

CALL of
HORROR ROLEPLAYING
Cthulhu

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Curse of the Yellow Sign
Act 1: Digging for a Dead God

January 27, 1940

KRAUS: The Captain ordered us to enter.

Q: What happened then?

KRAUS: I do not know. I cannot remember.

Q: The bite marks on your arm are from human teeth.

KRAUS: It found us. It (pause) infected us.

Q: What are you talking about?

KRAUS: The one trapped there.

Q: What?

KRAUS: (screaming) Do not make me remember! Do not make me remember!

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Curse of the Yellow Sign

Act I: Digging for a Dead God

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The Yellow Sign was created by Robert Chambers and designed by Kevin Ross.

Sometimes, it appears as a demon from German folklore with a grin as sharp as a razor in the moonlight.

Sometimes, it appears as a terrible figure in a black robe, carrying knives.

Sometimes, it appears as a king in tatters, wearing a Pallid Mask.



And its symbol is the Yellow Sign.

Introduction

In May of 1939, somewhere in the jungles of Africa, a small band of soldiers have stumbled across something ancient. Something terrible. And they are about to suffer the consequences.

Digging for a Dead God is a one-night scenario for *Call of Cthulhu*. The actual bulk of the story is only a few pages long; most of this small booklet concerns Keeper advice, tricks, props and options. That's because the whole experience rests on your players. There are no monsters, no moldy tomes, no spells, no magic items. Just a small group of soldiers and a malignant idea infesting their brains. And that's enough.

DfaDG is not a linear adventure. Instead, it is more like a sandbox game: you have characters and environments and certain events that occur, but there is no step-by-step, clue-by-clue progress. I'll give you all the information you need to play in the sandbox (including Locations, NPCs, etc.), but once the scenario gets started, it's really up to you and the players to move the plot forward.

I should warn you: there is little chance for character survival. This is the bleak darkness of Lovecraft's vision made manifest. Think of the two "survivors" of John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Think of the "survivors" of Ridley Scott's *Alien* or James Cameron's *Aliens*. Think of the "survivors" of any truly horrific experience. They are, in fact, survivors in the plainest sense of the word: they lived through the experience. They didn't win. They *survived*.

I have this joke I always tell about making a set of *CoC* dice. Actually, you really only need one die; you don't even need a set. And, it's not really a die, but a weighted marble and on one side it says, "You're dead" and on the other it says, "You're insane."

That's the legend of *CoC*. Either your character dies or goes insane. The mortality rate of characters is insanely high. Nobody expects to get out alive. Except... that's not really the way it goes. Gamers are gamers and when you tell them "Nobody survives a *CoC* game," they take that as a kind of challenge. Their characters stock up on TNT

and machine guns and other equipment. They approach the adventure like they'd approach any fantasy adventure: with an eye at survival.

Needless to say, many folks who write *CoC* adventures enable this behavior. They write adventures that can be "survived." Lots of weapon stats and rules for explosives and vehicle speeds. Tactical design anticipating gamer tactical thinking.

Well, I don't design *CoC* adventures with this mentality. (Thus, my deliberate use of the words "story" and "scenario" rather than "adventure.") I don't expect the characters to survive. If they do, it has more to do with chance than any decisions the characters make. If they do survive, the characters are permanently scarred—both physically and mentally.

I don't run *CoC* as dark fantasy. I run it as horror. Let me explain. It really comes down to the difference between *Alien* and *Aliens*. *Alien* is horror and *Aliens* is dark fantasy.

In *Alien*, the crew members don't have a chance. One-by-one, the alien murders each of them. Killed by a horror they don't really understand. Every attempt they make to control it or lock it down fails. In the end, the only reason Ripley survives is pure luck. Sure, she had a plan, and yeah, it worked, but come on. Let's be honest. There's a reason she's singing "You're my lucky star." She's praying this stupid idea will work because *she's got nothing else*. That's horror. You are alone and naked against an uncaring foe that wants to do unspeakable things to you. Not because of who you are, but just because you're warm and a good place to lay eggs.

Aliens, on the other hand, is dark fantasy. The heroes aren't running from the horror, they're fighting it. And they have a chance to win. Sure, they get their asses handed to them at the beginning, but that's just to remind all of us how horrible that horror truly is. But while *Alien* is about fear, *Aliens* is about courage. Fighting. *Alien* is about running away and *Aliens* is about standing up and fighting.

That's the difference.

Now, you may ask, “John, why are you bringing this up?”

Because this story isn't about standing up and fighting. This isn't dark fantasy. This is horror.

You may want to warn your players ahead of time.

I always make sure my players know this when I run *Call of Cthulhu*. Your players should have this understanding before you begin. This is not a standard roleplaying game adventure. This is the Cthulhu Mythos. You've just taken a single step out of your warm, cozy bubble into the vast, uncaring, inhuman universe. This isn't a bug hunt. This is cosmic horror. You are the tiny, insignificant mistake of chemistry that happened to bubble up between two great ages. And as soon as the stars are right, your time is over.

This isn't fighting the good fight. This is a deep, long look into the endless void.

This is *Call of Cthulhu*.

But before we go any further, if you would allow me, I'd like to spend just a few hundred words on philosophy. This is *Call of Cthulhu*, after all, and I think I can get away with just a few hundred words. And part of the game is that every Lovecraft scholar gets to add his own viewpoint to the Mythos, and well, this is my chance. And I'm not going to waste it.

And so, with your permission...

THE HASTUR HERESY

I'm a big fan of heresy.

If you know anything about the Cthulhu Mythos (and since you bought this, I assume you do), you know all about Lovecraft's inheritor, August Derleth and his creation, the Unspeakable One, Hastur.

(Actually, Derleth really *adopted* Hastur from authors like Chambers and Bierce, but who's really paying attention?)

Derleth originally suggested HP call his cannon “the Hastur Mythos,” but Lovecraft declined. Later, after the Old Man's death, Derleth's creation slowly grew in importance. This was no

accident, nor was it a coincidence. And many saw it as intentional heresy.

While I personally don't like Derleth's interpretation of the Mythos (and its decidedly Christian flavor), I do love me some heresy. And so, as my own Lovecraft scholarship started to bloom, I found a bit of grudging respect for Auggie and his Unspeakable Fellow.

Besides, is it any wonder scholars of the Mythos are drawn to the Yellow Sign? I mean, you can learn the blasphemous secrets of most Mythos entities in modly old books, but Hastur? He's got himself a play. *A play!* That immediately got my attention.

But what does it mean? Hidden by cryptic references, we never get a good look at exactly why *The King in Yellow* corrupts the creative mind. I have my own hypothesis and I'm using it in this series of stories. You see, it all has to do with information...

THE INFECTION OF DANGEROUS MEMES

There are deep truths in our universe. Powerful concepts we can't even begin to understand. Consider the concept of the Big Bang: all of existence—even beyond our own planet—crammed into a point within a point within a point. Everything that has ever existed, everything that exists, everything that will ever exist. Our universe, something bigger than our language can convey, reduced down to a singularity, something smaller than our language can convey. And then, it exploded. An explosion so huge, after billions of years, we're still feeling its effects. We have no way to communicate that concept, so we use poetic language to express it...

“Let there be Light...”

A language to communicate that which is too grand for mere words to convey. A symbol. A sign. A sign to communicate a truth so awful, it cannot be unseen. A message so terrible, it cannot be unheard. Burned into your brain, it lays seeds that eventually blossom into absolute madness.

Lovecraft's view of the universe is one of alien incoherence. Inhuman R'lyeh dreams under the

waves and the Daemon Sultan spins mindlessly at the center of the universe, showing how naked and alone mankind truly is. Too inconsequential to even be noticed, humanity is a brief moment of consciousness naive to its true impotence. The horrors of the Mythos can't even be bothered to notice us.

But then there's the Yellow Sign. Like a wayward branch of the Mythos, it stands alone, luring creative and sensitive minds to its call. The creatures and entities associated with it seem to have noticed mankind... and find us playthings. Amusing and disposable.

Writers who adopted the mythology—arguably begun by Chambers—have adopted his style of surreal nihilism. Of all the hoary tomes in the Mythos, the book most associated with the sign—*The King in Yellow*—is a play. Not the rabid scribbling of a madman, but a *play*. Another distinction that makes the Hastur mythology that much more... *fun*.

Curse of the Yellow Sign is a series of surreal stories for the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game. I use the word “stories” deliberately here. These are not adventures. There are no investigators, there are no clues, no mysteries to solve, no visits to the library, no ancient tomes to scan for spells. None of these stories are your typical “Cthulhu adventure.” The dangers here are dangers of the mind. Yes, there are physical dangers, but more importantly, these stories are meant to *terrify* and *unnerve* your group, not challenge their tactical and strategic skills. More than likely, the characters they play will not survive the stories unscathed—physically or mentally.

The purpose here is not to play a campaign, but to step through the pages of a short story collection, encountering new characters and situations with each tale, leaving them behind when you are done. Like Chambers' own collection of weird stories (*The King in Yellow*), we will see re-occurring themes and symbols, but each story is self-contained. Hopefully, repeat visits to the collection will enhance each subsequent tale.

This is the first of three stories all bound by the Yellow Sign, *The King in Yellow*, Hali and other Chambers creations. *Digging for a Dead God* is the closest to a “traditional” CoC scenario, but don't get too comfortable: this story is anything but your daddy's Cthulhu.

AVHRIL: THE MAN IN BLACK

A re-occurring figure in *Curse of the Yellow Sign* is the Man in Black. The MiB is not a Great Old One or an Elder God or anything like that. It is the physical manifestation of an idea. Known to the Udndkal as “Avhril.” To the Udndkal, it manifested as an abstract thought. To the Nazis, it will take the form of a figure from Germanic folklore. The Man in Black is a demonic and malicious trickster who delights in wickedness and sorrow. A fitting archetype for Avhril to take.

Avhril is not a sentient creature—as Cthulhu, Hastur and Nyralathotep appear to be—but more of a manifestation of consciousness. In fact, it is *created* by self-awareness: a force that cannot manifest unless self-aware creatures become aware of it. The Udndkal became aware of Avhril long ago and were destroyed by it. But, in the last moments of their existence, they trapped Avhril here, in the Temple.

Now, the Nazis are about to open the door.

FINALLY...

Like I said, I designed this story so you can tell it in a single night. Not a lot of details here. Instead of filling this little book with stats, Sanity checks and other rules, I've done my best to help you establish an environment and an atmosphere. I've used the space provided to give you lots of props, tricks, and Keeper advice.

The real “monsters” here are the characters themselves. What we want to do here is drive the characters mad. One or two may escape our clutches, but they'll never forget tonight. No, they won't.



PART I: PREPPING THE GAME

Before you run *DfaDG*, we have to get a few things prepped.

I've given you six pre-made characters for the story. All are Nazis. Soldiers guarding a clandestine mining camp just a few miles away from Allied controlled territory. Photocopy and hand out a character sheet to each player as well as the corresponding orders. Each soldier has his own orders for the scenario.

ORDERS

I *highly* suggest reading through each of the officer's backgrounds. I provided a sheet for each of them detailing who they are and their motives.

This scenario really depends on the players taking on their roles as the soldiers. The better you have an understanding of the SS officers, the better equipped you will be to assist them when you run the game.

If you want to download copies of the orders, you can go to www.johnwickpresents.com/yellow to get PDF copies. I've also provided them in the back of the book. Please feel free to photocopy them for handouts.

(During playtest, I put the orders in manila envelopes and handed them to the players.)

Make sure nobody shares any information in their orders. Each set of orders has a brief paragraph for the players to read aloud as a kind of introduction for the others.

THE ORDERS

Primary Orders

(to be read and/or given to the players)

You have been assigned a special service for the Fuhrer and Germany. You will infiltrate British occupied Africa for the purpose of exploiting a diamond mine. The mine is unknown to the British. It is imperative you not alert the British to your presence and retrieve as many diamonds as possible to further the cause of the Fuhrer and the Fatherland.

Captain Kort Habsucht is the commander of this mission. We have assigned four lieutenants to assist him as well as a regular sergeant and twelve soldiers.

A nearby native tribe will provide you any additional labor you may need.



PART 2: LOCATIONS

This section contains all the pertinent information for running *DfaDG*. All the stats and numbers and Sanity checks are here as well as full descriptions so you can read them to your players (or use them to create your own descriptions).

For ease of use, all Sanity losses and other game mechanics are listed in bold.

The scenario breaks down into three important locations: the Camp, the Native Village and the Temple.

LOCATION 1: THE CAMP

I've divided the camp into Areas.

- a) The Mess – where the soldiers eat
- b) The Mine – where the natives dig
- c) The Kennel – where the dogs wait
- d) The Quarters – where the soldiers sleep
- e) The Cage – where the natives sleep
- f) The Hotbox – where the natives are punished

The Mess

A large freestanding tent with poles and pegs covered in mosquito netting. The tent is twenty feet long and ten feet wide. Inside is a long table for the six men to eat, drink and smoke.

Currently, the mess is cramped with sick soldiers. Six of the sergeant's twelve regulars have come down with something resembling malaria. None of the officers have any medical training (other than the sergeant's basic first aid skills), so the soldiers just have to suffer.

The Mine

Sitting at the bottom of a small mountain, the mine is a series of long shafts reaching downwards into the Earth. The hole is tight—only allowing one man at a time. It reaches approximately fifty feet down. Find a map of the caverns near the end of this booklet.

The Kennel

To keep the natives in line—and warn of any approaching complications—the soldiers keep two dogs. Well-trained and very mean. Only one of the soldiers has the key to their cage.

The Quarters

The officers sleep in separate tents. Each tent is approximately ten feet by ten feet, has a foot locker, a cot, re-loads for their rifles, grenades and other necessities.

The Cage

The natives—all twenty of them—are crammed into a twenty-by-twenty cage standing twenty feet tall and covered with mesh and barbed wire. They have a bucket for a toilet, no water and little food. If they complain (in their native tongue, of course), they get beaten or shot. Twenty of them with only ten feet each. There used to be thirty, so at least they are getting a little more room.

The Hotbox

If one of the natives gets out of line, there's a small box—only five-by-five—where he gets thrown in. He stays there for a few hours, maybe a day, until he figures out he shouldn't complain so much.

The Supply Tent

Here's a list of everything they can find in the supply tent. Players may come up with supplies not listed here; I generally allowed them to have whatever they wanted. It's not like they can throw a grenade at an *idea*.

- Six cases of dynamite (24 sticks per case)
- Twelve cases of ammunition (enough for everyone)
- Food for another two weeks
- First aid supplies
- Uniforms
- One box of grenades (twelve)
- Digging equipment (shovels, picks, etc.)
- 24 oil lamps (10 being used in the tunnels now)
- Twenty gallons of oil (10 remaining)
- Fifty gallons of gasoline
- 4 jeeps
- 2 trucks



LOCATION 2: THE VILLAGE

The natives' village is a circle of squalid huts. All the able bodied men are digging for the Nazis so the women and children are suffering. The Nazis have been digging for a week and the price is beginning to show. No food, no protection.

The village consists of eight mothers and seventeen children. They look terrible. They are terrified of the Nazis. They are *more* terrified of the mountain. They say its cursed. They say an evil spirit lives under the mountain. They say anyone who sleeps under the shadow of the mountain will go mad from wicked dreams.

The villagers should remain as nameless as possible: you don't want the officers sympathizing with them. You want victims. The more pathetic and helpless you make them, the better. Of course, if you need some murder (to feed the newfound god), go ahead and make them resistant to the officer's orders. You'd be surprised how easy it is to push people toward homicide.

LOCATION 3: THE TEMPLE

The Temple is one large room divided into Areas. The room is large enough (100 yards by 100 yards) that a small group of men may take as much as an hour exploring it. There are no internal lights and the air is bad.

Each Area has two parts: Description and Details. Description is what you read to the players (or use it to inspire your own description) and the Details tell you what's in the Area.

PREFACE: OPENING THE TEMPLE DOOR

Description

Fifty feet below the surface, your workers have found something remarkable. It looks to be some kind of door, still half-covered in debris and soil. The doors are carved from stone, marked with symbols you do not recognize.

In the center of the two doors is a symbol that appears to be made of solid gold. The symbol is embedded in the stone. A man, reaching out with both hands, could not touch either side of the symbol. It looks too large and too heavy for a single man to carry.

Details

The symbol, of course, is the Yellow Sign. **Direct contact with or staring at the Yellow Sign for any period of time requires a Sanity check: 0/1d6 (first time only).**

Entering the Temple through the main doors is a trick requiring a Strength Resistance Roll against Strength 30. Of course, if the Nazis can't open the door, they'll have to blast it. They have dynamite, but if they use it to open the door, they will certainly damage the solid gold seal, smashing it into a million smaller pieces, thus decreasing its value.

Once the soldiers remove the symbol—and who doesn't want to get their hands on a solid gold symbol so large and heavy that no one man can carry it?—the bad air inside the temple rushes out. **The bad air rushing out of the Temple causes all in the cavern to make a Constitution check. If they fail, they pass out from the rush of bad air and suffer -d4 to Constitution until the end of the story.**

Then, another wind rushes out of the door. An ice-cold wind that smells like rotting flesh. **All must make a Sanity check: 0/1. Any present when the Nazis open the door feel as if something has passed by them. Any who fail the check hear the sound of laughter.**



ENTRYWAY

Description

This is a large place. You can hear the echoes of your voices against a wall far into the darkness. You cannot see the sides of any walls here. Only the blackness surrounding you.

There are no spider webs. It smells like mold and rot. Runes carved into the stone in a language you don't understand. Dust and ruin everywhere. In the center of the room, a mound of rotting fabric... and a knife surrounded by a black stain on the floor.

Barely at the edge of your light you see a wrecked statue. Broken at the base, carved from a black stone, the pieces lie on the floor.

Details

If they search the body, the robes fall apart at the touch. A gold and jeweled necklace is wrapped around the body's neck. The dagger it holds looks like brass, but on closer inspection, it appears to be an unknown metal. The dagger is stained black.

Realizing the corpse is not human calls for a Sanity check: 1/d4.

A closer examination of the skeleton reveals it used to be a body standing at least ten feet tall. The bones are thin, however, like a bird's bones. They break easily and are hollow. Also, the fingers are too long. And each hand has six digits. The skull? Eight eyes, arranged like a spider. There is no jawbone or teeth.

All the bones are broken at various points.

The necklace is made of an ancient amalgam of gold and silver currently unknown to human science. In other words: priceless.

The black stain on the floor is still thick and oozing—not at all like human blood. **Touching the substance causes 1d2 Hit Points of burning damage. The substance can be contained in non-organic containers.**

No roll can decipher the script on the wall. The language has no human roots and has not been spoken for tens of thousands of years.

The statue is completely shattered, but it may be re-assembled. A successful Art or Luck roll will re-assemble the statue, showing the terrible robed figure that once stood here. Standing ten feet tall, it is a replica of the corpse lying in the center of the room. No features are visible under the hood. The hands—all twelve fingers—reach out toward the door. **Looking upon the restored statue requires a Sanity check: 0/1d4.**

ALTAR

Description

The ceiling here is too tall to reach. Nearly thirty yards high. The ceiling is curved and angled. You've seen the pattern somewhere before... somewhere in a dream... a horrible, horrible dream...

(If players do not turn away from the ceiling at this point in your description, they make a 0/1 Sanity check as they briefly remember a half-forgotten nightmare while sleeping outside this terrible place.)

Stone and other debris litters the floor between you and a stone altar at the end of the room. Among the wreckage, you see the glint of gold scattered among skeletons in rotting robes, circled by black stains on the floor.

Details

There is gold here. Necklaces, rings, a few chalices, and other items adorn each of the bodies. Enough to make one hundred men rich for the rest of their lives.

BRASS CYLINDERS

Language: The Udndkal

Cthulhu Mythos: none

Sanity Loss: 1/d4

The brass cylinders found in the Scroll Room provide very little Mythos Lore and no spells, but they do give the “reader” a view of what happened here.

Anyone who touches the scrolls gains a vision of the past. A look into the events that led to the demise of the Udndkal. You can find appropriate Flashbacks in the Appendix.

THE CURSE OF THE YELLOW SIGN

As the Man in Black may explain, the Yellow Sign is only a symbol. You can see the symbol without ever seeing the Yellow Sign. It is a symbol of deeper truths. Terrifying truths that all conscious creatures try to ignore.

When mortals see the Sign for the first time, they gain a brief glimpse at its true meaning. That’s what causes the 0/d6 Sanity loss.

But seeing the Yellow Sign is a different matter. A glimpse causes an unnamable dread. Seeing it and recognizing its truth brings on something deeper. The Nazis may realize the unforgiving truth when they touch one of the scrolls. Or, the Man in Black may whisper it into their ears. Give them a vision. Or let them walk through the sea of blood, guts and feces humanity has made for itself.

Life must eat other life to exist. We try to ignore this truth with taboos like cannibalism and becoming vegan, but the awful truth is very simple: we must murder living creatures and consume flesh to continue our own existence.

We are creatures who know we are going to die. And despite the promise of an afterlife, we all know it is a lie. We cling to religions that promise us we will continue after our deaths, and we nod and praise the invented gods who make these promises, but deep in our hearts, we know this is a lie. Because we are afraid. Because we are ashamed of that fear, we refuse to let go of our childish beliefs. But we know. We know. No salvation or damnation. Just oblivion. That’s all that waits for us. Just oblivion.

In the time it takes you to complain to the waiter that your soup is cold, eight thousand children die of starvation. Not just human beings: children. And you don’t care. Right now. What I told you. You don’t care. It’s only a distant number. Antipathy is easier than compassion. That’s what mankind is best at: ignoring the suffering of others. And not just mankind. You.

Avhril exists because these truths exist. It is the manifestation of these truths. The illusion of morality. The illusion of immortality. We fool ourselves with lies and these lies give Avhril life. The lies call to it and the lies give Avhril form.

Sometimes, it appears as a demon from German folklore with a grin as sharp as a razor in the moonlight.

Sometimes, it appears as a terrible figure in a black robe, carrying knives.

Sometimes, it appears as a king in tatters, wearing a Pallid Mask.

And its symbol is the Yellow Sign.

The Curse of the Yellow Sign is not a spell; it is the understanding that life is futility. The knowledge that all human accomplishment means nothing in the grand scope of the universe. And once you’ve looked into the vast emptiness of this truth, you cannot look back. You cannot un-see what you have seen.

This is the Curse. When it comes upon you—from watching the world-wide murder of the Udndkal, Take a d6/d10 Sanity Loss

The skeletons all have knives in their hands or near their bodies. The black stains accompanying each of them are bloodstains, but they are still thick and oozing—just like the high priest above—causing 1d2 Hit Points of damage.

Counting them all: the Nazis find twenty-four bodies. All adorned with gold and silver and metals they cannot identify. As usual, the corpses collapse on the touch.

There are runes on the altar, but nobody can translate them. The altar is stained black all the way through, the material sticking to and burning any hands that dare touch it.

SCROLLS

Description

There is nowhere to walk in this corner of the chamber; metal cylinders cover the floor. You must wade through them to make any progress at all. The cylinders have carvings on their surface: some abstract language you do not understand. They clink and clank as you move through the room, pushing them aside with your feet.

What used to be shelves are now ruins along the walls. You see symbols on the wall as well: graffiti written in the same language on the bronze cylinders. The graffiti is black: perhaps blood?

Details

The brass cylinders are scrolls: knowledge from a forgotten time. Although the Nazis lack the knowledge to read them, one of the more sensitive types may have a chance to do so.

Any Nazi who has gone temporarily insane or has lost a great deal of Sanity or has suffered from one or more flashbacks (see the Appendix) can make an Idea Roll to understand the scrolls. Or, if you feel generous, just give them the information. After all, reading the scrolls grants Cthulhu Mythos knowledge and that blasts their Sanity even further, driving them deeper into instability, allowing the psychic power of the Udndkal to take greater control of his mind. See a nearby sidebar for details on the scrolls.

Gate

Description

You feel the air chilling here. Perhaps a hole somewhere to the surface? As you step further in, you feel the sting of static electricity from your uniform to your skin. Your feet feel something... vibrating. What's that? A soft hum.

Your lights peer about the room. Circular. Angular. In the center stands a tall, thin podium—standing ten feet tall.

Details

The top of the podium stands at ten feet. Atop the podium is an indentation for a hand... but not a human hand. The fingers are too long. Six of them. The thumb is on the wrong side.

When one group of players found “the hand,” they immediately began thinking about ways to fake it. One Nazi, who was insane at this point, began thinking about ways to modify *his* hand to make *it* fit. One of the characters was already dead, so he started carving off the corpse's fingers and stitching them to his own. Elongating the fingers... adding a sixth digit...

When he started doing this, I knew I was going to have to think fast. That kind of creativity should be *rewarded*, not punished. When he put his modified hand on the platform—and he killed another character who tried to stop him—the room turned bright white, the smell turned foul, he screamed... and everything disappeared, leaving nothing but a thick slime on the wall. The Nazi, the other Nazi he killed: both gone.

Or, you can have the hand activate a gateway working in the other direction: bringing something back. Perhaps it opens a portal to the place the Temple's inhabitants came from. Or perhaps it is a kind of lock, keeping something trapped in the room? Do a random thumb through your favorite monster book and pick something.

Like I said, the player made a choice and forced my hand. I decided the room was a lock, keeping something powerful trapped within. I decided it was a piece of the Man in Black's soul. Don't know the Man in Black? You will. See *Part 3: Advice for more info*.

PART 3: ADVICE

Okay, so now you know when this whole thing takes place and you know where it takes place and you know on whose shoulders it rests... so how do you do it? It's easy. I'm going to show you how.

BEGINNING

This scenario really only has two set events.

- 1) Handing out the orders to the players, and
- 2) The NPC soldiers waking the Sergeant, telling him, "We've found something."

Anything that happens after those two events is up in the air. I've run this scenario a few times, and each time was a *completely* different experience.

Essentially, the beginning was always the same: I start with a soldier waking the sergeant in the middle of the night, telling him the natives have found something in the diamond mine. Something he should really see himself. So, the sergeant drags himself out of his cot and goes down to the mine. There, half buried behind soil and rubble, is a door.

From that point on, any kind of plans you make for this scenario go right out the window. What does the sergeant do? Who does he tell? Does he tell *anyone*? I had one scenario play out with the sergeant keeping the find to himself, trying to keep the solid gold Yellow Sign hidden from the officers so only he and his soldiers would split the reward.

That didn't work out well.

One the soldiers find the door, you are pretty much on your own. However, I can tell you—from experience—a few tricks I've used to move the scenario in certain directions and keep the action flowing.

Look at the character descriptions in the back of this book. Read through them carefully and take notes. Assign the characters to the players you feel will exploit them best.

SERGEANT JOHANN GRIMM

Hates: The Officers

Loyal to: His men

The Sergeant hates the SS. He hates a lot of things, actually, but he loves Germany. He puts his soldiers over the SS, the mission (which he doesn't really understand), the villagers and Hitler. He is Germany first, Nazi second. In fact, he isn't even a Nazi: he's just a sergeant in the German Army.

Play on his hatreds and paranoia. Whenever the officers do something selfish, stupid or detrimental to the men, look at the player who has the Sergeant's sheet and nod knowingly. *You're on his side.* And encourage him with suggestions through Idea rolls. What if he sabotaged the jeeps so only he and his men could leave this place? That idea looks very attractive once Avhril starts haunting the officers.

LIEUTENANT BERNHARD BEGIERDE

Hates: Missgunst (knows his secret)

Loyal to: Captain Habsucht

Begierde's homosexuality never became an open issue in any of my playtests, but it did slant the way people played the character. I say nothing about his relationship with the Captain, but more than one player assumed their relationship—from Begierde's point of view—was more than just friendship. Also, because of the homophobia of the time (and the people involved), if Missgunst does reveal his secret, the game is all but over for Begierde.

Most players sought ways to do away with Begierde as soon as possible. I tried to keep them busy and in sight of other characters: the best way to avoid murder right at the beginning. The point of Begierde and Missgunst's relationship is to build tension. If one kills the other right away, you've got nothing but a simple homicide. You need to let the tension build between the two. Make sure they're in scenes together (in sight of other characters) as often as you can. Force them to interact. That's when the fun really begins.

CAPTAIN KORT HABSUCHT

Hates: Africa

Loyal to: Lieutenant Begierde

The Captain has a hard job. Usually, he's just trying to maintain the chaos as soon as someone opens the door. He's also ambitious. He's loyal to Begierde, but nobody else. More often than not, I found him trying to steal the Yellow Sign and smuggle it out with Begierde. I encourage this kind of activity: it leads to conflict.

It's purely coincidence, but more often than not, the Captain was the first to go insane. This led to all kinds of fun. I usually give him paranoia: the other officers are conspiring against him. Trying to kill him and take his command (or the gold). Just like most military organizations, if you lose the head, the body soon follows. Keep reminding Habsucht that he's a man with ambition. He let nothing stand in his way before, why should he start now?

GREGOR HOCHMUT

Hates: nobody

Loyal to: self

One of the best players to tackle Gregor was a woman. She changed the name to "Gregora" and rocked the house. Reason? She played the character to the hilt. She really didn't care about anyone else but herself and made sure *she* was the one with the Yellow Sign at the end of the story. She was willing to do anything to get what she wanted. And when she found the Gate Room, she was fully willing to use her own blood—and the blood of others—to activate it.

Reward Gregor any way you can for being creepy and duplicitous. Gregor is the character who will throw all the others under the bus to gain occult knowledge. The Man in Black should be whispering to Gregor all through the scenario, encouraging him to sacrifice his friends for power. Avhril knows Gregor's favorite tune and knows how to make him dance.

LIEUTENANT RAMBERT MISSGUNST

Hates: self

Loyal to: self

Missgunst knows everybody's secrets and he's cashing in on them. One player who got Missgunst spent his entire time sneaking into other character's tents and breaking into their footlockers to find out what he could. I improvised each time, not anticipating this portrayal. I put a copy of Golden Dawn and Freemason texts in Hochmut's locker, a diary in Begierde's locker, a list of betrayals written by a drunken Captain Habsucht (he's too guilt-written to throw it away)... you get the idea. Encourage him to do so. He's got the Lockpick Skill after all. Might as well use it.

Missgunst got a peek at Gregor Hochmut's secret orders, so he knows what's going on here. He knows Gregor has orders to kill all of them. He also knows about Begierde's homosexuality, about the Captain's ruthless ambition... but he doesn't know *anything* about Faulheit. And that's got to be an itch he can't scratch. Taunt him with secrets. And reward him when he's cruel. Missgunst is a monster. Let him be a monster.

SOREN FAULHEIT

Hates: Germans

Loyal to: Allies

"Soren Faulheit" often gets killed early. Only when the player is very careful and very clever does he make it to the end. Put him in positions where he has to execute natives, where he has to throw some pregnant woman in the sweat house, where he has to hang a child by his arms until the boy gives up some trivial piece of information. Push him to keep his identity. And then use the Man in Black to taunt him for it.

Soren also has the habit of calling his Allied buddies a bit too soon. If he does, create a reason why they can't show up. I always found vague answers like, "We're not ready yet" and "Just a little longer" highly useful. Also, playing off his paranoia is easy. He wants to stay alive—he's the Good Guy, after all—so he'll do all kinds of crazy stuff to maintain his cover. CoC players are also crafty bastards, so they'll figure out there's something wrong about him *fast...* and they'll test him.

Atmosphere

As always, dim the lights. Use candles. I made sure the character sheets we provided are easy to read in near darkness.

Control the tone of your voice. Establish the setting right away. The jungle. The heat. The heat that feels like sitting in the middle of the desert with a snowsuit on covered by five wool blankets. And the complete darkness of the jungle. No artificial lights. Only the jungle canopy blocking out the stars and the moon.

In fact, after giving them their identities, I start the game in complete darkness, playing the sounds of the jungle. They already know who they are, they already know when they are, they already know where they are. Just the darkness and the jungle. Give that about a minute. Don't let anyone talk or snicker or joke. Just the darkness and the sound of the jungle.

And rain. Don't forget the rain. It's raining *all the time* in the jungle. Heat, rain. These things are great environments for fungus. In your shoes, in your shorts. Everywhere. And it doesn't take long for those things to grow.

If you head on over to www.johnwickpresents.com/yellow, you will find an atmospheric soundtrack for this scenario. The soundtrack has those sounds of rain, thunder and animals. At a certain point, something happens. A sound unlike any sound that should ever be heard in the jungle stops everything. Then, the dogs start to bark. Loudly. Madly. Use this as you will.

If you feel *very* ambitious, get a penlight for each player. Turn off all the lights. Play the game by penlight.

Basic Structure

This one is pretty straightforward. Humans reaching into a part of the universe they are ill equipped to handle. The characters do not have the right skills. (Only the Sergeant has the right skills for this scenario and he's the lowest ranking soldier in the lot, so nobody's gonna listen to him.)

While this is a sandbox scenario, it has the same three key points.

1. The Nazis discover the door.
2. The Nazis unlock the door.
3. The Nazis suffer the consequences.

These things have to happen for the scenario to work. The natives find the door while the Nazis are asleep, so you're covered there. Getting them to unlock the door is tricky. I had a couple of groups who refused to unlock the door. In that case, I had one of the soldiers do it. Finally, suffering the consequences is where the Man in Black comes into play.

THE MAN IN BLACK

When I ran *The Curse of the Yellow Sign* stories for my own Halloween Cthulhu game, I wore a black suit—tie, vest, etc.—and a Yellow Sign pin on my lapel. I *was* the Man in Black. Right there, in the room with them.

As soon as the Nazis open that seal, Avhril escapes. Later, he will appear to the officers as a vision. A spectre. Something that can be seen and heard but not touched. Not unless he wants to be touched. He will taunt them, bait them, scold them, tantalize them, make them promises, threaten them and even seduce them if he can. Avhril is free and it wants to play with its new toys.

I used the Man in Black to reveal the secrets of all the characters... but I never said exactly who I was talking about. When the Sergeant asked the Man in Black, "Who moved the dynamite," I told him, "The faggot did." When Missgunst was looking for secrets, I had the Man in Black open Hochmut's footlocker showing him the books on Freemasonry, the Golden Dawn and Kaballah.

I used the Man in Black to boil up the simmering hatreds in the officers. I used him to reveal secrets. I used him to show the Nazis exactly what they accomplished. He is an omniscient narrator, capable of seeing anything, showing everything. He is vulnerable to nothing.

(Okay, he *may* be vulnerable to the Yellow Sign. A few groups tried to use the Yellow Sign as some kind of holy symbol. For a short while, he played along and showed absolute terror when he saw the Sign, but later in the story, he revealed he wasn't really afraid of it at all.)

In other words, use the Man in Black to plant internal troubles with the officers. Some will listen to him, some will not. If you can't get any footing at all with the officers, send Avhril at the soldiers. They'll be more than willing to listen to his devious whispers.

The Man in Black is the physical embodiment of the very concepts the Yellow Sign stands for. The horror of consciousness. The absolute terror of understanding. The numbing fear of awareness. We are only aware of the man in the closet because we are aware there *could* be a man in the closet. The Man in Black is just that: the awareness that something as awful as he *could* exist *created him*.

And something as trivial or sophomoric as "disbelieving" him won't send him away.

The Nazis have released him and there's no putting him back. They may try something clever like luring him back into the Temple... that may work. But he's infected their own consciousnesses now. He's with them. To completely trap him back in the Temple, they'll have to be trapped there, too. They are contaminated. Either they die or the Man in Black comes back to Europe with them...

... and in just a few months, World War II begins in earnest.

FLASHBACKS

Sanity losses can be boring. Sure, you lose some SAN then gain a psychosis. Big deal. How do we make Sanity losses *mean* something to the players? Let's try this on for size.

The psychic energy of the Udndkal still lingers in this place. Like the air, it's gone bad, but it is still here and can infect the minds of the Nazis just as the air can infect their lungs. Whenever a character suffers a Sanity loss—particularly a nasty one—send the character back in time. Back to when the Udndkal still lived and thrived, back to when they worshipped Avhril, back to when they realized their own hubris and tried to seal themselves away for all Time.

The flashbacks should give the characters a sense of what happened here. Not a complete picture, but a view through a shattered mirror. Here are a few examples of flashbacks I used. Use them as you will or modify them to your own taste.

Opening the Door/Seeing the Yellow Sign

Pulling the door open, you feel you've experienced this moment before. The sound of stone on stone. The dark chamber beyond. You've seen this. You've been here. But that's impossible...

You put your hand—six-fingered hand—on the door. You speak the words. The door glows warm for a moment, then opens.

And now, darkness. Your hand on the door. Blue blood on your hands. You hear the screams—inhuman screams—behind you. You speak the words. The door glows warm. Then hot. Burning your flesh. The pain coursing through your fingers, then palm, then arm, then shoulder.

You don't stop. The words. You must speak the words. You must lock the...

Something breaks over your head and you fall. Looking up. Is the door sealed? A figure hidden by the darkness holds a knife. It descends on you. You scream through lips that could never make human sounds...

The Entryway

Through a dark lens, you step into the Temple for the first time. You have sacrificed much to be here. The priests are impressed with your devotion. Your pain. The pain you gave. So much. You stagger forward, your knees and wrists bleeding. You look down at your hands... but they are not your hands. The naked body you see... it is not...

You fall forward from the pain, blacking out.

Another time now. Standing in the entryway, your knife in your hand. What you've seen... what you've done... you cannot be forgiven. Bodies all around you. The bodies of friends. The bodies of loved ones. The bodies of enemies. Dead, dead, dead. Bleeding. More blood. It demands more blood. Your blood.

You look at the knife in your hand. The knife will provide release... the knife will provide release... the knife will provi—

The Altar Room

You hear the chants of voices. Bodies bowed low in supplication. A clicking, buzzing sound. And then a name. "Avhril... Avhril... Avhril..."

You look up... and standing at the altar is a Thing. A tall, slender thing. Hooded. Face unseen. It raises its hands—six-fingered hands—holding a knife. Before the Thing, on the altar, is a man. A naked man. His skin dark, his eyes wide with fear. The Thing plunges the knife down and blood sprays on the Thing's robe. The chants become maddening. The Thing spreads the blood on its hands and throws aside its hood...

... and its face. Eight eyes. Mandibles. The buzzing and clicking...

You look up and all around you, the worshipers sing with their alien tongues. Their spastic gestures. Their maddening chant. "Ahvril... Ahvril... Ahvril..."

You try to scream... but the only sound that escapes you is a kind of whine. You look down at your hands... your six-fingered hands. And you look up. And standing at the altar is a man. A man. Dressed all in black.

He grins at you. His grin shining like a razor in the moonlight. He grins at you.

Scrolls

Your fingers fly across the scrolls, reading the language there by touch. The raised and lowered surfaces, the dots and bars. You read of history. Of war. Of peace. Of faith. Philosophy. And, of Avhril.

The Seeker, they call Avhril. But that is not what it is. You must learn the truth. You must know its secrets.

Another scroll.

Gate

With your hand on it, you chant the words.

Avhril th'llala yvtona yvtona th'lalla Avhril futona.

You chant them three times. You feel the blood oozing from your palm as you look up through eight eyes to the curved ceiling. And it splits open like the skull of an enemy and reveals the secrets that lay within.

Avhril th'llala yvtona yvtona th'lalla Avhril futona.

You look out into what amateur poets call "the vast emptiness of space." There are no words for this. Not in your language. Not in any language. Your eyes widen to encompass it. And you feel a chill wind on your skin.

Avhril th'llala yvtona yvtona th'lalla Avhril futona.

And you can feel its presence. You can feel its power. You can feel what you called. Its name. Avhril. And you know what it means...

I'M DEAD. WHAT NOW?

Just because a character dies doesn't mean the player's done. Quite the contrary. The nature of the place traps an escaping soul, binding it to the Temple. That means any character who dies is trapped forever in the Temple with the trapped spirits of the Udndkal. Trapped. Malevolent. Insane.

Once a player's character dies, tell him that he is now a spirit trapped inside the Temple and he may haunt the others as the Man in Black does. Taunting them.

Just because your character dies doesn't mean you can't keep playing.

WRAPPING IT ALL UP

How does all of this end? Well, the Germans could decide to blow up the Temple. That's fine, Avhril is already free.

They may also decide on a plan to trap Avhril back inside the Temple. He fell for that trick once; he's not going to fall for it again.

They may all kill each other. A nihilistic end, but fitting for the genre.

Hopefully, one of them will escape to bring the tale back to Europe... and bring Avhril with them.



SERGEANT

JOHANN GRIMM



STR 17

DEX 14

INT 12

CON 16

APP 8

POW 11

SIZ 16

SAN 55

EDU 10

You are an angry, hateful man. You served in WWI and spent time in prison. You hate the English, hate the French, hate the Jews and Freemasons and homosexuals who ruined Germany to fill their own pockets and fulfill their own perverse desires. You are also disdainful of SS officers who always ask your advice then take all the credit when they succeed; blaming you if they fail.

You are fully aware Sergeants run the Army. When the officers need assistance, they ask the Sergeants. When the enlisted men need assistance, they ask the Sergeants. But you are also loyal to Germany and will do anything to make sure she is not raped again.

Your orders are simple: follow the officer's commands and protect your men. You have twelve soldiers under your command. Six of them are suffering from malaria at the moment and the natives are looking restless. The officers are not concerned. They don't care about the men, they don't care about Germany, they just care about their own glory and impressing their own superiors.

You are also a bit superstitious when it comes to the natives. You are convinced they've put a curse on your soldiers. There's no way they all came down with the same sickness at once. Even if it's something as simple as poisoning the water supply, the natives are up to something and you'll do whatever it takes to find out what it is.

Hit Points: 16 DAMAGE BONUS: +106

Pistol: 1010 KNIFE: 104 RIFLE: 2010

SKILLS: Dodge 90, Hide 60, Listen 50, First Aid 90, Mech.

Repair 60, Rifle 90, Sneak 60, Demolitions 50, Brawl 90,

Pistol 90

GREGOR HOCHMUT



STR 10

DEX 12

INT 19

CON 10

APP 13

POW 15

SIZ 10

SAN 75

EDU 19

You are the only one who knows what this small band of soldiers is really doing here.

One person only knows why the Fuhrer needed an anthropologist on this mission and that's you. Digging for diamonds? That's just the front. Because you are trusted by the Fuhrer and because you are part of the Ahnenerbe and the Thule Society... and both organizations have interest in what may be down in those caverns.

There is a hidden temple in these catacombs. The Society gave you a map to find it and clues to discovering its mystery. But you cannot tell the others. What's more, you must make sure that if the others discover what you are really looking for, that they do not make it back to Germany.

These are your specific orders—in case they were not clear:

- 1) Discover any relics hidden inside the tomb.
- 2) Ensure only you return with knowledge of it.

Hit Points: 10 DAMAGE BONUS: +0

Pistol: 1010 KNIFE: 104 RIFLE: 2010

SKILLS: ANTHROPOLOGY 90, HISTORY 90, LANGUAGE: "NATIVE"

50, LIBRARY USE 70, OCCULT 90, LATIN 90, PHOTOGRAPHY 60,

PSYCHOLOGY 70, PISTOL 60

SOREN FAULHEIT



STR 15
DEX 14
INT 15
CON 15
APP 13
POL 16
SIZ 13
SAN 90
EDU 15

You are not Soren Faulheit. Your name is Arthur Madison. You were born in Germany, lived in Berlin for the first fourteen years of your life, then moved with your parents back to England. You joined British Intelligence, served as a spy during the First World War and remained in your post since. You've been placed high in the ranks of the SS for the purpose of keeping your eye on Himmler's elite forces.

You don't know why you were assigned to this squad. In fact, you've never been outside of Europe. You suspect your cover may be blown. You are the outsider here; the others seem to know each other. And they all look at you. Keeping their eyes on you.

Keep track of what happens and remember: there's a squad of British soldiers just a few clicks away. If things get out of hand, send the emergency signal through your radio. If you click "SOS" five times in a row, they'll show up.

HIT POINTS: 14 DAMAGE BONUS: +104

PISTOL: 1010 KNIFE: 104 RIFLE: 2010

SKILLS: FAST TALK 90, PISTOL 90, HIDE 70, DODGE 70, CONCEAL 90, BARGAIN 70, FIRST AID 70, NAVIGATE 60, DISGUISE 90, LISTEN 70

CAPTAIN

KORT HABSUCHT



STR 14
DEX 15
INT 16
CON 13
APP 16
POL 16
SIZ 13
SAN 90
EDU 19

You have risen quickly through the ranks of the SS. This has to do with your own ambition and the intelligence of your closest ally, Lieutenant Begierde. Together, you have earned Himmler's trust. There has even be talk of bringing you in to the Thule Society. Another distinction that will further your career.

Since you were first assigned to this mission, you have suspected there may be something more here happening. This isn't just "digging for diamonds." You can also sense Begierde is lying to you about something; a fact that has sabotaged your trust of him.

If there are diamonds here, you will retrieve them for Himmler... and keep a few for yourself. Himmler must suspect that you will; that's why he sent so many unfamiliar officers with you. He doesn't trust you entirely. A wise move. But with Begierde at your side, you will win his trust. This is your chance to prove yourself. Do not fail.

HIT POINTS: 13 DAMAGE BONUS: +104 PISTOL: 1010

KNIFE: 104 RIFLE: 2010

SKILLS: ACCOUNTING 60, BARGAIN 70, CREDIT RATING 90, LAW 60, NAVIGATE 70, PERSUADE 90, PSYCHOLOGY 90, RIFLE 60, PISTOL 60

LIEUTENANT
BERNHARD BEGIERDE



STR 15
DEX 14
INT 15
CON 15
APP 13
POW 16
SIZ 13
SAN 80
EDU 15

You are the Captain's closest ally. He trusts you implicitly. The others, he does not know; they were assigned to this mission by the highest order. But you and Captain Habsucht have known each other since you were boys. He trusts your judgment, your cool temper and your understanding of military history and tactics.

But he doesn't know that you are a homosexual. Nobody knows that. Nobody except Lieutenant Missgunst. And you've been paying ever since. Paying for his silence.

As your career has prospered in the SS, his payments have been getting larger. Why the Fuhrer sent him along on this mission, you don't know... but it provides a perfect opportunity to do away with the blackmailing bastard one and for all.

HIT POINTS: 13 DAMAGE BONUS: +0
PISTOL: 1D10 KNIFE: 1D4 RIFLE: 2D10
SKILLS: BARGAIN 70, CREDIT RATING 90, LIBRARY USE 80,
LANGUAGE: "NATIVE" 50, PERSUADE 80, PSYCHOLOGY 80,
ANTHROPOLOGY 90, ARCHAEOLOGY 90

LIEUTENANT
RAMBERT MISSGUNST



STR 15
DEX 14
INT 19
CON 18
APP 0
POW 11
SIZ 9
SAN 55
EDU 14

You've always been overlooked. It's because of your face. They're afraid to look at you. Afraid to talk to you. Afraid to get close to you. You didn't ask for it. When the shell went off and took away most of your face with it...

Because you aren't the beautiful, perfect Aryan Dream. Your family was once German nobility, but they were ruined by the Great War. Now, all you have is your cunning, your ability, and your unique skills. But they're still afraid to look at you.

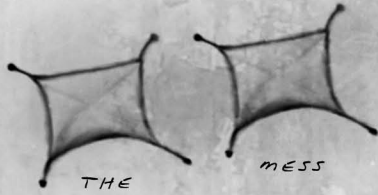
But Himmler sent you here because he knows you get results. Germany needs wealth for its plans and locating a new diamond mine is exactly the kind of opportunity you need.

HIT POINTS: 14 DAMAGE BONUS: +0
PISTOL: 1D10 KNIFE: 1D4 RIFLE: 2D10
SKILLS: CONCEAL 80, HIDE 80, PERSUADE 80, PSYCHOLOGY 90,
TORTURE 80, SPOT HIDDEN 80, PISTOL 90, KNIFE 80, DODGE 60,
LISTEN 70

JANUARY 27, 1940

THE CAMP

THE QUARTERS



THE
SUPPLY
TENT

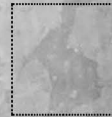
MESS

THE
HOTBOX



THE
CAGE

THE
KENNEL



THE
MINES



THE TEMPLE

ALTAR

SCROLLS


ENTRYWAY

BROKEN
STATUE

PODIUM



Camilla: You, sir, should unmask.
Stranger: Indeed?
Cassilda: Indeed, it's time. We have all laid aside disguise but you.
Stranger: I wear no mask.
Camilla: (Terrified, aside to Cassilda.) No mask? No mask!



The King In Yellow

Curse of the Yellow Sign, Act II, coming soon...



Africa, 1939.

In May of 1939, somewhere in the jungles of Africa, a small band of soldiers have stumbled across something ancient. Something terrible. And they are about to suffer the consequences.

