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# Tekeli-li!

*“The universe is not only queerer than we imagined, it is queerer than we can imagine.” —J. B. S. Haldane*

## OVERVIEW

*Tekeli-li!* contains the following sections:

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## A. What is Tekeli-li!?

This is a supplement for using Fuzion™ to run Lovecraftian horror, such as one gets with *Call of Cthulhu*®, in either its Chaosium or D20 incarnation. Horror games, in other words, but a particular kind of horror: something slow, insidious, and *wrong*. It is not mad slashers chasing nubile teenagers; it is encounters with things that drive humans mad, and risking insanity to banish those things.

In H.P. Lovecraft's fiction, Earth is an exception. The laws here are not the same as the laws Out There, and we, who have evolved in this benign environment, cannot stand the harsh light of reality.

Oh—*Tekeli-li!* was the cry of the strange beings that lived “At The Mountains Of Madness.”

### **IMPORTANT NOTE**

This is not, of course, a role-playing system for Lovecraft specifically; that's under trademark and I have not licensed it. Oh, you *could* convert published CoC material to it (see “Using Other RPG Resources” on page 14) but I'm not saying you have to.

### **TRADEMARKS AND COPYRIGHTS**

*Tekeli-li!* written by John McMullen, December 2002.

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## B. Rules Additions to Fuzion

*Tekeli-li!* uses the standard Fuzion characteristics (Intelligence, Will, Presence, and so on). It adds two new characteristics (Madness and Soul), modifies the derived characteristic Humanity (described in the Fuzion rules), and adds two new skills (Mythos and Rationalization).

### MADNESS

Madness is a measure of your insanity. It is a *difficulty* to test against, and it starts at 13. It can grow indefinitely. (If it helps, you might think of it as something separate from the character, an inner self he or she wrestles with.) A player only tests Madness when encountering something truly horrific, something that is utterly outside their normal sphere of experience. The more times you fail to conquer your Madness, the more difficult it becomes to conquer.

Your base Madness is 13 *plus* your level of Mythos skill (Mythos skill is explained below). Each time you fail a Madness check, your Madness increases; these increases can be erased by therapy or by visibly defeating the creatures and agents of the Mythos.

Some Complications may add to the difficulty of Madness rolls under certain circumstances. This is up to the GM.

At the GM's discretion, the Talent "Eidetic Memory" may add 5 to a character's Madness; one of the themes of this sort of fiction is that failure to remember is a blessing, not a curse.

### HUMANITY

Humanity is almost exactly as described in the core Fuzion rules, except it's calculated slightly differently. Humanity is calculated as  $(PRE - \text{Mythos}) \times 10$ . The higher your Mythos skill, the lower your maximum possible Humanity. Most people have a Humanity of 10-30; saints could go up to 70.

When making rolls to attempt Mythos tasks, your character can "burn" Humanity to help ensure that the

As in the core rules, every 10 points of Humanity lost is -1 to all PRE-related when dealing with things of this earth (people and animals).

Characters can regain Humanity in the same way as Madness can be reduced: by therapy or by visibly defeating the creatures and agents of the Mythos.

At 0 Humanity, a character is precariously balanced. At -10 Humanity a character goes permanently insane, and control is given to the GM.

## **SOUL**

Soul reflects how much magic a character can perform. It is calculated identically to Resistance,  $3 \times \text{WILL}$ . (It is included as a separate derived characteristic for those GMs who use both Resistance and Soul.)

When a character's Soul drops to zero, the character falls unconscious. If some mechanism (such as a spell) subtracts further Soul points, the character's body may live, but his or her spirit is gone. The character is effectively dead at -10 Soul.

## **MYTHOS SKILL**

Mythos is your knowledge and ability to deal with the Mythos. It starts at 0 and functions as a skill— $\text{INT} + \text{Mythos}$  is your chance to know something about the Mythos without doing further research.  $\text{WILL} + \text{Mythos}$  is your chance to cast Mythos spells. (The GM may require binding spells to use  $\text{PRE} + \text{Mythos}$ .)

No character starts with Mythos skill (so it is always paid for using the Experience rules). There are two in-game ways to increase your Mythos skill:

- Research through Mythos-related tomes—experience points already saved and cost paid for in standard way ( $5 \text{ OP} \times \text{the new level}$ : 5, 10, 15, 20, and so on up until 35).
- Insanity—cost paid by the accumulation of appropriate Complications (see “Going Mad,” below).

A character who goes temporarily insane does not necessarily gain Mythos skill. The player can refuse to take additional Complications to pay for any insights.

The more Mythos you know, the harder it is to stay sane. Mythos also functions a little bit like a Characteristic: it's involved in calculating your maximum Humanity (which can be negative), and it's involved in calculating your Madness, a derived Characteristic. As soon as a character improves Mythos, maximum possible Humanity drops. If the character's current Humanity is above the new maximum, it is lowered too, but the character need not go insane.

Players should record the spells they learn and research; no amount of Mythos skill will help a player cast a spell if he or she hasn't yet learned it.

## **RATIONALIZATION SKILL**

Rationalization is your ability to fit odd or unbelievable items into your current worldview. It's used when making a Madness check. Normally one rolls  $\text{WILL} + \text{Rationalization}$ .

Most people simply don't need to develop a rationalization skill since they ignore or don't encounter the odd and unbelievable. Normally it is developed through psychotherapy.

A beginning character should have no more than 2 in Rationalization, and that should indicate a very troubled mental past and subsequent therapy. At character creation, the GM may request that the Madness level be increased by 1 for each point in Rationalization.

**Example:** Gabriel Rowan is a petrochemical geologist called back home after the mysterious death of his father. He has INT 5, WILL 4, PRE 3. His Madness is 13, because he's a starting character. His starting Humanity is 30, and his starting Soul is 11.

Because the player wants a character with a troubled past, he asks the GM to allow 2 points of Rationalization (reflecting past therapies; there's a reason Gabe picked a career that would take him far from home). The GM agrees, but she says that Gabe's player must up his Madness to 15 to reflect these troubles and must take a Complication to reflect it.

## GOING MAD

When your character encounters something beyond the pale, make a Madness check

The process of checking Madness is described below:

### Checking Madness

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1. Make a Madness check of WILL+Rationalization vs. current Madness.  
If it succeeds, the GM will tell you if you still lose Humanity and how much.
  2. If it fails:
    - Roll to see how much Humanity you've lost; the GM will tell you how many dice to roll.
    - Add one to your Madness
  3. If you've lost more Humanity than your PRE, you are temporarily insane for 1d6 hours for each point over your PRE. Let the GM control your character briefly.
- 

**Example:** Gabe has gone to the ancestral tomb to investigate fragmentary memories of his father recently uncovered by therapy. The whippoorwills fall silent as he unlocks the heavy doors decorated with peeling gilt. Inside he finds the most recent graves open, the bones scattered, and his father's desiccated corpse on the ground in an attitude of supplication.

Gabe must make a Madness roll. His Madness is 15, his WILL is 4, and he has a Rationalization skill of 2. He rolls

3d6+6 against the difficulty of 15, and rolls an 6: bad luck for Gabe. He loses Humanity and his Madness increases to 16.

Since the evidence is indirect, the GM asks Gabe's player to roll 1D6 to determine loss of Humanity. He rolls a 3, exactly Gabe's PRE. He lowers Gabe's Humanity to 27.

If the player has a critical failure (a roll of 3), the character loses maximum Humanity for the situation. Had Gabe's player rolled a 3, Gabe would have lost 6 points of Humanity.

When you lose more than your PRE in Humanity, you go temporarily insane. Temporary insanity lasts 1d6 hours for each point lost over your PRE. When you lose *half* your remaining Humanity, you go insane for longer: 2d6 months.

Normally once something has driven you to a Madness check, you're inured to it for the course of the adventure (subject to GM's call). However, new information may bring the horror of the events back to you, calling for another check.

**Example:** Panting with fear, Gabe bends to examine the long bones scattered about the tomb. He succeeds at a Notice roll and realizes that the bones show signs of being *gnawed*, and that the tooth marks match *his father's teeth*.

Gabe's player checks again against Madness (this time a difficulty of 16), and has a critical failure, rolling a 3. He loses 6 points of Humanity, which is more than his PRE of 3. Gabe's player marks Gabe's Humanity down to 21, and Gabe runs from the tomb, gibbering with fear and leaving the door wide open. His temporary insanity will last 3d6 hours. (And twelve hours later, Gabe becomes aware that he is naked in a slaughterhouse, covered in pig's blood, with no memory of how he got there.)

Insanity in *Tekeli-li!* may be temporary, indefinite, or permanent. Temporary insanities go away, but they may leave scars (Complications; see below). Permanent insanity puts the character under the GM's control.

If the character gained Mythos knowledge from the insanity. In that case, the character gains Complications to pay for the new Mythos knowledge. Usually a character gains Psychological Complications, Phobias, or Compulsive Behaviors, but could conceivably gain Personality Traits ("disbelieves in supernatural") and Responsibilities ("vows to hunt down 'things'") or even Physiological Complications ("gouged out one eye

while in throes of madness”). The new Complication should be appropriate in some way to the circumstances of the insanity.

These additional Complications are usually minor in game terms.

**Example:** Gabe delved into his father’s occult library for some hint as to the family’s ancient curse. Unfortunately, the reading drove him insane, and Gabe’s player doesn’t have 5 OP to buy the 1 point of Mythos skill.

So his player looks at the list of Complications and decides that Gabe is now obsessed with the strange events going on. He will be reckless in his attempts to investigate and all conversations will eventually lead there, even when it isn’t appropriate. This happens more than once a session (Constantly, 15 pts), and it’s a Strong compulsion (10 pts). This has no effect on combat skills, so it’s Minor ( $25/5=5$ ). Perhaps later, therapy will help Gabe...

Normally the GM dictates what happens to the character during temporary insanity, but the GM may choose to let players describe the results, so long as it’s still entertaining and fair to the rest of the group.

**Note**

Some Fuzion games have an advantage called “Humanity Defense” which reduces the amount of Humanity lost. *Tekeli-li!* does not have this advantage, and in the *Tekeli-li!* universe it doesn’t work.

## CALCULATING HUMANITY LOSSES

Your character loses Humanity in encounters with these Things Man Was Not Meant To Know. Failing a Madness check causes a character to lose Humanity; sometimes even succeeding a Madness check still causes a character to lose Humanity, so horrific are the creatures of the Mythos.

The GM should recognize that Humanity loss comes in levels:

**TRIVIAL.** Indirect evidence that doesn’t personally affect the character. The important thing is the cap: in case of a critical failure, the GM doesn’t feel that this would result in a temporary insanity. Normally 1d2 or 1d3.

**MINOR.** This loss of Humanity may drive “normal” people temporarily mad, but characters are usually made of sterner stuff. Normally 1d6, 1d6-1 or 1d6+1. Direct evidence of humans acting in a loathsome manner or indirect evidence that points to the character or the character’s family in some way. Discovering the truth of one’s ancestry, for example, or viewing creatures that are reasonably human-like, such as *ghuls*

**SIGNIFICANT.** Most people will be driven temporarily insane by this, if they succumb to madness at all. 2d6, possibly 2d6-1. Some Humanity loss is to be expected even if the character succeeds at the Madness check, usually 1, 1d2, or 1d3.

**MAJOR.** Madness is almost sure to follow: 3d6, and may follow even if the character makes the Madness check (1d6 loss even for successful Madness check). In the normal run of events, a character loses at most 3d6.

**CATASTROPHIC.** Some entities are worse and may instantly drive a human mad; seeing them is worth 5d6 (average loss 17) or more.

On a critical failure, you lose maximum Humanity for that encounter.

When performing Mythos skill tasks, you can “burn” Humanity to improve your chances, but you can never burn more Humanity than your Skill level. (And some Mythos tasks will cost Humanity *anyway*)

## **THERAPY AND RECOVERING HUMANITY**

Therapy will help you recover. Your Madness is the difficulty the therapist has to beat. Successful therapy has one of two effects: You can gain back 2d6 Humanity or erase one point of temporary Madness, player’s choice. (Your Madness can never go below 13+Mythos.) Normally one rolls for therapy every month, and the character has an extended stay away from all things unnatural.

If the therapist fails the roll, the character *loses* 1d3 Humanity, and the therapist must make a Madness roll or lose 1d3 Humanity.

If for some reason the therapy is being tried in the midst of some Mythos-related activity (“Snap him out of it! He’s the only one who knows the spell!”), add 10 to the character’s Madness for the purposes of the therapy roll.

## **MAGIC**

A character may cast any spell he or she knows, given the time, material components, and Soul points. The difficulty of the spell is determined by the GM; the acting value is WILL+Mythos. A player can increase the chances of success by “burning” Humanity points, up to a maximum of one’s Mythos skill. (Yes, you can guarantee temporary insanity this way.)

Note that Mythos spells *can* work without an understanding of the Mythos (that is, with no Mythos skill).

Most spells have a difficulty between 10 and 21; additional tactics may be used to improve the chances of a spell working. (GMs should be liberal with these, since it’s often the fate of the world at stake.)



A spell may cost Soul points. Soul points regenerate each day, after a night's sleep. (Dreaming is an important part of the character's connection to magic.)

**Example:** A thing has possessed the corpse of Gabe's father, and Gabe has managed to trap the desiccated clattering horror in the bedroom. He has learned a dismissal spell in his father's old copy of *Affari dei Mostros*, and casts it. Since Gabe now has a Mythos of 2, the player decides to burn two additional Humanity points to make his acting value  $WILL + Mythos + 2$ , or  $4 + 2 + 2 = 8$ . The difficulty is 18, so he further decides he will take an hour to prepare for it and cast it instead of 20 minutes, for an additional +1 to his skill. He rolls a 9—and succeeds. Gabe's player subtracts 3 Soul points from his total, and 2 more points from his Humanity.

## EXPERIENCE

Experience is given out as described in the Fuzion rules. A successful end to the adventure (in which the plans of the horrors are defeated or averted) should also be accompanied by a reward of Humanity or a decrease in Madness or both.

**Example:** Since he defeated the horror, the GM gives out experience points, and tells Gabe he can erase 1 point of Madness and regain 6 points of Humanity.

## CHARACTER CREATION

A typical *Tekeli-li!* campaign uses characters built on 40 Characteristic Points and 40 Option points, with up to 40 more Option points in Complications. That's sufficient for characters to have 4 in each primary characteristic: very competent but not yet heroic. Guns and other humans are still a threat to the characters.

To recap items already mentioned:

- Characters have the additional characteristic of “Madness” which starts at 13.
- With the GM's permission, players can buy the skill “Rationalization” for the normal cost, but each level of Rationalization will also raise the character's Madness level by one.
- Characters have the additional skill of “Mythos” which *must* start with a value of 0.
- There is no “Humanity Defense.”

## **THE INTERLOCK OPTION**

I'm assuming 3d6 rolls; if you are using the Interlock option, subtract 5 from difficulties mentioned here. Base Madness becomes 8+Mythos; foxhole therapy adds 5 to the existing Madness, not 10.

## C. Creating the World of Tekeli-li!

You can just use materials straight from the Cthulhu Mythos. (See “Using Other RPG Resources” on page 14.) Several advantages to this:

- Lots of material already exists
- Material created by many different people so there are some startling differences—it doesn’t have a sense of “sameness” that can be boring
- Many players already familiar with the background

Or you can create new equivalents to Lovecraft’s creations. This is a lot of work (though you can do it slowly) but it, too, has its advantages:

- Players uncertain: they have no way of knowing that the book *Liber Mortis* is roughly equivalent to the Necronomicon, and when they ask about the Necronomicon, you calmly explain that that’s something an author named H. P. Lovecraft wrote about and they can find a knockoff in the used book store.
- Tuned to what scares your players (perhaps the dehumanization of possession doesn’t bother you, but dehumanization through computers does)

### THEMES

Lovecraft’s stories display a number of recurring themes and elements that you may or may not want to play up. *Tekeli-li!* accepts the basics: the universe is fundamentally unknowable and to know the truth will drive humans mad.

- In the nature vs. nurture argument, heredity—“bad blood”—will win out.
- It is possible for people to degenerate under stress, especially if they have bad blood.
- Certain groups or cults are degenerate in nature; they are “less evolved.”
- Since the universe is unknowable, the monsters are largely indescribable.
- Possession, either by magicians or alien intelligences.
- Cannibalism.

Your group may find other things frightening; or you may want to bring these themes into the 21st century. (The current discussion of genetic markers for some traits sounds very much like Lovecraft’s belief.)

### TOMES

To get you started, here are a couple of books that contain Mythos material in the world of *Tekeli-li!*

- *Liber Mortis*, translation into the Latin supposedly by the Comte de Ste-Germaine.

- *Traffick with Air*, collection of spells and incantations supposedly used by Edmund Kelley, published 1601 by a Venetian press.
- *Cyclopes of the Sea*, a discussion of odd tribal customs and worship of gods throughout the oceans of the world, written by Olaf Kringhaus, 1878.
- *Affari dei Mostros*, transl. from the Greek by unnamed Italian monk approx 1430.
- *Circuits Never Rust*, Internet document, anonymous author; apparently incoherent but discusses superiority of certain kinds of “recorded intelligence.” Some versions differ, apparently due to transmission errors.

## MAGIC

Magic in *Tekeli-li!* is not like most RPG magic. Most magical acts are done through alien servants, often described in old grimoires as “demons” or “angels.” The principal types of spells are:

- Summon/dismiss spells, one for each kind of creature
- Binding spells, one for each kind of creature
- Curses
- Create enchanted object
- Possession or soul destroying spells

## CREATURES

The most significant danger comes from people: people worship these creatures, these things, and work for them even if the creatures are not free to work unless summoned.

Creatures come in three kinds: the Tainted, the Servant Races, and the Unutterable.

**TAINTED.** Tainted creatures are not necessarily affiliated with the others, but serve as markers of their presence. Some family bloodlines are intertwined with the Tainted creatures and members of those families may in fact degenerate into Tainted beings. For example, the *ghuls* are hyena-like cannibals who frequent places of the dead searching for food. They seem to have been with us always. They do have religion but no families—no one has ever observed an infant *ghul*. It may be that they start as humans and through unspeakable actions revert to the ancestral line. Seeing a member of the Tainted without preparation is usually a Minor Humanity loss; a group of characters should be able to defeat a smaller number of Tainted.

**SERVANT RACES.** These are races under the control of the Unutterable. They rarely come to Earth of their own free will but spells to summon and control them may be given as a gift to loyal cultists. Seeing a member of the Tainted without preparation is usually a Significant or Major Humanity loss, 2d6 or 3d6; a group of characters may be able to defeat a single member of a servant race, but usually cannot.

**THE UNUTTERABLE.** The Unutterable may have factions of different power within them, but they do not come to Earth—they cannot, except when conditions are right. They are beings of unimaginable power, and it is often the goal of their worshippers to bring them here. The ones who are concerned with Earth often communicate through dreams. Other Unutterable forces may have no concern with Earth at all, but can be summoned in some form or another, usually with disastrous results for the humans concerned. The Unutterable cannot be defeated if they fully manifest; seeing one is a Catastrophic Humanity loss, 5d6 or more.

## D. Using Other RPG Resources

This supplement was inspired by Norbert Franz's BRP to Fuzion notes, and I recommend those to you if you want to convert characters from BRP to Fuzion. See his notes at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/fuzionforum/files/Conversions%20to%20FUZION/Revised%20Conversion%20Notes%202.doc>.

(I disagree with Norbert's skill conversion—in *Call of Cthulhu* characters with more than 100% in skills are disallowed—but dividing the *CoC* skill rankings by 15 gives a fair estimation.)

A couple of extra notes not covered by Norbert:

**Q How do I convert Armor?**

**A** *Values for Armor translate directly. The BRP and Fuzion damage scales are quite different, but the figures provided for damage stopped by Armor are roughly compatible.*

**Q What about Damage?**

**A** *Don't translate weapon damages; use the damages given in the various Fuzion plug-ins. When converting BRP monster damages, try this rule of thumb: Calculate the average damage done by a roll, halve that, and have the Fuzion version do that many DCs in damage. For some of the monsters, you will have to convert to Kill.*

The Cthadran has claws, a tail, and a Damage Bonus of +5d6. The claws do 1d6+5d6, or 6d6; the average for 6d6 is 21 points; this will kill Joe Normal in BRP. The Fuzion version does 10 DC in damage, which will kill Joe Normal in Fuzion.

**Q How do magic points translate?**

**A** *Magic points translate directly to Soul points. Spells work exactly as they do in CoC.*

**Q How do Sanity losses translate?**

**A** *See this table. Because Tekeli-li! uses modifiers and multiple dice, the distributions of results are often different: rolls will have a higher minimum or cluster closer to the average.*

Die	Average Roll	Tekeli-li! Equivalent
1D2	1.5	1D2 (Roll 1D6: odd, 1; even 2)
1D3	2	1D3 (Roll 1D6, divide result in half, rounding up)
1D4	2.5	1D6-1
1D6	3.5	1D6
1D8	4.5	1D6+1
1D10	5.5	1D6+1D3
2D10	11	3D6
1D20	10.5	3D6

## E. Designer Notes

I was reading a lot of Lovecraft and then I ran across Norbert's conversion rules of BRP to Fuzion. It intrigued me, so I thought I would extend those notes to Fuzion.

There were a couple of other interesting aspects. First of all, CoC is a low-key, gritty, often desperate, system. Characters are not in control of the world, and this extends right down to character creation, which is largely random. Fuzion is broader and much more optimistic: characters are in control of their world. The mechanics of the two are opposed, and the scale of skills and attributes in Fuzion is much more compressed.

I think it's noteworthy that the average human is in the middle of the BRP scale for humans (10 or 11 in a range of 3-18) while the average human is skewed far to one side in Fuzion (2 in a range of 1-7).

I've added several significant chunks to the Fuzion mechanics. For one thing, several of the characteristics I've added are beyond the player's control, and the line between skill and characteristic is blurred.

For Sanity, I wanted a mechanism that gets steadily more difficult to beat, yet it must be possible to fail even at the very beginning and it must be possible to succeed even at the very end. Some kind of reasonably large scale should be used, so that the feel of eroding sanity is maintained. Human max of 7 is assumed, and for now I'll assume 3d6 method of skill rolls. The mechanism should keep to the Fuzion standard of high roll = good.

And I wanted a Fuzion mechanic, not one lifted directly from *CoC*.

Madness is not under the control of the player, which was important to me in keeping the feel of the source material. An "average" human with a Will of 2 and a Rationalization of 0 makes the first Madness roll at  $2+3d6$  vs. 13, and needs 11+ to succeed (50% chance of failure). A player who maxes out on WILL (value of 7) makes the first Madness roll at an acting value of 7 vs. a Madness of 13, and needs 6+ to succeed (4.4% chance of failure).

The Humanity characteristic was provided in Fuzion without hints as to how one loses Humanity. I originally had all sorts of convolutions involving rolling against  $(100 - \text{Humanity})/3$ , and that looked to me too difficult to calculate.

Therapy here is more effective than in CoC (where one only gains 1d3 for a successful month of therapy), but the fact that you can burn Humanity and that I'm using generally larger average die rolls means that Humanity should bounce up and down more. The more Mythos you learn, though, the lower your maximum Humanity is.

It's also difficult controlling how quickly characters learn Mythos skill. They need to learn *some* and in the source material it's clear that not all spells are learned through

insanity (though insanity can grant those insights). My compromise here puts it in the control of the players: they must want to spend the points or they get no Mythos skill. The madness Complications are simply a way of paying the points in the context of the Fuzion advantage/disadvantage system.

You can be a really powerful Mythos sorcerer—you just won't be sane. A character with WILL, INT, PRE, Mythos, and Rationalization all at 7 can hover at 0 Humanity for a long time, being mentally fragile, but since the Madness checks become AV 14 +3d6 vs. DV 21, about half the time he or she will lose Humanity, and it's not that far from 0 to -10 and permanent insanity.

I think the easiest thing to do is borrow wholesale from the Chaosium material, but want to include enough information so you don't *need* to do that: material that could be dropped into a *CoC* game or replace it.

## **TO DO**

I'd like to include a character sheet, some creatures of the Mythos, a cult, and some sample adventures. Also, I think the system as a whole needs playtesting.



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