

Vikings vs Cthulhu — A game by Marcus Holm

It's the year 1899, and a team of elite Viking warrior-shamans have been called to stop a group of cultists worshipping the Great Old Ones from bringing their twisted gods into our world and destroying reality as we know it.

What you need: these instructions, paper to create character sheets, and at least two six-sided dice per person.

How to play: Each *Player* creates a Viking character. The *Game Master* controls the setting, the NPC's, and resolves the outcome of player actions. More detailed instructions to the GM, including plot secrets, are presented on the next page.

Resolving challenges: When a player attempts a difficult task, the GM decides which Attribute(s) to apply and selects an appropriate difficulty level (2: child's play, 6: moderately difficult, 10: very difficult, 15: extreme). The Player then rolls a die and adds their Attribute (or the mean of the Attributes if a challenge involves more than one). If the result is higher than the difficulty level, then the character is successful.

Resolving conflict: When two players, or one player and an NPC, engage in conflicting actions (e.g. arm-wrestling), a die-roll is made as above but with the opposing player's roll setting the difficulty level.

Character creation: Each Vikings has 20 points to distribute among three Attributes (minimum 1).

- **Mind (M)** is associated with intelligence, memory, observation.
- **Body (B)** is associated with strength, agility, and endurance
- **Soul (S)** is associated with the supernatural

For every 2 **Body**, you can select a special skill that gets an additional +1 on rolls, e.g. balance, strength, agility, endurance, coordination, pain resistance, disease resistance.

Viking shamans have been taught how to use **Runes**, an system of writing and magic discovered by *Odin* as he impaled himself by his own spear on Yggdrasil, the tree of life, and placed his eye in Mimir's well of wisdom.

The use of Runes is accordingly two-fold, creating overt magical effects, and as an augury device.

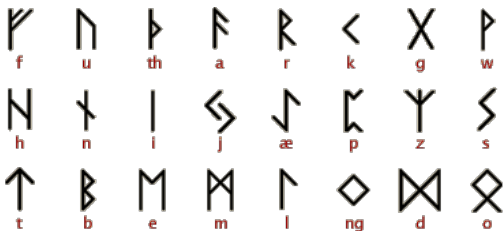


Figure 1: The Elder Futhark with 24 runes.

Augury: Every day, a Viking can use a total of **Mind+Soul** Runic letters to receive guidance. Alternatives are carved onto small beech sticks, which are thrown

into the air. The pattern the sticks make as they land is then interpreted. Several vikings can work together to create more elaborate alternatives. Bindrunes may be used to conserve letters, spelling is done phonetically with the 24 runes of the Elder Futhark.

Table 1: Examples of rune magic

Rune	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Wind	Cause a breeze	Strong gust	Blow people over
Fire	Light a candle	Light a log	Set anything on fire
Protection	Take a punch	Block a knife	Stop a bullet
Strength		Body = Body + Level*2	
Love	Attract interest	Make seduction easier	Someone falls in love

Magic: Every day, a Viking can carve or write **Mind**×2 Runic letters to create new inscriptions. Every day, a Viking receives **Soul**×2 **Power Points (PP)**, which are used to empower runic inscriptions.

Runes can be carved into surfaces or painted on. They either operate on the thing that is named in the inscription, e.g. “wind” or “George”, or on the item/person they are applied to, e.g. to magically bolster a shield or grant a person more agility.

To activate an inscription, the Viking applies a bodily fluid and (optionally) shouts the intended effect. Saliva and urine are the most convenient and least powerful fluid, yielding 1 **PP** of power. Blood and sexual fluids are more powerful, yielding 2 **PP** of power, although care should be taken not to use the wrong one, e.g. blood for seduction or semen for something destructive — the **PP** will be spent to little or no effect. Lastly, shouting (or keening) *increases* the power by an additional **PP**.

An effect lasts until the inscription is broken or the activating fluid is removed. An inscription that is *altered* does not need reactivation, although an alteration involving many runes is likely to fail (**M+B** skill roll).

For example, Ragnar is a Viking scout with a strong mind and able physique. He placed 8 points each in **Body** and **Mind** and 4 in **Soul**, selecting agility twice, balance, and endurance as specializations. He can scribe 16 runic letters per day, but can only use 8 PP per day. Facing a difficult climb up a crumbly wall, he inscribes “STRO(NG)” into the wall, using 5 of his letters, and empowers it with spit. The surface of the wall now holds his weight as he climbs up. Halfway up, he finds that the old wall has been resurfaced with smooth concrete. Now he activates the “GRIP” runes he had previously tattooed onto his gloves with more spit. While he now gains some traction, one PP wasn't enough. Either he can extract some blood to gain more power (tricky when perched on a wall), or he can forego stealth by shouting for another **PP**.

This page should be read only by *Game Masters*.

Plot: *Note: For the best possible experience, it is recommended that the GM is comfortable with H.P. Lovecraft's fiction and the Cthulhu mythos as well as Nordic mythology.*

The players have been called upon by their king's sooth-saying council to travel to a small town in a country of the GM's choosing to investigate some troubling readings indicating a dangerous cult. When the players arrive, they are met with a quiet, sleepy town that is largely ignored by the surrounding world. Almost everyone attends the local church, frequents the local bar, and shops in the local store. Traffic in and out of the town is non-existent, and the players are not made to feel welcome. In the typical Lovecraftian way, things seem *off*, the church Bibles are dusty, a strange and unsettling figurine stands among some candles on the side, the library carries a peculiar selection of off-colour books, etc, etc. As leads start to trickle in, the players discover secret passages and secret compartments documenting the extent and activity of the cult.

The cult is led by a tall, amicable, good-looking Egyptian who calls himself Nyarlathotep. Unbeknownst to the players, he is a thoroughly evil shapeshifter who delights in torture. They worship Yog-Shothoth, a being locked in a dimension everywhere and everywhen adjacent to ours. With the right support, Yog-Shothoth can open doors, share information, and cause all kinds of problems ranging from disease epidemics to interdimensional invasions to mass insanity. Nyarlathotep is a cruel humanoid god who serves his father, the blind idiot god at the center of the universe, by aiding and guiding human cults of his family in their worship and practice. As opposed to the other Great Old Ones who are caught outside this universe, one may surmise that Nyarlathotep is caught inside ours.

Intelligent Vikings (roll a Mind check whenever the players get a hint) will eventually realize that Nyarlathotep is another identity of Loki, the Norse god of trickery and by virtue of his association with Ragnarok (the end of the world), one of the most dangerous beings in the pantheon. This means that, in the Norse mythology, the Great Old Ones of the cultists correspond to the race of giants and dark elves that oppose the gods of Valhalla and humanity. Yog-Sothoth is the world serpent Jormungand. This knowledge yields the symbolic power needed to fight Nyarlathotep and Yog-Sothoth. In legend, Loki is bound in the earth and tortured with acid, and he retains these weaknesses. Jormungand's nemesis is Thor, who is the only one strong enough to fight the serpent. In legend, Jormungand spews poison that pollutes the sky and kills Thor. This poison is the insanity that is unavoidably linked to Yog-Sothoth's presence in the world.

These insights are critical because without their Nordic names, runic bindings and magic are powerless to stop the activity of Loki and the cultists.

Nyarlathotep will not try to fight unless forced to. Instead, he will attempt to demoralize and misdirect the players, claiming he is a victim and on the side of good. The

motives of Thor, Odin, and the council that sent the team are questioned.

"I'm not the bad guy here! Before, when the barriers between dimensions were weaker, men were like gods, they had control over the elements and their fate. Now, humans are mere animals except for the scraps of power fed to them by their superiors, like the runes given to you by your Odin. This isn't fair! I'm on humanity's side, but when I demanded humans to have an equal share of power they cast me out. Lucifer, the Christians call me, the Bringer of Light! It is the others who would cast you into darkness, not me."

– Nyarlathotep, AKA Loki

Augury: It is up to you to make the augury meaningful. This can be done in several ways, depending on the sort of question the players asked. For example: If the players are looking for something and the alternatives are possible locations, then you can simply indicate the best alternative. If the players are asking about which equipment to select for an operation, then you can select a fun or interesting alternative and create a situation where the equipment solves an otherwise difficult situation.

(In)sanity: When confronted with the abhorrently otherworldly, the mind risks losing its grip on reality. More intelligent, quick-witted individuals have an easier time grasping the fundamental flaws on which the universe is built, and are therefore more susceptible. When encountering elements such as the ones found on the - - - table, look up the **Difficulty Level(DL)** of the encounter and roll for **Sanity** damage: $SD = 1d6 + DL - (S-M/2)$. If **SD** is positive, roll on the Insanity table to see what the effect is. When the total Sanity damage that a character has accrued is greater than their **Soul**, the character starts to suffer permanent psychological maladies.

Table 1: Insanity table. 1d10

	Temporary	Permanent
1	vertigo	phobia of heights
2	faces don't look right	facial agnosia
3	hallucinate creepy-crawly X	phobia of X
4	screaming fit	become mute
5	threatening shadows	become cruel and spiteful
6	feel gaping emptiness	amnesia
7	skin prickles painfully	phobia of the dark
8	skin feels numb	get a compulsion (OCD)
9	blank stare for 1d4 minutes	lose 1d4 Mind
10	convulsions for 1d4 minutes	lose 1d4 Body

Table 1: Insanity Difficulty Level

DL	Examples
-1	Indirect evidence like tracks, photos, fragments, sounds
0	Inanimate objects like cyclopean monoliths & artifacts
1	Unsettling experiences like meeting tainted people
2	Witness a cult ritual
3	See a Shoggoth or similar monster
4	Read a tome like the Necronomicon
5	See the likes of Cthulhu or Shub-Niggurath
6	See the likes of Azathoth or Yog-Sothoth