Tomes and Times

Tomes and Times was designed to help Keepers give more consistent reading times to books in their scenarios, and in passing ended up touching on the mechanics for successfully understanding the contents. It has three main components:

- A system for working out reading times based on the book's properties (or conversely, designing a book to fit a reading time).

- A tweaked system for skill changes due to reading, making incremental changes during ongoing study, rather than applying them all when the book is finished.

- A tweaked spell-learning mechanism, making it more predictable.

Reading Times

This system is fairly complex. First off, here are three clunky new terms:

Base reading time: the time needed to physically read through a specific copy of a book.

Study time: the time needed to read and comprehend a specific copy of a book. This incorporates the base reading time.

Personal reading time: the time it will take a specific investigator to read a specific copy of a book. This incorporates all attributes of the book, modified by the investigator's abilities.

Tome Attributes

This system gives a book six attributes, three for the physical book, and three for the content.

The properties of the book determine the **base reading time**.

Length: How many words, symbols, pictures etc. are there to plough through? All copies of a particular book are the same length, barring damage. However, concise or abridged editions, "introductions to" and so on will be shorter (but often less informative). Editions "with notes and commentary" or expanded editions will be longer.

Condition: Is the book intact and unmarked; is it heavily underlined and annotated by an earlier reader; or is it dog-eared, crumpled, smudged, badly repaired with opaque materials, smoke-damaged, bloodstained and partly burned with various pages missing? (a book with a lot of missing pages becomes significantly shorter as well!) Condition varies between individual copies of a book. Problems caused by poor condition can be alleviated by getting copies of missing or damaged pages, or checking other references to find out what pages said. Of course, readers may also be able to source alternative copies that are in better condition.

Legibility: Is the text clear, neat printing with labelled diagrams, or is it illegible, ink-spattered scrawl with many unexplained abbreviations? Legibility varies between printings; in general, newer printings tend to be clearer and in more familiar typefaces, while very old copies may be hand-written and hard to decipher. On the other hand, cheap knockoff reprints by enthusiasts or opportunists may be worse than the original. Some books may begin as a high-quality limited-circulation work, be banned and destroyed by authorities, and be illicitly reprinted in dubious workshops across the slums of the continent.

The properties of the content influence the **study time**. They are intrinsic to the text of the book and do not vary between copies or printings. Only a substantial rewrite (such as a New Revised Edition or a new translation) will alter these properties.

Madness: How much sense does the book make? Is the content lucid, clearly-expressed and comprehensible, or is it the ravings of a lunatic?

A high POW helps readers to keep focused and to work out which elements are relevant.

Difficulty: How accessible is the book? Is the writing a well-organised development of ideas, or a dense academic fog of cross-references, assumptions and jargon? Is it a compelling narrative with vivid scenes, memorable characters and accessible metaphor, or is it a highly allegorical, stream-of-consciousness poem with impenetrable layers of meaning?

A high EDU helps readers follow the thread of the text.

Complexity: How technical are the ideas contained in the book? Does the work discuss a few straightforward ideas and accessible facts; is it a complex tangle of hypotheses of vast and sweeping importance to a whole field; or does it present an entirely new angle on reality, meaning and the human condition?

A high INT helps readers grasp the ideas inside.

Explaining and Assigning Attributes

Length is the amount of content in the book, mostly determined by the word count.

- 10 minutes for a pamphlet, brief report, picture book or the text of most speeches.

- 1 hour for a children's book or introductory work, as well as most plays and the classic slender volume of poetry.

- 2 hours for a slim novel.

- About 4 hours for an average novel, school textbook or biography.

- About 8 hours for a heavy novel or average academic work.

- About 16 hours for your typical brick-like fantasy novel or large university textbook.

- About 32 hours for a concise encyclopaedia, comprehensive handbook of metaphysics, or the kind of novel that you keep on the shelf but can't quite be bothered to read. *A Suitable Boy* and *War and Peace* clock in over 500,000 words.

- About 64 hours for the longest individual books, including epic novels, massive scientific works, "complete works of", and certain holy books. *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the Bible and *In Search of Lost Time* are around the million-word mark.

Large multi-volume sets like the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* are outside the scope of this project.

We'll use two books as examples – the first is (naturally) *The Necronomicon* – using the commonest 17th-century Spanish printing of the Latin version, as held by Miskatonic University. The second is a new Mythos Tome, a supposed children's story book entitled *Five Go Mad in Massachusetts*.

The Necronomicon *is described as an "immense compendium" so must, really, go into the highest (64 hour reading time) category.*

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts *is longer than most children's books so we'll give it a length of 2 hours.*

Condition and **Legibility** modify this time. That might be because the book needs delicate handling, or because puzzling out the words gives you a headache. On the other hand, it might be a solid, cunningly-annotated copy that's a joy to read. Add these modifiers together, then adjust the reading time of the book accordingly.

Condition determines how much care is needed to handle the book safely, and whether damage or defacement has made it hard to study.

- -20% for exceptional quality, and helpful underlining or marking-up

- +0% for works in normal condition

- +20% for damage affecting the text, distracting annotations, or works in generally bad condition

- +50% for a heavily damaged work where significant content is missing, for frail and delicate works that need special handling, or those with pages uncut or stuck together

- +100% if the book is so damaged that most of the words have to be puzzled out

The Necronomicon *is "fair to good" but "fragile", which I would expect from a 400-year-old work used by mad wizards. That gives it at least a +20% for Condition.*

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts *is a recent printing, albeit without helpful underlining (unless your copy came from a specialist second-hand outlet), so gets no modifier for Condition.*

Legibility is simply a matter of how easy it is to make out the words and images.

- -20% for exceptionally good layout and printing, good text size and clear illustrations

- +0% for normal quality

- +20% for small, dense printing or good handwriting

- +50% for poor quality printing, bad or antiquated handwriting

- +100% for very poor printing or illegible fonts, confusing illustrations, or archaic handwriting that needs palaeography to decipher.

The Necronomicon *has "poorer cut" type, and printing of the 17th century wasn't up to modern standards. I'll interpret that as +50%.*

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts *has exceptionally good layout and text size, with helpful illustrations, and deserves a -20% modifier.*

The **base reading time** is the length, adjusted by the condition and legibility modifiers. This gives the time needed to just read through the words, regardless of understanding.

The Necronomicon's *length of 64 hours, and modifiers totalling 70%, give us a base reading time of 108.8 hours.*

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts's *length of 2 hours, and a single -20% modifier, gives a base reading time of 1.6 hours.*

Madness, **Difficulty** and **Complexity** determine how long it takes to understand what you're reading. They are themselves subject to the reader's capabilities, as explained later.

Madness is a matter of how rational and reasonable the content appears.

- -2 for works with unusually clear arguments or plots that come together seamlessly and intuitively.

- 0 for normal works.

- 3 for questionable arguments, implausible plots, or incoherent imagery, which distract the reader and make it hard to focus.

- 6 for incoherent arguments, nonsensical plots or incomprehensible examples; and for work peppered with bizarre, unrelated and disturbing elements, as if written by someone half-mad.

- 12 for works of the truly insane, with confounding descriptions and more baffling proclamations than meaningful content.

"The Necronomicon is encyclopaedic, bafflingly so. Allusions are definitions, inflections are explanations, wishes are proofs, and decoration and design are indistinguishable. The vocabulary is as interior of that of a dream." I think that indisputably counts as 'truly insane' on my list. Madness=12.

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts *has an implausible plot and incoherent imagery (as you might expect in a tale involving lashings of ginger beer and Dagon). Madness=3.*

Difficulty measures the structure of the content, and how accessible it is to the reader.

- 0 for works that are particularly well-structured, with natural and captivating narratives, scintillating poetic imagery, or arguments that fall perfectly into place.

- 3 for normal works.

- 5 for works that assume considerable background knowledge, require a lot of cross-referencing, use specialised language, or lean towards symbolism.

- 10 for works designed for professionals, those with many footnotes and references to check, and highly symbolic or metaphorical works.

- 15 for works written for a very limited audience, the densest academic texts and manuals, and cryptic allegorical works whose true messages are deeply buried.

The Necronomicon *is undoubtedly one of the most difficult books ever written, so Difficulty=15.*

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts*, when being studied for its hidden Mythos content, requires some background knowledge and tends towards symbolism. Difficulty=5*

Complexity measures the technicality of the ideas in the text, and how far they depart from general knowledge.

- 0 for introductory works, straightforward poetry and very familiar narratives.

- 3 for normal works.

- 6 for basic academic works, or stories with points to make.

- 9 for advanced academic works, detailed technical manuals, poetry portraying complex ideas about the world, or stories with very complex plots.

- 12 for the most specialised textbooks, comprehensive new philosophies, or narratives with radical points to make about reality and the universe.

I think unveiling large sections of the Mythos probably falls squarely under "radical points about reality and the Universe". The Necronomicon's complexity=12.

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts *is definitely a story with a point to make (don't play in the sea). Complexity=6.*

To get the **study time**, add together the Madness, Complexity and Difficulty, add 1, and multiply by the **base reading time**. The +1 avoids having any zero-hour reading times. In other words:

study time = base reading time x (madness + complexity + difficulty +1)

The Necronomicon *has multipliers of 12, 15 and 12 which means the base reading time is multiplied by 40 to give a Study Time of 4,352 hours – just under 26 weeks of non-stop studying. At 8 hours study per day, it'll take 544 days to study this immense and insane tome.*

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts *scores 3, 5 and 6, multiplying 1.6 by 15 to give a Study Time of 24 hours. Even the dimmest investigator can finish this book in a weekend if they put their mind to it.*

Ability adjustments

The modifiers should be adjusted by the reader's characteristics. The most focused can pick out meaning amidst insanity; the scholar is accustomed to academic texts or complex metaphor; and the sharpest intellect can follow even the most challenging ideas.

Reader

How well do you understand the language it's written in? How good are you at grasping complex or allegorical ideas? How much experience do you have of reading similar works? How good are you at concentrating, and picking out meaningful elements from gibberish? For 7th edition divide POW, EDU and INT by five in the following section:

- Each point of POW above 10 cancels a point of **Madness**, to a minimum of 0.

- Each point of EDU above 10 cancels a point of **Difficulty**, to a minimum of 0.

- Each point of INT above 10 cancels a point of **Complexity**, to a minimum of 0.

(Keepers may also wish to penalise ability scores below 10 by increasing *these values as appropriate)*

So an average 6th edition investigator (INT 13, POW 10, EDU 15) cancels out 3 Complexity, 0 Madness and 5 Difficulty (an average 7th edition investigator has EDU 13 and so only cancels out 3 Difficulty).

For The Necronomicon *this will reduce Difficulty to 10 and Complexity to 9 (Madness is unchanged, as POW of 10 doesn't give any benefits). This reduces the multipliers to a total of 31 for a study time of 3,372.8 hours (422 days of studying for 8 solid hours each day).*

Five Go Mad in Massachusetts is easier on the reader. Its Difficulty is cancelled out completely and its Complexity is halved to 3, giving a Personal Study Time of 11.2 hours for this average investigator.

It's worth noting that using these guidelines an average person can understand an average book about as fast as they can read the words. Whether that's completely realistic is up for debate, but it isn't half handy.

In theory, the Keeper can work out personal reading times for each investigator separately. In practice, they might prefer to ignore that, and just use the average investigator as a handy benchmark to see how quickly investigators are likely to get through their tomes. This gives a rough idea of how much time is needed during the scenario or between scenarios (if they want the tomes read), or how quickly they need to push on with events (if the investigators shouldn't have all that knowledge yet).

Situational modifiers

Some special situations might adjust these reading times.

Reference works might alleviate Madness by highlighting important sections or perhaps indicating nonsensical elements. They might alleviate Difficulty by clarifying ambiguities, helping reading to get a basic grasp of topics, or elucidating metaphors. They might alleviate Complexity by checking what implications ideas might have, or relating ideas to other works.

Unusual properties of books – such as those written in obscure dialects, poorly translated, or otherwise outside the general run of things – are best handled as simple exceptions with special notes. In these circumstances, investigators' skills or background might influence their ability to read the tome.

Learning Spells

The basic mechanic for learning spells involves reading and then making an INTx3 roll to learn the spell. If you fail, you must start again. I felt that an incremental approach might be more useful; it's more forgiving when spells are very important to the plot, and makes things more predictable. I also felt that the default 2d6 week, 30-hour study period was too inflexible on the one hand, and (for many scenarios) too damn long on the other. Many scenarios end up simply ignoring these mechanics entirely, and giving arbitrary learning times that fit into the scenario's demands. Rather than have rules that scenario-designers and Keepers ignore entirely, I thought creating a more helpful set of guidelines might help someone.

There are two simple elements to this system.

Firstly, the time to study a spell is equal to 20 hours, multiplied by the average (mean) SAN cost of casting it. If a spell has no SAN cost, it is 20 hours. Once the time has been spent, they can roll INTx3 to learn the spell.

Secondly, a failed INT roll does not mean all the time was wasted. This is not how learning works. The investigator must spend 20% of the original time on further study and practice. For a simple spell with a 20-hour cost, a failed roll means they must spend a further 4 hours before attempting the INTx3 roll again.

Under this system, three attempts will allow three-quarters of average investigators to learn a spell, spending about one-and-a-half times the original time to do so.

Skill changes, Other Language rolls and finding spells

These three ideas are grouped together because I think the best way to handle them is to relate them to one another.

The core rulebook requires a roll to read Other Language books. A success lets you read it as normal, while a failure means you lose "some" Sanity but gain no benefits. While simple, it's potentially punishing and unclear on what 'failing to read a book' means in practice, since if you spent a year studying it full-time you must have found *something* to do. Learning nothing from your epic read-through of the *Necronomicon* because you failed your 99% Latin roll is a bit harsh. It also allows readers to be driven mad without learning anything, which doesn't make sense to me; you lose SAN from tomes because you learn about the Mythos, so if you haven't learned anything, why lose SAN? A further problem is that it makes reading small tomes a much better option mechanically than major ones, as you'll have less to reread if you fail your roll. Narratively, though, reading a major tome should be a better option because they contain much more lore.

A related problem is the way skill changes and spells are applied. By default, Cthulhu Mythos is gained, SAN lost and spells identified only when someone finishes reading a book. This makes it harder to use major tomes as ongoing sources of plot in campaigns, or a way to gain new abilities between scenarios, since even if investigators are reading them between scenarios, by the rules as written they learn nothing until they finish. And again, that's not how learning works.

My solution is to combine these problems.

The reading time is divided by the Mythos bonus, giving a number of **blocks** of equal reading time. At the end of each block, the reader makes any necessary Language roll. If successful, they gain a point of Mythos and incur a proportional amount of any SAN loss, as well as gaining access to whatever spells the Keeper deems appropriate. If they fail, as with spells, they must spend 20% of the original time on further study before making another roll to successfully learn that block's content.

SAN loss might be calculated by the Keeper beforehand and allocated as reading proceeds. Alternatively, Keepers might save them for the later sections of the book, when the reader understands more of what is going on. In either case, SAN loss should relate directly to Cthulhu Mythos gained.

"The Necronomicon" confers +18 to Cthulhu Mythos, so our average investigator will make an Other Language (Latin) roll after sessions of 187.4 hours (roughly once every 24 days). If their roll fails then they'll have to re-read that block for 37.4 hours and try again.

"Five Go Mad in Massachusetts" confers +3 to Cthulhu Mythos so can be studied in three 3.7 hour blocks, subject to any English rolls required.

After each block, the reader gains +1 Mythos, and any proportional SAN costs, and possibly identifies some spells that they might choose to try and learn.

This system spaces out the effects of reading, makes reading major tomes less of a thankless (and suboptimal) activity, and allows some benefit from reading even substantial tomes during scenarios.

Shimmin Beg (with thanks to Emrys), July 2012 (updated September 2015)

Tome Title	

Language		Cthulhu Mythos gain (CM)	

Length		Condition		Legibility	
Pamphlet	10 mins	Exceptional	-0.2	Exceptionally good	-0.2
Introductory work	1 hour	Normal	+0.0	Normal	+0.0
Children's book	1 hour	Damaged	+0.2	Small, dense print	+0.2
Novel, slim	2 hours	Heavily damaged	+0.5	Good handwriting	+0.2
Novel, average	4 hours	Excessively damaged	+1.0	Poor printing	+0.5
Novel, heavy	8 hours			Poor handwriting	+0.5
Novel, brick-like	16 hours			Very poor print	+1.0
Encyclopaedia	32 hours			Illegible handwriting	+1.0
Necronomicon	64 hours				

Length (Ln)		Condition (Cn)		Legibility (Lg)	

Length is shown in hours (10 mins is 0.16667 hours)

Base Reading Time (BRT)   Ln * (1 + Cn + Lg)

Madness		Difficulty		Complexity	
Unusual clarity	-2	Exceptional quality, natural and captivating narratives, perfect arguments	0	Introductory works, straightforward poetry and very familiar narratives	0
Normal	0	Normal works	3	Normal works	3
Questionable arguments, implausible plots or incoherent imagery	3	Require considerable background knowledge, much cross-referencing, specialised language and/or symbolism	5	Basic academic works, stories with points to make	6
Incoherent arguments, nonsensical plots or incomprehensible examples	6	Designed for professionals, many footnotes and references to check, highly symbolic or metaphorical	10	Advanced academic works, detailed technical manuals, poetry portraying complex ideas, stories with very complex plots	9
Truly insane, confounding descriptions	12	Very limited audience, densest academic texts and manuals, cryptic allegorical works	15	The most specialised textbooks, comprehensive new philosophies, narratives with radial points about reality	12

Madness (Ma)		Difficulty (Df)		Complexity (Co)	

Base Study Time (BST)   BRT * (Ma + Df + Co)

Investigator's POW		Investigator's EDU		Investigator's INT	

Revised Madness RMa = Ma - (POW-10)		Revised Difficulty RDf = Df - (EDU-10)		Revised Complexity RCo = Co-(INT-10)	

Personal Study Time (PST)   BRT * (RMa + RDf + RCo)

Reading block size   (CM) blocks of (PST / CM) hours

blocks of _____ _hours_

Spell	Block	Spell	Block	Spell	Block