Last Man*, about the last survivor of a plague and was written by Mary Shelley in 1826. Since then, there have been many contributions to the genre. These are highlights useful to Keepers:

- *The War of the Worlds*, by H. G. Wells. Though it does not end in an apocalypse, it presents a terrifying alien invasion that almost eradicates humankind through a combination of brute force and biological contamination. The comic series *Killraven*, though arguably a super hero story, presents a post-Wellsian invasion.
- *Terminator*, by James Cameron (director). Though its apocalypse is entirely technology-based, the images of humankind huddling below ground while a metal army patrols the ground and skies above is an easy one to translate to the Cthulhu Mythos. Replace Terminators

with Deep One hybrids, and Skynet with Cthulhu, and there's a campaign!

- *The Road Warrior*, by George Miller (director). Though there are no supernatural or even advanced scientific elements to this film, it presents a stark view of the effect of the collapse of society. A campaign could be constructed around the premise of 'survivors sitting on a resource surrounded by enemies' setup.
- *The Road*, by Cormac McCarthy. A merciless, relentlessly bleak post-apocalyptic novel featuring a father and child's struggle for survival, this epitomises the emptiness and desperation inherent in the genre. The novel spotlights the day-to-day effort of obtaining food and safe refuges, as well as the depths to which the human spirit will sink in the face of hopelessness.
- *I Am Legend*, by Richard Matheson. An archetypal novel of a human surviving a biological plague whose victims resemble vampires. It has been filmed three times, as *The Last Man on Earth*, *The Omega Man*, and finally as *I Am Legend*. A wonderful resource for the 'sole survivor(s) vs. an army' scenario.
- *The Day of the Triffids*, by John Wyndham. A post-apocalyptic novel based on a biological premise—a sentient bioengineered plant species bred for mobility and durability overwhelms humanity and engulfs most of the Earth. A sentient flora-based apocalypse is very Lovecraftian... what if they had a guiding intellect?
- *Fallout*, by Black Isle Studio (developers). The first in a computer-game franchise, *Fallout* is set in post-apocalyptic world flavoured with dark humour and faux 1950s-era Cold War sensibility. A weird and entertaining mix of action, horror, and retro sensibilities.

Chaosium has published other resources useful for Keepers. Notable is the *Malleus Monstrorum*, a bestiary (including Martians and Triffids). The *End Times* and *Cthulhu Rising* monographs present alternate futures dominated by creatures of the Mythos. For Keeper's who want to push the feel further, the *Basic Role Playing* core rule book is entirely compatible with *Call of Cthulhu* and contains a wealth of additional material, including a variety of systems for supernatural powers, mutations and psychic abilities which open further possibilities. What if the children with strange powers in John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* were linked to the Mythos? Plus there are BRP monographs of potential interest such as *Rubble and Ruin* and *Ashes to Ashes*.

# *Tombs & Tentacles*

## *Sword-and-Sorcery using the Cthulhu Mythos*

*By Jason Durall*

Imagine *Call of Cthulhu* where the Investigators aren't afraid of the social repercussions of their actions, where the halls of university are nowhere to be found... where research is conducted in strange magic-haunted towers, and the denizens of the dark are fought not with gunpowder, but with sword, bow, and spell.

We're talking sword-and-sorcery-style fantasy adventuring using the Cthulhu Mythos as the setting. Pulp fantasy master Robert E. Howard liberally borrowed Lovecraftian monsters and concepts whole cloth into his tales of Conan, Kull, and Bran Mak Morn; Clark Ashton Smith's tales were rife with Lovecraftian creatures cross-pollinated from HPL's works; and Fritz Leiber used Cthulhian elements in his *Fafhrd & the Gray Mouser* stories. Many writers have followed suit, and one of the most influential fantasy roleplaying games has many Lovecraft-inspired creatures and even adapted HPL's creations for use with its rules set.

A sword-and-sorcery campaign can appeal to jaded *Call of Cthulhu* players or even players of the most popular generic fantasy RPG... giving them an insight into the terrors of the Cthulhu mythos. For a Keeper, this presents an opportunity to pit Investigators (or, as we'll call them, Explorers) against mythos creatures in situations where they can't call the police, radio for backup, apply a spray of Tommy-gun fire to any problem, or pile the explosives high when something bigger than a car shows up.

Here's how Keepers can use the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook as the main resource for a sword-and-sorcery campaign pitting heroes versus monsters on a playing field more suited to grim and bloody adventure than the eras of Victorian England, the 1920s, or even the modern world. What should we call such an endeavour? *Dungeons & Deep Ones*? *Catacombs & Cephalopods*? How about *Tombs & Tentacles*?

This article requires use of the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook. Other source material can be found in *Cthulhu Dark Ages*, *H.P. Lovecraft's Dreamlands*, *Malleus Monstrorum*, or even the upcoming *Basic Roleplaying* rulebook. Older Chaosium fantasy adventure games also contain a wealth of information.

We're going to develop this campaign as the early sword-and-sorcery authors did... playing fast and loose with background and setting, but pouring on the mood, building the map as need be, and trying to keep things fast, furious, and full of white-knuckle terror. The difference is that the white knuckles will be grasping sword-hilts, and our Explorers are *expected to win*.

## **Character Creation**

First off, while the usual means of determining characteristics (3D6) is fine for proper Lovecraftian protagonists (usually hapless souls in over their heads), it's poor for heroic sword-and-sorcery heroes. Instead, roll 2D6+6 for all characteristics (STR, DEX, INT, CON, APP, POW, and SIZ) and assign them as desired.

Finally, each Explorer should get a +3 bonus to apply to one characteristic... his defining quality, chosen by the player. For a warrior, it might be immense STR, hulking SIZ, or surpassing CON; while for a fast-talking rogue it might be a cunning INT, a charming APP, blazing-fast DEX, or a fortunate POW.

EDU is handled by choice; the player should choose a social background for his character. EDU is no longer the defining characteristic for initial professional skills, so it's mostly a measure of how educated the character is (in the school of life, if not monastic or tutored teaching). The Keeper and player can derive a value appropriate to the Explorer's background, or the Keeper may choose to eliminate EDU altogether.

Other derived values, such as SAN, magic points, characteristic rolls, etc., are determined as normal, with one important exception. Hit points (HP) become CON+SIZ, rather than (CON+SIZ)/2. This gives heroic Explorers a significant edge over their normal modern-day counterparts. Normal humans (guards, rabble, crowds of monsters, etc.) do not get these heightened HP—their HP are determined as normal.

## **Skills**

Make the following modifications to the skill list:

- Ignore these skills: *Computer Use, Electrical Repair, Electronics, Handgun, Machine Gun, Photography, Psychoanalysis, Rifle, Shotgun, and Submachine Gun*. (However, weird fantasy sometimes features ancient, alien technology. If it exists in your setting, some of these skills can stay.)
- These skills exist, but are rarer, more primitive, and/or stranger than normal: *Anthropology, Archaeology, Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Credit Rating, Geology, Library Use, Locksmith, Mechanical Repair, Medicine, Natural History, Operate Heavy Machine, Pharmacy, Physics, and Psychology*.
- Combat skills are limited to *Dodge, Fist/Punch, Grapple, Head Butt, Kick, Martial Arts, and Throw*. The Keeper should add combat skills to reflect the weapons of the setting, such as

*Fencing, Sabre, Axe, etc.*, perhaps adding new weapon skills based on any additions to the weapons chart.

## Occupations

The Keeper may allow Explorers to choose eight skills according to character concept rather than use an existing occupation. Here's a list of iconic sword-and-sorcery professions. Feel free to develop more or modify these as desired.

- **Minstrel:** Multiply APP by 20 and assign it among the following: Art, Conceal, Fast Talk, History, Listen, Own Language, Persuade, and another skill as a specialty.
- **Priest:** Multiply POW by 20 and assign it among the following: First Aid, History, Listen, Occult, Other Language, Own Language, Persuade, and another skill as a specialty. The priest will know 2D3 spells if his POW is 16+.
- **Thief:** Multiply DEX by 20 and assign it among the following: Climb, Conceal, Dodge, Hide, Locksmith, Sneak, Spot Hidden, and another skill as a specialty.
- **Warrior:** Multiply STR by 20 and assign it among the following: Dodge, Fist/Punch, Grapple, Kick, Ride, a hand weapon, a missile weapon, and another skill as a specialty.
- **Wizard:** Multiply INT by 20 and assign it among the following: Chemistry, History, Library Use, Occult, Own Language, Pharmacy, Physics, and another skill as a specialty. The wizard will know 2D3 spells if his INT is 16+.

After initial skill points are assigned, multiply the Explorer's highest characteristic by 20 and assign these skill points as desired (including any occupational skills). Skills can go up to 99% (the total of skill points added plus the skill's base chance).

## **Weapons and Equipment**

Sword-and-sorcery characters often have few possessions other than what they are able to wear and carry. Their adventures often present them with unimaginable wealth, and take it away in a heartbeat. Even treasure kept at the end of one adventure may be lost before the next adventure begins, so Explorers are cautioned against placing undue emphasis on material possessions.

Each Explorer begins with the clothing on his or her back, a personal item of some value (a religious talisman, an icon, ring, keepsake, etc.), one or more weapons, armour (if suitable), a riding horse (if suitable), and a few occupational accoutrements. For example, a thief may have thieving tools; a wizard might have a spell book; and a priest a holy symbol. The Keeper should be the judge of what Explorers are able to possess at the beginning of the campaign.

Sword-and-sorcery weapons from the Weapons Table include the fencing foil, rapier, heavy epee, cavalier sabre, cavalry lance, wood axe, hatchet, fighting knife, butcher knife, small knife, blackjack, large club, small club, garrotte, bullwhip, war boomerang, thrown spear, burning torch, and the jungle hunting bow. Other Chaosium games may have greatly expanded weapons charts.

Armour can range from a light leather jerkin (1 point of protection) to full plate armour (10 points). Between these is a range of types from studded or hardened leather, chain, scale, ring, partial plate, etc. Adding a helmet to any suit of armour adds 2 points of armour protection. As with weapons, other

Chaosium games will have more detail on medieval or historical armour, if desired.

## **Additional Background**

Players are encouraged to personalise Explorers with distinguishing marks, mannerisms, sayings, etc. They may add additional age to Explorers and create intriguing origins, though neither step is necessary.

## **Sanity**

Here's the most dramatic difference in a sword-and-sorcery game: characters in a heroic fantasy setting aren't as quick to faint or run screaming into the night when faced with the terrors of the unknown... instead, as they're accustomed to belief systems that incorporate demon gods, monsters, and other horrors, they suffer sanity loss much less deeply than their modern counterparts.

To reflect this, take the normal 'made roll/failed roll' values for SAN loss, and treat the first value (if the roll is a success) as the penalty for a failed roll. Then, ignore the second value, or perhaps only use it for NPCs or when the hero critically fails his SAN check. This way, there will be some SAN loss when SAN rolls are failed, but normally Explorers are made of sterner stuff—the real danger is being torn into shreds by the claws of that strange monster, rather than being driven mad at the sight of it. Handle temporary insanity as normal.

Remember, too, that the primary means of regaining lost SAN are unlikely to be psychoanalysis and recuperation in a sanitarium. Instead, lost SAN should be gained by thwarting evil, defeating monsters, increasing skills, increasing POW, and (in rare cases) through counselling, perhaps from some religious

orders. There may be rare alchemical or herbal substances that can aid in restoring lost SAN... this should be determined by the Keeper.

## **Mythos Tomes**

Many of the accursed volumes from the Cthulhu Mythos can easily be adapted to a sword-and-sorcery setting. Instead of published works, they will all be unique, hand-copied volumes or scrolls, sometimes inscriptions on tablets or other unorthodox formats. A title change can make a well-known book a new oddity. Some 'normal' occult books may have sword-and-sorcery equivalents, such as the *Emerald Tablet* and the *Pert Em Hru*. Classic Mythos texts such as the *Book of Dyzan*, *Liber Ivonis*, *Celaeno Fragments*, *Eltdown Shards*, *G'harne Fragments*, *Al-Azif*, *Pnakotic Manuscripts*, *R'lyeh Text*, and the *Zanthu Tablets* are naturals for inclusion in a sword-and-sorcery setting. The 'other mythos books' tables are full of tomes that might serve a wizard well... or inspire degenerate worship.

## **Spells**

Spells a starting priest or wizard might know should be drawn from the following list: *Alter Weather*, *Augur*, *Baneful Dust of Hermes Trismegistus*, *Bless Blade* (especially so!), *Candle Communication*, *Chant of Thoth*, *Charm Animal*, *Cloak of Fire*, *Cloud Memory*, *Conjure Glass of Mortlan*, *Deflect Harm*, *Detect Enchantment*, *Dominate*, *Heal*, *Healing*, *Levitate*, *Mesmerize*, *Power Drain*, *Shriveling*, *Spectral Razor*, *Voice of Ra*, *Voorish Sign*, *Warding*. At the Keeper's discretion, other spells may be available based on the type of magic the Explorer has learned. Priests may have a Contact spell specific to their deity. Older or more experienced magic-using Explorers may know a great many other spells.

## **Foes**

Common mythos creatures make excellent foes, such as byakhees, deep ones, ghastrs, ghouls, servants of Glaaki, nightgaunts, rat things, sand-dwellers, serpent people, and the Tcho-Tcho. One tactic is to have one of these creatures at the heart of a strange and terrible cult or evil organisation dwelling in human society. Alternately, the Keeper can have one member be particularly powerful (like a serpent people sorcerer or a ghoulish priest), served by a number of lesser kindred creatures.

Many make excellent 'evil races', taking the place of common fantasy foes like orcs, goblins, etc. Instead, imagine desert cities made and dwelt in by serpent people, muck-encrusted catacombs full of deep ones, and even giant necropolises inhabited by ghouls and their kin. Most creatures from the 'Beasts & Monsters' section can be utilised: ghosts, mummies, rat packs, skeletons, vampires, werewolves, wraiths, zombies, and mundane creatures such as horses or snakes.

## **Setting**

As noted earlier, initially the setting should be barely developed, and fleshed out as required. All that is needed is a starting locale (a city, perhaps) and some notes in various directions stating 'The Coiled Lands' and 'The Scaled Swamps', homes to serpent people and deep ones, respectively. Let the players develop the map with you, adding their own favourite Mythos monsters and their suggestions for what sorts of adventures they'd like to have.

The major decision the Keeper should make would be when/where the setting is located. Is it some ancient and unknown past of our own world? Is it another world altogether, or is it even an untold, distant future that has come to pass after the stars were right? Each of these options presents many

exciting opportunities for the Keeper to flesh out the flavour of the setting. Civilisation should be sparse... and barbarism and the terrible unknown are at the fringes, always attempting to defeat mankind and drive them into despair.

When constructing adventures, it is elementary to involve the Explorers. Rather than the *'Your second cousin Rupert vanished recently, and left this parcel for you'* style of introduction, the Keeper can simply begin an adventure with *'While crossing the Burning Desert, you are nearly out of water, and the heat is beginning to weigh upon you. Up ahead, you see a black tower jutting from the fiery red sands.'* Simplicity itself. Adventures don't have to be the height of imagination, or involve lengthy investigations. Nor do they even have to involve significant role-playing. Instead, fast action and unearthly peril should be the order of the day.

Many published Call of Cthulhu scenarios can be adapted to heroic fantasy, and there is no shortage of existing fantasy scenarios that can be darkened and made appropriate to Lovecraft-inspired sword-and-sorcery.

# *Foul Spawn*

## *Occulis and Rh'knaus*

*by Darrel Floyd*

### **The Occulis**

Whether the Occulis is a form of odd demon or some creature deformed by chaos, it is a dangerous being. Their innate magical powers make them capable of subtle interaction and stealth. In form they look like a curiously malformed goblin with a head bigger than their body, with eyes on small protrusions like a chameleons, placed almost randomly about the head. One large eye in the centre of their face glows an eerie red. The central eye provides an ability to perceive in remarkable ways and the (typically six, but as few as three and as many as nine) lesser eyes provide an amazing array of powers as well. A gaping maw provides a surprisingly vicious bite. The humanoid body dangles from the immense head like an odd afterthought. Tiny arms dangle almost uselessly and are so stunted and weak that they are effectively unusable.

Legends claim the Occulis are the descendants of the Jawaziyani College of Astrologers, whom the Caliph of Biraz cursed for failing to predict the invasion of Biraz, shortly before his death in that invasion. However, whilst Occulis are more common in the ancient crypts and labyrinths of the desert nations, they can be encountered elsewhere. In general Occulis tend to be solitary – no one has any idea how or if they reproduce and they generally attempt to destroy another Occulis that intrudes in to their territory. They have a voracious appetite for arcane lore and items and will go to considerable lengths to accumulate such treasures. They generally despise humans and other similar species, regarding them as only fit as slaves or food.

Characteristic	Roll	Average
STR	3D6	10-11
CON	3D6	10-11
SIZ	3D6+6	17-18
INT	3D6+6	17-18
POW	3D6+6	23-24
DEX	3D6	11-12
APP	1D3+13	

**Move:** 2 (walking) / 10 (flying)

**Hit Points:** 14      **Major Wound:** 7+

**Armour:** 6 point thick bone on head / none on body

**Damage Bonus:** +0

Weapon	Skill%	Dmg	Attk	Special	Rng
Bite	40%	1D8+db	1		
Eye-Ray	80%	special		Projection skill	50 Meters

**Communication:** Language (Occulis) 90%; Language (Other -Pick one) 30%; Command 25%; Persuade 40%

**Manipulation:** Lift manipulation\* 45%

**Mental:** Appraise 35%; Knowledge (Local Lore) 35%; Knowledge (Occult) 45%

**Perception:** Spot 90%

**Physical:** Dodge 60%; Fly 60%; Hide 50%; Stealth 75%

**Combat:** See above, and notes below.

\* Lift Manipulation allows an Occulis using his 'Lift' based magical ability to perform fine manipulation with it such as flipping a switch, opening a vial, etc. Most Occulis find it easier to employ slaves instead.

**Special abilities:** 360 degree Vision; Innate flight ability.

**Spell like abilities:** All affect 1 target at a time (except for 'Dispel' which is an area effect); All have a range of 50 meters; All require a successful attack roll with the Projection skill: Treat roll as combined Attack & casting roll; All are as if powered with 9 POW any extra levels merely extend duration.

Due to the placement of their lesser eyes, an Occulis can typically target any area with no more than 3 eyes. Occulis have 2D4+1 lesser eyes and 1 greater eye.

### Lesser Eyes

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Levels/Effects</i>
Blast	Ranged, does 1D6 points of magical damage per level.	3D6 Damage
Change	Transforms 3 SIZ points of an item or being per level.	Up to 27 SIZ
Control	Allows control over a target's mind, requires a resistance roll.	1 target/ 15 minutes
Diminish	Reduces one of the target's characteristics by 1 per level.	-9 to STR, CON, SIZ or DEX
Dispel	Eliminates existing spell effects, May banish supernatural beings.	9 levels of dispelling
Illusion	Creates 3 SIZ points of an illusion per level.	Up to 27 SIZ
Lift	Lifts 3 SIZ points of an object or person per level.	Up to 27 SIZ
Speak to Mind	Allows mental communication between your character and a target.	900 meter range
Wound	Causes 1D6 points of damage per level.	3D6 damage

### Greater Eye

<i>Spell</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Levels/Effects</i>
Perception	Allows your character to detect one thing within range.	Up to 9 items
Vision	Allows your character to see what is happening elsewhere, or in the past.	See spell*

## **Tactics:**

An Occulis typical uses the following tactics. The Occulis tries to start in areas where they can retain an advantage of flight. They usually start by detecting for magic using beings, believing (rightly) that that is one of the greater threats to them. They will move to keep their 'Dispel' eye directed at spell casters. They will target foes with ranged weapons with a 'Diminish' beam hopefully lowering STR to the point where ranged weapons cannot be used or create illusions to block vision preventing targeting.

An Occulis can choose to use his eye-beams on himself enabling it to change form at least for a time. Some Occulis assume human or similar form and infiltrate society. In transformed state, only the powers of the greater eye remain. An Occulis in such form, can choose to end its transformation early. Such transformed Occulis often have initial difficulty with such basic motor skills as walking or picking up items with their hands, since in their base form their stunted bodies are almost useless.

## **Rh'knaus**

The Rh'knaus are a race of beings whose origins are shrouded in mystery. Some scholars believe they are the principle of Chaos made manifest to subvert the mortal realms, others maintain that they were once mortals who undertook a great magical experiment to explore the further reaches of the Uncounted Worlds and were consumed, transformed and regurgitated from some far distant Chaos realm...

Whatever the truth of their origins, they are clearly no longer “native” to the mortal realms. Whether it has always been their nature or they were hideously mutated by exposure to raw chaos stuff, they are unable to exist unshielded in our realms and must shroud themselves in special materials to ward themselves. Some scholars argue that their natural ability to produce a variety of secretions, including a silk-like covering that can be stiffened and crafted as an insulating material that protects them from our reality, shows that they have been in our realm for some time. Others claim it argues that their original un-mutated form is that of a spider or insect.

Whatever the origin of their weaving ability, the Rh'knaus create underground or otherwise hidden enclaves called ‘Webs’ that are kept lined with their silk and allow them to rest and recover, shielded from the ravaging effects of exposure to the mortal realms. This silk slowly decays and requires constant upkeep. Additionally, they create all enclosing silk garments to move about outside their 'Web' and special silk thread weapons to fight. They are effectively immortal, but cannot reproduce. Instead they inject a slow acting venom into possible victims transforming them in to Rh'knaus. Most humanoids can become Rh'knaus, though non-humanoid can become transformed as well, into a variety of monstrous forms.

Rh'knaus Webs are found scattered throughout the realm – some are in remote wilderness areas, others concealed below the streets of populous cities. Whilst each Web appears to be a

sovereign entity, there is a constant trickle of communication between the Webs – lone vaguely Romani style wagons, crewed by strange travellers swathed from head to foot in weird silk robes that travel only on the quiet back roads. Those few scholars aware of the presence of the Rh'knaus in this realm cannot agree on why they undertake these journeys – simple communication, trade, sharing intelligence? Many agree however that the Rh'knaus appear to be learning about this realm, and sharing that knowledge, but for what purpose is currently unknown.

Characteristic	Roll	Average
STR	2D6	7
CON	3D6	10-11
SIZ	2D4+4	9
INT	3D6+3	13-14
POW	3D6+6	17-18
DEX	3D6+3	13-14
APP	1D4+1	3-4

**Move:** 10 walk /Jump 3 meters up, 7 meters across

**Hit Points:** 9-10      **Major Wound:** 4+

**Armour:** 2 points Innate, +4 points stiffened silk Armour

**Damage Bonus:** -1D4

Weapon	Atk	Dmg
Bite	35%	1D4
Thread-Dagger*	45%	1D4*
Thread-Dart*	45%	1d3**

\* see below

**Communication:** Language (1 local) 40%; Language (Rh'knaus) 70%; Persuade 40%

**Manipulation:** Craft (Rh'knaus Silk) 35%; First Aid 45%

**Mental:** Knowledge (The Uncounted Worlds) 45%; Knowledge (Occult) 45%

**Perception:** Listen 55%; Sense 30%;Spot 45%

**Physical:** Climb 100%; Dodge 55%; Hide 35%; Jump 75%; Stealth 45%

**Combat:** See above.

**Powers:** Rh'knaus have several innate abilities and depend on them primarily. Certain Rh'knaus may possess additional Sorcerous abilities. Rh'knaus never possess “conventional” Demon or Elemental summoning abilities but may at the GM’s option possess a similar ability to summon creatures from the obscure Chaos realms.

Rh'knaus are rather spider like in their nature and typically possess several innate physical powers: *Super Movement (Wall walking)*; *Super Movement (Leap)*: +2 meters up, +4 meters across; *Super Power (Darkvision)*: 15 meters; *Resistance(Poison)*: +6 to CON to resist poisons

Rh'knaus are distinctly otherworldly and all manifest the following Sorcery spells as innate magical powers: *Liken Shape (4)*; *Muddle (1)*; *Pox (1)*; *Sorcerers Plasticity (1-3)*

## **Rh'knaus Transformation**

A Rh'knaus can infuse any living creature with their chaotic otherworldly essence, permanently transforming the target into a mockery of its previous form. This process takes 8 hours, during which time the Rh'knaus’s jaws must be locked onto the victim, who must be either willing or helpless for the duration. After 8 hours, the victim must make an Opposed CON vs. Rh'knaus’s POW roll. Failure indicates that the victim transforms into a Rh'knaus (if the victim was humanoid), or into a Rh'knaus spawn. If the victim succeeds at the resistance roll, the Rh'knaus can attempt the transformation again; each additional attempt to transform a victim decrease the targets effective CON by one.

## **Material Vulnerability**

Outside the Realms of Chaos a Rh'knaus must make a POW check each hour at or lose 1D6 Power points. It starts at POW x5, and then drops by 1 multiplier per hour. (POW x4 second hour, POW x3 third hours etc.) The loss of Power points cannot be recovered until they return to a Chaos Realm or they are safely insulated from the reality of a non-Chaos Realm. If rendered unconscious through the accumulation of Power point loss (from this ability or from any other source), the non-Chaos Realm environs begin to deal hit point damage at the same rate (CON check; continues to increase per check as stated above). If a Rh'knaus wears his Silken garment or is inside his web, he is protected from the effects of the non-Chaos Realm.

## **Other Traits**

The Rh'knaus cannot be healed through magic or sorcery. A Rh'knaus only heals through natural means or a rare Rh'knaus specific versions of Sorcerous Healing.

Rh'knaus can produce thread-like secretions such as their silk, and the curing agent that stiffens it, through glands inside their mouths. A Rh'knaus can produce enough silk to insulate a 3 meter square area in a typical day. Silk will normally last approximately 90 days before deteriorating to non-usefulness.

## **Rh'knaus Tactics**

Despite their impressive abilities, Rh'knaus are also incredibly vulnerable. In combat they depend on magic and ranged attacks to weaken foes, using their abilities to wall walk & leap to stay out of melee range. For Social interaction, they use 'Liken Shape' and 'Muddle' to confuse and/or persuade targets. A recent trend

has been the development of mobile 'webs' in gypsy style wagons, ships or other craft.

Rh'knaus silk suits and silk armour is a difficult item to craft. It is only given to special agents dedicated to dealing with situations outside the webs. In most situations, a Rh'knaus will briefly exit the safety of Web returning within a few hours at the most.

In extremely rare cases, someone subjected to the vile transformation does not undergo the full mental transformation; instead, they retain their memories and become rogues from the web. Sadly, their alien appearance and vulnerabilities mean they seldom live long.

### **Rh'knaus Silk-thread Weapons**

<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>Dmg</i>	<i># Attk</i>	<i>Special</i>	<i>Rng</i>	<i>Value</i>
Thread-Dagger	15	1D4	1	Bleeding	S	Priceless
Thread-Sword	10	1D6+1	1	Bleeding	M	Priceless
Thread-Dart	10	1D3	2	Impaling	20	Priceless

  

<i>Weapon</i>	<i>Hnds</i>	<i>HP</i>	<i>Parry</i>	<i>STR/DEX</i>	<i>Mal</i>
Thread-Dagger	1H	5	yes	4/4	91-00
Thread-Sword	1H	8	yes	5/5	91-00
Thread-Dart	1H	2	no	/13	91-00

A Thread-Dagger (or rarer Thread-Sword) is a weapon crafted from near mono-molecular thread of Rh'knaus silk. Damage is as per weapon, but physical armour is reduced to half value (round up). On a roll of 91-00 while using the weapon it breaks. Because of the nature of the weapon damage bonus or penalty does not apply. The design and method of use in these weapons often produce wounds that continue to bleed.

A Thread-Dart is a rare Rh'knaus weapon woven from their silk. Weapons stat as shown above, but physical armour is reduced to half value (round up). On a roll off 91-00 while using the weapon it breaks.