

ELIZABETHAN CALL OF CTHULHU

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INTRODUCTION TO ELIZABETHAN CTHULHU

I've wanted to set a Call of Cthulhu game in the Elizabethan period for a while now. The main factor is the ability to easily isolate the Investigators (always a classical tool of horror, see Alien and The Shining). Finding that other roleplayers have also seen the potential of this period, mixing traditional medieval concepts with a more modern non-feudal outlook, has inspired me to put these notes onto the web. I've done a crash course in Tudor history, so please forgive any mistakes. E-mail me with corrections - go on! Feel free!

There are a number of good reasons for setting a game of Call of Cthulhu (published by Chaosium) in Elizabethan times. Firstly, technology is not omnipresent, giving the players an opt-out through cars, radios, telephones or Tommy guns. Secondly, the era is one of very real witchcraft and very real sorcerers poring over ancient tomes. Thirdly, it is an era of exploration. Unlike the 1920s, the Elizabethan era is full of new discoveries, of trade routes, new lands and peoples. There are foreign cultures and cults to be encountered - and maybe brought back to England.

The guidelines here suggest that a Keeper utilise the RuneQuest rules as an adjunct to the Call of Cthulhu rules, mainly for character creation and combat. Both games use the same mechanics, but RuneQuest concentrates on sword-fighting and hand-to-hand combat to a much greater degree.

ELIZABETHAN DUNGEON IDEAS

- # Tombs of the Middle Ages
- # Wight's Barrows (Resting place of Bronze Age chieftans)
- # Haunted castles
- # Ancient Roman ruins (forts, temples, parts of Hadrian's Wall, secret chambers underneath Roman Bath)
- # Elven woods, with scary stuff happening, twisting thorn mazes, etc.
- # Holy Hills - a catch-all covering Celtic Sidhe Mounds and gates to the Celtic Otherworld (land of Faerie). This hills may look normal, may have ancient ruins on top of them, monoliths, stone circles, causewayed enclosures (neolithic), they may even have chalk figures.
- # Ruined Monasteries with terrible curses left behind after the Reformation.
- # Priests holes that lead down to chambers of Satanic worship
- # Arthur in suspended animation with his bravest knights and their horses, cared for by Merlin (this is a Cheshire folk tale).

CREATING ELIZABETHAN INVESTIGATORS

While player-character Investigators could be created using the Call of Cthulhu rules (and I am sure I'll put that option up here shortly), I suggest using the RuneQuest Fantasy Roleplaying Adventure Game rules (which share a very similar and related games system). Characteristics are created by the method chosen by the referee. My own method follows:

Allocation Method: roll 2D6+6 twice, allocate one total to INT the other to SIZ - as desired. Roll 3D6 five times and allocate these totals to the remaining attributes as desired. If three or more of these totals are less than 12 - roll all the attributes again. Elizabethan Investigators have a new Sanity (SAN) attribute taken straight from Call of Cthulhu, determined by POW x5.

Elizabethan England is classed as a Civilised Culture. No-one may learn magic as portrayed within the RuneQuest rules, and no-one may begin the game with any magical spells in any case. Rather than roll for Occupation, players may select the Occupation of their character. The following Occupations are suitable for use as Elizabethan Investigators:

Bard

A poet, playwright, musician and entertainer. May play the lute, recorder, viol, harpsichord or shawm. Use Entertainer details.

Journeyman

A practicing craftsman who must seek out work. Not yet settled down in a city or town as a 'master'. Use Crafter details.

Knight of the Realm

A knight or perhaps squire or esquire - a member of the landed gentry with an estate and manor house. No longer an armoured warrior, but a country gentleman. Use Noble details.

Man-at-Arms

A soldier, fighting man and loyal retainer. Here, either a Billman or an Arquebusier (gunner). Use Soldier details. Billman has 2-handed Axe skill; Arquebusier has Black Powder Weapon skill (0% Base Chance, Manipulation skill).

Merchant

An educated man, a trader, of standing, thriving in a new age of commerce and riches. Use Merchant for details.

Minister (new Occupation)

An ordained man of the cloth, perhaps a parish priest or a deacon.

<skills> Ride x3, Throw x1, Fast Talk x2, Orate x5, Speak English x 3, First Aid x 1, Human Lore x 3, Read/Write English x 3, Read/Write Latin x3, Occult (10% Base Chance, Knowledge skill) x4, Fist Attack x2, Dagger Attack x1, and Quarterstaff x1.

<equipment> as Priest

Physician

Henry VIII founded the Royal College of Physicians; a noble and well thought of profession. Use Healer details.

Rogue

A footpad, thief and conman; some dwell in cities, many roam the country as beggars and vagabonds. These latter folk are the new underclass created in the aftermath of the Medieval period, with new agricultural ways and the end of the feudal tenure (and the safety net of the feudal system). Use Thief details.

Scholar

A highly educated man of standing, perhaps a teacher or lawyer. Probably a university graduate (from Oxford or Cambridge). Use Scribe for details. Read & Write x 3 is Latin, Read & Write x 1 is English.

Seadog

A sailor in Elizabeth's new navy. Use Sailor for details.

Yeoman

A free-farmer, skilled in country ways and a good shot with the fabled longbow. Use Farmer for details. Weapon skill is Bow x2.

LANGUAGES

Own Language is commonly English. The common written language is Latin; English is less commonly written. Common Other Languages are: Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, Flemish and German.

COMMON WEAPONRY OF THE ERA

Dagger - Commonly carried by all and sundry

Rapier - Commonly carried by the wealthy and by gentlemen

Broadsword - A military sword in long-standing, not court or street dress.

Bastard Sword - Huge military sword for use on the battlefield only.

Great Sword - A new two-handed monster used by some knights in battle.

Main Gauche - Parrying dagger sometimes used with a Rapier

Poleaxe - Infantry chopping blade on a haft, usually called a Bill or Glaive.

Halberd - Infantry chopping blade on a haft, with a spike for dismounting cavalry.

Arquebus - An unwieldy wheellock or matchlock gun, use these statistics:

Arquebus

STR/DEX 9/-, ENC 4.0, Damage 3d6, Armour 8, Range Effect/Max 50/300, Rate of Fire 1/5 MR, Price 400 [taken from Land of Ninja, Games Workshop 1987]

COMMON ARMOUR OF THE ERA

With the growing power and popularity of guns on the battlefield, armour is in decline. Full plate suits are a hundred years out of date. Melee weapons are still very much in use, however, so that armour is still valued. Its low price means that almost anyone can now afford plate armour.

Open Plate Helm, worn by infantry (AP 4)

Closed Plate Helm, such as the Spanish morion (AP 8)

Plate Vambraces (AP 8)

Quilted Jack [Byrmie] (AP 3)

Plate Cuirass (AP 8)

Plate Skirts, encumbering segmented plates (AP 8)

Plate Greaves (AP 8)

COINAGE

1 RuneQuest copper penny = 1 Elizabethan silver penny

Elizabethan coinage Values

Noble = 10 shillings (or 120 pennies)

Crown = 5 shillings (or 60 pennies)

Shilling = 12 pennies

Sixpence = 6 pennies (or half a shilling)

Groat = 4 pennies

Thru 'penny piece = 3 pennies

Penny = 4 Farthings
Ha'penny = 1/2 Penny
Farthing = 1/4 Penny

MAGIC - ELIZABETHAN NOTES

Mythos magic is the realm of the Elizabethan sorcerer and Cabbalist. The most common of the Mythos spells, those of the Greater Grimoire, mirror quite well the ritual magics of the period.

Summon/Bind Servitor spells require elaborate rituals and magical circles or pentagrams in which to bind the creature. These creatures are considered to be foul demons. Contact spells also call savage demons, but these cannot be bound - they must be bargained with. Call/Dismiss Deity spells also use pentacles and magic circles to call awesome 'demons'. Contact Deity spells are used by sorcerers to call upon a 'demon' to visit them.

The spells of the Lesser Grimoire contains a host of spells that quite nicely mirror the type of magic of the Elizabethan period called 'maleficarum'. Maleficarum is the harmful magic of witches and warlocks; but the Lesser Grimoire also provides a great variety of spells suitable for an evil and ambitious (NPC) sorcerer.

Learning Spells

Mythos tomes are not overly available - and only just being translated into common languages. Sorcerers nearly always learn spells the hard way - through the summoning of a deity or monstrous being. Such a method is dangerous, and equated with 'bargaining with the Devil'.

The Dreamlands

This alternate dreamlike realm filled with beauty, wonder and abject terror is a part of the Cthulhu Mythos and can play an integral part in Elizabethan magic. Cabbalists, that is mystic sorcerers inspired by the Jewish Cabbalist tradition and the Zohar, can reach the Dreamlands. Cabbalists try to rise above Earth, through the nine spheres to reach God and achieve ultimate wisdom. This is done through meditation, concentration and spiritual awareness, separating the spirit from the body, freeing it for its wanderings through the spheres to amass forbidden knowledge for the journey onwards.

In Mythos terminology, the Cabbalists are dreamers, able to transport their spirits, while meditating, into the Dreamlands. The angels they meet and communicate with are actually Mythos beings - and gods. Cabbalists believe they are in touch with God, and are moving through the 'sephira' or spheres to reach him. They are mistaken - they are in the Dreamlands contacting Mythos creatures of terrible malignity and awesome power. They in turn, learn many magics and occult secrets. At every turn their search for God is being corrupted and tainted.

USEFUL PERIOD LINKS

[Life in Elizabethan England](#) - A vast single page document that covers everything a roleplayer will want to know. The document is aimed at re-enactors and stage actors. It is very thorough.

Other links being prepared ...

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