

FATE OF CTHULHU



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THE STARS ARE RIGHT FOR GREAT CTHULHU'S RETURN. IT'S UP TO YOU TO MAKE THEM WRONG AGAIN!

The Great Old Ones reach out from the future and into their past—our present—corrupting the timeline such that events and individuals turn towards the apocalyptic and lead to their inevitable rise. A small and battered resistance effort mounted by **time-travelers** and **present-day heroes** stands in their way.

You are those **one-way travelers from a dark future** and their **crucial allies from the present day**, working together to save the human race from looming apocalypse. Armed with foreknowledge of Judgment Day, you must succeed at a series of **vital missions** aimed at restoring hope to the future.

But the clock is ticking. The corrupting influence of the Great Old Ones is sure to affect you before the end, twisting you slowly and inexorably into something alien and unrecognizable.

Can you defeat the vast unknowable evils of the Great Old Ones before you become a monster yourself? Find out in **Fate of Cthulhu!**

Fate of Cthulhu contains all the rules you need to play:

- The full **Fate Core** game system condensed to about 50 pages but still supporting the standard Core skill list, stunt building, and more.
- Rules for **corruption**, where characters sacrifice more of their humanity to take on monstrous abilities to fight the apocalypse.
- A **timeline alteration system** for tracking key events leading up to the apocalypse that the players change through their actions and choices during play, including support for ripple effects and time paradoxes.
- Support for **heroic last stands** that sacrifice a character but help turn the timeline towards a better outcome.
- **Rituals and spells** that offer great power at a cost, treating spells as secrets of arcane Elder technology that must be sought out in play.
- **Five detailed apocalyptic timelines** plus rules for running them and making your own.

FATE OF CTHULHU. IT'S TIME TO FIGHT THE FUTURE!

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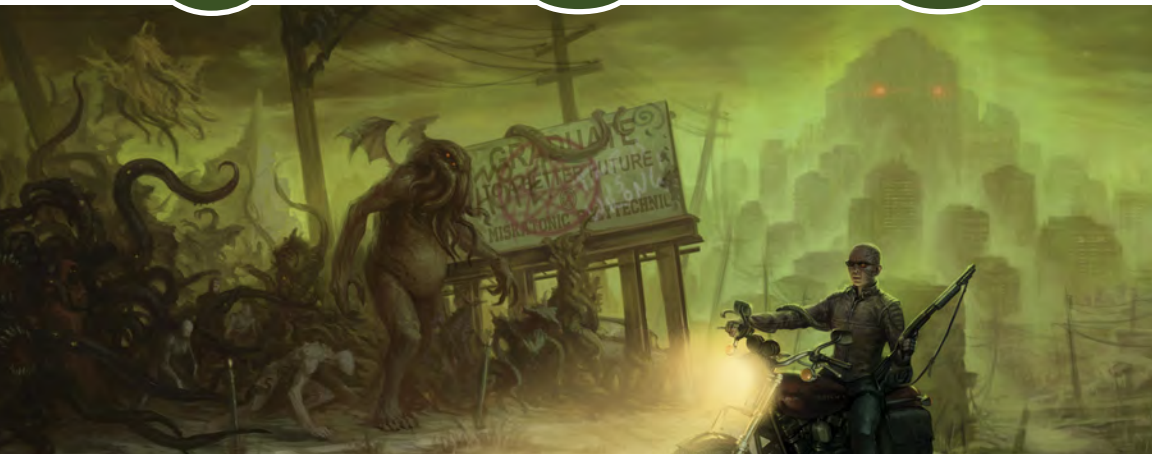


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FATE OF CTHULHU



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Setting based on the works of H.P. Lovecraft. System based on *Fate Core System* by Leonard Balsera, Brian Engard, Jeremy Keller, Ryan Macklin, and Mike Olson. Turn order system based on “*Accidentally Designing Marvel’s Action Order System*,” written by Fred Hicks and describing a variation on a method originally devised by Leonard Balsera.

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This is a game where people make up stories about wonderful, terrible, impossible, glorious things. All the characters and events portrayed in this work are fictional. Any resemblance to real people, cyclopean impossible alien deities, synthetic flesh-encased time-travelers who’ll be back, apocalypses past present or future, or really anything squamous or tentacled is purely coincidental, but kinda hilarious. For now. But just wait. You’ll see. Oh, how you’ll see. *We have such sights to show you.*

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INTRODUCTION

What Is Fate of Cthulhu?

Fate of Cthulhu is an action horror game where one of the Great Old Ones from H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos has broken through the thinning barriers of the universe and begun laying waste to the Earth, leaving humanity scrambling in a war against gibbering abominations. A war humanity is losing.

Your job is to go back in time and make sure it doesn't happen. Time travel is limited to about thirty years or so, and the Great Old Ones already have plans in motion. It's an uphill struggle, but no one ever said changing the future would be easy.

More *Aliens* and *Terminator*, less *Shadow over Innsmouth*, it's a game where instead of becoming a howling fool when faced with the terrifying truth of nightmare creatures from beyond space and time, you pick up a twelve-gauge and do what needs doing. Your job is to save the future, not to sit in a corner screaming and clawing your eyeballs out.

With nothing more than the skin on your back and a map in your head of the key events that will lead to the Apocalypse, you will travel to the past, find allies, make hard choices, and change those events. Do it right and it might prevent the Apocalypse. Do it wrong and you doom humanity forever.

What Do I Need to Play?

To play *Fate of Cthulhu* you'll need two to four friends, some dice, some tokens, the necessary game materials, writing implements, and something to write short notes on.

Fate of Cthulhu uses **Fate Dice™** when characters take action. One set of four will work fine, but one set per player is ideal. Alternatively, you could use the **Deck of Fate**, which has all the possible outcomes of the dice in a deck of cards. Use whichever your group prefers. We use the word "roll" throughout the text for simplicity.



PICK YOUR APOCALYPSE

Preventing the Old Ones from invading Earth isn't as simple as killing one person so they never have a child who will go on to doom humanity. History and timelines are complicated and messy things. *Fate of Cthulhu's* road to the Apocalypse is no different.

Before you can even attempt to save the world from the predation of horrors from beyond space and time, you have to find out just what it is that's oozing corruption over the planet, and how things got so bad that the Old One was able to burst through.

This book describes five apocalyptic scenarios, in which humanity is taken to the brink of destruction by one of the Great Old Ones. Each Old One has its own ambition, goals, tactics, and minions, but most importantly, each has its own **TIMELINE**—the story of how that Great Old One came to power, the events we have identified as being instrumental in its rise, and which you must return to 2020 to meddle with.

To begin, start by choosing which of the Old Ones you are going to fight (see the list of timelines below).

For each timeline, the players know the information about the arrival of the Great Old One included in *“What Brought This Upon Us”*. The information after that—the timeline itself, the Great Old One's agenda, and its minions and monsters—is intended for the GM's use.

Later in the book, you'll learn how to read the timeline (page 81), and we offer rules for creating your own timeline to fight unique cosmic horrors (page 240).

The Timelines

Great Cthulhu (page 87): An enormous entity emerges from the sea, and simply gazing upon it drives people insensible with terror. The stars were right for Cthulhu's return; your job is to go back and make them wrong again.

Dagon (page 113): Humanity is changed in mere hours as Dagon's return triggers mass mutations, leaving most dead and the survivors transformed into Deep Ones. You must investigate the Deep Ones' conspiracy and stop it before the whole of humanity is infected.

Shub-Niggurath (page 137): A tremendous monster and her innumerable horrible spawn cover the Earth, bar a few mysterious and shrinking safe zones. By returning to the past, you might discover who summoned this thing to Earth, and why.

Nyarlahotep (page 163): The president of Egypt abruptly declares himself the Dark Pharaoh, summons unspeakable alien horrors to his side, and wars against the Earth. Only by going back to the beginning can you hope to understand what happened, let alone change it.

The King in Yellow (page 191): An incurable plague sweeps the world as a bizarre figure forces his lost kingdom to appear in our world. But can you go back to stop him without making things worse?

Content and Consent

Fate of Cthulhu is a game that deals with many hard topics, including mental health, systemic abuses of power, and the deaths of huge portions of the human species. Make sure all the players are aware of these things and give enthusiastic consent before they begin playing.

Also—**Howard Phillips Lovecraft was a racist and an anti-Semite.**

There. We said it.

We could give a litany of examples, but they are easy to find with a simple Internet search. Look up the name of his cat, for instance (HPL was over-the-top, even for his time). Go ahead, we'll wait.

Now that we've gotten that issue out in the open, let us turn our attention to why we still find the Cthulhu mythos, of which he planted the seed, a fruitful garden in which to find stories.

Lovecraft once said, "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." He filled that void of knowledge with his imagination, creating Old Ones and forbidden knowledge, strange religions and fantastical superstitions, threats to society and suspicion of what science might unlock. We can acknowledge the fear behind his imagination while also re-examining what came out of it.

In recent years, many writers, including writers of color, have flipped the perspective on some of Lovecraft's most famous stories and made brilliant new works. Excellent examples are *The Ballad of Black Tom* by Victor LaValle, *The Dream-Quest of Vellitt Boe* by Kij Johnson, *Hammers on Bone* by Cassandra Khaw, *Winter Tide* by Ruthanna Emrys, and *Agents of Dreamland* by Caitlín R. Kiernan. We hope you use them for inspiration just as much as you use Lovecraft's original works.

WHO ARE YOU?

Once you've decided on a timeline, it's time for the players to make characters—also called PCs. Each player takes on the role of one of the heroes of this adventure, controlling all their actions. You get to build the character you want to see in the world.

Want to play a soldier who came back from the future to change the past? Go ahead! What about a modern-day psychic with premonitions of the terrible future that's coming? No problem. You could even play a normal person caught up in the fight to change the future. What's important is that your character is competent, dramatic, and willing to fight for the future.

Your PC is made up of several elements:

- ▼ **Personal Timeline:** when your hero is from
- ▼ **Aspects:** phrases describing who your hero is
- ▼ **Skills:** your hero's areas of relative expertise
- ▼ **Stunts:** remarkable things your hero does
- ▼ **Stress:** your hero's ability to keep calm and carry on
- ▼ **Consequences:** the wounds, physical and mental, your hero can endure
- ▼ **Refresh:** a measure of your hero's free will and narrative agency
- ▼ **Finishing Touches:** your hero's personal details



Personal Timeline

The first thing you'll need to decide is whether your character comes from the future or the present.

Characters from the future are invariably corrupted by the Great Old One. Coming back through time requires a sacrifice of self, a joining with Yog-Sothoth, and no one escapes that without **CORRUPTION**—mutations of body and mind caused by contact with a Great Old One's power. Corruption is described more on page 58, but for now just know that time travelers emerge in the past a little bit eldritch.

Most characters from the present do not start with corruption, because the Great Old One has not yet taken power in their time. However, if your character's background suggests a connection to arcane forces, for instance if you are a cultist or an arcane researcher, you may choose to begin corrupted.

Sophie is going to make a *Fate of Cthulhu* character, and her first decision is where in time they come from. While she certainly could be a character from the present fighting to prevent an unimaginable future, she would much rather be a time traveler. That is the lens through which she'll be picking all of her character's aspects; she also notes that because she is from the future, at least one of her aspects will start the game corrupted.

Aspects

ASPECTS are phrases or short sentences that describe who your character is or what is important to them. They can relate to your character's history, beliefs, training, relationships, physical or mental qualities, or even particularly important equipment.

The first thing to know about them is: **Aspects are true** (see page 28 for a discussion of this). In other words, how you define your character is real and true in the story you're telling. If you write down that your character is a **PRECOG SNIPER**, then they *are* a precog sniper. You've told everyone that your character sees the future and is a crack shot with a rifle.

You'll also use aspects in play to change the story. They give you permission to improve your dice rolls and establish facts about the world. Lastly, aspects can earn you **FATE POINTS** if they create complications for your character—so to make the most versatile aspects, aim for ones that are double-edged, working both for you and against you.

To learn more about aspects and what makes a good one, consider reading some of *Aspects and Fate Points* (page 28).

To begin, you'll give your character five aspects: a high concept, a trouble, a relationship, and two free aspects. Start with the high concept and go from there.

HIGH CONCEPT

Your **HIGH CONCEPT** is a broad description of the character, covering the vital bits. It's how you would open your pitch for the character when telling a friend about them.

If you are playing a character from the future, be sure to reference that in your high concept.

Examples: PROFESSOR OF ANCIENT LINGUISTICS AT MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY; HISTORIAN FROM THE FUTURE; ONLY SURVIVOR OF THE CULT OF VIRIDIAN DAWN; PRIVATE DETECTIVE WHO KNOWS TOO MUCH; POST-APOCALYPTIC SURVIVALIST LONER

Sophie gives her character the high concept SENIOR TIME-TRAVEL RESEARCHER, which not only shows his area of expertise, but indicates that he must be from the future.

TROUBLE

Next is your character's **TROUBLE**—something that makes your character's life more complicated. It could be a personal weakness, family entanglements, or other obligations.

Examples: THE HOUNDS OF TINDALOS HAVE MY SCENT; ALWAYS TEMPTED TO USE MAGIC; MY FAMILY'S CAUGHT UP IN THE CONSPIRACIES; UTTERLY TERRIFIED OF DEEP WATER; ABOUT AS SUBTLE AS A MULE

For a trouble, Sophie decides that because of her character's overwhelming intellect and the harshness of post-apocalyptic life, he's REALLY JUST A HUGE JERK. That will prove troublesome in social situations.

RELATIONSHIP

Your **RELATIONSHIP** describes a connection with another PC. Typically, the characters already know one another or have just met.

Good relationship aspects should introduce or hint at conflict. This doesn't mean they are openly antagonistic, but they shouldn't be all roses either.

If you wish, you can wait to write down relationship aspects until everyone has more or less completed their characters.

Examples: I DON'T TRUST CASSANDRA BUT I BELIEVE IN HER; HANK FOUGHT WITH ME IN THE BATTLE OF NEW R'LYEH; I KNOW HOW DESTRUCTIVE LIZA CAN BE; ONLY HOSHI KNOWS MY SECRETS; I OWE CARMINE MY LIFE

Sophie could wait to make her relationship aspect, but she already knows that one of the other players will be a time-travelling soldier named Ruth. Since she thinks her character will be a thinker, not a fighter, she gives him the aspect COUNTING ON RUTH TO KEEP ME SAFE. He trusts Ruth, but also is dependent on her.

FREE ASPECTS

You can make your character's last two aspects anything you want—there are no restrictions. Choose anything which you think will make your character more interesting, more fun to play, or better able to defend the future from the Great Old Ones.

Examples: MY REVOLVER NEVER LETS ME DOWN; "DO YOU KNOW WHO MY FAMILY IS?"; THE BIGGEST PERSON IN THE ROOM; LIGHT-FINGERED LOCKPICKER; HIGH SCHOOL TRACK STAR

For her first free aspect, Sophie thinks it would be fun to play around with the time travel of the setting. She gives him MY PAST SELF KNOWS I'M HERE; this aspect gives him some present-day resources, but also gives the GM leverage over him. Because Sophie knows her character is from the future, she saves her second free aspect for the next step.

Corrupted Aspects

Corrupted aspects are a bit more complicated than the others—in addition to describing your character, they give you access to arcane power, at a price, in the form of a **CORRUPTION STUNT**.

If you don't have any corrupted aspects, you don't need to worry about this...at least, not yet.

If you *do* have corrupted aspects, you'll find more details about them on page 64, including examples of corrupted aspects you can use as-is or as inspiration. You may want to wait until after you have finished the rest of your character before finalizing the effects of their corruption.

Sophie doesn't want to wait to make her character's corrupted aspect. She knows she wants him to be OOZING BLACK ICHOR—it's a bizarre mutation triggered by time travel. It makes him slippery, but very noticeable. It comes with a corruption stunt, which allows him to spray ichor in every direction, like a squid spraying ink, to get out of dangerous situations, which she notes on her character sheet.

Skills

While aspects define who your character is, **SKILLS** show what they can do. Each skill describes a broad activity your character might have learned through study and practice or simply have an innate talent for. A character with Burglary is capable, to some degree, at all manner of crime relating to the fine art of burgling—casing a joint, bypassing security, pick-pocketing, and lock-picking.

Each skill has a **RATING**. The higher the rating, the better the character is at the skill. As a whole, your character's skills will show you what actions they are built for, which ones they'll get by on, and which aren't their forte.

You'll choose your character's skill ratings, arranged in a pyramid with the highest-rated skill at Great (+4), as follows:

- ▼ One Great (+4) skill
- ▼ Two Good (+3) skills
- ▼ Three Fair (+2) skills
- ▼ Four Average (+1) skills
- ▼ All other skills at Mediocre (+0)

SKILL LIST

Descriptions for these skills are found starting on the next page.

Academics	Empathy	Rapport
Athletics	Fight	Resources
Burglary	Investigate	Shoot
Contacts	Lore	Stealth
Crafts	Notice	Will
Deceive	Physique	
Drive	Provoke	

Sophie knows right away that her character's Great (+4) skill will be Academics. She wants him to be a bit of an engineer type, so he gets Good (+3) Crafts, and to make him a little more survivable, Good (+3) Athletics. He's had to run from a lot of exploding equipment, she thinks.

She fills in the rest of his skill pyramid in the same way, giving him Fight, Lore, and Will at Fair (+2)—skills he would need to survive in the post-apocalyptic environment—and Contacts, Investigate, Physique, and Resources at Average (+1).

THE ADJECTIVE LADDER

In *Fate of Cthulhu*, and Fate in general, all ratings are organized into a ladder of adjectives, shown here.

RATING	ADJECTIVE
+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Fair
+1	Average
+0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible
-3	Catastrophic
-4	Horrrifying

Academics: Mundane, everyday human knowledge and education, including history, sciences, and medicine. Academics stunts often refer to specialized areas of knowledge and medical skills.

Athletics: A measurement of physical potential. Athletics stunts focus on movement—running, jumping, parkour—and dodging attacks.

Burglary: Knowledge of and ability to bypass security systems, pick pockets, and generally commit crimes. Burglary stunts give bonuses to the various stages of committing a crime, from the planning to the execution and escape.

Contacts: Knowledge of the right people and connections that can help you. Contacts stunts give you ready allies and an information network wherever you go in the world.

Crafts: Ability to make or break machinery, build contraptions, and pull off MacGyver-esque feats of ingenuity. Crafts stunts let you have the gizmo on hand, give bonuses to building and breaking things, and provide justification for using Crafts in place of skills like Burglary or Academics under certain circumstances.

Deceive: Ability to lie and cheat convincingly and with aplomb. Deceive stunts improve your ability to tell a particular breed of lie or help invent false identities.

Drive: Controlling vehicles under the most grueling circumstances, pulling wicked maneuvers, and simply getting the most out of your ride. Drive stunts can be signature maneuvers, a special vehicle of your own, or the ability to use Drive in place of a skill like Burglary or Academics under certain circumstances.

Empathy: Ability to accurately judge someone's mood and intentions. Empathy stunts can be about judging a crowd, picking up on lies, or helping others recover from mental consequences.

Fight: Ability to excel at hand-to-hand combat, whether with weapons or fists. Fight stunts include signature weapons and special techniques.

Investigate: Deliberate, careful study and puzzling out mysteries. Use this to piece together clues or reconstruct a crime scene. Investigate stunts help you form brilliant deductions or piece together information more quickly.

Lore: Knowledge of the future, the Great Old Ones, and the reality-warping technology they bring. This skill allows you to use the technology of the Old Ones. Lore stunts are often about specific Old One stories, being able to use Old One technology more effectively, or a way to view bits of the future.

Notice: Ability to pick up details in the moment, spot trouble before it happens, and generally be perceptive. It contrasts Investigate, which is for slow, deliberate observation. Notice stunts sharpen your senses, improve your reaction time, or make you harder to sneak up on.

Physique: Raw power and durability. Physique stunts let you perform superhuman feats of strength, throw your weight around while wrestling, and shrug off physical consequences. In addition, a high Physique rating gives you more physical stress or consequence slots (page 16).

Provoke: Ability to push people to act the way you want them to. It's coarse and manipulative, not a positive interaction. Provoke stunts let you push opponents into foolhardy action, draw aggression toward you, or scare enemies (assuming they can feel fear).

Rapport: Building connections with others and working together. Where Provoke is manipulation, Rapport is sincerity, trust, and goodwill. Rapport stunts let you sway the crowd, improve relationships, or build contacts.

Resources: Access to material things, not just money or direct ownership. It might reflect your ability to borrow from friends or dip into an organization's armory. Resources stunts let you use Resources in place of Rapport or Contacts or give you extra free invocations when you pay for the best.

Shoot: All forms of ranged combat, whether guns, throwing knives, or bow and arrow. Shoot stunts let you make called shots, quick-draw, or always have a gun handy.

Stealth: Staying unseen or unheard and escaping when you need to hide. Stealth stunts let you vanish in plain sight, blend into crowds, or advance through shadows unseen.

Will: Mental fortitude, the ability to overcome temptation and to withstand the terrors of the Great Old Ones. Will stunts let you ignore mental consequences, withstand the mental agony of using Great Old One technology, and hold steady against enemies who provoke you. In addition, a high Will rating gives you more mental stress or consequence slots (page 16).

Refresh

Your **REFRESH** is the minimum number of **FATE POINTS** (page 30) your character begins with at the start of each session. Your character begins with 3 refresh.

Stunts

While every character has access to all the skills—even if they are Mediocre (+0) at most of them—your character has some unique **STUNTS**. Stunts are the cool techniques, tricks, or bits of equipment that make your character unique and interesting. Where skills are about a character's broad competencies, stunts are about specific areas of excellence; most of them give you a bonus in particular circumstances or let you do something that other characters simply can't.

Your character begins with two stunts. You may purchase more stunts by spending 1 refresh each, to a minimum of 1 refresh.

If your character starts corrupted, you also get one **CORRUPTION STUNT** for each of your corrupted aspects, as described in “*Corruption Stunts*” (page 65). As with your corrupted aspect, you may wish to wait until you've finished your character before writing your corruption stunts.



WRITING STUNTS

You write your own stunts when building a character. Broadly, there are two types of stunts.

The first type of stunt **gives you a +2 bonus** when you use a named skill within certain parameters, usually limited to a specific type of action (page 24) and type of narrative circumstance.

Write this type of stunt as follows:

Because I **[describe how you are amazing or have a cool bit of gear]**, I get a +2 when I use **[pick a skill]** to **[pick one: overcome, create an advantage, attack, defend]** when **[describe a circumstance]**.

Example Bonus Stunt: Because I am a **military-trained sniper**, I get a +2 when I use **Shoot** to **attack** when **I have a target IN MY SIGHTS**.

The second type of stunt **changes the rules of the game**. This is a broad category that includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- ▼ **Swapping which skills are used in a given situation.** For instance, a researcher might use Academics to perform a ritual, while anyone else would use Lore.
- ▼ **Using an action with a skill that isn't normally used with it.** For instance, allowing a character to use Stealth to backstab an opponent from the shadows (which would typically be a use of Fight).
- ▼ **Giving a character a different kind of bonus to skills that's roughly equivalent to a +2.** For instance, when a skilled orator creates an advantage with Rapport, it gets an extra free invoke.
- ▼ **Allowing a character to declare a minor fact is always true.** For instance, a survivalist always has survival items like matches on their person, even under unlikely circumstances.
- ▼ **Allowing a character to make a specific rules exception.** For instance, a character might have two more stress boxes or another mild consequence slot.

Write this type of stunt as follows:

Because I **[describe how you are amazing or have a cool bit of gear]**, I can **[describe your amazing feat]**, but only **[describe a circumstance or limitation]**.

Example Rule-Breaking Stunt: Because I am a **physics Ph.D. and don't believe in magic**, I can use **Academics** to defend against backlash but **only when using Great Old One tech**.

Sophie gets two stunts for free; she makes one that lets her use Academics in place of Rapport when dealing with other academic types, along with one that gives her a +2 bonus to Resources when using his past self's money to buy equipment. Because her character feels a little fragile still, she spends one refresh to get a third stunt, which gives him a +2 bonus toward fighting dirty—that'll help in a fight, and it helps show how he's a huge jerk. He now has three regular stunts, one corruption stunt that she made along with his corrupted aspect, and two refresh remaining.

Stress and Consequences

STRESS and **CONSEQUENCES** are how your character withstands the mental and physical toll of their adventures. Characters start with three one-point boxes for physical stress and three one-point boxes for mental stress. They also get one slot each for mild, moderate, and severe consequences.

Your rating in Physique affects how many total physical stress boxes you have. Will does the same for your mental stress. Refer to the following table:

PHYSIQUE/WILL	PHYSICAL/MENTAL STRESS
Mediocre (+0)	□□□
Average (+1) or Fair (+2)	□□□□ □
Good (+3) or Great (+4)	□□□ □□□
Superb (+5) and higher	□□□ □□□ and a second mild consequence slot specifically for physical or mental hits

You'll learn how stress and consequences work during play in "Taking Harm" (page 43).

Since her character has Fair (+2) Will and Average (+1) Physique, he'll have four stress boxes for both mental and physical stress, and the default set of mild, moderate, and severe consequences.

Finishing Touches

Give your character a name and description, and discuss their history with the other players. If you haven't yet written down a relationship aspect or decided on the effects of a corrupted aspect, do so now.

Sophie names her character Charles, and his past self will go by Charlie. She describes him as being balding, with thick glasses and a permanent scowl, and dark clothes that hide a little of the perpetual ichor leak.

TAKING ACTION, ROLLING THE DICE

In a game of *Fate of Cthulhu*, you will control the actions of the character you created, contributing to the story you are all telling together. In general, the GM will narrate the world and the actions of non-player characters (**NPCs**), and the other players will narrate their individual PCs' actions.

To act, usually you will just narrate what your character is trying to do. Your character's aspects will inform what they can attempt. Most people couldn't even try to perform emergency surgery on a disemboweled ally, but if your aspects suggest a medical background, you can try. Most people in 2020 don't carry a sword, but if you have an aspect that describes the mystic blade you wield, you can unsheathe it to hold off the charging shoggoth. This is especially true if you have corrupted aspects (page 64), which you can justify even some actions beyond human abilities.




How do you know if you're successful? Often, your character will simply succeed, because the action isn't hard and nobody's trying to stop you. But in difficult or unpredictable situations, you'll break out the dice to find out what happens.

When a character wants to take an action, the group should think about these questions:

- ▼ What's stopping this from happening?
- ▼ What could go wrong?
- ▼ How is it interesting when it does go wrong?

If no one has good answers to all of these questions, it simply happens. Driving to the airport doesn't require a roll of the dice. Racing down the highway to a waiting plane while being pursued by cybernetically enhanced hounds from another world, on the other hand, is a perfect time to roll the dice.

Whenever you take action, follow these steps:

- 1 Describe what you're trying to do. Choose the skill and action that fits.
- 2 Roll four dice.
- 3 Add up the symbols on the dice: a  is +1, a  is -1, and a  is 0. This will give you a dice result of -4 to 4.
- 4 Add the dice result to your skill rating.
- 5 Modify the dice by invoking aspects (page 19) and using stunts (page 20).
- 6 Declare your total result, called your **EFFORT**.

Difficulty and Opposition

If the character's action faces a fixed obstacle or otherwise tries to alter the world rather than a character or creature, their action faces a static **DIFFICULTY** rating. These actions include picking locks, barring doors, and tactically assessing an enemy camp.

At other times, an enemy will provide **OPPOSITION** against the character's action. In these cases, the GM will also roll the dice and follow the same rules as in the previous section, using any skills, stunts, or aspects the enemy has. Any time you roll to attack an enemy or to create an advantage directly against them, the enemy will roll to defend against it, providing opposition.

Opposition can take many forms. Struggling with a cultist over the ritual dagger has a clear opponent. Or you might be opposed by the power of an ancient ritual that must be overcome to save the world. Cracking the safe in the First Arkham Bank to access the safe deposit boxes is a challenge with risk of discovery, but it's up to the GM if you're rolling against *opposition* from the patrolling guards or the *difficulty* presented by the safe itself.



Modifying the Dice

Modify your dice by invoking aspects to get +2 to your roll or reroll the dice. Some stunts also give you a bonus.

INVOKING ASPECTS


When you take action but the dice come up short, you don't have to sit back and accept failure. (Though you totally can. That's fun too.) The aspects in play give you options and opportunity to succeed.

When an aspect could justifiably help your efforts, describe how it helps and spend a fate point (or use a free invoke) to **INVOLVE** it. What is and isn't justifiable is subject to the bullshit rule—anyone can call bullshit on invoking an aspect.

You have two options when bullshit is called on your invoke. First, you can retract your invoke and try something else, maybe a different aspect. Second, you can have a quick discussion about why you think the aspect fits. If the person still isn't convinced, retract the invoke and move on. If they come around to your perspective, go ahead with the invoke as usual. The bullshit rule is in here to help everyone at the table have a good time. Use it when something doesn't sound right, make sense, or fit the tone. Someone invoking GREAT AT FIRST IMPRESSIONS to throw a car at a shoggoth is worthy of a bullshit call. But maybe that character has a corruption stunt that makes them incredibly strong, strong enough to plausibly throw a car, and this is their opening gambit in a fight with a horrible monster. In that case, maybe GREAT AT FIRST IMPRESSIONS is plausible.

When you invoke an aspect, you can either **gain a +2 bonus** to your roll or **reroll all four dice**. You can invoke multiple aspects on the same roll, each adding +2 or rerolling, but you cannot invoke the same aspect multiple times on the same roll. There is one exception: you can spend as many *free invokes* on an aspect as you like on the same roll.

Most often you'll invoke one of your character aspects, but sometimes you'll invoke a situation aspect or even make a hostile invocation of another character's aspect (page 30).

The moon has turned blood red, which means the cultists must have started their ritual to summon one of the Great Old One's spawn. If she's to have any hope of stopping it in time, Cassandra needs to figure out just where the ritual is taking place. Cassandra's player argues that she should be able to use Lore to figure out where an appropriate spot for the ritual would be (she is a RIGOROUS STUDENT OF THE ARCANE after all, and aspects are true; see page 28). The GM agrees and says she faces Great (+4) difficulty. Cassandra's Lore is Good (+3), but her roll is not; she gets , giving a Fair (+2) effort.

Because this is important, Cassandra's player describes how her character wracks her brain to recall all of the details about arcane locations she must have picked up during her time as cultist, and offers a fate point to invoke her aspect **FORMER ACOLYTE OF THE CHILDREN OF AZATHOTH**. The GM accepts it, and Cassandra's player chooses to get +2 on her roll, bringing her effort to Great (+4). That's a tie, and the GM makes it a success at a minor cost (page 23): Cassandra realizes that the ritual could only be taking place on the shores of Lake Carter, but because it took her so long to figure it out, the ritual will be nearly finished by the time she arrives.

USING STUNTS

Stunts may give you a bonus to your roll, provided you meet the criteria written in the stunt, such as the circumstances, action, or skill used. You may wish to use create advantage (page 25) to introduce aspects that line up with those circumstances. Keep your stunts' circumstances in mind when you describe your actions too, and set yourself up for success.

Normally, stunts give you a +2 bonus in a narrow circumstance with no cost; you may use them anytime they apply. Some rare and exceptionally powerful stunts may require you to spend a fate point to use them.

Corruption stunts will give you a +4 bonus or a +2 bonus *and* a rules exception—corruption stunts are puissant but come at the cost of your humanity. You'll find more on corruption and corruption stunts in *Corruption* (page 58).

Ruth has been ambushed by a Hound of Tindalos, which has dealt her a Great (+4) attack. Her Athletics is Good (+3) and her defense roll is **■-■●+**, leaving her at Fair (+2)—since the Hound rolled higher, Ruth is about to get hurt. Fortunately, Ruth has a stunt that can help:

Monster Fighter: Because I fought uncanny creatures in the post-apocalyptic wastes, I get +2 when I defend with Athletics against a single eldritch monster.

The +2 bonus brings Ruth's effort up to Great (+4): a tie! The Hound gets a boost, but Ruth at least avoids getting hurt. For now.

Outcomes

Whenever you roll the dice, the difference between your effort and the difficulty or opposition is measured in **SHIFTS**. There are four possible outcomes:

- ▼ If your effort is less than the difficulty or opposition, you **fail**.
- ▼ If your effort is equal to the difficulty or opposition, you **tie**.
- ▼ If your effort is one or two shifts more than the difficulty or opposition, you **succeed**.
- ▼ If your effort is three or more shifts more than the difficulty or opposition, you **succeed with style**.

Some outcomes are obviously better for you than others, but all of them should advance the story in interesting ways.

Ethan is not a particularly adept safe-cracker, and yet he finds himself in a sinister cult's secret headquarters, with a steel door between him and the ritual book he desperately needs so he can banish a shoggoth to another dimension. There are guards around, and he knows the safe is likely trapped. Can he get in?





FAILURE

IF YOUR EFFORT IS LESS THAN THE DIFFICULTY OR OPPOSITION, YOU FAIL.

This can play out in a few ways: simple failure, success at a major cost, or taking a hit.

SIMPLE FAILURE

The first is the easiest to understand—**SIMPLE FAILURE**. You don't accomplish your goal, don't make any progress, and are left wanting. Ensure this keeps the story moving—simply failing to crack the safe is stagnant and boring.

Ethan pulls the handle triumphantly, but the safe remains resolutely closed while the alarms begin to blare. Failure has changed the situation and driven the story forward—now there are guards on the way. Ethan is faced with a new choice—try another way of opening the safe, now that subtlety is out the window, or cut his losses and run?

SUCCESS AT A MAJOR COST

Second is **SUCCESS AT A MAJOR COST**. You do what you set out to do, but there's a significant price to be paid—the situation gets worse or more complicated. GM, you can either declare this is the result or can offer it in place of failure. Both options are good and useful in different situations.

Ethan fails his roll and the GM says, “You hear the click of the last tumbler falling into place. It's echoed by the click of the hammer on a revolver as the guard tells you to put your hands in the air.” The major cost here is the confrontation with a guard that the PCs had hoped to avoid.

TAKE A HIT

Lastly, you may **TAKE A HIT**, which you'll need to absorb with stress or consequences, or suffer some other drawback. This sort of failure is most common when defending against attacks or overcoming dangerous obstacles. This is different from a simple failure because the character alone, not necessarily the whole group, is affected. It's also different from success at a major cost, in that success isn't necessarily on the table.

Ethan is able to get the safe door open, but as he grasps the handle, he feels a jab in the back of his hand. He couldn't disable the trap! He writes down the mild consequence **POISONED**.

You can mix these options together: Harmful failure can be harsh but appropriate in the moment. Success at the cost of harm is certainly an option.

**TIE**

IF YOUR EFFORT IS EQUAL TO THE DIFFICULTY OR OPPOSITION, YOU TIE.

Just like failure, ties should move the story forward, never stymie the action. Something interesting should happen. Similar to failure, this can play out a couple ways: success at a minor cost, or partial success.

SUCCESS AT A MINOR COST

The first is **SUCCESS AT A MINOR COST**—a few points of stress, story details about difficulty or complication but aren't hindrances themselves, and a boost (page 29) to the enemy are all minor costs.

Ethan's first attempt is a failure—and his second, and his third. By the time he actually gets the door open, dawn has broken, and he won't be able to make his escape under cover of darkness. He got what he needed, but his situation is worse now.

PARTIAL SUCCESS

The other way to handle a tie is **PARTIAL SUCCESS**—you succeeded but only got some of what you wanted.

Ethan can only open the safe door a crack—if the door opens more than an inch, the alarm will sound, and he can't figure out how to disengage that. He manages to pull a couple pages of the ritual out through the narrow gap, but he'll have to guess at the final steps.

**SUCCESS**

IF YOUR EFFORT IS ONE OR TWO MORE THAN THE DIFFICULTY OR OPPOSITION, YOU SUCCEED.

You get what you want with no cost.

The safe door swings open. Ethan grabs the ritual and gets out before the guards notice him.

**SUCCESS WITH STYLE**

IF YOUR EFFORT IS THREE OR MORE THAN THE DIFFICULTY OR OPPOSITION, YOU SUCCEED WITH STYLE.

You get what you want, and you get a bit more on top of that.

Ethan is beyond lucky; the safe door opens almost instantly. Not only does he get the ritual, but he has enough time to poke through the other papers in the back of the safe. Amidst various ledgers and financial documents, he finds a map of the old Akeley mansion. That will come in handy!

Actions

There are four actions you can roll, each with a specific purpose and effect on the story:

- ▼ **Overcome** to surmount obstacles with your skills.
- ▼ **Create an advantage** to change a situation to your benefit.
- ▼ **Attack** to harm the enemy.
- ▼ **Defend** to survive an attack or stop a foe from creating an advantage.



OVERCOME

OVERCOME TO SURMOUNT OBSTACLES WITH YOUR SKILLS.

Every character will face untold challenges in the course of saving the timeline. The **OVERCOME** action is how they face and surmount those obstacles.

A character good at Athletics can climb over walls and race through crowded streets. A detective with high Investigate can piece together clues others have missed. Someone skilled in Rapport will find it easier to avoid a fight in a hostile bar.

Your outcomes when overcoming are:

- ↓ **If you fail**, discuss with the GM whether it's a failure or success at a major cost (page 22).
- ↻ **If you tie**, it's success at a minor cost (page 23)—you're in a tough spot, the enemy gets a boost (page 29), or you may take a hit.
- ↑ **If you succeed**, you meet your goal and the story moves on without hiccups.
- ↑↑ **If you succeed with style**, it's a success and you also get a boost.

Charles has made his way to an Antarctic research facility. The buildings have been wrecked, and the occupants are missing. He wants to search the wreckage for clues. The GM tells him to roll Investigate against Fair (+2) difficulty. Charles gets **■ ■ + +** on the dice, plus his Average (+1) Investigate, for a Good (+3) effort. A success! The GM describes the clue he finds: footprints in the snow, made by creatures walking on many thin, inhuman legs.





CREATE AN ADVANTAGE

CREATE AN ASPECT OR GAIN BENEFIT FROM AN EXISTING ASPECT.

You can use the **CREATE AN ADVANTAGE** action to change the course of the story. By using your skills to introduce new aspects or add invokes to existing aspects, you can stack the deck for yourself and your teammates. You might change the circumstances (barring a door or creating a plan), discover new information (learning the weakness of a vile horror through research), or take advantage of something already known (such as a CEO's taste for single malt scotch).

An aspect created (or discovered) by creating an advantage works like any other: It defines the narrative circumstances and can allow, prevent, or impede actions—for instance, you cannot read a spell if the room has been made **PITCH BLACK**. It can also be invoked or compelled (pages 30–32). In addition, creating an advantage gives you one or more **FREE INVOKES** of the created aspect. A free invoke, as the name suggests, lets you invoke an aspect without spending a fate point. You can even let your allies use free invokes you have created.

When you roll to create an advantage, specify whether you're creating a new aspect or taking advantage of an existing one. If the former, are you attaching the aspect to an ally, opponent, or the environment? If you're attaching it to an opponent, they can take the defend action to oppose you. Otherwise you'll usually face a difficulty, but the GM can decide if something or someone opposes your efforts with a defend roll instead.

Your outcomes when creating an advantage are:

- ↓ **If you fail**, you either don't create the aspect (failure) or you create it but the enemy gets the free invoke (success at a cost). If you succeed at a cost, the final aspect may need to be rewritten to benefit the enemy. This may still be worth it because aspects are true (page 28).
- ↻ **If you tie**, you do not create an aspect, but you do get a boost (page 29).
- ↑ **If you succeed**, you create a situation aspect with one free invoke on it.
- ↑↑ **If you succeed with style**, you create a situation aspect with *two* free invokes on it.

The outcomes when working with an existing aspect are:

- ↓ **If you fail**, the enemy gets a free invoke on the aspect instead.
- ↻ **If you tie or ↑ succeed**, you add a free invoke to the aspect.
- ↑↑ **If you succeed with style**, you add two free invokes to the aspect.

Ethan is face-to-something with a shoggoth, a massive and tireless fleshy beast. He knows it's too powerful to attack directly, so he decides his best bet is to distract it: "I'd like to make a Molotov cocktail and set this thing on fire!" he announces.

The GM decides that actually hitting the shoggoth is trivial, so this is a Crafts roll—how quickly can he find and weaponize something flammable? The difficulty is set at Good (+3). Ethan has Average (+1) Crafts but rolls **■●+++**, giving a Great (+4) effort.

Ethan cobbles together the Molotov and tosses it at the beast. The shoggoth is now ON FIRE, and Ethan has one free invoke on that aspect. The shoggoth is definitely distracted, and if it does try to chase him, Ethan can use that invoke to help himself get away.



ATTACK

ATTACK TO HARM THE ENEMY.

The **ATTACK** action is how you try to take out an opponent—whether you're looking to kill a loathsome monster, or knock out an innocent guard who doesn't know the truth about what he's guarding. An attack can be unloading with a machine gun, throwing a solid punch, or casting a baleful spell.

Keep in mind that this is a Cthulhu game. Not every attack is equal. You can't just punch the colour out of space and hope to hurt it. Determine whether the attack even has a chance of being successful before you start rolling the dice. A number of squamous, extradimensional beings may have specific weaknesses that need to be exploited, or some means of defense you must get through before you can even begin to hurt it.

Your outcomes when attacking are:

- ↓ **If you fail**, you fail to connect—the attack is parried, dodged, or maybe just absorbed by armor.
- ↔ **If you tie**, maybe you barely connect, maybe you cause the defender to flinch. Either way, you get a boost (page 29).
- ↑ **If you succeed**, you deal a hit equal to the difference between your attack's total and defense's effort. The defender must absorb this hit with stress or consequences, or else be taken out (page 45).
- ↑↑ **If you succeed with style**, you deal a hit just like a success, but you may reduce the shifts of the hit by one to get a boost.

Ruth has stumbled across a corpse raised by arcane powers to fulfill some dark purpose. She decides to punch it. She has Great (+4) Fight but rolls **■-■■■**, giving a Fair (+2) effort. (Continues on next page.)



DEFEND

DEFEND TO SURVIVE AN ATTACK OR STOP A FOE FROM CREATING AN ADVANTAGE.

Is a hound trying to eat your face? Is a Mi-go doing its level best to wrap you up in a viscous cocoon? What about when that cultist tries to stab you in both kidneys? **DEFEND**, defend, defend.

Defend is the only reaction in *Fate of Cthulhu*—you use it to stop something from happening outside your turn. Because defend is a reaction, you will almost always face an active opposition, rather than a static difficulty. Your enemy will roll to attack you or create an advantage, and you'll immediately roll to defend against it. The exception to this is backlash (page 53)—the power of time isn't random, it's a reflection of your own efforts.

Your outcomes when defending are:

- ↓ **If you fail** against an attack, you take a hit, which you must absorb with stress (page 43) or consequences (page 44).
- ↔ **If you tie**, your opponent gets a boost.
- ↑ **If you succeed**, you don't take a hit or you deny the enemy the advantage.
- ↑↑ **If you succeed with style**, it's the same as when you succeed, and you also get a boost as you gain the upper hand for a moment.

Continuing from the previous example, the corpse gets to defend itself against Ruth. The GM rolls **—■■■+**, which doesn't change the creature's Mediocre (+0) Athletics.

Because Ruth's effort was higher, her attack succeeds by two shifts, and the corpse is a little closer to being down for good. Had the corpse rolled better—for instance, rolling **■■+++** for a Good (+3) effort—then its defense would have succeeded, and the undead monstrosity would have avoided taking a hit.



ASPECTS AND FATE POINTS

An **ASPECT** is a word or phrase that describes something special about a person, place, thing, situation, or group. Almost anything you can think of can have aspects. A person might have a reputation as the **GREATEST SHARPSHOOTER IN THE WASTELAND** (see below for more about these kinds of aspects). A room might be **ON FIRE** after you knock over an oil lamp. After an encounter with a shoggoth, you might be **TERRIFIED**. Aspects let you change the story in ways that go along with your character's tendencies, skills, or problems.

Aspects Are Always True

You can invoke aspects for a bonus to a roll (page 30) and compel them to create a complication (page 32). But even when those aren't in play, aspects still affect the narrative. When you have that flesh-wrapped monstrosity **PINNED IN A HYDRAULIC PRESS**, that is *true*. It can't do much stuck in there, and it's not getting out easy.

In essence, "aspects are always true" means that **aspects can grant or withdraw permission for what can happen in the story** (they can also affect difficulty). If the aforementioned monstrosity is **PINNED**, the GM (and everyone else) has to respect that. The creature has lost permission to move until something happens which removes that aspect, either a successful overcome (which itself might require a justifying aspect like **SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH**) or someone foolishly reversing the press. Similarly, if corruption has granted you **BIG WARTY FROG LEGS**, you've arguably gained permission to leap over walls in a single bound without even having to roll for it.

That's not to say you can create any aspect you want and use its truth like a club. Aspects grant a lot of power to shape the story, yes, but with that power comes the responsibility to play within the story's constraints. Aspects have to line up with the table's sense of what actually passes muster. **If an aspect doesn't pass the sniff test, it needs to be reworted.**

Sure, you might *like* to use create an advantage to inflict the aspect **DISMEMBERED** on that fungal super-soldier, but that clearly steps on the toes of the attack action, and besides, it takes a bit more work to lop her arm off than that (could work as a consequence, though—see the next page). You might say you're the **WORLD'S BEST SHOT**, but you'll need to back that up with your skills. And as much as you'd like to make yourself **BULLET-PROOF**, removing permission for someone to use small arms fire to harm you, that is unlikely to fly except as the result of corruption (page 58).

What Kinds of Aspects Are There? _____

There's an endless variety of aspects, but no matter what they're called, they all work pretty much the same way. The main difference is how long they stick around before going away.

CHARACTER ASPECTS

These aspects are on your character sheet, such as your high concept and trouble. They describe personality traits, important details about your past, relationships you have with others, important items or titles you possess, problems you're dealing with or goals you're working toward, or reputations and obligations you carry. These aspects only change during milestones (page 49) or when corrupted (page 58).

Examples: LEADER OF MY BAND OF SURVIVORS; ON THE RUN FROM THE CULT OF THE VIRIDIAN CIRCLE; ATTENTION TO DETAIL; I MUST PROTECT MY BROTHER

SITUATION ASPECTS

These aspects describe the surroundings or scenario where the action is taking place. A situation aspect usually vanishes at the end of the scene it was part of, or when someone takes some action that would change or get rid of it. Essentially, they last only as long as the situation they represent lasts.

Examples: ON FIRE; BRIGHT SUNLIGHT; CROWD OF ANGRY PEOPLE; KNOCKED TO THE GROUND; PURSUED BY THE POLICE

CONSEQUENCES

These aspects represent injuries or other lasting trauma taken by absorbing a hit, often from attacks (page 26).

Examples: SPRAINED ANKLE; CONCUSSION; DEBILITATING SELF-DOUBT; EVER-LASTING ENMITY OF THE FACELESS MOTHER

BOOSTS

A **BOOST** is a special kind of aspect, representing an extremely temporary or minor situation. You cannot compel a boost or spend a fate point to invoke it. You may invoke it once for free, after which it vanishes. An unused boost vanishes when the advantage it represents no longer exists, which may be a few seconds or the duration of a single action. They never persist beyond the end of a scene, and you can hold off naming one until you're using it. If you're in control of a boost, you may pass it to an ally if there's rationale for it.

Examples: IN MY SIGHTS; DISTRACTED; UNSTABLE FOOTING; ROCK IN HIS BOOT

What Can I Do with Aspects?

INVOKES

To unlock the true power of aspects and make them help you, you'll need to spend **FATE POINTS** to **INVOKE** them during dice rolls (page 19). Keep track of your fate points with pennies or glass beads or poker chips or some other tokens.

You can also invoke aspects for free, *if* you have a free invoke from you or an ally creating an advantage you can use (page 25).

HOSTILE INVOCATIONS

Most of the time an aspect is invoked, it's a character aspect or a situation aspect. Sometimes you'll invoke enemies' character aspects *against* them. This is called a **HOSTILE INVOCATION**, and it works just like invoking any other aspect—pay a fate point and get a +2 to your roll or reroll the dice. There's one small difference—**when you use a hostile invocation, you give the fate point to the enemy**, but they don't get to use the fate point until after the scene is over. This payout only applies when a fate point is actually spent on a hostile invocation. Free invokes do not trigger a payout.

Ruth is being chased by a Byakhee down a dark alley. The beast is made of esoteric matter, and none of Ruth's weapons can hurt it, so all she can do is run. It dives at her with Great (+4) effort; Ruth has Fair (+2) Athletics but rolls **■—■—■**, for a Bad (-1) effort. At the moment, that would be enough to take her out.

From earlier experience, Ruth knows that Byakhee have **BROAD, BAT-LIKE WINGS**. She proffers a fate point to the GM, and suggests that the Byakhee might have a hard time getting its big wings though a narrow alley. The GM accepts it and sets the fate point off to the side; they can't use it right away, but will get it when the scene ends. Ruth, having invoked the Byakhee's aspect, rerolls her dice and gets **■■+■**. She lives to fight a little longer.



HOSTILE INVOCATIONS OR COMPELS?

Don't confuse hostile invocations and compels! Though they are similar—they are ways to give a character an immediate problem in exchange for a fate point—they work differently.

A compel creates a *narrative change*. The decision to compel a character's aspect isn't something that happens in-universe; rather, it's the GM or player proposing a change to the story. The effect can be broad, but the target gets the fate point immediately if they accept the compel, and may choose to refuse the compel.

A hostile invocation is a *mechanical effect*. The target doesn't get a chance to refuse the invocation—but as with any invocation, you will need to explain how that aspect makes sense to invoke. And while they do get a fate point, they don't get to use it in the current scene. However, the ultimate result is much more constrained: a +2 bonus or one reroll of the dice.

Compels let you, as a player or GM, change what a scene is *about*. They throw a wrench in the narrative. Using them against an opponent is a risky proposition—they might refuse, or accomplish their objective despite the complication thanks to the shiny new fate point you handed them.

Hostile invocations help you in the current moment. In addition to your own aspects, you have your opponent's aspects available to invoke, giving you more options and making scenes more dynamic and connected.

EARNING FATE POINTS

Each session, you start with fate points at least equal to your **REFRESH**. Be sure to keep track of the fate points you have left at the end of each session of play—if you have more fate points than your refresh, you'll start the next session with the fate points you ended this session with.

Charles earned a lot of fate points during today's session, ending it with five fate points. His refresh is 2, so Charles will start the next session with five fate points. But Ethan ends the same session with just one fate point. His refresh is 3, so he'll begin the next session with three fate points, not just the one he had left over.

You can also earn fate points by letting your character's aspects be **COMPELLED** (page 32) against you to complicate the situation or make your life harder.

COMPELS

Aspects can be **COMPELLED** to complicate the situation and earn fate points. To compel an aspect, the GM or a player offers a fate point to the player whose character is being compelled, and tells them why an aspect is making things more difficult or complicated. If you refuse the compel, you must spend a fate point from your own supply and describe how your character avoids the complication. Yes, this means that if you don't have any fate points, you can't refuse a compel!

Ethan needs to get into the Miskatonic University Library to do a little research about an ancient artifact the team is seeking. Unfortunately, as Ethan's player describes his arrival at the library, the GM smiles.

"Hey Ethan," they say. "You know how you have that THE CHILDREN OF AZATHOTH WANT ME DEAD aspect?"

"I do, yeah."

"Well, it would make sense that the cult has been keeping an eye on your team. I think that as you walk up to the library, you spot someone you know to be a cultist watching the entrance." The GM slides a fate point forward to tempt Ethan's player.

"Hm. Does that mean I can't go in?"

"Of course not! But you will have to be clever if you don't want to get spotted and start a fight."

Ethan's player thinks about it. He's only got one fate point right now; he could buy off the compel, but he'd much rather have two fate points than zero. "Alright," Ethan's player says, taking the fate point. "The building's front door is being monitored. I guess I'll sneak around to the back, keeping an eye out for more suspicious cultists, and see if I can find a window to shimmy through. Nuts!"

COMPELS ARE COMPLICATIONS, NOT STYMIES

When offering a compel, make sure that the complication is a course of action or major change in circumstance, not a denial of options.

"Oh, you've got sand in your eyes, so you shoot at the shoggoth and miss," is not a compel. It denies action rather than complicating anything.

"You know, damn your luck, I think that the sand in your eyes means you can't really see anything. Your shots at the shoggoth go wild, puncturing a few barrels that are now gushing gasoline toward the fire pit." This is a much better compel. It changes the scene, ratchets up the tension, and gives the players something new to think about.

For some ideas about what does and doesn't work as a compel, check out the discussion of types of compels found in *Fate Core System* starting on page 72 of that book, or online at: <https://fate-srd.com/fate-core/invoking-compelling-aspects#types-of-compels>

Any aspect can be compelled—whether it’s a character aspect, timeline aspect, situation aspect, or consequence—but it must be something that affects the character being compelled.

Anyone can offer a compel. The player proposing the compel must spend one of their own fate points. The GM then takes over running the compel for the affected target. The GM does not lose a fate point by offering a compel—they have a limited pool of fate points for invoking aspects, but can compel as much as they’d like.

Compels can be retroactive. If a player finds they have roleplayed themselves into a complication related to one of their aspects or a situation aspect that concerns them, they can ask the GM if that counts as a **SELF-COMPEL**. If the group agrees, the GM slides the player a fate point.

Charles is trying to investigate the scene of a ritualistic murder when he’s stopped by a police officer. Instead of trying to talk things out, Charles’s player has him get into a screaming altercation with the officer who, in Charles’s words, “is too intellectually dense to recognize the approach of someone who could actually handle this situation competently.”

While Charles is being hauled to the station for processing, Charles’s player says, “Gosh, I really did play into my REALLY JUST A HUGE JERK trouble, didn’t I?” The GM agrees and passes a fate point over.



EVENTS AND DECISIONS

There are two general kinds of compels: **EVENTS** and **DECISIONS**. An event is something that happens to a character because of an external force. A decision is internal, where the character's flaws or competing values get in the way of better judgment. In either case, a resulting complication is key!

Examples of Event Compels:

- ▼ Charles is **OZZING BLACK ICHOR** as the result of his ongoing corruption. In addition to being generally disgusting, it would make sense that one of the Great Old One's servants would be able to follow his trail as the team flees. Charles can run, but he can't hide from the inevitable confrontation.
- ▼ The timeline aspect in play is **CREATURES ARE LURKING IN THE WATER**. Unfortunately, the team has tracked an essential contact to their beach house. It would make sense that now's the time for a whole cadre of monsters to emerge from the deep, eager to grab humans and drag them out to sea.

Examples of Decision Compels:

- ▼ Ruth's time in the post-apocalyptic wastes has left her **ITCHING FOR A FIGHT**. It would make sense that when she's approached by a guard in the back room of the museum she's broken into, she would instinctively draw her weapon, escalating the situation and removing all hope of getting out of there stealthily.
- ▼ Cassandra is a **RIGOROUS STUDENT OF THE ARCANE**. It would make sense that while fleeing through the burning wreckage of the Akeley Mansion, she would snatch a few books from the library so she could study them. Wizard Akeley might have forgiven the damage, but by touching the books, Cassandra has made a powerful enemy.

How Can I Add and Remove Aspects? _____

You can create or discover a situation aspect using the create an advantage action (page 25). You may also create boosts that way, or as a result of a tie or success with style when you overcome an obstacle, attack, or defend.

You can remove an aspect provided you can think of a way your character could do so—blast the **RAGING FIRE** with a fire extinguisher, use evasive maneuvers to escape the pursuing Byakhee that's **ON YOUR TAIL**. Depending on the situation, that might require an overcome action (page 24); in this case, an opponent could provide active opposition to try to preserve the aspect, if they can describe how they do so.

However, if there's no narrative block to removing an aspect, you can simply do so. If you're **ALL TIED UP** and then a friend unties you, the aspect goes away. If there's nothing stopping you, there's no need to roll.

CHALLENGES, CONFLICTS, AND CONTESTS

Many times, you will be able to resolve an action with a single roll of the dice—do you crack the safe, avoid security, or convince the reporter to give you their notes? Other times you'll face extended engagements that take many rolls to resolve. These are called **SCENES**, which have three types: **CHALLENGES**, **CONTESTS**, and **CONFLICTS**. Each does things a little differently, depending on the goal of the engagement and the opposition involved.

- ▼ **A challenge is a complicated or dynamic situation.** You'll be opposed by someone or something, but there isn't a dominant "other side." This is how you'd play out a researcher looking for clues in an ancient tome, the party negotiator distracting the librarian, and the bruiser holding back untold horrors from entering the library all at the same time.
- ▼ **A contest is a situation where two parties are pursuing mutually exclusive goals, but not actively harming one another.** Contests are perfect for chases, debates, and races of all sorts.
- ▼ **A conflict is when characters can and want to harm one another.** Wrestling in the mud with a cultist as knives stab at bellies, riddling a swarm of Mi-go with bullets as their claws rake at your flesh, and a pitched battle against an enhanced soldier from the future—these are all conflicts.



Setting Up Scenes

Regardless of the type of scene, the GM will start by setting the essential pieces into place, so that the players know what resources are available and what complications are in play.

ZONES

ZONES are a representation of the physical space—a quick map broken into a few discrete sections. A conflict in a remote farmhouse might have four zones: the first floor, second floor, front yard, and back woods. Two to four zones are sufficient to handle most conflicts. Large or complicated scenes may require more. Try to keep your zone map to a simple sketch, something that fits on a note card or can be quickly drawn on a whiteboard.

Zones help guide the story by shaping what is possible. Who you can attack and where you can move depend on the zone you're in.

Anyone in a zone can interact with everyone and everything in that zone. This means you can hit, stab, or otherwise physically engage with people and things in your zone. Need to open that wall safe in the bedroom? You'll have to be in that zone. Anything outside your zone is usually beyond your reach—you'll need to move to get there, or use something that can extend your reach there (a gun, telekinesis, etc).

Moving between zones is easy, as long as there's nothing in your way. **You can move to an adjacent zone in addition to your action during an exchange (page 38) as long as nothing is in your way.** If your movement is impeded, it takes your action to do so. Make an overcome roll to climb a wall, rush past a group of cultists, or leap across rooftops. If you fail, you stay in your zone or the movement costs you something. You can also use your action to move *anywhere* on the map—though the GM is within rights to set a high difficulty if it's an epic movement.

If something isn't risky or interesting enough to merit a roll, then it isn't an impediment to movement. For instance, you don't need to use up your action opening an unlocked door—that's just a part of the movement.

Shooting lets you attack from a distance. Ranged attacks can target enemies in adjacent zones or maybe further, if the zones are clear enough. If there's a creature rooting around in the bedroom upstairs and around the corner, you can't shoot it from the bottom of the stairs. Pay attention to the way the zones and situation aspects are set up when deciding what's fair game or not.

SITUATION ASPECTS

When setting the scene, the GM should think of interesting and dynamic environmental features that can constrain the action or provide opportunities to change the situation by using them. Three to five details are more than enough. Use these categories as a guide:

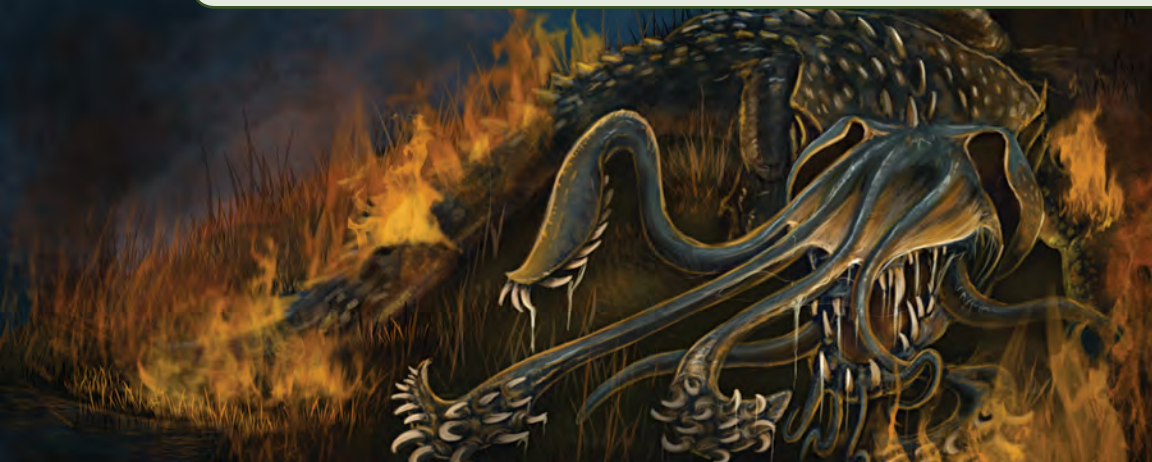
- ▼ **Tone, mood, or weather**—darkness, lightning, and howling winds
- ▼ **Impediments to movement**—connected by ladders, covered in slime, and filled with smoke
- ▼ **Cover and obstructions**—vehicles, pillars, and crates
- ▼ **Dangerous features**—crates of TNT, barrels of oil, and eldritch artifacts crackling with electricity
- ▼ **Usable objects**—improvised weapons, statues or bookshelves to knock over, and doors to be barred

Anyone can invoke and compel these aspects, so remember to take them into account when you wrestle that cultist to the ground amid the CAUSTIC SLIME COVERING EVERYTHING.

More situation aspects can be written down as the scene plays out. If it makes sense that there are DEEP SHADOWS in the recesses of the catacombs, go ahead and write that down when a player asks if there are any shadows they can use to hide. Other aspects come into play because characters use the create an advantage action. Things like FLAMES EVERYWHERE! don't just happen without character action. Well. Usually.

FREE INVOKES ON THE SCENE'S ASPECTS?

It's up to the GM to decide if a situation aspect arising from the scene's setup provides a free invoke to the players (or even the NPCs). Some of the scene's aspects might provide a clever player just the advantage they need right away—and a free invoke can be a strong incentive to drive players to interact with the environment. Free invokes also might end up on the scene's aspects at the start due to preparations made in advance.



TURN ORDER

Often, you won't need to know who is acting precisely when, but in contests and conflicts turn order can become important. These scenes take place over a series of **EXCHANGES**. In an exchange, each involved character can take one overcome, create an advantage, or attack action, and can move once. Because defending is a reaction to someone else's action, characters can defend as many times as they need to during other characters' turns.

At the start of a scene, the GM and players decide who goes first based on the situation, then the active player picks who goes next. The GM's characters are selected in the turn order just like the PCs, with the GM deciding who goes next after the NPCs have acted. After everyone has taken a turn, the last player picks who goes next at the start of the next exchange.

Cassandra and Ruth have stumbled across a small group of cultists, led by an acolyte in a golden mask, performing some arcane ritual. Because the cultists are focused on their work, the GM declares that the PCs will go first in this conflict. The players decide that Cassandra will act first: she creates an advantage against the masked cultist, **DISTRACTED**, by running directly at them screaming. It's crude but effective. To make the best use of the situation aspect, Cassandra's player decides that Ruth should go next. Ruth throws a dagger at the masked acolyte, and immediately invokes **DISTRACTED** to improve her attack. It's not enough to take out the acolyte in one hit, but it is a one-two punch that leaves the cultist reeling.

Unfortunately, now that all the PCs in the scene have acted, Ruth has no choice but to pick one of the cultists to go next. She chooses the masked acolyte. The GM smiles, because they know that once the acolyte acts, she can have the cultists act until the end of the round, at which point they can choose the masked acolyte to start the next exchange. The PCs may have gotten a good first hit in, but now the cultists get to fight back.

Challenges

Many of the difficulties your characters face can be handled with a single roll in the course of a scene—disarm the bomb, find the tome of eldritch lore, or decode the cypher. But sometimes things are more fluid, more complicated, and it's just not as simple as finding the tome of eldritch lore because the yacht you're searching is careening through Hong Kong harbor while a monsoon rages outside and the boat's library is on fire—which is totally not your fault.

In complicated circumstances with no opposition, you'll want to use a **CHALLENGE**: a series of overcome actions that tackle a bigger issue. Challenges let the entire group work together in a scene, and they keep things dynamic.

To set up a challenge, the GM considers the situation and picks a number of skills that can contribute to the success of the group. Treat each action as a separate overcome roll. Do your best to give each character in the scene an opportunity to contribute. For more difficult challenges, build the challenge with more needed actions than there are characters, in addition to setting the difficulties of the actions.

After an endless journey through deep forests, the team has finally reached the ancient temple they've sought. Now they just need to get in.

The GM decides that this is a challenge with three parts. First, someone needs to decipher the inscription over the door that explains how to get it open. Second, someone needs to navigate the non-Euclidean halls of this strange structure. Third, someone needs to keep the corrupted hounds that have been tracking everyone through the woods at bay.

Ruth opts to take care of the hounds. Since they are an annoyance and not a threat, this isn't being run as a conflict, just a test of how well she can Fight them off whenever they get too close. The GM says she faces Great (+4) opposition, and Ruth rolls. She adds ■■ ■+ to her Great (+4) Fight, and ties. The GM calls this a success at a minor cost: Ruth will need to strain hard enough to take a mild consequence to keep the hounds at bay. Ruth agrees without hesitation—she can take the pain.

Cassandra tries to read the runes, and the GM decides that she faces Superb (+5) opposition, given the age of the language and the stress of the situation. Her Academics is Fair (+2), and she rolls ■ ■++. Normally that would leave her at Great (+4), but Cassandra

has a stunt that gives her +2 to translate dead languages, letting her squeak out a Fantastic (+6). The GM describes how she recognizes a few key verbs from the inscription, enough to figure out just what she needs to chant to make the door slowly slide open.

Finally, Ruth is in charge of navigating through the twisting halls. She'll have to Investigate with Good (+3) opposition. Ruth's **■■■■+** roll and Good (+3) Investigate give her a Great (+4) effort, enough to succeed. The team has made their way through the ancient halls to the arcane nexus at the heart of the temple.

Contests

A **CONTEST** is when two or more characters are in direct opposition but there isn't a conflict. This doesn't mean one side doesn't *want* to hurt the other. Contests include situations where the forces of the Great Old One are trying to kill the PCs, but the PCs have no hope of harming the vile creatures.

At the start of a contest, everyone involved declares their intent, what they hope to get out of it. If there are multiple PCs involved, they can have the same or differing goals. **If the PCs can't or aren't trying to harm the enemy, the GM can still declare a goal of harming or killing the PCs.**

Contests take place over a series of exchanges (page 38), during which everyone involved will take an overcome action to do something to achieve their goals.

At the end of each exchange, compare the efforts of everyone's action.

Whoever has the highest effort marks a **VICTORY**. If the victor succeeds with style—and no one else did—then they mark **two** victories. The first one to three victories wins the contest.

When there's a tie for the highest effort, no one marks a victory, and an **UNEXPECTED TWIST** happens. The GM will introduce a new situation aspect to reflect how the scene, terrain, or situation has changed.

The overcome actions can be against passive difficulties—if the contestants are facing separate environmental challenges—or compared against one another when they're in direct competition.

In contests where the GM's goal is to injure or kill the PCs, the PCs take hits whenever the opposition beats them in an exchange. The hit has shifts equal to the shifts of failure, just as if they were in a conflict. Just like in a conflict, if a character can't absorb all the shifts of a hit, they are taken out.

If the team has any hope of saving the world, they need to obtain an icon of the Great Old One currently on display at the museum. Unfortunately, the icon has a protector: an avatar of the chaos god itself, in the guise of a writhing mass of eyes and tentacles. There's no possible way for the PCs to harm an avatar of a Great Old One, but it can and very much will hurt anything that gets close.

The PCs declare that their intent is to get the icon and get out. Simple. The GM declares that the avatar's intent is to keep the icon safe, and it generally does that by killing anything that gets close. Even simpler.

In the first exchange, the PCs attempt to be stealthy. They all roll their Stealth, and Ruth gets the highest effort, Great (+4). The avatar, meanwhile, rolls Notice and only gets a Fair (+2) effort. The PCs gain one victory.

In the second exchange, the crew try to sneak a little closer, but the best roll among them is only a Good (+3). Once again, the avatar rolls Notice, but this time the GM invokes its MASS OF EYES AND TENTACLES aspect, because the thing can see in every direction at once. This is enough to take its effort up to Good (+3) as well. No victory, and an unexpected twist occurs: the GM decides that the avatar lashes out wildly, and while it doesn't hit anybody, it does smash through several of the pillars in this small room, and the ceiling begins to crack and sag ominously. The GM creates the situation aspect THE ROOM IS COLLAPSING.

The PCs can't very well sneak anymore, so they have to run. The GM says that, given the state of the room, they'll have to beat a Great (+4) on their Athletics roll to even qualify as a success. The only one who gets close is Ethan, who gets a Good (+3). The avatar is trying to intercept the PCs and also rolls Athletics, getting a Great (+4) effort, which it increases to Fantastic (+6) by invoking THE ROOM IS COLLAPSING; it is using its tentacles to throw bits of falling masonry at the intruders to slow them down. Since it succeeded with style, it gets two victories; furthermore, since it's trying to hurt the PCs, they all take a hit. Ethan must absorb three shifts, and the others must absorb even more.

Now that the avatar is between them and the icon, the PCs make the desperate decision to shove the thing out of the way, using Physique. It will try to hold its ground, also using Physique. The best effort on the PCs' side is Great (+4), but the avatar edges it out with a Superb (+5), giving it the third victory it needs and delivering another blow to the foolish humans who got too close.

The avatar didn't actually kill anyone; it was willing to, but its actual goal was to protect the icon. It achieved its end and delivered some lasting consequences in the process. The humans are forced to flee.

Conflicts

When the heroes get into a straight-up fight—whether with the present-day authorities, cultists worshipping the Great Old One, or some unspeakable horror—and can win, you have a **CONFLICT**. In other words, use conflicts when violence or coercion is a reasonable means to the ends of the PCs.

Conflicts may seem the most straightforward—after all, the history of roleplaying games is built on combat simulators. But keep in mind a key part of their description: the characters involved have the capability to harm *each other*. If it's one-sided—say you're trying to punch Cthulhu itself—there's no chance you can hurt it. That's not a conflict. That's a contest, probably where the PCs are trying to escape or find the means to fight back.

Conflicts can be physical or mental. Physical conflicts can be shoot-outs, sword-fights, or ramming extradimensional beings with trucks. Mental conflicts include arguments with loved ones, interrogations, and eldritch assaults upon the mind.



TAKING HARM

When an attack is successful, the defender must absorb the hit, which has shifts equal to the difference between the attack's effort and defense's effort.

You can absorb shifts of a hit by marking stress boxes and by taking consequences. If you can't or don't absorb all of the shifts, you are **TAKEN OUT** (page 45)—you're removed from the scene, and the attacker decides how it plays out.

A series of regrettable decisions has put Charles in a dank basement, confronting a ghoul that very much wants to eat him. The ghoul attacks, lunging with its sharp claws; this is an attack using its Fair (+2) Fight. The GM rolls **■ ■ + +**, bringing the effort up to Great (+4). Charles tries to leap out of the way with his Good (+3) Athletics, but rolls **■ ■ ■ -**, taking his effort down to Fair (+2). Because the ghoul's attack effort was two steps higher than Charles's defense effort, Charles must absorb two shifts. He marks the first two of his three physical stress boxes; already the fight is proving dangerous.

STRESS

Simply put, **STRESS** is plot armor. It's a resource used to keep your character up and in the fight when the monsters hit them. When you mark stress boxes to absorb a hit, you're saying things like "that was a near miss," or "Whoa, that knocked the wind out of me but I'm okay." That said, it's a limited resource—most characters only have three boxes for physical stress and three boxes for mental stress, though characters with high Physique or Will have more.

You'll find two **STRESS TRACKS** on your character sheet, one for physical harm and one for mental harm. When you take a hit, you can mark empty stress boxes of the appropriate type to absorb it and stay in the fight. Each stress box you mark absorbs one shift. You can mark multiple stress boxes if you need to.

The boxes are binary—either they're empty and can be used or they're full and can't. That's okay, though. You'll clear the stress track as soon as you make it through the scene.

Provided the monsters don't eat you first.

CONSEQUENCES

CONSEQUENCES are new aspects you write on your character sheet when your character takes a hit, representing the real harm and injury your character suffers.

When you take a consequence to absorb a hit, write an aspect in an empty consequence slot that describes what harm befalls your character. Use the severity of the consequence as a guide: If you were bitten by star spawn, a mild consequence might be **NASTY BITE**, but a moderate consequence could be **BITE THAT WON'T STOP BLEEDING**, and a severe consequence might be **CRIPPLED LEG**.

While stress turns a hit into a near miss, taking a consequence means you got hit hard. Why would you take a consequence? Because sometimes stress isn't enough. Remember, you have to absorb *all* the shifts of the hit to stay in the fight. You only have so many stress boxes. The good news is that consequences can take pretty big hits.

Each character starts with three consequence slots—mild, moderate, and severe. Taking a minor consequence absorbs two shifts, a moderate one absorbs four shifts, and a severe one absorbs six shifts.

So, if you take a big five-shift hit, you can absorb the whole thing with a single stress box and a moderate consequence. That's a lot more efficient than spending all but one of your stress boxes.

The downside to consequences is that they are aspects—and aspects are always true. So if you've got **GUT SHOT**, your character's gut is shot! That will mean you can't do things a gut-shot person can't do (like run fast). If things get particularly complicated due to this, you might even face a compel on your consequence, too. And, just like the aspects you make when you create an advantage, the character that created the consequence—that is, whoever shot you—gets one free invoke on that consequence. Ouch!

Charles is still battling the ghoul. It claws at him, this time rolling a **■■■+**, adding its Fair (+2) Fight, and invokes its **HUNGRY FOR FLESH** aspect for an additional +2, adding up to a devastating Fantastic (+6) blow. Charles's **—■■■**, added to his Good (+3) Athletics, gives him a merely Average (+1) defense; that's five shifts he needs to absorb. He chooses to take a moderate consequence. His player and the GM decide that the ghoul gave Charles a **GAPING CHEST WOUND**. This consequence absorbs four of the shifts, leaving one, which Charles absorbs with his last remaining stress box.

GETTING TAKEN OUT

If you can't absorb all the shifts of a hit with stress and consequences, you're **TAKEN OUT**.

Getting taken out is bad. Whoever took you out decides what happens. Given the dangerous situations and powerful enemies of *Fate of Cthulhu*, this could mean you're dead, but that's not the only possibility. The outcome must be in keeping with the scope and scale of the conflict at hand—in other words, you won't die of shame if you lose an argument. The outcome should also fit within the boundaries your group has established—if your group feels that characters should never get killed without the player's consent, that's perfectly valid. But even when death is on the table (it's best to be clear when it is, before the dice roll), GMs should remember that it's usually a boring result. A PC that's been taken out could be lost, kidnapped, imperiled, be forced to take consequences or corruption... the list goes on. A character's death means someone has to make a new character and bring them into the story, but a fate worse than death is limited only by your imagination.

Follow the fiction when describing how someone—or something—is taken out. Was a cultist taken out by a barrage of machine gun fire? A spray of red fills the air as they slump with a wet thump to the ground. Were you hurled from the truck as it crossed the 26th Street overpass? You disappear over the edge and are left behind as the conflict rumbles on along the Dan Ryan. Keep death in mind when discussing the terms of being taken out, but often it's just as interesting to cheat death.

The ghoul got in a very lucky hit, dealing a Legendary (+8) attack against Charles's Poor (-1) defense. By this point in the conflict, all of Charles's stress boxes are full, as is his moderate consequence slot. Even if he were to take a mild and a severe consequence at once, absorbing eight shifts, it wouldn't be enough. As a result, Charles is taken out. The ghoul gets to decide his fate. The GM would be within their rights to have the ghoul kill Charles then and there...but getting killed isn't the most interesting result.

Instead, the GM declares that Charles survives, getting knocked out and dragged to the ghoul's lair, but not only does he have to take a mild and severe consequence anyway, the process also left him so weak that the corruption in him had a chance to spread. Charles must corrupt another aspect, and will wake up lost and very fragile in the pitch-dark catacombs beneath the city. Because he was taken out, Charles has no choice but to accept the terms laid before him, and begins figuring out what form his new consequences and his new corruption will take.

CONCEDING CONFLICTS

So how do you keep from dying horribly to the non-Euclidian horrors you're fighting? You can interrupt any action in a conflict to **CONCEDE** as long as the dice haven't hit the table yet. Just give in. Tell everyone that you're done, that you can't keep going. You lose the conflict, but **you gain a fate point** plus an extra one for each consequence you took in the current conflict.

Also, concession means *you* declare the terms of your loss and how you exit the conflict. You can escape the monsters and live to fight another day. It is a loss, though. You'll have to give your foe something they want. You can't concede and describe how you heroically save the day—that's not on the table anymore. Conceding is a powerful tool. You can concede to escape with an action plan for the next fight, a clue as to where to go, or some advantage going forward. You just can't win this fight.

You must concede before your opponent rolls the dice. You can't wait to see the outcome of the dice and concede when it's obvious you can't win—that's poor form.

The PCs have tracked down Alice Westforth, a wealthy art dealer who's been sending eldritch artifacts around the globe for unknown purposes. A fight broke out when they showed up at her office, and Westforth has already taken a mild and a moderate consequence. "I think Westforth wants to concede," the GM says. "She wants to get out of here alive."

Ruth's player shakes her head. "No way. We're winning this conflict, and Ruth wants to capture this chump so we can figure out what she's up to."



The GM thinks a moment. "I really want Westforth to get out of here, so...what if she's forced to leave her briefcase as she runs off? It pops open, and it's full of all kinds of paperwork. Stuff that's bound to be more informative than interviewing a captive."

"Right. We grab the paperwork, but it gives her enough time to disappear. We learn her plan, but she still escapes," Ruth's player says. "That sounds fair to me." The other players agree, and the GM describes the scene as Alice Westforth flees into the night. The players get some useful information, and the GM notes that because Westforth took two consequences before conceding, she'll be getting three more fate points the next time she shows up. And she's definitely going to show up again.

HEROIC LAST STANDS

In truly dire circumstances, your character can make a **HEROIC LAST STAND**, sacrificing their life to improve the future. This is a special kind of concession (page 46). Instead of conceding to survive and lose the conflict, a character can make a heroic last stand to win the conflict at the cost of their own life. Maybe a character uses it while being overrun by Deep Ones, or they stay behind while being chased by a Mask of Nyarlathotep to give the others time to escape. However it plays out, that's the end of the character.

The player then has the option, with the GM's agreement, of explaining how their character's sacrifice will affect events. Whatever it is, it should be worthy of the sacrifice. Here are some examples:

- ▼ End a big, climactic conflict in the characters' favor.
- ▼ Allow other characters a miraculous escape.
- ▼ Give an automatic success with style on a spell or ritual, and prevent the other participants in the ritual from suffering backlash.
- ▼ Heal a corrupted aspect from one of the survivors.
- ▼ Create a dramatic positive shift in the timeline, replacing one  on the timeline track with a .

The team has really stepped in it now. What was supposed to be a simple mission has become a complete fiasco, and they find themselves trapped in the cellar of a house in the Siberian wilderness, inches away from an ever-burning corrupted humanoid Ruth has dubbed a "fire vampire." They don't know enough about the thing to even try attacking it, and it is definitely unwilling to parlay. The mission, and the future itself, are doomed.

Charles's player sighs. He has three corrupted aspects at this point...he's quickly losing his humanity, and might as well go out as a hero instead of a monster. "I'm going to make a heroic sacrifice," he announces.

Charles's player and the GM hash out what goes into the sacrifice: specifically, he wants the rest of the team to get out of the situation safely. That's something a heroic sacrifice can do. The GM suggests that he distract the fire vampire, giving the others a chance to sneak away before he's killed.

Charles has a more dramatic idea in mind: Corruption has caused him to ooze an oily ichor, so what if it turns out it's incredibly flammable? He could attack the fire vampire, trying to be a distraction, but actually explode, taking out the monster and allowing his teammates to escape. The GM considers this to be suitably heroic and wonderfully grotesque, and agrees. They describe Charles's heroic sacrifice and its aftermath, and the others are able to escape to safety.

ENDING A CONFLICT

A conflict draws to a close when everyone on one side has either conceded or been taken out. At the end of a conflict, any players who conceded collect their fate points for the concession (page 46). The GM also pays out fate points owed to players for hostile invokes (page 30) that happened during the conflict.

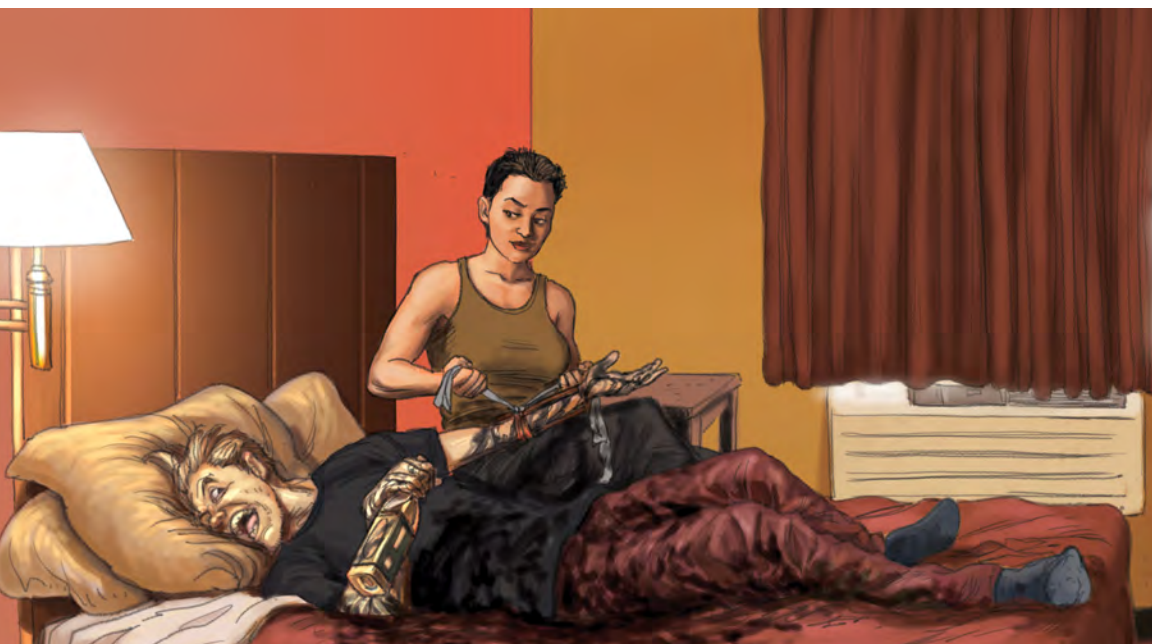
RECOVERING FROM CONFLICTS

At the end of each scene, every character clears their stress boxes. Consequences take more time and effort to clear.

To start the **RECOVERY PROCESS**, the person treating you will need to succeed at an overcome action with an appropriate skill. Physical injuries typically are addressed using Academics, while mental consequences are healed with Empathy. This overcome action faces difficulty equal to the severity of the consequence: Fair (+2) for a mild consequence, Great (+4) for moderate, and Fantastic (+6) for severe. These difficulties increase by two when you're trying to treat yourself (it's easier to have someone else do that).

If you succeed on this roll, rewrite the consequence to indicate that it is healing. A **BROKEN ARM** may be rewritten as **ARM IN A CAST**, for instance.

Success here is only the first hurdle—it takes time to clear the consequence. **Mild** consequences take one full scene after treatment to clear. **Moderate** consequences last longer, taking a full session after treatment to clear. **Severe** consequences only clear when you reach a major milestone after treatment.



MILESTONES AND ADVANCEMENT

As your characters muck about in the timeline, they'll grow and change. At the end of each session you'll earn a **MINOR MILESTONE**, which lets you move things around on your character sheet. As you conclude each timeline event, you'll earn a **MAJOR MILESTONE**, which lets you add things to your character sheet.

Minor Milestones

Minor milestones happen at the end of a session, part of the way through dealing with a timeline event. They are focused on adjusting your character laterally rather than advancing the character. You may not wish to use a minor milestone, which is fine. It doesn't always make sense to change your character. The opportunity is there if you need it.

During a minor milestone, you can do one of the following:

- ▼ Switch the ranks of any two skills, or replace one Average (+1) skill with one that isn't on your sheet.
- ▼ Rewrite one stunt.
- ▼ Purchase a new stunt by spending 1 refresh. (Remember, you can't go below 1 refresh.)
- ▼ Rewrite any one of your uncorrupted aspects, except your high concept.

You may also take a corruption stunt if you've recently corrupted an aspect due to filling your corruption clock (page 63).



Major Milestones

Major milestones are more significant, letting your character actually grow in power. A major milestone lets you do one thing from the minor milestone list. On top of that, you do *all* of the following:

- ▼ Gain a point of refresh, which you can immediately spend to buy a new stunt if you like.
- ▼ Rewrite your character's high concept, if you care to.
- ▼ If you have any moderate or severe consequences not yet in recovery, you can begin the recovery process and rename them. Any that were already in recovery may now be cleared.
- ▼ Increase the skill rating of two different skills each by one step—even from Mediocre (+0) to Average (+1).

IMPROVING SKILL RATINGS

When improving a skill rating, you must have an equal or greater number of skills at the rating below that skill's new rating.

Ruth wants to increase her Lore from Average (+1) to Fair (+2), but this means she'd have four Fair (+2) skills and only three Average (+1).. that won't do. Luckily, she can increase another skill by one rank, increasing her Mediocre (+0) Empathy to Average (+1). Now she has one Great (+4), two Good (+3), four Fair (+2), and four Average (+1) skills.

BEFORE	NOT VALID	VALID	ALSO VALID
+4 █	+4 █	+4 █	+4 █
+3 █ █	+3 █ █	+3 █ █	+3 █ █ █
+2 █ █ █	+2 █ █ █ █	+2 █ █ █ █	+2 █ █ █ █
+1 █ █ █ █	+1 █ █ █ █	+1 █ █ █ █	+1 █ █ █ █

When improving skills, you no longer need to maintain the “pyramid” from character creation. Instead, you must maintain a “column” structure.

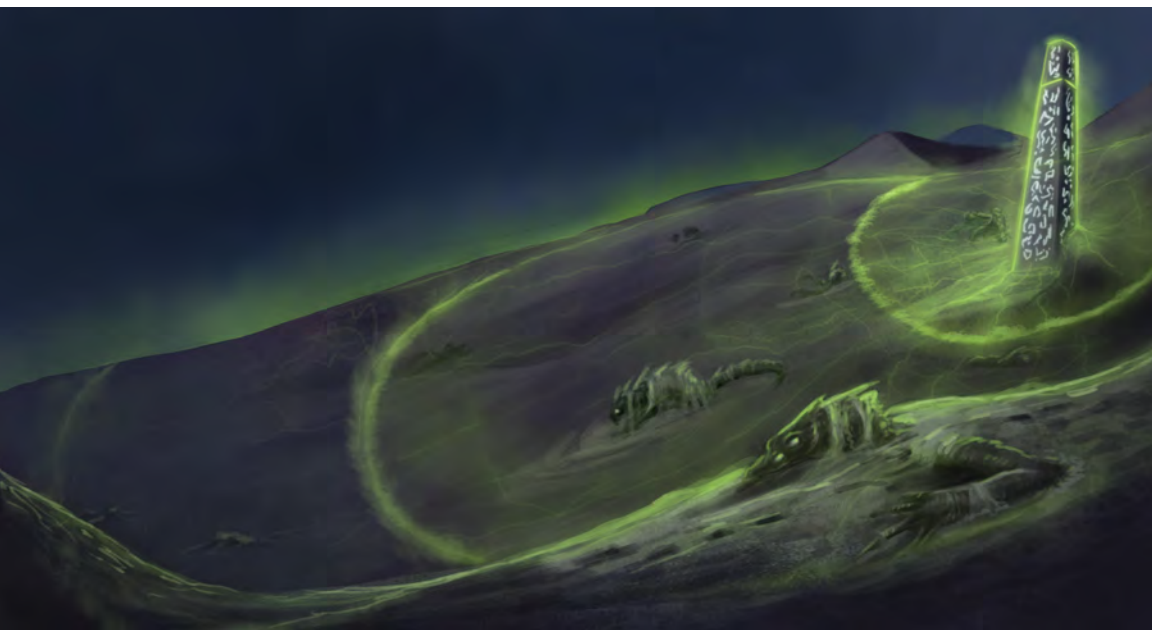
GREAT OLD ONE TECHNOLOGY

It's said that advanced technology and magic are indistinguishable, and with the Old Ones that's very much the case.

Occult symbols carved into the walls of ancient burial sites, runes written in silver on obelisks deep in the desert, the inky scrawlings in tomes long thought lost. These aren't the gibberings of madmen, but physics-bending formulae that can explain the multiverse—and twist it. With this math, one can bridge dimensions, open gateways to other worlds, transform matter, and warp space and time.

Since the Old One's arrival, humans have tried to make sense of this new technology, turning their understanding of the cosmos and the nature of reality on its head. Though many can use it in a dangerously clumsy fashion, much like chimpanzees with chainsaws, only a handful of people seem to truly grasp its meaning.

Bending reality has its uses, large and small, but it comes with a terrible price, slowly corrupting the wielder and the subject into something less than human. The armies fighting the Old One have faced the worst corruption of mind and body, and more than a few soldiers have been lost not to enemy action but to dependence on Old One technology, becoming the very abominations they're fighting against.



Acquiring Magic

Except for memorized spells and biomechanical augmentations—both of which are expressed as corruption stunts (page 65)—characters from the future cannot bring Old One magic back with them, and characters from the present would not have access to spells or rituals in any normal circumstances. Magic is incredibly valuable, and even the most dedicated arcane researcher or fervent cultist is unlikely to ever encounter a ritual or spell, let alone be allowed to *keep* it.

To that end, Old One technology isn't something that the PCs start with, but rather something for them to pursue, as a tool to aid them in their fight to fix the future. Trying to borrow or steal a ritual from a powerful organization is an adventure in its own right. Having a spell or ritual cross the PCs' path, perhaps in the hands of a powerful opponent, will make matters more intense and put a difficult decision their way: this technology is usually better off destroyed...if they can resist the urge to harness it.

And of course, that's *if* they can hold onto it. Possessing Old One technology makes you a target, both for those who seek power and corrupted minions of the Old One sent back in time. Remember that spells and rituals aren't abstract knowledge, but written on *things*, like thick notebooks, ancient tomes, and stone statues. They can't simply be copied onto a sheet of paper—it takes years of effort to understand one enough to recreate it, so if a tome gets taken or destroyed, it's gone for good.

Performing Magic

Old One technology is ridiculously dangerous. The very act of performing magic is corrupting: **the caster or casters must mark corruption to even attempt the spell or ritual.** And that's just the beginning.

Performing a spell or ritual uses the Lore skill, which governs knowledge of the Old Ones and their reality-bending math. Characters with high Lore will have an easier time casting spells. That is a double-edged sword, though. The better they are at casting spells, the more deeply they align themselves with the Old Ones, so they run the risk of corrupting themselves.

BACKLASH

Using Old One technology prompts **BACKLASH** as the universe itself fights back against the strain. When a character does something that triggers backlash, note the effort of the roll. After resolving the action, the caster must defend with Will against a mental attack whose rating equals that effort; for instance, if their effort was Great (+4), the backlash will also be Great (+4), whether their action succeeded or failed. The mental attack can be absorbed with stress and consequences, as normal. If they're taken out by backlash, they must corrupt an aspect and clear their corruption clock.

Charles wants to get rid of a shoggoth by casting a spell to banish it to the future, a task which faces Fantastic (+6) difficulty. Rolling the dice, Charles gets **++■■■** and adds it to his Fair (+2) Lore to get a Great (+4) effort.

He doesn't want to fail, so he spends his last fate point to invoke an aspect, boosting his effort to Fantastic (+6)—a tie. The GM tells Charles's player, "Since you tied, you can succeed at a minor cost...and in this case, I gain a boost, which I'm going to immediately spend on the backlash. You need to defend against a Legendary (+8) psychic attack as infinity fills your mind."

Charles's Will is Fair (+2). The dice come up **+---■**, for a total of Average (+1). That leaves seven shifts of the hit he needs to absorb, but he only has four mental stress boxes. He really doesn't want a corrupted aspect, so he marks three stress boxes and takes the moderate consequence I SEE THE BRANCHES OF TIME.

RITUALS VERSUS SPELLS

Though Old One technology is a mathematical language, it seems to operate best when spoken. The best practitioners are more like improvisational artists than like mathematicians. They can think on the fly, stringing unpronounceable words and mathematical constructs into new combinations, creating new effects.

Practitioners have been unable to shed the trappings of magic. And so the Old Ones' technology is roughly split into two camps: **SPELLS** and **RITUALS**. Though the nomenclature offends the more academic-minded, nobody's come up with anything better, so the names stuck. The distinction between the two forms is important for the simple reason that one is much more likely to cause corruption than the other. Specifically, rituals can spread the risk of backlash among participants or dump all of it into a sacrifice—it depends on how the casters construct the ritual and space.

Rituals

Rituals tend to be used for big magic, tearing through the fabric of reality to another dimension, traveling through time, summoning the Old Ones, raising the dead, and so on. They take hours, days, sometimes weeks to perform.

Though rituals have impressive effects, they are safer than spells by far. During a ritual, one participant must be the leader, who rolls the dice, but each other participant with Lore of Average (+1) or better adds a +1 bonus to the leader's roll. Use of multiple participants reduces the likelihood of catastrophic failure as each person checks the work, so to speak, and the risk of corruption is spread among them, lessening it considerably.

If a living human sacrifice is used in the ritual, the risk drops even further as the corruption is shunted into the sacrifice. Murdering the sacrifice isn't just some gore fetish on the part of cultists, it has a practical application. If the sacrifice becomes completely corrupted, there's a very good chance it will end up killing all the participants.

If a sacrifice is used, there is no backlash against those casting the spell. If there is no sacrifice, each participant in the ritual rolls to defend against backlash, but the difficulty is decreased by one step per participant. With enough people, the risk of backlash is effectively zero. Regardless, each participant in the ritual must mark corruption simply for taking part.

EXAMPLE RITUALS

GAZE INTO THE FUTURE

An invaluable ritual for those who meddle in time. You call upon Yog-Sothoth to tear open a hole in time, allowing you to glimpse changes that your actions have made to the unfolding of fate. The only tome containing the appropriate invocations was once held at Miskatonic University, but has been missing for decades.

Time to Perform: One day

Opposition: Legendary (+8)

Effect: Choose one of the events remaining in the timeline. The GM will present you with a vision of one of that event's catalysts that has been altered because of ripples in the time stream. The vision may be confusing, but it is always true and accurate.

RAISE THE DEAD

To eternal beings, death is an inconvenience. This ritual, scrawled onto the base of a truly hideous stone statue in the possession of a profane cult in the southern US, calls upon forces of chaos to imbue a corpse with life. The target is returned to life, seemingly healed of all their wounds, but not unchanged by the experience.

Time to Perform: One week of constant effort, undertaken in shifts

Opposition: Beyond Legendary (+10)

Effect: A corpse comes back to life. The wounds that killed it, and any decay it's experienced since death, are healed in the process—all of its physical consequences are cleared. However, the now-living target must corrupt one of their aspects, and will also face the backlash of the ritual as if they were a participant.

ELDRITCH HALL

Space is distressingly malleable. This ritual allows two distant locations to be connected by a strange doorway, allowing anyone to travel hundreds of kilometers in a few seconds. Copies of *The Book of Opening* containing the ritual can be found in the private libraries of the wealthiest book collectors in the world.

Time to Perform: Three days of effort, twice—first where you want one side of the door to be, then the other (the ritual still only requires one roll)

Opposition: Legendary (+8)

Effect: A plain wood door manifests on a wall or other vertical surface in both areas where the ritual was cast. These two doors are connected by a hallway that is ten feet long, regardless of the actual distance between the two locations. The door has a knob but no lock, though it can be barricaded. If something breaks either one of the doors, the hallway and the other door immediately disappear; what happens to anything or anyone caught in the hallway at that time is unknown.



Spells

Spells—with their short casting time and ability to be roughly approximated through rote memorization—tend to be used for more personal magic. Since most humans aren't adept at picturing n -dimensional spaces and simulating subatomic particle decay paths in their head, results tend to be messy.

The chance of corruption is much higher with spells than with rituals. Instead of spreading the risk among multiple participants, everything is placed onto a single practitioner. Failures are more likely and can have far more disastrous effects.

This is one of the many reasons soldiers in the field have such a short life expectancy. In the heat of a battle, no one has time to perform an hours-long ritual. Mistakes are easy to make, and magical friendly fire can mean transforming yourself or your squadmates into shambling horrors.



EXAMPLE SPELLS

KNOCK

This spell was painstakingly reconstructed from the burned remains of a failed Antarctic expedition. Its original purpose and name are lost, but its effects are clear: it annihilates matter. It was last seen used by a group of mercenaries in Eastern Europe, who used it to break into and out of an otherwise secure military prison.

Opposition: Superb (+5)

Effect: The caster must intone the spell while holding their right hand firmly against solid matter. Upon completion, the matter will begin to dissolve in a cylindrical hole, just over two feet in diameter, centered on the caster's hand, and about three feet deep. The dissolving process takes about a minute.

FREEZE

As should be obvious by now, time is not perfectly linear and constant. If people can travel through time, they may also become trapped by it. This spell, etched onto a silver amulet of uncertain provenance, was last seen in possession of an assassin who used it to evade the bodyguard of her target, a minor Egyptian politician.

Active Opposition: The target's Will

Effect: The target of this spell is immune to the passage of time for about a minute and a half. During this time, they have no awareness of their surroundings and cannot be moved or injured in any way. Upon returning to the flow of time, the target is invariably unsettled but does not know they have been frozen.

ARCANE EMPOWERMENT

There are parallel dimensions to our own reality, filled with the same chaotic energies that empower the Great Old Ones and their servants. This spell, distributed in cyphered form on paranoid little corners of the dark web, allows a person to tap into some of that power.

Opposition: Great (+4)

Effect: This spell can be cast on any inanimate object. When cast, the object will glow bright blue for a few minutes. During that time, the object is particularly effective against eldritch creatures. It is a magic weapon, which will damage anything that is otherwise resistant to mundane weapons, and it cannot be stopped by magic shielding.

CORRUPTION



The power of the Great Old Ones can change things. The air, the water, the very fabric of reality. They warp the world into something more to their liking, and in the process warp humanity as well.

Though billions died in the first few days of their arrival, millions were left changed, warped into shadows of humanity, their minds destroyed, their bodies twisted. Nightmare horrors with mouths where eyes should be, fungal stalks where there once were arms, flesh that now flows like black tar. Many of the terrors that now walk the Earth used to be human.

The survivors call it CORRUPTION.

Some even let themselves be corrupted voluntarily, learning the mind-altering language of the Great Old Ones in order to perform feats of seeming magic. Language is the key to great power, but it is also the pathway to corruption. As eldritch practitioners learn to speak the tongue of the Great Old Ones, they begin to think as the Great Old Ones do. Their thoughts slowly align with those of beings from outside our reality. These are dark, twisted, inhuman thoughts no person was ever meant to conceive.

Old One-enhanced augmentations are hardly safer. These pieces of implantable technology are not entirely unlike modern-day prostheses or sensory enhancements, but make use of alien technology. Augmentations are chosen for their utility; users know more or less what power they are getting when they go under the knife. But corruption is still corruption, and even the most benign augmentation will, in time, change its host in unpredictable ways. The predominant thinking is that the benefits outweigh the risks, particularly for front-line soldiers who need every advantage they can get.

Not everyone in the future suffers from corruption, and those who do don't necessarily show signs of it. But unless watched carefully, corruption can grow and fester until the victim finally succumbs, turning into something that can't even be called human, not anymore.

Manifestations of Corruption

Just as there are many causes of corruption, its manifestation is varied. Corruption typically starts small, some minor change that may go unnoticed to anyone but the victim, and is almost always of some benefit. Sharper vision, greater agility, unusual strength.

As the condition progresses, it becomes more and more visible. Though the victim's abilities are enhanced to superhuman levels, they also begin to take on characteristics of the Old One and their spawn. Bones shift, skin changes texture, teeth sharpen, gills appear, limbs might become more like tentacles, and so on.

There are mental changes too. Victims become more emotionally volatile, pushing away friends and family. As the condition progresses, they become less able to perform higher-order thinking. Motivations shift, language skills suffer. This is particularly rampant among those who study the language of the Great Old One—the words and gestures that create seemingly magical effects. Simply speaking a spell is dangerous, but to *learn* a spell, to perform it by rote with a modicum of reliability, can only be done by allowing the words of the spell to corrupt one's very psyche.

CORRUPTION IS NOT INSANITY

In *Fate of Cthulhu*, we're moving away from representing the effects of exposure to the Great Old Ones and their ilk as "insanity" or some other form of mental illness by default. We've chosen instead to call the effect **CORRUPTION** and propose a wide variety of ways that such an effect could manifest in characters. **You're never obligated, as a player or GM, to portray a character with corrupted aspects as being mentally ill, "going crazy," or any such thing.**

However, we do recognize that Lovecraftian fiction and games have included the suffering of mental trauma as a cost of engaging the mythos. If you want to express a character's corruption as the development of mental trauma or illness, we recognize that as a valid choice consistent with the genre. That said, we're sensitive to the fact that roleplaying games don't have a great track record for representing mental illness well, or for treating people who have mental illnesses with respect. We hope you're sensitive to this too, and we offer the following advice if you want to make this a part of your game without, quite frankly, being an asshole about it.

DON'T DIAGNOSE

One of the best ways to avoid falling into harmful tropes is to describe how your character's behaviors and responses change, but avoid the temptation to diagnose them with some kind of mental illness.

A corrupted character might become very ego-driven and go to extremes to protect their self-image, but that doesn't mean they are a narcissist in the clinical sense. They might start triple-checking their survival gear at random intervals instead of concentrating on the world around them, but that doesn't mean they have OCD. If you start with the diagnosis, you're a lot more likely to guide the character into over-the-top, simplified stereotypes based on what you think that diagnosis means.

Likewise, don't use diagnostic names as shorthand in corrupted aspects. Something like **EVERYONE'S OUT TO GET ME** is much more accessible and respectful than **PARANOID SCHIZOPHRENIC**.

DON'T PUNISH

The purpose of corruption is to demonstrate how people change when they're exposed to cosmic, world-altering horrors. It's not a form of "damage" that makes a character less viable or less of a protagonist. (It's more of a resource that, when spent by the player, pushes the character towards transformation. The next section covers this.)

Never feel obligated to force a character to act cartoonishly out-of-sync with the rest of their aspects because they are corrupted, and as a GM, don't constantly demand compels of a character who doesn't act out their corrupted aspect in an extreme manner.

Aspects are a way to help you put things in the spotlight, but *you* decide how often they're relevant. If one character's corrupted aspect threatens to put them in too many situations where they can't be effective or will end up being the butt of a joke, back off or revise that aspect into something that won't be as disruptive.

DON'T MAKE IT EXOTIC

Trauma, both mental and physical, is a *normal* outcome of engaging in stressful, dangerous activity. Avoid the temptation to single a character out as being unique if they end up with a mental or physical health issue as a result of corruption. It would be much weirder if they confronted the mythos and came out unscathed, right? Look at their traumas like you look at any other trait in the game—represent and describe them if they're relevant, and don't worry about them if they aren't.

Corruption Clock


Every character has a **CORRUPTION CLOCK** with four quarters, which are filled in as you feel the effects of corruption. When you're prompted to **MARK CORRUPTION**, fill in one space of your corruption clock to show that you are becoming more like the Great Old One. Characters who are already corrupted will grow more so as they lean on their uncanny abilities. Even characters who have not yet been infected by the Great Old Ones can mark corruption as the price of using Great Old One technology, performing spells and rituals, or facing off against particularly eldritch creatures. Marking corruption may also be the cost of success at a cost (pages 22-23) if a character is up close and personal with incomprehensible creatures or in a place beyond imagination. The most common reasons you'll mark corruption are:

- ▼ Using a corruption stunt
- ▼ Casting a spell
- ▼ As the cost of success for using Old One technology
- ▼ As part of an eldritch horror's attack against you

The corruption clock doesn't clear out easily, either—there are only two ways to do so:

- ▼ Clear one corruption space at the end of a session in which you filled no corruption spaces.
- ▼ Clear all of your corruption spaces when you corrupt an aspect.

Ruth has come into possession of some Great Old One technology: a spell that invokes the name of Yog-Sothoth to open a portal in a blank stretch of wall. She needs to break into a secure compound, and she needs to get in now, so she casts it. This requires her to beat Fantastic (+6) opposition.

To begin, she marks corruption—the price of even attempting the spell. Between her Average (+1) Lore, a lucky die roll, and invoking a few aspects in her favor, Ruth manages an Epic (+7) effort, but her work is not over. The wall opens like a door, but her brief communion with Yog-Sothoth is assaulting Ruth's mind with visions of impossible vistas. She must defend against Epic (+7) backlash. Her Will is only Mediocre (+0) and her roll is unimpressive——for an effort of Terrible (-2). That's nine mental shifts to absorb! Her three mental stress boxes can only take her down to six shifts, so she must take consequences or get corrupted. Ultimately, she chooses the former: she takes a severe consequence, **DISTRACTING VISIONS OF IMPOSSIBLE VISTAS**, which will haunt her for some time.

Cassandra has tracked down a valuable ritual which allows the casters to pinpoint the current location of any single person on Earth; this will allow them to track down the current whereabouts of the mysterious Alice Westforth.

Because this is a ritual, it has an extended casting time—in this case, nearly six hours of constant effort—and Legendary (+8) difficulty. The team clears their schedules, and everyone marks corruption. Cassandra has the best Lore, at Good (+3), so she takes the lead. Charles and Ruth have Lore at Fair (+2) and Average (+1), respectively, so they each contribute +1 to Cassandra's roll. Ethan's Lore is Mediocre (+0), so he doesn't provide a bonus, but he's still there to help!

Cassandra rolls **■+++**. That, plus her Good (+3) Lore and the +2 from Charles and Ruth, takes her effort to Epic (+7). Fortunately, she can invoke her **FORMER MEMBER OF THE CHILDREN OF AZATHOTH** aspect for another +2. As a former cultist, she's done this kind of thing before.

The ritual works, and the team is granted a vision of Westforth in a cheap hotel in Krasnoyarsk, Russia. What's she doing there?

But before they can follow up, the team must deal with the backlash. The group's effort was Beyond Legendary (+9), but the pain is spread out over four people—Ethan might not have contributed to the casting, but his presence still helps in this way. Because Cassandra had three people assisting her, the backlash is reduced by three steps, to Fantastic (+6).

Each character defends with Will against the onslaught. Most of them end up taking a consequence, but because they worked together, nobody gets taken out and corrupted.



FILLING YOUR CORRUPTION CLOCK

If you ever fill your corruption clock, you fall deeper into the Old Ones' clutches—you must immediately rewrite an aspect into a corrupted aspect, then you clear your corruption clock. At your next minor milestone—or if you get a moment of downtime during the session—fill out the corresponding corruption stunt.

Ethan has pushed himself too far. He already had three corruption spaces filled when he had the misfortune to run into one of the Great Old One's corrupted thralls: human servitors who've become so twisted that they can forcibly corrupt those around them. The thrall has a stunt which, if it succeeds with style on an attack, forces the defender to mark corruption. Sure enough, it succeeds with style, and Ethan fills his last corruption space.

Immediately, Ethan clears all of his corruption spaces and chooses one of his aspects to corrupt. Because this is his first time being corrupted, he must choose to corrupt a free aspect: I SEE THE BEST IN EVERYBODY. He and the GM take a moment to discuss just how his corruption is manifesting. He opts to keep it simple: his hand has mutated, growing thinner and longer, with sharp talons like a ghoul. He rewrites his aspect into the corrupted aspect GHOULISH CLAWS.

At the next minor milestone, Ethan and the GM can figure out just what stunt he gets from his fresh corruption. For now, though, Ethan's still fighting a corrupted thrall.... Perhaps his shiny new claws will give him the upper hand.



Corrupted Aspects

Corrupted aspects are aspects that have been rewritten because the character has fallen under the power of a Great Old One. Because of the influence of ancient, unknowable powers, these aspects are more easily compelled than invoked.

When writing a corrupted aspect, be sure that it reflects the dark, sinister powers that granted it. Spend some time discussing with the GM what the benefits and downsides of that corruption will be. The supernatural influence of the corrupted aspect gives your character a passive benefit, which is true whether you invoke it or not, and new circumstances under which it can be compelled. This aspect marks your character as otherworldly, giving you some broad permission to leverage that aspect, so go for broke when you're coming up with them.

Ruth has ALIEN MUSCLE GRAFTS that give her superhuman strength, meaning she will always win straightforward contests of strength with any normal human. It will also allow her to do things a normal human could not, such as break down a brick wall with bare hands or lift a motorcycle over her head. However, this corrupted aspect can also be compelled in situations where too much strength is a problem, as well as in any other situation where visibly monstrous limbs would cause trouble for her.

The first aspect to be corrupted is any free aspect. The last aspect to be corrupted is the high concept.

Once an aspect has been corrupted, it can't be redeemed through normal means. Corruption is permanent—unless one of your fellows makes the ultimate sacrifice (page 47) to save you from the Great Old Ones.

If all of your character's aspects are corrupted, you can still play them, but they will be dangerous and deeply unsettling to work with. However, if their corruption clock fills but they have no more aspects to corrupt, they lose their last shred of humanity. They are no longer playable, having transformed into a shambling monster or mindless servant of the Great Old One—a very dangerous NPC.

Corruption Stunts

Tapping into the power of the Elder Gods lets you do incredible things beyond human capacity. This can manifest as physical abilities, powerful attacks, and access to weird science from out of space and time.

Corruption stunts do not cost refresh and cannot be purchased with refresh. The only way to get a corruption stunt is to corrupt an aspect. At creation, a character starts with one corruption stunt per corrupted aspect they have. If a character corrupts an aspect during play, they gain a corruption stunt at the next minor milestone.

Corruption stunts work like normal stunts, but are roughly twice as powerful—when only granting a skill bonus, they give a +4 rather than a +2, and those that create rules exceptions *also* grant a +2 bonus. And of course, the nature of the stunt must be justified by the aspect that created it—having eyes that glow an eerie violet light is unlikely to give you +4 to Athletics, for instance.

The cost is this: using a corruption stunt makes you mark corruption. That's the downside of tapping into eldritch power—you risk becoming that which you fight against. Particularly potent corruption stunts may also require you to pay a fate point or take a hit. Keep these in mind as you work out your corruption stunt with your GM.

Cassandra is sneaking through a dusty warehouse at night. The room is completely dark; any of her allies would need to bring a light source to make it anywhere in the facility, or otherwise roll Notice against particularly high opposition to stumble forward in the dark without getting lost or hurt.

Cassandra, the former cultist, however, can move freely. During creation, her player and the GM decided that her corrupted aspect lets her see perfectly well regardless of lighting. Cassandra has the corrupted aspect I SEE THE DARK FLAMES.... She can see embers of black fire leaking in from a tangent plane of reality. The darkness is lit up with fire only Cassandra can see.

Unfortunately, the door she needs to get to is in the light and protected by a security guard. He hasn't noticed her yet, but she can't get close without him seeing her. Cassandra decides it's worth it to use her corruption stunt: in addition to seeing dark fire, she can weaponize it. By marking corruption, Cassandra can throw a fireball using Shoot with a +4 bonus. Cassandra's Shoot is only Mediocre (+0), but between a die roll of **■●⊕⊕** and her corruption stunt, her effort is Fantastic (+6). It proves enough to take out the guard in one blow, and all Cassandra needed to do was sacrifice a tiny portion of her very being to an unknowable force of chaos.

Examples of Corrupted Aspects and Corruption Stunts

AUGMENTED WINGS

You've had a pair of leathery wings from an alien creature surgically attached to your shoulder blades. By all earthly science, they should not work. But of course, they do.

Aspect: **GRAFTED-ON BYAKHEE WINGS.** Though they're too small to actually allow you to fly, your wings let you leap higher and farther than any human and then descend slowly rather than falling. However, there's no way to hide your augmentation; the wings must be spread to function.

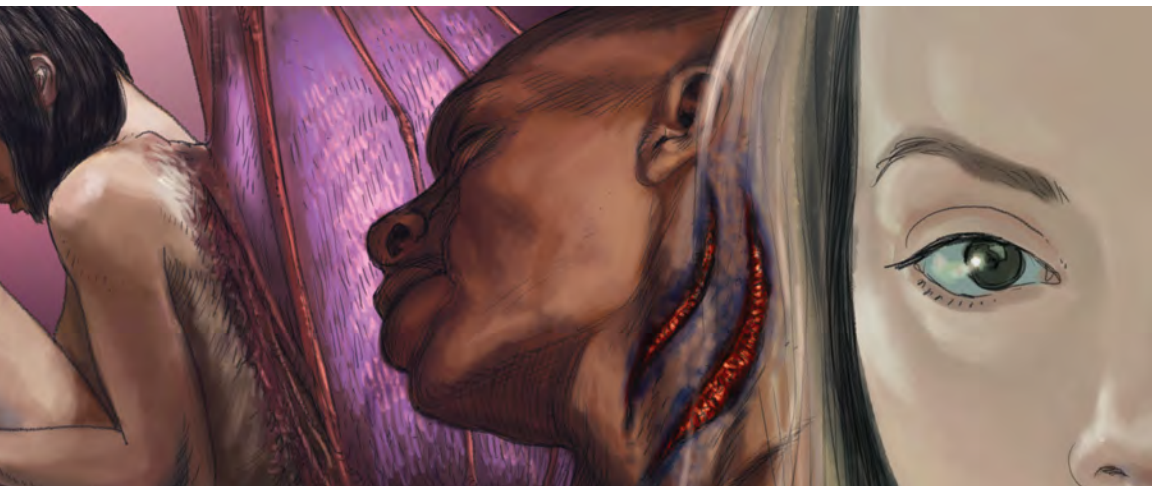
Flight of the Bumblebee (Corruption): It's physically impossible for these wings to grant you flight. But of course, they can. You can mark corruption to unfurl your wings to their fullest extent, allowing you a moment of actual flight and +2 to Athletics if you perform a feat of aerial maneuvering.

DESCENDANT OF DAGON

Your family tree stretches back to a quaint coastal fishing village by the name of Innsmouth, Massachusetts. That ancestry is beginning to make itself known.

Aspect: **THE INNSMOUTH LOOK.** You are made for the water, and can swim faster, longer, and more gracefully than a human without your particular ancestry. You also have a froggy, fishy appearance that is undeniably off-putting.

Gift of Father Dagon (Corruption): Your body is adapting to life beneath the crushing pressure of the sea. You can mark corruption to gain a +4 bonus to Physique when performing feats of raw strength.



FAVORED OF YOG-SOTHOTH

You have dedicated your life to studying the great Yog-Sothoth. While others who do so become mutated by the experience, the lurker at the threshold has instead turned its baleful eye upon you and granted you a boon.

Aspect: THE KEY TO ALL GATES. Yog-Sothoth's blessing undoes locks around you. Literally, any door or box in your presence is unlocked, unless physically barricaded or protected by magic. Which is all well and good if you're trying to get in, and not trying to keep something out.

Reality Step (Corruption): By uttering a brief prayer to Yog-Sothoth, you can perform the Whateley Maneuver—you shift into a tangent thread of reality where you cannot be seen. You can mark corruption to gain +4 to Stealth when temporary invisibility works to your benefit.

HOUND'S EYE

The Hounds have a natural ability to see what has been displaced in time. They use it to hunt time travelers; you can use it for your own ends.

Aspect: EYE OF TINDALOS. One of your eyes is a pure black orb pulled from a dead Hound. With it, anything that has itself traveled through time appears to glow, and people or items that have been affected by time travel have an obvious aura as well. Unfortunately, being a time traveler yourself, you're susceptible to being distracted by your own temporal-displacement aura.

Fourth-Dimensional Vision (Corruption): Your eye catches on the angles of time, allowing you to see changes just before they happen. You can mark corruption to defend with Notice, with a +2 bonus, against any form of backlash.



RE-ANIMATED

You are dead. Fortunately, somebody thought you were a valuable enough resource that they injected you with West's Revitalizing Agent, returning your body to a grim semblance of life.

Aspect: ANIMATED CORPSE. You're not alive, but you're still moving. Practically, this makes you immune to death: you can't starve or suffocate, and while physical injuries can certainly take you out, nothing short of complete disintegration will kill you. That said, while your body functions, you are slower and clumsier than someone whose nervous system never needed to reboot.

Oobleck Blood (Corruption): The chemical cocktail that's replaced your blood has made your body impossibly resilient. You can mark corruption to defend with Physique, with a +2 bonus, against a physical attack.

YITHIAN PASSENGER

There is a voice in your head. It claims to be an alien, exploring the universe by projecting itself into creatures across space and time. It gives you advice. Do you listen?

Aspect: CURIOUS ALIEN CO-PILOT. The Yithian in your head has an infectious enthusiasm for learning...or maybe it's overriding important parts of your brain. Regardless, you are immune to attacks and attempts to create an advantage done by causing fear. However, the Yithian can execute subtle control, and doesn't much care if the body it's in dies, so you may find yourself approaching an eldritch monster in a full-tilt sprint rather than, you know, stealthily through the shadows.

Impossible Knowledge (Corruption): The Yithian has studied in the Great Library of Pnakotus and is willing to share its foul knowledge, if you ask. You may mark corruption and roll with Lore, with a +2 bonus, to discover an aspect of eldritch entities, even if it's impossible for you to have ever encountered them before.

MINIONS OF THE OLD ONES

Though the Old Ones have not walked the Earth in thousands upon thousands of years, some of their minions are still on Earth, hiding, waiting for the right moment to reveal themselves. Minions can take many forms, from human cultists to eldritch monsters to physical avatars of the Great Old One itself.

You can build these minions using the rules for building NPCs from *Fate Core* (page 213) or the *Fate Adversary Toolkit*. Additionally, some common creatures are listed here, and some minions unique to specific Great Old Ones are provided in their timelines.



The Corrupted

Most corrupted humans prior to the arrival of the Old Ones are the products of cults, where they have been exposed to the Old Ones' mathematical rituals too many times, or are the results of mingling between humans and an Old One's horrifying spawn.

Many of the Corrupted show no outward signs and in fact may not even be aware of their state. They may even be able to operate in human society, with no one the wiser.

But others are so extremely tainted that they are kept in hiding. Stories abound of nightmare creatures that stalk the wilderness, or urban legends like those in Dunwich, Massachusetts, of a family so inbred that they can barely be called human.

Some of the Corrupted that the heroes encounter will undoubtedly have been sent to the past by the Old Ones to thwart them. Whether showing obvious signs or not, the Corrupted will likely be their most common adversaries.

The Hounds

The Hounds were first encountered during time-travel tests in 2034 when a prototype device was powered up. Instead of sending the test subject through time, half a dozen of these creatures appeared in the test chamber, killed all of the test personnel, destroyed the time-travel device, and then disappeared again. The only evidence remaining of their attack is distorted surveillance footage from the test.

About the size of horses, the Hounds are thick, muscled creatures with spikes all along their hides that drip a glowing blue goo. Studies of the images by biologists indicate that the musculature makes no sense for the way the Hounds move, which is a sort of undulating stutter. Their limbs appear to be in a constant state of movement, vibrating while moving less like legs and more like tentacles. Their heads have a long, tapered snout that splits into a mouth made of four-piece sections studded with long, needle-like teeth. Inside the mouth is something between a tongue and a chainsaw, a tentacle studded with more needle-like teeth, all vibrating at blinding speed.

Since that initial attack the Hounds have appeared a total of five documented times at various sites engaged in time-travel research. There have been no survivors.

One theory is that the Hounds are able to travel through time themselves and are drawn to the energy given off by the time-travel devices. Whether this is true or not has not been proven.

THE CORRUPTED

ASPECTS

MINDLESS MINION OF THE OLD ONES

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Tracking Humans (use as Notice when hunting for humans)

Average (+1): Call for Backup (psychically calls for assistance from any nearby Corrupted), Fight

STUNTS

Horrifying Mutation: The Corrupted are easy to underestimate, as they often appear weakened or hampered by their corruption. But occasionally, their twisted forms belie incredible power. By paying a fate point, the Corrupted can suddenly reveal (or develop) a potent mutation, and get +4 to Fight when attacking or defending against humans until the end of the scene.

Corrupting Influence: If the Corrupted succeeds with style on an attack, the defender must mark corruption. Once a character fills a corruption space in this manner, they become immune to this stunt from any Corrupted until the end of the scene.

STRESS [1]

THE HOUNDS

ASPECTS

INTERDIMENSIONAL, TIME-TRAVELING NIGHTMARE

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight

Fair (+2): Stealth

Average (+1): Athletics, Physique

STUNTS

Chainsaw Tongue Spear: After a successful attack, the Hounds can pay a fate point to poison the defender, reducing their Fight rating by two steps until the end of the scene and dealing an extra physical shift.

STRESS [1][1][1][1]

CONSEQUENCES

[2] Mild:

Organizations

Eldritch creatures can be terrifying antagonists, but they are rarely subtle. In some ways, organizations composed entirely of modern-day humans are more dangerous: they operate in secret, pursuing their own ends, often in ways that advance the agenda of the Great Old One. Meddling in occult business is sure to draw their attention, which means organizations are likely to crop up when making changes to the timeline—an organization makes an easy recurring foe.

But organizations don't always have to be antagonists. Characters who have allied themselves with an organization may see a friendly person as they tackle the next event on their timeline. But no matter how helpful they might be, can they ever truly be trusted?

Players are unlikely to make permanent relationships with these organizations—secret societies are not in the habit of hiring strange time travelers—but they are a useful tool to put a human face on events. They can also drive action, as they often have access to strange knowledge and Old One technology. Time travelers might not be able to say *what* an organization knew, but they know that these organizations existed. And that can be a useful starting point.

THE FARM

The Farm is the independent intelligence arm of International Order, a military contractor that supplies arms, personnel, and support staff to a variety of governments throughout the world. They work alongside the intelligence organizations of the United States and its allies and are no strangers to the NSA, the CIA, or MI-6. They have several resources at their disposal and can either be a powerful ally or a terrible enemy.

As a patron, the Farm can supply material and intelligence to the PCs. But they'll want something in return. Nothing big. Maybe just a blood sample. Something they can study, pull a genome from. You'll never miss it.

As an antagonist, they are everywhere and they seem to know everything. If you've been targeted, you've got your work cut out for you. But then, after you've fought some of the most terrifying creatures ever to walk the Earth in a blasted wasteland, they don't really seem that bad.

THE WATCHERS OF GOD

The Watchers of God are a religious cult principally known for their prepper mentality. Strongest in rural areas where they leverage various anti-government militia movements, the Watchers believe that the Apocalypse is coming, and they will be ready for it.

Being ready in this case means well-supplied bunkers, a heavily armed militia, and a willingness to murder “Satan’s spawn”—those who they believe are a danger to the future.

As a patron, they may see the PCs as the world’s best hope for keeping Satan from consuming the Earth. They operate best in the shadows, and the matériel they can supply is haphazard, improvised, and usually low-tech.

As an antagonist, take a guess what they might think of a corrupted soldier from the future with Old One tech cyber-eyes. They may not have a lot of resources, but they use what’s at their disposal ruthlessly and to great effect.

ORDER OF THE UNSEEN HAND

The Order of the Unseen Hand is a secretive cult that is looking to bring about the End Times. They have roots going back over six hundred years, and they have wormed their way into the halls of power across the globe.

Using a combination of influence, blackmail, and intimidation, the Order has managed to stockpile a massive amount of power and resources. With more than half a millennium to hone their craft, they are unparalleled in the arts of subterfuge and deception.

As a patron, well, they would likely only come to that if they’re manipulating the heroes into thinking they are getting assistance from another organization, a tactic which has worked for them surprisingly well.

As an antagonist, they are formidable. With agents across the globe and resources that only governments could hope to pull together, they often strike from the shadows. Their enemies may find themselves being hunted for crimes they did not commit, the victims of accidents and stunning bad luck. If they have any loved ones, rest assured that the Order will target them.

SO YOU'RE TRAVELING BACK IN TIME

RECONSTRUCTED FROM WHAT WE REMEMBER OF OUR TRAINING BRIEFING BEFORE WE GOT KNOCKED BACK TO THE "PRESENT" DAY. NOT THAT IT'LL HELP YOU NOW.

Welcome, time traveler! Hail and well met. Thank you for your sacrifice on what is no doubt a suicide mission to save humanity from these dark times.

By now you've seen the horrors unleashed by eldritch monstrosities, reducing our world to a nightmarish wasteland where humans are a dying breed. A world in which corruption strips us of humanity in an attempt to enlist us, mindless and monstrous, over to the side of evil.

And that's why you're here.

With a combination of human ingenuity and advanced sciences—and by tapping into the arcane energies of a being called Yog-Sothoth that exists in all times and all dimensions, and might be the most terrifying thing we've ever dealt with as a species—we've perfected time travel.

The apocalypse we live in now might very well be prevented if you can break the chain of causality that led to this horrifying end. Our scientists and historians have determined that there are four major events in the past that if disrupted, changed, or stopped altogether will change the course of human history. You might even keep the Apocalypse from happening at all!

Perhaps you will be called on to destroy a scientist's work, make sure technology gets into the right hands, murder an entire group of people who you've never met but will accidentally or on purpose speed us along the route to disaster. Morally questionable though some of these tasks may be, remember, you're saving the future. A little murder today can stop a lot of murder tomorrow.



Time Travel

Traveling back in time taps you into the mind of Yog-Sothoth itself. And that leaves a scar, Corruption, of which we'll talk more later. Why back in time? Why not to the distant future after all the dust has settled and we can begin anew?

Well, there's no guarantee the future is safer than the present. Also, traveling to the future splits the traveler into pieces to experience all the possible permutations and timelines, and then stitches the traveler back together at the end of it. What comes out is messy, and the less said about that, the better.

Going into the past is far safer. Any changes you make in the past will affect the future, possibly even preventing some important events in your life. That's okay. Your subjective past does not change, even though you've essentially annihilated your old timeline in favor of the new one. Thank you for killing us all in a bright flash of arcane physics so that we may live again in a world that knows no such horrors.

You'll be put into a chair in a shielded chamber, and rapid chants in the language of the Great Old Ones will be pumped in through loudspeakers, enacting a ritual to connect you to Yog-Sothoth and send you back in time.

You will be naked when you get there. Sorry, but there's just no way around that. Anything that isn't a living organism, or fused into such that it's simply part of the organism, won't go through. So don't worry about that hip replacement you got when we had real doctors. It's part of you now. It'll go over just fine.

Other than that, you're just gosh darn naked. No guns. No knives. No clothes. No money. No identification. You get the idea. Swallowing items or inserting them into other orifices is not recommended. They don't go across and you'll be left with a burning itch that won't go away for weeks. And you can't bring a trusted hunting dog or comforting bunny friend with you either; a human with training, willpower, and luck will merely be scarred by the process, but an animal will be inevitably twisted into a corrupted monstrosity that you won't want to fight. Especially while you're still naked.

Now what?

THE PRACTICAL PROBLEM OF NOTHING TO WEAR

The first thing you will need to do upon arriving is check yourself. Did all of your pieces come across with you? Missing arms? Legs? Also check for new things. One side effect of time travel is that you will gain a little bit of Corruption. A tiny bit. Nothing to worry about. But in our time we all have a little bit of Corruption already, so adding more might just tip you over the edge.

Look for new appendages, tentacles, claws, mental powers, the complete loss of your entire personality in favor of a horrifying and mindless beast that wants to do nothing but kill.

Check your comrades, as well. Did they all make it through? Do they need medical attention due to missing limbs? Do they need to be put down because they've tipped over into madness and mutated into a once-human horror?

Once you've assessed yourself and your team, assess your surroundings. Depending on where you are, the next few minutes could make or break you. Are you on a street corner? In the ocean? In snow? Each situation calls for a different tactic, but the basics are the same: get safe, get shelter, get dressed.

Once you've got that handled, it's time to turn to the problem of identification, money, and resources. We suggest theft. Roll somebody for their wallet and clothes. If they have cash, fantastic. If they have ID that looks a little like you, even better. The best is finding credit cards with low balances on them, but you'll need to use those fast.

Don't forget family. They might have all been turned into nightmare creatures that roam the wasteland in great agony, but in this timeline they're still around, oblivious to the horrors that await them. Consider stealing from them as well.

And if your family is alive, so are you. If your younger self is old enough in this timeline to be useful, steal their identity if you can. After all, it's your identity too. Or, if you think it will work, enroll them to our cause. But be careful. The wheels of fate are already turning, and if the enemy gets wind of your mission, that could be disastrous.

Some of the events you must affect are built upon worldwide conspiracies, so you might need to travel to far-flung destinations. And that means passports and visas—which ain't easy. You're new in this time, arrived naked, and literally have no history to use to your advantage. Find some identity thieves and get a fake ID for the present. Oh, and you'll need to get some money somehow to pay for it all.

Cultivate allies in the underworld. Good forgers are worth their weight in gold. And they'll likely charge as much too, so amass as much wealth as you can, and quickly.

CORRUPTION

The sad truth is that all of us here in the future are tainted. The Old Ones spread their influence and madness unseen, changing us all. It's in the water we drink, the food we eat, the air we breathe. Over time it might give you new powers and abilities.

But beware! Those are mere stepping stones. Eventually you'll be so riddled with Corruption that you cease being human at all, becoming a mindless servitor of the Great Old Ones. The only way to save you then, sadly, is to kill you.

And just because you're in the past doesn't mean you can't gain Corruption. Merely using powers Corruption has given you, or playing around with Old One technologies, may boost it up.

Corruption is a very real danger. So be on the lookout for it in yourself and others.

WHO CONTROLS THE PAST CONTROLS THE FUTURE

Once you've gotten your bearings, the real work begins. You'll be sent to change current events that will impact the future in wonderful or terrible ways. You'll be given your tasks, but don't get too attached to them.

The only thing we in the future have to go on is history. Some of it documented, some of it not, some of it destroyed or inaccessible. When you're in the thick of it, you may find that what you thought was true is anything but, and you're going to have to improvise and make some hard choices.

But how do you know when you've changed an event? How do you know it helped? Or made things worse? Chances are, you'll see something as the change ripples through the timeline. You might see differences you don't expect in the other events you are trying to change. An election might not turn out the way you remembered, or war may break out in a different part of the world, for example.

We might send someone back to check on you periodically. We won't know if there are changes, but you will, so after they brief you on what the future is like, you should have a good idea of what's happened.

Or, and this is both a blessing and a curse, time might lash out at you. You've disrupted the flow of things, changed the natural order, what is destined to happen. There are safeguards against this. Time might try to kill you.

It's as if time is slapping you in the face with the changes in time that you made, shredding your mind with visions of the future. Because if you hold on to your will and ride out the storm, you'll see what your changes have wrought, for good or ill.

Try to make them good.

The Laws of Time Travel

Humanity has developed a crude understanding of time travel through rough theoretical models, dangerous testing, and terrible sacrifices. The rules that govern time travel are not pleasant, but they are somewhat predictable.

CORRUPTION IS KEY

To hurl oneself back in time involves joining with an ineffable being known as Yog-Sothoth, resulting in corruption of the traveler. Only the traveler's own biological matter or technology embedded within their flesh, survives the trip to the past.

It also means that anyone else who follows the heroes back in time will be corrupted, at least a little bit. They will have *changed*, even if the timeline hasn't shifted yet.

THE FUTURE CANNOT OVERWRITE THE PAST

From the observer's point of view, the future exists only as potential. Subjective time isn't affected by events that haven't happened yet. Even as time moves forward and probabilities collapse into certainty, the past of the observer is unaffected.

In other words: what happened to you *happened to you*. There's no retconning your history.

This can get complicated—especially when deciding which verb tense to use—but the important thing to remember is that your lived experience was real, even if the future is changed and those events don't come to pass.

Eighteen-year-old Corporal Claire Davenport comes back from 2050 to 2020 and accidentally accelerates the Rise of the Great Old One to 2030. Her mother is killed in this new timeline before Claire is born, but since Claire's past is still her past, she doesn't fade from existence.

From Claire's point of view, and the point of view of the multiverse, she is still herself. She may have changed the future, it may not even be recognizable as the future she remembers, but her past is still her past. It's just the past of a future that may no longer—potentially—exist.

Even if Claire lives long enough to see the Old One rise, collapsing this potential future into a certainty, her subjective timeline is still unaffected. Similarly, if she creates a timeline in which the Old One never arrives, and therefore never had to go back in time, her timeline is unchanged.

Now it gets tricky.

Corporal Davenport comes back to 2020 and creates a future wherein she still leaves 2050 and lands in 2020. But in the changed 2050, her target date is several weeks later in 2020. When she arrives, there are now two Corporal Claire Davenports in 2020 existing side by side.

The new event still occurs because the original Claire's subjective timeline is unaffected—nothing has changed for her. She wouldn't even know that her duplicate has arrived until they met.

But the second Corporal Davenport has no knowledge of the original either. Her lived experience is separate and distinct from the other Claire's. They could have led very different lives in the future. It's entirely likely that they have different personalities—and goals.

Assuming that both Davenports are different in some way but had the same arrival time, the second one would arrive later—at the point in time when the timeline was altered. Because Claire Prime arrived alone, the timeline shifts the later Claire's arrival to the point the timelines join.

Time resists paradoxes, which isn't to say they aren't possible but they are damned difficult.

Which reminds us—all of that above? It's a long-winded way of explaining that, no, you can't become your own grandfather. That would be gross.

GOING BACKWARD IS EASIER THAN GOING FORWARD

Thus far, the only time travel that is possible for humans is going into the past.

When traveling backward in time, you have guideposts. You know where everything is. History acts as a tether in this way. Because the past exists—or did, rather—then it can be traversed with some modicum of confidence.

In contrast, going forward in time means you need to land on an infinitesimally small point in an infinitely large, ever-shifting plane. It's a bit like trying to throw a dart to pin a fly to the bullseye while blindfolded on the deck of a ship in the middle of a typhoon. Statistically *possible* but infinitely *improbable*.

Ultimately, what is known about time travel is that no one who has ever been sent forward in time has been observed arriving. While there are dangers associated with traveling backward in time, there are observed success stories, and scientists have managed to bring the success rate of the latest methods up to nearly 40%. Truly a stunning achievement in science.



YOU CAN ONLY GO SO FAR BACK

Thirty years is the furthest back travelers can go with a reasonable chance of arriving in the past—rather than being hurled into the void outside of time and space.

The mechanisms of time travel aren't fully understood by humans. It's entirely possible that they can't be fully understood, as the powers and methods originate from outside of our reality.

The best hypothesis of scientists as to the thirty-year limit is that the variables involved spiral out of control. The simple variables are the ones humanity has the best grasp of—things like time, date, position of the Earth in orbit, the galaxy, and so on. There are more obscure, unknowable variables that humanity doesn't—and cannot—track, such as how many fans were listening on the radio in Sandusky, Ohio, as Babe Ruth called his shot in the '32 World Series. Lastly, some of the pre-eminent science priests of various cults claim that esoteric variables play the biggest part in timeline confidence. These esoteric variables include such nonsense as the strength of humanity's belief in the Great Old Ones, how many people have read *The King In Yellow*, and the collective fear of humanity rated on a scale of one to infinity minus one.

READING A TIMELINE

If you're going to have any hope of fixing the future, you need to understand how time travel works and, more importantly, how a timeline will affect your game.

A timeline is constructed from five events. An **EVENT** is the functional unit of a timeline. Events aren't always discrete moments in time and space. We call them events for the sake of simplicity, because human language doesn't really have the words to describe these points of potentiality within a timestream. An event can be a social movement, a collection of groups loosely organized around a common interest like the /r/LostCarcosa subreddit or the Urban Explorers of Arkham vlog. Other events might be a series of scientific advancements based on poorly understood genetic materials or objects from beyond our reality. Events seem innocuous—or even greatly beneficial—to someone living in the present day, but have hidden consequences that lead to the doom of humanity.

The fifth and final event in a timeline is always “Rise of the Great Old One.” This is the event the heroes are trying to stop, or at least keep from being as absolutely terrible as it was. Will be. Had been? See what we mean about tenses getting weird with time travel?

The other four events are tributaries in the great river of space-time. They feed into “Rise of the Great Old One” and shape it. They're also a kind of road map to the Apocalypse, telling you what needs to change so as to save the future.

While the events are loosely connected, they aren't linear. No event is a prerequisite for any of the others; the machinations of the Great Old One are boundless, and as such it has many discrete plots running simultaneously. As you change your timeline, you'll inevitably draw connections between the events. But resist the urge to line them up like dominos—time just isn't that simple.

Each event is defined by a **TIMELINE ASPECT** and a set of four **CATALYSTS**, which add up to give the event a **RATING**.

Timeline Aspects

A **TIMELINE ASPECT** is more or less the high concept for the event. They are always in play and can be invoked or compelled by any character. Think of timeline aspects like evocative chapter titles—they describe what’s going on in the event and how it corrupts humanity or otherwise leads to the coming of the Great Old One.

Also keep in mind that all of the timeline aspects are in play at all times—just because you’re working on monsters in the New York sewers doesn’t mean a cult operating in Kyoto can’t affect things. Time is wibbly-wobbly and interconnected. The stars may need to align *just right* for another event’s timeline aspect to be a valid invocation, but it’s absolutely available if you have the justification. The usual table rule for calling bullshit (page 19) is in play.

For example, in Cthulhu’s timeline, its “Bytes and Bodies” event has the timeline aspect **GHOULS ARE ON THE PROWL**. Though this aspect is especially relevant while the PCs are focused on that event, the GM can use it throughout the campaign to complicate their missions, perhaps compelling it to have a ghoul leap out from the bushes. Likewise, the players can invoke or compel **GHOULS ARE ON THE PROWL** when it works to their advantage, although such situations will be harder to come by—as one might expect from an aspect literally representing the forces dooming humanity.

Event Catalysts

Each event has four **CATALYSTS**, its pressure points and linchpins. The GM uses them as adventure seeds, story hooks, and guidance for pacing; players use them as fodder for backstory and to help them plan their actions against the malevolent beings from beyond.



Each catalyst is rated with a **+**, **■**, or **—**, representing how bad it is for humanity—ranging from mildly terrible to the worst thing ever.



Sometimes, the PCs’ intel is missing or misleading, represented by catalysts partially enclosed in **square brackets**. GMs, when filling out a timeline sheet for the players, start with just the unbracketed catalysts; the players can update them when they encounter the actual situation.



There are four kinds of catalysts.

A **PERSON** or group of people who are instrumental in the event. A

+ person might be a potential ally trying to fight the forces of the Old One, while a **—** person will be standing against you. Their motivations, whether they are a servitor of the Great Old One or just misguided, doesn’t matter. They are a breaking point in the timeline.

A **PLACE** where bad things happen. When in doubt, this is where the heroes need to go to change the future. A  place will be easily accessed and filled with helpful resources. In contrast, a  place will somehow be hostile to outsiders—a remote location, insular community, or maximum-security lab or government complex.







A **FOE** serving the Great Old One's goals or a horrible, squamous creature from outside of space and time. What makes a foe different from a person is that foes are always antagonistic; they oppose the heroes and actively work to promote the Old One's agenda. This doesn't mean they knowingly serve the Old One—they could be a corporation focused on profits over any potential risks or drawbacks. A  foe may be ineffective, bumbling, or unprepared, while a  foe is particularly driven and deadly.

A **THING** connected to the Great Old One in some fashion—a physical relic, a ritual, or even an image that's become a viral meme. A  thing may be eerie but informative or even useful to the heroes, while a  thing is going to be a nexus of death, destruction, and corruption.



The four catalysts for an event are all named specifically. It's not that you are fighting *a person* it's that you have to stop *Dr. Maria Stafford, Ph.D.* from developing gene therapies based off of Deep One DNA.

Catalysts are malleable, they are the levers by which the heroes change the future. As characters meddle about in the timestream, their actions will change the timeline by altering the catalysts. **When a catalyst is rewritten, the *who*, *what*, or *where* it is gets erased and a new entry written.** This can change the type of catalyst—perhaps Dr. Stafford escaped the heroes and joined a defense contractor to continue her research, changing that catalyst from a person to a foe makes a lot of sense.

The actions of the heroes also cause **ripples** in the timeline—these ripples change the catalysts in the events the heroes haven't explored yet. As such, the timeline changes before the heroes get to those events because of their own actions.

Each catalyst has a **RATING** that is one of the faces of a Fate dice: , , or . The rating tells you how good or bad that catalyst is for humanity. A catalyst rated  is the worst thing that it could be—the deadliest enemy, most inhospitable location, or most powerful artifact of eldritch might. When a catalyst is  it means it's not the worst thing, though it's far from good. All things considered, it's mediocre, moderately effective evil. The best the heroes can hope for is a  catalyst—these are the least potent opponents and occasionally even allies.

Event Rating

Lastly, an event's rating is the sum of the ratings for the four catalysts. The  and  cancel one another out, just like with the dice. Much like a catalyst, the event rating is a guide as to how utterly terrible it is. A Horrifying (-4) rating is the absolute worst that things could be; just utterly hopeless and a complete win for the Great Old One. A Great (+4) rating is pretty much as good as it gets for humanity. That doesn't necessarily mean it's a win for them or that the Old One won't rise, it just means that the future has a decent fighting chance because of their efforts.

The events leading up to the Rise of the Great Old One all begin at Terrible (-2). The primary goal of the time travelers is to raise the rating of Rise of the Great Old One to a point where humanity can survive in a semblance of its natural state. They have their work cut out for them.

The Timeline Track

The players' actions—and the Great Old One's response—cause ripples in the timestream. The heroes hope to prevent the rise of the Great Old One, but at the very least maybe they will make the other events a little easier to deal with.

The **TIMELINE TRACK** is how the GM tracks the effects the heroes are having on the timeline. This is what it looks like:



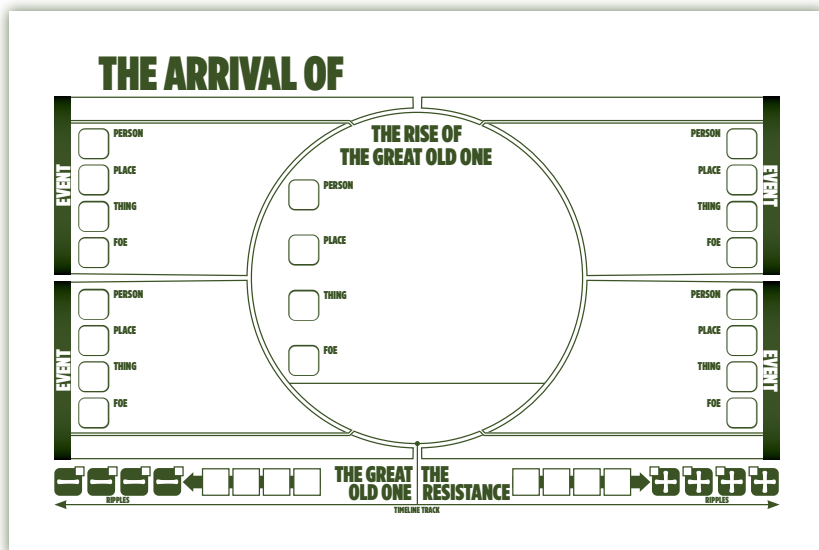
The timeline track consists of eight boxes, four on each side. During play, the GM marks boxes on either side in response to the events at the table. Keep in mind that we are speaking from the perspective of humans when we say “something good” or “something bad” happens.

The left four are for the Great Old One. It represents the status quo, the corruption of heroes, and all the things your heroes are working to change. These boxes get filled in as events go badly.

The right four boxes are for the resistance—that is, the heroes—and represents flux in the timestream, heroic sacrifices, and the best humanity has to offer. These boxes get filled in as good things happen.

Mark a Great Old One box when...

- ▼ A player accepts a compel on a corrupted aspect.
- ▼ A player invokes a corrupted aspect.
- ▼ A player succeeds at a cost, if the GM can justify how the Great Old One would benefit.
- ▼ A player marks corruption for any reason.
- ▼ A minion of the Great Old One achieves a goal.



Check a Resistance box when...

- ▼ A player invokes a timeline aspect and succeeds on a roll.
- ▼ A player foils a Great Old One's minion.
- ▼ The players do something that changes the timeline (basically the end of an adventure).
- ▼ A player makes a heroic last stand.

When all four boxes on either half of the timeline track are filled, mark a matching **+** or **-** **RIPPLE** and clear that half of the track. A ripple is a change in the timeline that is reflected in a future event. Something the heroes did has changed the future. A **+** ripple is generated when the Resistance side of the timeline track is filled. A **-** ripple occurs when the Great Old One side of the timeline track is filled. At the end of the adventure, you will apply the ripples to the timeline by changing **CATALYSTS**.

Each **+** is a positive change to another timeline event. Something the heroes did made the future less bleak for humanity. Each **-** is a negative change to another event. The changes in the present worked to the advantage of the Great Old One.

The group finished their first session with three marks on each side of the timeline track. The second session gets cut short, but the Resistance managed to mark a box on the timeline track all the same, so that side gets reset. After the session, the GM looks at the timeline and decides to apply that **+** ripple to the event "Rise of the Great Old One," bringing it to **- - - -**, a Catastrophic (-3) rating. Sadly, while the efforts of the heroes have made the final outcome of the timeline less severe, it's still looking pretty bad for the future.



THE ARRIVAL OF GREAT CTHULHU

In 2030 an island roughly the size of Tasmania breaches the waves in the Pacific Ocean between Australia and South America in the middle of designated shipping routes. There is no earthquake or tsunami. It rises from the ocean depths without making any visible ripple.

To more sensitive equipment than human eyes, however, the effect is massive. Satellites record a huge localized change in the Earth's gravitational field at that precise spot. The last time a change anywhere near this level was detected was during a magnitude-9.1 earthquake in 2004 that raised several thousand square kilometers in the sea floor. This time the measurements redline.

A handful of ships are caught by the rising island, and several more skirt its shores. One of the grounded ships is the Royal New Zealand Navy's Anzac class frigate, the HMNZS *Te Kaha*. Images from the *Te Kaha* show the island covered in a city of impossible towers and gargantuan structures that twist their way across the island like an Escher lithograph.

The *Te Kaha* transmits a video minutes before contact is lost with the ship showing a swarm of enormous beasts converging. Their rubbery skin is a sickly shade of green, and their heads resemble a giant octopus with a mass of tentacles hanging down from its face beneath a pair of glowing, malevolent eyes. They have stubby wings along their back that shouldn't be able to support their bulk, yet several of them are seen taking to the air.

The audio is choppy but what sounds like chanting can be heard in the background. "*Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn.*" The New Zealand government shares the recording with multiple nations, and within hours the words are identified by Dr. Aditi Chowdhury of Miskatonic Polytechnic as a precursor to Eblaite, an extinct third millennium language from northern Syria, that roughly translates to "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."

The media latches onto the names Cthulhu and—though most newscasters are unable to pronounce it—R'lyeh. There is some confusion at first over which one is the name of the island.

By the next morning the new island has been quarantined and surrounded by ships from seven navies. Research vessels from each country with military escorts converge on the island, but before most of them can make landfall a tremendous shadow steps from deep within the impossible city.

It looks like the abominations that attacked the *Te Kaha* only on a horrifyingly huge scale. Estimated to be well over three hundred meters tall, the sheer immensity of the thing terrifies everyone in the fleets. Those who get a good view of the monster either have heart attacks or aneurysms, dying on the spot, or immediately go catatonic.

It quickly becomes obvious that things are even worse when thousands upon thousands of the smaller versions of this towering nightmare burst from the depths of the city and make toward the shore. Still enormous at well over ten feet tall, they dive into the ocean.

Every ship, submarine, fighter, bomber, and drone opens fire. Missiles pound the city and Cthulhu itself, while fighters attack the creature's spawn swarming into the ocean in droves. Though thousands are killed, more take their place in what appears to be an unending stream. Cthulhu itself appears to be unaffected by the artillery as it lumbers across the city toward the shore.

It's unclear who fires the first warhead, but by the time it strikes its target, every vessel capable has let loose its nuclear arsenal on Cthulhu. Dozens of ships are destroyed, and far more crippled by the sheer megatonnage unleashed.

When the smoke clears, instead of an irradiated crater and millions of tons of burnt calamari, R'lyeh remains untouched, with Cthulhu apparently unaware that anything has even happened. It continues its trek to the ocean undaunted and follows its spawn into the sea.

The remaining ships in the area are quickly overwhelmed by Cthulhu's spawn or dragged under the waves by Cthulhu itself. Satellite imagery



from a few hours after the event shows only a tenth of the ships still afloat, with the remainder well on their way to the bottom.

Besides falling to the weight of sheer numbers, many of the men and women on the front lines simply fall down dead or go into a coma upon seeing Cthulhu or its army. The few autopsies performed on those victims show that their bodies dumped massive amounts of norepinephrine into the lateral nucleus of the amygdala, creating the mother of all fear responses.

Almost everyone who directly sees, hears, or otherwise experiences Cthulhu literally dies of fright. Even recorded or remote imaging of Cthulhu can trigger an episode, with victims exhibiting any number of neurological disorders as their brains attempt to process the mental assault.

But most terrifying are the Corrupted. Those who survive having their minds blasted into jelly come under Cthulhu's sway, following it and its spawn like soldiers following generals. As their numbers grow, other, more visible changes occur. Tentacles grow from their bodies, eyes split into multifaceted insectoid orbs, chitinous armor grows like barnacles across their skin, or their skin sloughs off completely, leaving behind muscle and sinew and wide, staring eyes. Each of the Corrupted is its own unique horror.

Between Cthulhu and its spawn, millions are corrupted within days. Asia and Australia are overrun within a week, and despite the best efforts by the militaries of the world, Europe, Africa, and the Americas follow soon after.

In less than a month, humanity is reduced to scattered enclaves fighting a losing war against this horrifying foe.



What Brought This Upon Us

Historians have identified the following events as being pivotal moments in the timeline, which led the world down the path to freeing Cthulhu from its watery slumber to enslave the Earth.

THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

There is a statue, a grotesquery made of dung and varnish, bone and animal gut, precious stones and pieces of broken mosaics from centuries-old civilizations no one has ever heard of. It is a tentacled, bat-like thing leering over a twisted base that fools the eyes, twisting impossibly in on itself. It is about 30 centimeters tall, and at its widest, measured from wingtip to wingtip, it's about 20 centimeters. Given the materials it appears to be made of, it is surprisingly heavy, clocking in at 18 kilograms.

Historical and occult texts suggest that this is a millennia-old representation of Cthulhu. What makes this one particularly special is that it isn't merely an effigy, but a piece of the Old One itself. According to entries in an obscure occult text titled the *Necronomicon*, a tiny piece of Cthulhu was torn loose thousands of years ago by a Sumerian wizard and trapped in a crude clay amulet, which had been ensorcelled so as to be nearly indestructible. Over time the vessel has been added to, molded and reshaped by those who felt its incredible power.

Its provenance is questionable, as every time it has surfaced it has been slightly different than previously as additions were made. It was supposedly looted from an Ottoman mosque in 1539 by knights from the Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, who sent it on a galley to Spain which never arrived. It turned up again in Sicily in 1713 before being lost again. It resurfaced in 1840, in Greece in 1923, and in San Francisco in 1940, where it languished in a police evidence room for 40 years before disappearing again. Thus far, every known owner of the statue has been murdered for it.

What can it do? Supposedly, it can whisper dark secrets that none should know in ancient languages of a people long gone in a universe blighted and forlorn. It gives plans to bring its holder to the heights of wealth, but keeping from them the fatal flaw that will bring them down. It is the madness that comes from greed. Whether it be power, wealth, or the world itself, it will worm its way into the minds of those who keep it, passing itself along from owner to owner.

And in 2030 it will be part of the rituals to raise the undersea city of impossible angles, R'lyeh, and waken Great Cthulhu. It is not the only thing that can raise R'lyeh; it just happens to be the one on auction.

Lot #250—“Effigy of Unknown God Molded from a Variety of Materials - Sumer, Early Dynastic Period”—will be going up for auction at Plimpton & MacReady’s Auction House in Edinburgh, Scotland, as part of an estate sale from a Scottish collector who recently died.

Sometime between the winning bid by a wealthy Chinese investor and his taking possession of it, the statue disappears. Ten years later, it turns up in the hands of cultists who use it to help waken Cthulhu. As one of the more prominent pieces used to raise R’lyeh, taking it out of play might just lessen the horrors wrought by Cthulhu’s return.

BYTES AND BODIES

In 2020 two rituals supposedly from the occult tome the *Necronomicon* begin spreading across social media. One ritual is said to “open the ways between to bring Glorious Cthulhu home.” No one seems to actually want to try it because it requires several hundred corpses. There is nothing in the ritual about sacrificing people to get them, just that they need to be dead.

The second ritual is supposedly to “gain mastery over the feral flesh-eating beasts from below” in order to “harvest the sweet meat to fuel the return of Glorious Cthulhu.” There appear to be chunks missing from each ritual.

Not long after they hit the Internet, bodies go missing from cemeteries across the world. Noticed at first by local news, then tabloid news, and finally by the mainstream media, these thefts take on a life of their own as urban legends begin to appear in popular culture.

Along with this are a series of murders in various countries across the globe with the same modus operandi. About a half-dozen people are found torn apart, clawed, and half-eaten inside prepared ritual spaces that all bear a striking resemblance to one another.

The rituals are real and were used to speed along the arrival of Cthulhu in 2030. Neither ritual is complete. There are large holes in each. It is believed that “the feral flesh-eating beasts from below” are ghouls controlled by one of the rituals to bring bodies from the cemeteries. The people found torn apart and eaten appear to be ones who tried the ritual without having all of the pieces.

If one digs enough, they can contact the originator of the rituals and request the missing pieces, which are kept in constantly changing locations on compromised corporate servers. Once access is granted, the file must be downloaded within an hour before the location changes. Once the file is opened, it will eat itself after 24 hours, or immediately if it can’t ping the US Naval Observatory Master Clock servers every five minutes. Historians have never been able to piece together what the actual data is. Audio file? Text? Video? No one knows.

But the historians do know who runs the whole thing. The person who has the original spell and put it out onto the Internet is a hacker who goes by C00l@ir. They're good, but they're not as good as they think. An unrelated security breach at a New York financial institution in 2019 prompted an investigation that traced their location to somewhere in an industrial area filled with warehouses in the small university town of Arkham, Massachusetts. The company didn't want the story leaking out, so they paid out a few hundred thousand in Bitcoin, and that was that.

Sources indicate that in 2020, C00l@ir is still in Arkham in the same warehouse district that they were in 2019. If these files can be stopped from getting out onto the Internet, it may turn the tide in 2030.

Find C00l@ir. Neutralize them. Make sure that file doesn't get out.

THE MOTHER ART IS ARCHITECTURE

Two scientists in New Zealand invent a new form of concrete in 2019 with mind-bending properties. Lighter than styrofoam, it has a compression strength three times as high as the best concrete out there, and a tensile strength twice that of carbon fiber. Small samples of the material have been given out for testing, and everyone who works with it is amazed at how revolutionary it is.

The mixture is proprietary and, so far as anyone can tell, only the two scientists who invented it know exactly how it's made. But it can't just exist in someone's head. It has to be written down somewhere. Whoever gets that information could become very rich, very fast.

It can be shaped and hardened like conventional concrete. In small amounts it's just a very strong substance, though those who handle it report strange and horrifying dreams.



In large amounts, things go a little weird. Some people report disorientation and perceive impossible changes near it. Gravity, time, the entire nature of physics seems to fall apart near this stuff.

And these men make an entire skyscraper out of it.

With an eccentric architect from Rome, a new four-tower mixed-use residential/commercial complex goes up in Auckland using architectural and engineering elements never before possible. The towers should collapse; the connecting bridges are attached to the building, but engineers can't seem to tell how. The complex that was proposed to the Auckland planning commission is not the building that was put up, but while the litigation goes on, people move into the building.

Those who spend a long time inside report that the walls and floors seem to almost bend in on themselves. Occasionally an elevator will miss a floor as if it had never been there, its matching elevator button disappearing from the panel. The bridges between the towers often look upside-down from the ground, but on the bridge itself everything is normal.

These are all optical illusions, the designers say. Tricks of the light that they felt would give the place a funhouse air, something to make it a little whimsical instead of another drab, dreary set of buildings.

Whimsy notwithstanding, residents report horrifying dreams and move out as soon as they can. There is a notable and unusual uptick in workplace and domestic violence, depression, and suicide. In the first year alone, five people leap to their deaths from one of the bridges.

Anything strange in the building is explained away with a thin veneer of science, magic tricks, and optical illusions. Even the material used is still a mystery. A small factory owned by the two scientists create preformed pieces for construction crews to more or less snap into place, though no one in the city can think of a single person they know who works for the company.

There is apparently a night construction crew for the building, but no one recalls seeing or hearing construction in the evenings, though the morning shift would find that their plans for work that day had already been half-finished in the night.

Papers found in the ruins of Auckland after the calamity explain that the building was designed as an antenna, amplifying the rituals being performed across the world and channeling them to R'lyeh's location. Incidentally, after Cthulhu rises it is the only building left standing in the entire city.

Bring the building down if possible, make it unusable and uninhabitable if not, and make sure the designers aren't alive to try it again.

THE GREAT SERPENT'S LAMENT

Alphonze LéBon, a multi-strike felon in Louisiana, will become a cult leader based out of the bayou and play a key role in bringing together the various factions and cults that will ultimately lead to the worldwide ritual that raises Cthulhu from the depths.

In 2020 he will create his church, reading from a bastardized version of the Christian bible that he wrote in prison, titled *The Great Serpent's Lament*. Services are loosely based on Pentecostalism, with a lot of faith healing and snake handling. The Great Serpent and a manifestation of Christ, who is the Great Serpent's Lament, battle for the souls of all humankind.

By 2028 the movement will grow across the country and spread to Europe, Asia, and South America, but changed. The Great Serpent's Lament is still a manifestation of Christ in constant battle with the Great Serpent, but it is at the bottom of the ocean, and the Great Serpent has trapped him in a twisted city where he lies sleeping, waiting for his followers to sing his praises and raise their voices to bring him from the depths of the sea to the sky above. In 2030 when it all hits the fan, Alphonze is one of the most important people coordinating the rituals that waken Cthulhu.

Fortunately, he got out of prison in 2019, and pieces of his parole officer's schedule book survived the cataclysm and paper copies of his record survived. This has provided a date, time, and place where he can be found, along with a photograph to help identify him.

He's living in Venice, Louisiana, a small town out in the bayou. Hang around outside the sheriff's office and put a bullet in his head as soon as he shows up, ending his church before it's even started.

If Alphonze lives, humanity dies.



Cthulhu's Timeline (GM Only)

In 2020, Cthulhu lies dreaming in the undersea city of R'lyeh waiting for the stars to align, which will wake it and raise the island from the depths. Many of its spawn are active, protecting and maintaining the impossible architecture, but the vast majority are still asleep.

There are men and women, some working together, some independently, who know of Cthulhu and wish to bring about its rise, and they are disturbingly close to making it happen. The cultists use social media to pass around arcane secrets, advanced algorithms are used to predict the perfect times and places for terrible rituals, collections of prophecies and portents have been digitized and shared across the globe on the dark web. They see in Cthulhu an opportunity for unlimited power by riding on its coattails, as it were.

They're wrong, of course. They're as important to Cthulhu as vermin, and when the Apocalypse comes they'll be just as screwed as everyone else. More so in most cases, since they'll be some of the first whose minds are destroyed.

When time travel is used through the portal of Yog-Sothoth to go from the 2030s to 2020, this will catch Cthulhu's attention. Because of its interdimensional nature, Cthulhu remembers forwards, backwards, and in directions modern science has not even conceived of. Though it dreams beneath the waves, its consciousness is quite active. And now it is paying very close attention to the heroes.

Cthulhu knows what the heroes are trying to accomplish, if not how they will try to accomplish it. It may not be constrained by the limitations of time, but it is constrained by the limits of probability. It can see infinite possible outcomes but doesn't know which one will come to pass. As events unfold, the probabilities narrow further and further until it can perceive the most probable outcomes and plan for them. But like all gamblers, sometimes it backs the wrong horse.

Since there are so many possibilities rippling out from the characters' arrival in the past, Cthulhu hedges its bets and spreads its consciousness across the world, invading the various shrines, statues, drawings, and other depictions of itself with fragments of its personality. Wherever there is a representation of it, Cthulhu is aware and watching.

But perceiving the world through ancient Hittite tablets and grotesque statuary locked away on dusty museum shelves gives it a disjointed awareness of events as they unfold across the world. To make up for this, Cthulhu uses a lesser but more insidious form of corruption through these representations to corrupt and control those nearby. Hundreds of academics, museum staff, librarians, art collectors, archaeologists, cultists, and conspiracy theorists will all find themselves slowly coming under Cthulhu's influence and working to spread it even further.

With these unwitting and in most cases unknowing troops, Cthulhu will work to thwart the characters. Despite its size and appearance, Cthulhu is surprisingly subtle. It will use these thralls to get close to the characters, lead them astray, walk them into traps. And the whole time they will justify it to themselves and come up with elaborate reasons, never having an idea of the control the Old One has over them until it's too late, if ever. Anyone could be Cthulhu's minion, and there's no way to truly tell.

Thankfully, this type of corruption is weak. If the one under Cthulhu's sway can be snapped out of it, sometimes just by pointing out how out-of-character they're acting, they become immune to the same form of control, as they have now become corrupted. This immunity extends to the characters. Compared to the world they've just come from, this is nothing.

Occasionally, Cthulhu can plant a seed of its life force within one of its thralls, not only influencing the unfortunate soul but also changing them physically. Like its Corrupted in the future, these are soldiers. Cthulhu does not have an infinite supply of them and so does not use them without cause. But when it does, the heroes can expect to go up against some truly formidable horrors.

THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

Timeline Aspect: ARTIFACTS OF CTHULHU SPEAK TO THOSE WHO LISTEN

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	Xiong Chia, wealthy investor destined to win the auction
PLACE	■	Plimpton & MacReady's Auction House, Edinburgh, Scotland
THING	■	A grotesque statue <i>[...a font of corruption to those who have it]</i>
FOE	■	???

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

The auction for Lot #250—"Effigy of Unknown God Molded from a Variety of Materials - Sumer, Early Dynastic Period"—is a trap.

It legitimately is something that helps Cthulhu appear and take over the Earth, and with Cthulhu aware of the PCs' attempts to thwart its plans in the past, it is stacking the deck in its favor.

Cthulhu has spread its consciousness into the statue and has corrupted everyone who's come in contact with it to be its unwitting servant. Everyone at the auction house is one of its minions.

In the normal course of events, the statue should be bought and disappear only to resurface years later to be used to raise Cthulhu from its slumber. But Cthulhu is potentially sacrificing a pawn in an effort to take down the entire opposing side of the board. If something happens to the artifact, it could be the setback the heroes need, or Cthulhu may find some other way to influence its rise in the future.

However the PCs approach things—attending the auction, breaking into the vault the night before, or some other plan—they're going to encounter resistance.

If they try to break in, there are armed guards patrolling the grounds, and weight, heat, and motion sensors in the rooms in front of and adjacent to the vault. With a little digging they can discover that the alarms ignore the guards because of the keycards on their person.

At the auction itself there are armed guards, staff, and attendees. The statue is sitting right there next to the podium, but the heroes might be a little concerned about the guards. They don't look like they'll have a problem shooting anyone who comes too close. Or maybe the heroes won't care and they'll just rush the guards. Who knows?

Regardless of the heroes' plan, everyone they meet is a servant of Cthulhu. Cthulhu won't use these people as puppets unless it thinks it stands a good chance of killing the PCs. It doesn't want to tip its hand too soon.

The moment the heroes are spotted on the grounds, Cthulhu will be aware of them. It will let all of its minions function as they normally would until there's enough of them or enough firepower to bring the characters down.

If possible, Cthulhu will use its minions to try to separate the PCs and overwhelm them with numbers. If it can't, then it will wait until it at least has the PCs outgunned before letting loose. If for whatever reason Cthulhu is unable to do either, it will simply pull the trigger as a last ditch effort and have everyone under its sway attempt to kill the PCs. This could get very ugly very fast.

Assuming the PCs get past that gauntlet, they now have to figure out what to do with the statue. Destroying it is an option—until they get down to the original amulet encased inside, which is indestructible. Hiding it is an option, but there's no guarantee it won't be found again.

Keeping it is not a great idea. It does contain a piece of Cthulhu itself in it, after all, and Cthulhu can sense whatever is going on around it. It's like carrying around a Great Old One GPS tracker.

The best option is probably to just toss the whole thing into an active volcano. It won't be destroyed, but it's going to take a while before it surfaces again. Maybe.

UNWITTING MINION**SKILLS**

Fair (+2): Moving Quickly

STRESS [1][1][1]**UNWITTING MINION WHO'S SOMEWHAT MORE INCLINED TO BE A PROBLEM****SKILLS**

Average (+1): Brawling

STRESS [1]**UNWITTING MINION WITH A GUN WHO IS ABSOLUTELY GOING TO BE A PROBLEM FOR FAIRLY OBVIOUS REASONS****SKILLS**

Good (+3): Lore

Average (+1): Shoot

STRESS [1][1][1]**SPELL: BARRIER**

This simple spell is scrawled on an old piece of parchment being auctioned off. The minions might not know what it is, but Cthulhu does and it will have a minion grab it to slow the PCs down.

Opposition: Fair (+2)

Effect: A barrier of strange energy is raised, blocking the border between two zones. It's translucent and weak. Someone can try to overcome it with Physique against Great (+4) difficulty. The barrier dissipates in about a minute.



BYTES AND BODIES

Timeline Aspect: GHOULS ARE ON THE PROWL

A ritual designed by a hacker loyal to Cthulhu is a key component in acquiring the bodies needed to summon Cthulhu from the depths, by animating ghouls to dig up corpses from beneath. It's digital sorcery, baby, and it's going viral among cults across the world.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■ Agatha Manderley, dean of the School of Occult Studies
PLACE	■ Miskatonic University, Arkham, Massachusetts, USA
THING	■ The ritual, a snippet of encrypted code
FOE	■ The mysterious COOL@ir [<i>...actually a team of grad students from the university's Occult Studies and Computer Science departments</i>]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

COOL@ir is a hacker collective on the campus of Miskatonic Polytechnic in Arkham, Massachusetts, made up of a dozen grad students with a combination of questionable ethics and a desire to afford rent. Mostly they do security consulting, after which they take everything they know about a company's security and use their servers to host ransomware, handle money laundering, mine Bitcoin, and so on.

Their lair, if you can call it that, is in the steam tunnels underneath the campus behind a fake wall with noise baffles, though the occasional click of keyboards can be heard through it. Other clues are the out-of-place ventilation ducts connecting to the main HVAC system, and a slight tang of burnt metal in the air from all of the overclocked systems they have.

Two of the hackers are handling the rituals and keeping them secret from the others, mostly out of embarrassment. Calling them acolytes of Cthulhu is stretching things a bit. They're really just a couple of idiots who thought it'd be fun to see how many people they could get to jump through their hoops to get the missing parts of the rituals. Harmless stuff.

They are not aware of just how dangerous a situation they're in. The rituals are from a copy of the *Necronomicon* from the school's collection in the Miskatonic School of Occult Studies, where they're both employed as part-time librarian's assistants. They have read translations of the *Necronomicon*, the *Pnakotic Manuscripts*, *De Vermis Mysteriis*, and so on. Fortunately, neither of them has the imagination to understand any of it.

The dean of the Miskatonic School of Occult Studies, Agatha Manderley, knows about the rituals online, that C00l@ir is distributing them, and just how dangerous they really are. But she hasn't figured out who C00l@ir is, though she's reasonably certain it's more than one person and that they're near or on campus. They would have to have access to a translated copy of the *Necronomicon*, and that narrows the field considerably. There are only two outside of private collections in the United States, and she has one of them.

In the original timeline, Manderley discovers their identities and confronts them in their dorm. But before she can do anything, the two panic and perform the ritual to summon and control ghouls, which they use to murder her. They're as surprised as anyone that it works. Seeing that this stuff is real, they end up joining a Cthulhu cult and are instrumental in the downfall of mankind in 2030.

When the heroes arrive, it is two days before Dr. Manderley figures out who C00l@ir is and is murdered for it. There's no better place to look than the university, where they'll eventually cross paths with her, seeing as they're both looking for the same thing in the same places. If they don't frag her right out of the gate because, well, players do that kind of thing, she will prove to be an invaluable ally.

Another possibility is to breach the hacktivist collective itself. That's a little harder, requiring some infiltration of the social scene on campus. Make up a few different types for C00l@ir to throw at them: the skeptic, the true believer, the hardcore coder nerd, etc. Pick one of them as one of the C00l@ir coders who takes things too far and send ghouls to kill anyone who gets close, whether that's Manderley or the PCs.

If the heroes come clean to Dr. Manderley, she'll believe they are who they say they are. Her work as dean of occult studies has opened her mind to a wide variety of weird, and the PCs are maybe the third or fourth weirdest thing she's ever encountered. If they tell her just how bad it's going to get, she'll let out a heavy sigh and cryptically say, "Again?" and refuse to explain what she's talking about.

She knows the rituals that are being distributed across the Internet. Memorized them, in fact, along with several other pieces of the *Necronomicon* and other occult texts. She also knows a ritual that will transfer control of subjugated ghouls to whoever casts it, though it takes time and preparation to perform.

She's pretty much figured out who the culprits are, and having the PCs around to back her up will give her the courage she needs to confront the two hackers. They are nowhere to be found. They've gone into their server-room bolthole to wait out the wrath of Dr. Manderley and then skip town.

Finding them means finding the server room in the steam tunnels. A few ways to do this might be seeing a student that Manderley suspects is part of the hacker group enter a maintenance room that has an entrance to the tunnels and not come back out. Other possibilities exist, but if they're at a loss, having the hacker essentially lead them to or give them enough clues to find them works too.

The two coders are already panicking about getting caught. They've been in the kitchen space whispering the ritual so the other hackers don't hear them. They have it mostly completed. A couple of words, and the ghouls should be digging up from underneath through the concrete floor. When they're found, they'll bring the ghouls into play.

This is where Cthulhu itself steps in. All the reading they've done of the *Necronomicon*, specifically the bits concerning Cthulhu's ascension, has caught its attention, and they are now officially in the Minions of Cthulhu Fan Club whether they realize it or not.

Just because they've read the *Necronomicon*, though, doesn't mean they understand a word of it. Cthulhu fixes that situation, and they are granted full insight into the wonders and horrors of everything within its pages. Unlike Dr. Manderley, who has done her work over several decades, they're getting it in one concentrated dose in a tenth of a second.

They are beyond panicking. Or reason, sanity, or their own identities. They are empty husks ready to do Cthulhu's bidding with more power than any human being has had in a millennium. They can pretty much counter anything the PCs throw at them, and can do some serious damage, flinging magic around like it's blacklight Silly String at Burning Man. But with great power comes great burnout, and their bodies and brains won't be able to handle the power coursing through them for very long.

Assuming the PCs win this fight, they're now tasked with scrubbing the rituals off the servers they're on. The PCs themselves can try their hand at it, but otherwise, any of the collective hackers who are still alive will help with the eagerness of those confronted by toppling beliefs, an epistemological crisis, and women and men wielding horrifying magics. It's pretty clear that the other hackers had no idea what was going on, so let that serve as a moral dilemma if the PCs think about killing them—if you don't know you're going to help destroy the world, do you deserve to die for it?

They can't do anything about what's already out there, but Manderley thinks she can get something set up to go searching for those and delete them. Regardless, the PCs will have taken one more step to averting the Apocalypse.

GHOUL

ASPECTS

High Concept: FLESH-EATING ABOMINATION

Other Aspects: HUNGRY, ALWAYS HUNGRY; BARELY CONTROLLED BY THE RITUAL

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight

Fair (+2): Athletics

Average (+1): Stealth

STUNTS

Jagged Teeth and Digging Claws: On a successful attack, a ghoul deals one additional point of stress.

Burrowing: Once per scene, the ghoul may take an action to burrow underground, giving it the aspect UNDERGROUND with one free invoke. It cannot be followed or attacked until it chooses to reveal itself.

STRESS

Physical **1111**

Mental **1111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:



RITUAL: CONTROL GHOULS

At present, this ritual is only available to those who access it online. For unknown reasons, printouts and even downloaded copies do not function.

Casting Time: 48 hours

Opposition: Epic (+7)

Effect: This ritual targets one person. Upon completion, this person can issue commands to ghouls and will be understood. A ghoul can break free of this domination by taking the mild consequence FIGHTING THE RITUAL. The effect will dissipate in about two weeks (or at the end of the scenario).

THE MOTHER ART IS ARCHITECTURE

Timeline Aspect: DREAMS OF R'LYEH

A building made from extradimensional materials and non-Euclidean geometry will serve as an antenna to focus ritual energy toward powering Cthulhu's rise. It must be destroyed at any cost.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nicholas Landor, the architect <i>[... corrupted and under Cthulhu's thrall.]</i>
PLACE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A very messed up skyscraper in Auckland, New Zealand
THING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impossible concrete <i>[a fourth-dimensional material shipped in from R'lyeh]</i>
FOE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paramilitary security contractors <i>[and camouflaged servants of Cthulhu]</i>

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

The revolutionary concrete mix going into the building is actually the same space- and geometry-bending material that makes up the city of R'lyeh. The inventors have created a portal through which the raw material—a viscous, gelatinous goo—pours into machines that mix it with concrete aggregate, and then pour it into prefab molds. The portal can be opened or closed, and it is currently opened for the night shift at the building site.

The building is still under construction with a ridiculous amount of day and nighttime security, troops, armored vehicles, and probably some servitors of an unnatural kind as well.

At night, professional armed soldiers patrol the perimeter of the construction site, and there is at least one patrolling each story with a completed floor. There's very little cover in any of these floors, especially the ones that don't have walls yet.

The most heavily guarded area, day and night, is the gated and covered space where the concrete is mixed. This is guarded not only by human guards, but also by inhuman servants of Cthulhu. They maintain an ever-shifting camouflage, making them very difficult to see even when they're very close in bright light.

The night shift, and a handful of day-shift workers to ensure everything goes well, are cultists. They are using a combination of normal building techniques as well as magical ones. The chief architect, Dr. Landor, has been fully given over to Cthulhu's thrall.

Daytime might appear slightly more lax, as it's mostly made up of conventional construction workers, but the camouflaged servitors are still guarding the site, ensuring that no one causes a problem.

Destroying the building will be no small feat. The material is multi-dimensional, making it impossible to destroy by conventional means. However, it's all attached to a conventional frame of steel girders. Being incomplete, the building is more vulnerable than if it were finished. So, though the material can't be destroyed, it doesn't mean the building supports holding it up can't be brought down.

If the PCs want to actually destroy the material, they're going to need more than high explosives. They're going to need magic too. How they go about it is up to the PCs, but each step they take opens them up to further corruption.

NICHOLAS LANDOR

ASPECTS

High Concept: ECCENTRIC ARCHITECT

Trouble: UNDER CTHULHU'S THRALL

Other Aspects: "I'M GOING TO BE BIGGER THAN FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT!"; DREAMING DARK VISIONS OF THE FUTURE; PERFECTIONIST

SKILLS

Great (+4): Crafts, Notice

Good (+3): Academics, Lore, Will

Fair (+2): Fight, Physique, Provoke, Rapport

STUNTS

Visionary: Dr. Landor's sense of self is a bit unstuck in time, allowing him to perfectly predict the outcome of random phenomena like coin flips and die rolls. Also, once per conflict, he may completely ignore a single hit he saw coming by stepping out of its path. He may choose to activate this stunt after rolling his defense.

This Is My Building: When Landor is in the building he designed, he can sense the locations of everyone else in the building. Finding a specific person takes a moment's thought, and he immediately knows if someone is where nobody should be.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **11111111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

CAMOUFLAGED SERVITOR

ASPECTS

High Concept: NEARLY INVISIBLE GUARDIAN

Other Aspects: NEVER WHERE YOU THINK; BOUND TO THE SITE



SKILLS

Good (+3): Stealth

Fair (+2): Fight



Average (+1): Notice

STUNTS

Arcane Camouflage: The camouflaged servitor gets +4 to defense against any attack where the number of  rolled is less than or equal to the number of  rolled.

Sneak Attack: The camouflaged servitor gets +2 to Fight attacks when attacking unseen or from cover.

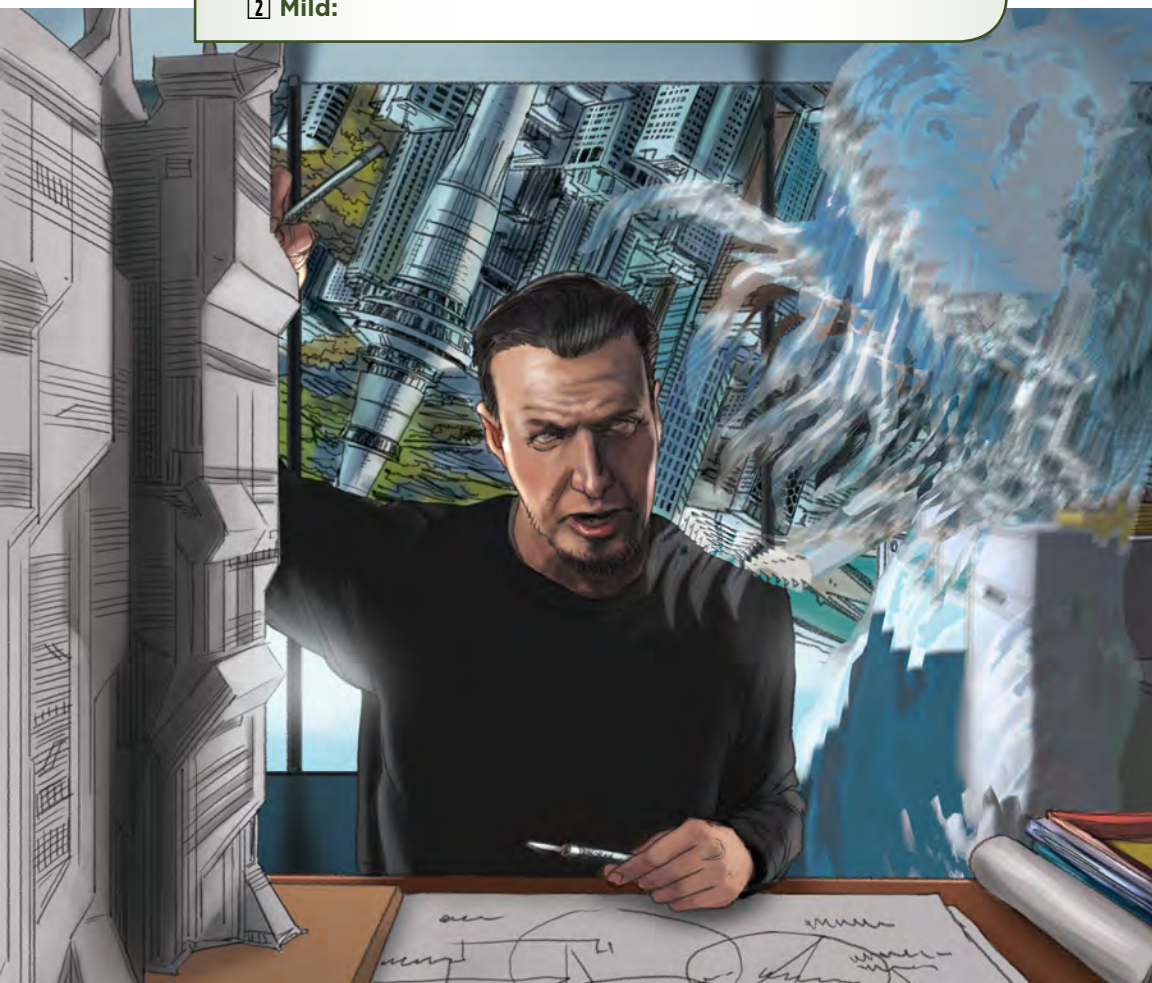
STRESS

Physical   

Mental   

CONSEQUENCES

 **Mild:**



THE GREAT SERPENT'S LAMENT

Timeline Aspect: THE CULT OF CTHULHU IS GROWING

A cult to end all cults will rise and eventually coordinate efforts to raise Cthulhu across the globe. But that won't happen for a few more years, making their leader vulnerable and ripe for the killing. One problem: someone's beaten the PCs to the punch and he's already dead.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☹	Alphonze LeBon [<i>But he's already dead! It's actually Red Magdalena, a cultist from the future</i>]
PLACE	☹	Venice, Louisiana, USA—the “end of the world”
THING	☹	The first draft of the Great Serpent's Lament
FOE	☹	???. [<i>Alphonze LeBon, undead servitor</i>]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

So, about that mission to track down and kill Alphonze LéBon in Venice, Louisiana. Yeah. Slight glitch. Somebody's already gone and done it. By the time the players arrive in Venice, the murder is already the front-page news of the local paper.

His body was found in an alley spread eagle with his chest opened up and most of his organs decorating the alley like Christmas garlands at an unusually festive morgue.

This raises several questions. “What the hell?” being chief among them. Followed by who? (a minion of Cthulhu), why? (because Cthulhu figured out this would happen and did an end run around the PCs), and does this mean that humanity's doubly screwed (it does) or did somebody just do their job for them (they so didn't)?

As Cthulhu can remember the past, the future, and in directions of time humans can't even comprehend, Cthulhu has determined that the PCs' efforts to murder LéBon will be their next move. Figuring that if the PCs can play with time travel then it certainly can, Cthulhu has sent a powerful servant, a cultist who gave up her name to become the Red Magdalena, ten years before the PCs arrive.

She is now Joanie Goudeau, a prominent member of the insular community in Venice, and sits on the City Council. Everyone loves her pecan pies at the bake sale, and nobody's got an unkind word for her. Hell, they're talking about asking her to run for mayor.

Not that she's planning on maintaining the charade for much longer. Over the last ten years she has guided LéBon through his dreams to write *The Great Serpent's Lament*. Upon his release from prison, she has kept to the shadows, anonymously helping him out, finalizing his grand plans to bring *The Great Serpent's Lament* to the masses.

Only, she'll be the one doing it. She has sacrificed LéBon to Dread Cthulhu, empowering her with all she needs to spread the cult like a virus. What's more, she's raised LéBon as an undead servitor to meet her every whim.

There's just one more thing she has to do before she can put her grand plans into action: kill the PCs so they can't cause any more trouble.

Once they begin investigating, here are some things that might point the PCs in the right direction:

- ▼ It's been three days since LéBon's body was discovered. It was sent to the Dubriel & Sons Mortuary, which also doubles as Venice's morgue, with old man Dubriel as its impromptu medical examiner. If they want to see the body, that's going to be a problem, since it's gone. Disappeared the night before. So far only Dubriel, his two sons, and the sheriff know about it. There's talk of satanic rituals and they don't want to cause a panic.
- ▼ No one's cleared out LéBon's apartment yet, a single room in the town's only flophouse. Bathroom at the end of the hall; no smoking, gambling, or carousing past 11 pm. If they check that out, they'll probably find LéBon's handwritten copy of the *Great Serpent's Lament*. Chunks of it appear to be notes, all talking about the woman in his dreams, the Red Magdalena guiding his hand as he writes his bible. The imagery around the Red Magdalena in his dreams is all rivers of blood, viscera hanging from the walls, her eyes deep red with lines of blood running down her cheeks like tears.
- ▼ Later entries of *The Great Serpent's Lament* appear to be written after his release from prison. The Red Magdalena comes up a lot, but they may notice that another name begins to appear almost as often, someone who befriended him and helped him get back into the community, a woman named Joanie Goudeau. It could be nothing, but there are times where he wonders why she seems to care about him so much.
- ▼ Folded between the pages of the handwritten copy of *The Great Serpent's Lament* is a piece of paper with what appear to be a nonsense chant and crude pictures of a disemboweled body, with notes on the wounds and which ones need to be done in which order. If any of the PCs are familiar with such things, they'll recognize it as a ritual to create an undead servant.

Sooner or later, whether they figure out who Joanie Goudeau is and confront her or not, the PCs will run into the true form of the Red Magdalena, and she'll have LéBon with her. Alone, each one is formidable; together, they might just prove unstoppable.

THE RED MAGDALENA

ASPECTS

High Concept: DEDICATED SERVANT TO THE GREAT CTHULHU

Trouble: TERRIFIED OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE

Other Aspects: IMPOSSIBLY TALL AND COVERED IN RED RUNES;
MY DEVOTED FOLLOWERS; TEN YEARS BEING JOANIE GOUDEAU

SKILLS

Great (+4): Lore, Will

Good (+3): Notice, Physique, Provoke

Fair (+2): Academics, Empathy, Fight, Rapport

STUNTS

Eldritch Glamour: The Red Magdalena can disguise her appearance and hide her corruption, using Will instead of Deceive.

Horrifying True Form: Once per scene, the Red Magdalena can reveal her horrifyingly stretched and rune-etched true form, making a mental attack using Will against every person in the scene.

Spreader of Corruption: While the Red Magdalena is in the scene, any effect that requires marking corruption now fills two corruption spaces.

STRESS

Physical **11111111**

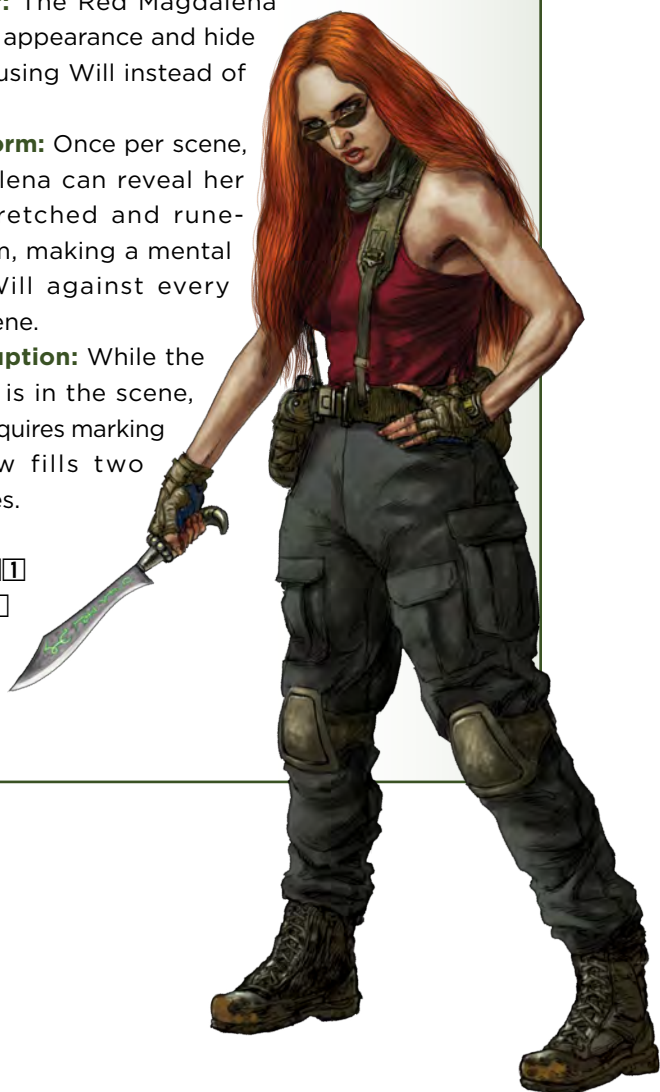
Mental **11111111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:



THE SERVITOR

ASPECTS

High Concept: REANIMATED SERVANT TO THE GREAT OLD ONE

Other Aspects: BOUND TO THE RED MAGDALENA; UTTERLY INDEFATIGABLE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Physique

Good (+3): Notice

Fair (+2): Fight

STUNTS

Already Dead: The servitor can defend with Physique against physical attacks by just shrugging off the hit.

Powered by Eldritch Energy: If the servitor is taken out, everyone in its zone must defend against backlash with an effort equal to the shifts of the hit that took the servitor out.

Mindless: The servitor is immune to mental stress and mind-altering effects. If the Red Magdalena is slain, it too will immediately die.

STRESS

Physical **11111111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

THE RISE OF THE GREAT OLD ONE

Timeline Aspect: GREAT CTHULHU IS WAITING AND WATCHING

Weary of paying attention to the heroes, mighty Cthulhu acts early. R'lyeh rises quickly and violently, and Cthulhu wastes no time in striking against humanity. Moreover, the Corrupted are pressed into service across the world; even those weakly influenced are unable to resist the call when Cthulhu stands at full power. No place is safe from the Old One's influence.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☒	Mighty Cthulhu, awake and fully empowered
PLACE	☒	The great city of R'lyeh, risen in all its glory
THING	☒	Innumerable icons of Cthulhu, in schools and museums across the globe
FOE	☒	Corrupted humans, spread across all corners of the world, completely under Cthulhu's thrall

Cthulhu's Agenda (GM Only)

AMBITION: TO TOUCH FOREVER

Cthulhu's ultimate goal is to simultaneously perceive all of eternity at once and flood all of existence with the imprint of its malevolent will. Every representation of Cthulhu, every person it corrupts, and every consciousness it touches adds to this perceptual network, which will eventually stretch backwards, forwards, and sideways in time, as well as to every realm of the multiverse.

GOALS

To Wake from Its Eternal Dream: The only reason Cthulhu hasn't united the multiverse under its terrible gaze is because it exists in an almost dreamlike state, only able to touch reality in fleeting manifestations of consciousness. Only in attaining full consciousness can it bring the full depth of its will to bear.

To Raise R'lyeh from the Depths: The sunken city of R'lyeh was the seat of Cthulhu's former dominion over Earth, but it rests, like Cthulhu does, deep under the ocean and partly in another realm of existence. What precise link the city has to Cthulhu's power may never be known, but it must be summoned forth from the depths, at a particular time when the stars come right. Most of the rituals Cthulhu needs in order to enact this are literally about shifting the stars.

To Enthrall Everyone, Everything, Everywhen: To extend its consciousness to every millimeter of the eternal cosmos, Cthulhu requires all living things in all dimensions to become corrupted or replaced with its own spawn. It will always attempt to influence as many minds as possible to turn them toward its nihilistic ends.

TACTICS

THE CALL OF CTHULHU

The biggest tool in Cthulhu's toolbox is a simple but terrifying one: just about anyone at any time could be working for Cthulhu, either in a temporary lapse of self-control or because they're fully enthralled via long exposure. Aligning yourself with the Old One's goals isn't even necessary to be its pawn—its influence is more like cancer for the mind, which can turn even the noblest of intentions to destructive ends.

This device works best if it's used to ratchet up mistrust and paranoia among the PCs, like so:

- ▼ Have a key allied NPC betray the PCs inexplicably, maybe even without that NPC's knowledge.
- ▼ Compel corrupted aspects to have the PCs sabotage their own goals.
- ▼ Have Cthulhu's artifacts tempt the PCs with offers of knowledge or power.

THE CORRUPTED

Cthulhu's influence warps and twists living beings into servitor creatures eventually. Almost any kind of monster or creature you can imagine could be considered a spawn of Cthulhu or something remade by its power, and these monsters are not subtle in the least. The King in Yellow may be all visions and dreams, but Cthulhu is gaping maws, tentacles, and lumbering masses of terrifying power.

To employ the Corrupted:

- ▼ Think of something fucked up and send it to kill the PCs.
- ▼ Turn an NPC they care about into something fucked up and send it to kill the PCs.
- ▼ Turn a PC who has become too corrupted into something fucked up and send it to kill its former allies.

INNOCENT INSTRUMENTS OF A CORRUPT STATE

Because Cthulhu influences people from all walks of life, its most dangerous infiltrations are of people who lead powerful mortal institutions, such as financiers, politicians, and police. This gives any of Cthulhu's cultists a veritable army of lawyers, beat cops, guards, and other people to interfere with the PCs' goals, but who aren't themselves privy to the real goals of the people they serve and believe themselves to just be doing their jobs.

To use these people, the GM can:

- ▼ Emphasize the ignorance of NPCs who oppose the PCs whenever possible, while keeping them in the PCs' way.
- ▼ Have one of these innocents confront the truth in a grisly, terrifying way and require saving by the PCs.
- ▼ Reveal or hint that an NPC was uninvolved in the cult's crimes after the PCs have killed or traumatized them.

CULTISTS

Literally anyone; that's what makes the cult of Cthulhu so terrifying.



THE ARRIVAL OF DAGON

In 2019 the world is hammered by a strain of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) that no antibiotic can touch. Dubbed the MRSA plague, it has an almost a 75% mortality rate. Millions die from pneumonia or sepsis. Three billion deaths are linked to the MRSA plague before the end of 2020.

In mid-2020, Dr. Amanda Wesson of Miskatonic Polytechnic, in conjunction with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is working on an antibiotic that might stem the tide. She finds unusual proteins in donated blood samples, and a lab accident contaminates some of her MRSA cultures with them.

The bacteria dies off in minutes. Soon, lab and animal tests have a 100% success rate for combating not only MRSA but every common antibiotic-resistant bacteria she tries it on. Further, the drug appears to have preventive properties: uninfected rats given a dose prior to any infection appear to be completely immune to any disease she throws at them for up to three months.

Human trials in the USA are sped through by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and by June of 2021 the medication is released worldwide as Palliagil, manufactured by Arkham Pharmaceuticals. The MRSA Plague and hundreds of other diseases disappear almost overnight, no one aware that the true nightmare is only a few years away.

In 2028 an enormous island three times the size of Long Island breaches the water off the coast of Rockport, Massachusetts, like an exploding whale, sending a tsunami that sweeps through Massachusetts and Cape Cod Bays, flooding every city along the shoreline from Rockport south to Cohasset. Boston, Plymouth, Salem, and areas as far inland as Framingham are flooded and pummeled by the waves.

Not long after, a distress call goes out from the USS *Coronado*, a littoral combat ship out of Norfolk, Virginia, talking about fish people attacking the ship, after which all radio contact is lost. Soon, similar calls come in from other ships. A Coast Guard helicopter catches sight of a yacht being swarmed by fish people. A cruise ship coming up from Florida makes a single distress call and goes silent. A Coast Guard flyby sees no damage to the ship, nor passengers or crew, but the decks are awash in blood.

A captain of a fishing trawler grounded on the new island streams video on her smartphone showing a landscape of odd architecture and streets that stretch to the horizon, panning to the side of the boat to reveal an army of these fish people, rubbery, eight-foot-tall monstrosities with heads like deep-sea helmets sitting neckless atop fireplug-like torsos.

The video ends with a shot of one of these creatures, larger than all of its companions, opening its mouth to reveal row upon row of teeth, each hooked like the beak of a snapping turtle to pull in prey and prevent it from escaping. A loud snapping crunch, jerky video from the phone, and then 45 seconds in total darkness before the stream stops, the only sounds a loud crunching and muffled screams.

Later that day Patrick Klein, famed archaeologist and host of the popular television show *Klein's Finds*, goes on television claiming that he has seen these creatures before. They are called Deep Ones and they worship a god named Dagon, who sleeps in his city Y'ha-nthlei, buried beneath the mud and rock of the seabed. He claims to have an artifact that can defend against the Deep Ones, though before he can say anything else, the studio broadcast dies out.

Klein and the studio staff are found disemboweled and heaped in a pile inside the studio. Unlike the other corpses, Klein's is the only one missing its head. News and photos of the slaughter go viral in hours. News outlets, always on the lookout for new clickbait, spread the Dagon and Deep One names, but ignore Y'ha-nthlei as being too difficult to pronounce.

In the early evening, a search-and-rescue team in the devastated village of Innsmouth, Massachusetts, witnesses survivors transform into Deep Ones, their bodies growing bloated, hands and feet turning into webbed and clawed weapons. Worse, four members of the search-and-rescue team, none of whom have ever before been to Innsmouth, are similarly affected. Only a handful of the team escape with their lives.

Throughout the night a wave of transformations blankets the Earth. Dubbed the Innsmouth plague, billions change into Deep Ones over the course of the next several hours. Less than 10% of people affected survive the process.

Scientists find a strong correlation between the transformations and population groups that have been taking Palliagil for the last five to seven years. Word goes out for people to stop taking it immediately, but the damage is done. The thing that saved humanity less than ten years before is shown to be the means of its destruction.

By the next morning there are more Deep Ones on the planet than there are uninfected human beings.

Satellite imagery captures a mountainous form rising from the ocean between Y'ha-nthlei and Rockport just before midnight. Survivors of the Innsmouth Plague holed up at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration offices in Silver Spring, Maryland, watch in horror as this lumbering monstrosity makes its way toward shore.

As Deep Ones tear through the building, they use their last remaining minutes to upload their data to servers across the world, in the hope that there is still someone who can do something about this nightmare before it's too late. But there isn't. Humanity has fallen in less than two days.

Dagon has arrived.

What Brought This Upon Us

Historians have identified the following events as being pivotal moments in the timeline, which led the world down the path to allowing Dagon and his Deep Ones to overrun the Earth.

DO NO HARM

By 2020 the MRSA plague has killed billions. Hospitals and morgues are overfull. At Miskatonic Polytechnic in Arkham, Massachusetts, Dr. Amanda Wesson works on a new antibiotic to fight this horrifying disease. A premier authority on bacterial diseases, Dr. Wesson works with the CDC and is on the board of Arkham Pharmaceuticals.

Sometime between mid-2020 and June 2021, a courier delivers a shipment of blood vials for testing. Assuming that these are new samples of infected blood from the CDC, Dr. Wesson refrigerates and forgets about them. As events become dire, and more and more people die, she remembers the samples and checks them. They're normal blood with no trace of MRSA. Unsure why she was sent untainted blood, she examines them and finds a protein she can't identify. She isolates the protein, but accidentally mixes it up with another solution she's working on, contaminating some of her MRSA cultures.

The cultures are dead within minutes. Things move quickly from there and soon Palliagil is on the market and stemming the tide against MRSA and a host of other diseases. Seven years later, Palliagil is found to be responsible for the wave of transformations that doom humanity.

It is believed that the blood either came from Deep One / human hybrids, or humans whose blood was contaminated after collection. Regardless of the source, these blood samples are at the root of Palliagil.

The mission is straightforward: Stop Dr. Wesson's research. Period.

The choice to take this step has been debated hotly by the women and men who are sending the PCs back in time. On the one hand, stopping her research prevents billions of people from becoming Deep Ones. On the other hand, stopping her research dooms billions of people to die from the MRSA plague.

After weighing the risks, the powers-that-be feel that humanity can better survive a disease than being stripped of their humanity altogether. There are no good solutions here. The PCs should know that either through their action or inaction they are killing billions of people. In this case, it's felt that Palliagil is the greater risk.

There is a complication, however. No one is quite sure when Dr. Wesson received the CDC blood samples or when she tried them on the MRSA cultures, as there are no surviving CDC records of the program. It is known to be sometime before June 2021, when Palliagil was announced, and there is some evidence that she may have received the sample in early 2020 and started work with them by the end of the year. Considering her close ties to Arkham Pharmaceuticals, who go on to manufacture and distribute Palliagil, it is possible the company assisted her. Given what's known of her personality—secretive bordering on paranoid—that seems unlikely.

How the heroes go about stopping Dr. Wesson is up to them. Ideally, the work will be halted before she even gets the blood samples, or if not that, then before the MRSA cultures are contaminated.

If she has moved any data from her lab at Miskatonic Polytechnic, it would likely have been to Arkham Pharmaceuticals, so that will be a place the PCs will need to check as well.

However it's handled, it has to be done before the data gets out to the public. The trick is figuring out when that is and getting to it before it's too late.

DOWN TO A SUNLESS SEA

On the day of the tsunami, the sensationalist archaeologist Patrick Klein goes on national television claiming to have encountered the creatures attacking shipping lanes along the Eastern Seaboard, naming them Deep Ones, their god Dagon, and their island city Y'ha-nthlei. He also claims to have an artifact in his possession that could be used against them. Before he can say more, the broadcast signal cuts out. His decapitated body is later found along with the corpses of the rest of the studio staff. His head is the only one missing, and is never recovered.

In 2020 Klein hosted a popular web series called True Tales of the Unexpected. Each episode found him traveling to an archaeological site to find evidence of a legend. Traveling through the Amazon looking for

El Dorado, climbing into the Himalayas in search of Shangri-La. Most of these shows were shot on a lot or against a green screen.

Though no one realized it at the time, Klein encountered the Deep Ones in the summer of 2020 during the filming of an episode about the legend of the Flying Dutchman. Massachusetts Bay acted as a stand-in for the Horn of Africa, and Klein's show rented a yacht and crew for a day of filming exterior shots.

The yacht never returned. The Coast Guard mounted a three-day search before giving up. Since conditions were clear and calm, and no wreckage was found, the prevailing theory was that the passengers and crew left the area without reporting in, or the yacht had been hijacked.

A week after the disappearance, Klein washed up unconscious on the shore of Pinkney's Point in Nova Scotia in a Norwegian Navy Submarine Escape Immersion Suit, suffering from hypothermia and decompression sickness. Nothing but the SEIS and the clothes he wore on the yacht was found on him.

When he was revived and able to talk several days later, his memory was disjointed and he would break down into hysterical sobs and screaming. He claimed that the ship had been pulled down into the water by men in old-time diving suits who took them to an underwater city. They tortured and murdered everyone else. He was somehow able to escape but couldn't remember how he did it.

Clearly traumatized as he was, no one believed him. A story was circulated that the yacht had been hijacked, the crew murdered, with Klein the only survivor. Certain details were left out, like that he was suffering from decompression sickness or wearing a Norwegian SEIS. After therapy and a heavy addiction to prescription pills, Klein returned to entertainment and archaeology, but never set foot in the ocean again, or even publicly discussed the story. With regards to the artifact he claimed to have, he was killed before any details could be given.

The team's mission is to infiltrate the yacht crew and get the artifact, whatever it happens to be. This will require the PCs to stay close to Klein throughout his ordeal. From there they are to either deliver it to a drop point in Portland, Maine, in the cornerstone of a building under construction that is known to survive the Apocalypse, where it will be retrieved in the future, or use it against the Deep Ones or Dagon to alter the timeline should the PCs figure out how.

LAST TRAIN TO INNSMOUTH

When the name “Dagon” first reaches the airwaves, it prompts immediate and intensive research. Academics, government agents, and Internet bloggers alike dive into whatever resources they can drum up to find out who or what this “Dagon” is.

Needless to say, they don’t find much. But the search isn’t fruitless. In the dwindling hours between the rise of Y’ha-nthlei and the emergence of Dagon himself, billions are reading as information drips forth: Dagon was known to the Sumerians as a monster, or a god, or something between the two. He was associated with the sea, fertility, destruction. Millennia later he was worshipped by something called the Esoteric Order of Dagon.

As humanity’s final hours dwindle, someone stumbles across the name that gives grim focus to the research: Innsmouth, Massachusetts. A town too remote and insular to draw attention, but now that the world deigns to look, they see how deeply disturbing the news from that sleepy hamlet is—and has been for over a century. Disappearances in the area are ten times higher than in the country as a whole. Reports of horrible frog-faced men and uncanny lights in the sea are a common occurrence.

More odd: nothing seems to leave Innsmouth. It’s a fishing village, but nobody’s ever bought fish from it. No business has records of importing from or exporting to Innsmouth. Enterprising hackers try in vain to find official documents that list Innsmouth as someone’s place of birth. Nothing. It’s not even on the nation’s electrical grid.

Satellite images of Innsmouth reveal that it is overrun with Deep Ones—as it had been since just before Y’ha-nthlei rose. In response, the US government throws together a group of operatives, which they publicly describe as a search-and-rescue team. It is common knowledge that rescuing people is a distant priority, and the team’s actual purpose is to quite simply find out anything about this village. In this they technically succeeded: they catch footage of humans mutating into Deep Ones, and of the monsters working alongside robed human cultists. But the mission is costly—most operatives are killed, a few find themselves undergoing the Deep One transformation as soon as they set foot in the town square.

Innsmouth is a bad place. The extent of its corruption is unknown, but evidence suggests that it is infected beyond saving. End it. Burn Innsmouth to the ground and salt the ashes if that’s what it takes—as far as you know, every man, woman, and child is a part of the Esoteric Order of Dagon. As far as you know, none of them are even actually human.

MOTHER HYDRA SLEEPS

Moments after Y’ha-nthlei bursts from the depths, every nation with a satellite in the sky turns its gaze upon the island. Humanity gets a very good look at the place: its strangely shaped buildings arranged at chaotic angles, caked with seaweed and crawling with Deep Ones. And at the center of it all, a throne, upon which a huge Deep One sits. It is enormous even compared to the others—fifteen feet tall, at least—and surrounded by worshippers attending to its needs.

At first, naively, people assume that the giant Deep One must be Dagon himself.

Nobody knows who gives the order to bomb Y’ha-nthlei, but the whole world is watching when an anonymous plane flies over the island, opens its doors, and releases its explosive cargo. Likewise, the whole world sees the giant Deep One raise its hand, encasing the island in a protective bubble of arcane energy. The bombs explode after dropping only a few meters, and the plane is caught in its own blast and tumbles into the sea.

This is the world’s introduction to Mother Hydra, the greatest of the Deep Ones, consort and herald of Dagon. There is precious little intel on Mother Hydra, but she clearly occupies a dominant position among the Deep Ones. Moreover, her command of magic is great enough that we must assume that she plays a vital role in summoning Dagon himself.

So the mission is simple. Find Mother Hydra. Kill Mother Hydra.

You have one anecdote to go on. At a bar in Halifax, Nova Scotia, customers are gathered around the television to watch grainy images of the island on the news. At the appearance of Mother Hydra on her throne, a regular known only as Old Man Farmer screams, “That’s her! I told you! It’s Hydra!”

The other customers try to get the man to elaborate on his story, but he is too agitated to communicate, and eventually flees into the night, raving about Hydra’s return. The next day, Dagon rose, and even if Farmer survived the incident, the world is in no position to track him down and ask what he means.



Dagon's Timeline (GM Only)

DO NO HARM

Timeline Aspect: THE MRSA PLAGUE HAS THE WORLD TERRIFIED

The ersatz cure to a worldwide plague will spell humanity's ultimate doom. The PCs need to figure out why this happened and stop it before humanity is infected by something much worse than MSRA.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☒	Dr. Amanda Wesson [<i>a Deep One</i>]
PLACE	☑	Miskatonic Polytechnic in Arkham, MA
THING	☑	Blood samples of unknown provenance
FOE	☒	???. [<i>Deep One Hybrids, hiding in plain sight</i>]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

It's Dr. Wesson's blood.

There are no records of a CDC courier because there never was a CDC courier. There are no records of blood vials because they never existed either. Most of her documents can't be found because she didn't bother keeping any beyond the ones required to fool the FDA and CDC into speeding up the approval process, and those were all falsified anyway.

She's not hiding that Palliagil doesn't work. It works perfectly. What she's hiding is that it includes Deep One DNA that has been modified to act as a parasite, taking over the human genome and rewriting it. The immunity given to the host is part of the replication strategy. With protection from disease, there is a greater chance that the host is kept alive until the process completes.

Amanda Wesson grew up in Innsmouth, Massachusetts. For almost three hundred years the residents of Innsmouth have had a deal with the Deep Ones and their god Dagon. For wealth and prosperity, they would send their children out to sea, where they would interbreed with the Deep Ones.

For centuries, the entire population of Innsmouth has been Deep One hybrids. Residents from Innsmouth don't look like Deep Ones, not at first. They look completely human up to adolescence, and some even into their twenties or thirties. Then they get what's been dubbed the Innsmouth Look: slightly bulging eyes, a wider mouth, the development of what appears to be a goiter. The Look progresses to the point where people can't go out in public, at least anywhere outside of Innsmouth, making the town isolationist. Then, one day, they just go for a swim and don't bother coming back.

Wesson is one of the few hybrids who has aged into her forties without developing the Innsmouth Look. She's actually quite bitter about it. She was promised the sea, an entire ocean to fly through with fins and gills. She wants to hunt prey among the shipwrecks, fall serene into the deep abyss that she's been told about her entire life. But no, she's stuck in this ridiculous landlocked flesh.

But times are changing. Dagon is coming. She can feel it. They can all feel it. Her brothers and sisters of the Sea. Dagon is calling to them, to his worshippers in the Esoteric Order of Dagon, a cult of fanatics that has stayed below the radar for hundreds of years. When Dagon arrives, humanity must be primed and ready, and the MRSA plague is the perfect excuse to make it happen.

Wesson has contacts in the CDC and the FDA who are—if not Deep One hybrids themselves—members of the Esoteric Order of Dagon, who believe that humanity is a scourge to be wiped from the world. They've been promised a transformation, and they will do whatever they have to in order to make it happen.

The bulk of her research isn't in developing Palliagil as an antibiotic, but in balancing out the immunity benefit with the power of the transformation, throwing in some Old One magic so that it triggers when Dagon appears. Humanity needs to stay unaware of the Deep Ones' plans until Dagon's arrival is assured. Too much of the DNA, and the transformation will trigger too soon, preventing others from taking it. Too little, and the humans might not transform at all, allowing them to potentially fend off the attacks by the Deep Ones when Dagon arrives.

The easiest solution for the PCs here is to just kill Dr. Wesson as soon as they run into her, then burn her lab down. But they don't know she's not on their side, or whether or not the Palliagil data has been given to anyone else. That might give them pause. They might also pause at the fact that people are dying by the thousands every day, and that killing her could sound the death knell of humanity long before Dagon arrives.

More difficult solutions might be finding the blood samples (they don't exist), the CDC courier before he brings her the vials (he doesn't exist either), or contaminating her results to derail her work (they're already falsified, and she already knows it works, so any attempts will just tip her off).

Even if the PCs approach Dr. Wesson as friendly, she's paranoid enough to believe they're enemies right out of the gate. If they try to convince her that she is creating a future that must be stopped, she is ecstatic because she knows the Deep Ones' plan worked. Either way, she will play along for as long as it's useful to her, engineering situations that paint her as a

potential victim of the Deep Ones' sinister plans in order to gain the PCs' trust and sympathy. The closer she can get to the PCs, the more information she has to pass on to her family beneath the waves about the future.

As soon as she suspects anything, she'll have copies of her data and samples of the proto-Palliagil sent over to Arkham Pharmaceuticals. AP is run by another Deep One hybrid, Henry Lyman. He is well on his way to his transformation and has the characteristic Innsmouth Look—bulging eyes, not much of a neck, heavy muscles and tall stature, a mouth that looks just a little too wide.

AP is an old Arkham institution and so the family manor and the AP offices and manufacturing plant are on the same property. Lyman almost always stays in the manor, and if he does leave it's through a hidden tunnel beneath the manor that leads to the Miskatonic River.

If either Wesson or Lyman is attacked, they are not without resources. Though Wesson hasn't developed the Innsmouth Look, she is very much a Deep One hybrid. She can breathe underwater, is an excellent swimmer, and has razor sharp claws that she hides behind unusually long fake nails. Though these signs may not be obvious at first glance, if the PCs spend a lot of time with her they might notice that she doesn't blink much and is very protective of her impractical manicure.

Similarly, if the PCs take on Lyman, he can easily hold his own. His skin is thick and works as well as a ballistic vest against bullets, and his hands are webbed with razor claws. He never shakes hands or shows them to anyone, claiming that a childhood condition left them deformed, so he covers them in custom gloves that hide their shape.

Many of Wesson's and Lyman's brothers and sisters who can still pass for human, but have enough Deep One traits like Wesson, work on campus as support personnel. Cooks, janitors, gardeners, and so on. They keep a very close eye on her to make sure that she's not disturbed. They try hard to not attract attention, though most of them have the Innsmouth Look.

If the PCs are getting close figuring out who and what Wesson is, she will attempt to shunt attention over to Arkham Pharmaceuticals, staging a break-in at her lab and destroying her samples, and telling the PCs that the only copies of her data, findings, and samples are at AP.

This strategy might mess with the PCs further if they trust her. Who else besides themselves would want Palliagil destroyed? Is there another group of people from the future trying to stop them?

Eventually, she will be found out, reveal herself to the PCs, or escape with her data in order to release it in some other way so that Palliagil gets into the wild as soon as possible.

STATBLOCKS

DR. AMANDA WESSON

ASPECTS

High Concept: PHARMACEUTICAL
RESEARCHER AT MISKATONIC
POLYTECHNIC

Other Aspects: UNSTOPPABLE
DEDICATION TO HER CAUSE;
SECRET DEEP ONE ANCESTRY

SKILLS

Great (+4): Academics

Good (+3): Deceive, Lore

Fair (+2): Crafts, Empathy, Fight

Average (+1): Physique, Rapport,
Resources, Will

STUNTS

Paranoid: During a conflict, once per exchange, Dr. Wesson can force any player to choose her to take the next turn.

Protective: Wesson has thrown a protective ward over her valuable research. If someone attempts to break into her office, she becomes immediately aware of it and may actively defend to prevent it, using Crafts with a +2 bonus.

STRESS

Physical Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild:

Moderate:



HENRY LYMAN

ASPECTS

High Concept: EXECUTIVE DEEP ONE

Other Aspects: DAGON FIRST, PROFIT SECOND; "I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR YOU!"

SKILLS

Good (+3): Resources

Fair (+2): Contacts, Fight

Average (+1): Athletics, Notice, Physique

STUNTS

Tough: Lyman is stout and powerful even by the standards of Deep Ones. He has an extra mild physical consequence slot.

STRESS

Physical **|||||**

Mental **||||**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

2 Mild Physical:

4 Moderate:



YOUNG DEEP ONE HYBRID

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Going Unnoticed

STRESS **||||**

NEARLY TRANSFORMED
HYBRID

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight, Physique

Average (+1): Stealth

STRESS **|||||||**

DOWN TO A SUNLESS SEA

Timeline Aspect: A RASH OF DISAPPEARING SHIPS

Patrick Klein discovered the truth about Dagon on a doomed expedition. The PCs must join the crew to discover the artifact Klein was ranting about.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	Patrick Klein, mildly famous Internet personality
PLACE	■	???. [<i>A hole in reality at the bottom of Massachusetts Bay</i>]
THING	■	A rented weekend yacht
FOE	■	The Deep Ones

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

The artifact is a thin, curved, circular crystal about two inches in diameter that was fused with the back of Patrick's skull. Removing it would crack his skull like an egg, killing him.

When the yacht went out for the day, there was a swarm of Deep Ones looking for prey to sacrifice to Dagon in an attempt to raise him. They brought the entire ship down and either killed or picked out crew and passengers to carry to Y'ha-nthlei, forming protective bubbles of air around their unconscious victims.

Y'ha-nthlei exists in a dimension slightly off from our own. This is why it has never been discovered by humans. The Deep Ones are capable of traveling back and forth between these two dimensions, but the larger the hole they create, the more magical power it takes.

Dagon requires a very large hole.

Klein woke up in an air-filled structure in Y'ha-nthlei with half of the crew and a tremendous headache. A tiny scale from Dagon's skin had been inserted under their skin, where it immediately fused with their skulls. This created a link to the god, through which the power generated by their sacrifices would widen the passage for Dagon to pass through. He managed to escape his prison and find clothes and gear from previous sacrifices, eventually obtaining a self-inflating submarine escape suit that he mistook for a diving suit and managed to get to the surface.

Ever since his ordeal he has suffered terrible migraines, but it wasn't until years later that he started having vivid dreams he couldn't understand or explain. Worried for his sanity, he saw a doctor who found what he thought was a cyst on the back of Klein's skull, but as it wasn't growing and removing it could kill Klein, the doctor decided to leave it alone and watch to see if it changed.

As the migraines and dreams went on, Klein began to understand the strange language he was hearing, the odd visions he was seeing. He learned of Dagon and the Deep Ones, eventually realizing that he was somehow connected to Dagon through the thing on his skull. The connection was a two-way street: Dagon was responsible for Klein's dreams and migraines, but a year later when Klein fractured his arm in a car accident, he knew Dagon felt it. The amount of damage he could do to Dagon was miniscule, but it was something.

When the Deep Ones mounted their attack, Klein understood what was going on and knew that he needed to at least tell the world what was happening, even if he looked like a crackpot. Once he did that, though, the Deep Ones were onto him and came for his head. He was murdered by a Deep One hybrid in the studio, his head taken and its scale retrieved.

If the PCs are on the yacht when it is seized by Deep Ones, some of them may be captured and will wake up with Klein and the crew with a splitting headache. Some of them may figure out what happened to them if they have a lot of experience and knowledge of the Deep Ones.

From here there are a lot of options, depending on the PCs' situation. If they all avoided capture—by being on another ship, for example—they can mount an attempt to get to Klein, though passing through the dimensional barrier will be tough without a Deep One who can open a portal.

If some or all of them are captured, the PCs can try to rescue Klein and anyone who hasn't already been murdered, or if they realize the situation, they might choose to cut off everybody's heads and escape on their own. Those who escaped capture may try to rescue the rest of their party, might just go after Klein, etc.

Opting to not rescue Klein, or even deal with him at all, is also an option. If any of the other crew are rescued, their heads will do just as well as Klein's will. The more, the merrier. Note that this also applies to any PCs who are captured by the Deep Ones.

So if anyone's willing, there's a building's cornerstone in Portland, Maine, that's a perfect fit for their heads.

STATBLOCKS

DEEP ONE

ASPECTS

High Concept: HORRIFYING FISH-PERSON

Other Aspect: FANATICAL DEVOTION TO DAGON

SKILLS

Great (+4): Physique

Good (+3): Athletics, Fight

Fair (+2): Lore, Provoke, Will

STUNTS

Made for the Seas: Deep Ones can move on the land, but they do not favor it. When a Deep One steps onto land, it gains the situation aspect **UNGAINLY** with one free invoke that the PCs can use. When it returns to the water, the aspect is removed.

Scaly Hide: Whenever a Deep One would take physical stress, it takes one less physical stress.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild:



LAST TRAIN TO INNSMOUTH

Timeline Aspect: THE ESOTERIC ORDER OF DAGON IS FEELING TRIUMPHANT

Dark dealings in Innsmouth have gone long unnoticed, and they clearly tie into the Esoteric Order of Dagon. The PCs don't know what exactly is going on there, but it needs to be investigated and taken out.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■ ??? [<i>Skyler Marsh, a helpful local</i>]
PLACE	■ Innsmouth [<i>...a quaint seaside hamlet, surprisingly lovely</i>]
THING	■ ??? [<i>A wooden cage below the dock</i>]
FOE	■ The Esoteric Order of Dagon, lurking in the shadows

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

Innsmouth is lovely. Surprisingly lovely.

When the PCs arrive in Innsmouth, the city, despite its reputation, is clean, sunny—or, if they arrive at night, crisp with a beautiful starry sky. The people are friendly. Moments after the PCs appear, they'll be approached by a twenty-year-old who introduces himself as Skyler. He works at the Gilman Bed and Breakfast and offers them a good deal on a room, and can give them a tour of the place if they'd like.

Innsmouth is not what the PCs were led to believe. Everybody is friendly. The stereotype of paranoid isolationists simply isn't there. It's a quaint, touristy seaside village filled with local artisans, shops, and cute little bookstores. They don't have a Starbucks, but they do have three coffee houses that make damn fine lattes.

But the longer the PCs stay in town, the odder things get. Strange lights can be seen on the shore late at night. Forms in alleyways appear to be hulking beasts, but turn out to be nothing at all, though there is an overpowering stink of fish. Some of the older residents have a...look about them. Something not quite right.

During their investigations—during which they may uncover some unusual details about Innsmouth and the Esoteric Order of Dagon—at least one resident will come to them asking for help, claiming that they are being followed late at night, witnessing strange things, and none of the other residents believe her. A few more will come forward and talk about the lights, the stink of fish, strange guests in some of the B&Bs. They've heard of the Esoteric Order of Dagon but thought it was some Masonic thing.

The truth is, everyone who lives in Innsmouth is Deep One hybrid. They look human at first, but as they age they become more and more fish-like until a final transformation takes them to the ocean to join their brethren.

They will try to pull the PCs apart and overwhelm them when they're alone. The goal is to capture them for a sacrifice to Dagon on the beach during the next new moon by lowering them in a wooden cage just below the surface of the water until they drown.

The people who come to the PCs for help are plants. None of them have the distinctive Innsmouth Look. They will attempt to play to the PCs' weaknesses. If a PC appears to be the type who wouldn't dare to hurt children, they'll send a child, and so on.

If the PCs escape the sacrifice, there's still the townsfolk to deal with. They won't take kindly to one of their sacrificial lambs going astray. In the fullness of time, Innsmouth's residents will come together, forming a huge mob with the single goal of sacrificing the interlopers.

STATBLOCKS

MOB

ASPECTS

High Concept: A MOB OF INNSMOUTH CITIZENS

Other Aspects: ORGANIZED AND DEDICATED CULTISTS; ROWDY DEEP-ONE HYBRIDS; A FEW POWERFUL DEEP ONES

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Athletics, Physique

Fair (+2): Investigate, Notice, Shoot

Average (+1): Empathy, Provoke, Stealth, Will

STUNTS

Come with Us!: The mob gets +2 to create an advantage with Physique by grappling.

Strength in Numbers: The mob's stress boxes can each absorb up to two stress.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild:

Moderate:

Severe:

INNSMOUTH CITIZEN

ASPECTS

High Concept: FRIENDLY, CHARMING LOCAL

Other Aspects: SECRET WORSHIPPER OF DAGON; WE ONLY CARE ABOUT OUR OWN

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive

Good (+3): Rapport, Notice

Fair (+2): Athletics, Fight, Physique

Average (+1): Empathy, Investigate, Resources, Will

STRESS

Physical **||||**

Mental **||||**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

NOTES

This is a “default” Innsmouth citizen. Individuals that the PCs spend time with should have another aspect or two that reflect their role; Skyles Marsh, for instance, would also have the aspect YOUR HELPFUL GUIDE TO THE AREA.

RITUAL: EMPATHIC WEATHER

This ritual is painstakingly carved into a massive conch shell, kept in the basement of the old Olmstead House, where the Esoteric Order of Dagon conducts regular meetings.

Casting Time: 12 hours

Opposition: Superb (+5)

Effect: The lead caster of this ritual becomes psychically linked to local weather patterns. They can’t directly control the weather; rather, it reflects their psyche. While they are calm, the weather is clear. When they grow agitated, the winds kick up. When they are furious, storms rage. When their emotional state changes, the GM can choose to reflect this change in the weather by creating a situation aspect. The effect lasts about a week and covers an area no larger than Innsmouth itself.

MOTHER HYDRA SLEEPS

Timeline Aspect: MOTHER HYDRA GUIDES HER CHILDREN

The greatest of Deep Ones is Mother Hydra: herald and consort of Dagon. The PCs need to find her and kill her. Simple, but not easy.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☹	Terrified, traumatized Everett Farmer
PLACE	☹	???. [<i>A sprawling temple on an uncharted island</i>]
THING	☹	???. [<i>A mysterious spear of Deep One design</i>]
FOE	☹	Mother Hydra, newly awakened

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

At this moment, Mother Hydra rests on a volcanic island in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic. Everett Farmer of Halifax knows the approximate location and can guide a ship there.

In the seventies, he owned a fishing boat, but the ship capsized during a sudden storm at sea. All hands were lost except Farmer, who washed up on the shockingly warm shores of an uncharted island. Like Y'ha-nthlei, it was covered in strange houses, but this city was seemingly unoccupied. At its center there was a truly massive stone temple, within which was a huge staircase that descended much further than Farmer could see, though it was lit by ghostly glowing moss on the walls.

For days, Farmer constructed a raft out of flotsam and the strange furnishings of the island's waterlogged homes. He found a crude-looking spear at the entrance to the temple, and was surprisingly fortunate when using it to fish along the shore.

Eventually, Farmer decided to explore the temple; he hoped there might be a source of fresh water underground, or at least a vessel he could store fish in. Instead, he stumbled across the massive frame of Mother Hydra, being attended to by a pair of Deep Ones. She was asleep, but woke up when Farmer entered her chamber. He was barely able to defend himself with the spear. Even still, he took a massive wound to the chest as Mother Hydra lashed out at him. He fled; Mother Hydra was too weak to follow him, and the Deep Ones stayed with her.

Some days later, dehydrated and nearly dead, he was picked up by a cargo ship. Perhaps needless to say, nobody believed the delusional ravings of the traumatized man on death's door.

Farmer never recovered from the experience. Not only has it haunted him, but his scar remains fresh and livid: a living connection to Mother Hydra. He can feel her. For decades she has been asleep, waking rarely to give guidance to her children. Now, she's stirring, readying herself for the great event.



Finding Everett Farmer is the first challenge, but it's not hard; Old Man Farmer can feel the beast waking, and he's been trying to warn people. Pushing through his paranoia will be harder, and convincing him to go out to sea and guide the PCs to Mother Hydra's temple will be a significant undertaking. He hasn't crossed a body of water for forty years, and doesn't intend to now.

Mother Hydra's temple is right where he thinks it is. It's better defended now, but only just: a small cadre of Deep Ones, and some clever traps within the temple itself.

Mother Hydra herself is weaker than she will be, but incredibly potent regardless—she is a big, scary boss battle. Her size and her magic make her effectively immune to mundane weapons, but magic can hurt her, and so can the spear Farmer brought back from the island. He's kept it all these years as a reminder that the events he remembered really happened. He doesn't know that it's a ritual blade, fashioned from a shard of Dagon's tooth. The Deep Ones have been looking for it since it was stolen, and if the PCs or Farmer have it with them, getting it back will be the Deep Ones' first priority.

Also, while Mother Hydra can shrug off most mundane weaponry, she's not untouchable. A nuclear bomb dropped on the island might not kill her outright, but in her current, weakened state, it will tax her abilities or deal her a significant injury.

While the PCs' stated goal is to take Mother Hydra out entirely, that might not be possible. Still, even minor injuries should be considered significant gains as they ripple forward and leave her weaker in the future, increasing the time between the arrival of Y'ha-nthlei and the rise of Dagon.



MOTHER HYDRA

ASPECTS

High Concept: THE MOTHER OF ALL DEEP ONES

Other Aspects: JUST RISEN FROM HER GREAT SLEEP; IMMUNE TO MUNDANE WEAPONRY; MAGICALLY POTENT; FIFTEEN FEET TALL

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Will

Great (+4): Lore, Physique

Good (+3): Athletics, Fight, Notice

Fair (+2): Academics, Empathy, Investigate, Shoot

STUNTS

Arcane Blasts: Mother Hydra can summon massive blasts of eldritch energy. Her Shoot attacks target everyone in a zone—including allies and, if she's targeting her own zone, herself.

Font of Corruption: Mother Hydra is suffused with Dagon's corrupting energy. Whenever a character takes a consequence to absorb shifts from her attack, they must also mark corruption.

Obedient Children: Mother Hydra has protectors. You may spend a fate point to immediately summon a Deep One, who will leap from the nearest body of water.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild:

Mild Mental:

Moderate:

Severe:

THE RISE OF THE GREAT OLD ONE

Timeline Aspect: DEEP ONE HYBRIDS WALK AMONG US

Y'ha-nthlei rises from the deep and, soon after, Dagon himself arrives. Billions of people, infected with Deep One DNA, undergo spontaneous mutations, either dying horribly or being twisted into aquatic servants of the Great Old One.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☒	Dagon, striding forth from the sea
PLACE	☒	The Risen Island of Y'ha-nthlei
THING	☒	Deep One DNA Infecting Most of Humanity
FOE	☒	Millions and Millions of Deep Ones

Dagon's Agenda (GM Only)

AMBITION: TO CREATE AN UNCONQUERABLE KINGDOM AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

Dagon's goals are simple. He wants to sit deep underwater, next to Mother Hydra, surrounded by innumerable fawning worshippers. More specifically, he wants to be untouchable down there.

There are dangerous creatures in the universe, and though Dagon is immeasurably powerful compared to humans, he is still threatened by things from outside the world: Mi-Go, Yithians, flying polyps, et cetera. But deep beneath the waves, with a slavishly devoted army at his command, he will be safe from invaders.

GOALS

Create More Deep Ones: The waters of Earth are vast. The territory is immeasurably huge, and Dagon means to fill it. To that end he needs to create more Deep Ones, preferably out of humans.

Return Y'ha-nthlei: At present, Dagon is in a slightly tangent reality. It is a pocket dimension, where he is safely trapped. He needs his followers, led by Mother Hydra, to pull him back into our world when the time is right for him to take over.

Cleanse the Surface: Deep beneath the waves, the only lingering threat to Dagon's dominion would be the surface-dwellers. Once they've given him his unstoppable army of Deep Ones, the remaining humans will need to be quickly disposed of and, in the fullness of time, the surface of the planet rendered uninhabitable.

TACTICS

DEEP ONE AGENTS

Deep One hybrids have been sneaking out of Innsmouth and into human society for well over a century. There are more of them than anybody knows. They communicate in secret and look out for their own. Dagon may have an agent just about anywhere. That said, they tend to stay out of the spotlight, rather than assuming leadership positions where others can see their inhuman features.

Use this tactic to:

- ▼ Make a seemingly trustworthy NPC turn on the PCs.
- ▼ Trap essential resources behind an organization controlled by Deep Ones.
- ▼ Give Deep Ones access to surprising and esoteric information.

XENOPHOBIA

Dagon does not trust anyone or anything except himself and his Deep Ones. His followers are likewise driven to distrust outsiders, and they excel at stoking that paranoia in others. Dagon's agents will urge crowds to fear newcomers and strangers, or try to turn the PCs against one another by raising suspicions.

Sow xenophobia by:

- ▼ Having Deep Ones bring the PCs to the attention of the law.
- ▼ Having information about the PCs unexpectedly broadcast to the public.
- ▼ Having people who trusted the PCs abruptly turn on them because of the Deep Ones' influence.

SMASHING THINGS TO PIECES

When it's the quickest or most efficient way to deal with problems, a horde of Deep Ones can get rid of problems with sudden and extreme violence.

Use this tactic by having something smashed to pieces and pulled into the water. Dagon does not require subtlety.

CULTISTS

Dagon is worshipped by the Deep Ones, of course. Likewise by the Deep One hybrids, most of whom are readily identifiable by their Innsmouth Look. Finally there is the Esoteric Order of Dagon; while there are many hybrids in its ranks, it also hosts humans who are willing to sell out their species. Dagon is able to offer material wealth, in the form of treasures dredged up from the seafloor, to those who do his bidding.



THE ARRIVAL OF SHUB-NIGGURATH

Brocken, the highest summit in the Harz mountain range in Germany, has long been associated with pagan rituals, devils, and witchcraft. The mountain appears in local legends and folklore, most notably in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's play *Faust*.

It is heavily associated with April 30th, *Hexennacht*, Witch's Night, where the forces of evil are said to be at their strongest and the veil between worlds the thinnest. It was later changed to *Walpurgisnacht*, the Eve of St. Walpurga, in an attempt to separate it from its pagan roots.

Since the reunification of Germany, Brocken has become a tourist attraction, where people celebrate Walpurgisnacht as a kitschy Halloween-esque festival including a performance of a rock opera based on *Faust*. Thousands of people come to stay in the hotels, party til dawn, and occasionally try to summon the devil.

On April 30th, 2030, more than six thousand people are scattered around Brocken at various hotels and parties celebrating Walpurgisnacht. Just as the sun sets and the last light dies away, the top of the mountain explodes into a fountain of orange light, revealing a tentacled monstrosity a thousand feet tall, its tentacles the thickness of old-growth redwood trees pointed to the sky, and just about as wide. Its body is a mass of bursting cloacal openings, enormous eyes, grasping tentacles. Moment by moment flesh flows over one nightmare feature only to reveal two more from its gelatinous mass. The thing stands on eight legs, each the width of a building, that end in goat-like hooves.

Its appearance crushes the structures at the peak, and it emits a noise that is so loud it is heard all the way down the mountain, shattering glass, bursting eardrums, and causing brain hemorrhages to those closest to it.

Its appearance prompts the Luftwaffe to scramble jets from Wunstorf Air Base. The monstrosity stands there, tentacles flailing, making this noise for about twenty minutes. The fighter pilots get a good look at it, one of them has a sudden seizure, another screams and, if the flight recorder is to be believed, purposely flew his plane straight into the ground. The other two pilots, without any orders, fire their full complement of missiles at it. The missiles impact it but are subsumed by the ever-shifting morass of its body. As the jets go back for another run, it disappears.

And that's when everyone on the mountain goes insane.



Men and women fall onto each other like rabid animals, tearing and biting, ripping chunks of flesh out with their teeth. The strong eat the weak in a nightmare orgy of cannibalism, only to become the meal for someone else stronger and hungrier. Audio from mobile phones and various microphones picks up growling, screaming, and the same nonsense chant—“Iä! Iä! Shub-Niggurath!”—over and over again.

Within an hour everyone on the mountain is dead.

Military and medical first responders are helicoptered in about an hour later. As they approach, one of the corpses swells and bursts like a water balloon, a miniature version of the horror on the mountain rising from the gore. It isn't large at first, about the size of a soda can.

It grows quickly once it shoots its tentacles down the throat of a soldier, pulling his lungs out through his throat and dissolving them into a thick slurry that it absorbs like a sponge. Then another one pops. And another, and another. The soldiers are quickly overwhelmed and killed, spawning new horrors from their corpses.

Throughout the night this scene repeats itself across the globe. In forests, on mountaintops; urban centers, coliseums, amusement parks, shopping malls. By the time anyone realizes that this is happening everywhere else, two-thirds of humanity has been killed to feed these horrors.

As the devastation grows, some areas waiting to be hit either by the mass murder of the beast everyone is now calling Shub-Niggurath, or an invasion of her minions, realize that they aren't. Shub-Niggurath never appears. Her minions never enter the area. Named the Exclusion Zones, these regions have given humanity a tiny foothold. But with each day that passes, they grow smaller.



There are at three known Exclusion Zones, centered on cities and extending in a radius of about 200 kilometers.

First, the city of Arkham, encompassing Massachusetts, Connecticut, parts of New Hampshire and Long Island, and most of the surrounding coastal areas and the Atlantic Ocean.

Second, the city of Ibadan, in Nigeria, encompassing the cities of Ogbomosho, Ilorin, Lagos, parts of the neighboring country Benin, and a stretch of coast of the Gulf of Guinea.

Third, the city of Newcastle in New South Wales, Australia, covering up to Port Macquarie in the north, Sydney and Wollongong to the south, a stretch of the Pacific to the east, and not much of anything out to the west.

No one understands what is keeping Shub-Niggurath and her spawn out of these areas. The only commonalities appear to be that they are all centered on large cities and include a stretch of coastline. There may be others, but these three are the only ones to have established communication with each other, sharing information and intel.

But these areas are not self-sufficient. They depend on goods and industries that would normally come from outside of their boundaries. Worse, they're shrinking. At the current rate they will be completely gone in less than ten years, but that's okay, because nobody will be around for it. The latest estimates have humanity starving to death within the next three years.

This is the world now. And it is not humanity's.

What Brought This Upon Us

These are some of the key events that are believed to have led to the rise of Shub-Niggurath.

CASH ON DELIVERY

In 2020 Jürgen Sauer of Berlin, the leader of a small doomsday cult called *Sündenmörder*, the Sin-Slayers, wins an online auction of the *Necronomicon*, a book filled with rituals to summon not just Shub-Niggurath, but several horrifying beings.

There is reason to believe that Sauer is behind bringing Shub-Niggurath into our world. It isn't known whether his possession of the *Necronomicon* is the lynchpin to summoning the Black Goat of the Woods, or if it merely makes it easier.

He is to pick it up from a locker on the ground floor of Alexanderplatz Station in Berlin. Though the date and approximate location are known, it's unclear what time Sauer picks up the book, which locker it's in, or how long the book has been in there. It could have been sitting in there since before the auction, or it could have been placed there the morning Sauer goes to retrieve it.

The mission is to make sure Sauer doesn't get his hands on that book, and to destroy it at the first opportunity. If Sauer doesn't walk away from the encounter, even better.

DRY RUN ON BALD MOUNTAIN

A heavily damaged journal found in the aftermath of the calamity in 2030 indicates that Brocken, the mountain where everything goes to hell, may have also been used for a previous summoning attempt of Shub-Niggurath ten years before, in 2020.

Though the attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, the fear is that it helped open the door that much wider to allow Shub-Niggurath entry into our world.

The date and time aren't overly specific. There's a window of three or four days during which it might take place. As to location, it's known that it's on Brocken, but where on the mountain is unclear. Given what happens in ten years, the peak seems a likely possibility.

The mission is to prevent the summoning. Failing that, improvise. It's known that the summoning was unsuccessful, but how unsuccessful was it? The team's job is to make sure that the answer to that question is "very."

THE THOUSAND YOUNG

Berlin, 2020. A naked man staggers down the Oberbaum Bridge out of Friedrichshain. He's picked up by police, who need to call for backup because he manages to throw one of them over the bridge into the Spree River. It takes fifteen officers to take him down, and he manages to injure twelve others.

He's put into an interrogation cell, handcuffed to U-bolts in a metal table that's bolted to the wall. They use five sets of hand and ankle cuffs. When he regains consciousness he starts banging on the table and screaming nonsense. A particularly brave officer goes in to interview with a recorder.

And what is Mister Naked screaming?

"lä! lä! Shub-Niggurath! Aiüvhyllatl lesh! Aiüvhyllatl kamrath! Aiüvhyllatl p'fan! lä! lä! Shub-Niggurath!"

Any of that sound vaguely familiar? Aside from the obvious link to Shub-Niggurath, the word Aiüvhyllatl is referenced in some texts as the name of a servitor of Shub-Niggurath. If the translation is correct, the man is saying, "Aiüvhyllatl dies. Aiüvhyllatl kills. Aiüvhyllatl is reborn."

While the police are trying to figure out what to do with this maniac and debating the legality of gassing him with fentanyl, every alarm in the station goes off because of disturbances on every floor.

Before all the interior cameras shut down, a man in the corner of one of the cells convulses, pukes up black bile, and is torn apart from the inside as a spawn of Shub-Niggurath is unleashed.

Like the ones that are spewed forth from the bodies of partiers on Brocken in 2030, this one begins feeding on whatever it can get its hands on, killing three other people in the cell it's in, and another two in the next cell over—pulling them through the bars, ripping them in half.

The same happens to three police officers coming in from the parking lot, two civilians waiting in the lobby, an HVAC worker repairing a duct on the top floor, and three people being processed along with the three officers doing the processing.

Fortunately, unlike the spawn that appear on Brocken and elsewhere across the world, the corpses these ones make don't give birth to further spawn. Thank the gods for small favors.

Not much else is known of the carnage as the interior cameras shut off, but reports afterward say that a terrorist attack was carried out at the police station, and was quietly pushed out of the news cycle by a series of larger terrorist attacks elsewhere in the city. There is no mention of Shub-Niggurath's spawn or what happened to them.

The only image available is from an exterior camera that was on a different circuit and kept filming a short while longer. It shows two men, one wearing a trenchcoat over a hoodie, the hood hiding his face, and the other apparently nude except for a blanket thrown over his shoulders. Then the camera cuts.

The suspicion is that the naked man is Aiüvhyllatl inhabiting a human body. The identity of the man taking him out of the police station is unknown. The spawn were clearly designed to cause chaos and mayhem and possibly self-destruct after some time, which would explain why none were found afterward.

The mission is to first and foremost neutralize Aiüvhyllatl if at all possible. Shred its body, figure out how to banish it from our dimension, whatever.

Secondly, neutralize the person or persons responsible for freeing it from police custody. Whoever they are, they have power and resources. The spawn of Shub-Niggurath don't just grow on trees. Also, they were implanted into people who as far as anyone can tell had seen no contact with Aiüvhyllatl, so how did they get infected?

The important thing is making sure that Aiüvhyllatl and whoever is behind the rescue are taken off the board.

A MOST EXCLUSIVE CLUB

The three Exclusion Zones that exist in the future have very little in common. They're all 400 kilometers in diameter, center on large cities, and contain a coastline.

Recently, one more similarity has come to light. From late 2018 to early 2020, each one held a major university that partnered with each other to perform a series of experiments in high-energy particle physics. It's unclear what the goal of the work was, and it was dropped in 2020 for some reason. This can't be coincidence. Whatever work was done must be responsible for the Exclusion Zones.

The project was run largely out of Miskatonic Polytechnic under Dr. Henry Armitage. The mission is to find out what was being worked on, see if it can be scaled up to prevent Shub-Niggurath from appearing in the first place, and then work to get it deployed.

It's not known how much security is in place at the lab, or how difficult it will be to get access. Regardless, no one on the project can be hurt. This cannot be stressed enough. If for whatever reason the Exclusion Zones are not created, humanity is done.

Shub-Niggurath's Timeline (GM Only)

Shub-Niggurath was on Earth for billions of years until an upstart little species—descended from rats that hid beneath the trees when the asteroid killed the dinosaurs—evolved into humanity and banished her from the Earth.

Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young, has been worshipped as a fertility goddess for thousands of years by misguided humans who keep trying to bring her into being, sometimes almost, but not quite succeeding.

Rituals and spells to bring her or summon her spawn were recorded on papyrus in Greek by an unknown author, attributed in the mid-19th century to a fictional character, Abdul Alhazred, who supposedly wrote it in Damascus in 730. It's a nonsense name, and papyrus was only rarely used after the 5th century BCE.

The collected papyri were transcribed into Latin by deranged monks, along with other rituals for beings like Azathoth, Nyarlathotep, and Cthulhu. These were bound into books and named the *Necronomicon*. An unknown number of copies were created.

Reading the *Necronomicon* is not in itself a problem. Much like, say, a Jonathan Franzen novel, it is confusing, nonsensical, but ultimately harmless. The trouble comes from—again, much like a Franzen novel—taking it seriously. Those who do take the time to truly understand the rituals, the arcane math, the methods for walking among other realms and twisting reality to one's whims, they tend to go a little...off. In more practical terms, delving into the *Necronomicon* is a good way to crank up one's corruption.

In 2020 a copy of the *Necronomicon* is purchased in a blind auction and delivered to Jürgen Sauer of Berlin, the leader of a small doomsday cult called *Sündenmörder*, the Sin-Slayers. He spent the next several years studying the book, finally contacting Shub-Niggurath and making a deal with her.

He would help Shub-Niggurath return to Earth and wipe it clean of the infestation of humanity, and in return Shub-Niggurath would elevate Sauer and his cultists to demigods free of mortal flesh to live forever alongside her greatness. Shub-Niggurath agreed, and on April 31st, 2030, Sauer enacted his plan, bringing forth and spreading Shub-Niggurath's will across the world.

Shub-Niggurath kept her deal to free Sauer and his cultists from their mortal flesh. But not the second part. They died like everybody else did, just slightly more surprised than the others.

CASH ON DELIVERY

Timeline Aspect: CULTS AND CREEPS ARE SEEKING THE NECRONOMICON

Obtain, or better yet destroy, the *Necronomicon* before the leader of a doomsday cult can get his stinking hands on it.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☒	Jürgen Sauer, leader of the Sin-Slayers
PLACE	☑	Alexanderplatz Station in Berlin
THING	☒	The <i>Necronomicon</i> , an arcane text thrumming with power
FOE	☑	??? [Several cults working at cross purposes]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

The *Necronomicon* in and of itself is useless. Just reading it does nothing. Might as well read any tinfoil whackjob's manifesto, for all the difference it will make. It's the intense study required that makes it so dangerous. For those who delve into it, the truths of the universe can open up.

It also isn't necessary for Sauer's plan. It just makes it a hell of a lot easier. If he doesn't have it, then the appearance of Shub-Niggurath and the spawning of the Thousand Young will be lessened, and the invasion might be containable. Maybe. Possibly. Probably not.

Sauer has already dug into several other occult tomes, so he knows what he's looking for and what he expects the *Necronomicon* will give him. He's also aware that a lot of people will be unhappy with the fact that he won the auction, and that going to retrieve the book will likely be dangerous.

And Sauer knows dangerous. Sauer is ex-Stasi, East German secret police. Mid-sixties, with graying hair, a bushy mustache, and a pair of glasses perched on his nose, he excels at looking harmless and studious, and he's really, really good at killing people.

So are the five men he brings with him, who will place themselves in strategic locations throughout the station to watch for anyone who might come calling.

Oddly enough, the PCs aren't the only ones. Three other groups of cultists are trying to take out Sauer and get hold of the book. One is made of four highly trained armed professionals. Another is pretty much a bunch of idiot skinhead thugs.

The third is one guy who looks like a trenchcoated hobo, but he's been digging into Old One magic for the last thirty years and is quite insane—the most dangerous person within twenty kilometers. This isn't just because he can make people's brains bleed out their eyeballs, but also because he's so corrupted that his body has sprouted tentacles and his chest has opened up in a massive, toothed mouth, which he will happily show to anyone who messes with him simply by opening his coat and, if he's really upset, eating them.

This will likely play out messy. Everyone has a better idea of what's actually going than the PCs do, except maybe the skinheads, who really are very stupid.

Ultimately, the PCs will get the book or someone else will, whether Sauer or one of the others. Whichever group gets the book will be the one to summon Shub-Niggurath.

One thing to consider: if this is the first event played, and Sauer gets the book, he could make a very good nemesis for the rest of the game. He could not only be at the center of at least two more events, but could also harry the PCs since he knows they're out to get him, even if he doesn't know exactly who they are.

NOTES ON SAUER

If the PCs and Sauer have met in a previous scene, he's prepared for them. He's made a number of spells and put them into glass marbles that are designed to shatter on impact. These will have a variety of effects: paralysis, burning, freezing time for a short bit, and so on. He'll deploy these as soon as he sees the PCs.

If he hasn't, he's still a pretty impressive wizard and can cast the same spells, but instead of being able to just throw a bunch of them at the PCs, he's got to do them one at a time.

Sauer is the only NPC in this book with a corruption clock. Most people will simply perish when overwhelmed by the influence of a Great Old One, but Sauer has the potential to gain a corrupted aspect and stunt, just like a PC. He knows enough about the dangerous side effects of magic that he won't fill his corruption clock unless he is in a truly desperate situation, if the PCs put him on the ropes.

JÜRGEN SAUER

ASPECTS

High Concept: LEADER OF THE SÜNDENMÖRDER

Other Aspects: A COMPETENT WIZARD; FORMER STASI OFFICER; UNASSUMING DEMEANOR

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Lore

Great (+4): Deceive, Will

Good (+3): Athletics, Physique, Shoot

Fair (+2): Fight, Investigate, Notice, Rapport

Average (+1): All other skills

STUNTS

Strange Magic: Sauer may mark corruption to cast a spell, as described in “*Sauer’s Spells*”, with Lore; targets will defend with Physique, Will, or Athletics, depending on the nature of the spell. If the attack is successful, the target is forced to take a situation aspect with one free invoke; in addition, the attack deals stress as normal. If Sauer targets himself or an ally, the target must still defend and take stress—the human body and mind instinctively reject the effects of Great Old One magic—but if the attack is successful, the resulting situation aspect gets a second free invoke.

Cantripped: If Sauer has already met the PCs, he will make cantrips, in the form of marbles imbued with the effects of any and all of the spells he knows, as described in “*Sauer’s Spells*”. He can use them as an action without filling corruption spaces. He throws them using Shoot, opposed by the target using Athletics to dodge.

Corrupted: For whatever reason, Sauer appears to absorb the corruption of Great Old Ones with alarming alacrity. His corruption clock clears at the end of each session.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

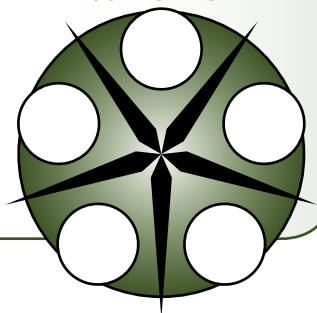
CONSEQUENCES

Mild:

Moderate:

Severe:

CORRUPTION



SAUER'S SPELLS

Jürgen Sauer doesn't have a concrete list of spells—his mind is sufficiently twisted that he can not only cast eldritch magic, but also invent new spells on the fly using his dim understanding of the convoluted principles of Great Old One technology. To that end, this list is not complete; these are merely the spells he's likely to fall back on. You should supplement these spells with whatever you can imagine.

WREATHED IN FLAME: The target is covered in arcane violet flames. They hurt more than they actually harm, but the target will have trouble doing anything except putting them out.

Opposition: The target's Will

Effect: On a success, the target is **WREATHED IN FLAME**, suffering one shift of physical hit and a -2 penalty to all actions except Will rolls made to overcome the searing pain, against Great (+4) difficulty. Once the target overcomes the pain, the flames will quickly fade and the aspect will go away. On a success with style, the target instead takes a 2-shift physical hit, and the Will roll to overcome the spell's effect faces Fantastic (+6) difficulty.

PHASED: The target is wrenched onto a perpendicular thread of reality. They are unable to interact with any physical material in our dimension, but they can still observe and move around.

Opposition: The target's Athletics

Effect: On a success, the target can overcome the plane-shifting effect with Lore against Great (+4) difficulty. On a success with style, the Lore roll to overcome the spell's effect instead faces Fantastic (+6) difficulty.

ENSPHERED IN ICE: The target is encased in a large, hollow sphere of ice. It's thick, nearly impossible to break from within, but could with some effort be maneuvered like a hamster ball.

Opposition: The target's Athletics

Effect: On a success, the target is **ENCASED IN A SPHERE OF ICE**. The ensphered target can maneuver the sphere to another zone by overcoming with Athletics against Fair (+2) difficulty. Destroying the sphere from within faces Fantastic (+6) difficulty, while an effort to destroy it from outside merely faces Great (+4) difficulty.

PARAMILITARY OPERATIVE

ASPECTS

High Concept: FORMER MERCENARY, CURRENT CULTIST

Other Aspects: WELL-ARMED AND WELL-TRAINED; SEEKING ARCANE POWER

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight, Shoot

Fair (+2): Investigate, Notice, Stealth

Average (+1): Burglary, Deceive, Drive, Empathy

STUNTS

Cover Me!: Paramilitary operatives get +2 to creating an advantage with Shoot by laying down suppressing fire.

Fight Through the Pain: A paramilitary operative's consequence slots can each absorb an extra shift.

STRESS

Physical **1111**

Mental **1111**

CONSEQUENCES

3 Mild:

5 Moderate:

SIN-SLAYER

ASPECTS

High Concept: ACOLYTE OF JÜRGEN SAUER

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Fight, Lore

Average (+1): Notice, Physique, Will

STUNTS

Cantripped: If Jürgen Sauer has made his enchanted marbles, then he will distribute a few to his followers. Once per session, the Sin-Slayer may cast a spell, as per Sauer's Cantripped stunt.

For the Leader: Sauer's acolytes are most effective when following his lead. In a conflict, the Sin-Slayer gets +1 to attack or create an advantage against the target that Sauer attacked most recently.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **11111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

SKINHEAD

ASPECTS

High Concept: SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BUT DETERMINED DUMBASS

Other Aspect: DELUSIONS OF COMPETENCE

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Fight, Physique

Bad (-1): Literally everything else

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **1111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

WAYLON BENNETT

ASPECTS

High Concept: A CREEPY LITTLE WEIRDO

Other Aspects: DEEPLY, HORRIFICALLY CORRUPTED; A MASS OF HIDDEN TENTACLES

SKILLS

Good (+3): Empathy, Lore

Fair (+2): Academics, Athletics, Provoke

Average (+1): Drive, Rapport, Resources, Will

STUNTS

Absorption: Waylon can open the gaping maw in his chest to consume a defenseless target; this includes anyone he takes out in conflict or a convenient nameless NPC. If he does so, he immediately clears all of his stress tracks and consequences.

Raw Arcana: Waylon can't cast focused spells like Jürgen Sauer, but he can throw raw magic energy around. To do so, he attacks with Lore, and his targets defend with Will or Physique. If a target takes any stress, they also mark corruption; if they take a consequence, it represents a bizarre but thankfully short-term mutation.

STRESS

Physical **1111**

Mental **11111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

DRY RUN ON BALD MOUNTAIN

Timeline Aspect: SHUB-NIGGURATH'S CHILDREN ARE WILLING TO DEAL

It appears there was an unsuccessful attempt to summon Shub-Niggurath on Brocken in 2020. It may have paved the way for the real summoning. Put a stop to it.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☒	??? [<i>Tiolk'thu, servitor of Shub-Niggurath</i>]
PLACE	☑	The peak of Brocken
THING	☑	A summoning circle
FOE	☒	A group of cultists [<i>...led by Jürgen Sauer</i>]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

If the PCs have already met Jürgen Sauer in “*Cash on Delivery*” or “*The Thousand Young*,” they’ll have a pretty good idea what he’s capable of. If they haven’t, this is a good place for an introduction.

If he’s dead, one cult leader looks pretty much like another, so it’s not a big deal. Also, if he or someone else got the *Necronomicon* in “*Cash on Delivery*,” then they’re using it here, giving the PCs another chance at getting and destroying it.

Jürgen Sauer, the cult leader of Sündenmörder, the Sin-Slayers, is experimenting with a summoning of Shub-Niggurath. With a group of half a dozen cultists with him, he doesn’t have high hopes for it, but if he can just catch Shub-Niggurath’s attention for a brief moment, he sees it as a win.

He gets a surprisingly big win.

The summoning does not call forth Shub-Niggurath but a servitor named Tiolk’thu, which appears as a ten-foot-tall worm made of fire inside the protection circle. It laughs at Sauer for thinking he could just bring Shub-Niggurath into the world with a handful of fancy words.

There are procedures and decorum to follow. You don’t just go waltzing in and expect an audience with a being of Shub-Niggurath’s stature. Tiolk’thu will carry a message to the Black Goat, but only that there is a human who wants to parley, so should Sauer learn the proper incantations and make the proper tithes to request an audience, then perhaps Shub-Niggurath will deign to speak with him.

Tiolk’thu in all its magnanimity offers to give Sauer some assistance, the titles of books of dark lore he should read, passages he should focus on. And with that, Tiolk’thu is ready to depart, but before it does it demands payment for its services.



Sauer, guessing what the payment probably is, tells Tiolk'thu that it can have all of the other humans who came with him, as long as he is spared. Tiolk'thu agrees, and the slaughter begins. Sauer walks away with new information on how to summon Shub-Niggurath, and a new appreciation for the unswerving loyalty and gullibility of cultists.

When the PCs finally find Sauer and his cultists, he is already conversing with Tiolk'thu. They aren't speaking German—or any other human language. If a PC is versed in mythos lore, they can get the gist of the conversation: that Sauer needs to do more before he can invoke Shub-Niggurath, and Tiolk'thu is about to tell him what those steps are.

It's at this moment that Tiolk'thu mentions the presence of the PCs. It knew they were coming once they were halfway up the mountain. Sauer's cultists go on the offensive.

If Sauer already has the *Necronomicon* from "Cash on Delivery," one of the PCs will see it sitting unattended on a podium, there for the taking. Not really, but it looks like it. Sauer has put a spell on it to electrocute anyone but him who touches it.

As for Tiolk'thu, it's curious how this will all shake out. It sees no reason to join the fight unless the fight comes to it. Not much can hurt it, though, beyond Old One magic and technology. Bullets are about half as effective, but attacks fueled by corruption stunts work just fine.

It can't get out of its summoning circle without someone else's help, so depending on which way the fight is going, Tiolk'thu will speak into the mind of whichever PCs are most corrupted. It will attempt to bargain with them, promising them great power, if they only break the circle so that it can go home.

Failing that, it will attempt to take over the mind of one or more of the PCs to break the circle, providing that it hasn't already gotten one of Sauer's cultists to do it.

Where all these shenanigans end up is anybody's guess, but it'll be bloody one way or the other. On the one hand, the PCs didn't stop the summoning. On the other hand, it wasn't the summoning they thought it was and their arrival will prevent Sauer from learning some important details that will make his goals easier to achieve.



TIOLK'THU

ASPECTS

High Concept: SERVITOR OF SHUB-NIGGURATH

Other Aspects: TEN-FOOT-TALL WORM MADE OF FIRE; BOUND TO THE SUMMONING CIRCLE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Academics, Lore

Good (+3): Deceive, Physique, Will

Fair (+2): Empathy, Fight, Rapport, Shoot

STUNTS

Alien Matter: Tiolk'thu is extremely resistant to mundane weaponry; anything less powerful than a large gun cannot harm him at all. More powerful human weaponry deals a 1-shift physical hit on a successful attack, regardless of the shifts of the hit. Attacks empowered by corruption or Great Old One tech are treated normally.

Made of Fire: Everyone who begins their turn in Tiolk'thu's zone takes a 1-shift physical hit, due to the sheer heat pouring off it.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild:

Moderate:

THE THOUSAND YOUNG

Timeline Aspect: SHUB-NIGGURATH'S CHILDREN ARE WAITING FOR THEIR CHANCE

There was a precursor to the Brocken attack, in a police station in Friedrichshain; it involved Aiüvhyllatl, a servitor of Shub-Niggurath. Find it, stop it, figure out who summoned it.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	??? [<i>An unusually rattled and underprepared Jürgen Sauer</i>]
PLACE	■	A small police station in Friedrichshain
THING	■	A human corpse, puppeteered by Aiüvhyllatl
FOE	■	A chaotic mélange of cultists, cops, and horrible monsters

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

It's our old friend Jürgen Sauer! Hi, Jürgen!

He's in on this one, unless he's dead. In which case he's either back, and you don't need to explain that, or it's another cultist. Making the PCs think he's actually unkillable might be a fun little fear to play off of.

If “*Cash on Delivery*” and “*Dry Run on Bald Mountain*” haven't been played, this will be the first time Sauer and the PCs meet. If not, neither he nor the PCs are likely to be happy seeing each other.

The naked man is indeed Aiüvhyllatl. Up until about three hours before being found on Oberbaum Bridge, the body was a wealthy banker who got in a fight and didn't get out alive.

Sauer has summoned Aiüvhyllatl to help him with ceremonies that will curry favor with Shub-Niggurath, and placed its spirit into the body of the dead banker. Unfortunately, a police patrol spots Sauer as he's packing things up. Not wanting to be discovered—for no other reason than it would make things harder—he casts a spell on the police, who promptly forget him and drive off.

While Sauer is busy doing that, Aiüvhyllatl wanders off like a toddler without a leash. By the time Sauer realizes Aiüvhyllatl is gone, it's already gotten to the Oberbaum Bridge where it soon runs into the police.

Instead of trying to take on the police then and there, which would just attract more attention, Sauer listens in on their radio chatter and follows them to the police station.

Outside the station Sauer throws a handful of spores, from which the spawn could grow, into the air and casts a spell to send them flying to random people in the station.

Then he waits. When the chaos gets going, he cuts the cameras, goes inside, and grabs Aiüvhyllatl.

Now that the PCs are in play, Sauer will find things a little more difficult. The PCs know what station it is, what day it happened, and that it happened in the evening. It might not be much, but it should be plenty to intercept Sauer.

Don't forget Aiüvhyllatl. It's no slouch. However, despite its superior strength and speed, its body is decaying faster than Sauer anticipated. In a few hours it will barely be able to walk. But what's more important to the PCs is the next few minutes.

The best way to take out Aiüvhyllatl is to kill the body, either destroying it such that there's nothing really there—high explosives are always popular—or destroying its head.

Sauer's still human, but also has magical protections to make him harder to hurt. If Aiüvhyllatl is taken out, that's a win. If Aiüvhyllatl and Sauer are both taken out, that's an even bigger win.



AIÜVHYLLATL

ASPECTS

High Concept: DECAYING CORPSE ANIMATED BY ELDRITCH FORCE

Other Aspects: IMMUNE TO PAIN; DELIGHTED TO BE ON EARTH

SKILLS

Great (+4): Lore

Good (+3): Physique, Will

Fair (+2): Deceive, Empathy, Rapport

Average (+1): Fight, Investigate, Notice, Shoot

STUNTS

Useless Flesh: Aiüvhyllatl can defend with Physique against Fight and Shoot attacks—it simply takes the hit with its disposable flesh-puppet.

STRESS

Physical **11111111**

Mental **11111111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:

SPAWN OF SHUB-NIGGURATH

ASPECTS

High Concept: HIDEOUS CHILD OF THE GREAT OLD ONE

Other Aspects: AMORPHOUS; UNSTOPPABLE; DOZENS OF WAVING TENTACLES

SKILLS

Great (+4): Mindless Destruction

STUNTS

Gestating: Any NPC who has been exposed to Sauer's spores might be infected with a spawn. If there's an NPC in the scene that could have been exposed, the GM may at any point spend a fate point to have a spawn of Shub-Niggurath burst forth from their body.

STRESS 111111

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

A MOST EXCLUSIVE CLUB

Timeline Aspect: THE WALLS BETWEEN DIMENSIONS ARE THIN

For reasons unknown, there are three Exclusion Zones that Shub-Niggurath has yet to penetrate. All they have in common is an experiment—a synchronized test involving high-energy particle physics. Figure out how we can use that knowledge to stop Shub-Niggurath.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	Dr. Henry Armitage
PLACE	■	Miskatonic Polytechnic
THING	■	Particle accelerator [...and trans-dimensional bridge]
FOE	■	??? [Things from the other side, desperate and furious]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

Ironically enough, the project is to see if holes can be opened into other dimensions.

The Exclusion Zones were created during a synchronized experiment between the universities of Ibadan, Newcastle, and Miskatonic Polytechnic. The point was to see if they could at least create some kind of measurable breach between worlds, which they theorized would be about the size of a few protons.

Instead, it created massive breaches 15 meters in diameter at all three sites, revealing a desert with two blazing red suns in the sky. At first shocked that it worked, much less that it worked so well that it showed them an alien landscape, they were further elated when they realized they could see each other's breaches through their own only a few meters away.

While they were discussing whether someone should step through, a five-foot-wide crab-thing burst out of the sand and jumped into the lab at Miskatonic.

Newcastle shut down their equipment, closing the breach at all three locations. Armitage and his students managed to kill the thing that came through, but one was so badly wounded she spent months in the hospital.

Though the breaches were closed, the experiment created an outcropping of Earth's reality into the alien reality, and one from the alien reality into Earth's. Each dimension was slightly out of phase from the other, imperceptible to human senses.

Not understanding what happened, the teams agreed to put the project on hold so they could figure out where their math went wrong. The next year, Dr. Armitage died of a heart attack and the project was never restarted.

The Exclusion Zones keep out Shub-Niggurath and her spawn because the strange mix of realities isn't safe for the creatures to cross into. Humans have no problems with it because their brains and biology are so simple. But Shub-Niggurath and her spawn are so many orders of magnitude more complex that they need dimensional consistency or they'll fragment along the transition lines.

Becoming a member of the science team, should they want to, is pretty easy for PCs who still look human enough. There's always heavy equipment to move, and nobody in the lab realizes they're about to change reality forever, so they don't really care who sees it.

If they look for it, the PCs can easily find data on the experiment. It's stored on servers in the lab, which has a barely serviceable lock on it. The workstation password is written on a Post-It note on the monitor.

It will be obvious to anyone who studies the data that the team is attempting to make a tiny hole between dimensions and has scheduled the experiment to run in a few hours' time.

If a PC has a science background and dig into the data a bit, they might realize a few other things:

- ▼ The Exclusion Zones exist because of the experiment.
- ▼ The Zones only exist if the three sites are not in sync when they shut down. Pull the plug on one or two, and you get a Zone. Pull it on all three, you don't. There's no indication as to why that might be the case, but the math supports it.
- ▼ Since the Zones exist in the future, that means somebody pulled the plug on the experiment, but not at all three sites. Accident? Sabotage? Something gone horribly, horribly wrong?
- ▼ The system does not appear to be scalable to cover the Earth, but if more sites were built, there would be more Zones.
- ▼ The math is wrong. In the future the Exclusion Zones stretch 200 kilometers in any direction. The math says they should be tiny pinpricks in reality.
- ▼ Since this is all hypothetical, it would be a really good idea for them to actually witness the experiment.

For the scientists, this is the only time this event happens in their timeline. For the PCs, this event will happen twice. Once in their history, and now a second time as they've gone back to before it occurred. If they were to go back again, it'd be three times, and so on.

But in the dimension to which the breach was opened, time functions and is experienced differently by the beings living in it. Opening the breach put the dimension into a loop, trapping them into reliving the same event over and over and over again, remembering every single time it happens.



The alien side of the breach is causing the loops. But it has to be closed on Earth's side. Since the initial conditions on the Earth side are always the same, the result is always the same. No matter what they do, they can't get to the breach in time. They have lived through the same three hours of their lives 47,897,218 times. Give or take.

They are not happy about this.

But this time, something *is* different. The PCs are there, and their very presence in the past drastically changes the initial conditions. They don't need to be in the room. They simply need to be.

When the experiment is run this time, three vaguely humanoid things leap out of the breaches, one at each site, and start destroying equipment and killing anyone they can.

The creatures are all a slick, uniform black, have inward-curved horns, bat-like wings, a barbed tail, and, most notably, no faces.

If the PCs know that the Zones only exist because the breaches aren't shut down in sync, they might realize that that's exactly what these creatures are trying to change.

The PCs need to shut things down on their end before the creatures do it to all three, or humanity's screwed.

TRANSDIMENSIONAL INVADER

ASPECTS

High Concept: CREATURE OF LIVING SHADOW

Other Aspects: INVADER FROM ANOTHER REALITY; TRYING TO FIX WHAT HUMANS SCREWED UP; TRAPPED IN A TIME LOOP FOR SUBJECTIVE MILLENNIA

SKILLS

Good (+3): Athletics, Physique

Fair (+2): Fight, Shoot, Will

Average (+1): Academics, Lore, Provoke, Rapport

STUNTS

Bat Wings: The invaders can fly. For the most part, it's effortless, but if they need to perform a complex maneuver, they must overcome with Athletics.

STRESS

Physical 1111111

Mental 1111

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:

THE RISE OF THE GREAT OLD ONE

Timeline Aspect: SUMMONING PLANS HAVE ALREADY BEEN SET IN MOTION

Shub-Niggurath appears atop the peak of Brocken at the height of Walpurgisnacht. Soon, her spawn spread to cover nearly all of the world.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☞ Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young
PLACE	☞ Brocken, at the height of Walpurgisnacht
THING	☞ The <i>Necronomicon</i>
FOE	☞ Shub-Niggurath's multitudinous and self-propagating spawn

Shub-Niggurath's Agenda (GM Only)

AMBITION: CLEANSE THE WORLD OF ITS ACCUMULATED FILTH

Shub-Niggurath wants the Earth to be a clean slate that its many children can inhabit. That means getting rid of the innumerable annoying pests that have cropped up over the past couple millennia; you know, humans.

GOALS

Teach the Right Words: Shub-Niggurath understands the means by which people can use words and gestures to forcibly rewrite the underlying structures of reality. Basic actions which the profoundly ignorant call “magic.” If pestilent humans are useful at all, it’s only because they can perform rituals that can bring Shub-Niggurath back to Earth, and as a result she must see that knowledge spread, in the form of the *Necronomicon* and other texts, to those with the will to learn it.

Return to Earth: Shub-Niggurath has been banished to a distant realm, an empty corner of reality devoid of light and matter, where she impatiently watches our planet and its infestation of humanity. Were she able to return, to physically exist on Earth, she would be able to cleanse the world.

Reproduce: Shub-Niggurath has many children, and she plans to have many, many more. She will fill the world with her spawn, and when the Earth is at capacity, she shall move on to the next planet and, eventually, the rest of the universe.

TACTICS

EMPOWER MORTAL AGENTS

Shub-Niggurath knows magic, and she and her servitors can share that knowledge. Someone obedient, like Sauer, can be elevated into a fearsome wizard. If a lackey can’t be found, then any schlub can be gifted a magic spell they don’t know how to control, and Shub-Niggurath will benefit from the inevitable chaos.

You can use this tactic to:

- ▼ Expand the eldritch prowess of a notable enemy.
- ▼ Allow a minion to unleash uncontrollable destructive power.
- ▼ Lure an allied NPC into corruption with promises of arcane might.

SEND FORTH HER SPAWN OR A CHILD

It's difficult, but Shub-Niggurath can send one of her children to Earth. Her spawn, if course, are tools in her arsenal...but they aren't the same as her *children*. Spawn are relatively mindless, useful for raw destruction of humans, but useless at more nuanced tasks. Shub-Niggurath's favored children are creatures like Tioik'thu and Aiüvhyllat!; unique, indescribably horrific, and intelligent. Shub-Niggurath's children can and will parley with the PCs. They can make deals and promises which they absolutely won't keep. Where the Great Old One's spawn are chaotic, her children are malevolent. Fortunately, sending them to Earth when they haven't been summoned is very taxing indeed.

You can use this tactic to:

- ▼ Murder an unnamed or minor NPC by unleashing a spawn through them in a crowded, public space.
- ▼ Threaten to transform an allied NPC into a spawn.
- ▼ Send a child to Earth, but you must fill the whole Resistance side of the timeline track to do so.

TRICK FOOLISH HUMANS INTO SUMMONING ONE OF ITS CHILDREN

Luckily for Shub-Niggurath, humans are easy to fool.

You can use this tactic to:

- ▼ Pull people the heroes care about into a cult trying to summon a child of Shub-Niggurath.
- ▼ Have a group summon a child elsewhere, drawing the heroes' attention.

CULTISTS

Numerous. Sauer and his Sin-Slayers are the most powerful at present, but there are other competing factions. In general, the other cults are much like Sauer's: a powerful leader who has learned to work magic, and a small but dedicated cadre of followers. These leaders often come from military backgrounds—a human needs to be exceedingly strong and purpose-driven to handle the stresses of working magic.



THE ARRIVAL OF NYARLATHOTEP

Nyarlathotep is here. Nyarlathotep has always been here. From the time the universe began to the time that it will end, from the greatest stars to the most ordinary crossroads. Nyarlathotep is free, unbounded, unfettered.

He has walked the Earth when it was molten and cooling, when the air was poison, when the stars were young. When the Elder Things came, Nyarlathotep was waiting. He soaked in their worship, watched them battle against the Mi-Go and the Yithians in their stolen bodies, and die when beings of their own creation rebelled against them.

Since the time humanity first stood on two legs, Nyarlathotep has pruned and shaped us like topiary. He has culled and slaughtered us like cattle. He has designs, plans too complex for mortal thought. He has watched, and he has waited.

And soon he will wait no more.

**—From the journals of Enoch Bowen, founder
of the Church of Starry Wisdom**

In 2028 the world is a powder keg. Climate change, resource shortages, antibiotic-resistant diseases, viral outbreaks, military conflicts, trade wars. Tensions are higher between China, Russia, and the United States than at any time since the Cold War, and a number of proxy wars have sprung up across the globe.

In Egypt presidential elections are being held. The day before the cutoff for declaring candidacy, a man named Nour Al Hasan comes out of nowhere with an unprecedented 150,000 signatures from all twenty-seven provinces. After extensive investigation, it is found that all of the signatures are legitimate and Hasan must be allowed to run.

Despite not having the backing of any members of Parliament, millions of dollars put into negative campaigns against him mostly focusing on his mysterious origins, and barely running a campaign, Hasan wins by a landslide.

Hasan dissolves Parliament and declares a state of emergency, citing as his rationale the centuries-long conflicts in the Middle East in which Egypt has always played an important role, and Egypt's history as the ancient ruler of a vast empire. With the state of emergency declared, Hasan declares himself Nyarlathotep, the Dark Pharaoh, come to bring Egypt back to its original glory. Foreign reporters covering Egyptian politics are

surprised less that this is happening and more that so many Egyptians are going along with it as if it is completely normal.

In Antarctica, the day after Nyarlathotep's declaration, all 138 active and dormant volcanoes, many of which are beneath the surface of the ice, go off, blowing their tops like busted fire hydrants, melting most of the ice sheet. Almost all of the science stations on the continent are consumed in the blasts, but a handful last long enough to broadcast descriptions and a few images of towering spires of a city long buried in the ice.

One scientist at the French Dumont d'Urville Station reports witnessing immense, barrel-shaped, winged creatures with what appear to be star-shaped heads flying up from the smoke and ash like swarms of giant bats that blot out the sky, quickly followed by a thousand formless things that flow from one shape to another to cross the once icy fields.

The debris fills the air to the point where Antarctica is no longer visible from space, and it is estimated that if the eruptions continue the entire Southern Hemisphere will be covered by a thick cloud in a matter of days, blotting out the sun, with the Northern Hemisphere not long after.

The following day in Egypt, the pyramids of the Giza Necropolis, Saqqara, and Dahshur explode, throwing debris and sand into the air. In their places are 250-meter-tall, writhing, barrel-shaped monstrosities. Tentacles, eyes, and mouths with teeth dozens of meters long are constantly forming, then being subsumed back into the nightmare flesh only to have more appear somewhere else.

Terrifying though they are, it isn't until they pull themselves free from the ground and begin to move out that the real horror show begins. Out of the pits left behind by these giants, thousands upon thousands of faceless humanoid creatures burst forth like cockroaches. The towering monstrosities and armies of the Faceless head north at a terrifying clip, Nyarlathotep visible in the garb of an ancient pharaoh atop one of the beasts. He is reported holding aloft a large, finely cut crystal from which a light of ever-shifting colors appears. No one knows its purpose.

Air strikes against the giant beasts are ineffective, and attempts to kill Nyarlathotep atop the lead monster all fail. For every one of the Faceless killed, twenty more take its place. By the next morning they have lain waste to Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and parts of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran to the north and east, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco to the west, with no signs of stopping. High-altitude reconnaissance does not show any dead soldiers, but a reporter on the ground, before being overrun, gets a picture uploaded showing a faceless man in the tattered shreds of a Jordanian uniform.

The relentless and ever-growing army of the Faceless never stops, never rests. As the army splits—one going north into Turkey, while the other heads east into Iran—the United States, Russia, China, and India launch a full-scale nuclear bombardment into the heart of the horde, killing millions of the Faceless and civilians, laying down lines of destruction and nuclear fallout stretching from Lebanon to Azerbaijan, splitting Iran down the middle. Besides wholesale slaughter of millions of the Faceless, of which there is seemingly always more, there appears to be no effect.

With Nyarlathotep impossibly at the head of every arm of the horde simultaneously, Europe and most of Asia fall within the week, and by the second week they have overrun all of Africa, Asia, and have moved into North America across the Bering Strait.

As this is going on, the alien creatures witnessed in Antarctica move into South America and up into North America to meet up and join with Nyarlathotep's minions.

At this point, every human being on Earth is either dead, turned into one of the Faceless, or hiding, scattered in terror. Nyarlathotep rises, humanity falls.

What Brought This Upon Us

These are some of the key events that are believed to have led to the rise of Nyarlathotep.

DEEP FREEZE

In 2020 three volcanologists from Miskatonic Polytechnic—Dr. Hyunsook Sung, Dr. Natalie Delapore, and Dr. Wendy Dyer—are preparing to scale the dormant volcano Mount Sidley in the remote Executive Committee Range in Antarctica when an earthquake hits, cracking the ice and snow and revealing a massive columned arch carved out of the mountain, holding what looks to be 40-foot-tall double doors. The entire structure has elements of Egyptian architecture.

The possibility of aftershocks makes it too dangerous to stay, but the team takes time to capture video of their find. The arches and doors are covered in pictograms they don't recognize. A repeated image is that of strange, barrel-shaped creatures with star-shaped heads, standing above amoeba-shaped creatures dotted with eyes.

As they are packing up to leave, an aftershock opens a crevasse, pulling down Dr. Sung. Dr. Delapore's leg is broken, and Dr. Dyer is barely able to get the both of them out on their plane before the ice crumbles around them.



Dr. Sung's death becomes a media circus when someone gets hold of the video. Delapore and Dyer are accused of everything from murder to fraud and worse. Amid the storm of harassment they are contacted by representatives for the Church of Starry Wisdom, an organization neither of them have heard of, offering enough money to go back and investigate further, and hopefully retrieve the remains of Dr. Sung.

The money is more than enough to fund the entire project, allowing them to pull together a large team and equipment for the summer to see what else they can find and document it. The expedition is highly publicized, and everyone from conspiracy theorists to UFO nuts to skeptics follows it intently.

Finally, three months in, the team announces that they have found a way in through the doors and will be opening them the following morning, documenting the entire process.

And that's the last anyone hears of them. A summer snowstorm hits the next morning and lasts almost a week. When the weather clears enough, teams from the Scott and McMurdo stations go to the site and report that the team was lost in an avalanche that buried the arch, their equipment, everything.

It is unlikely that the kind of devastation the McMurdo and Scott teams reported happened, and it certainly wouldn't have left everyone dead. The expedition was a major undertaking, the base camp made of inflatable prefab structures located far enough from the ruins that the research team took tracked vehicles to get there. More than a dozen support staff, including mechanics, cooks, medics, and IT personnel, never left the camp.

It is believed that this event has a direct connection with the massive volcanic eruptions that will uncover the ancient city and release the nightmare creatures from the ice several years later.

The mission is to stop whatever it is that happened at the site. There's almost nothing to go on. The only advantage is that there was a support-staff rotation out of McMurdo four days before the incident. With luck, the PCs can get out to the site with the new staff. From there they have four days to figure out what is about to happen and stop it.

THE RAISING OF THE KING

When Nour Al Hasan breaks onto the Egyptian political scene in 2028, he is a mystery. He tells the media that he comes from humble beginnings, spent years as a laborer, and educated himself when he was denied opportunities for schooling.

Keta' El Amn El Watani, Egypt's national security agency, investigates him and finds that, yes, he does come from humble beginnings, and, yes, he did spend years as a laborer. All the way up to sometime in 2020 when he disappeared during a job digging at an archaeological site in Mit Rahina, twenty kilometers south of Cairo.

From 2020 to 2028 there is nothing. No sightings, no bank records, no crimes, nothing. And then, within the space of a day, a massive presidential campaign appeared out of nowhere. Paperwork was filed and processed with unheard-of speed, campaign volunteers were scouring the streets gathering signatures. Hasan made appearances in every province holding rallies. Government agents infiltrating them came away completely convinced that Hasan was the future of Egypt, even though they couldn't articulate anything that he had said. Video of the rallies shows him making the usual unoriginal promises of any politician, and yet from Hasan they are new and vibrant ideas.

Knowing that not long after he would reveal himself as the Dark Pharaoh, Nyarlathotep, a few questions arise. Was Hasan replaced? Possessed? Was it an accident or by design? And is there anything that can be done about it before it happens?

On the day of Hasan's disappearance, an elaborate sealed sarcophagus was discovered in a tomb inside what appeared to be a family home, in the Hid Al-Demerdash area in Mit Rahina, thought to be part of the ancient Egyptian city of Memphis. None of the archaeologists had ever found one in a residential area before like that. The sarcophagus was moved from the site to a laboratory not long after for imaging, and by 2028 it had still not been opened.

Significant evidence points to Hasan becoming corrupted and possessed by Nyarlathotep's will. The mission is to track down Hasan before he goes missing from the dig site in 2020 and prevent whatever turns him into Nyarlathotep by any means possible. If that means murdering him, then so be it.

DEMON AT THE CROSSROADS

Before they go back in time, the PCs will be briefed by an ex-member of the Church of Starry Wisdom who escaped before the Apocalypse and survived the nightmare that Nyarlathotep has unleashed upon the world. He doesn't know much, but he's all they've got.

The Church of Starry Wisdom is a cult dedicated to Nyarlathotep, started by archaeologist Enoch Bowen in the United States after he returned from Egypt in 1844. During his time there he unearthed the tomb of Nephren-Ka, an unknown pharaoh, whose name was stricken from all records after his rule.

He also brought back an artifact, a glowing trapezohedron that is said to imbue the holder with strange and arcane powers. From its description it appears to be the same glowing crystal that Nyarlathotep was seen holding as he led his armies to ravage the world.

The trapezohedron is moved from church to church, but in 2020, a little before the ex-cultist left the Church, it was housed in a safe inside a chapel in Crossroads, Mississippi, under the care of the Right Reverend Leroy Anderson.

If this is the crystal Nyarlathotep carried into battle, then taking it out the god's grasp might give humanity the edge it needs to topple Nyarlathotep before the entire world is destroyed.

Crossroads is a blip on the map. Aside from a couple of double-wides along the main highway, there is a road that leads up to the church, a set of buildings that can only be described as a bunker. They have armed guards at the gates. There's also...something else.

The informant couldn't say for sure, but there is something in a storm cellar beneath the chapel. Some people go in and never come out. The ones who do come out are "The Blessed." They don't talk, don't seem very aware of their surroundings at first, and they're kept away from the rest of the group and held in a building just for them.

The informant was able to escape as a riot broke out when some church members wanted to go outside the walls but weren't allowed. He never saw the storm cellar, but he still has nightmares about it.

The mission is straightforward. Break into the safe at the church, steal the trapezohedron, and destroy it by whatever means necessary. It must be kept out of Nyarlathotep's hands. Look out for the armed guards, the Blessed, whatever the hell they are, and the thing in the storm cellar.

THE FACELESS MOTHER

To some of the survivors, the corruption Nyarlathotep spread stood out not because it was more horrifying than the destruction of Antarctica, the swarm of monsters from the newly uncovered city, or even the speed with which Nyarlathotep's armies spread. It stood out because it didn't fit.

Every creature Nyarlathotep used once it declared itself was an otherworldly abomination. Except for the Faceless. Horrifying, yes, altered, but still recognizably human. Instead of becoming some necrotic, twisted nightmare, they retained some semblance of who and what they used to be. It's almost as though they weren't changed so much as they had something taken away.

Some suspect the Faceless are so different from the other nightmares Nyarlathotep released because they weren't actually Nyarlathotep's to begin with.

There is a legend dating back to ancient Sumeria about "The Faceless Mother," a creature that could devour a person's identity, their soul, memories, and experiences, leaving behind nothing but a husk. Though little-known, this legend propagates throughout the Middle East and Northern Africa into modern times.

In 2017 a French archaeological expedition in Sudan, while looking for lost burial sites of the Kingdom of Kush near the pyramids of Meroë, discovered a small tomb with two dozen stacked mummies. Two had Fayum portraits, wooden panels over the faces with a portrait of the deceased. The other twenty-two also had panels, but the portraits were blank. The words "Mother No Face" were written beneath each one in Old Nubian.

CAT scans show that the corpses do not in fact have faces. The theory was that these corpses had their faces cut off and the skulls beneath smoothed out with some kind of acid.

More important is the papyrus sheet found with them. Written in both Greek and Old Nubian, it has what appears to be a ritual spell to summon, find, or allow passage to the Faceless Mother. The scroll and the mummies were taken back to the Archaeology Department at l'Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne for further study.

Nyarlathotep's Timeline (GM Only)

Nyarlathotep has existed since the beginning of time. The spawn of the Elder God Azathoth, it has traveled through the universe, alighting upon civilizations on which to feed. To that end, Nyarlathotep cultivates a species, tending it like cattle, often for hundreds of thousands of years, until Nyarlathotep deems it appropriate for its appetite.

Nyarlathotep whiles away its time tormenting individuals and steering a civilization's advancement. It may appear as a god, a monster, a friend, a benefactor, a lover, a politician, an entertainer, whatever suits its capricious whims. Though it will whisper into the ears of mortals and play upon their fears and desires, it prefers to take a hands-on approach to its schemes.

Civilization has reached a point where Nyarlathotep can sate its appetite for fear and horror on the entirety of humanity, and so is setting things in motion to be ready for when the proper stars align to bring it into its full power in 2028.

Nyarlathotep exists within linear time and cannot see the future, though it can plot out likely outcomes with a disturbing degree of accuracy. Because of this, when the PCs go back in time, Nyarlathotep will feel the stirrings of Yog-Sothoth as the PCs invoke it to travel, but will not pay it much heed. Things are calling upon Yog-Sothoth all the time, after all.

It is only when the PCs thwart one of its grand designs that it will take notice of them. They are a wrench in the works, a surprise variable. Nyarlathotep does not like surprises.

Even then, it won't necessarily know who or where the PCs are, but it will keep a baleful eye on them and will take small steps to protect the plans it has been making for its final move against humanity. It might even take charge itself of smoking out the PCs and stopping them from ruining its plans.

Nyarlathotep isn't likely to try to kill the PCs itself unless they've been very successful. It prefers to manipulate and play upon fears. If there's an opportunity to make the PCs question each other's motives to separate them, or better yet get them to kill each other, it will take it. It is an expert mimic and can appear as anyone and be completely convincing.

If the PCs have already thwarted one of Nyarlathotep's plans, it will be present somewhere in the next event, watching and manipulating, but not revealing itself as anything more than what it appears.

If the PCs have changed two events, then it will send shoggoths to attack the PCs, either during the next event or at some time before.

Once the PCs have changed three events, Nyarlathotep will become directly involved to ensure that its final plan is set into motion as it wills.

Even if the PCs have made the future worse, Nyarlathotep might not necessarily know that, only that its will is being resisted. At that point it will have no qualms about revealing itself to the PCs and will likely make an appearance in all its horrifying glory.

DEEP FREEZE

Timeline Aspect: ALL EYES ARE ON ANTARCTICA

The only insight into the volcanic activity that released monsters from Antarctica is a well-funded but doomed expedition into an impossibly ancient city in the snow.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■ Dr. Delapore and Dr. Dyer
PLACE	■ Remote Antarctic base, cut off from civilization
THING	■ Immense doors in the mountain
FOE	■ Flying monsters and formless beasts [...and Dr. Sung]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

The rescue team's report was almost right. Everyone died, but it wasn't an avalanche that killed them. When they arrived, the rescue team found prefab shelters torn apart and covered in frozen blood, the planes and Sno-Cats either ripped to shreds or, in a couple of cases, sheared in half with laser-like precision. The satellite dishes and radio tower were crumpled into balls like tin foil.

More disturbing were the alien bodies—three enormous insect-like creatures with masses of pink tentacles where their heads should be, and two large, barrel-shaped things with wings and heads made of broad tentacles fanning out like a star. It looked as though they had fought each other at the base camp.

Having seen plenty of horror movies, the team didn't bother to take the time to document anything, they just set the bodies on fire, human and alien alike. The previous storm had already buried most of the camp, and another would handle covering up the rest.



At the excavation site the team found the bodies of about two-thirds of the research team, and half a dozen of alien corpses. The doors to the ruins were wide open, revealing a deep, cavernous chamber from which the sounds of chittering echoed from deep within.

So they let out a collective “nooooope,” set explosives, and buried the whole thing under several tons of snow and ice, and all vowed never to speak of it.

When the research team opened the doors, they accidentally woke members of two warring races, the antediluvian Elder Things and the alien Mi-Go. A billion or so years ago, the Mi-Go attacked the city of the Elder Things. A defense mechanism to capture invaders placed the entire chamber beyond the door into stasis, trapping both sides in a frozen slice of time until it was turned off when the doors opened.

When the stasis field shut off, the two groups, about thirty or so on each side, resumed their fight as if nothing had happened, because for them it hadn't. Some of the researchers died as collateral damage, some were taken by one side or the other.

But most of them were killed by Dr. Sung. He had survived his fall into the crevasse and was found by a lone Elder Thing, which had spent the last billion years in and out of hibernation on the other side of the stasis field, tending the machinery that kept that portion of its giant under-ice city working. Dr. Sung was experimented on, modified, experimented on again, and then modified some more—lather, rinse, repeat—until his mind snapped and he was no longer even remotely human.

He came out to join the fray, now a tentacled monstrosity with a man's face at the end of a long, sinuous neck, with strange devices and weapons protruding from his body, and proceeded to slaughter any and everything he could get hold of. Elder Things, Mi-Go, humans.

By opening the door, and shutting down the stasis field, not only did the researchers seal their own doom, but humanity's as well. The Elder Things slaughtered the Mi-Go, regrouped and began the arduous task of turning everything back on in the city. By 2028 the city was restored to function and they were ready to follow the will of their god, Nyarlathotep.

There are several ways this could play out for the PCs. Maybe they decide to prevent the doors from being opened, cause an avalanche themselves, let them be opened and deal with the consequences in the hope that the problem they need to fix is on the other side of it.

And if they open the doors, maybe they'll have some unwelcome company. There are Elder Things in there, shoggoths, and worst of all, Dr. Sung.

DR. SUNG

ASPECTS

High Concept: FORMERLY HUMAN KILLING MACHINE

Other Aspects: IMMENSE, TENTACLED, ARMED, DEADLY; DRIVEN TO DESTROY; DR. SUNG ISN'T IN THERE ANYMORE

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Physique

Great (+4): Athletics, Fight

Good (+3): Notice, Provoke, Shoot

STUNTS

Killing Machine: Because Dr. Sung has been transformed into a mindless force of destruction, he is immune to any form of mental stress. Furthermore, he can only be physically injured by sufficiently powerful weaponry; clubs won't do it, but pistols can.

Tentacles!: Dr. Sung may spend a fate point to instantly lash out with a tentacle and wrap up an opponent, giving them the situation aspect ENSNARED with one free invoke.

STRESS

Physical **1111111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

2 Mild Physical:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:



ELDER THING

ASPECTS

High Concept: ANCIENT ALIEN RULER

Other Aspects: EARTH'S ORIGINAL INHABITANTS; INCREDIBLE TECHNOLOGICAL MASTERY

SKILLS>

Great (+4): Notice

Good (+3): Academics, Crafts

Fair (+2): Lore, Physique, Will

Average (+1): Athletics, Empathy, Investigate, Stealth

STUNTS

All Eyes: An Elder Thing's body is radially symmetric and covered in sensory apparatus. As a result, it is immune to being ambushed, backstabbed, or otherwise taken by surprise in a conflict.

Brilliant Mind: An Elder Thing which has constructed its own weapon may use it to attack with Crafts instead of Fight or Shoot.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **11111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:



MI-GO

ASPECTS

High Concept: FLYING FUNGUSOID ALIEN

Other Aspect: BRAIN-HARVESTER

SKILLS

Good (+3): Academics, Lore

Fair (+2): Fight, Shoot, Stealth

Average (+1): Athletics, Crafts, Physique, Will

STUNTS

Surgical Enhancement: Mi-Go constantly augment and adapt their own bodies with arcane surgical techniques. If a Mi-Go takes a few minutes to operate, it may spend a fate point to give a skill, one of its own or of an ally, a Great (+4) rating until the end of the session.

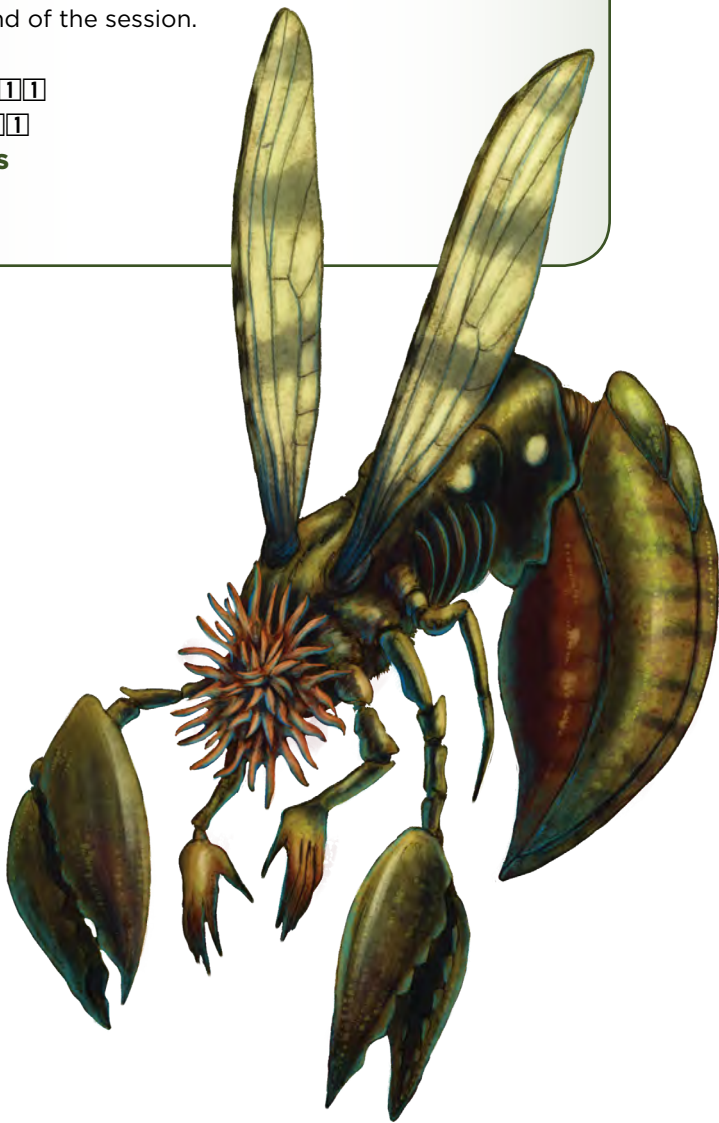
STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild:



THE RAISING OF THE KING

Timeline Aspect: NYARLATHOTEP IS CONFIDENT

A decade before he emerged as the living avatar of Nyarlathotep, Nour Al Hasan was just some nobody, whose claim to fame was disappearing without a trace at an Egyptian archaeological dig. Obviously, there's something important to investigate at that disappearance.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	Nour Al Hasan, a man of no particular evident importance
PLACE	■	A strange tomb in Mit Rahina, crawling with archaeologists
THING	■	A sarcophagus covered in alien writing
FOE	■	??? [<i>The Church of Starry Wisdom, determined to enact Nyarlathotep's will</i>]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

Yes, the sarcophagus is important. No, there's no one in it. It's magic stolen from Nyarlathotep that was sealed away and hidden in an effort to thwart plans the Dark Pharaoh had put into motion thousands of years before.

It is inscribed with a combination of Egyptian hieroglyphics, Greek, Akkadian cuneiform, and characters that the archaeologists on the dig have never seen before. Without knowing that fourth alien language, the message is something along the lines of "There's some stuff in here. Don't open it."

If any of the PCs understand the alien language, though, they might be able to understand that it's really saying, "The magic trapped herein will embolden the diminished Nyarlathotep, whose power was stolen and sealed away."

Going off the information they have at the mission start, the PCs may find that the most direct solution would be to simply kill Hasan. That would be a very bad idea.

Hasan is the Chosen One in the same way someone goes to a used car dealership and buys the first junker that isn't currently on fire. It's not perfect, but it'll do. Hasan has been marked by Nyarlathotep from childhood when his parents promised him to the Dark Pharaoh in return for prosperity. Nyarlathotep delivered, but then arranged for Hasan's parents to be killed by bandits, orphaning a child with no wealth to his name.

He is not the vessel through which Nyarlathotep will walk the Earth; he is a sacrifice that will make Nyarlathotep stronger. Once Hasan's blood has been spilled, the energy contained in the sarcophagus will be released, the magical seals holding it inside falling to the ground as multicolored sand.

Nyarlathotep has arranged things such that Hasan will be at the dig site when the sarcophagus is uncovered, timed so the stars are aligned for maximum effect. If Hasan is sacrificed at any other time, Nyarlathotep will receive only a fraction of its power. Members of the Church of Starry Wisdom have been sent to ritually sacrifice him, triggering the release of the dark energy.

Hasan is not aware of this plot against him, nor of the Church of Starry Wisdom, nor even of Nyarlathotep itself. He's just a guy whose parents made a really bad decision and now he's screwed.

What the PCs discover about the sarcophagus, Hasan's upbringing, or the cultists from the Church of Starry Wisdom may put them on the right track. If they can keep Hasan alive long enough to get him as far away as possible, preferably out of the country, then Nyarlathotep will only be able to get its full power by waiting another 75 years and grooming another sacrifice.

If they keep Hasan alive only long enough to get out of the stellar conjunction, but he dies near the sarcophagus, Nyarlathotep will still gain some of its power, but much less.

If the PCs kill Hasan themselves and it's anywhere near the sarcophagus or during the stellar conjunction, they've just done the cultists' job for them.



STARRY WISDOM ACOLYTE

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Fight

STRESS [1][1]

STARRY WISDOM DISCIPLE

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight

Average (+1): Athletics

STRESS [1][1][1]

STARRY WISDOM OPERATIVE

ASPECTS

High Concept: AGENT OF NYARLATHOTEP

Other Aspects: MORE CAPABLE THAN THE AVERAGE CULTIST;
DEVOTED TO THE CAUSE

SKILLS

Good (+3): Contacts, Lore

Fair (+2): Athletics, Fight, Resources

Average (+1): Deceive, Notice, Physique, Stealth

STUNTS

Backup: The Church of Starry Wisdom has many members. By spending a fate point, the Starry Wisdom operative may summon two Starry Wisdom acolytes or one Starry Wisdom disciple to their side.

Night-Eyes: The Church of Starry Wisdom worships Nyarlathotep in his avatar as the Haunter in the Dark by holding ceremonies in pitch black rooms. As a result, operatives have exceptional night vision—they get +2 to Notice and Fight when in deep shadows or darkness.

STRESS

Physical **1111**

Mental **111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

SPELL: SHROUD

Difficulty: Great (+4)

Most Starry Wisdom operatives carry a copy of this spell written on a small scroll. When its words are intoned, the caster will cough up what appears to be a black cloud that swiftly swells to fill their room. In fact, it is just air that prevents light from passing through it. This creates a shroud of absolute darkness around the caster, putting the situation aspect ABSOLUTE DARKNESS, with one free invoke, on the caster's zone.

The effect lasts for about ten minutes, and the shroud remains in the zone where it was created even if the caster leaves.

DEMON AT THE CROSSROADS

Timeline Aspect: THE CHURCH OF STARRY WISDOM IS POWERFUL AND GROWING

A credible source identified Nyarlathotep's jewel as the shining trapezohedron, currently held on a cult compound in rural Mississippi.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☹	Reverend Leroy Anderson
PLACE	🟢	A little compound in Crossroads, MS
THING	🟢	A hidden and protected trapezohedron
FOE	☹	The Blessed

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

The trapezohedron is indeed the one that Nyarlathotep will use when it rises to power in Egypt. For the most part, the mission really is as straightforward as it sounds. Get into the compound, get the trapezohedron, get out, deal with whatever problems come up, and neutralize them.

The devil is, as they say, in the details.

The wall surrounding the compound is about thirty feet tall with razor wire at the top. Whether it's to discourage entry or exit is hard to tell. The compound has about two hundred people in it, men in one bunkhouse, women in another, the Blessed in a third, much larger one. The chapel, large but fairly austere, is flanked by the bunkhouse for the Blessed and by the Right Reverend Leroy Anderson's mansion, a huge plantation-style building. In the rear of the compound are a small infirmary, a barn and coops for animals, and a couple of acres set aside for crops.

Most of the cult members are not armed. If anything, they're zealous slaves who do all the work to keep the compound going, running the farm, tending to animals, maintaining equipment and so on. If they're dangerous, it's only because there are so many of them. A hundred screaming cultists coming at you with grasping hands and gnashing teeth might as well be a jet-powered combine thresher.

The armed guards are kept separate. They live in a bunkhouse that crosses through the main wall and includes the only entry for people. Anyone walking in has to pass these armed men. A larger door for equipment is in the back of the compound near the farm buildings.

The guards patrol the outside perimeter, and have set patrols around the compound grounds.

Now about those details.

There is a safe in the chapel's offices. A glowing trapezohedron is kept inside. It's a fake made from glass and luminescent paint. Anyone seeing

it close up will realize this, as it looks like it was slapped together by a third-grader out of plastic and pipe cleaners.

The real one is in a much larger safe guarded by three of the Blessed up in Anderson's house. It's the same basic shape, but anyone seeing it will realize that it's the real deal. It burns with an inner fire, and anyone who comes close can hear a whisper of rhythmic chanting in an unknown language that seems to come from everywhere and nowhere.

The Blessed are mindless servitors who have been invaded by shoggoths in the storm cellar. They pour in through the nose and mouth, consuming the brain and taking up residence. In a fight they will use these stolen bodies and are quite skilled at their puppetry. But if the bodies take too much damage, the invading shoggoth will leave, making it far more dangerous. In this form they are immune to most forms of damage, save fire.

There's also the Right Reverend Leroy Anderson, who isn't human at all. He's a vessel filled with a sliver of Nyarlathotep's consciousness. Enough to control the body, make executive decisions, and such, but nowhere near as powerful as Nyarlathotep itself. If Anderson's body is killed, and it's hard to kill, then the sliver of Nyarlathotep is expelled and returns to the main entity.

If that happens, Nyarlathotep itself will probably be coming for the PCs fairly soon.

If they get past the wall, the razor wire, the armed guards, the Blessed, the terribly difficult-to-kill reverend, escape before Nyarlathotep comes to kill them all, and get away with the trapezohedron, there's one small problem.

It's indestructible.

Fire, hammers, bullets, tank shells, thermonuclear blasts—at most they'll shake off some dirt and smut that's gathered on the thing over the last billion years or so, but that's all. Expect hilarity when one of the PCs tries to crack it with a sledgehammer and ends up pulling their shoulder out of its socket instead.

It can't be destroyed, but it can be corrupted. For a three-dimensional representation of an n -dimensional object, it is surprisingly fragile when it comes to its own mathematical integrity. Anyone with a good understanding of Great Old One technology might be able to figure out a mathematical formula (a spell or ritual) that will render it inert or, even better, dangerous to Nyarlathotep.

Or they could try to hide it. Which won't work. At all. Nyarlathotep will find it eventually, and might even find it while the PCs still have it. They share a bond with each other, and sooner or later Nyarlathotep will find it.

THE BLESSED

ASPECTS

High Concept: MINDLESS SERVITOR OF THE STARRY WISDOM CULT

Other Aspects: NO SENSE OF SELF-PRESERVATION;
UNSETTLING GAIT AND MOVEMENTS

SKILLS

Fair (+2): Fight, Physique

Average (+1): Athletics, Drive, Shoot

STUNTS

Puppeteered: The Blessed don't take consequences. Instead, if they can't absorb hits with stress, the shoggoth within bursts out. The shoggoth immediately attacks with Physique against everyone in its zone, representing the flying bones and viscera.

STRESS ■■■■



SHOGGOTH

ASPECTS

High Concept: AMORPHOUS MASS OF EYES, TEETH, AND TENTACLES

Other Aspects: SERVANT TO THE ELDER THINGS; HUGE AND FAST; VIRTUALLY INDESTRUCTIBLE

SKILLS

Great (+4): Physique

Good (+3): Athletics, Fight

Fair (+2): Investigate, Notice, Provoke

STUNTS

Made to Last: The Elder Things created shoggoths to be nearly indestructible. Only heat and fire can harm shoggoths, and even then, their immense size and amorphous body make them resilient—their stress boxes can absorb three stress each.

STRESS

Physical **3 3 3 3 3 3**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:



THE RIGHT REVEREND LEROY ANDERSON

ASPECTS

High Concept: CHARISMATIC CULT LEADER

Other Aspect:

MINOR MANIFESTATION OF NYARLATHOTEP'S POWER

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive, Rapport

Good (+3): Empathy, Provoke, Will

Fair (+2): Athletics, Fight, Physique, Shoot

Average (+1): Drive, Investigate, Lore, Notice,
Resources

STUNTS

Disposable Vessel: Because Reverend Anderson is an empty shell animated by Nyarlathotep's power, he can take immense harm without being knocked out or killed. As a result, he has two more slots for severe physical consequences.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **1111111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:

6 Severe Physical:

6 Severe Physical:



THE FACELESS MOTHER

Timeline Aspect: THE FACELESS MOTHER WAITS HUNGRILY

Nyarlathotep's army of Faceless can be reliably connected to one horrifying progenitor. You think you know how to find her.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☒	The Faceless Mother
PLACE	☑	La Sorbonne in Paris
THING	☑	An arcane ritual [...that transports its caster to the Faceless Mother's pocket dimension]
FOE	☒	The Faceless Mother's brood

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

Thousands of years ago, the Faceless Mother was trapped in a pocket dimension slightly out of sync with our own. In the physical world it corresponds to an undiscovered cave system beneath Khartoum, but without a ritual to get to it or free it from its prison, all it can do is wait for prey.

It looks like an enormous spider, and has filled its world with a massive web that is so thick and convoluted, wormed through with passages and holes, that vision simply slides off it. When prey stumble into its realm, which happens from time to time, it hunts them, feeds on their memories and souls and leaves behind sexless, faceless, ash-white husks that it can control.

The face of each new victim appears somewhere on its body, seemingly aware, screaming. Long before it's seen it can be heard by the constant cries of the doomed souls that it wears like jewelry. But the web that fills its world twists sound around so much that hearing it doesn't do much good.

Nyarlathotep has already made a deal with the Faceless Mother—free it, and it can use the Mother's power to create an army of the Faceless. It will happily bargain with the PCs but only as a delaying tactic, so that it can separate them from each other and either trap them itself or use one of the thousand or so Faceless it keeps in its web to do it. The Faceless move through the web silently, so they can sneak up easily on the PCs, but the youngest is a couple thousand years old at this point. They disintegrate pretty easily if struck hard enough.

The Faceless Mother can't be killed, but it can soak up a tremendous amount of damage before it is (temporarily) taken out. It also has many Faceless that it can control to help hunt the PCs down. Its web, however, is extremely flammable. This can work for or against the PCs depending on how they discover this fact and what they do with it.

The ritual on the papyrus will transport the PCs in and can get them out again. If they're smart they'll take a photo of it on a mobile phone, because the papyrus will turn to dust if it's kept out of its sealed container in the lab for very long.

When the PCs appear in the Faceless Mother's den, on a stone floor surrounded by webs glowing a sickly green, it will instantly be alerted and the hunt will begin.

SWARM OF THE FACELESS

ASPECTS

High Concept: A SWARM OF ABOMINATIONS

Other Aspects: SERVANTS TO THE FACELESS MOTHER; STRONG IN NUMBERS

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight

Fair (+2): Athletics, Physique

STUNTS

Swarm of Bodies: The Faceless are individually weak, so they travel in packs of dozens of bodies. Because they can surround individuals, they get +2 to attack and defend with Fight when they are taking on an opponent who doesn't have an ally in their zone.

Hive-Minded: While their bodies may have some semblance of individuality, the Faceless are a collective, an extension of the Faceless Mother herself. As a result, everything that one Faceless knows is also known to all of the other Faceless and the Mother.

STRESS 11111

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:



THE FACELESS MOTHER

ASPECTS

High Concept: ALL-CONSUMING SPIDER GODDESS

Other Aspects: SURROUNDED BY FACELESS;
THE COMBINED KNOWLEDGE OF INNUMERABLE VICTIMS;
FULL CONTROL OF HER POCKET DIMENSION

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Notice

Great (+4): Fight, Physique

Good (+3): Athletics, Deceive, Will

Fair (+2): Empathy, Provoke, Rapport, Stealth

STUNTS

Surrounded by Her Brood: The Faceless Mother is never far from her children. She may spend a fate point to summon a Swarm of the Faceless to defend her.

Capture: The Faceless Mother can snare captives in her web. If she succeeds with style on a Fight attack, the defender also gains the situation aspect WEBBED IN PLACE with no free invokes.

Corrupting Capture: Being trapped in the Faceless Mother's web is exhausting, and it's the first step toward becoming one of the Faceless. Whenever a character with the WEBBED IN PLACE aspect ends their turn, they must mark corruption and take a 1-shift physical hit.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:



THE RISE OF THE GREAT OLD ONE

Timeline Aspect: NYARLATHOTEP ALWAYS HAS A PLAN

Nyarlathotep, in the vessel of Nour Al Hasan, rises to power in Egypt and immediately turns on the rest of the world, leading armies of Elder Things, shoggoths, Faceless, and even more nightmares.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☒	Nour Al Hasan, President of Egypt, reborn as Pharaoh al-Aswad, the Dark Pharaoh
PLACE	☒	Spreading in all directions from the Great Pyramids
THING	☒	The Shining Trapezohedron, held aloft by dozens of simultaneous incarnations of Nyarlathotep
FOE	☒	Shoggoths, Faceless, Elder Things, and who knows what else?

Nyarlathotep's Agenda (GM Only)

AMBITION: TO FEED ON HUMANITY'S FEAR AND HOPELESSNESS

Nyarlathotep has been farming the Earth for uncountable eons, ensuring that the world is not just ready for his return, but *seasoned* for him. He is going to have a grand feast.

GOALS

Ally with Dormant Factions: Nyarlathotep could raise chaos all on his own, certainly. But why should he be bothered? At his core, Nyarlathotep likes to make plans but let others do the bulk of the actual work; the Elder Things and the Faceless Mother can do the hard parts of killing vast swathes of humanity while driving the remainder to the absolute limits of human terror. Let them tenderize the meal.

Raise the Trapezohedron: The shining trapezohedron is a piece of Yuggothian technology that facilitates communication and transportation between planets and dimensions. Nyarlathotep can use it to project avatars to earth with exceptional ease. It's what he uses to allow the Dark Pharaoh to stand at the head of every army simultaneously, which is essential to letting humans know who precisely is acting as the agent of their destruction. Nyarlathotep doesn't need the trapezohedron per se, but the technology makes the process so much easier and more pleasant. For him.



Rise to Earthly Power: Nyarlathotep's true form is incomprehensible; unfortunately, he doesn't want humans to perish while confused. He wants us to die afraid. And in order to do that, he needs a focus that we can understand—something that looks human, reaching the upper limits of human-level power. Nyarlathotep must put on a face that humans can learn to be afraid of.

TACTICS

MAKE AN ALLY

Nyarlathotep knows about all of the eldritch powers on or around the Earth, and he's prepared to strike a deal with all of them. His ultimate plan is to use the Faceless and shoggoths as his shock troops, but he's pragmatic and willing to deal with anybody who can provide him a benefit.

To employ an ally, you can:

- ▼ Pull a monster from any Great Old One's timeline and sic it on the PCs.
- ▼ Put a monster somewhere it simply does not belong, like a Deep One in the middle of the Egyptian desert.
- ▼ Have different species of eldritch beast work together to get the PCs.

MAKE A DEAL

Nyarlathotep can appear in dreams to the PCs (or anyone else) to help set up a deal. He has the means and the power to offer just about anything to someone willing to sabotage the mission to save the future. And he'll deliver on his promises, although rarely without side effects.

To employ a deal, you could:

- ▼ Have Nyarlathotep threaten the loved ones of PCs in the present.
- ▼ Have Nyarlathotep offer to heal a PC's corruption.
- ▼ Have Nyarlathotep offer corruption, and the supernatural powers that come with it, to mundane PCs.

MAKE A MASK

At present, Nyarlathotep can only manifest a bare fraction of his power on Earth...but his power is limitless, so a bare fraction is more than enough to cause trouble. These are the Masks of Nyarlathotep: small avatars of his power. They are dangerous not because they're tough—they're actually fairly easy to dispel—but because they hit hard and fast. Even if you take out a Mask, it's just going to come back later.

To use this tactic, simply have a mask appear before the PCs. Here are a few examples, but Nyarlathotep has over a thousand forms he takes with some regularity.

THE HAUNTER IN THE DARK

SKILLS

Great (+4): Athletics, Fight, Provoke

STUNTS

Of the Darkness: The haunter appears to be made of shadow itself and is effectively invisible in the darkness. If exposed to sunlight, it's immediately banished.

STRESS [1][1][1]

THE MASKED PRIEST

SKILLS

Great (+4): Deceive

Good (+3): Fight

STUNTS

The Dreamlands: The masked priest can appear in and control the dreams of any sleeping person. In these dreams, PCs have their normal skills and abilities. The masked priest only deals mental harm, even in a seemingly physical attack.

STRESS [1][1][1]

THE TALL, HOOVED MAN

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight, Investigate

STUNTS

Unstoppable: The tall, hooved man can walk through walls.

STRESS [1][1][1]

CULTISTS

Nyarlathep's biggest worshippers are the Church of Starry Wisdom. You can call them a cult, but they're larger than the name implies: they've got compounds worldwide, significant resources at their disposal, and an organized hierarchy. Practically speaking, they're a small corporation, whose business happens to be "fulfilling the ancient plans of Nyarlathep."

But there are more cultists out there; virtually every Mask of Nyarlathep has a group of worshippers somewhere in the world, willing to do its dark bidding.



THE ARRIVAL OF THE KING IN YELLOW

The King in Yellow arrives on Earth in 2030 during a series of pandemics that began in 2020 with a viral outbreak, which has since mutated into multiple strains, increasing the infection rate ever since. Much of the world is severely weakened by the ravages of these diseases.

The King first appears in the middle of Covent Garden in London. A tall, masked figure in yellow robes, it is originally mistaken for a street performer playing the role of an urban legend that has sprung up in the last ten years, the King in Yellow. That lasts for about ten minutes. Then people start dying.

A yellow mist spreads out behind it as it walks through the streets of London toward Buckingham Palace. The people touched by the gas exhibit the same symptoms of the diseases that have spread across the world, but instead of a life cycle of days, the disease kills in seconds.

Their skin goes a bright shade of sickly yellow, pustules appear on their bodies, and they hemorrhage violently from every orifice. The ones who don't die undergo a grisly transformation, growing new appendages, faces and bodies covered in sores, twisted beyond recognition.

Within hours, the King in Yellow is seen in Amsterdam, Brussels, Berlin, Moscow, Bern, Stockholm, Helsinki, and Edinburgh, sometimes in multiple places at the same time. In each city it is a repeat of London. From there its corrupted minions, their twisted, yellow forms spreading out like ants leaving a flooding nest, take city after city, killing and corrupting everyone in their wake.

By the end of the day, Europe has fallen, followed by the most populated areas of Asia and the Middle East. The longest holdouts are in North and South America, with Canada the last to fall.

The world is a plague-filled nightmare in less than a month.

What Brought This Upon Us

Historians have identified the following events as being pivotal moments in the timeline, which led the world down the path to allowing the King in Yellow to manifest and destroy our world.

TO UNCOVER THE CONSCIENCE OF THE KING

In 2020 the only reference that exists of the King is a play by the 19th-century American author Robert Chambers, *The King in Yellow*, of which it is said only Act I has survived. Among the writings of some of his contemporaries, scholars of Chambers have found references to Act II and III, wherein two women, Cassilda and Camilla, experience a cataclysm of horrible proportions that has been visited upon the people of their doomed land, Carcosa.

The consensus on Act I is that it's not a very good play. Most of it is subtextual, dialog is stilted. It flips from a script to prose to poetry and is difficult to follow.

That changes, apparently, with Act II. Those who've read the play all the way through came away disturbed, reporting haunted dreams and frightening visions. Of Act II, Ambrose Bierce writes, "It reveals truths that should not be, and thins the walls between the seen and unseen."

The play has been performed only once as far as anyone can tell, on a stage in New York in 1896. Chambers scholars note that within a fortnight of this performance, all of the known cast were dead. Three hung themselves, one overdosed on opium, and two more shot each other in an apparent murder-suicide. The director burned all copies of the script and was later admitted to the New York State Lunatic Asylum at Utica, where he lived the rest of his life muttering about "the Yellow Sign" and would hide under tables claiming that "The King" could see him.

Chambers himself destroyed all of his own copies of the play, and it was thought completely lost.

Until now.

The Huntington Library in Pasadena, California, has acquired a complete copy of the script, which apparently neither Chambers nor the play's director got hold of. It is currently being studied and will make its debut in the Library Exhibition Hall as part of a collection of 19th-century playwrights.

After the cataclysm in 2030, a theory about the play gained traction among some of the survivors that the King's secret origin, and the means by which he might be destroyed, are written within the missing Acts II and III.

The mission is to steal the book from the library before it goes on display, take it to nearby San Gabriel Cemetery about three kilometers south of the library, and bury it with one Edith Preminger, 96, who will die of renal failure three days before the book is revealed and will be buried the day of the book's debut.

In the future, her grave will be dug up. If time travel theory, geology, and assorted other factors fit the simulation models, by the time someone takes a shovel to the grave, the play will already be there.

WRAPPED UP IN WHITE LINEN AND COLD AS THE CLAY

There are no sightings of the King In Yellow prior to 2030 when it appears in London, but some of the signs of its coming are plain in hindsight.

One of those signs is a series of mysterious outbreaks of a new virus that mutates rapidly, making it very difficult to fight against or even contain. In some cases the different outbreaks aren't even recognized as the same disease for several years.

Many of these small outbreaks beginning in 2020 grow to pandemic proportions by the time the King manifests in 2030. Many places are so plague-ridden that it doesn't take much for the King to corrupt its victims. They're nine-tenths there already.

The first outbreak of this new disease is identified in Sierra Leone in late 2020. Originally misdiagnosed as Marburg hemorrhagic fever, with similar symptoms and a 50–80% fatality rate, the disease spreads and becomes the most common strain of the King's diseases.

Its weakness is that the several viruses it mutates into have enough similarities that a cure for one is a cure for many of the others.

In 2029, Dr. Lisette Brodeur found that cure, but she and her team were too late for it to do much good. Most of Dr. Brodeur's notes and journals survived the cataclysm, and there is enough information to synthesize it. Almost.

Dr. Brodeur's notes refer constantly to an unusual protein, but the portions that clearly identify it are missing. It comes from some of the victims of the first outbreak that she encountered in Sierra Leone while working with Médecins Sans Frontières trying to contain the disease.

If the earliest outbreak can be stopped, it might break the cycle or at least slow it down. Even a few years' delay could make the difference between a robust population that can fight against the King and one too weak to stand.

The mission is to go to the port city of Bonthe, on Sherbro Island in Sierra Leone during the outbreak, find Dr. Brodeur, and get a sample of the unnamed protein. From there, use her facilities to synthesize the cure and get it out as quickly as possible.



BUT STRANGER STILL IS LOST CARCOSA

A series of archaeological sites from a lost civilization begin to appear across the world in caverns starting in 2020. Most of it is potshards, some evidence of city streets or foundations. These findings are quickly linked to each other. Overall, there's not much, but the archaeological world is abuzz over the finds.

And then the Peruvian site is found—a previously undiscovered cave system, within which is roughly 100 acres of a city. Streets, buildings, and artifacts are all in remarkable condition.

It's clearly related to the other sites and bears no resemblance to anything else in Peru. There are hints of a paradoxical technology. Some of it appears to be slightly above the Bronze Age, while some would not be out of place in the 19th century, like gas lamps.

When the King manifests in 2030, hundreds of Corrupted pour out of the cavern and overrun the surrounding countryside, helping bring about the fall of South America.

In hindsight, this archaeological site is believed to be a piece of a city linked to the King in Yellow named Carcosa.

The mission is to seal up the Peruvian site. Blast it, bury it, whatever. The cave entrance is fairly small and it shouldn't take much to make impassable. Though it is considered a find of the century, at most there are one or two archaeological teams in the area, so security should be lax.

If the place where the King's Corrupted will manifest in 2030 can be destroyed, South America has a far better chance of meeting the threat.



LE ROI EST MORT, VIVE LE ROI

A story from a few survivors of the King's manifestation in London says that after appearing, the King entered the British Museum. It corrupted most of the staff and the patrons, but it was particularly keen on a mask in the Assyrian collection. It put the mask on and, witnesses say, changed. More a sense of great power emanating from it than anything physical.

The mask was labeled "Pallid Mask - 870 BCE - Found in Palace of Ashurbanipal, in the ancient Assyrian city of Nimrud in 1851." Notable among the collection for its lack of adornment compared to the other, more elaborate masks, the Pallid Mask's plain form and pale, smooth surface has led many a scholar to believe that it is, in fact, not of Assyrian origin.

This would just be an interesting little footnote in an otherwise horrifying event, if not for Robert Chambers' play, *The King in Yellow*, which speaks of a stranger wearing a "pallid mask" during a masquerade, only for the guests to discover at the time of unmasking that it was never a mask at all.

Camilla: *You, sir, should unmask.*

Stranger: *Indeed?*

Cassilda: *Indeed it's time. We all have laid aside disguise but you.*

Stranger: *I wear no mask.*

Camilla: *(Terrified, aside to Cassilda.) No mask? No mask!*

—*The King in Yellow, Act 1, Scene 2*

If the Pallid Mask is important to the King, particularly if it enhances its power, then in 2020 the mask must be taken out of play.

The mission is to find the mask in the British Museum and destroy it. Pull it off the wall, take a hammer to the damn thing, and light the pieces on fire. Whatever works. Anything that can weaken the King in 2030 is one more advantage humanity has for survival.

The King in Yellow's Timeline (GM Only)

In 2020 the King in Yellow has not arrived on Earth. There are no shrines, altars, cults, or seemingly anything referring to it except in an obscure play of the same name, set in a place called Carcosa. References to the King are vague at best, as are allusions to something called the Yellow Sign, which is either the mark of the King or protection against it. Possibly both.

Traveling through time will attract the attention of the King in the present, and it will slide a piece of its consciousness into the past to follow the characters. It will take some time to gather itself, giving the characters days, or even weeks, to operate without its interference.

Unfortunately, by coming to the past, and bringing a piece of the King's consciousness with them, the PCs have already changed time, and not for the better. They have set in motion the very events that will ultimately doom humanity, starting the cycle that leads to the King's full manifestation in 2030.

Good job, everybody!

Not only have the PCs essentially doomed humanity, they've also changed the playing field. The King now manifests in 2020, though not nearly at the strength it has in the PCs' memories of it in 2030. The history that the PCs are depending on to guide them has been tossed out the window. They just won't know it until they find that events aren't unfolding in the way they're expecting them to.

When the King manifests in 2020, it is much the same as in 2030, though far less destructive. In the original 2030 timeline, its appearance was sudden, giving no one time to react. In 2020, however, sightings of the King begin to pour in across the world, though it doesn't appear to do anything. It just shows up and disappears again, hazy and indistinct, as if it's not fully formed. It isn't until conspiracy websites connect the sightings that anyone realizes there's something very odd happening.

The world sees a sharp, dramatic increase in antibiotic-resistant diseases and dangerous viral infections, though again, it isn't until conspiracy theorists notice that where there are outbreaks there are sightings of the King that anybody realizes a connection. Wherever the Yellow King appears, people get sick, many of them die.

People across the globe begin having strange dreams. Most ignore them or don't remember them. But the ones who do describe a shattered city of broken spires and twisted architecture, a lone man in yellow regalia wearing a broken crown, standing in the center of it all, weeping.

On waking, the dreamers can't remember what the king or the city looks like. All they remember is the great despair coming off the king, and a single word: Carcosa.

Within a few days, many of the dreamers connect through social media, and Act I of *The King in Yellow* is posted online and goes viral. They gather together to unravel the secret of the dreams, pass along their theories and beliefs. Most believe it's some sort of augmented-reality game, but others take it far more seriously. Within weeks, online forums spring up, some of them attracting the more apocalyptically minded, who soon begin worshipping this mysterious King in Yellow.

Not long after these dreams begin, evidence of a previously unknown culture is discovered in caves beneath Turkey, Mexico, Iraq, Scotland, and Wales. They are all clearly connected. Uncovered artifacts are identical in some places, or similar enough to be from the same culture.

In the original timeline, a section of a Peruvian city, about 100 acres, with streets made of strange, twisted stone is discovered. In the new timeline, it is ten times that size and far more elaborate and complete. People on the Internet start calling it Carcosa, and the name sticks. No one realizes how right they are.

The more people talk about the King, the more the King exists in the minds of the people, calling it further and further into this timeline that the PCs have unwittingly brought it to.

The King's agenda is far more opaque than those of the other Old Ones. It doesn't seem to want anything. It acts in seemingly random ways, disappearing only to reappear hundreds of kilometers away. At times it acts as if it has no memory, at other times as if it's frighteningly aware of the characters' plans.

This is because the King does not exist in linear time. To the King, everything is moving endlessly forward. But an observer experiences the King as a series of skips and jumps that don't seem to have any causal relationship. This makes the King disturbingly effective, sometimes appearing in places the characters are going long before they get there, and at the same time maddeningly unpredictable.

Though it's safe to say that the King opposes the characters, it's impossible to tell exactly what game it's playing. Four-dimensional chess, or tic-tac-toe played by a concussed monkey? It's a toss-up as to which is more dangerous.

The reality is that the King used to be human, or humanoid at the very least. After a terrible plague descended upon his kingdom, killing millions of his subjects, he made a deal with his god, Hastur, to stop the plague and keep it from ever affecting his people again.

Hastur granted this wish, but—typical for a god known for Monkey’s Paw deals—it wasn’t exactly what the King hoped for. Every infection shifted from the diseased to the King, turning him into a twisted, suffering caricature of himself and destroying most of his mind. In turn, following the King’s request that the plague never affect his people again, Hastur rained down a curse upon Carcosa, twisting its people into monstrosities and its architecture into insane shapes, shattering the kingdom and scattering its pieces throughout time and space. The plague would never trouble them again.

Subject to the worst of this curse, the King was thrust out into the reaches of the multiverse, wandering throughout time with no anchor. For billions of years, or maybe it was only the blink of an eye, every step the King took moved it to a different place and time. Eventually it learned enough control of time and its own abilities that it could maintain itself in one location and one sequence of linear time for a short while.

The King has little awareness of what it is or what it is doing. It stopped being human countless millennia ago, or possibly countless millennia from now, and the only thing that holds it together is its burning need to find Carcosa and its people and piece them back together, though it only barely comprehends what that means anymore.

When sizable pieces of Carcosa are unearthed after the King arrives along with the PCs in 2020, the King becomes aware of them. But were those pieces always there, waiting to be found? Did the King manifest them into being? Or did they sense that the King had made a stop and put themselves in place to be found?

The King has searched for countless years trying to reclaim its lost realm and restore its people, and now it has a chance. But one has to wonder, how many other chances did it have? How many other worlds did it destroy with plague and corruption, desperately trying to find Lost Carcosa?

After being lost for so long, all he can remember is the twisted nightmare that Hastur turned him and his people into. As far as the King is concerned, the Earth and humanity are nothing more than raw material to recreate this vision of Carcosa, a dimensional perversion that defies time, whose plague-ridden residents are echoes of the indescribable terrors Carcosa’s people were turned into.

TO UNCOVER THE CONSCIENCE OF THE KING

Timeline Aspect: THEY'RE HERE TO STOP US

A copy of the play *The King in Yellow* is set to be displayed at a library exhibition on 19th-century playwrights. The idea is to take it out of play, remove it from public view so it can't affect us. Sources in the future suggest the play has valuable information on how to fight the King, so it can't be destroyed or all hope is lost. It's got to be hidden.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☹	Dr. Robert Naylor, Pulitzer-winning biographer of Robert Chambers
PLACE	■	Huntington Library, California
THING	■	A tattered, yellowed copy of the script
FOE	☹	??? [<i>Alternate-future incarnations of the heroes</i>]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

However they do it, the heroes are going to have to go to where the book is stored. Whether that's a clean room for restoration purposes, a vault, or whatever is only relevant insofar as the difficulty in getting the book.

When the PCs get to where it should be, they find a card in its case that says simply, "Edith Preminger, R.I.P." How the heroes proceed is obviously up to them, but with a little luck someone will remember that poor Edith's grave is where they are supposed to bury the book. No one but someone from the future should know that. Something is very, very wrong. Might not be a bad idea to check out the gravesite.

The complication comes as the heroes encounter themselves—older, more battle-scarred. They've come back in time again to stop the theft, believing it was their actions that brought the King in Yellow back to the present and started everything in the first place.

This information may or may not be a surprise to the heroes depending on where in the cycle of events this one falls. If in the beginning, then they might surmise that everything they think they know is largely worthless. Or, if later, it might show them that their theories on why everything they think they know has been largely worthless are correct.

It's too late for their doubles from the future to keep them from bringing the King back, but letting the play survive, they say, will turn the future into an even greater disaster. When the play is performed, it acts as a meme, a thought that can't be dislodged, taking root in the mind, spreading from person to person like a virus. Carcosa must be saved. The King is the only way. Lost Carcosa can be found again. Years of battle couldn't obliterate all of humanity, but one badly written play from the 19th century did it in weeks.

They can't let the PCs finish their mission. Everything the PCs do in the past, they say, will lead to more brutality and terror. They need to stop them in as final a manner as possible.

We're talking about killing here, in case that wasn't clear.

The PCs came back to change time, and now their future selves are coming back to keep that from happening. Are they telling the truth? Are they really future versions of the PCs? If they failed in their missions, does that mean the PCs are doomed to fail too?

There's no clear-cut win scenario here. Carry out the mission as planned? Toss a match onto the book and watch it go up like a nice log of Mexican fatwood? In the end it boils down to two options: They bury the play for the future, or they don't. But there's no way to know which one is the right choice.

TIME TRAVELER

POSSIBLE ASPECTS

SEEN IT ALL BEFORE; NOTHING TO LOSE; VISIONS OF POSSIBLE FUTURES; UNTETHERED IN REALITY

POSSIBLE STUNTS

I Know Your Moves: Because they know themselves well enough, this time traveler gets +1 to any attack or defense roll against their past self.

Unstuck: Like the King in Yellow himself, the time traveler is loosely attached to the world, sometimes flickering in and out of existence. This allows them to phase through solid walls, although it is painful and time-consuming. Also, they can spend a fate point to gain +4 to defend with Athletics, by abruptly not existing at an appropriate time.

Eyes of Darkness: Corruption is evident in the time traveler's eyes, which appear solid black. They can see perfectly well in darkness, smoke, or other obscuring conditions. Also, they can spend a fate point to gain +4 to Notice anything that can be seen.

This Time We've Prepared: Once per scene, the time traveler can reveal that they have a small but specific item in their possession that they knew would be necessary, such as a key to a particular lock, a specific ritual component, a fake ID, et cetera.

NOTES

Because the time travelers are the older versions of the PCs, start by giving them the PCs' aspects, skills, and stunts, and then replace some (or all) of their aspects or stunts to make them distinct from and more threatening than their earlier selves.

WRAPPED UP IN WHITE LINEN AND COLD AS THE CLAY

Timeline Aspect: THE YELLOW KING'S PLAGUE IS SPREADING

The King in Yellow spreads its influence through plague, changing the victims into twisted Carcosans. Stopping an early outbreak and developing a cure for the King's plague may break the cycle. Dr. Lisette Brodeur discovered it too late to have much appreciable effect in the future, but if her research could be jump-started in the present, humanity might have a chance to stop the corruption of the world. She's in Bonthe, Sierra Leone, working with Médecins Sans Frontières tending to the plague, which has been misdiagnosed as Marburg hemorrhagic fever.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	Dr. Lisette Brodeur, epidemiologist who will discover a cure too late
PLACE	■	Bonthe, Sierra Leone, location of the first outbreak
THING	☹	"Marburg hemorrhagic fever"
FOE	☹	Victims of the plague [... <i>undead, twisted, and violent</i>]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

Bonthe is relatively small, but being a port city with a plague that spreads rapidly, it's a very dangerous place. Aside from the people who are trying to avoid the disease and shooting anyone they think might have it on sight, the Sierra Leonean officials are trying to keep everything contained to the island largely by shooting anyone they think might have it on sight.

When the PCs arrive, they will start hearing surprising stories that they should have had in their mission briefings. Some of the bodies in the initial outbreak are going wrong. There's no rot, bloating, or rigor mortis. With average winter temperatures ranging from the low 70s to the low 80s, you'd think this would be a fact someone would have commented upon.

Then, after a few days, over the course of minutes, the corpses develop physical deformities, growing appendages, new mouths, eyes, and so on. Their skin turns a bilious shade of yellow. Some of them become so deformed as to not even be recognizably human. That's when they get up and start killing. Some of their victims undergo the same grisly transformation.

This, too, is something one would expect to have shown up somewhere in the history books.

Why didn't it? Because in the PCs' timeline it didn't happen. They opened the way for the King to come to the past with them, getting things started much earlier than before.



When the characters get into Bonthe, the first resurrected Corrupted have risen, many during their own burials, tearing through funeral shrouds and killing dozens of people before they can be put down. In a city used to conflict, civil war, and plague outbreaks, pretty much everyone is armed.

The characters now have to navigate through a panicking port town where the armed populace may be just as dangerous as the Corrupted shambling through the streets. Can they find Dr. Brodeur and synthesize the cure? Will they get enough details on this mystery protein and find a source for it in time? Will it even work? The heroes were expecting a plague, not an unrecorded apocalypse.

There are disturbing stories in the air as well. People are talking about a golden angel, or maybe a demon, that has appeared in some of the victims' homes just before their passing. The only actual proof is a blurry cell phone picture of a stooped man wearing yellow clothes. At least it looks like a man. Man-shaped at the very least. And is that a crown on its head?

The mission hasn't changed—find the doctor, get the cure, stay alive. It's just gotten more complicated.

LESSER PLAGUE-BEARER

ASPECTS

High Concept: RISEN DEAD

Trouble: MINDLESS

Other Aspects: BENT ON DESTRUCTION; TWISTED AND SICKLY

SKILLS

Good (+3): Fight

Fair (+2): Athletics, Notice

Average (+1): Investigate, Physique, Will

STUNTS

Infectious: Anyone who enters or begins their turn in a zone with a lesser plague-bearer takes a 1-shift physical hit.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **11111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

GROTESQUE PLAGUE-BEARER

ASPECTS

High Concept: MALFORMED REVENANT

Trouble: FALLING APART

Other Aspects: FULL OF HATE; TWISTED BEYOND RECOGNITION

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Athletics, Stealth

Fair (+2): Empathy, Investigate, Notice

Average (+1): Physique, Provoke, Shoot, Will

STUNTS

Inhuman: This corpse has mutated extra limbs, eyes, and other body parts, which mostly lay dormant. Once per turn, it may take a 1-shift physical hit to get +2 to its next roll by activating relevant parts, such as opening its many eyes to Notice or flexing its extra arm to Fight.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **11111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

BUT STRANGER STILL IS LOST CARCOSA

Timeline Aspect: THE YELLOW SIGN IS SHOWING UP EVERYWHERE

Carcosa—the King in Yellow’s shattered demesne scattered across space-time—begins to appear in pieces across the globe. It’s uncertain whether the shards of Carcosa brought the King here or they came because he grows in power. A fragment of the city is discovered in a cave system near Machu Picchu in Peru. The archaeologists who made the discovery consider it the greatest find in history. Their initial findings have been published, but information has slowed to a trickle as the Peruvian military takes over the site and surrounding area.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	???	<i>[General Isac Mayta, his troops guarding the site]</i>
PLACE	■	Peru,	about 40 kilometers northeast of Machu Picchu
THING	■	The Yellow Sign	
FOE	■	Possible occupants of Carcosa	<i>[...thousands of them]</i>

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

When the PCs arrive in 2020, news reports are talking about the discovery of strange ruins across the globe, as expected. What isn’t expected is that they’re being referred to as Carcosa, which no one should know about for another ten years.

What’s worse, the Peruvian site, which they can find out about easily enough through news or web searches, is radically different from what history suggests it should be.

Instead of 100 acres, the Peruvian site has been roughly mapped to about 5000 acres with still more unexplored. The finding is baffling, for the city appears truly ancient but makes use of 19th-century technology, and there is some evidence that it was only recently abandoned. More frightening is the impossible geometry of the structures, seemingly something out of a Dr. Seuss nightmare.

It is the find of a lifetime, and already the archaeological team that discovered it has been on talk shows and in documentaries. They’ve been called frauds and heretics by professional rivals and religious zealots. They have had to deal with the Peruvian military and other governments trying to push their way into the project.

This will, obviously, make things far more difficult for the heroes. In their timeline, the Peruvian site was more of an oddity than anything else and had barely hit the mainstream media in 2020, mostly showing up in archaeological journals and sensationalized in tabloids. Getting into that site and sealing it up would be pretty straightforward. But now?

Maybe not as much of a challenge as it could be. Though the Peruvian military is there, there are also archaeologists, reporters, tomb robbers, zealots, Peruvian politicians, protesters, foreign ambassadors, all who might be part of the project, have been trying to break in, have broken in, or are just outside the gates waving signs with apocalyptic messages.

Security is not as tight as anyone would like, and with all the people with clearance to enter, the PCs could very well slip in unseen, if not unchallenged.

When they do get inside, they'll find that the photos they've seen don't do the place justice, and it doesn't match what they know it should look like from photos in 2030. It's not just the condition of the place, but there are details on the stonework, wood, and metal that pictures just can't capture. Everything has an almost glowing sheen to it, not as though it's new and shiny, or even slick and oily. It shifts and shimmers too much for that, as if there is something living beneath the skin of everything in the city. There's also an overwhelming sense of malevolence.

On every surface, sometimes hidden, sometimes not, there is a strange sign in yellow scrawled or stamped or carved. It never looks the same way twice, or the same to anyone else. All of the archaeologists who have drawn it have found that their drawings are different. Photos merely show it as a faint yellow blur.

And then there are the disappearances. Some of the workers are just... gone. Everyone goes into the caverns in teams of at least six people, yet no one ever sees them leave or even notices anything is amiss until they come back to the surface.

Throughout it all, like some parasite worming its way through flesh, there are rumors of El Fantasma Amarillo, the Yellow Ghost, who everyone has seen, though many won't admit it. Those who do talk about it, letting the experience out like draining a boil, have been found hours later, hanging from a tree outside the gates, or their wrists slashed, or their heads blown open from a pistol shot.

None of this should be this way. One thing to go and change the past, another thing entirely to show up in the past and find out it's already been changed for you.

What's down there? The corrupted citizens of Carcosa coming back into the world ten years early? Workers corrupted into horrifying monstrosities? The King? Something worse?

Yes.

The corrupted citizens are kidnapping the workers and corrupting them too. Occasionally the King manifests, but it doesn't really do much. The most frightening thing that the PCs may take a little while to figure out is Carcosa itself.

The city lives in a way that humans can't imagine, and is hungry to repopulate its streets. It has a consciousness and a will—whether that is its own or an extension of the King's, no one could say, possibly not even the King.

It is an ever-present dread, shifting parts of itself, showing glimpses of its glorious past, leading the unwary to their doom. It will attempt to separate the PCs, trap them, kill, and finally devour them.

Whatever the PCs run into in the shadows of Carcosa, and how they choose to deal with it, their mission is still the same. Seal up or destroy this piece of Carcosa, or risk the ruin of the world.



CARCOSAN

ASPECTS

High Concept: CITIZEN OF LOST CARCOSA

Trouble: UNFOCUSED

Other Aspects: TWISTED IN BODY AND MIND; "GET OUT OF MY CITY!"

SKILLS

Good (+3): Stealth

Fair (+2): Fight, Rapport

Average (+1): Athletics, Deceive, Shoot

STUNTS

Of the City: The citizens of Carcosa are inextricably linked to their city. Once per scene, a Carcosan may take an action to use the city's Visions of the Impossible stunt without spending a fate point.

Madness for Madness: A Carcosan gets +2 to Fight against anyone who has taken a hit from the city's Visions of the Impossible stunt.

STRESS

Physical **111**

Mental **111**

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

CARCOSA

ASPECTS

High Concept: THE LOST CITY

Other Aspects: THE YELLOW SIGN; IMPOSSIBLE ARCHITECTURE

STUNTS

Visions of the Impossible: By spending a fate point, the city of Carcosa can induce hallucinations in anyone who can see one of the yellow signs. This is a Fantastic (+6) mental attack.

Stranger Still: Carcosa twists and writhes in impossible ways. Once per session, the city may move an entire zone and everyone in it to another point within its bounds.

NOTES

The city of Carcosa appears to possess a malevolent intelligence of its own, though whether that is coming from the city itself or from some effort of the King in Yellow is unknown. Regardless, while it can't be attacked directly, it's a character present whenever the PCs are in the city, doing what it can to disrupt their activities.



LE ROI EST MORT, VIVE LE ROI

Timeline Aspect: THE YELLOW KING IS HERE, SOMEWHERE

Another talisman of the King in Yellow is the pallid mask referenced in the play. It has been kept in the British Museum, the curators unaware of its true significance until the King comes for it. The heroes may think this an easy, straightforward mission: destroy the mask. Sure, you might get a hefty prison sentence for destroying a priceless artifact, but that's a small price to pay for stopping the Apocalypse.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	■	Nigella Clarke, Director of the Museum
PLACE	■	The British Museum, London
THING	■	The Pallid Mask
FOE	■	???. [A manifestation of the King in Yellow himself]

WHAT THE PLAYERS DON'T KNOW

Things are never easy. Perhaps drawn by the heroes' intent, the King has shown up years early to claim the Pallid Mask. The building itself has transformed into a piece of lost Carcosa, the architecture now maddening and nauseating.

Arriving at the museum, the PCs discover it surrounded by Metropolitan Police. Something has happened inside the museum, and already monsters have started coming through the doors. SCO19 firearms units have been called in to deal with them since there's only so much billy clubs and tasers can do to an eight-foot-tall shambling abomination wearing tattered



Versace and the shredded remains of a pair of Louboutins where there shouldn't be any feet.

What the hell is going on in there?

At this point, the heroes should have a pretty good idea, even if the police don't. The King has come for its mask. And if it gets it and it is some kind of powerful talisman, then this apocalypse could kick into high gear well before 2030.

It's a race against time to get in, find the mask, and destroy it before either the King gets hold of it or the heroes are all dead or corrupted.

How they get in is, of course, up to them. But once they're inside, they'll see that the museum doesn't exactly look like a museum anymore. The inside walls are bent stone, impossibly holding a ceiling that gives you a blinding headache if you look at it for too long. Entire rooms and sections of the museum either don't exist or have grown to nightmare proportions.

Any map they have of the museum is useless—the Corrupted are everywhere. Though some don't seem to notice the PCs, others do and will react violently to their presence. The PCs will have to get past them. Fighting, hiding, finding a ventilation system big enough to crawl through, whatever.

They might even run into the King in Yellow itself.

They need to find that mask. But they have no idea where it is since the layout of the entire museum has changed, and they're on the clock too.

Does the King already have it? Have they just moved the time table up ten years? Or can they get hold of it before the King does and maybe give humanity a fighting chance in ten years' time?

New parameters, same mission. Get that mask.

MANIFESTATION OF THE KING IN YELLOW

ASPECTS

High Concept:

MANIFESTED ASPECT OF THE KING

Trouble: SINGLE-MINDED

Other Aspects: "I WILL REBUILD CARCOSA.";
TIME AND SPACE ARE ILLUSIONS;
HUMANITY IS BENEATH MY NOTICE

SKILLS

Superb (+5): Notice

Great (+4): Investigate, Rapport

Good (+3): Fight, Physique, Will

Fair (+2): Athletics, Empathy, Provoke,
Shoot

STUNTS

Manifestation of a Great Old One: It is difficult to cope with the fundamental *wrongness* of the King in Yellow. If the King succeeds with style on an attack, the defender suffers backlash equal to the shifts of the hit.

A Sense of Purpose: The King in Yellow cannot be taken out so long as the Pallid Mask still exists. If he would be taken out, he instead disappears and reappears at another point in the museum, with his stress cleared. If the mask is destroyed or removed from the museum, the King in Yellow's manifestation will be immediately dispelled.

Bringer of Sickness: The first time this manifestation of the King in Yellow deals a physical hit to a target, they must absorb it using a consequence, which will indicate the effects of the King's plague upon them.

STRESS

Physical

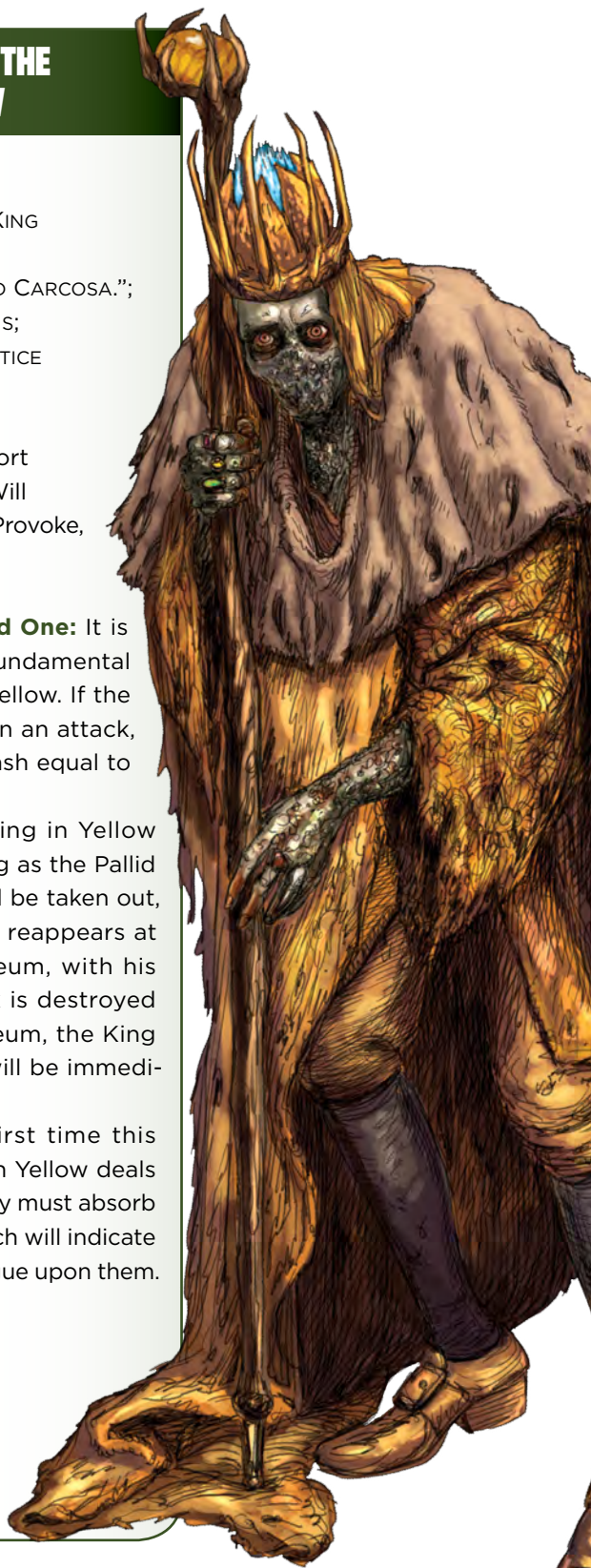
Mental

CONSEQUENCES

2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:



THE RISE OF THE GREAT OLD ONE

Timeline Aspect: CARCOSA WILL BE REBORN!

The King in Yellow manifests well before he was supposed to. Things play out much as they did before, but now he brings Carcosa with him. The cities he visits are not merely undone by plague. They are unmade entirely, replaced with the twisted spires of Carcosa, which now serve as a base for the King's many subjects, old and new.

CATALYSTS

PERSON	☹	The King in Yellow, appearing simultaneously in many locations
PLACE	☹	Every major city across the globe
THING	☹	The impossible architecture of lost Carcosa
FOE	☹	The millions who bear the King in Yellow's plague

The King in Yellow's Agenda (GM Only)

AMBITION: FIND AND REASSEMBLE CARCOSA

The King in Yellow's ultimate goal is to restore the city-kingdom of Carcosa. Earth is the place of that restoration, and the King plans to reign here for eternity.

GOALS

Attain the Pallid Mask: To unlock his true power, the King in Yellow needs the Pallid Mask. Reclaiming that artifact will speed along the destruction of humanity. The artifact has been lost, however, and the King's agents must find it.

Manifest Carcosa in Full: The King's ultimate goal is to rule over Carcosa once again. The city must be rejoined. The King and his followers can expend their power to bring a shard of Carcosa to Earth, warping the geography into that of the lost city.

Repopulate Carcosa: A restored Carcosa is of no use if there are no subjects to rule. The King aims to populate the city with a new breed of subjects that have been warped and twisted by the plague to resemble the Carcosans that died so long ago. This can be achieved by spreading the King's yellow plague throughout the world. Cults that worship the King in Yellow can also spread the King's influence. The two kinds of cults are really just variations on a theme. You have the memetic cults—online communities obsessed with Carcosa—and theatrical cults who have read or performed *The King in Yellow*. Both operate primarily by spreading the madness of obsession with the King in Yellow and Carcosa.



TACTICS

PLAGUE

This is the biggest direct move in the King in Yellow's playbook. The King is a walking epidemic. Where the King appears, people fall ill and eventually are twisted into new Carcosans. The disease manifests different symptoms across the globe but is always the same disease with the same cure. This is what stumped pathologists for so long.

The GM can use this tactic to:

- ▼ Create a new outbreak
- ▼ Infect someone a hero cares about
- ▼ Make an outbreak worse

MEMETIC CULTS

The Internet is the single greatest tool for the spread of knowledge to ever be created. It has been perverted by the King in Yellow to act as a transmission vector of obsession and madness. There are online communities dedicated to Carcosa that are cults unto themselves. Their obsession with the lost city feeds the King and gives him power. These cults are not confined to a single location, but are all around the world at once. They are dedicated to finding Carcosa and restoring it for the King in Yellow. They will not let anything stop them.

The GM can use this tactic to:

- ▼ SWAT the heroes at an inopportune time
- ▼ Dox the heroes, creating civil and social complications
- ▼ Have the heroes under constant surveillance

THE KING IN YELLOW

The King in Yellow's eponymous play is a powerful locus for the King. It acts as a conduit of corruption, seeding madness within those who read or perform it. Much like the memetic cults and dreams, the play drives obsession with *The King in Yellow* and spreads like plague—sometimes literally.

- ▼ Create a new copy of the play, which is to be performed
- ▼ Exhibit an extant copy in a museum
- ▼ Create a cult in a famous theater

DREAMS

The King in Yellow communicates to humans through dreams, corrupting their thoughts and fixating them upon the eponymous play. The King uses dreams to spread word of Carcosa and eventually transform an area into Carcosa if there are enough dreamers in one place.

The GM can use this tactic to:

- ▼ Start a cult of followers, entangling someone a hero cares about
- ▼ Torment a hero with dreams of Carcosa, pushing toward corruption
- ▼ Manifest a shard of Carcosa

CULTISTS

- ▼ Actors, artists, and academics who have read the play or dreamt about the King in Yellow
- ▼ Online communities about the play
- ▼ Twisted Carcosans, both old and new

BEING THE GAME MASTER

In *Fate of Cthulhu*, you know what kind of campaign you will be running: a group of humans out of their depth and slowly mutating as they try to prevent the machinations of a cosmic god from bringing about the Apocalypse they've already seen come to pass. You know, that old story.

The Great Old Ones' timelines give you the outline of what the campaign will look like. In "Using the Timeline in Play" (page 229), we'll talk about how to translate the events on the timeline into scenarios that the players can dive into. For now, let's look at the moment-to-moment jobs of the GM.



Running Game Sessions

As the GM, you are the director of game sessions. Note that you are not the boss—*Fate of Cthulhu* is collaborative, and the players have say in what happens to their characters. Your job is to keep things moving. There are a number of tasks associated with that:

Run scenes: A session is made up of scenes. Decide where the scene begins, who's there, and what's going on. Decide when all the interesting things have played out and the scene's over. Skip over unnecessary bits; in the same way that you don't roll dice if the outcome of an action won't be interesting, don't have a scene if nothing exciting, dramatic, useful, or fun will happen during it.

Adjudicate the rules: When some question comes up about how to apply the rules, you can discuss it with the players and try to reach an agreeable consensus, but you get final say.

Set difficulty: In addition to deciding when a roll will be necessary, you set the difficulty.

Determine the costs of failure: When a character fails their roll, you decide what the cost of success at a cost will be. You can certainly take suggestions from the player—they may know just how they want their character to get hurt—but you ultimately decide.

Play the NPCs: Each player controls their own character, but you control all the rest, from cultists to monsters to the Great Old One itself.

Force the PCs into action: If the players don't know what to do next, it's your job to give them a nudge. Never let things get too bogged down in indecision or lack of information—do something to shake things up. When in doubt, look to the Great Old One's tactics (page 238) to create a spot of bother for the heroes.

Make sure everyone gets the spotlight: Your goal isn't to defeat the players, but to challenge them. Make sure every PC gets a chance to be the star once in a while. Spread around compels and challenges tailored to the characters' different abilities and weaknesses.

Complicate the PCs' lives: In addition to throwing monsters at the characters, you will be the primary source of compels. Players can compel themselves and other characters, of course, but you must ensure that everyone gets opportunities to experience the negative repercussions of their aspects.

Setting Difficulty and Opposition

Sometimes, a PC's action will face **OPPOSITION** from another character in the scene. In this case, the opposing character rolls dice and adds their relevant skill rating, just like the PC. If the opposing character has relevant aspects, they can be invoked; the GM can invoke NPCs' aspects using the fate point in their pool (page 218).

But if there's no opposition, you have to decide on the **DIFFICULTY** of the action:

- ▼ **Low difficulties**, below the PC's relevant skill rating, are best when you want to give them a chance to show off.
- ▼ **Moderate difficulties**, near the PC's relevant skill rating, are best when you want to provide tension but not overwhelm them.
- ▼ **High difficulties**, much higher than the PC's relevant skill rating, are best when you want to emphasize how dire or unusual the circumstances are and make them pull out all the stops, or put them in a position where they will need to suffer the consequences of failure.

Likewise, use the adjective ladder (page 11) of ratings to help you choose an appropriate difficulty. Is it superbly difficult? Then pick Superb (+5)! Here are a few rules of thumb to get you started.

If the task isn't very tough at all, make it Mediocre (+0)—or just tell the player they succeed without a roll, as long as there's no serious time pressure or the character has an aspect that suggests they'd be good at it. If you can think of at least one reason why the task is tough, pick Fair (+2); for every extra factor working against them, add another +2 to the difficulty. The aspects present may count as factors; consult them.

If the task is impossibly difficult, go as high as you think makes sense. The PC will need to drop some fate points and get lots of help to succeed, but that's fine.



NPCs

The timelines have a few NPCs to get you started, but most of them are monsters, and the ones that are human are still pretty monstrous. You will probably want to create other characters for the PCs to interact with.

First, we must note: **Anyone coming back through time gains a full level of corruption, complete with corrupted aspect and corruption stunt, as a result of the process.** This includes NPCs.

MAJOR NPCS

If someone is particularly important to the story, you can stat them out just like a PC. This is appropriate for someone who the PCs will deal with a lot, such as an ally sent back in time or the representative of a powerful organization. They may even have corrupted aspects and stunts.

A major NPC doesn't necessarily follow the same limits as a starting PC. If the NPC is going to be a recurring boss-level threat, give them a higher peak skill, more stunts, and whatever else it takes to make them a danger.

MINOR NPCS

NPCs that aren't going to be major, recurring characters don't need to be nearly as well-defined as major NPCs. For a minor NPC, only define what is absolutely necessary.

Most minor NPCs will have a single aspect, which is just what they are: **GUARD DOG**, **OBSTRUCTIVE BUREAUCRAT**, or **ENRAGED CULTIST**, for instance.

If necessary, give them another aspect or two to reflect something interesting about them or a weakness. They may also have a stunt.

Give them one or two skills to describe what they're good at. You can use skills from the skill list or make up something more specific, like **Fair (+2) at Getting into Bar Fights** or **Great (+4) at Biting People**.

Give them zero to three stress boxes; the more they have, the more of a threat they can be. Generally, they have no consequence slots; if they take a hit with more shifts than they can absorb with stress, they are simply taken out. Minor NPCs aren't meant to stick around.

MONSTERS

Like minor NPCs, monsters are usually simpler than a PC, and you only need to define what is absolutely necessary. Unlike minor NPCs, monsters can be defined really in any way...they're eldritch creatures beyond human comprehension. Break the rules. Give them whatever combination of aspects, skills, stunts, stress, and consequences it will take to make them dangerous. Look to the various monsters described in the timelines for inspiration, and tweak them to your liking.

Your Fate Points

At the start of each scene, you get a pool of fate points equal to the number of PCs. Also, if the scene includes a major NPC or monster that conceded (page 46) a previous conflict, or received hostile invokes (page 30) in a previous scene, you get those fate points as well. If you received a compel in the prior scene that ended that scene, giving you no opportunity to spend that fate point, you may add that point to your pool as well.

Charles, Ruth, Cassandra, and Ethan are headed for the final confrontation with Alice Westforth. Previously, she escaped from the heroes by conceding a conflict after she had taken a moderate consequence. That means the GM gets four fate points for the PCs and two more that Alice is bringing along.

As the GM, you can spend fate points from this pool to invoke aspects, refuse compels that the players offer NPCs, and use any NPC stunts that require you to—all exactly as the players do.

However, you do *not* need to spend fate points to compel any aspects. You have an infinite supply of fate points for that purpose.

RUNNING A FATE OF CTHULHU CAMPAIGN

The timeline as presented, with its adventure seeds and catalysts, is the starting point for the adventures you run. But it is not *the adventures*. The timeline is your outline, a framework that guides you in creating the adventures you'll have at the table.

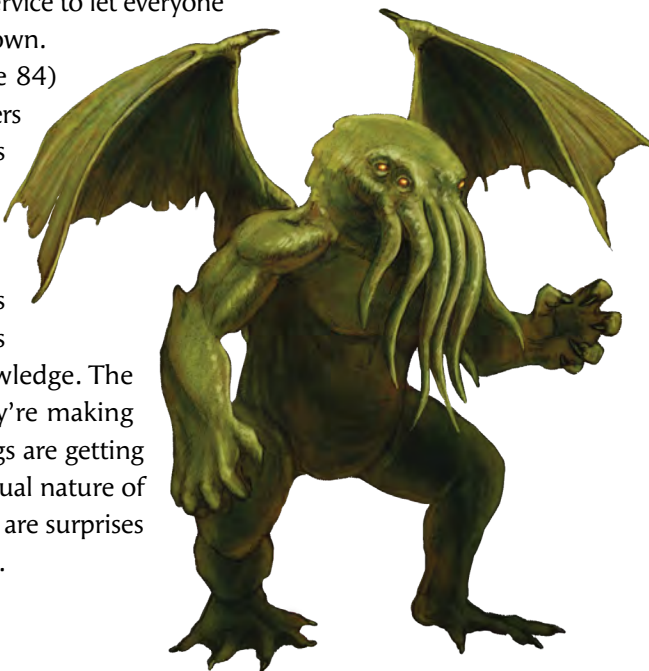
The timeline will evolve through play and become a unique artifact of your *Fate of Cthulhu* campaign. This starts when you create your own adventure based on the first event you choose. It continues as you change the future and play more events. Each event causes changes in the timeline, sending ripples into the future and moving the timeline further and further from the original.

What's Public? What's Secret?

Some other roleplaying games obscure a bunch of information from the players behind a screen. *Fate of Cthulhu* does not, for the most part. All the character sheets are open, as well as any aspects written down on notecards. Likewise, the statblocks for monsters and bad guys are mostly open—unless you have a particular reason to keep something a surprise, let players know what the characters are dealing with.

If you're playing online, you might use a shared document, in-group chat, or an online gaming service to let everyone see what's being written down.

The timeline track (page 84) is public as well, so that players can see whether their actions are changing the future. However, the GM-only section of the timeline and the effects of ripples (page 85) that the players create are **not** public knowledge. The players will know that they're making changes, and whether things are getting better or worse, but the actual nature of the changes to the timeline are surprises for them to stumble across.



The Cycle of a Timeline

The general flow of a *Fate of Cthulhu* campaign goes like this:

- 1 Choose or Create the Timeline and Characters
- 2 Pick an Event to Change
- 3 Play the Event
- 4 Change the Event
- 5 Change the Future
- 6 Repeat Steps 2–4 for All Events
- 7 Play the “Rise of the Great Old One” Event
- 8 Run the Denouement and Epilogue
- 9 Try Again?



CHOOSE OR CREATE THE TIMELINE AND CHARACTERS

This is the foundation of your campaign. The group will pick a timeline to tackle—i.e., the Great Old One—and the characters they build will try to change the future. Everything else on the timeline will change, but those two things will remain the same throughout the campaign—barring character death or complete corruption, of course.

Throughout this book, we've been using Ethan, Cassandra, Ruth, and Charles as example characters. They are dealing with a custom timeline created by the GM—see page 240 for details on creating a unique apocalypse.

PICK AN EVENT TO CHANGE

Put the options to the players and let them pick. They can pick any event other than “*Rise of the Great Old One*.” Once they choose an event, you'll need to prepare a situation for the characters to tackle (page 81).

Looking at the timeline in front of them, the players decide that the event titled “Eye of the Beholder” sounds like the most fun place to start: they need to track down an art dealer who is shipping icons of the Great Old One across the globe. Beyond the barest details about what happened before the time travelers went back, the players have a little information about the event—its timeline aspect, ELDRITCH ICONS SPREADING THE GREAT OLD ONE'S INFLUENCE, and its catalysts:

PERSON	☞	Alice Westforth, shady art dealer
PLACE	■	The Westforth Gallery in Soho
THING	■	Hideous icons of the Great Old One
FOE	☞	Humanoid abominations that guard the icons

PLAY THE EVENT

Playing out the heroes' attempts to change an event is the meat of the game. This is where the characters take action, players roll the dice, and the story gets told.

Each event is a single story, what's called an adventure or scenario in other roleplaying games. An event typically takes one to three sessions of play to complete. During the event you'll need to stay on top of the timeline track (page 84), marking boxes and marking ripples as needed.



CHANGE THE EVENT

The actions the characters take will change the present and have far-reaching effects on the future—but we'll get to that in a moment. The actions taken can seem dramatic in the moment but ultimately futile in the long term.

The players have the opportunity to rewrite the event's timeline aspect to reflect the new reality of causality. For example, if the heroes managed to put the brakes on COOL@ir and drive them underground, changing GHOULS ARE ON THE PROWL into something like RUMORS OF DIGITAL NECROMANCY is appropriate.

As GM, you will rewrite any catalysts directly affected by the heroes. Change the specifics of a catalyst by rewriting who, what, or where it is. This doesn't change the rating, it's just a narrative change. Follow the fiction for this—if the heroes' actions significantly affected the catalyst, rewrite it. Be liberal with changes to the timeline.

Change the rating of catalysts if possible, measuring the impact—the positive or negative shift—as the difference between the positive and negative ripples generated during the event. For example, if an event had two **⊖** ripples and no **⊕** ripples, you would apply both **⊖**; if there were two **⊕** ripples and one **⊖** ripple, you'd apply one **⊕** ripple. If the difference is zero, the heroes have changed the specifics of the event but not made it significantly better or worse. Things are simply *different* than they would have been.



Alice Westforth has been sending icons of the Great Old One across the world. Well, the team caught her, Alice is dead now, and her warehouses burned to cinders. The event is definitively completed.

In-game, the characters have some downtime to recuperate, deal with their injuries, and plan which event they'll take on next. The players and the GM have some work to do.

The players are responsible for rewriting the event's timeline aspect. The original timeline aspect of "Eye of the Beholder" was **ELDRITCH ICONS SPREADING THE GREAT OLD ONE'S INFLUENCE**; the GM compelled it more than once to infect NPCs with the corruptive influence of the Great Old One. Now that the team has halted that spread, the aspect needs to change. The players talk it over and eventually decide on an aspect that reflects the new state of the world: **SCATTERED ICONS OF THE GREAT OLD ONE**. They might still stumble across the icons Westforth already sent out, but the ongoing spread and corrupting influence is over. The GM agrees that the new aspect is accurate. Now the players need to figure out how to work it to their advantage.











Meanwhile, the GM adjusts the catalysts. Alice is dead and her studio burned, so those catalysts obviously need to be changed. Additionally, there is a net of one **+** on the timeline track, so one catalyst is improved. The GM decides that the abominations guarding the icons have probably all been destroyed, and replaces that catalyst with something a little less sinister.





PERSON	☹	Alice Westforth's mysterious financial backer
PLACE	🔥	The burned-down remains of the Westforth Gallery in Soho
THING	👁	Hideous icons of the Great Old One
FOE	👁	Art aficionados mesmerized by their icons



CHANGE THE FUTURE




After the event is over, it's time to change the future. Take the ripples created during the event and use them to change the timeline.




Use the ripples you marked in the event to change the events that haven't been explored yet. **Events that have already been played are time-locked and cannot be changed.**

- ▼ A  ripple improves a catalyst by one step, turning a  into a  or a  into a .
- ▼ A  ripple does the opposite, downgrading a catalyst by one step—a  becomes  and a  becomes a .

Ripples must change the timeline by changing catalysts. No applying a  to a  or a  to a . Apply the ripples as evenly as you can; don't apply a second ripple to an event until you've applied one to every other event. Each catalyst can only be changed once during this process. If you have more ripples than you can apply—this could happen in the last event before “Rise of the Great Old One”—then apply the difference just like you do when changing the event you played.

After working out the changes to “Eye of the Beholder,” the GM ripples changes to the other events on the timeline. On the timeline track, the players have generated three  and two . There are three remaining events plus the “Rise of the Great Old One.”

The GM looks over the catalysts and thinks about what might have changed because of the characters' actions. Their eye is drawn to an event with the  Place catalyst “The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art.” Maybe, with fewer dangerous icons out in the world, that event will be even more contained? The GM applies one of the  ripples to turn that event into a  version: “The Top Floor of the MMoMA.” Still public and populated, but easier for the characters to get a handle on.

The GM looks at the other events and spots the  Foe catalyst “Mindless thralls of the Great Old One.” Well, if the Old One's influence isn't spreading anymore, perhaps it's more potent in those already infected. The GM applies a  ripple to turn that catalyst into a  version: “Corrupted servants to the Great Old One.” The team will have a nasty surprise when the enemies they run into are much more aggressive than they expected.

The GM assigns the rest of the ripples the same way.

MANY RIPPLES ACROSS THE POND

When applying ripples to the timeline, spread the changes around all of the remaining events before you double up. This includes “Rise of the Great Old One.” Don’t stack multiple ripples on a single event at any given point unless you have more ripples than remaining events.

This is for a few reasons.

First, changing only one thing on the next event you run means you have less to alter when you prep the adventure. It also gives you more time to prep the bigger changes, which will happen further down the line.

Second, as later events diverge more from the original timeline, the players know there will be greater mystery and uncertainty. This is a valuable way to adjust pace and tone. By introducing small changes first, and making later events more and more different, you can feed into the players’ paranoia and cosmic horror. Things slowly become not as they should be.

Last, you want to project ripples all the way out to “Rise of the Great Old One” early to help yourself plan what the future looks like. This is invaluable when you send NPCs back in time to show the players how things have changed because of their actions.

DON’T CHANGE THINGS BACK

When you change a catalyst, don’t walk it back to its original state. Why? Because the fun of the timeline is *changing* the timeline. If you change a catalyst back to its original rating, rewrite it to something new. There are many possible, equally terrible futures. Think of it like making and erasing possible futures before they are solidified.

THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE

Resist the temptation to always make “Rise of the Great Old One” worse; *Fate of Cthulhu* is a game of cosmic horror, but it is also a game of heroic action. Follow the majority of ripples.

If there are more **+** than **-** ripples, apply a **+** ripple to “Rise of the Great Old One.” Same in reverse when you have mostly **-** ripples. On a tie, give them the **+**. There are precious few lucky breaks when dealing with impossibly powerful cosmic gods, but this is one of them.

This rewards players for good play and success during missions without handing them a shiny, happy unicorn future just for doing the adventure.



REPEAT STEPS 2–5 FOR ALL EVENTS

You'll repeat the cycle of choose an event, play the event, and change the future until you've exhausted the timeline. There are two rules to this cycle:

First, "Rise of the Great Old One" is the last event you play in your campaign. It's the one event that is causally linked to the others—it *must* come last.

Second, you can't go back and try any event again. If the players ask to, tell them it's off-limits. Strictly forbidden. There are complicated temporal reasons for it, but really it's because in order for the stakes to have meaning, failure must have consequences.

PLAY THE "RISE OF THE GREAT OLD ONE" EVENT

The last event you'll play is "Rise of the Great Old One." Feel free to elide a significant amount of time in the PCs' lives—it might take a decade or two before the Great Old One rises. If you do have a time jump, spend some time in the opening of the session finding out what the heroes have been up to and how they've prepared for the Apocalypse. Establish the new status quo and explore what it means for the characters to have to wait for the end.

The heroes can't change the catalysts anymore, so event rating is locked—everything they've done up to now is the best they can manage. As the GM, it's your job to set this event up according to its final rating. Is it Horrifying (-4)? Nothing the heroes do will have much of any impact. They're likely wiped out early on. If it's Average (+1), then things are still basically terrible for humanity but *less* terrible than the original timeline. The heroes will probably live long enough to see humanity subjugated again.

At Good (+3) the heroes might even have a fighting chance. If they've prepared enough and have gathered the resources and allies they need,



it's possible they could punch Cthulhu and R'lyeh back into the void. A Great (+4) rating is the best it can be. Humanity will triumph. Or maybe the Great Old One never rises. The day comes and passes with nothing of note. At least for the foreseeable future.

Cassandra, Ethan, and Ruth have made it to “Rise of the Great Old One.” Charles did not, alas, but his player made a new character: the younger version of Charles who already existed in this timeline has joined the team and fought to avenge himself. Through their adventures, the team has impacted “Rise” positively; instead of Horrifying (-4), the event is merely Mediocre (+0). Hardly ideal, but much better than it could have been.

The GM asks the players where their characters are on the day the Apocalypse is scheduled to happen: in the original timeline, a sinkhole opened up in downtown Kingsport, spewing forth an immense army of shadowy flying beasts. Ruth and Cassandra's players decide that their characters would be at the front lines, ready to fight the first wave of invading monsters. Ethan and Young Charles are also in Kingsport, but more pessimistic: they're in a bar waiting for the end.

The event itself is brief: Cassandra and Ruth battle the forces of the Great Old One, along with the handful of fighters they've somehow convinced to come with them. They take out several beasts, but eventually Ruth is taken out and Cassandra must concede. The forces of evil are slowed, but not halted.

Meanwhile, in Kingsport, Young Charles faces the inevitable with as much grace as he can muster and is torn apart by the eldritch beasts that emerge from the sinkhole. Ethan, seeing that there are many fewer monsters than there were supposed to be thanks to the team's efforts, decides at the last moment to flee. He's able to survive the panicked exodus from Kingsport, and even finds Cassandra in the escape.

RUN THE DENOUEMENT AND EPILOGUE

Stories need endings. It's what gives them meaning. This is your chance to do just that. As a group, take turns describing the future of humanity after the Rise of the Great Old One. How bleak is it? Do any of the heroes survive? Who starts the resistance against the Great Old One? Will people go back in time to change the future again?

The players think about the future.

Ruth's player suggests that it's much less bleak than it was the first go around; it helps that in the first appearance of the Great Old One's forces, a few monsters were actually taken out—that gives people some hope. Unfortunately, Ruth (or at least this iteration of Ruth) won't be there to see it.

Cassandra's player decides that Cassandra definitely takes charge of the resistance, with a goal of starting the time-travel project again.

Charles's player thinks that Project Yog-Sothoth will go much faster this time around. Charles might not be there to help, but many of the theories he developed live on in Cassandra. It's going to be a bigger, safer, and altogether more scientific endeavor.


Ethan's player decides that, with incredible reluctance, Ethan is going to volunteer to go back in time for another try. He knows how the first mission went, and he's significantly less corrupted than Cassandra. He's humanity's last hope, and he's none too happy about it.

And with that, the group puts an end to this version of the timeline.

TRY AGAIN?

Just like the source material, there's always a chance for a sequel. If the players want to have another go, they can!

Start over at step 1, Create the Campaign and Characters, using the final timeline from the original campaign. Start from scratch when building characters. Even if you're playing the "same" character as in the first timeline, it's a new version of them.

Apply one  ripple per character that is sent back in time during character creation. Apply them to the timeline as you see fit. We recommend applying the first one to "Rise of the Great Old One" and spreading the others around as needed.

Using the Timeline in Play

Prepping an adventure based on a timeline event is where the timeline becomes a unique expression of your group's story. The timeline isn't just a guide for the characters the players have created. The timeline is an outline of story you'll tell—it's an infinitely flexible guide and one that will change through play, but it's designed to help you along the way.

Each event has a number of components—a timeline aspect, four catalysts, and a rating for each catalyst that add up to an event rating.

TIMELINE ASPECTS

Aspects are always true (page 28). Look at the timeline aspect for the event you're prepping and consider how this true statement affects the world.

The GM is prepping the next event that the team will take on, "The Azure Codex." It is about tracking down a book that will be used to summon forth the Great Old One in ten years' time. The timeline aspect for this event is **SECRET SOCIETIES ARE HUNTING THE CODEX**.

Since this aspect is true, it means there are multiple secret societies in the world, aware of the power of this book. Most likely, the Azure Codex is a nexus of secret-society activity: infiltration, backstabbing, secret little wars fought through unwitting catspaws. And of course, information being traded around; at least once society is probably aware of the PCs and willing to use them for its own ends.

This gives the GM a lot to work with: a scenario heavy on secrets, groups who might be hoarding rituals and other forbidden knowledge, and the paranoia that comes from knowing that anybody could be an agent of a secret society with ill intent.



KEY CATALYSTS

Catalysts are the quick-and-dirty, broad overview of an event. When preparing an event, you'll use the catalysts as the broad strokes, filling in the details as you go along.

The starting point is your **KEY CATALYST**—pick one catalyst to emphasize for the event. All the catalysts play a part, but it helps to focus on one as the main source of action, with the others playing supporting roles.

When writing your adventure, keep the key catalyst in mind as you convey the mission to the players. Frame your descriptions around it. You're not railroading them with specific action, but giving them a target and letting them handle it in their own way.

A key catalyst directs your prep at a smaller target, which will be the main thrust of action in your adventure. When you pick it, you'll also pick which kind of adventure you're going to present to the players, like so:

Person: Change their mind, assassinate them, or undermine their work. When a person is a catalyst, it's because they—or the work only they can do—is of paramount importance to this event. People can be persuaded or coerced, in which case you might focus on the difficulties of getting access to the person. They may need convincing, a demonstration of the truth of the terrible future. They could go on the run and lead the players on a merry chase. Or they could be the under the influence of someone else in a situation more complicated than the history books will tell us.

Place: Destroy a lab, stop the opening night gala, or sabotage an excavation. Places as catalysts are more than just backdrops for adventures; they affect just how terrible the results will be; a larger, populated location will experience much more fallout than a smaller, contained location. Destroying a location before it can be corrupted or changing the locus of corruption can massively affect the timeline. A mission that forces the military to divert their operations to somewhere remote, rather than in a major base, can be the crux of an adventure. Imagine if John Carpenter's *The Thing* took place in Chicago rather than Antarctica. All those extra people for it to infect and spread to? Grim tidings.

Thing: Steal, destroy, or weaken an artifact of the Great Old One. Things are natural MacGuffins. They can be the target of heists or doomsday weapons for use by either side. It's a powerful item, one that drives people around it to action. Adventures framed around a thing don't need to be *Ocean's 11* heists—they can also be games of Three-Card Monte with the biggest stakes imaginable. Try shuffling the object around, changing hands frequently as various forces try to claim it as their own. Or it could be a full-on assault against prepared defenders.

Foe: Stop the evil person by whatever means necessary. Adventures aimed at stopping a foe are likely familiar—it's how many roleplaying adventures are written. This is particularly apt when the foe is an organization or a squamous horror, not an individual who can be reasoned with or coerced. Take inspiration from your favorite action and horror movies when planning these scenarios.

EXPANDING ON THE KEY CATALYST

After you've picked a focus for your adventure, spend some time fleshing it out.

Person: Give them a personality and motivations. The rest of the event will give you context for what they're doing, but the person is a blank slate waiting to be filled out. Are they a willing participant in the doom of mankind or an idealist who overlooked the dangers of their work? Are they a true believer or a mercenary? Look at the other catalysts to see where they'll be, who they're working with, and what powers they may be meddling with. Also consider the rating of the catalyst—a **■** person is likely a committed cultist or is completely without remorse, while a **+** person is more often than not unwittingly helping the Apocalypse.

Place: Think about how this place in particular affects the timeline. The place catalyst is unique in that it isn't necessarily present in an adventure where it's the key catalyst. The goal of the heroes could be to change the venue before the place becomes important, working to affect the flow of events so that things don't happen *there*. If this is the case, you'll need to decide where the heroes are going and what they're doing. Whichever location you pick—whether the catalyst itself or an alternate locale—you'll want to give it a few aspects and populate it with people and organizations. Look to your other catalysts to see who and what might be in play.

Thing: Ask yourself, "What makes this so dangerous?" The event itself might even describe the power it contains. The other catalysts will give you context about where the item is and who wants or controls it. When a thing is the key catalyst, be sure to offer the players multiple paths to victory. The future can be changed by stealing, destroying, substituting, or relocating the item. Expanding on this key catalyst means putting it in place and setting people in motion around it—it is not merely a thing *present* during this scenario, but is being *sought*.

Foe: Figure out why this foe needs to be stopped. Then show the players how terrible they are and let them loose at the enemy. Wind up the players, get them invested in stopping this organization or monster.

KEY SCENES

A mission that never veers too far from the key catalyst can be exhausting, both for you as the person crafting a scenario and for the players who are banging their heads against one issue for scene after scene after scene. Here are a few other types of scenes to keep in your toolbox to mix things up. Keep the players on their toes and invested in the action by changing the stakes every so often.

Push at the Balance of the Present and Future: The characters are looking to fix the future, but doing so means lots of dirty work in the present. Put them in situations where they are made to look like the bad guys. Give them moral quandaries. How far are they willing to go to change the future? What about the millions of lives that are saved by the research they want to destroy? Being in the present also means you have to deal with jobs, governments, and cops. How bad is the culture shock for future warriors? How willing are modern characters to break social taboos and, effectively, become time-terrorists?

Expand the Forces of the Old One: The Great Old Ones have had cults on Earth for millennia working to bring about the Apocalypse. They are ancient organizations with vast resources and brutal agendas. Pitch these shadowy cabals against the PCs.

Introduce Characters from the Present: Bringing NPCs back from the future isn't the only way to generate drama. Insert NPCs in the present day that keep the PCs grounded in reality, from becoming monsters. Build connections with them so that as the PCs are corrupted by the forces they're dealing with, the NPCs can hold up the metaphorical mirror of what's happening.

Create Monsters: The Old Ones have many servitors of terrible power. Sending back a horrid monstrosity to hunt the PCs is a well-established trope in time-travel fiction.



COMMUNICATING CHANGES TO THE FUTURE

As you play through events, the future will change via the ripple effect in unpredictable ways. Keep this explicit information secret from the players—they don't know the exact effects of their actions until something happens in the story to communicate that. This gives you some mystery and uncertainty to play with at the table. The joy of playing a game with a timeline is not knowing how that timeline changes.

All that said, you'll need to communicate timeline changes to the players *somehow*. Here are a few ways for you to do just that.

INTRODUCE CHARACTERS FROM THE FUTURE

At least one PC will be from the future. Bring back other time travelers—lean on the dramatic trope of bringing back family, friends, lovers, and rivals. Or send back children and aged acquaintances of present-day characters. Build off the relationships that the characters have, use them to develop drama and conflict.

Early in a campaign, especially during and immediately after the first adventure, the people sent back after the heroes will be from the same or a very similar future. Keep these NPCs mostly the same, with only small differences. Convey that the future has only *started* to change.

Later in the campaign, as the characters have changed the timeline more significantly, the people sent back might be from a wildly different future. Start flipping the relationships and making the NPCs drastically different from how the heroes remember them. Who a hero remembers as a friend might be a rival in the new future, or might not even know the hero. Worst of all, they might be completely corrupted and sent back in time to stop the heroes.

HINT AT RIPPLES IN THE GREAT OLD ONE'S GOALS

As the heroes change the timeline for better or worse, you can convey those changes through the status of the timeline relative to the original. The Old One's goals are perfect for conveying this because these are the steps along the path to victory for the eldritch forces.

You can start this as early as the first session as the first boxes on the timeline track get marked. With the first negative ripples, start hinting that the forces of the Great Old One are gaining power. If the heroes manage to make a positive ripple, then give some color commentary about a positive shift in the timeline.

Make these comments brief. And feel free to get weird with them! Mythos stories are full of alien geometries and nonlinear time, and this is a time-traveling game of action-horror. Negative hints can be visions of dark futures or horrid pasts overlaying themselves on the present.

Positive hints could be visions of the Great Old One wailing in frustration, or having an agent of evil simply give up as the Great Old One is no longer forcing them to follow its bidding.

GIVE INTERSTITIAL BRIEFINGS

As the timeline further diverges from the history the heroes of the future knew, give them updates at the start of an adventure. Make a list of things to change that are seemingly unrelated to the events of the timeline. Headline events from the past don't quite match anymore. Things that are a matter of record in the future—like who won the World Series in 2023—don't pan out that way they should have. Bonus points if you can tie them into the players' actual feelings on things. For example, if the timeline has shifted against the heroes and you have a bunch of Yankees fans, maybe the Yankees lose the 2023 ALCS and don't even get to the World Series that year, let alone win it all.

Do this along with, not instead of, the changes to events described in the other options. Interstitial briefings flesh out the world and drive home that the timeline is diverging, that anything can happen, that the future is in flux. It creates useful uncertainty and mild paranoia.

That said, don't go too far with it. Don't start World War III ten years early in a different part of the world. Keep these changes mundane, items of trivia. This is the Lone Pine Mall gag from *Back to the Future*, not the Biff-topian hellscape of *Back to the Future Part II*.

HAVE TIME LASH OUT

When you want to convey the new future as something concrete, have time lash out at one or more of the heroes. Show them a vision of the past, present, and future all intermixing and coalescing, with them and their compatriots at the center of it all.

If nature abhors a vacuum, time abhors paradox. It accepts small changes grudgingly, but large changes will prompt time to attack the source of the problem—much like a dog gnaws at a flea-infested leg.

Time lashes out with a Legendary (+8) mental attack. The heroes affected have little recourse but to weather the onslaught with Will. The benefit for the heroes—if there can be said to be a benefit—is they get a glimpse at what the probable future looks like.

Successfully defending against the attack gives them the vision of the future with no repercussions. Failure carries a special burden—the hero must take a consequence of any severity, reflecting the trauma of having peered into the incomprehensible planes of the infinite, before absorbing any of the hit with stress. If they cannot take a consequence, they instead corrupt an aspect and clear their corruption clock.



The team has taken out another one of the Great Old One's malevolent machinations. As they stand in the smoldering ashes of the profane temple that would have been the dark god's entry point into the world, they are exultant.

Distressingly, the GM is also smiling. "You have created a dramatic shift in the fabric of time and space," they say, "and you feel the world swirling and tearing as time itself lashes at you."

The PCs each roll Will, facing Legendary (+8) difficulty. Only Cassandra is able to weather the attack, getting a Beyond Legendary (+9) effort through a combination of a high Will rating, a lucky roll, and a lot of fate points spent.

Ethan and Ruth get an Epic (+7) and Good (+3) effort, respectively. As a result, Ethan takes PEERED INTO INFINITY as a mild consequence, and Ruth takes it as a moderate consequence along with one mental stress. They will be hounded by echoes of the possible for some time, especially Ruth.

Charles, unfortunately, had a bad mission; his consequence slots are all full, and his roll was nowhere near sufficient. His player erases another aspect, and starts thinking about what horrible mutation will be inflicted upon the character as he becomes corrupted yet again.

The GM, meanwhile, describes the vision that comes to the characters: They see the impenetrable tower of black stone, surrounded by armies of corrupted servants, where the Great Old One made its foul home. The scene fades from view and is replaced by a similar, but smaller, tower. It's set in the ruins of what must be London, and though there are Corrupted walking the streets, they are fewer and more harried, occasionally assaulted by human guerilla fighters.

It seems the Great Old One's position has been considerably weakened. When their vision clears, and they remember where they are in time and space, the teammates are eager to celebrate...except perhaps Charles, who has developed a BLOODSHOT THIRD EYE from the experience.

Using the Great Old One's Agenda in Play

Each Great Old One has an **AGENDA**, its *modus operandi* that determines its typical response. They don't tend to be surprising or crafty. It's hardly necessary, with the power they wield at a whim. Their agenda is the last tool for determining changes to the timeline. It's a guide for the GM to respond to the players' efforts and the sorts of things that will come back to haunt the heroes from the future.

Where the Great Old One's timeline is your basic tool to structure a campaign and its scenarios, the agenda is your guideline as GM for how to act and react in play. It's a tool for keeping the tone of play consistent with the themes and lore of the Old One of your timeline. Cthulhu is all about madness and incomprehensible plans. It doesn't make sense for you to use plagues and poisons as a theme when Cthulhu is the Great Old One. The King in Yellow is the one who uses plague and obsession.

Each agenda has the same basic parts:

- ▼ Its **AMBITION** is its fundamental purpose. Everything they do eventually boils down to furthering their ambition.
- ▼ Its ambition needs **GOALS**. The ambition is the big picture. Goals are smaller, more actionable steps along the way.
- ▼ Its **TACTICS** are the favored baseline tools for advancing goals and removing obstacles. If you are ever unsure what action an Old One will take next, they'll probably fall back on their tactics.
- ▼ Its **CULTISTS** are just that: people advancing the agenda of the Great Old One, often as supplicants or worshippers.

AMBITION

The ambition is the first thing you need to know about the Great Old One. It's the endgame, the ultimate motivation. Everything that happens in the timeline is because the Great Old One has an ambition. This is what happens after Rise of the Great Old One is over. You don't need to worry about pushing it forward in concrete steps—that's handled with events and goals—but instead should focus on using it as a thematic tool to guide your actions and descriptions.

Cthulhu's ambition is **To Touch Forever** and it is a particularly bold one—effectively to supplant Yog-Sothoth as the infinite being and solidify control across all of space and time. When playing Cthulhu's timeline, keep this in mind. Humanity is a means to Cthulhu's ends, using our consciousness to feed its own ambition.

You can use Cthulhu's ambition by expressing it through the various cultists and creatures. Treat them as extensions of Cthulhu's will or eyes and ears for Cthulhu's minions. The steps Cthulhu has already taken have advanced the ambition, show that in the fiction.

GOALS

The goals of a Great Old One are more immediate to the concerns of Earth and the timeline. These are plans and machinations underway to solidify the Great Old One's power and achieve their ambition. The events in the timeline generally advance one or more of the Great Old One's goals in a direct way.

Each Great Old One has three goals. They can be just as atmospheric as the ambition but with more immediacy. When you mark a box in the Great Old One side of the timeline track, do it as you hint of the doom coming in the future. Make reference to Cthulhu stirring in its slumber or how, just for a moment, the world seems to shift to a city in ruins and shrouded in yellow mist. The opposite holds true, as well, and you can convey positive changes to the timeline with the same techniques—though, on balance, we find it works better for atmospheric horror to do this less often and recommend that it be done only when you mark a positive ripple.

Unlike the ambition, you can incorporate changes to the goals in the events themselves. If the players have a bad session and the timeline gets worse, show how one of the goals has changed and the Great Old One has grown more powerful. Or if the timeline is shifting in humanity's favor, perhaps you can show how the Great Old One's influence is diminished compared to the future-historical records.

Cthulhu's three goals are **To Wake from Its Eternal Dream**, **To Raise R'lyeh from the Depths**, and **To Enthrall Everyone, Everywhere, Everywhen**. Convey the current status of the timeline by portraying these as better or worse, relatively speaking, than in the original timeline. When the timeline is looking grimmer than it was, the cultists the heroes encounter babble of how Cthulhu stirs. Or perhaps there is an earthquake with an epicenter over where the heroes know R'lyeh to be—years before it should rise from the depths.



TACTICS

Tactics are where you and the Great Old One's moves and purposes become as one. Just don't let it go any further, okay?

These are specific moves or responses you can bring into play when you need to take action on behalf of the Great Old One. Think of it as a way to work the Great Old One's terrible will upon the game. How does this work? When the players present you with an opportunity—with a failed roll, when the table goes quiet, or when it's too good to pass up—use one of the favored tactics to hammer home the stakes of the game.

- ▼ **Failed Roll:** Being the GM means that deciding the cost of failure generally falls to you. Look to the Great Old One's tactics to draw inspiration for what sorts of horrible, nasty things could happen to the hero when they fail. This is especially good if you can dangle that tactic in front of them as the cost of a success at a cost.
- ▼ **The Table Goes Quiet:** If the conversation of the game stalls out and nothing seems to be happening, look to the Great Old One's tactics to change things up. Earlier Fate games referred to this as “sending in the ninjas.” The point is to never let the game stop moving and keep play lively. *Fate of Cthulhu* is in part a horror game with higher stakes than usual, so you'll want to do more than throw ninjas in the mix.
- ▼ **It's Too Good to Pass Up:** When a player hands you a golden opportunity—like hiding away the eldritch statue even from the other heroes—you should respond with one of the Great Old One's tactics. The best thing for the Great Old One is for humanity to do their work for them. Any time a player does something that could potentially shift the timeline toward a worse fate, respond with a Great Old One tactic.



CULTISTS

The cults and followers of the Great Old Ones make up the last part of the agenda. They work the will of their dark master, and are a channel by which eldritch powers flow into the world and alter reality itself.

Use the cultists as the—mostly—mundane agents of the eldritch forces. Need a generic mook to fill out a scene? Cultists. Need a creepy setting for your adventure? A cult's hideout. The cultists are generally plug-and-play villains and filler. Use them to round out your events as needed.

But they can also be an important tool for theme and mood. Take Cthulhu's cultist entry as an example: "Literally anyone; that's what makes the cult of Cthulhu so terrifying." When running Cthulhu's timeline, lean into the paranoia and horror of never knowing who might be the enemy. This is why one of Cthulhu's tactics is **The Call of Cthulhu** and is all about temptation and cultists lurking about everywhere.

The outline of the cultists is intentionally brief, giving you a starting point to flesh out the cults as you see fit for your campaign.

BUILDING YOUR OWN APOCALYPSE

The five included timelines are simply the starting point. There are infinite apocalypses to explore, as varied as the imagination and the Great Old Ones themselves. This guide will help you build your own timeline of terrible, humanity-ending events that would inspire desperate survivors to risk everything in an attempt to change the past.

Building a timeline is a big job and, as such, it's collaborative. Everyone at the table works together to doom the world. It's fun and a great team-building exercise.



Choose the Form of the Destructor _____

Start by discussing which Great Old One will destroy all of humanity. There are a great many of them in the Cthulhu mythos to choose from, many more than the five covered in this book. You can also create your own, which is more involved but lets you lean into the specific fears and discomforts of the players while avoiding specific phobias and traumas up front.

THE EXTANT MYTHOS

If you're picking from the Great Old Ones that already exist in the Cthulhu mythos, you'll want to identify and distill the following information:

The ambition of the Great Old One is going to translate directly into the **AGENDA** you create for the timeline. This is what drives the whole timeline, the Great Old One's ultimate aim and reason for action. Make it grandiose and literary, something that is impossible and almost beyond comprehension.

The themes are common motifs, elements, and repeated ideas in the stories featuring that Great Old One. Cthulhu brings madness and domination. The King in Yellow is a locus of disease and plague. You'll be building these themes into the Great Old One's agenda as parts of its **GOALS**, **TACTICS**, and **CULTISTS**. You'll want to glean as many themes as you can, but at least three.

Repeated actions form the basis of the **TACTICS** in the agenda. If the Great Old One responds in a particular way multiple times across the stories, jot it down here. If there aren't many examples of direct action, look at what its cultists and creatures do. Generally there will be a thematic thrust behind the stories that will help you piece these together. For instance, stories featuring Nyarlathotep often demonstrate his different forms: *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, *The Dreams in the Witch House*, and *The Haunter in the Dark* all feature very different avatars of Nyarlathotep, and the first two also suggest his tendency to appear in the dreams of humans.

Lastly, look at the followers of the Great Old One if there are any. Look past the purple prose describing them—all the “frothing” and “raving” and “wild-eyed” descriptors—and figure out *who* they are. The King in Yellow recruits thespians and playwrights, for example. This gives you the basis to assemble the **CULTISTS** of the Great Old One.

CRAFTING YOUR OWN ELDER GOD

The DIY approach to the Great Old One takes a bit more work. Rather than looking for the information, you have to create it whole cloth. Start by answering the following questions:

What themes define the stories of this Old One? These are the bedrock of your story; you can't tell the story until you know what kind of story it is. Deciding on themes can be easier than pulling them out of existing stories. They can be broad, overarching ideas and motifs—madness, plague, desperation, and loss are all perfectly valid. Keep them simple. They will manifest more explicitly in the agenda.

What makes them scary? This is where you first put the themes into practice. Take the themes and follow them to their horrifying conclusions. Cthulhu's theme is madness and domination. What makes Cthulhu scary is that anyone can fall prey to the his call—the fragility of the human psyche compared to the indomitable, terrible will of Cthulhu. That's the cosmic horror of Cthulhu stories. The horror of the King in Yellow comes from the impermanence of all things and the loss of all we hold dear.

How do they view Earth and humanity? Each Old One has a different take on humanity. To Cthulhu we are but cogs working in its attempt to reach forever, nothing more than a step in infinite conquest. The King in Yellow views humanity as the best replacement for the people of Carcosa. This helps you shape the horrors that will come about in the events of the timeline as you tie into the themes and source of horror.

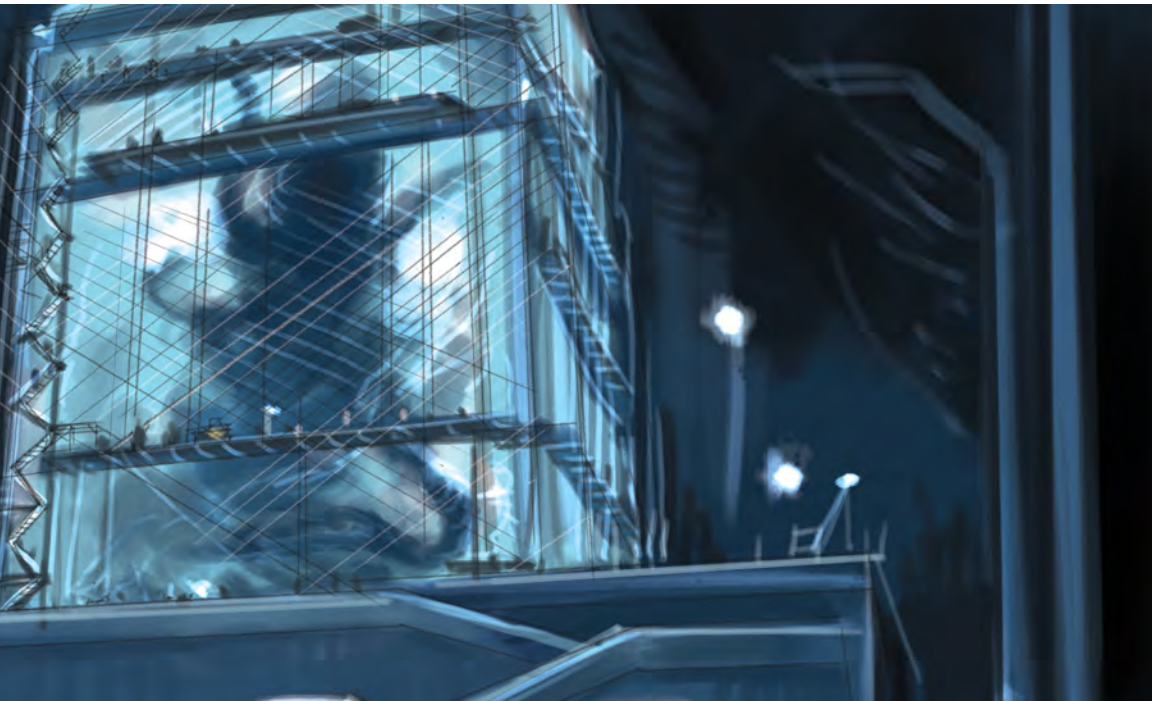


What is their ambition? Here you lay the foundation of the Old One's agenda. Decide on the ambition, that lofty, unknowable aim of the Old One. Read *"Ambition"* (page 236) for a full description and how it is used in play. Keep in mind that this isn't something you need to worry about putting into action in play itself—the ambition isn't realized until after the final event.

What are their avenues of attack? These inform the Old One's tactics: the moves that the GM gets to make in response to the players. Don't worry about refining them into final tactics just yet. Brainstorm the various actions the Old One might use to influence the mortal world, leaning on the answers above for guidance.

Who is likely to serve them? The cultists of an Old One play an integral part of the timeline. Start thinking about who could possibly be twisted enough to serve an unknowable, uncaring creature from beyond space and time. What motivates them? Is it an indescribable connection to the Old One, some strange alignment of motive? Do they crave power? Have they been dominated? Is there a familial or social pressure?

What's their name? Remember to give your wee little elder god a name and backstory. Something simple and evocative like "Cihndha, Lady of the Mountain Who Rules Upon Khatvoum" suffices. It's important to name your doom.



Roadmap to Destruction

Once you have the basics of your Old One fleshed out, it's time to lay out your timeline. You'll have five events, and the final one will be "Rise of the Great Old One," which works just like the ones listed in the premade timelines. Each event needs a **NAME**, a **TIMELINE ASPECT**, and four **CATALYSTS**.

NAME

The event's name is a sort of title, almost like an episode title in a TV series. For example, "Rise of the Great Old One" is the name of the final event. Pitching ideas for event names is a good way to see what people are interested in, and it will help to form the shape of the timeline in your minds. Don't worry about making it permanent just yet—you can always revise it up until you start playing. For now, just get down a few ideas that you can refine as you go along.

You'll want to discuss the events' names and what each one means, telling stories of what went on in the event. It's okay to be a bit vague—this is the best information you've got, pieced together in a shattered future.

TIMELINE ASPECTS

Each event needs a timeline aspect. This is a punchier, more actionable phrase than its title. In the event "The Great Serpent's Lament," for instance, its timeline aspect is **THE CULT OF CTHULHU IS GROWING**. It's more easily invoked and compelled than a phrase like "The Great Serpent's Lament." It also speaks directly to the plot of the event—Cthulhu's influence among mankind is spreading, and anyone could be a cultist.

You can use the timeline aspect to reflect various portions of an event. **THE CULT OF CTHULHU IS GROWING** is about what happens in the event. **GHOULS ARE ON THE PROWL** is more about the immediate threat in the event. **DREAMS OF R'LYEH** can be atmospheric or invasive depending on how it is used. Emphasize whatever facet of the event you feel is important and interesting. You can always change it later.

CATALYSTS

Catalysts are the simplest parts of an event. **The secret to writing catalysts is to not worry about them too much, since there's a good chance any given catalyst will change before it comes into play.** The timeline is ever-changing, right? Think of this as your first draft—barf forth the words onto the page and fix it in editing. Use them as quick prompts and guides for creating adventures and move on.

Each event gets **four catalysts**, and each catalyst has a **name** and a **rating**. The **rating** is easier—give two a **■** rating and two a **■** rating for the first four events. You can do this at random or pick which two you think are worse. The final event—“Rise of the Great Old One”—is slightly different. It’s the absolute worst it could be, with all four catalysts rated **■**.

The **name** takes a little more creativity. The simplest way to assign catalysts is to have a person, thing, place, and foe in each event. Feel free to double up on one category and leave another off, though.

- ▼ **Person:** Lists of names are invaluable. You can pick them at random—just slot in any name on the list—and keep the list handy for when those catalysts get rewritten as the timeline changes. Be sure to include some notion of how the person is involved—head of research, military director, patient zero, etc.—to make things easier when the GM creates adventures.
- ▼ **Place:** This is a location important to the event, but not necessarily the location of the action itself. A place can be specific—the omega-level security biolab on the 16th floor of the IIT Research Institute—when the action is very contained. Broader locations—such as Moscow or Hong Kong—are useful when that place is the *worst possible place on Earth* this event could happen. Don’t go larger than a city, as it gets hard to distill the action into something meaningful with a playing field that big.
- ▼ **Thing:** This is a great place to get weird—non-Euclidean idols, amulets of eldritch power, computational models that create rifts in the universe, and the secrets of lost civilizations are perfect things. A thing should be related to the story of the event, like a vaccine based on Deep One DNA or a map to R’lyeh. Think of things that make for good MacGuffins in a variety of story types.
- ▼ **Foe:** Groups or organizations arrayed against the heroes. When you first set up the timeline, don’t worry about specifics. It’s fine to come up with a cool name for a death cult—the Speakers of Eternal Silence, for example—and fill in the details later. Maybe write down who they worship or work for, but don’t get too in the weeds. Make note of each foe in a separate document. Just because a person or organization is a foe for a particular event doesn’t mean they are limited to appearing in that event; the Speakers of Eternal Silence are a part of the setting, so they can crop up wherever it makes sense. The foe is merely the dominant opposition for this particular event.




Create the Elder God's Agenda

The next step is to create the agenda of your chosen Old One. This is still a group activity, even though the agenda is normally GM-only information. It can be a lot of work and seriously affects how the campaign plays.

An agenda has four components: **ambition**, **goals**, **tactics**, and **cultists**.

- ▼ **Ambition:** You should have decided on a rough ambition in the early steps of timeline creation. Here is where you refine it for your campaign. Remember—make it lofty, unattainable by mortals, and destructive; the Great Old One's ambition requires human life as we know it to come to an end. The ambition of an elder god is beyond mortal understanding. Mostly this informs the shape of the Apocalypse after the Rise of the Great Old One; effectively, it becomes backstory fodder for heroes from the future and informs the NPCs that follow them back in time.
- ▼ **Goals:** The agenda has three goals. These are atmospheric, like the ambition, but more actionable. They hint at doom as the GM advances the Great Old One's timeline track. Unlike the ambition, goals can see progress in the course of the campaign.
- ▼ **Tactics:** These are parts of the Great Old One's agenda which most directly impact play. Tactics are the means by which the GM can bring the Old One's actions, reactions, and petty cruelties into play. (If you're familiar with *Apocalypse World* and its derivatives, these are GM hard moves.) Good tactics reinforce the themes and tropes of an Old One in the story, and they guide the GM in some of the actions they can take against the PCs.
- ▼ **Cultists:** Working off the questions you answered earlier, flesh out who the cultists of the Great Old One are. This should be a broad group of people—machinists, a family line, people who have visited a particular haunted shrine. The cultists of an agenda is a starting point for the GM when creating the opposition for an adventure.

Review

Give your timeline a once-over to make sure everything is filled in. Each event needs a name, a timeline aspect, and four catalysts—two rated  and two rated , except the "Rise of the Great Old One," for which all are rated . The agenda needs an ambition, three goals, a handful of tactics, and descriptions of some cultists. The Great Old One itself needs a name and a few key details, including what is horrifying about it and what its relationship is to our world.

Fill in any gaps that you might have, and then move on to creating characters (page 7).

APPENDIX: SAMPLE CHARACTERS

CASSANDRA THE FORMER CULTIST

ASPECTS

High Concept: FORMER ACOLYTE OF THE CHILDREN OF AZATHOTH

Trouble: THE NIGHTMARES KEEP ME UP ALL NIGHT

Relationship: ETHAN HELPED ME ESCAPE

Free Aspect: RIGOROUS STUDENT OF THE ARCANE

Corrupted Aspect: I SEE THE DARK FLAMES. Cassandra can see embers of eldritch black fire that nobody else can. She can make them real, meaning she always has access to fire...but sometimes they become real whether she wants them to or not.

SKILLS

Great (+4): Will

Good (+3): Lore, Rapport

Fair (+2): Academics, Deceive, Stealth

Average (+1): Athletics, Drive, Investigate, Physique

STUNTS

I Wield the Dark Flames (Corruption): Cassandra can summon forth the black fire that underlies reality and hurl it. Mark corruption to throw a ball of arcane fire up to two zones, with a +4 bonus to Shoot.

One of Them: Because she knows how cultists think, Cassandra gets +2 to creating an advantage with Rapport by talking to members of secret societies.

Backstabber: Because she's spent time skulking in the shadows, Cassandra can use Stealth to attack, but only if it's dark.

Reader of the Dead: Because she has studied ancient arcane texts, Cassandra gets +2 to overcome with Academics by translating texts written in dead or secret languages.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **11111111**

CONSEQUENCES

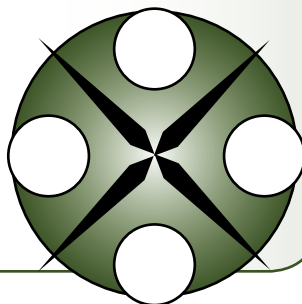
2 Mild:

4 Moderate:

6 Severe:

REFRESH: 2

CORRUPTION



CHARLES THE ARCANE SCIENTIST

ASPECTS

High Concept: SENIOR TIME-TRAVEL RESEARCHER

Trouble: BASICALLY JUST A HUGE JERK

Relationship: I'M COUNTING ON RUTH TO KEEP ME SAFE

Free Aspect: MY PAST SELF KNOWS I'M HERE

Corrupted Aspect: OOZING BLACK ICHOR. An unexpected consequence of time travel. The oily substance makes Charles slippery—he's virtually impossible to grapple or restrain. But also the stuff gets everywhere.

SKILLS

Great (+4): Academics

Good (+3): Athletics, Craft

Fair (+2): Fight, Lore, Will

Average (+1): Contacts, Investigate, Physique, Resources

STUNTS

Academic Jargon: Because he is a smart guy, Charles can use Academics instead of Rapport when creating an advantage by talking to college professors and other academic types.

Inky Escape (Corruption): When danger beckons, Charles can make like a squid and blind his attackers with a spray of ink. Mark corruption to blast ichor into the faces of everyone around and get a +4 bonus to sneak away to safety with Stealth.

Pre-Emptive Inheritance: Because he can use his past self's family money, Charles gets +2 to creating an advantage with Resources by purchasing high-quality equipment.

Take That!: Because he is a dirty fighter, Charles gets +2 to creating an advantage with Fight by throwing dirt in his opponent's eyes, kneecapping them, or employing a similar dirty trick.

STRESS

Physical **11111**

Mental **11111**

CONSEQUENCES

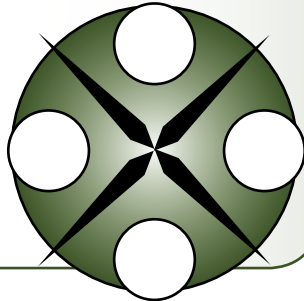
2 Mild:

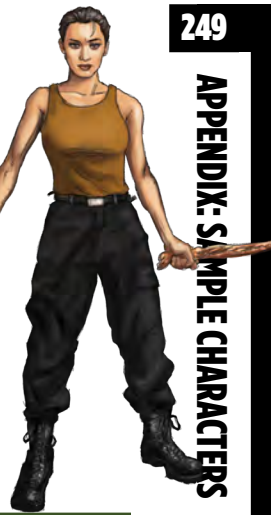
4 Moderate:

6 Severe:

REFRESH: 2

CORRUPTION





ETHAN THE IN-OVER-HIS-HEAD GUY

ASPECTS

High Concept: OVERCAFFEINATED BARISTA

Trouble: THE CHILDREN OF AZATHOTH WANT ME DEAD

Relationship: I TRUST CHARLES WHEN NOBODY ELSE DOES

Free Aspects: I SEE THE BEST IN EVERYBODY; MY LOYAL DOG, REG

SKILLS

Great (+4): Rapport

Good (+3): Deceive, Will

Fair (+2): Empathy, Fight, Investigate

Average (+1): Contacts, Crafts, Notice, Physique

STUNTS

Sniff 'em Out: Because he's got his dog Reg by his side, Ethan gets +2 to overcome with Investigate when tracking someone (or something).

Duck and Weave: Because he's good at reading people, Ethan can use Empathy to defend against a melee attack, predicting his opponent's movements, when facing a single foe.

Exit, Pursued: Because he's in over his head and knows it, Ethan gets +2 to overcome with Athletics when he's fleeing from dangerous situations.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

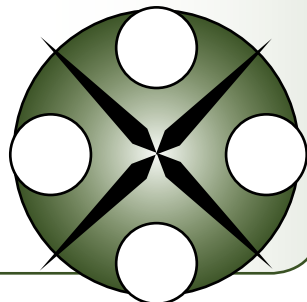
Mild:

Moderate:

Severe:

REFRESH: 2

CORRUPTION



RUTH THE SUPER-SOLDIER

ASPECTS

High Concept: BIO-AUGMENTED SOLDIER FROM THE FUTURE

Trouble: ITCHING FOR A FIGHT

Relationship: I WILL TEACH CASSANDRA TO BE STRONG

Corrupted Aspect: HAND-GROWN BONE DAGGERS. Ruth had a penchant for using daggers in the future. Since coming to the past she's been able to extrude daggers from her hands. It's painful but handy when she doesn't have any other weapons.

Corrupted Aspect: ALIEN MUSCLE GRAFTS. Ruth's muscular system has been augmented with the flesh of the Great Old One's spawn. This gives her incredible strength—she is absolutely stronger than any human, but her incredible might can be hard to control.

SKILLS

Great (+4): Fight

Good (+3): Investigate, Notice

Fair (+2): Athletics, Physique, Shoot

Average (+1): Academics, Drive, Lore, Provoke

STUNTS

Killing Limbs (Corruption): Ruth was re-made to do one thing and one thing well—hurt eldritch creatures. Mark corruption to add +4 to a Fight attack.

Blades of Bone Thirst for Blood (Corruption): The blades Ruth extrudes aren't just bone. They are imbued with an eldritch desire for blood. Mark corruption to extrude a pair of daggers; until the end of the scene, they will deal two extra shifts on a successful physical hit.

Knife-Thrower: Because she's adept with knives, Ruth gets +2 to create an advantage with Shoot by hurling daggers.

Monster Fighter: Because she has fought in post-apocalyptic wastes, Ruth gets +2 to defend with Athletics against the melee attacks of eldritch monsters.

I Can Take It: Because she's a wasteland survivor, Ruth gets an extra mild physical consequence slot.

STRESS

Physical

Mental

CONSEQUENCES

Mild:

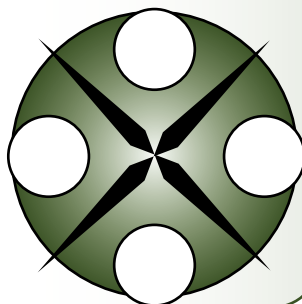
Mild Physical:

Moderate:

Severe:

REFRESH: 2

CORRUPTION



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THE ARRIVAL OF

EVENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PERSON	<input type="checkbox"/> PLACE	<input type="checkbox"/> THING	<input type="checkbox"/> FOE
THE RISE OF THE GREAT OLD ONE				
<input type="checkbox"/> PERSON	<input type="checkbox"/> PLACE	<input type="checkbox"/> THING	<input type="checkbox"/> FOE	
EVENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PERSON	<input type="checkbox"/> PLACE	<input type="checkbox"/> THING	<input type="checkbox"/> FOE



NAME

ASPECTS

HIGH CONCEPT

TROUBLE

RELATIONSHIP

OTHER ASPECT

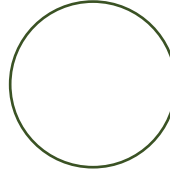
OTHER ASPECT

CORRUPTED?



VITALS

REFRESH



Starts at 3.

CORRUPTION



When filled, erase all marks and corrupt an aspect.

STRESS

PHYSICAL

1	1	1	1	1	1
---	---	---	---	---	---

MENTAL

1	1	1	1	1	1
---	---	---	---	---	---

CONSEQUENCES

2

 MILD

4

 MODERATE

6

 SEVERE

2

 MILD

REGULAR STUNTS

Start with two stunts for free. You may buy additional stunts for 1 Refresh each, so long as your Refresh remains at or above 1.

CORRUPTION STUNTS

Whenever one of your aspects becomes corrupted, you also gain a corruption stunt at the next minor milestone.



SKILLS

Start with one Great (+4), two Good (+3), three Fair (+2), four Average (+1).

- + ___ Academics
- + ___ Athletics
- + ___ Burglary
- + ___ Contacts
- + ___ Crafts
- + ___ Deceive
- + ___ Drive
- + ___ Empathy
- + ___ Fight
- + ___ Investigate
- + ___ Lore
- + ___ Notice
- + ___ Physique
- + ___ Provoke
- + ___ Rapport
- + ___ Resources
- + ___ Shoot
- + ___ Stealth
- + ___ Will