

# STEALING CTHULHU.

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# INTRODUCTION.

WHEN you've played many Cthulhu scenarios, they start to look the same. You shoot cultists. You do rituals. You unearth a buried god that's similar to every other god you've dug up.

This book makes a strange suggestion: to write original scenarios, go back to Lovecraft. Copy his ideas, adapt them and use them again. Graft parts of his stories together. Steal his plots, locations and tropes, tweak them and reuse them.

Throughout this book, you'll see four patterns repeated. The first is: steal an idea from Lovecraft, change it and reuse it. The second: steal an idea, emphasise something that Lovecraft didn't emphasise and reuse the idea. The third is: steal various ideas and combine parts of each. And the fourth: take a Lovecraftian<sup>1</sup> theme and riff on it.<sup>2</sup> Although they are simple ideas, they work well. You'll be surprised how little you need to do. Don't try to be strikingly original. Don't worry about being accurate or consistent.<sup>3</sup> Just play around with Lovecraft's ideas and you'll create something fresh and original.

Why does it work? Because Cthulhu gaming has moved so far from Lovecraft that anything Lovecraftian is a breath of foul air. After years of shooting tentacles, most players love something genuinely bleak and horrific.

And if you have ideas of your own? If you want, say, to put Cthonians under the slums of Victorian London or Yog-Sothoth inside Schrödinger's equation? Simply blend

- 
1. I use this word loosely. It normally means "like Lovecraft", but sometimes "by Lovecraft".
  2. Here's an example of "riffing". For the Deep Ones, take the theme of "breeding", then write a scenario with midwives, inbreeding and changelings. These things weren't specifically mentioned by Lovecraft, but you're riffing on a theme.
  3. Lovecraft wasn't.

your ideas with Lovecraft's. By starting with Lovecraft, you ensure a solid base for your ideas.

Importantly, this book does not say: *This Is How You Must Write Scenarios*. Instead, it is a collection of ideas and tools. Use the ones you like, ignore the ones you don't and bastardise the rest until they work for you. After all, that is precisely what we will do to Lovecraft's work.

This book, then, is about returning to Lovecraft.<sup>1</sup> It uses his ideas to add new things to your game. Somewhere in those old texts, in the patterns behind the stories, is knowledge you can use.

Lomberto Eco's Foucault's  
Pendulum mentions  
Cthulhu once, so I  
decree it part of the  
canon. Go read it.

1. In fact, not just Lovecraft, but other Mythos authors: Campbell, Wilson, Blackwood, Chambers and Lumley.

## STEALING CREATURES.

LOVECRAFT used one type of creature for each story. For example, *The Call of Cthulhu*<sup>1</sup> has Cthulhu. Not Cthulhu plus a horde of Deep One servants: just Cthulhu. Similarly, *The Whisperer in Darkness* uses the Mi-Go. Not Nyarlathotep controlling the Mi-Go: just the Mi-Go.

This makes the creature seem vastly powerful. Lovecraft is saying: this *one thing* could beat you all. If you use more creatures, you make them seem weaker. If, for example, Nyarlathotep controls the Mi-Go, the Mi-Go become mooks.

Now, sometimes Lovecraft uses a single creature (Cthulhu, a Colour). Sometimes he uses a whole race (the Mi-Go, the Deep Ones).<sup>2</sup> Sometimes he uses a complementary pair (Elder Things and Shoggoths, Great Race and Flying Polyps). Sometimes the creature has servitors (Yog-Sothoth). Nevertheless, the scenario focuses on one type of creature.

So don't mess about. Use one type of creature. No conspiracies between Mi-Go and Elder Things. No wars between the Great Race and Cthulhu.<sup>3</sup> More creatures dilute the story, rather than enhancing it.

Finally, rather than using a Lovecraftian creature, try inventing your own. To do this, either change something about a Lovecraftian creature or combine parts to create something new. This is how Brian Lumley created the Cthonians: he combined Cthulhu's squid-like appearance, the Mi-Go's theft of human brains and the Shoggoths' tendency to hurtle through the Earth.

1. For most examples, I have chosen well-known Lovecraft stories. Partly, this is because they are the best. Partly, it is so Lovecraft novices need only read a few stories to catch up. For further explanation, see the Bibliography.  
2. For convenience, I will sometimes refer to "the creature" even when I mean "the creatures".  
3. Lovecraft describes such wars, but they weren't the story.

Actually, there's some debate about this. The "Bostonian voice" on the recording, giving the Mi-Go their responses, has been glossed as Nyarlathotep by several critics, which is to say, <sup>3</sup> Keep 'em guessing.

Try doing the same. Invent a race of Deep One-like creatures, which live in desert sand rather than water. Invent a Colour-like creature, which drains life but travels through time like the Great Race. With your tweaked creature, you can tell a Lovecraftian story and it will feel fresh and original.

## READING THE STORY.

NOW READ the story associated with your creature. This is simple advice, but important. Each time you read it, you will discover new things.<sup>1</sup>

For example, when I reread *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, I remembered the Deep One concentration camps. When I reread *At the Mountains of Madness*, I realised how horrific the human dissections were. Remember what you notice and use it in your scenarios.<sup>2</sup>

Note especially when Lovecraft's creatures differ from the versions used in Cthulhu games. For example, Cthulhu has claws, not tentacles. The Mi-Go are welcoming and perhaps even benevolent. Shoggoths imitate voices. Use these differences in your scenario.<sup>3</sup>

And trust your initial impressions of each creature. For example, when I first read *At the Mountains of Madness*. I thought the protagonists were chased by deformed Elder Things. When I read *The Colour Out of Space*, I thought the Colour was purple and gaseous. Don't question whether these impressions are *right*. Trust them. They will produce a unique take on the creature.

1. If you don't have time, skim the story and remember what catches your eye.
2. In *The Statement of Randolph Carter*, it's the implication that there are underground labyrinths of horror just down the road. Carter doesn't travel to some distant land or city: it's a cemetery just off the Gainsville Pike...
3. Or deliberately free-associate. Dreams, waking, rebirth, Australia, desert.

I always forget that the newly-resurrected ones in CHARLES DEXTER WARD must be fed on human (or animal) blood. Vampires in Lovecraft!

## STEALING SCENARIOS.

TO WRITE Lovecraftian scenarios, steal Lovecraft's plots. Steal his beginnings and endings. Steal backstories, from the mouths of his characters, and rerun them as scenarios. Take a plot, tweak the protagonists, locations and creatures, then reuse it.

Some of these tricks will instantly give new scenarios from Lovecraft's plots. Some are subtler: you will need two or three to produce something new. Let's start at the beginning.

## STEALING BEGINNINGS.

TO START the scenario, steal one of Lovecraft's beginnings.

You arrive in a strange place (*The Colour Out of Space*, *At the Mountains of Madness*).<sup>1</sup>

You hear tales of a strange place (*The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

You read, in a newspaper, of strange events (*The Whisperer in Darkness*).

You get a letter (*The Whisperer in Darkness*).<sup>2</sup>

You find a strange artefact (*The Call of Cthulhu*).

You go to a strange event (*Nyarlathept*).

Something strange happens to someone, probably you (*The Shadow Out of Time*).

A friend starts behaving oddly (Pickman's Model)

1. For summaries of these plots, see the appropriate creature's section in *The Mythos* (page 75).
2. Not quite the beginning of *The Whisperer In Darkness*, but a good beginning for a scenario.

Alternatively: don't start at the beginning. Start in media res and use this as backstory.

These beginnings are largely interchangeable. For example, *The Colour Out of Space* could easily begin with a strange artefact (probably the meteorite). *The Whisperer in Darkness* could simply begin with the protagonist arriving.

So choose a different beginning from the one Lovecraft used for your creature. For example, start a Mi-Go scenario with a strange artefact: perhaps the black stone mentioned in *The Whisperer in Darkness*. Or start a Cthulhu scenario with something strange happening to the Investigators: probably, they have unnatural dreams.

Having chosen your beginning, change something from the way Lovecraft used it. For example:

You arrive in a strange place...

*Not Antarctica or Innsmouth, but a desert or forest.*

You hear tales of a strange place...

*Not Innsmouth, but a Pacific island or Antarctic plain.*

You read, in a newspaper, of strange events...

*Not a dead Mi-Go, but a dead person or a light in the sky.*

You get a letter...

*Not from a mysterious correspondent, but a relative or colleague.*

You find a strange item...

*Not a sculpture, but a musical score or mathematical equation.*

You go to a strange event...

*Not a technological demonstration, but a public dissection or circus performance.*

Something strange happens to someone, probably you...

*Not amnesia, but hallucinations or dreams.*

For some reason, Lovecraft never uses a jungle.  
Lots of swamps, though.

When you make these changes, riff on Lovecraftian themes. In the above examples, the mathematical equation comes from *The Dreams in the Witch House*, the light in the sky from *The Colour Out of Space* and Antarctica from *At the Mountains of Madness*. Use these themes freely in any scenario, without worrying about being faithful to Lovecraft: try putting equations in Deep One scenarios, mysterious lights in Mi-Go stories or using Antarctica as the home for the Great Race.

Keep your beginning low-key. Begin with folktales and eeriness, saving true horror for later. Don't start with tales of a Deep One concentration camp. Don't start with a dissected body. Instead, begin with tales and build the horror slowly.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, Lovecraft's favourite beginning is "You arrive in a strange place". He uses it in many, many stories. You can do the same. Don't feel you need a clever, interesting beginning. Just let the Investigators arrive.<sup>2</sup>

Since Mi-Go stories are UFO stories,  
mysterious lights are right at home.

1. See *Increasing Horror* (page 38).

2. But give the Investigators some weirdness to attract their attention. It need not be a dramatic hook, but give them enough to intrigue them.



## STEALING SET PIECES.

NEXT, steal the best moments from Lovecraft's stories: the set pieces, the parts that people remember, the moments on which the story hangs.

For example, in a Mi-Go scenario, you might include:<sup>1</sup>

A chase through an old building (from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

An impossibly ancient object of unknown workmanship, made of unearthly and unpleasant material (from *The Call of Cthulhu*).

A dissected body, with the brain skilfully removed (from *At the Mountains of Madness*).

By using these set-pieces, you keep your scenario close to Lovecraft, ensuring you don't stray into pulp, cliché or generic horror.<sup>2</sup> Lovecraft wrote about a limited range of topics: often about chases, dreams and underground cities, but rarely about trains, gangsters and gunfights. Stick with the first and your scenario will feel Lovecraftian; use the second and you'll have to work harder.

When you steal a Lovecraftian set piece, tweak it, as you did with the scenario's beginning. For example, if the Mi-Go chase the Investigators through a hotel, everyone will recognise the scene from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. So chase the Investigators through *sewers* or *woods* or *valleys*. By switching one element, you keep things new.

You needn't steal every scene from Lovecraft. But, with judicious tweaking, you'll be surprised how much you can steal.

1. I've changed these set-pieces slightly, to keep them distinct from the original.

2. Venture into these areas if you like, but do it deliberately.

WHISPERER  
IN  
DARKNESS  
TERRIBLE  
OLD MAN

Lots of guns  
in Lovecraft  
Not quite  
as many  
gunfights

## STEALING DETAILS.

HAVING stolen the big scenes, steal the little things too. Lovecraft often makes brief, teasing references, which you can expand. Any of the following would work well in scenarios:

An undersea city of the Elder Things (stolen from *At the Mountains of Madness*).

A Mi-Go corpse, washed up on a riverbank after a flood (stolen from *The Whisperer in Darkness*).

A Shoggoth, controlled by the Deep Ones (stolen from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

This leads to a powerful rule: play something that Lovecraft only mentioned. And tweak these details, too. Give the Great Race an undersea city. Put Mi-Go corpses on beaches, in woodland or frozen under ice.

I've always wondered about those corpses. Did the Mi-Go just drown, or was the 'malign cult of evil men' involved.

The "black-winged ones" that the cult blames for the killings  
(CALL OF CTHULHU)

## STEALING BACKSTORY.

LOVECRAFT talks a lot: or, rather, his characters do. In almost every story, an incidental character tells a horrific story from the past. For an easy scenario, then, steal this backstory for your main plot.

Here, for example, are three ready-made scenarios, stolen straight from Lovecraftian backstories:

On a Pacific island, the Investigators find great carved statues. The islanders wear strange jewellery. Fish seem particularly abundant. Upon investigating, the Investigators discover the islanders have made a pact with the Deep Ones (stolen from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

On a scholarly tour of Greenland, the Investigators find ancient religious carvings. They trace these to a degenerate Eskimo cult, whose strange ways have been handed down through generations, and who are shunned by other inhabitants. The cult conducts cruel, brutal rituals under the Aurora Borealis (stolen from *The Call of Cthulhu*).

A meteorite falls. On the first night afterwards, during a thunderstorm, the meteorite appears to draw the lightning. Scientific investigation reveals globules inside the meteorite, which dissolve test tubes and laboratory benches. Soon, the fruit grows bloated and life drains out of the land (stolen from *The Colour Out of Space*).<sup>1</sup>

As before, tweak some details. For example, perhaps the meteorite falls in a desert, rather than the woods of *The Colour Out of Space*. Not all backstories need tweaking, however: the first two stories above work as written.<sup>2</sup>

1. This needs an ending, but endings are easy, as I'll explain shortly.
2. Be careful with backstories which feature Mythos creatures as protagonists. For example, playing through the Elder Things' annihilation by the Shoggoths will take things in a distinctly strange direction. After all, the Mythos is meant to be unknowable: if the Investigators are themselves Mythos creatures, it takes away the mystery.<sup>3</sup>
3. Although playing Investigators in the bodies of the Great Race could work well. See *The Great Race Of Yith* (page 115).

## SWITCHING VIEWPOINTS.

WHEN Lovecraft describes something happening to his protagonist,<sup>1</sup> make that happen to an NPC instead. When he describes something happening to a supporting character, let that happen to your Investigators.

This is a powerful switch, letting us tell Lovecraft stories from a different angle. Here are examples of things that happen to Lovecraft's protagonists, shifted to NPCs:

The Investigators meet someone who is possessed by the Great Race (rather than being possessed themselves).

The Investigators find the diaries of someone who was chased by a Shoggoth (rather than being chased by one themselves).

The Investigators must track down a Deep One hybrid (rather than being hybrids themselves).

Indeed, finding someone possessed by the Great Race could span an entire scenario: the Investigators could begin with medical reports of amnesia, then track down the possessee amongst a mountain cult. Similarly, finding a Deep One hybrid gives an interesting scenario: what do the Investigators do with a half-human monster? It's stolen directly from Lovecraft, but shifts the story to an NPC.

Even more powerfully, steal things that happen to Lovecraft's supporting characters and shift them to Investigators. This lets them experience the horror directly.

1. From now on, I deliberately blur the lines between Lovecraft stories and scenarios. Thus, I use "protagonist" and "Investigator" interchangeably, as well as "supporting character" and "NPC".

Lovecraft changes up his own narratives: CALL OF CTHULHU, CHARLES DEXTER WARD, and DUNWICH HORROR all use this different-angled perspective often several times in the same story.

Making monsters sympathetic is powerful. Players expect black and white. Give them shades of grey instead.

I once ran a convention game where on PC tell unconscious for an instant from the perspective of the other characters. From his perspective, he was dragged back in time and trained for decades by the Great Race to deal with the threat faced by the investigators.

Thus, try letting the following things, which were experienced by Lovecraft's minor characters, happen to your Investigators.

The Investigators dream about Cthulhu.

The Investigators discover bitter fruit of an indescribable colour.

The Investigators are besieged by Mi-Go.

Both directions of shift have advantages and disadvantages. By shifting events to the Investigators, you let the Investigators experience something Lovecraft only described.<sup>1</sup> However, you risk overloading the story with strangeness. If the Investigators are besieged by Mi-Go, it's interesting; if the Investigators' brains are removed, placed in cylinders and flown through space, things get weirder.

So, sometimes it is better to shift events to NPCs. Sometimes, that distance is necessary.<sup>2</sup> Meeting a Great Race possessee is often more powerful than being one.

Often, timing determines whether things should happen to Investigator or NPCs. Here's a disgusting example. At the start of the scenario, the Investigators might *hear about* humans mating with Deep Ones. At the end, they might *see* humans mating with Deep Ones. It's unlikely that, at any point, they will themselves mate with Deep Ones.

Switching viewpoints is a powerful trick. Use it often.

Knowingly, anyway.

1. As above: play something Lovecraft only mentioned.

2. See *Keeping Distance* (page 40).

## SWITCHING LOCATIONS.

WHEREVER Lovecraft put his creature, place yours somewhere else. For example:

Put Deep Ones off the Alaskan coast.

Put Elder Things in a desert.

Put Shoggoths on, rather than beneath, an Antarctic plain.

Put the Great Race on a risen seabed.

Obviously, there are restrictions. You won't find many Deep Ones in a desert. Mi-Go prefer the mountains. And Cthulhu should really be in the Pacific. There are mountains under the sea. → His cult is centred in Arabia.

But you can always make a change. Put Deep Ones in the Arctic Ocean. Place Mi-Go in desert mountains. Run a Cthulhu scenario on a Pacific island, rather than the ocean itself.

By moving the location, you change the story. Here, for example, is the plot of *At the Mountains of Madness*, shifted to a desert.

The Investigators are archaeologists, searching for a legendary desert city.

The sand dunes shift constantly, often forming into five-pointed stars.

The Investigators find an abandoned camp, with journals suggesting the explorers had found an ancient city. Within, these explorers found a fossil, which they began to study.

Half-buried beneath sand dunes, they find all the explorers but one, carefully dissected.

Put the Shoggoths in the sky — they can adapt to a purely aerial existence, floating along in the stratosphere. See Conan Doyle's THE HORROR FROM THE HEIGHTS.

Finally, in the shifting sands, they see an ancient city.

They explore the city, travelling deeper and deeper underground. From carvings, they learn of the Shoggoths, a slave race. They also find the missing explorer, dissected and wrapped, as if for further study.

When they penetrate too deep, a Shoggoth hurtles towards them, chasing them out.

Here, I have changed details to fit the new location. Odd rock markings become strangely-shaped dunes. Dreamlike mountains become shifting sand. Those aside, the plot is entirely stolen.<sup>1</sup>

Try changing other parts of this plot. Switch protagonists, letting Investigators dissect a fossilised Elder Thing. Change the ending, with the Shoggoth being *released*, like Cthulhu, into the world above. Nevertheless, changing the location does most of the work.

Here is a final example. Choose a port or seaside resort near where you live. In Massachusetts, a good choice might be Wellfleet, on Cape Cod. In Britain, Southend works well. Then rerun the plot from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* in that location.

For example, here's an Innsmouth plot in England:

The Investigators hear odd tales about the fishing port of Fleetwood.

When they arrive, it is winter and the resort is deserted. The few people on the misty promenade are secretive and unfriendly. Many of the hotels are closed and boarded-up, although the Investigators hear strange noises from within. An unpleasant odour pervades the town.

They glimpse inside a church, where they see something horrific. Later, locals warn the Investigators not to linger near the church.

1. In particular, much of the imagery is stolen from *The Shadow Out of Time*.

As the sun sets over the grey sea, the Investigators talk to a drunk. He tells crazed stories of creatures in the sea, who he believes are watching him.

When they arrive back at the ferry, it is broken down. The ferrymaster tells the Investigators they will need to stay the night.

In the Euston Hotel, the Investigators are attacked by things that seem only half-human. In the dead of night, they flee the town.

You might change the ending: try replacing it with the one from *The Whisperer in Darkness*, so that the Investigators sneak away then flee by car. That aside, the plot works well.

Don't underestimate the power of switching locations. From that simple change, you get a whole new set of descriptive detail. With one switch, you make an old story seem new.

Players love strong similarities to the original stories. Don't be shy.

Try changing the time too.  
A 16th Century  
Massachusetts seaside  
village is very different  
to a 21st Century one.



## SWITCHING CREATURES.

HERE is the most powerful trick of all. Use a Lovecraft plot, but switch the creature. With simple changes, you'll have a new story.

This is because Lovecraft's creatures are mostly interchangeable. For example, here is the plot of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, redone as a Mi-Go scenario:

The Investigators drive to a strange mountain town, which the locals avoid.

As they wander around the crumbling town, they see closed-up buildings and hear buzzing voices.

Everywhere in the town, there is an oppressive rhythm or vibration, half-imagined and half-real.

From a rambling drunk, the Investigators hear about rituals in the wood, where inhabitants worship Shub-Niggurath with hideous black winged creatures.

When the Investigators return to their car, the engine is broken. They must stay in the mountain town.

In the dead of the night, the winged creatures swarm on the Investigators, who must flee.

Only the details have changed. The seaside town becomes a mountain town. Guttural voices become buzzing ones. The fishy smell becomes an alien vibration. Mating becomes a ritual in the woods. The plot, however, is the same.

This messes the whole 'Innsmouth look' miscegenation plot. You could replace 'breeding with Deep ones' with 'alien abduction-style experiments' and 'eggs beneath the skin', turning the whole thing into a backwoods take on Alien.

Conversely, here is the plot of *The Whisperer in Darkness*, redone as a Deep One scenario:

The Investigators read reports of corpses, half-human and half-fish, washed up on remote beaches.

Locals tell folktales of mermaid-like creatures and strangers speaking in unnatural, guttural voices.

The Investigators receive a letter from a correspondent, who believes the fish-creatures are watching him.

In a museum near the coast, the Investigators find an engraved monolith, depicting the creatures.

When the Investigators visit their correspondent, in his seafront house, they find him sitting in the dark. A fishy odour pervades. His features are strange, with bulbous, unclosing eyes.

He tells them, in exquisite detail, of beautiful undersea cities, seeming friendly and benevolent as he does so.

In the night, the Investigators hear Deep Ones in the house below them. They flee.

And so the changes work in reverse. Mountains become seaside, buzzing voices become guttural and vibration becomes odour. The plot is identical: only the descriptions change.

Naturally, not all creatures are interchangeable. You can't run *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* with Cthulhu bursting into the hotel to capture the Investigators. And some creatures require greater changes: for example, the Shan would fit into either of the plots above, but should possess someone.

The Shadow [Preposition][Noun] is a handy brainstorming tool. The Shadow [under][London], The Shadow [from][beyond], The Shadow [through][a lens], The Shadow [from][the hills] and so on.

But this switch will create many new plots. Try the following or invent your own:

*The Shadow Out of Time*, but with Investigators possessed by the Shan.

*At the Mountains of Madness*, but with Investigators discovering a Great Race city.

*The Dreams in the Witch House*, but with Investigators dreaming of Cthulhu.

*Nyarlahotep*, but with the prophetic stranger being an avatar of Shub-Niggurath, giving a demonstration of natural wonder.

*The Call of Cthulhu*, replacing Cthulhu with any other buried Old One.

*The Colour Out of Space*, replacing the Colour with a Lloigor and the gradual decay with intermittent destruction.

These won't all be straight swaps. Often, you'll need to add things specific to the creature: for example, in the Great Race version of *At the Mountains of Madness*, the Investigators should discover a possessed, not a dissected, explorer.

But, with few changes, you have a wealth of new scenarios. If you cannot use a whole plot, use parts. For example, start a Hastur scenario with the show from *Nyarlahotep*, even if you then take the scenario elsewhere.

1. Try switching the creature for a location. That is, use a creature that is, effectively, a location: for example, a malevolent theatre, island or village. Increasing reprisals appear as malicious acts of nature: foul weather, automobile failure, rockslides. Look at Lloigor and Colours as models (they are almost monstrous locations already). Locations to steal from Lovecraft: the Devil's Hop-Yard, Plateau of Leng, Kadath.

Generally, if creatures are similar in some way, you can swap them between stories. Here are some similarities:

The **Mi-Go**, **Shan** and **Deep Ones** are all malevolent races, rather than single creatures.

— So are Ghouls

**Nyarlahotep**, **Hastur** and **Shub-Niggurath** are all nebulous and ill-defined. Their stories are largely interchangeable.

**Lloigor** and **Colours** are both intangible, subterranean and sap energy.

The **Great Race**, **Hounds of Tindalos** and **Lloigor** all manipulate time.

The **Great Race**, **Cthonians** and **Shan** can both possess a human being.

The **Great Race**, **Cthonians** and **Mi-Go** can, in different ways, take a human's mind out of its body.

← Humans can turn into Deep Ones and Ghouls

The **Elder Things** and **Shoggoths** form a pair, as do the **Great Race** and **Flying Polyps**. In both cases, the second race exterminated the first.

**Cthulhu** can be interchanged with any underground Old One.

There are subtler connections, too: both the **Lloigor** and **Cthulhu** want to enslave humanity; both **Cthonians** and **Lloigor** cause flu-like symptoms; both **Cthonians** and **Colours** cause buildings to collapse.

So try using **Cthonians** in *The Colour Out of Space*: they swarm beneath farmland, draining the energy from the humans above. Or try the **Colour** in place of **Cthonians**: when a meteorite is taken by scientists, a **Colour** pursues it and destroys the laboratory where it is kept.

Switching creatures is your most powerful tool. That simple change lets you recycle Lovecraft's plots endlessly.

## SHIFTING TIMING.

LOVECRAFT'S creatures, roughly speaking, work to the following timeline:

The creatures arrive.<sup>1</sup>

The creatures do bad things to humans.

The creatures depart.

The creatures return.

This lets you start your scenario at three points.

Just after the creatures arrive.<sup>2</sup>

When the creatures are present.

After the creatures have departed, with the threat they may return.

For your scenario, try a different timing from the one Lovecraft used.<sup>3</sup> For example:

Start a Mi-Go scenario just after the creatures arrive in the mountains.

Start a Deep Ones scenario just after they have been summoned.

Start a Great Race scenario while someone is possessed.

Start a Colour scenario with a meteorite falling.

Start a scenario after Cthulhu has been hit by a ship, letting the Investigators discover that he will inevitably rise again.

There are limits here. You cannot easily begin with Cthulhu coming to Earth, nor with him already risen.

- 
1. Some arrived in prehistoric times.
  2. This is probably not a practical option for creatures that arrived in prehistoric times.
  3. Another general rule. Whatever Lovecraft did, change it.

But maybe they've just awakened again.

But some shift of timing is always possible. You could, for example, start a Cthulhu scenario as the stars begin aligning or as he is waking.

Better still, many creatures have their own timeline. Colours have a timeline of decay. The Great Race has a timeline of possession.<sup>1</sup> To create new scenarios, start at different points in these timelines.

## STEALING ENDINGS.

YOU can also steal Lovecraft's endings. This gets complicated, however, since Lovecraft likes to end stories many times. For example, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* has a climactic chase, then a sight of the creatures, then an extended epilogue.

Broadly speaking, Lovecraft's endings happen in the following order:

**The descent** into an underground city.

**The final horror**, in which the Investigators see the horror clearly for the first time.

**The escape**, as the Investigators flee from a supernatural creature, or **the confrontation**, as they confront it.

**The realisation** that the creature remains and may rise again.<sup>2</sup>

Not every story has every ending, but if they occur, they are normally in that sequence. Let's consider them in turn.

- 
1. I'll discuss these creatures' timelines under *Colours* (page 80) and *The Great Race Of Yith* (page 115). But you can find timelines in almost any creature's story.
  2. Perhaps, after this, there is a further ending: the punchline. Lovecraft likes to end stories with a pithy, surprising phrase: "It was his twin brother", "In my own handwriting", "The face and hands of Henry Wentworth Akeley". It's hard to make these effective in roleplaying games.

More generally, you can't flee back to ignorance.

## THE DESCENT.

TOWARDS the story's end, Lovecraft's protagonists often descend into an underground city.<sup>1</sup> This journey may be prolonged, as in *At the Mountains of Madness*, or shorter, as in *The Shadow Out of Time*.

You can end any scenario with an underground city. Thus, you could:

Finish a Deep One scenario with a descent into watery caves.

Finish a Mi-Go scenario with a descent into mines.

Finish a Colour scenario with a descent into a glowing underworld, filled with the Colour.

Underground cities never get old. Treat them as your default option for bringing scenarios to a close.<sup>2</sup>

Try a metaphorical underground:  
Chinatown is an "underground city".

1. When they don't, the horror often comes from below ground: for example, Cthulhu, the Lloigor or the Colour. And if it does not, the horror is often associated with an underworld: the Mi-Go dig mines, the Deep Ones hide in tunnels below houses. Scatter subterranean references freely.
2. Especially if, when Lovecraft wrote about your creature, he *didn't* end with an underground city.

## THE FINAL HORROR.

JUST before the story ends, the most horrific event occurs. If the Investigators descended into an underground city, that's where it happens. If not, the event happens somewhere dark and enclosed. ←

It is a visual spectacle. The narrative slows down as it is described in maddening detail. For the first time, the Investigators see the full horror clearly: if they go mad, they do it now. There may be a greater, lingering unease afterwards, but this is the peak of *terror*.<sup>1</sup>

Here are the final horrors of some Lovecraft stories:

In *The Call of Cthulhu*, Cthulhu rises.

In *Dagon*, Dagon appears.

In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the Shoggoth appears.

In *The Colour Out of Space*, Nahum is destroyed by the Colour.

In *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, the Deep One army streams along the road.

In *The Shadow Out of Time*, the protagonist finds his handwriting within an ancient city.

Broadly, then, there are three types of final horror:

**The creature:** Seeing the creature<sup>2</sup> or creatures clearly for the first time.

**The harm:** Seeing the harm the creature does to humans.

**Self-realisation:** Discovering something horrific about yourself.<sup>3</sup>

1. *The Whisperer in Darkness*, which has no definite peak of terror, breaks this rule. Perhaps the final horror is the brain-in-cylinder or the sight of Akeley's hands.
2. When you're using a complementary pair of creatures, this creature is the second of the pair. For example, if your scenario is about Elder Things and Shoggoths, this creature is a Shoggoth.
3. Arguably, this is the same as "the harm", but it's important enough to keep separate.

Interestingly, in the strange case of Charles Dexter Ward, the final horror is also a moment of triumph. Dr Willett calls up something from the essential salts that reveals how to destroy Curwen while also terrifying him.



Never show. Make them realise. Instead of saying 'you're infected by the colour', establish that those infected by the colour are wildly radioactive, and then have one of the investigators accidentally switch on his geiger counter, and hear a ticking that's in time with his own heartbeat...

In your scenario, then, you have three options for your Final Horror. Your default option is letting the Investigators see the creature. They might:

- See a horde of Mi-Go.
- See The King In Yellow.
- Watch the Lloigor becoming visible.

Sensing can be eerier than seeing.

Your second option is showing the Investigators how the creature harms humans. They could:

- Find a pile of corpses, whose brains were removed by the Mi-Go.
- Find people who were driven mad by The King In Yellow.
- Find the mutilated, ententacled slaves of the Lloigor, whose limbs are amputated so they cannot run.

And your third option is showing Investigators something horrific about themselves:

- Discovering the cylinders where their brains were kept.
- Discovering they are Deep One hybrids.
- Discovering they are infected by the Colour and gradually decaying.

With this option, keep the horror personal. Don't just show that humanity is doomed. Make it about the Investigators.<sup>1</sup>

If you can think of a worse terror, use it. Perhaps, for example, you could show the Investigators a postapocalyptic city or prehistoric landscape.<sup>2</sup> Nine times out of ten, however, you won't beat showing them the creature or the harm it does.

1. Or the people they love. This isn't a Lovecraftian option, but it's a good one, used by other authors such as Robert Chambers. See *Hastur* (page 123).
2. Under *Cthonians* (page 87), I discuss fountains of blood as Final Horrors.

## THE CONFRONTATION.

SOMETIMES, Lovecraft's protagonists confront the monster directly. This is never simply a fight: in *The Dunwich Horror*, there's a magical battle; in *The Call of Cthulhu*, Cthulhu is hit by a ship.

So, if you end your scenario with a confrontation, make it good. Guns are not enough. Make it a sorcerous or vehicular combat. Make it spectacular.

And consider avoiding the confrontation entirely. Fights are used too much in Cthulhu games and rarely in Lovecraft. Instead, try letting the Investigators escape.

Rule of thumb: if you fight it, you die.

## THE ESCAPE.

AFTER the final horror, the Investigators may run away. If they are in an underground city, they escape through that city. If not, they at least escape in darkness.

Lovecraft is being clever here. He needs a dramatic ending, but if he ends with a fight, he shows that the Mythos can be defeated. Instead, he lets the Investigators escape, highlighting the creature's invincibility while providing a shot of adrenaline.

There are two sorts of escape: the chase and the sneak.<sup>1</sup> The chase is your default option: a high-adrenaline flight, with the creature at the Investigators' heels. The sneak is subtler: a stealthy escape, avoiding the creature's attention.

1. I apologise for using "sneak" as a noun, but it's useful, so I have appropriated it as terminology.

The players should still have accomplished some goal.

Now, there are different sorts of chase:<sup>1</sup>

An organised pursuit (from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

A creature chasing a ship (from *The Call of Cthulhu*).

A desperate rush through an ancient city (from *At the Mountains of Madness* and *The Shadow Out of Time*).

And different sorts of sneak:

Through a dark, creaking house (from *The Whisperer In Darkness*).<sup>2</sup>

Through hostile streets (from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

Choose whichever suits your scenario. Even better, switch between the two. On a failed sneaking roll, a sneak becomes a chase. On a successful hiding roll, a chase becomes a sneak. And vary the transport: try planes, cars and ships.

However you do it, sneak or chase, the escape provides the adrenaline to end the scenario. It is also, probably, the last time you roll dice. After that, it is all narration.

## THE REALISATION.

THIS final ending is short but important. In it, the Investigators realise that the danger is still there. Even when the creature is defeated (e.g. Cthulhu), it is not truly dead. Even when it leaves (e.g. the Colour), part of it remains.

Perhaps this is just a piece of narration at the end of your scenario, but it must be there. The Mythos is not defeated. It merely waits.

1. There are many, many chases in Lovecraft. In *The Music Of Erich Zann*, for example, there's a beautiful and brief dash through a crumbling city: "clattering down steps and over cobbles to the lower streets and the putrid canyon-walled river".
2. In Lovecraft's sneaks and chases, it's often unclear whether there is anything pursuing the protagonist. It doesn't matter. Steal the imagery anyway.
3. Read *The Whisperer In Darkness* and *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, noting when the protagonist fails a sneaking roll.

There's also the Testimony, where the characters account for their seemingly insane actions to the mundane authorities.  
THREE ALTERNATIVE ENDINGS.

THREE other endings are often useful. The first two are excellent ways to end an individual Investigator's story: — or to end the story of a loved one or favourite NPC.

Going mad (from *Dagon*).<sup>1</sup>

Committing suicide (from *Dagon* and *The Insects from Shaggai*).<sup>2</sup>

When these happen in your scenarios, describe them as Lovecraft would. Mad Investigators go to asylums, while suicides are found alone in rooms.

A third alternative ending is from *The Colour Out of Space*:

The creature leaves.

Note, here, that the departure is *spectacular*: an alien firework display. This spectacle gives a satisfying, definite ending (rather like the adrenaline rush of a chase).

Also, note that the creature *chooses* to leave. Thus, this is a bleak ending, an expression of human irrelevance. The creature was not defeated. The Investigators's actions have barely affected it. And, as mentioned above, the creature never leaves completely: something remains behind.

Try this ending in a scenario. Let a Lloigor leave, but only to feed elsewhere. Let Cthulhu stir and return to sleep. Let the Mi-Go leave, in a spectacular flurry of black wings, but only because their mines are exhausted. Make it bleak, uncaring and spectacular.

That said, being trapped and waiting to die is a great ending.

1. And note that Lovecraft's protagonists go mad, rather than die. So, in your games, drive Investigators insane rather than killing them.
2. In *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, the protagonist must choose whether to commit suicide or become a monster. Give choices like this to your players (and we'll discuss them further later).

The fourth ending: Joining willingly with the horror. This happens in Lovecraft to PCs (Olmstead in *SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH*, possibly Robert Blake in *HAUNTER OF THE DARK*) and to NPCs (Akeley in *WHISPERER*, perhaps)

## STEALING LOCATIONS.

LOVECRAFT has five favourite locations:<sup>1</sup> the Town, Old Building, Wooded Hills, Inhospitable Plain and Underground City. Steal them.

For example, try starting a scenario in the wooded hills (from *The Whisperer in Darkness*), move to an old building (like *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*), then end with an underground city (like *The Shadow Out of Time*). Use these locations as defaults: if you don't know where your Deep One hybrid lives, put her in an old building.

Try, also, using these stock locations as bases for your own. If your scenario includes a university, make it resemble an Old Building: crumbling, dark and crowned with spires. If it includes mines, make them like an Underground City: immense, black and strangely angled.

Do this especially for historical locations. Describe Victorian London like the Town: dark and shuttered, with narrow streets. Make Shanghai like the Inhospitable Plain: dreamlike, shifting and vast.

We'll consider the five locations individually.<sup>2</sup> First, however, here are the themes that link them.

Run-down neighbourhood  
inhabited by dodgy  
foreigners, too.

1. There may be more than five, of course. The Expedition Camp is a candidate, as is The City (as distinct from The Town). But let's start with five.
2. A cautionary note. Lovecraft's stories rarely divide into discrete locations, as roleplaying scenarios do. *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, for example, doesn't proceed simply from the Museum to Innsmouth to the Hotel. So use the descriptions, but don't think of scenarios as chains of locations.

## THE THEMES.

AT THE BEGINNING of the scenario, everywhere is:

- Old.
- Decaying.
- Unsettling.
- Crumbling.
- Dimly lit.
- Indefinably unpleasant.
- Disliked by those in the surrounding area.

And everywhere has:

- Suspicious, unhelpful inhabitants.
- An unpleasant odour.

These themes are common to the Town, Old Building and Wooded Hills.

You can apply them to any location. If your scenario begins in caves, make them crumbling and unsettling. If it begins on a space station, make it dark, creaking and ill-reputed.

Maintain these themes for the first part of your scenario. Resist the temptation to describe modernity<sup>1</sup> or pleasantness. In these early stages, there should be no relief: everywhere is unpleasant and indefinably bad.

1. In particular, Lovecraft rarely mentions technology until the story's end. On the rare occasions he does, such as *Nyarlathept*, it follows similar themes to those above: dark, unpleasant, unsettling.

They're also close enough  
to the mundane  
world for the pro-  
tagonist to just  
wander in, but  
strange enough to  
hide all manner  
of horrors. Getting  
to an inhospitable  
Plain or Under-  
ground city  
usually takes  
more effort.

Later in the story, the themes change subtly. Now, everywhere is:

Ancient.

Dark.

Huge.

Alien.

Strangely angled.

And everywhere has:

Strange geometry.

Carvings.

Signs of vast intelligence.

These themes apply perfectly to the Underground City. They also describe other Lovecraftian locations: the last part of *Dagon* uses a vast, dark, alien mire, with a carved monolith. Meanwhile, the Inhospitable Plain mixes themes from the first and second sets.

At a minimum, the final location must be dark. When Lovecraft's stories do not end underground, they end in darkness: the final scenes of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* and *The Whisperer in Darkness* are nighttime scenes. So, if the scenario ends without your Investigators changing location, night must fall.

With those themes identified, let's go through the stock locations one by one.

## THE WOODED HILLS.

REMOTE  
OVERGROWN  
FORBIDDING.

THE HILLS are overgrown and remote. Few people go there: roads and railways have fallen into disuse. In the dense, wooded valleys, there are streams whose sources are unknown.

There is something unnatural about the wooded hills. The slopes drop at dizzying, fantastic, almost perpendicular angles. Perhaps, even, they are supernatural, for nature seems to run wild within the woods. Bridges are overgrown. Often, the trees grow unnaturally thick, so that the alleys between them are dark.

In the wooded hills are old buildings (see below), ancient and decaying. Sometimes, the visitor will see half-crumbled bridges, leading nowhere. Sometimes the hills seem fantastically beautiful, but more often they are oppressive and foreboding, and always they are timeless.

Nobody goes to the highest hills. There are tales of the things that live there, but the old folk know not to tell them too loudly. They know, too, not to enquire too deeply into the creatures that live on the darkest mountains.

On top of the hills may be standing stones  
(DUNWICH HORROR) or strange mineral  
formations that look eerily regular  
(WHISPERER IN DARKNESS)

1. Note how the "ancient" theme emerges in a natural setting: crumbling, overgrown, timeless. See also *Ithaqua* (page 130) for the best timeless forest of them all.

Good wooded hills: the Black Forest, Guatemalan cloud forests, Appalachian forests, Nallamala Hills, Andhra Pradesh.



ANCIENT,  
DARK,  
FULL OF STORIES.

## THE TOWN.

Good towns:  
Joueish.  
Kinsale.  
Onkema.  
Gumma.

IT MAY BE a coastal town, city or Arkham itself.<sup>1</sup> Wherever it is, it is timeless, filled with hidden stories. Its ancient spires and peaked roofs cluster close together, falling apart. The streets are cobbled, narrow and frequently steep.

The town is dark: if there are lights, they are dim and distant. Perhaps the Investigators navigate by moonlight. At night, the town stirs: timbers creak and rats scurry. Many parts of the town, from secluded courts to shadowy alleys, are hidden or dangerous.

The town is curiously lifeless. The houses are shuttered, hidden from the view of outsiders. The telegraph poles have no wires. Railways are disused and overgrown.

Gambrel roofs. In HPL the 17th century is the architecture of horror; the 18th century is the architecture of reason.

## THE OLD BUILDING.

CRUMBLING  
DUSTY  
UNWELCOMING  
IT IS unimaginably ancient, with crumbling brickwork and chimneys.<sup>2</sup> It is remote: perhaps on a hill, in a seldom-visited part of town or a long way from civilisation. And it is dark in colour, perhaps brown or grey, with a sharply peaked roof.

From the outside, you cannot see in: perhaps the shutters are down or perhaps the windows are small. When you enter, a smell of dust and mouldering timber hits your nostrils. Paint peels and decorations are shabby. The light is dim and the floorboards creak under your feet.

1. *The Music of Erich Zann* has beautiful descriptions of an ancient city, complete with a street that the protagonist can never find again.

2. The default Old Building is a farm. There are always farms.

Arkham never struck me as lifeless; indeed, it is abuzz with activity. This description applies more to Dunwich, Innsmouth, Kingsport and the rundown bits of Arkham.

Good Old Buildings:  
Flakum VIN  
Witley Hall.  
Botany Water Works.

## THE INHOSPITABLE PLAIN.

VAST,  
EXPOSED,  
DREAMLIKE

WHETHER the plain is a remote desert, icy waste or mountain plateau, it is desolate, vast and ancient. Its landscape seems dreamlike and ever-changing.

Unusually for a Lovecraftian location, the inhospitable plain may be bright. Perhaps the sun beats down or perhaps the moon bathes the land in a pallid, leprous light. This light is not pleasant. Instead, it exposes the land as utterly alien.

On the Inhospitable Plain, the Investigators are totally exposed to the elements. The wind howls from unimaginable heights and tears aeroplanes from the sky. If there are dwellings here, they are squat huts or abandoned camps, and they are deserted.

DARK,  
IMMENSE,  
STRANGE  
WITH SYMMETRIES

## THE UNDERGROUND CITY.

THE UNDERGROUND CITY is vast, dark and alien. It is Cyclopean,<sup>1</sup> constructed of huge stone blocks, which are probably black or green.

The geometry and symmetry seems *wrong*, with unnatural curves and angles. Certainly, the geometry is non-Euclidian, designed by alien intelligences superior to ours. Carvings depict the history of the race.

Inside, corridors and doorways are designed for creatures larger than humans. There may be rooms for eating, sleeping, and other unidentifiable purposes.

Getting to the plain usually requires special preparations and survival gear, like the expedition preparations in *At the Mountains of Madness*.

Carvings and bas-reliefs hint at the city's history. Its pre-human history.

1. Which means "constructed of huge stone blocks". Lovecraft frequently uses both descriptions: after describing a city as Cyclopean, he mentions it is constructed of huge stone blocks.

Good Plains:  
Crocker Land  
Pustynia Biedonaka  
Rangipo Desert

Good Undergrounds:  
Undara lava tubes.  
Odessa catacombs.  
Necromanteion Temple.

## THE CHARACTERS.

ALL these locations are populated by Lovecraftian characters. These, too, conform to particular templates. They are:

The old rustic who has seen too much.

The suspicious, unwelcoming rustic.

The straightforward rustic, who warns you against enquiring further.

The educated ally, who has also seen too much.

Obliging non-entities, who offer assistance.

In your scenarios, use these characters as NPCs.<sup>1</sup> Use them like the locations: either put them in scenarios as written or base your own characters on them.

And, as with the locations, use these stock characters as default options. If you cannot decide what the shop owner is like, make her an obliging non-entity or suspicious rustic. If the Investigators visit a museum, make the curator an educated ally.

In cities, 'rustic' tends to be replaced with 'foreign immigrant', like the superstitious Poles in 'Dreams in the Witch House'.

1. NPCs perform an important function: they let the Investigators discover clues by talking, rather than searching. Thus, they inject roleplay into your scenario. If your scenario seems too dull or too short, try revealing clues through NPCs rather than books.

## STEALING PATTERNS.

Now, let's look for patterns behind the stories. How does Lovecraft increase the horror? How does he bring his protagonists closer to the creature? How does he ramp up the weirdness and the harm?

In this section, we steal the structures that underlie Lovecraft's plots. Let's start with two structures we have already uncovered: beginnings and endings, then locations.

### BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS.

FROM what we've discovered about beginnings and endings, we can create a rough structure for Lovecraftian plots:

Something strange draws the Investigators in:

*They arrive somewhere strange.*

*They hear tales of somewhere strange.*

*They read about strange events.*

*They get a letter.*

*They find a strange artefact.*

*They attend a strange event.*

*Something strange happens to someone.*

They investigate.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of their investigation, they may:<sup>2</sup>

*Descend underground.*

*See a final horror.*

*Escape the creature or confront it.*

*Realise the creature may rise again.*

It's not always a creature. Lovecraft also wrote about magic, about strange gods, about hidden cults.

1. The rest of this chapter largely consists of expanding "They investigate".  
2. I've simplified this, leaving out some of the alternative horrors.

In Lovecraft stories, the patterns recur. A descriptive element - weird effect, or strange event happens repeatedly during the tale, sometimes in flashback or anticipation. This "symphonic structure", where repetition reinforces horror, and the sense of the uncanny, definitely works in games. Steal it!

Use this as a template for scenarios. Begin with strangeness, to draw the Investigators in. Later, send the Investigators somewhere underground (or dark). Reveal the horror, then end with a chase or sneak.

By using this structure, you build and release anticipation. The strange beginning creates interest. Then, as the investigation progresses, anticipation grows. The tension ramps up sharply when the Investigators go underground:<sup>1</sup> when they do, they know something bad is waiting.<sup>2</sup>

Having built the anticipation, the final horror releases it. Until then, there have only been hints, tales and glimpses: now, the truth bursts out.

The final horror and burst of adrenaline disguises the fact that questions remain unanswered. Why do the Mi-Go put brains in jars? What is the strange vibration within the Akeley farmhouse? What were the Deep Ones planning to do with a Shoggoth? All these mysteries lie unresolved,<sup>3</sup> but the released anticipation makes the story feel finished.

The 'hook' that brought the characters in at the start should be resolved, even if bigger questions remain. If you start off investigating the death of Harvey Walters, then by the end you should know what happened to him.

1. Or, as an alternative, climb, as in *The Haunter of the Dark*.
2. If they don't descend underground, they often descend into a dip or valley (c.f. *Dagon*).
3. Even if there aren't specifically unanswered questions, there is a sense that the Investigators know little. For example, at the end of *The Colour Out of Space*, the prevailing mood is bewilderment. I'll come back to this in *Leave Questions Unanswered* (page 51).

## LOCATIONS.

LOVECRAFT'S locations also form a simple structure.

The Wooded Hills *or* The Town *or* The Inhospitable Plain.

The Underground City *or* The Old Building.

It runs in parallel with the Beginnings and Endings structure above. Thus, the Final Horror probably occurs in an Old Building or Underground City.

Scatters signs of your creature<sup>1</sup> throughout these locations. For example, in *At the Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft places strange rock markings on the icy plain, dissected bodies in the deserted camp, and a body preserved for later study in the underground city. Do the same in your scenario.

These signs, of course, are clues.<sup>2</sup> When the Investigators investigate,<sup>3</sup> they discover signs of your creature. These signs can be many things – folktales, rumours, writings, markings, victims – but they must be there. Scatter them liberally.

Try giving clues willingly,  
and in abundance, rather than  
hoarding them.

1. *The Mythos* (page 75) gives you appropriate signs to scatter for each creature. For example, a Mi-Go scenario contains strange vibrations and buzzing voices, while a Deep One scenario contains fishy odours and guttural voices.
2. And I often use the word "clues" interchangeably with "signs of the creature".
3. This phrase, "The Investigators investigate", is clunky but useful.

## INCREASING HORROR.

LOVECRAFTIAN horror is not like modern horror. In modern stories, the tension runs in peaks and troughs. There's a shock to begin, then a moment to recover, then another shock, then more recovery. As the story continues, the shocks get greater.

Lovecraft's stories, by contrast, begin with only foreboding and eeriness. For the first 75% of the story, the horror increases very, very slowly. Finally, all hell breaks loose.

So, in your scenarios, hold the horror back. Increase tension gradually, then ramp it up suddenly for the finale. And, when you scatter signs of your creature, start with the least horrific. Only after much eeriness should you advance to the truly terrifying.

Let's put all this together and construct a Mi-Go scenario. Start with some signs of the Winged Ones:<sup>1</sup>

A child is frightened by something in the forest.

Clawprints, with saw-toothed nippers protruding from a central pad.

Tales of creatures in the hills, looking for an unusual type of stone.

Caves of vast depth, their mouths deliberately sealed by boulders.

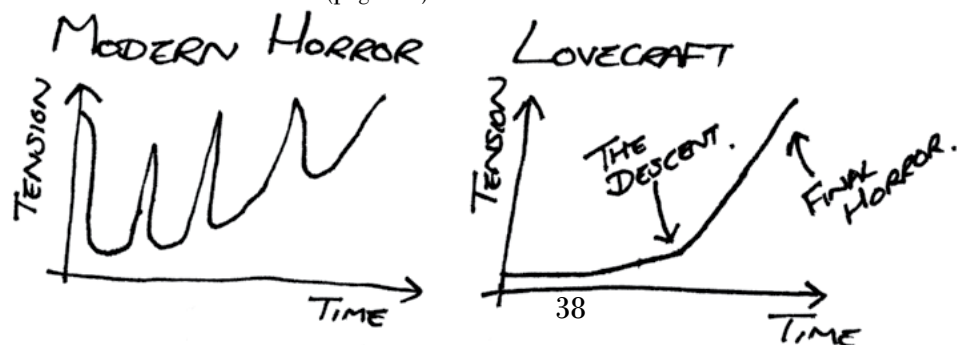
A great black stone with worn hieroglyphics.

Buzzing voices.

An indefinable rhythm or vibration in the air.

Brains, humans and alien, stored under Round Hill in Massachusetts.

1. See *Mi-Go* (page 145).



Now let's build a simple string of locations: a strange town, an old building, an underground city. For the old building, steal the museum from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. And, by riffing on Mi-Goan themes, let's put the town in the mountains and make the underground city a mine.

Then put signs of the Mi-Go into those locations, increasing the horror gradually.

The Investigators arrive in Roehampton, a remote mountain town. It is silent, with an odd vibration hanging in the air.

In an old museum, they find an unearthly black stone, covered in carvings. Through a wall, they hear the curator's wife, who has a fluttering, buzzing voice.

Outside the museum are oddly-shaped footprints surrounding their car.

In the deserted town, the Investigators discover Ellen, a terrified child. She tells of creatures, high in the hills, and gives the Investigators a stone, which she believes they are mining for. Clearly, it is not of earthly origin.

In the hills, the Investigators find caves, carefully blocked by boulders.

They descend into vast mines, which are filled with alien carvings.

Deep within, they discover many brains in metal containers.<sup>1</sup>

From even deeper in the mines, a horde of Mi-Go rushes at the Investigators, who must flee.

Thus, we've ended with a chase. We could add complexity: perhaps townspeople, with buzzing voices, could warn Investigators away.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, just by slowly increasing the horror, we've created a workable scenario.

1. Remember that you needn't explain everything. Why are brains in the mines? How is the curator's wife connected to the Mi-Go? Leave such questions unanswered, as Lovecraft did.
2. Alternating investigations with reprisals is a powerful tool. See *Increasing Reprisals* (page 45) and *Lloigor* (page 137).

Even if you "explain" things, you can use an unreliable narrator: The old coot is an alcoholic, the diary's author died in a madhouse. Insert one or two details that are clearly, provably mistaken.

Players being players, there's every chance they'll end up bursting into the other room. I'd put her at the other end of a phone line instead. That way the buzzing can be disguised as a bad line.



## KEEPING DISTANCE.

WHEN the story starts, the protagonist is far away from the creature. As it continues, he<sup>1</sup> gets closer to it. Only at the end might the protagonist see the creature: until then, Lovecraft keeps a distance between the two.

Often, this distance is physical. Thus, in *The Whisperer in Darkness*, Wilmarth gets physically closer to the farmhouse, where he finally meets the Mi-Go. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the protagonists get closer to the Shoggoth.

However, sometimes the distance is conceptual: there is a “narrative distance” between protagonist and creature. Rather than letting his characters perceive the horror directly, Lovecraft adds degrees of separation.

For example, at the start of *The Whisperer in Darkness*: Wilmarth hears *from an unnamed friend*, who *received a letter, from his mother*, about *unreliable tales from naive country folk* who saw a monstrous corpse in a stream. Note the degrees of separation: anonymity, unreliability, naiveté, the chain of people. Lovecraft couldn’t begin his story with Wilmarth finding a dead Mi-Go: it would destroy the horror.<sup>2</sup> Instead, he keeps distance between protagonist and monster.

Similarly, in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, there is narrative distance between protagonist and Deep Ones, which gradually decreases. We begin with *folktales* from an unnamed ticket agent, then *stories* from an unnamed youth.<sup>3</sup> As the protagonist explores, he hears *distant* scurrings, but only *through walls*. Then comes a direct report from a *named* witness, but a *drunk, unreliable* one.

1. See *The Investigators* (page 52).

2. Put another way: if you start the story by seeing a monster (even a dead one), then there is no way to increase the horror. You can’t then end the story by seeing another monster. You’ve done that already.

3. The protagonist glimpses a Deep One priest, which disrupts this structure, but it’s a dark, distant, short sighting.

Even when the protagonist is attacked, he does not see his attackers, although now there are monstrous footprints and voices. While escaping through darkened Innsmouth, the protagonist perceives two shambling figures, but only dimly. Only at the end does the protagonist see the creatures fully. When he does, both physical and narrative distance collapse to zero.<sup>1</sup>

So steal this pattern. Keep the creatures distant, let the protagonists approach gradually, then suddenly bring the creatures close for the final horror.

Here are things that increase narrative distance:<sup>2</sup>

Hearing about horror second- or third-hand.

Folktales, rather than reports.

Reading about horror, rather than seeing it.

Glimpses or impressions, rather than a clear view.

Hybrids or servitors, rather than the creature itself.

Darkness or obscured view.

Physical barriers, such as walls.

Unreliable, rather than reliable, reports.

Information that is open to other interpretations.

Unnamed, rather than named, people.

Dreaming, rather than seeing directly.

Fewer, rather than many, creatures.

Physical distance.

1. Interestingly, when the protagonist first sees the Deep Ones approaching, he *closes his eyes*. When they are closer, he opens them again. Why? Because it makes the Final Horror, of seeing the creatures, a sudden shock.
2. Another thing that increases narrative distance is ignorance: being close to a monster without realising what it is. This happens in many Lovecraft stories. However, it’s tough in games, since players usually guess what they’re dealing with.

Historical distance works well. Tales of Native American legends are more distant than colonial records, which are themselves more distant than your grandfather's childhood memories, which are more distant than the news report in today's paper.

You can, of course, combine these. Indeed, in the early stages of your scenarios, you should use multiple tricks to increase narrative distance. Try dreams of unseen voices, distant glimpses through fog, unreliable unnamed witnesses and disputed folktales about a faraway town. Best of all, use a chain of people: let the Investigators *meet someone who met someone else who heard a folktale*.

By putting these tricks together, we get a scenario structure, based around narrative distance:

The Investigators hear about the creature. They may read reports or hear tales. However, they do not speak directly to witnesses, see the creature or find traces of it.<sup>1</sup>

The Investigators speak to witnesses, although not victims.<sup>2</sup> They may find signs of the creature, including artefacts. Nothing they discover points clearly to alien influence.

The Investigators may speak to an unreliable victim of the creature. They may find traces of the creature, including alien artefacts, which are difficult to explain rationally. If they glimpse the creature, their view is obscured or in darkness.

The Investigators find direct traces of the creature, with no rational explanation. They may find victims of the creature whose experiences cannot be explained naturally. Now, they find incontrovertible evidence of the creature.<sup>3</sup>

Suddenly, the Investigators see the creature directly.

Don't follow this structure slavishly. Simply keep the general sense of getting closer to the creature. Keep the creature distant, then right at the end, bring it dangerously close.

1. This initial stage, in which Investigators only hear tales, is common in Lovecraft. Although atmospheric, it can be dull to play. Consider skipping it or advancing quickly to the second stage.
2. Note the progression in the people whom the Investigators meet. They change from *unreliable* to *reliable* characters; from *unnamed* to *named* people; and from *indirect informants* to *direct witnesses* to *victims*.
3. They normally won't glimpse the creature now, since we save that until the end.

USE HANDOUTS !!  
Give the players the stories to read and research.

## INCREASING CERTAINTY.

NEXT, how credible is it that something supernatural is happening? At the beginning of the story, it seems incredible. At the end, it is the only explanation possible.

Thus, at first, everything is rationally explicable.<sup>1</sup> Later, although events and objects cannot be explained rationally, they are not clearly supernatural. Finally, everything is obviously supernatural.

So the story progresses as follows:

Everything can be explained rationally.<sup>2</sup>

Not everything can be explained rationally.

The only explanation is supernatural.

This final realisation that supernatural forces are at work comes *after* the Investigators descend underground<sup>3</sup> but *before* the final horror. Thus, the climax of the story runs as follows: the Investigators enter the creature's lair, find proof the creature exists, then finally see the creature itself.

However, although the Investigators see evidence of the creature, they cannot take it with them. Thus, in *The Colour Out of Space*, the scientists' samples of the Colour disappear. In *The Shadow Out of Time*, the protagonist's writing remains within the underground city. When the Investigators emerge, they have no proof of their story. Use this trick in your scenarios: ensure that, by the end of the story, any direct evidence of supernatural activity is vanished, destroyed or left behind.

1. Sometimes, the rational explanation is "I am mad" or "Everyone else is mad".
2. One exception: at any time, the Investigators can discover an artefact beyond human knowledge/workmanship, such as Cthulhu's bas-relief or the Deep Ones' jewellery. Nevertheless, there is a prevailing atmosphere of sober investigation: everyone keeps looking for a rational explanation.
3. Or the equivalent in the story: after they descend into a valley, after they climb the dark mountain, after they enter the old house and so on.

There may, however, be indirect evidence. Thus, *The Whisperer in Darkness* ends with Akeley's disembodied face and hands. In *The Colour Out of Space*, five acres of dusty desert remain. *The Dreams in the Witch House* ends with Gilman's hollowed corpse and various inexplicable artefacts. Crucially, however, this evidence is ambiguous: curiously inexplicable, rather than definitively alien.

All this gives us another scenario structure, which runs alongside the one above. Where the previous structure described what the Investigators *see*, this one describes what they can *prove*:

There is no tangible evidence of supernatural activity.

There may be tangible evidence of supernatural activity.

Any hard evidence of supernatural activity is destroyed, although ambiguous evidence may remain.

Putting the two structures together, then, gives the familiar Lovecraftian dilemma: when the story ends, the Investigators have seen things beyond human understanding, but nobody will believe them.

Exceptions: At the Mountains of Madness ends with the horror still accessible, and the narrator begging people not to go there. The Call of Cthulhu's cult suppresses knowledge of their God; the narrator is likely to be assassinated to conceal the cult.

## INCREASING REPRISALS.

LOVECRAFT'S creatures often have human allies.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Cthulhu has worshippers, the Deep Ones have hybrids, the Mi-Go have agents.<sup>2</sup>

They have a useful function within the story: they take action against Investigators, without the creature needing to show itself. Thus, in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, they sabotage the bus. In *The Whisperer in Darkness*, they cut communication lines. And, in *The Call of Cthulhu*, they kill.

Importantly, these servitors are active rather than passive: they respond defensively to the Investigators investigating. First, they warn the Investigators verbally. Later, they take direct reprisals. Then, at the end of the story, they disappear, leaving the creature to take centre stage.

This gives another plot structure, which runs as follows. Not every stage is necessary, but if they occur, they do so, in this order.

The Investigators investigate.

The servitors warn the Investigators not to proceed further.

They take indirect action, such as sabotage, against the Investigators.

They take direct action against the Investigators, trying to kill them.

The Investigators encounter the creature itself.

Naturally, your scenario does not *need* servitors. Often, stories are better without them: they let you focus on the creature. But if you want to use them, this is how.

1. Inventing servitors is easy: the Dark Flautists of Azathoth, The Ice Vampires of Ithaqua, The Shades of the Colour. This can get silly, of course, but the broader lesson is: use the creature's themes to define its servitors. The servitors are, effectively, extensions of the creature.
2. And the *Lloigor* (page 137) have splendidly detailed servitors. In that section, I'll discuss the narrative function of servitors in more detail.

They can also intimidate witnesses and take other indirect action, like breaking into the investigator's hotel room and stealing what evidence they've found so far.

## INCREASING HARM.

NOBODY gets harmed until the end of the story. They may go mad. They may be scared. But, until the end, nobody gets physically harmed.

Or, to be exact, the Investigators do not *see* anyone harmed.<sup>1</sup> What matters here is what the Investigators see. Before the story starts, the Mi-Go might capture brains and the Colour drain victims. But the Investigators only see this at the end.<sup>2</sup>

To modern eyes, this seems strange. After all, most detective stories begin with a corpse. Lovecraft's tales, however, do not. We may hear about horror, but only at the end will we see it.

Now, Lovecraft's creatures do different sorts of harm. Cthulhu kills, the Mi-Go remove brains, the Great Race possess, Colours drain life.

Nevertheless, the rule still generally applies:<sup>3</sup>

In *The Call of Cthulhu*, no-one dies until the end.

In *The Whisperer in Darkness*, the brains-in-cylinders are discovered at the end.

The victims of *The Colour Out of Space* are found at the end.

The protagonist of *The Shadow Out of Time* only discovers his imprisonment in a prehistoric city at the end.

Except the victims of the swamp cult. But the cultists claim it wasn't them, but the "black winged ones"...

1. You'll notice qualifications, like this, throughout this section. Increasing Harm is a broad generalisation, not a solid rule, and there are exceptions to the guidelines I mention. Nevertheless, the concept is useful.
2. Which, of course, is related to *The Final Horror* (page 23), *Increasing Certainty* (page 43) and other topics.
3. At *the Mountains of Madness* is an exception: bodies are found halfway through the story. Interestingly, however, they are unnamed. The named victim is only found later.

Mysterious deaths can happen way back in the past, of course. They show up in that unreliable diary or folk tale.

In fact, the harm increases even more subtly. Take, for example, *The Colour Out of Space*. At the beginning of the story, nothing is harmed. Indeed, there seems to be no immediate danger, only strangeness. Then, when the harm begins, the victims come in a particular order: first plants,<sup>1</sup> then animals,<sup>2</sup> then Nahum's unnamed wife and finally Nahum himself.

Thus, the structure runs as follows:<sup>3</sup>

There is no apparent danger, only strangeness.

There are signs or reports that the creature could be harmful.

Plants are harmed.

Animals are harmed.

Unnamed humans are harmed.

Humans are harmed.

The Investigators are harmed.

Most Lovecraftian tales have a single protagonist; most Lovecraft RPGs have a group of investigators. Having one PC is a very different dynamic to having one of them.

That last step does not appear in *The Colour Out of Space*. But it's an obvious progression, which occurs in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* and *The Shadow Out of Time*.

So carefully manage the harm that the Investigators see. First let them find victims, then, at the end, make them realise they are victims themselves.

Curiously, many players hate animal violence (but think nothing of killing humans).

1. Plant deaths are unusual in Lovecraft, but useful in scenarios. They signal danger without killing anything.
2. Animal deaths are even more useful in scenarios. They demonstrate that the creature can kill. They also foreshadow human deaths.
3. And, as usual, not every scenario needs every step.



## CREATING INVESTIGATIONS.

SO FAR, we have copied Lovecraft's stories. But we're not writing stories. We're playing games: games in which Investigators uncover mysteries.

So, in the next two sections, we convert Lovecraft's stories into investigative scenarios. In this section, *Creating Investigations*, we change his plots into investigations. In the next, *The Investigators*, we'll convert his protagonists into Investigators.

## NOT INVESTIGATING.

LOVECRAFT'S stories are not investigations. There are rarely clues to follow or mysteries to solve. Likewise, Lovecraft's protagonists are not investigators. They encounter the horror, rather than actively uncovering it.

For example, in *The Call of Cthulhu*, the protagonist never picks locks, translates documents, uses libraries or does anything we would recognise as investigation. Similarly, he never persuades or questions people. Instead, everyone he meets is willing to talk.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, the protagonist only actively investigates twice: when he bribes a drunk for information and when he researches genealogy. Otherwise, the mystery comes to him: he stumbles across shuttered houses and willing talkers.

1. To put it another way: Lovecraft's protagonists do not use skills.

NPCs, however, investigate all kinds of stuff, which you can reveal in whatever eerie fashion you like, of course...

Witchhouse, Gilman assembles many clues about the nature of Regiah Mason. You can investigate best by putting the pieces together.

Thus, Lovecraft's protagonists are not really protagonists, but viewpoints to show us the horror. Like remote-controlled robots with mounted cameras, they trundle through the locations, showing us everything Lovecraft wants us to see.

In scenarios, however, such passivity works badly. We cannot let the Investigators trundle through the horror: we must give them something to *do*. Hence, we structure scenarios as investigations, letting the Investigators actively uncover the mystery, rather than passively encountering it.

So, when you steal Lovecraft's stories, convert them into active investigations. Where Lovecraft's protagonists simply find information, make your Investigators actively uncover it. Here are some examples.

Where Lovecraft's protagonists *perceive* things from ancient artefacts, make your Investigators research the artefacts.

Where Lovecraft's protagonists *recall* what an ancient manuscript said, make your Investigators search libraries for the book.

Where Lovecraft's protagonists are *told* folktales, make your Investigators question locals or research legends.

Where Lovecraft's protagonists *know* relevant scientific knowledge, make your Investigators search a library or make the discovery themselves.

Where Lovecraft's NPCs *talk willingly*, make your NPCs unwilling to talk, through anger, fear, shyness, suspicion or another reason.

The general rule is: whenever you have information to give, make Investigators work for it.<sup>1</sup>

1. Here, "work for it" often means "make a skill roll". But not always. If the Investigators roleplay their search for information, they still work for it.

Orbit around the central horror instead of revealing it directly.

## NOT A CRIME.

IN CONVERTING Lovecraft's stories into investigative scenarios, it's easy to think of *crime* investigations. Avoid this. Specifically, avoid stealing elements from detective stories: for example, bodies, murders and evidence.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, avoid making humans responsible for the horror. These are tales of cosmic horror, not human plots. They concern hyperintelligent beings, not evil villains.

Finally, you need not begin scenarios with explicit mysteries, as detective stories do.<sup>2</sup> There need not be a crime, death or mysterious disappearance. Although something must draw the Investigators' attention, it need not be an definite puzzle. You can simply begin with strangeness.

Except, of course, for CHARLES DEXTER WARD.  
And THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP. And HE.  
And COOL AIR. And THE HORROR AT RED  
HOOK. And THE DUNWICH HORROR.

1. And, as ever, if you do steal these elements, keep other events in the scenario as close to Lovecraft as possible.
2. See the footnote in *Stealing Beginnings* (page 5). You must give enough weirdness to intrigue the Investigators, but need not give them an explicit hook.

## LEAVE QUESTIONS UNANSWERED.

MYTHOS stories leave many questions unanswered:<sup>1</sup>

Why do the Mi-Go put brains in containers?

What are the three oaths of the Esoteric Order of Dagon?

What is the text of *The King in Yellow*?<sup>2</sup>

It is tempting, in scenarios, to answer these questions. But they are interesting precisely because they are unanswered. So leave them that way. If you answer them definitively, you take the fun away.

Indeed, if you try answering them, you will find that no answer seems satisfactory. Try writing the Dagonic Oaths or *The King in Yellow*. Whatever you write, it won't be as impressive as the mystery.

So deal with such questions as Lovecraft did: answer them partially and mysteriously, raising even more questions in the process. Why do the Mi-Go put brains in containers? To take them to other planets. What are the Dagonic Oaths? You don't know, but the third one is indefinably terrible. What is the text of *The King in Yellow*? It concerns a Stranger whose face looks like a mask. Give incomplete and nebulous answers.

Most generally, give mysterious descriptions rather than definite ones. For example: hint that there are different types of Deep One, but don't give a breakdown of Deep One subspecies. Create mysteries and, instead of solving them, create more.

1. I've touched on this under *Beginnings And Endings* (page 35) and I'll describe something similar in *Leaving Loose Ends* (page 66).
2. This is from Robert Chambers, not Lovecraft. It is one of the best unanswered Mythos questions. See *Hastur* (page 123).

Incorporate real-life mysteries.  
Try searching any digital archive  
for "strange lights" or "sea serpents".

## THE INVESTIGATORS.

LOVECRAFT'S stories have one protagonist. He<sup>1</sup> is undistinguished and two-dimensional. If he has an occupation, it is undramatic, and he displays no particular skills. He rarely speaks. He is naive: when he meets monsters, he does not realise they are monsters. If he is accompanied, his companions are equally unremarkable.

However, in your games, there will be multiple Investigators, suspicious and alert, distinguished by occupations and skills. This section discusses how to adapt Lovecraft's plots for Investigators.

### OCCUPATIONS AND SKILLS.

IF INVESTIGATORS were exactly like Lovecraft's protagonists, they would be identical, two-dimensional men. Instead, we must make them into believable, but distinct, Lovecraftian protagonists.

To do this, we have occupations and skills. These ensure that everyone gets a moment in the spotlight. When exploring an ancient tomb, the archaeologist goes first; when someone is injured, the doctor steps forward. Skills have a similar function. When a manuscript needs decoding, someone with Cryptography takes the lead; when a heretic tract needs deciphering, the Occult expert takes over.

Thus, occupations and skills ensure the story is shared between the protagonists. Everyone gets a turn.

1. Lovecraft's protagonists were male. You can make his plots seem new simply by putting women in them.<sup>2</sup>
2. Note, especially, the possibility of pregnancy in Deep One plots.

I've always thought there were two Lovecraft-hero archetypes. The young, sensitive dreamer (Randolph Carter) and the older, harder scientist/professional (Professor Armitage).

More interestingly, occupations and skills set the tone for the scenario. In selecting them, players are choosing what their Investigators will *do*.

Thus, if Investigators are scientists and librarians, they will research. If they are soldiers and gangsters, they will fight. Similarly, if players choose the Library Use skill, they will read books. If they choose Fast Talk, they will talk.

So use occupations and skills to create a Lovecraftian tone. Steal the occupations of Lovecraft's protagonists: professors, surveyors and students. Steal from secondary characters too: artists, scientists and police officers.

Similarly, try choosing the skills that Lovecraft's protagonists use in stories. First, however, we must work out what they are. By comparing Lovecraft's stories, the most common ways that protagonists gather information are:

Observing.

Reading.

Asking.

Recalling.<sup>1</sup>

Now, some investigative skills are mentioned directly:

Chemistry (in *The Colour Out of Space*).

Genealogy (in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

Geology (in *At the Mountains of Madness*).

Mathematics (in *The Dreams in the Witch House*).<sup>2</sup>

Trading for information (in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*).

1. An immensely important way of getting information, which hardly appears in most Cthulhu systems. Use it in your games. Fake it with whatever tools your system gives you: an Idea roll, a retrospective skill roll.
2. Curiously, given its importance in *The Dreams in the Witch House* and the many references to geometry in other stories, there is no Mathematics skill in most Cthulhu systems. Put one in.

IN THE HORROR AT RED HOOK, Malone, Lovecraft's policeman, for example, does little except harass his superiors and get crushed by a collapsing basement.

These non-investigative skills are also mentioned:

Operating cars, planes and ships.

Fleeing on foot.

Sneaking.<sup>1</sup>

Putting all this together, we get a list of authentic Lovecraftian skills:

**Social abilities:** Persuade, Oral History, Fast Talk.<sup>2</sup>

**Scientific abilities:** Chemistry, Geology.

**Academic abilities:** Library Use, Languages, Archaeology.

**Escaping on foot:** Jump, Climb, Fleeing.

**Sneaking:** Hide, Sneak.

**Operating transport:** Piloting, Driving.

And we can add the following abilities, which are mentioned indirectly:

**Performance abilities:** Art, Craft.

**Practical abilities:** Navigate, Electrical Repair, Mechanical Repair, Operate Heavy Machinery.<sup>3</sup>

To give your games a Lovecraftian feel, then, try choosing skills from the eight groups listed above: *social*, *scientific*, *academic*, *escaping*, *sneaking*, *transport*, *performance* and *practical*. You needn't stick to the exact skills mentioned (e.g. Chemistry): if a skill fits into a group, choose it, even if it isn't specifically mentioned (e.g. Biology, Astronomy).

1. When Lovecraft describes sneaking, he describes sneaking *out* of somewhere dangerous. He rarely mentions sneaking *in*. There are mentions of creeping cautiously into mysterious places, but this simply builds atmosphere: it's not actual infiltration.
2. These skill and ability names are taken from various roleplaying games. So don't be surprised if you find one on your character sheet, but not another.
3. Especially in explorative stories such as *At the Mountains of Madness*.

What is missing from the list above? Here are some non-Lovecraftian abilities, which appear in many roleplaying games, but almost never in Lovecraft:

**Combat abilities.**

**Active subterfuge:** Locksmith, Disguise, Shadowing.

**Detective investigation:** Evidence Collection, Interrogation.

Avoid these abilities if you want a bleak Lovecraftian tone. After all, if the Investigators take combat, subterfuge and detective abilities, they will want to fight, infiltrate and detect. If you want a scenario that feels like a Lovecraft story, start with the Investigators.

## HANDLING SUSPICION.

LOVECRAFT'S protagonists are frighteningly naive. In *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, the protagonist sleeps in a room with no doorbolts. In *The Whisperer in Darkness*, the protagonist talks to a thinly-disguised monster, then goes to bed. No Cthulhu player would be so trusting.

In your games, then, expect Investigators to realise that monsters are monsters. Design scenarios so that, even if the Investigators get suspicious, the scenario works.

For example, if you put a man with a buzzing voice in a Mi-Go scenario, ensure the scenario works whether they shoot him or interview him.<sup>1</sup> Make sure that, even if he dies, the Investigators get to the next part of the scenario.

1. Try giving him documents to carry. Then, even if the Investigators kill him, the documents show where to go next.

That's true of horror protagonists in general. Don't go into the Attic!



## STAYING THE DISTANCE.

FINALLY, Lovecraft's protagonists never walk away.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the final horror, they stay until they see it. Thus, your Investigators must continue until the end.

Sometimes, the players make this happen. Perhaps there is a tacit agreement: they know that, for the scenario to work, they must pursue the mystery. Perhaps they invent reasons to keep pursuing. Or perhaps they give Investigators in-character reasons for investigating the Mythos.<sup>2</sup> For example, the Investigators seek power, knowledge or academic status.

Sometimes, the GM ensures the Investigators pursue the mystery. For example, you could give them an in-character reason to investigate. Examples from Lovecraft stories include surveying for a reservoir (from *The Colour Out Of Space*) or finding what happened to you (from *The Shadow Out Of Time*). You might, alternatively, structure the scenario so they cannot escape the horror.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, and most satisfyingly, sometimes Investigators create their own final horror. For example, in a Shan scenario, one Investigator may decapitate another, to remove the creature from their head. In a Deep One scenario, the Investigators may burn a house of hybrids.

So watch for these moments. They provide the best endings of all. If something suitably horrific happens, put aside your preplanned final horror and end the scenario.

And, of course, you can encourage these moments in your scenario. If you put a Shan inside an Investigator, you can bet it won't end well.

1. The roleplaying game *Call of Cthulhu* describes scenarios as resembling the layers of an onion: the Investigators unpeel the layers, one by one, until they decide it is unsafe to continue. By contrast, Lovecraft's protagonists always continue. They unpeel the whole onion until they find the monster at its centre (at which point the metaphor breaks down).
2. The roleplaying game *Trail of Cthulhu* gives its Investigators a Drive: a reason why they pursue the Mythos.
3. For example, if the Investigators have a Cthonian egg, the creature will chase them whatever they do. See *Cthonians* (page 87).

## ANOMALIES.

NOW FOR three things that rarely appear in Lovecraft, but are staples of Cthulhu gaming: fights, cultists and rituals.<sup>1</sup>

For a strictly Lovecraftian scenario, omit all three. Try replacing fights with chases, cultists with servitors and rituals with other climactic endings.

Nevertheless, all three can be fun in roleplaying games. Here, then, are guidelines to add fights, cultists and rituals into your scenario, while sticking close to Lovecraft.

### FIGHTS.

THERE are two types of fight. The first type is tied to particular locations: you arrive *somewhere* and are attacked by the *things that are there*. These opponents are reactive: they sit in a room, waiting for the Investigators to arrive. For example, you arrive at the bottom of the Great Race's city and are attacked by Flying Polyps.

Such fights fit neatly into Lovecraftian plots. Take any structure, above, and add one fight per location.<sup>2</sup> Instantly, you'll have a Lovecraftian scenario with added combat.

The second type of fight comes to you: when you investigate, someone uses violence to stop you investigating. This type of fight is more common in Lovecraft: for example, in *The Whisperer In Darkness*, the Mi-Go attack Akeley's farmhouse, while in *The Call of Cthulhu*, an assassin kills Professor Angell in a cobbled street.

1. A fourth candidate is space travel, which occurs much more frequently in games than in Lovecraft's Mythos stories. The guideline for space travel is: where possible, refer to space, rather than going there. Thus, put observatories and meteorites into your scenario, but not spaceships. If you do send the Investigators into space, describe the journey in fantastic, nebulous terms. See *Obfuscating* (page 67) and *Dreaming* (page 71).
2. When fights are tied to particular places, they force you to structure scenarios as chains of locations. This is not always good. As mentioned above, Lovecraft's stories don't divide into discrete locations.

*This type of fight is more terrifying.  
The monster 57 comes to you.*

FAINTING: Lots of Lovecraft's protagonists faint dead away at the climax. Sometimes, they faint during the rising action. This allows Lovecraft to:  
• Imply the protagonist is unreliable  
• Avoid a clear description or memory of the monster  
• Advance the story clock or move the hero in space (to a hotel room to a sanitarium, to the abandoned church at night)  
• Do creepy things to the protagonist all in one go.

For this type of fight, use the structure given in *Increasing Reprisals* (page 45), adding fights to the later stages:

The Investigators investigate.

The servitors warn the Investigators not to proceed further.

They take direct action to stop the Investigators investigating.  
There's a fight!

As the Investigators investigate, the servitors take further action.  
There are more fights!

The Investigators encounter the creature itself. There's a fight!

Thus, early fights are with servitors, while the final fight is with the creature. This maintains narrative distance: by using human opponents for the early fights, we save the sight of the creature for the Final Horror.

In fact, you can expand the structure above, sending progressively more horrific creatures at the Investigators:

The Investigators investigate.

Human servitors warn the Investigators not to proceed further.

Human servitors fight the Investigators.

Half-human servitors (humans that are possessed, insane, infected or *changed*) fight the Investigators.

Monstrous servitors fight the Investigators.

The Investigators fight the creature itself.

Don't put all these opponents into one scenario. Instead, use this structure as a guideline, showing when to introduce half-humans and monsters into a story. Human servitors can arrive near the start of the scenario. Half-human ones should wait until later.

In both sorts of fights, try adding narrative distance. Simply use the tricks from *Keeping Distance* (page 40) to add separation between Investigators and opponents.

Thus, the Investigators could fight:

Things that are glimpsed, rather than viewed clearly.

Things obscured by darkness, water or fog.

Things that protrude from behind physical barriers, such as walls or floors.

Things whose very identity is open to many interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

The secret, here, is that fighting something unseen is scarier than fighting something visible. Likewise, fighting something unknown is scarier than fighting something you understand. The combat mechanics stay the same, but the description makes the fight more interesting.

One final descriptive tip: when the Investigators win the fight with the creature, emphasise that the horror isn't over. Perhaps, like Cthulhu, the defeat merely subdues the thing. Perhaps, like the Colour, other creatures are waiting.<sup>2</sup>

Never give the Investigators victory. Let them win the fight, but never let them defeat the Mythos.<sup>3</sup>

1. For example, attack the Investigators with something that could either be a dog, werewolf or Hound of Tindalos. Or let them fight in the dark, against *humanoid* opponents. They will not know what hit them.
2. See *The Realisation* (page 26).
3. Try letting Investigators fight *in order to* escape. They cannot kill the thing (or things), but they can fight their way out.

Remember, leave no alien bodies behind. Dead servitors can have clues, tattoos, amulets, or (best of all) deformities: dead monsters dissolve.

## CULTISTS.

IN MANY Cthulhu games, cultists are everywhere: the villains behind every plot, the opponents in every fight. They are bland, predictable and unthreatening. If you use them, make them interesting.

Firstly, avoid the word “cultist”. Lovecraft didn’t use it: indeed, he rarely used the word “cult”. Instead, he describes the person: worshipper, prisoner, “the man”, “a voice”. Relabel your cultists and they become more interesting.

Next, give the cult a rich description. Here are some examples from Lovecraft’s stories:

The unorthodox churches of Innsmouth, with blasphemous creeds.<sup>1</sup>

The shadowy Great Race helpers, who assist their travels in time.

The Cthulhu worshippers in New Orleans, baying and dancing around rings of fire.

The immortal leaders of the Cthulhu cult in the Chinese mountains.

The Mi-Go agents, with buzzing voices, who intercept and infiltrate.

Steal these descriptions or invent your own. Note especially that these followers are rarely described as *worshippers*. Nor are they *organised in a cult*. So, rather than generic cultists, try using *followers*, *helpers* or *thralls* of the creatures.

Finally, note that Lovecraft’s cultists are rarely the villains or instigators. Make the Mythos the true horror. The cultists merely assist.

1. See *Deep Ones* (page 98).

2. Try describing your cultists as less than human. Lovecraft’s cultists are monstrous or animalistic: the Mi-Go’s agents have buzzing voices, the Cthulhu cult is animalistic and the Deep One hybrids are fishlike. The Mythos has reduced their humanity. So, when you describe cultists, throw in some animal references.

Even one cultist can be terrifying: Kesiah Mason (DREAMS IN THE WITCH HOUSE) is just one witch; Asenath Waite (THING ON THE DOORSTEP) holds just one member of the Order of the Skull.

## RITUALS.

LOVECRAFT’S BEST ritual occurs in *The Dunwich Horror*. In that story, Armitage fights a sorcerous battle with Yog-Sothoth’s offspring. That fight teaches us many things about using rituals in scenarios.<sup>1</sup>

Firstly, learning about rituals is *harmful*. It exhausts Armitage and it should exhaust your Investigators. They won’t simply discover a spell to read. Piecing the spell together must cost them health and sanity.

Next, this learning is *unreliable*. Your Investigators won’t discover a spell that will definitely stop the creature. They will discover, from obscure sources and references, a spell that *might* stop the creature. But only if they cast it precisely right.

Additionally, spellcasting requires *narrative distance*. In *The Dunwich Horror*, we see the first stages of the ritual from Armitage’s point of view. When things get weird, however, Lovecraft takes a step back. He describes *how others see* the sorcery, *from a distance, through a telescope*.

So, when your Investigators dabble in magic, try adding narrative distance. Describe what people see from afar, what the Investigators think happens or what they remember later. Or ask the players to describe their sorcery in this way.

Finally, spellcasting is a *struggle*. In *The Dunwich Horror*, Armitage frequently seems close to losing control of the spell or the creature. So make rituals a battle: one the Investigators might lose.

1. In this section, I blur the line between spellcasting and rituals. Generally, everything applies, not just to rituals, but to any form of Mythos magic.

The Strange case of Charles Dexter Ward also ends with a ritual, and in both cases, it's used as a cop-out ending. Say the right words and the badness goes away. Rituals are a crutch for Cthulhu stories. Avoid using them if you can.

## STEALING DESCRIPTIONS.

THE LAST thing left to steal is Lovecraft's descriptive style. His ponderous, curious writing immediately sets the otherworldly tone.

Here, there is a danger of pastiche: if every creature is "eldritch" and every moon is "gibbous", the game becomes clichéd. Let's start with those clichés.

### AVOIDING CLICHÉS.

HERE are the worst Lovecraftian clichés.<sup>1</sup> Unless you're brilliantly reinventing them, find an alternative.<sup>2</sup>

The Necronomicon. Try the Pnakotic Manuscripts instead.

"Eldritch". Try "blasphemous".

Tentacles. Try claws or appendages.

Cultists. Try worshippers or servitors (as above).

The Elder Sign. Try any other symbol.

Avatars of Nyarlathotep. Try Hastur or Shub-Niggurath instead.

Arkham. Try Kingsport.

If you must use a cliché, change the description. Describe something half-octopoid, half-dragon, but don't immediately call it Cthulhu. Describe a malevolent, branching symbol, but don't call it the Elder Sign.

1. Some, such as tentacles, are used often by Lovecraft but overused in games. Others, such as cultists, appear rarely in Lovecraft.
2. Please do brilliantly reinvent them. Write an entire scenario about the cave paintings on which the Necronomicon was based. Write a story set in a meticulously-detailed Arkham.

Another cliché: the sacrificial dagger. Maybe, instead, the cult familiar chews on the sacrifice, or they drink the sacrifice's blood through sharpened straws; or the scientist has carved runes into his bone saw or geological core sampler.

## PAINTING PICTURES.

WHEN Investigators arrive somewhere or see something new, pause the action and describe the scene.

In Lovecraft's stories, each location warrants a paragraph of description, sometimes even pages. So never assume the players know what their Investigators are seeing. Take moments away from the investigation to describe the world.

### DESCRIBING DETAILS.

IMAGINE a camera that pans, from a distance, over a Lovecraftian location. As it moves, we see the place exactly. Everything is clear.

Now imagine a camera that focuses tightly on details. It gives confusing images: broken windows, cobblestone streets, a tangle of chimney pots. These details cloud our mental image of the location: we cannot see the wood for the trees.

Use the second camera, not the first. Don't describe monsters and locations from top to bottom. Instead, describe individual, isolated elements.

Here, for example, is a town described using three elements:

An aging church, with a sagging, twisted grey-brown spire and rusting weathercock.

Cobbled streets, which are slippery even though there has been no rain.

Abandoned houses, on which paint peels and the window-frames rot.

Try asking players to describe what they see.

Some of these are shibboleths, not clichés. They add to the Lovecraftian feel. It's like saying 'avoid having Vulcans calling things illogical in a Star Trek game' - the players want that cliché.

The players still have to ~~be~~ interact with the environment you describe. If they ask what the church looks like, you can give them a jumble of disturbing impressions. If they ask how they can get into the church, describe the door.



Describe these elements in detail, too. Don't just describe a church spire: mention cracked tiles and leaking guttering. Don't just describe a cobbled street: have loose cobbles and lichen growing in the cracks.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, when you describe monsters, give tantalising glimpses, rather than the full picture. This, for example, is how Lovecraft describes Cthulhu:

A tangible blackness.

A green, gelatinous mass.

Flapping, membraneous wings.

Thus, he does not give an overview, starting with the squid-like head and ending with tentacles.<sup>2</sup> He zooms in on details. This emphasises Cthulhu's size (he cannot all be seen at once) and the protagonist's confusion. So give disorientating, detailed glimpses, rather than the full picture.

## BEING NICE.

THE MYTHOS is creepiest when it is nice. The Elder Things just want to learn. The Great Race treat captives well. The Mi-Go want peace and intellectual rapport.<sup>3</sup>

Try this horrific benevolence. Let Deep One hybrids welcome Investigators into their hotel. Make Cthulhu cultists eager to share secrets. It is surprising and disturbing.

*The Deep Ones keep their bargains. Like the Devil does.*

1. Inventing these details is easy. Close your eyes. Picture, say, an old house. Then mentally zoom in.
2. Ramsey Campbell sometimes gives top-to-bottom descriptions of creatures. They are less effective than Lovecraft's descriptions.
3. This might be a facade, but it's infinitely more interesting if they mean it.

*And Cthulhu will teach  
us new forms of Joy.*

## ENGAGING THE SENSES.

LOVECRAFT's descriptions are not just visual. He describes sounds, smells and supernatural feelings.

For example, in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, the protagonist hears a raucous bell, smells a disgusting odour and feels a odd malignancy. In a single paragraph of *The Call of Cthulhu*, Lovecraft describes Cthulhu's sight, sound, stink and alien presence.

So, when describing anything, ask yourself:

What does it look like?

What does it smell like?

What does it sound like?

What does it feel like?

Whatever the answers, make them unpleasant.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the least important of these senses is hearing. Riff on the creature's themes: thus, Deep Ones make gurgling sounds, while Colours suck. Remember the value of silence: try describing locations as unnaturally still.

A more important sense is smell. When the Investigators enter a location or see a supernatural creature, always describe the odour. You need not be imaginative: mouldy and rotten odours work well.

Most important of all is the supernatural feeling. Here, steal directly from Lovecraft. Simply describe a place as unpleasant, repellent or *wrong*.<sup>2</sup>

1. But, for an important exception, see *Dreaming* (page 71).
2. Imagine saying this in italics. *Wrong*.

*Find a way to make  
them taste the horror.*

My favourite bit of Lovecraftian description is in *Dreams in the Witch House*, when Gilman realises he's being drawn to a point in deep space as he walks around Arkham. Something is tugging him from the stars.

## LEAVING LOOSE ENDS.

PEPPER your descriptions with unexplained references.<sup>1</sup>  
Here are some Lovecraftian examples:

“The queer ancient house of which so many legends are told”, from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.

“The fabled plateau of Leng”, from *At the Mountains of Madness*.

“The immortal allegory of Tao”, from *The Whisperer in Darkness*.

Lovecraft also threw about references to “the moon ladder” and “the black pit”. Such references hint at mysteries which he has no time to explain. Try doing the same.

Often, too, Lovecraft describes *strangely specific* details.<sup>2</sup>  
For example:

The violet westward mountains in *At the Mountains of Madness*.

Brown Jenkin nuzzling people in *The Dreams in the Witch House*.

The soapy, greenish-black stone with gold flecks in *The Call of Cthulhu*.

The three tall steeples over Innsmouth.

Why are the mountains violet? Why does Brown Jenkin nuzzle? What is the green, black, soapy, flecked stone? Why are there three steeples? Lovecraft probably did not know himself. But the specificity adds richness to the story.

So be oddly specific. Give your town blue-green cupolas. Let your creatures leave heptagonal hieroglyphs. Make a material glow dark, grainy red. Add details and leave them unexplained.

1. I discuss something similar in *Leave Questions Unanswered* (page 51).

2. See *Ithaqua* (page 130). Algernon Blackwood gives his creature an “odour of lions”. The specific animal makes the description more interesting.

This works really well in handouts. If a diary mentions ‘the curious whiteness in the air’, the players will tie themselves up in knots worrying about the cryptic phrase.

## OBFUSCATING.

LOVECRAFT’S descriptions are often deliberately unhelpful. They blur pictures, rather than revealing them.<sup>1</sup>

Often, he simply states that something is beyond description:

“The Thing cannot be described; there is no language ... a mountain walked or stumbled.” (from *The Call of Cthulhu*)

“It presented no identifying features whatever; and at the end of the tests the college scientists were forced to own they could not place it.” (from *The Colour Out of Space*)

“I think their predominant colour was a greyish-green...” (from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*)

It’s a cheap trick, but a good one, and he uses it a lot. For example, in one paragraph of *The Colour Out of Space*, the “nameless” colour, which “every spectator later described differently”, produces a sound that nobody had “ever heard”.

Try, then, cloaking descriptions behind disclaimers, implying they are approximations to the full horror. Describe what Investigators *think they see* or *remember later*. And, sometimes, state that there are no words to describe the horror.<sup>1</sup>

More subtly, Lovecraft’s descriptions often convey *feeling*, rather than *information*. To do this, he uses:

Words of religious significance: Blasphemous, Daemoniac, Evil.<sup>2</sup>

Words implying scale: Immense, Great, Limitless.

1. As an aside: consider how this relates to maps in roleplaying games. At first sight, maps seem deliberately non-obfuscatory: they show where everything is. In play, however, maps reveal how little the Investigators know. Behind that door, the map suggests, is something you cannot see.
2. Don’t overlook these religious words. They are quintessentially Lovecraftian and give an instant sense of period.

Again, throw it back to the players.  
“What did it look like to you?”

You can also use these weird little details as the core elements of your own monster or enigma. Steal, and blow up the image until it's only half-recognizable.

He also combines them: 'Pre-human' was connotations of both alien life AND immense age.

- Words implying impossibility: Contradiction, Wrong, Abnormal.
- Words implying age: Ancient, Timeless.
- Words implying repulsion: Intolerable, Nauseating, Abhorrent.
- Words implying alienness: Other-worldly, Inhuman.

Although these words describe something, they crucially do not allow the reader to picture it.

Next, Lovecraft uses "half-descriptions": that is, the word "half-", followed by an adjective. By doing this, he creates mystery: for example, a *vegetable* alien race sounds silly, but a *half-vegetable* race is intriguing.

Here is a selection of half-adjectives:

- Half-forgotten.
- Half-remembered.
- Half worn away.
- Half-existence.
- Half-afraid.
- Half-illusory.
- Half-mental.
- Half-bewitched.
- Half-abandoned.
- Half-concealed.
- Half-numb.

Another Lovecraft technique:

"like, but also like"  
• Like an octopus, but also like a dragon.

"like, but not like"  
• Like cattle, but humanoid.

"like, but wrong"  
• Like a gem, but dark.

- Half-delirious.
- Half-deserted.
- Half-imaginary.
- Half-incapable.
- Half-unknown.

Half-alive.

Try the same trick for verbs and nouns. Never tiptoe when you can half-tiptoe, doubt when you can half-doubt or imagine when you can half-imagine. Let your investigators hear half-sounds in the half-daylight, getting half-impressions of a half-human.

Creatures are often half one thing, half another. Thus, the Mi-Go are half-fungous and half-crustacean. Cthulhu is half-awake and half-dreaming.

And, finally, Lovecraft uses the same trick without the word "half". Thus, the Deep Ones are both fishlike and humanoid. The Colour is both liquid and gaseous. Meanwhile, the bas-relief in *The Call of Cthulhu* seems both modern and ancient; depicts a creature octopoid, human and dragonlike; and is green and black, with golden flecks.

Often, these descriptions seem nonsensical. How can you be half-incapable: aren't you either capable or incapable? Similarly, what does half-solid mean: can you touch it or not?

You need neither explain nor know. When you describe something, simply smash irreconcilable concepts together. Whatever it is, it is beyond the Investigators' understanding.

## DESCRIBING PRACTICALITIES.

LOVECRAFT frequently describes practicalities in detail: especially when mentioning accommodation, transport, weather and geography.

Here are some examples. Note the extraordinary, unnecessary level of explanation.

The sullen, queer-looking night clerk told me I could have Room 428 on next the top floor – large, but without running water – for a dollar ... I signed the register, paid my dollar, let the clerk take my valise and followed that sour, solitary attendant up three creaking flights of stairs past dusty corridors which seemed wholly devoid of life. (from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*)

I changed trains in Boston and began the long, westward run out of familiar regions into those I knew less thoroughly. Waltham – Concord – Ayer – Fitchburg – Gardner – Athol. My train reached Greenfield seven minutes late, but the northbound connecting express had been held. (from *The Whisperer in Darkness*)

The successful establishment of the southern base above the glacier in Latitude 86° 7', East Longitude 174° 23' and the phenomenally rapid and effective borings and blastings made at various points reached by our sledge trips and short aeroplane flights are matters of history, as is the arduous and triumphant ascent of Mt Nansen. (from *At the Mountains of Madness*)

This ponderous detail does three things. It gives an air of normality, later to be shattered. It slows the narrative, building tension. And, importantly in Cthulhu games, it allows historical descriptions.

Never, then, let your Investigators simply sleep or travel. Describe the details.

Research! Dropping in historical details makes the game feel weighty.

Use Google Maps, or contemporary travel guides like Baedeker's.

## DREAMING.

OCCASIONALLY, Lovecraft switches to a dreamlike writing style, giving a sudden and vivid contrast.<sup>1</sup>

The material seemed to be predominantly gold, though a weird lighter lustrousness hinted at some strange alloy with an equally beautiful and scarcely identifiable metal. Its condition was almost perfect, and one could have spent hours in studying the striking and puzzlingly untraditional designs – some simply geometrical, and some plainly marine – chased or moulded in high relief on its surface with a craftsmanship of incredible skill and grace. (from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*)

There was a strangely calming element of cosmic beauty in the hypnotic landscape through which we climbed and plunged fantastically. Time had lost itself in the labyrinths behind, and around us stretched only the flowering waves of faery and the recaptured loveliness of vanished centuries – the hoary groves, the untainted pastures edged with gay autumnal blossoms, and at vast intervals the small brown farmsteads nestling amidst huge trees beneath vertical precipices of fragrant brier and meadow-grass. Even the sunlight assumed a supernal glamour ... I seemed to find in its necromancy a thing I had innately known or inherited and for which I had always been vainly searching. (from *The Whisperer in Darkness*)

These descriptions rarely make sense. Has the protagonist of *The Whisperer in Darkness* really been “vainly searching” for the Vermont woodland? Has he really inherited something from the creatures? This senselessness is itself disturbing.

So, in your games, try switching briefly into dreamlike description. Your watchwords are *beautiful*, *light*, *captivating*, *ancient* and *eerie*.<sup>2</sup> It will surprise and disturb your players.

1. The style resembles that used in his “Dream” stories, such as *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*.
2. *Beautiful*, *light* and *captivating* contrast with *ugly*, *dark* and *repellent*, which describe most things in Lovecraft. *Ancient* and *eerie*, by contrast, resemble other Lovecraftian descriptions. Another possible word is *dreamlike*, which although tautological, is a useful spark for the imagination.

Recall the glories of Y'ha-Nthlei in THE SHADOW OVER INNSMOUTH, of Providence in CHARLES DEXTER WARD and HAUNTER OF THE DARK, and of THE NAMELESS CITY

So use this style, sometimes to describe something truly dreadful.



## REMEMBERING TALES.

RATHER than discovering information, Lovecraft's protagonists often remember it.<sup>1</sup> In particular, they remember events related to whatever they are investigating. For example:

On discovering an Elder Thing corpse, the protagonist recalls "wild tales of cosmic hill things from outside, told by a folklorist colleague in Miskatonic's English department".

On seeing the Cthulhu bas-relief, Professor Webb recalls his studies of Eskimo cults.

While attempting to decipher carvings, Akeley is reminded of "fearful myths" in the Necronomicon.

On reading reports of bloated Mi-Go corpses, Wilmarth recalls folklore outlined in "the exceedingly rare monograph of Eli Davenport, which embraces material orally obtained prior to 1839 among the oldest people of the state".<sup>2</sup>

So, in your scenarios, let Investigators remember tales from faraway countries, remote places and ancient writings. These related tales rarely give more information. Instead, they provide connectedness, continuity and richness.

Imply everything is connected.  
Imply our reality is a thin  
gauze over cosmic horror.

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1. See *Occupations And Skills* (page 52). There, I mentioned that recalling was a frequently-used way of getting information. Here, I describe recollections that, while providing little *information*, add descriptive richness.

2. Note the layers of narrative distance here. Wilmarth *recalls* (rather than reads) a *rare monograph* that describes folklore, *collected a long time ago*, from the *recollections of elderly people*.

## MONSTERS.

THERE are surprising similarities between Lovecraft's monsters. Almost all are:

Ancient.

From other planets.

Foul-smelling.

Repulsive.

Hated by animals.

Featured in old tales.

Bigger than humans.<sup>1</sup>

- Or, conversely:
- From the future
  - From inside the Earth, the "original tenants"
  - Smell strange, like juniper/heated copper
  - Fascinating
  - Loved / followed by animals
  - Unknown to history
  - Tiny, but intelligent

This is most useful when creating your own monsters. By default, they have the attributes above. If, for example, you used werewolves in a Mythos story, they would be probably be ancient, repulsive and originally from another planet.

In addition, many of Lovecraft's creatures:

Make a piping or whistling sound.

Communicate via telepathy.

Appear in dreams.

Try using these descriptions for any creature. Let the Mi-Go make a piping or whistling sound as they fly. Make the Deep Ones telepathic. Give the Investigators dreams of shifting, alien Colours.

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1. Even the Great Race and Elder Things, who are approximately human-sized, are actually slightly taller than humans.

## NAMING.

FINALLY, Lovecraft calls creatures by many names. Often, they are “things”, “creatures” or “horrors”. Sometimes, they have names specific to the situation: “pursuers”, “my host”, “the column of unknown colour”. Whatever he calls the monsters, he switches names regularly.

Crucially, he rarely uses the name we commonly associate with the creature. For example, the Mi-Go are never directly called ‘Mi-Go’. They are “Winged Ones”, “Outer Ones”, “hillside creatures” and many other names.

So avoid naming the creatures. By leaving them unnamed, you keep them unknown and frightening. Resist the temptation to say, “There’s a Deep One.” Instead, vary the names you use, and avoid the best-known one.

He also mixes and reuses names. The elder Things were also referred to as “old ones”.

## THE MYTHOS.

THIS section examines Lovecraft’s creatures, one by one. It returns to their original stories and rebuilds each creature from scratch.

By doing this, we often get a new picture of a creature. For example, the Flying Polyps appear as a living wind, while Ithaqua personifies isolation. Sometimes, underused details emerge: the Deep Ones are associated with beauty, while Shoggoths are imitators.

We also find things we can steal. For example, the Great Race have a superb underground city, the Lloigor have the best servitors and the Shan have an interesting form of possession. Steal these things for other creatures. Give Deep Ones a city like that of the Great Race. Give Cthulhu servitors like those of the Lloigor.

The list of creatures is deliberately incomplete. It’s a selection of the best, the creatures that do particular things well. Many favourites do not appear: for example, Cthugha doesn’t get his own section. To write a Cthugha adventure, try copying from Cthulhu or Ithaqua.

When you use this section, treat canon with disdain. Reinvent the creatures for yourself, ignoring anything you have read before. For example, the classic Call of Cthulhu scenario *Escape From Innsmouth* defines the three Dagonic Oaths. Don’t stick to this definition. Define the Oaths yourself or, better still, leave them undefined.

Remember especially the four tricks we defined at the start. Steal an idea from a creature, tweak it and reuse it.

Steal something that Lovecraft didn't emphasise about a creature and build a scenario around it. Steal ideas from different creatures and combine them. And find themes and riff on them.<sup>1</sup>

Most importantly, be creative. Perhaps Cthulhu *controls* the sea. Perhaps Ithaqua inhabits any wasteland, not just the Arctic. Perhaps, underneath it all, the Deep Ones genuinely want to relate to humans.<sup>2</sup>

- 
1. So, for Deep Ones, riff on themes of immortality or breeding. For Cthulhu, riff on themes of dreams or water. And so on.
  2. Probably by breeding with them. Deep down, they just want to be loved.

## AZATHOTH.

*Stories: The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath, The Whisperer in Darkness and The Dreams in the Witch House.*<sup>1</sup>

AZATHOTH is nebulous, defined only by teasing references.

He is the nuclear chaos, sprawling and bubbling on his throne at the centre of the universe.

Around him, flutes pipe and drums beat in a maddening rhythm.<sup>2</sup>

Other gods dance around him.

He is mindless, an idiot god.

So, for an Azathothian scenario, we must make something from these, using the tricks outlined above.<sup>3</sup>

First, try a straight substitution: Azathoth for Cthulhu. Take part of the plot from *The Call of Cthulhu* (specifically, the Tale of Inspector Legrasse) and just add Azathoth.

The Investigators discover a jet-black sculpture of a bubbling, sprawling mass, made of unearthly material.

They discover it is linked with barbaric rituals in the mountains.

When they arrive at a mountain town, they discover reports of disappearances and rumours of cults.

They find a raving man who screams of evil in the highest mountains.

When they climb these mountains, the Investigators find worshippers dancing mindlessly to piping flutes.<sup>4</sup>

At the climax of the ritual, a black polypous thing, possibly an extension or facet of Azathoth, bulges down from the night sky.

- 
1. Whenever I list a story without an author, it's by Lovecraft. Here, because Azathoth is only mentioned briefly in stories, I omit synopses of those stories.
  2. Steal this reference whenever you have music and dance in a scenario, especially if it is influenced by the Mythos. If, for example, the Investigators hear jazz in New Orleans, it will have a piping clarinet and a maddening rhythm.
  3. Use the same method for Shub-Niggurath scenarios. Also see the "living nature" creature in *Flying Polyps* (page 109).
  4. We've replaced the standard descent with a climb.

This is a straight steal, with imagery changed. Cthulhu's green becomes Azathoth's black. Drums become flutes. And, where *The Call of Cthulhu* riffed around the theme of water, with lakes and swamps, this plot riffs around space themes, with the mountains and the night sky.<sup>1</sup>

Next, instead of stealing a Lovecraft plot for Azathoth, let's assemble one. Use a progression of Lovecraftian locations, slowly increasing the horror and harm. Riff on Azathothian themes and add some Lovecraftian set pieces.

The Investigators read press reports of comatose animals found in mountain streams. The animals are drooling corpses, their minds blasted by unknown forces.

Following the streams, they find a forgotten, crumbling mountain town. Although most inhabitants will not talk, one tells them strange tales of worshippers who lost their minds and raved about stars.

That night, the Investigators stay in an old and stinking hotel. On the wind, they hear discordant flutes and the beat of drums. They dream of flying beyond the stars, where polypous things caper around an unknown black mass.

The next morning, the Investigators find a twitching and comatose dog. Its mind has gone.

When they enquire about the worshippers, the Investigators are told they worship at an observatory on the highest peak. They are warned not to go there.

The Investigators go there. They find a drooling, near-comatose man, babbling about stars and thrones. There are records of strange rituals performed in the observatory. The sound of flutes is loud, now, and comes from beneath the observatory.

1. Try adding further details from other stories. Steal descriptions of the mountain town from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. Steal the mountain expedition from *At the Mountains of Madness*.

When the Investigators descend, they find an ancient network of tunnels. Deep within, they find a great chamber, with a bubbling mass seething within. It is Azathoth, summoned, seeping through an interstitial vortex. The bubbling mass grows and floods through the tunnels, forcing the Investigators to flee.

At the end, the Investigators stand outside the observatory. An immense blackness radiates from the mountain, beautiful and terrible, as Azathoth returns to the sky.

This simply uses the tricks outlined above. The locations are stock ones: a town, an old building, an underground city. The distance between Investigators and Azathoth decreases: the Investigators read reports, hear second-hand stories, meet a babbling witness, then see Azathoth himself. The victims increase in importance: first a dog, a human, then the Investigators themselves. And, since Lovecraft didn't say how Azathoth harms people, this plot riffs on the "mindless" theme, giving the victims blasted minds.

It also steals Lovecraftian set pieces. Animals-in-streams come from *The Whisperer in Darkness*, the dreams from *The Call of Cthulhu*. The bubbling mass is a Shoggoth clone, from *At the Mountains of Madness*. And the ending comes from *The Colour Out of Space*, with blackness replacing colour.

We've taken space as our theme for Azathoth, giving us meteorites, telescopes, astronomy and so on.<sup>1</sup> An alternative theme is "nuclear", riffing on "nuclear chaos", which takes us into the physics laboratory and Manhattan project.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, even the nebulous Azathoth can spawn scenarios. Simply steal his ideas and riff on his themes. If we can do it for him, we can do it for anyone.

1. To avoid problems with narrative distance, we *refer to* space, rather than *going* there.  
2. Almost certainly, Lovecraft didn't mean "nuclear" this way, but it's too good to waste.

Debatable! How often does Lovecraft talk about Einstein?

Steal only the creepy bits from BEYOND THE WALL OF SLEEP here.

Try setting this somewhere real.  
North Carolina's Brown Mountain is well-known for mysterious activity.

## COLOURS.

*Story: The Colour Out of Space.*

*Synopsis: On arrival in the Arkham Hills, the protagonist meets Ammi, who tells the following story. A meteorite fell, which scientists studied but could not understand. Afterwards, local flora and fauna grew strangely, then decayed. When Ammi visited the farm where the meteorite fell, he found the farmer and his wife, alive but crumbling, apparently attacked by something in the well. Ammi summoned the authorities. When they arrived, everything began to glow and the Colour shot from the well into the sky. It left behind a blighted area, which grows by an inch each year.*

COLOURS, unlike Azathoth, don't transplant well. Try taking the plot of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* and substituting Colours for Deep Ones. It won't work.<sup>1</sup> You can't have a hotel run by a Colour.

This is because Colours are unique. They do one thing and do it well: slow, inexorable decay.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Colour scenarios are about decay.

First, decide when your scenario begins in the Colour's chronology:

The Colour falls to Earth in a meteorite.

It gradually sucks the life from the land.

The Colour shoots back into the sky, although part remains behind.<sup>3</sup> It leaves a devastated area, like an acid burn.

- 
1. Although try substituting a buried Old One with a Colour.
  2. Another unique race is the Great Race. Their one thing, which they do well, is possession.
  3. It's unclear whether there are several Colours, of which one remains behind, or one, of which part remains behind. It doesn't matter.





This gives us three places to begin a scenario: when the Colour arrives, when it is present and just after it has left. Let's briefly consider the third. Lovecraft largely leaves this unexplored, but describes:

A devastated, blighted area, which spreads gradually, growing an inch each year.

The Arkham reservoir, built on the dusty land.

Here, then, is a possible scenario about the spreading blight and poisoned reservoir. Slowly increase the weirdness and end with the Colour beneath the soil.

But let's return to the first two timing options: scenarios set when the Colour arrives and when it is present. Both options, for the most part, follow the plot of *The Colour Out of Space*.

How can we rerun this plot, but make it look new? First, switch locations. Pick any Lovecraftian location: a town, the mountains, Antarctica. Or pick somewhere specific: a theatre, an observatory, a museum, a Victorian slum.<sup>1</sup>

In that location, run through the process of decay, which progresses as follows.

Inanimate things decay: water tastes bad and milk goes sour.

Plants become glossy and strangely coloured and grow to phenomenal size.<sup>2</sup> They bud prematurely and move even when there is no wind. They taste bitter and sickening.

Animals are born with unnatural proportions, move oddly, have unnatural agility and leave strange arrangements of footprints. For example, rabbits leap further than seems possible.<sup>3</sup>

1. And, depending on the location, describe the decay differently. Perhaps, in Antarctica, the ice breaks apart or the rock becomes brittle. Perhaps, in the slums of Victorian London, the decay looks like a disease.
2. This description has dreamlike elements: beautiful, eerie, light (note how the plants are glossy rather than dull). See *Dreaming* (page 71).
3. Note the narrative distance. Seeing an overpowered rabbit might be comical. Finding footprints is eerie.

Ice under high pressure  
can become an unearthly  
blue colour...

Humans sicken, shun company and go mad. They glimpse shifting walls and hear things moving in the night. These people lose motivation, becoming listless and mechanical. Towards the end, they become luminous, crumble or mysteriously disappear.

So, the order is: *things, plants, animals, humans*.<sup>1</sup> This is both the order in which things decay and the order in which Investigators encounter the Colour's victims.

Another sequence describes *how* these things decay. Broadly, the decay progresses through the following stages:

Unhealthy.

Unnatural.

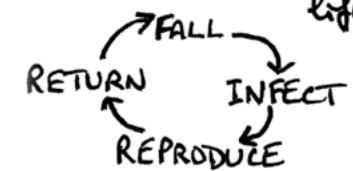
Moving strangely.

Oddly coloured.

Luminous.<sup>2</sup>

Grey and brittle.

Crumbling.



Much of the Colour's alien-ness comes from the notion that it is merely carrying out its life cycle:

Try to steal this mechanical, inevitable, inplacability for other phenomena, from Deep Ones to Hastur.

So, in your chosen location, run through these two sequences of decay. By using them side-by-side, you get a rich array of weirdness. Here's an example set in Victorian London:

In the East End markets, the fruits are huge and glossy, but taste bitter. The milk, too, has an unnatural taste.

Traders report tales of unnaturally large rats, which scurry up walls.

The Investigators uncover tales of an ancient meteorite, which landed in London's East End, and rumours of something underlying the soil, getting stronger. At night, the buildings of the East End glow.

1. See *Increasing Harm* (page 46). As noted in that section, we can add "the Investigators" as a fifth step. That is, in your scenario, the Investigators could be the Colour's final victims. At the end, they notice they are glowing or decaying.
2. In Colour stories, riff on themes of light and decay.

There are tales of animals that the thing under the soil has sucked dry. The Investigators find mice and birds, crumbling and decaying.

Now, the fruits in the market become brittle, crumbling when they are touched. There is starvation in the poorer areas of London.

The buildings, too, begin to crumble.

As the Investigators investigate, they find crumbling humans, confined to slum housing and slowly dying.

A new road is driven through the crumbling slums. Yet the Investigators know that, eventually, the Colour will suck the life out of that too.

Thus, with a good location, you can simply rerun the *Colour Out of Space* plot, and it will seem new.

Throughout your scenario, tease the players with impressions of colour. Lovecraft gives us the following:

Distortions in the colours of the sun.

Cloudiness.

Moving colours.

Being brushed by a vapour.

A pale, insidious beam.

Add your own: try shimmering, glistening or impressions of mirages. Begin with intangible impressions, then move towards tangible contact and sightings of the Colour.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Again, note how dreamlike these descriptions are. Alongside the unpleasantness, there is distorted beauty.

The Colour is a great story, but makes an unsatisfying plot for a game. Give the players something to do against the background of inevitable decay.

To end your scenario, either copy the bleak ending of *The Colour Out of Space*, or use a standard Lovecraftian climax:

**The Descent.** Although the protagonist of *The Colour Out of Space* doesn't descend underground, your Investigators might. They could discover the Colour roosting in caves, mines or tunnels.

**The Final Horror.** Since the Colour is more dreamlike than horrific, the final horror is probably a victim of the Colour, rather than the Colour itself. Nevertheless, it's possible to imagine a larger, horrific Colour, hurtling towards the Investigators or hanging bleakly in the night sky.<sup>1</sup>

**The Chase.** It's unlikely the Colour will participate in a dramatic car chase. However, it could rush through tunnels, Shoggoth-style. Alternatively, the Investigators could flee the spreading grey blight, as the countryside collapses behind. Although *The Colour Out of Space* ends bleakly, your scenario can end with adrenaline.

**The Realisation,** with the Colour remaining beneath the soil, is ready provided for you.

Other endings are less probable, but worth considering. Fighting the Colour is probably silly: the Investigators would simply attack a patch of light. But self-realisation makes a good ending: an Investigator could realise they have been infected by the Colour.

Finally, let's return to the meteorite, which is ripe for stealing. Here is how it arrives:

There is a string of explosions in the air.<sup>2</sup>

There is a pillar of smoke.

The next morning, a huge rock is found.

- 
1. Switch with the eponymous *Haunter of the Dark*, an intangible blackness that protects Mythos knowledge and pursues those who seek it. Try the Colour as a guardian or aggressive pursuer.
  2. c.f. H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, in which green flares from Mars fall to Earth as green shooting stars. They turn out to be huge cylinders. It doesn't end well.

Would inventing the chase work?  
The investigators have to follow a mind-controlled victim into the heart of the colour zone.

It is struck by lightning on the nights after it lands.

It contains several “globules”, of an alien colour, which pop when hit with a hammer.

Over time, it shrinks into nothing.

Steal this description for anything that falls to Earth. Note two things in particular. Firstly, although the lightning makes little sense, it makes a wonderful omen. Put similar omens in your scenarios. Secondly and importantly, the meteorite leaves no permanent evidence behind.

Steal, also, the material from that meteorite.

It is soft: you scoop it, rather than chipping it.

It is luminous.

It is hot.

It is corrosive, burning through any container.

It is invulnerable to all known reagents.

It is composed of a previously unknown element.

It produces strange emissions when analysed with a spectrometer.

It shrinks to nothing over time.

So, it is *odd, powerful, beyond science*<sup>1</sup> and *decaying*. Other alien materials, in other stories, are similar: for example, the soapstone in *The Call of Cthulhu*. Whenever you need alien substances, then, steal these descriptions, either by using the specific details above or by expanding on those four points.

- 
1. Presumably, if you put it near a cloud chamber, it would give strange tracks. If you put a radio near it, it would give strange radio emissions. And so on. Inventing scientific anomalies is easy.

Radio is a wonderfully spooky technology.  
Voices out of the aether, whispering  
strange truths.

## CTHONIANS.

*Story: Brian Lumley's The Burrowers Beneath.*

*Synopsis: While investigating collapsing mines, the protagonist is sent a pearlescent sphere. This, it emerges, is a Cthonian egg. The Cthonians chase him round the country: at one point, there is a car chase. Then the creatures send the protagonist a human brain, kept alive inside a body of filth, to warn him not to investigate. Finally, they destroy his house with him inside.*

THE CTHONIANS<sup>1</sup> were created, not by Lovecraft, but by Brian Lumley. They cause problems. Lumley, whose style is much pulpier than Lovecraft,<sup>2</sup> gives them every supernatural power imaginable, from telepathy to possession. Often, they seem more superpowered than eldritch.

Nevertheless, at heart, the Cthonians are beautifully conceived. They are an Earth Monster, who riff on “underground” themes as Cthulhu riffs on “water” themes. By stealing judiciously, we can create a Lovecraftian version of the creature.

Start underground, where Cthonians burn through rock like knives through butter, leaving wormlike tunnels behind. Here, the Investigators might find:

Smoothly-finished tunnels, bored through the rock at unnatural, sometimes vertical, angles. *(Like lava tubes).*

Subsidence, as the Cthonians' tunnels collapse.

A honeycomb of tunnels, lacing in and out of man-made mines.

- 
1. This is how Lumley spells it. The Greek word would be Chthonian.
  2. Avoid the teleporting clock. Or use Lovecraft's original version instead.

Etchings of unnatural creatures, like elongated octopuses.

Chanting heard deep in the tunnels.<sup>1</sup>

This burrowing leads to:

Earthquakes which, against any seismological explanation, run in a straight line.<sup>2</sup>

Inexplicable seismologic readings, in areas not normally prone to earthquakes.

Strangely-built seismological instruments, constructed by others who attempted to trace the Cthonians. They may be mysteriously sabotaged, as if to conceal the Cthonians' approach.

These earthquakes, in turn, cause property damage. Indeed, Cthonians deliberately attack buildings by burrowing beneath them. Thus, the Investigators might discover:

Buildings collapsing and people disappearing without explanation.

Reports of a disgusting odour, slime, chanting and something gigantic writhing, shortly before the building collapses.

No corpse within the house and nothing else missing.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, we have three good scenario beginnings: collapsing mines, unexplained tremors and destroyed buildings. Note that, unusually, our scenario can begin underground, rather than ending there.

Or it's an evolutionary response to Cthonians—they come from Africa, like we do. Maybe drawings and chants are the human equivalent of a bird's warning call of predators. All human religion begins as

1. Let's assume the chanting and etchings are by worshippers. The alternative, that the Cthonians themselves sing and doodle, seems rather ludicrous.
2. These let the Investigators trace the Cthonian.
3. Except, perhaps, the Cthonian egg (see below).

just such an evolutionary response

Another possible starting point is the Cthonian egg. These eggs:

Appear as “cave-pearls”, four inches in diameter and beautiful.

Are made of an unknown material, immune to X-rays and radiation.

Have thick, almost impenetrable shells.

Contain something fumbling inside, which can be heard with a stethoscope.

May hatch, revealing a vulnerable creature the size of a walnut.

Are often found in a box (actually an incubator), with queerly-angled sides and carvings.

Are immensely rare and precious to the Cthonians, who can instantly locate them by telepathy, and retrieve them with force.

Put this egg, inside its carved box, anywhere in your scenario. Lumley puts it in a mine, but you could use an archaeological dig, antiques shop or (stealing from *The Call of Cthulhu*) bequest from a relative.

The egg, of course, is a MacGuffin.<sup>1</sup> Wherever it is, the Cthonians chase it.<sup>2</sup> If the Investigators keep it, the Cthonians pursue them. If they store it, the Cthonians destroy wherever it is stored. If they return it to the mine, the Cthonians destroy that mine too.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the chase defines the entire scenario. As the Cthonian approaches, gradually increase the horror: start with dreams, move to earth tremors and end with the Cthonians' attack. Note that, as the Cthonian gets closer, narrative distance naturally decreases.

1. The egg is fascinatingly close to the Shining Trapezohedron in *The Haunter of the Dark*, except the Trapezohedron allows clairvoyance and is not a MacGuffin. So switch details: make Cthonian eggs like crystal balls; use the Trapezohedron as a MacGuffin.
2. There are few Cthonians: too few to pursue their plans of world domination. Thus, each retrieved egg is precious, bringing their plans closer to fruition.
3. Put people near or in the mine, which ensures the Investigators cannot simply ignore its destruction. Also ensure the Investigators know that, if the egg gets captured, the world comes closer to doom.

Or assume the chants and doodles are involuntary responses to Cthonian infestation: just as infra-sound makes you hallucinate or get nervous, Cthonians instill this response automatically.

You can even make an investigator be the MacGuffin. Just have him uncover family records proving he's the heir to the Imperial Dynasty of America or something.



Or switch with the Cult of the Skull or the Great Race: maybe Cthonians just put the mind into filth

Or drop the whole brain angle and just go with mud-man fetches. Much cooler.

Steal this structure for any Mythos creature.<sup>1</sup> Give the Investigators a MacGuffin: perhaps a black stone, ornate tiara or theatrical script. Then send, respectively, the Mi-Go, Deep Ones or the King in Yellow after the Investigators. Instantly, you have a scenario.

We can also steal Lumley's take on nightmares. His characters dream of:

Chants that, on waking, the dreamer finds she can repeat.

Things that the Investigator could not understand when awake, but can understand in dreams. For example, codes, carvings and writing in foreign languages.

Thus, dreams *teach skills*, whether the Investigators want to learn them or not, and *grant understanding*. Put another way, they allow investigation in dreams. Steal this for other creatures, especially Cthulhu.

There is more to steal. Here are the Cthonian's powers:

They are telepathic.

They warn you to stop investigating and return the eggs.<sup>2</sup>

They can be killed by water or radiation and are afraid of both.<sup>3</sup>

They make people feel tired and ill.<sup>4</sup>

They remove human brains and encase them, still living, in filth, while milking information from them. They can force this filth into human shape and send it to warn Investigators.

They control people by implanting ideas. They influence burglars into stealing their eggs and travellers into carrying them.

1. Lovecraft uses a similar structure in *The Hound*.
2. Be careful here. When you talk to monsters, they stop being frightening. The *Lloigor* (page 137) do this better: they use servitors to send warnings.
3. When attacked by either, they dissolve away to nothing, rather like the material from the Colour's meteorite.
4. Again, the *Lloigor* do this better.

Try communicating in images instead. Send premonitions of the heroes' deaths.

Steal selectively here: if you give the Cthonians too many powers, they become unfocussed.

However, the last power is especially useful. It is a subtle form of mind control, more interesting than most Lovecraftian possession.<sup>1</sup> Use it to inspire scenarios: let the Cthonians possess individuals, families or entire towns. This form of possession gives us practical advantages, too: we can oppose the Investigators with NPCs who, if captured, know little.<sup>2</sup>

There are three things left to steal. The first is a car chase, in which the Investigators are threatened by:

Tendrils emerging from cracks in the ground.

Earthquakes and rockfalls.

Cthonians bursting out of the ground and attacking.<sup>3</sup>

Essentially, this is the car escape from *The Whisperer in Darkness*, but with much more detail. Use it, suitably adapted for your creature, to end any scenario.

Next, steal Lumley's concept of survivals in the fossil record. Everything that is found as a fossil, he suggests, is occasionally found as a living creature. It's a beautiful piece of pseudoscience. Steal it for moments of weirdness and a source of monsters: Lumley suggests that the Loch Ness monster is one such "survival".<sup>4</sup>

Finally, Lumley gives a backstory, which makes a perfect and bleak scenario. It is set on an oil rig, but with a few changes, you could use it anywhere.

1. *The Shan* (page 156) have a similar form of soft possession.
2. Under *The Great Race Of Yith* (page 115), I discuss possession plots in more detail.
3. These dangers are particularly acute in valleys and other low-lying areas: every time the road dips, the Investigators should be scared.
4. Compare with the introduction to *The Call of Cthulhu*. An interesting exercise is to do a search for "survival" throughout Lovecraft's stories.



This backstory runs as follows.

The seismograph, analysing the sea bed, shows odd, rhythmic blips.<sup>1</sup>

When a diver attempts to investigate, the sea fills with fish, who prevent the dive by gnawing his diving apparatus.

When another diver goes down, a swarm of fish devours him, leaving nothing.

Later, when the oil rig begins drilling, the whole seabed shakes, as if trying to stop the process.

The drill penetrates the Cthonian's heart, which issues a rhythmic spurt of red liquid, hundreds of feet into the air.

That spurt of blood becomes the final horror of the scenario.<sup>2</sup>  
Steal it for Cthonians or any buried creature.

Steal the devouring fish, too. It's a genuinely terrifying set-piece, which also works for Cthulhu or the Deep Ones. Change the fish to birds, flies or animals and you can use them for Ithaqua, Shub-Niggurath, Mordiggan and many, many Mythos creatures. Steal that horrific set-piece, in which small creatures consume a human, for any scenario.

- 
1. It's the Cthonian's heartbeat. Imagine what Cthulhu's heartbeat sounds like (then put it in a scenario).
  2. This Final Horror is subtly different from those we have considered so far. It is neither a sighting of the monster, nor of the harm it does, but a horrific first contact. Steal this Final Horror. Try ending scenarios with fountains of ichor, outpourings of monstrous entrails or huge, unidentifiable fleshy organs.

## CTHULHU.

*Story: The Call of Cthulhu.*

*Synopsis: See Angell, Legrasse and Johannsen, below.*

CTHULHU. What a nightmare. It's hard to make something scary when people wear T-shirts supporting it for President.

Let's begin by stealing the plot, which splits into three parts that skip back and forward in time. It runs as follows:

**Angell.** The protagonist inherits a sculpture and papers from his great-uncle, Professor Angell. The papers describe Angell being visited by a sculptor, who had sculpted something from his dreams. Angell investigates the dreaming and discovers simultaneous events of eccentricity and insanity.

**Legrasse.** Inspector Legrasse takes a sculpture to an archaeological conference. It reminds one archaeologist of an artefact from a bloody Eskimo cult. The story then flashes back to the Inspector raiding a cult in the New Orleans swamps, who worship a white polypous thing, which reputedly lives in a nearby lake. From the cult, the Inspector captures the sculpture.

**Johannsen.** When a ship's crew refuse a warning to turn back, they find a risen Cyclopean city. There, they see Cthulhu rise, are chased by him and ram him with a ship.

All three plots are useful. In *Angell*, the protagonist's discovery leads him into a spiral of weirdness. Steal the plot for other creatures and note that the family connection makes it stronger. Let an Investigator discover that her father was investigating the Lloigor. Let an Investigator's nephew disappear in Mi-Go infested hills.<sup>1</sup>

- 
1. If you steal the Angell plot, you need to add an ending. As ever, endings are easy.

Cthulhu as a signifier for things that slumber, dead yet dreaming still works. Cthulhu works best when kept offscreen and referred to often.

Yet *Legrasse* makes the best standalone plot. Start by switching the timing: when the Investigators research a sculpture, it *leads them to* a swamp cult. Let the Investigators question natives of the swamp. Increase the horror slowly. Then, as a final horror, show the cult's horrific rites or the white polypous thing rising from the lake. Use the same plot for Mi-Go, Ghouls, Deep Ones and others.

*Johannsen*, meanwhile, gives us the ship-ramming ending. It's fascinating but problematic, because:

It makes Cthulhu seem weak. Although Cthulhu is ostensibly powerful, Lovecraft shows him being defeated.

There is no drama. If we give the Investigators a ship, they know exactly how they are expected to defeat Cthulhu.

It is difficult to run in a roleplaying game. Ending the scenario with a single Piloting roll, to hit Cthulhu with a ship, is an anticlimax.<sup>1</sup>

So how can we make this ending work? First, substitute the ship: try a plane, submarine or bomb. Once Cthulhu reaches land, try trucks, explosives or collapsing masonry.<sup>2</sup>

Next, switch creatures: use this ending for other monsters, but not Cthulhu. Ram Gol-Goroth with the Titanic, hit Ithaqua with a plane, hit Shub-Niggurath with a collapsing building and blow up a tomb with Mordiggan inside.<sup>3</sup> But for Cthulhu himself, change the ending: try a descent into R'lyeh or a chase.

Best of all, be open to such endings, rather than prescribing them. When you plan scenarios, expect the Investigators to run from the creature. If, instead, they produce a plan of attack, *Johannsen* shows how to handle it.

1. Replace the single roll with something that involves everyone. Perhaps one Investigator sails the ship, while the others shoot. Hack the combat system or stack skill rolls, ensuring that Cthulhu's defeat takes more than one roll.
2. This gives you a way to avoid railroading. When the Investigators fail a roll to kill Cthulhu at sea, don't fudge things so that they succeed. Instead, let the failure stand. Let Cthulhu reach land and devastate a few coastal villages.
3. Cthulhu is almost completely interchangeable with other buried Old Ones. Also, Lloigor and Colours.

Now, let's go deeper into these plots and steal the details.<sup>1</sup> From *Angell*, we get dreams.

Underground voices shouting monotonously.

Unpronounceable, unwriteable words.

Alien landscapes and Cyclopean cities.

A gigantic thing, miles high, lumbering about.

These dreams have a useful function within the story: they foreshadow the creature, while maintaining narrative distance. They also bookend the scenario, so that the investigation both starts and ends with the monster. Steal them for other creatures. Start a Cthugha scenario with dreams of fire, a Lloigor scenario with dreams of slavery or a Deep One scenario with dreams of undersea cities.<sup>2</sup>

These dreams are not simply disturbing. They cause inexplicable behaviour and social unrest:

A rash of suicides.

An outbreak of fever, from which victims awake remembering nothing.

Unrest in lunatic asylums.

Increased religious activity, especially from apocalyptic cults.

Bizarre artworks, which the artist produces while sleepwalking.<sup>3</sup>

Use these phenomena to start scenarios: in newspaper offices, hospitals, asylums, churches and art exhibitions. And steal the unrest for any creature connected with visions and dreams: Cthonians, Nyarlathotep, Hastur and Deep Ones.

1. For more Cthulhuesque imagery, read *Dagon*. *Dagon* is Lovecraft's prototype for Cthulhu: smaller, but otherwise interchangeable.
2. This last dream probably implies that the dreamers are Deep One hybrids. But it may not: who knows how dreams work in the Mythos?
3. Steal this and change the artistic medium.

It exemplifies the whole idea of increasing closeness. Dreams → unrelatable witnesses → physical signs → Direct Confrontation.

Another detail, from *Legrasse*, is the unusually-detailed cults. Firstly, the horrific swamp cult, who:

Dance naked around ring-shaped bonfires and granite monoliths.

Howl ecstatically, like animals.

Hang bodies of victims upside-down over the bonfire.

These are vastly more horrific than standard cultists.<sup>1</sup> Steal their blood, murder and animalism for any Mythos servitor.

Secondly, Lovecraft describes the leaders of the cult, in Chinese mountains. These leaders:

Are “deathless” and “undying”.

Kill those who investigate them, using “secret methods” such as poisoned needles.<sup>2</sup>

Have strange, hereditary rituals.

Have “mastered their dreams”.

These cult leaders, mentioned by Lovecraft but never encountered by his protagonist, are ripe for stealing. There is a whole scenario here. Start with folktales,<sup>3</sup> which lead the Investigators to the mountains. Riff on themes of immortality and “dream mastery”.<sup>4</sup> Let the Investigators descend into tunnels beneath the mountain and discover ancient carvings. Finish with a standard climax, probably a sneak or chase.

And steal these leaders for other Mythos servitors. Perhaps Cthonian cult leaders chant in tunnels beneath G’harne. Perhaps Yithian cultists plot immortality in buried cities.

1. Try rerunning *Legrasse*, but replace the swamp cult with the Eskimo cult mentioned in the story. Thus, you switch locations and steal backstory.
2. If you want to begin a scenario with a murder, this is where you start.
3. Or, of course, the Cthulhu bas-relief from *Angell*.
4. Here is a wonderful opportunity for switching protagonists. Let the Investigators master their dreams: perhaps, in their dreams, they could explore R’lyeh. Let them achieve immortality: steal from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.

The next thing to steal is more than a detail. It is the apocalypse, in which:

People become like the Old Ones.

They are beyond good and evil, without laws or morals.

They shout and kill joyfully.

The black, mouldy spirits of the Earth rise from the ground.

Steal this for premonitions, dreams and visions. Or steal the themes of amorality and joyful murder. Note, especially, the black, mouldy spirits: jet-black ghosts, stinking of mould, are perfect and unusual Lovecraftian creatures.

Most useful of all, however, is the “white, polypous thing” in the lake. It seems to be a mini-Cthulhu: perhaps an avatar, projection or facet of Cthulhu.<sup>1</sup> Steal it.

It is huge and formless, with luminous eyes.

At midnight, bat-winged devils fly from caverns to worship it.<sup>2</sup>

It catches sacrifices for the ritual.

It lives in a hidden lake, deep within the dark wood.

During the ritual, it flies and echoes the chants of the cultists.

Thus, we have an alternative Cthulhu, which Lovecraft described in detail, but his protagonists never saw.

It gives us a perfect ending for Cthulhu-based scenarios. Let the Investigators find the hidden lake. Let the white polypous thing chase them. It’s a whole new Cthulhu and one that has never appeared on a T-shirt.

1. It doesn’t matter what it is. Probably, Lovecraft didn’t know. Choose a plausible explanation: once, I explained it was a projection of Cthulhu’s dreams.
2. These winged creatures, of course, are tantalisingly close to Mi-Go.

Cthulhu is the literal Apocalypse. Steal that, dress it up in what you personally hate and fear: global warming, terrorism, corporations, cancer, Use that to anchor your Apocalypse. Call it Cthulhu, or something<sup>97</sup> else.

Always,  
always  
call it  
something  
else. ✓

## DEEP ONES.

*Story: The Shadow Over Innsmouth.*

*Synopsis: The protagonist arrives in Innsmouth and explores. He is warned about the town's church, the Esoteric Order of Dagon, and bribes a drunk, who tells horrific tales of monsters mating with humans. When the protagonist tries to leave, the bus is suspiciously out of commission, and he must stay in a hotel. During the night, he is attacked and flees the town. Later, he discovers he is related to the monsters.*

DEEP ONES, like Cthulhu, have cliché issues. They are genuinely horrific, but have become so familiar that the horror is lost. How can we get it back?

Let's tackle the clichés one by one, starting with the biggest: the Innsmouth Look. It's often described with bulging eyes and a fish-like face, making it comic, rather than horrific. But Lovecraft gives us many other descriptions of the Look. Choose something unexpected.<sup>1</sup>

A dull, expressionless face.

Large, veined hands, with short fingers.

A receding forehead and chin, with small ears and a flat nose.

A shambling gait, with large feet.

A blue-grey tinge to the skin.

Greasy, peeling skin, as though there were a disease beneath.<sup>2</sup>

A repellent nature.

1. Or simply hold back in your description. Just because the NPC is a Deep One hybrid doesn't mean you must mention their strange appearance. You don't describe the eyes of every NPC the Investigators meet.
2. Try basing a scenario around Innsmouth-look-as-disease. Start in a hospital.

By choosing a different description, you unsettle the players. Use lesser-known descriptions for other creatures, too. Describe Great Race bodies as iridescent, not rugose. Describe the Shan's hate-filled eyes.

The next cliché is Innsmouth itself. It is more than a fishy, crumbling town: it is beautiful. In Innsmouth, Lovecraft juxtaposes revolting descriptions with dreamlike ones.

Old buildings with a departed grandeur.

Eerily beautiful jewellery, intricately crafted from a lustrous gold alloy.

Phosphorescent undersea terraces and coral gardens.

Keep this tension between beauty and repulsiveness. The town is repellent, but sometimes wonderful. The jewellery is abhorrent but attractive. Note, particularly, that the beautiful things *glow*.

Another, subtler, cliché is “breeding”. It's often represented by NPC hybrids and suspicious-looking families. You can do better than that.

For example, Lovecraft mentions conversations with long-dead relatives: let your Investigators *experience* these conversations.<sup>1</sup> Let them talk with people who should be dead. Let them find diaries, personal effects or other clues that people are still alive.

Similarly, Lovecraft mentions imprisoned relatives, who presumably are too monstrous to appear publicly.<sup>2</sup> Let Investigators meet these relatives. Use them as a Final Horror, stealing the scene from *The Colour Out of Space*.

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1. Either with their own relatives or the relatives of NPCs.

2. Monstrous relatives, imprisoned in the attic, are a Lovecraftian theme.

*You can also use the players' knowledge to scare them. The investigators' boat sinks, but in the nick of time they're rescued by a fishing boat and brought to shore. When they awake up the next morning, they realise that everyone in town has the Innsmouth look. They are surrounded by 99 monsters...*



Steal the Order of Dagon for the Starry Wisdom Church in HAUNTER OF THE DARK. And vice versa. Festivals and holy days make for great deadlines in scenarios. You have to rescue the victims before they're sacrificed. Maybe Innsmouth jewellery has effects like the Shining Trapezohedron!

Perhaps the worst cliché, however, is the Esoteric Order of Dagon. It is much more than a generic cult. It is Innsmouth's richest source of inspiration, with enough material for several scenarios.

When the Order arrives in a town, they run other churches out.

They promise marvellous changes, leading to immortality.<sup>1</sup>

Bizarre chants come from inside the church.

They worship on Walpurgis Night (30 April) and Halloween.

They make people take three Oaths. The third is particularly horrific.

Steal these descriptions. Here, for example, is a Dagonic scenario, patched together from the parts above.

An old colleague, Professor Walter Pike,<sup>2</sup> invites the Investigators to a seaside resort, to assist with his studies.

When the Investigators arrive, Pike's house is empty. His notebooks and library reveal that he has been studying the local church.

The townsfolk reveal that this new church drove out the other churches. The Investigators meet a curate, who was threatened by the newcomers.

That night, the Investigators meet a frightened escapee, who tells of horrors beneath the church. When the worshippers tried to make him take the Third Oath, he fled.

The Investigators hear odd chants from the church on the hill.<sup>3</sup>

Inside, the Investigators find heretic texts, promising immortality.

In a stinking basement, they find Pike, horrifically transformed into a Deep One hybrid.

1. Riff on the themes of church and immortality. Set Deep One scenarios within the Catholic Church. Offer Investigators eternal life.
2. But be careful with fish puns. Although Lovecraft used them, they signal comedy rather than horror.
3. The default location for a strange old building is on a hill, c.f. *The Strange High House in the Mist*, *The Haunter of the Dark* and so on.

Now, there is a sequence connected to the Order's worship. To make a deal with the Deep Ones, follow these steps:

Use an odd lead object<sup>1</sup> to bring the creatures out of the sea.

Sacrifice some young people to them.

Enjoy the increased amount of fish that comes to your town.

Also enjoy the strange jewellery they give you.

Later, expect a request to mate with the townsfolk.

Keep sacrificing, otherwise the Deep Ones will destroy the town.

The sacrifices are particularly underexplored. Let your Investigators find caged sacrificial victims or children earmarked for sacrifice. Again, riff on the family theme.

The sequence, above, lets us play tricks with time. You could start a scenario:

Before the creatures are summoned, so that Investigators must prevent the summoning.

After the sacrifices begin, so that Investigators investigate mysterious disappearances of young people.

Before the mating begins, so that the final horror is seeing townsfolk mate with Deep Ones.<sup>2</sup>

After the mating begins, as in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.

Before the creatures destroy the town, so that the Investigators discover the past sacrifices and imminent destruction.

After the destruction, so that Investigators investigate a ghost town.

1. Lovecraft only describes this object. Let your Investigators find it.
2. It's a superb and obvious final horror. Lovecraft couldn't bring himself to describe it, so you should.

This reminds me of the strange rotten vitality associated with the Colours. How about a deal with a Colour to rescue a starving town? The Dustbowl horror?



Most usefully, there is a backstory connected with Dagonic worship. Adapted slightly, it makes an excellent scenario.

The Investigators arrive on an island. There, they find inhabitants who tell evil tales of a neighbouring island.<sup>1</sup>

On this neighbouring island, they find a ruined settlement. There are stones with swastikas on them and carvings of monsters.

On the beach, washed-up, they find the bones of young men and women sacrificed to the Deep Ones.

Then they find more carvings, which illustrate that the Deep Ones will rise unless more are sacrificed.

Finally, either the Investigators sacrifice one of their number or the Deep Ones rise from the sea.

Here, the swastika stones are ostensibly wards against the Deep Ones. Use them carefully: they are not simply Deep One repellents. They do not make you *safe*. Instead, use them to create danger. Let the Investigators believe they are protected, then find stones missing. And this is a general rule: any ward against the Mythos must fail.

There are many miscellaneous Deep One details, ripe for stealing and expansion. Any of the following could inspire an entire scenario.

Ruins, beautiful and golden, rising from the bottom of the sea.

The Deep Ones are preparing something terrible, involving a Shoggoth.

After the raid on Innsmouth, captured Deep One hybrids were kept in concentration camps, then dispersed throughout military prisons.

A gold refinery with no noise<sup>2</sup> coming from inside.

1. In *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, these inhabitants *destroyed* the people on the neighbouring island. After all, the neighbouring islanders were worshipping monsters. If you want human horror, this is how you do it: with mass murder.
2. There is no noise because it doesn't actually refine gold. It just melts the Deep Ones' jewellery.

Yet the most horrific idea from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* is discovering you are a monster. Only Deep Ones give the grim inevitability of transforming into something horrible.

This discovery presents a terrible choice: does the Investigator kill themselves or become a monster? Other Investigators get a similar choice: do they kill their colleague or let them transform?

So steal this choice for other monsters, adapting it where necessary.<sup>1</sup> For the Shan, the question is: do they kill themselves or become a thrall?<sup>2</sup> For the Great Race: do they allow themselves to be possessed? For the Mi-Go: do they allow their brain to be taken?

Having dispensed with the clichés, you can use the tricks from the first part of this book. Try switching creatures, interchanging Deep Ones with Ghouls, Mi-Go and Shan. Try switching endings, sending Investigators into the tunnels beneath the Innsmouth houses, then chasing them out with Deep Ones. Switch protagonists, letting the Investigators meet, rather than be, Deep One hybrids.<sup>3</sup> Or switch locations, as described in detail above.

At heart, the Deep Ones are deeply horrific. By going back to Lovecraft, you can rescue them from cliché.

*This works best if you've played up the unearthly beauty of the Deep Ones, to make the transformation alluring.*

1. This means you must state that a player's character is a monster. It's a big thing to say about a player's character, but see it as an opportunity. It lets you create a new and unusual scenario.
2. This is how Ramsey Campbell ends *The Insects from Shaggai*.
3. Read Zadok's drunken oration in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. We've stolen from it already, but there is much more to take.

which means that they, too, can go mad, torture, or worship Nyarlathotep. Anything a human sorcerer can do, an Elder Thing can do. Better. ELDER THINGS.

Story: *At the Mountains of Madness*.

Synopsis: *In the Antarctic rock, explorers find signs of prehistoric life. They later discover a deserted campsite, which belonged to other explorers. These other explorers apparently tried to dissect a fossil (an Elder Thing), which came alive and dissected them. The protagonists descend into an ancient city, where they find both human bodies and those of Elder Things (and also albino penguins). From carvings, it appears that the Elder Things created Shoggoths, which then turned against them. Deeper inside, a Shoggoth chases the protagonists out.*

UNLIKE the races we have considered so far, the Elder Things are not evil.<sup>1</sup> They are not malevolent,<sup>2</sup> like Cthulhu, nor indifferent, like Colours. They are, in fact, rather like us.

Lovecraft wants us to relate, identify with and even like the Elder Things.<sup>3</sup> They are civilised scientists. They just want to learn. And that is where the horror comes from. They learn precisely as we learn: by dissecting other species.

In your scenarios, then, the Investigators might find.

Human bodies, packaged as experimental subjects, for later study.

Human equipment, intelligently packaged for later study.

Dissected human and animal bodies, with tissue neatly removed.

Rough sketches, using strange alien techniques.

1. Although they are not necessarily *benevolent*, as the Great Race are.
2. It is arguable whether Cthulhu is truly malevolent. Probably, he is merely indifferent to human suffering. However, he encourages humans to laugh and kill, so let's call this malevolence. Certainly, it is not very nice.

The Great Race aren't necessarily benevolent either. "Fascistic Socialism" and organized cross-time kidnapping rings don't sound very benevolent. Think of the "Library" of the Great Race as Abu Ghraib: a place of interrogation. Run by aliens. This can go easy, 104 or this can go hard...

Your first task, then, is to get the Investigators to relate to the Elder Things. If your Investigators are doctors, give your Elder Things a medical air. If the Investigators are engineers, emphasise the construction of the Elder Thing city. If they are artists, emphasise the Elder Things' creativity. Similarly, let biologists find dissected human bodies. Let mathematicians find diagrams of vast intelligence. Let archaeologists find ancient items of beautiful construction. And so on.<sup>1</sup>

Having humanised the Elder Things, you can steal the *Mountains of Madness* plot. All the familiar tricks work well.<sup>2</sup>

First, switch creatures. Because *At the Mountains of Madness* is a "buried monster" story, you can put almost anything into the Elder Thing city. The plot runs as follows: the Investigators enter the city, learn about the creature, then flee from it. Try Old Ones, such as Ithaqua, Cthugha or Mordiggan. Try races, such as Mi-Go or Deep Ones, who chase the Investigators in a swarm. Note that, whichever creature you choose, it replaces both the Elder Things *and* the Shoggoth: it is both the thing investigated and the final danger.

Next, switch locations. Try putting the buried city in the desert, as in *The Shadow Out of Time*. Better still, put it in the sea. Use Lovecraft's descriptions of undersea Elder Things, who:

Write on wax surfaces, using a stylus.

Use phosphorescent organisms to light their city.

1. And, as ever, steal this for other creatures. Emphasise the brilliance of Mi-Go technology. Show that the Colour feeds like a human baby.
2. By switching protagonists, you can give your Investigators an Elder Thing fossil to dissect. That'll end well. Be careful with narrative distance: don't let your Investigators see an Elder Thing in the first scene. Try obscuring it, with darkness or mist, or have it move too fast for Investigators to see.

This undersea city is an instant scenario. Simply rerun *At the Mountains of Madness* at sea: the expedition becomes a ship voyage, drawing from *The Call of Cthulhu*, perhaps stopping at islands for investigation. Perhaps, when Investigators discover the undersea city itself, its architecture echoes the dreamlike construction of the Deep Ones.<sup>1</sup>

Even better, use Switching Creatures and Switching Locations together. Run the *Mountains of Madness* plot, replacing the Elder Thing city with a Mi-Go mountain mine, a Lloigor beneath the desert or R'lyeh itself. That “buried creature” plotline is endlessly recyclable.

Note, especially, how detailed the Elder Thing city is. From the outside, we see *geometry* and *intricacy*:

Vertical sides, constructed from rectangular blocks.

Oddly regular openings in these vertical walls.

Fragments of perfect cubes, truncated cones and pinnacles.

Five-pointed stars.

Pylons and beautiful stone bridges.

Inside, we see how they *live*:

Intricate devices, employing principles of energy unknown to humanity.

Electro-chemical devices used for lighting.

Tables and chairs, shaped in cylindrical frames.

Small, flat, five-pointed counters, used as money.

1. For undersea exploration, the Investigators must use a diving chamber, diving equipment or a submarine. All existed from the late 19th century onwards. For Victorian scenarios, steal from Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*. For the 1920s and 1930s, use the fascinating William Beebe for inspiration.

Or something else ubiquitous. Rifle bullets, say. Or bio-psionic identity matrices: imagine a deserted human city awash in non-bio-degradable credit cards.

Rooms in which everything is placed in the centre.

Remains of mechanised lifeforms, which the Elder Things used to live on other planets.<sup>1</sup>

Steal this city for other creatures, changing details as necessary. Make Deep One cities beautiful and marshy. Fill Mi-Go cities with mining equipment.

To describe such cities, simply take an aspect of human living and make it alien. Ask yourself: where do the creatures sleep? How do they see underground? How do they eat? Invent alien equivalents for libraries, bedrooms, dining rooms and scientific labs. You can improvise alien cities endlessly.

What else can we steal? Try the albino penguins: a strange, innocent race, seemingly alien but actually strangely evolved. Use other innocent creatures, alien or otherwise, in your scenarios. Harming innocents is always horrific.<sup>2</sup>

Steal, also, the motif of “five”.<sup>3</sup> Throughout *At the Mountains of Madness*, things occur in fives, echoing the Elder Things’ five-pointed heads: five-pointed architecture, five-sided mounds, clusters of five dots.<sup>4</sup>

So, in any scenario, choose a number and repeat it. For a Mi-Go scenario, try describing nine-legged structures, nine-pointed earth mounds and cylinders with nine antennae. Even if the repetition is meaningless, it adds an eerie consistency.

But the biggest thing to steal is Antarctica. Use it, not just for the Elder Things, but for any creature. As Lovecraft describes it, it is strikingly dreamlike.

1. These mechanised lifeforms are intriguing. They make the Elder Things into creatures like H. G. Wells’ Martians.  
2. In *The Insects From Shaggai*, Ramsay Campbell uses an enslaved, innocent alien race. See *The Shan* (page 156).  
3. Lovecraft likes numbers. For a true Lovecraftian description, add numbers: not an afternoon’s journey, but a *three-hour* journey.  
4. To a lesser extent, the Great Race use the number three similarly.

The Antarctic is:

Ancient.

Dreamlike, with immense mountains rising like mirages.

Obscured, with opaque fogs and sky and snow merging into one.

Windy.

Painted in fantastic colours: scarlets, blues and golds.

Thus, although terrifying, it is beautiful. In your Antarctic scenarios, describe colourful sunsets, fantastic cities and sparkling ice. Paint pictures in extraordinary colours: not the dark greens and browns of Innsmouth and Arkham, but golds, silvers, blues and scarlets.

More practically, Antarctica gives us:

Travel by ship, sledge and aeroplane.

Geology, including drilling equipment and markings in rock strata.

Archaeology, including fossils. *? Desiccated mummies.*

Radio communication.<sup>1</sup>

Explosives, used to blast into underground caves.

Camps.

Most of these fit into any scenario about exploration.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there is the Shoggoth, whom we will meet again later. For now, note that the Elder Things are too nice to end the scenario. For the final horror, Lovecraft needs something thoroughly evil, and so the Shoggoth enters.

1. Which Lovecraft uses as he uses letters in other stories.

2. When you write a scenario about exploration, *At The Mountains of Madness* is an excellent model to use. Other possible starting points are *The Shadow Out Of Time* and *The Wendigo*, both of which are discussed below.

Use the Arctic, too. Note its grim history.  
Until recently, the only practical ways to get there were walking and skiing. Scott walked. Amundsen ski-ed, using dogs to haul supplies.

## FLYING POLYPS.

Story: *The Shadow Out of Time*.

Synopsis: *The protagonist searches for an ancient desert city from his nightmares. He finds it, goes inside and is chased out by invisible, wind-like creatures.*<sup>1</sup>

In *The Shadow Out of Time*, the Flying Polyps take the Shoggoth role: they appear at the end and chase the protagonist from the underground city. They provide the evil and adrenaline to end the story.

Although this is a cameo role, the Polyps are detailed enough to carry a scenario alone. This scenario starts when the Investigators hear about ancient buildings:

Stone cities, which the natives fear.

Folktales of unearthly winds, blowing from half-buried stone huts.

Indecipherable rock markings.

Basalt towers, tall, black and windowless, which taper towards the top.<sup>2</sup>

When the Investigators enter these buildings, they appear deserted. Deep within, however, the Investigators find where the Polyps are imprisoned.

Great trapdoors, sealed with metal bands, from which cool, damp air issues.

A shrill, whistling noise.

Tunnels, in which the Polyps are sealed.

1. This isn't the full story, but it's what we need for the Polyps. For a fuller synopsis, see *The Great Race Of Yith* (page 115).

2. In *The Shadow Out Of Time*, Lovecraft provides two separate underground cities. The Polyps live in basalt towers. The Great Race prefer buildings of sandstone and granite. Note how describing the rock enhances the imagery.

From these tunnels, the Polyps emerge. The Investigators experience:

Clutching tentacles of wind, like nooses, which stop them fleeing.  
Unimaginable gales, used as a weapon. *They whistle like the wind, too.*  
White, cold fingers of vapour.

Interestingly, they are vulnerable:

They are weak and slowly dying.  
They are harmed by electricity.

Nevertheless, they have powers which any Mythos creature would envy. They can:

Levitate.  
Turn invisible.  
Sense things through rock.

With all this, we can easily construct a scenario. Change the location: perhaps to the sea, the mountains or Antarctica. Then slowly increase horror and decrease narrative distance.

Here, for example, is a simple scenario set in the Massachusetts hills:

The Investigators arrive in a mountain town, where the wind makes a shrill, whistling sound.

At night, gales rise to unearthly speeds, as though attacking the Investigators. Tendrils of wind pluck at them like fingers.

The Investigators hear folktales of half-buried cities, in the woods, which the natives fear.

*Where Cthulhu is a personal apocalypse, tuned to Lovecraft's personal fears, the Flying Polyps are a meta-apocalypse. They are the doom of the Great Race, but their airy abstraction is the thing to steal for any abstract, uncaring, mindlessly hostile Apocalypse.*

In the woods, they find odd carvings on ancient stones.

Deeper still, they find half-buried basalt towers.

When the Investigators descend into the towers, they find great, open trapdoors, from which the Flying Polyps emerge.

That, then, is a simple Polyp scenario. In play, it would be focussed and horrific.

But the Polyps are much more than basic monsters. In Lovecraft's story, they seem intangible,<sup>1</sup> inseparable from the winds they control. They are, effectively, a living wind.

When considered that way, the Polyps solve many problems. For example, it is usually difficult for monsters to attack early in the scenario. Imagine if, say, the Mi-Go attacked the Investigators just after they had started investigating. The Investigators would see them, which would destroy the narrative distance, and might kill them, which would make them less scary. Afterwards, it would be difficult to scare the Investigators with Mi-Go again.

The Polyps-as-living-wind, however, can attack any time. Just assault the Investigators with gales, hurricanes or tornados, whenever you like. Because the Investigators can neither see the creatures, nor fight back, the narrative distance remains. And, later, you can send more obviously unnatural winds, with clutching misty tendrils, to menace the Investigators.<sup>2</sup>

Better still, we can view the Polyps as not just a living wind, but an air elemental. The elements - earth, air, fire and water - are problematic but important in the Cthulhu Mythos.<sup>3</sup> Many creatures, including Cthugha, Ithaqua and

1. Many of Lovecraft's creatures flirt with intangibility. Cthulhu, for example, is preceded by a "polarising miasma", which distorts the sun, then a blackness that "bursts forth like smoke". Thus, when he first appears, he seems gaseous rather than squid-like. It's an interesting alternative Cthulhu.
2. Slowly increase the unnaturalness of the wind.
3. August Derleth shoehorned the Mythos into elemental categories. He did it clumsily, but created interesting creatures in the process.

*other associations: law/chaos, past/future, over/under, dream/real*



Tsathoggua, are elementals. The Polyps show how to use the elements in a suitably Lovecraftian way. Simply steal the plot from *The Shadow Out of Time*, replacing the Polyps with a creature of living earth, fire or water. For example, here's a "fire" plot:

A team of Investigators – geologists, anthropologists and volcanologists – are sent to the active volcano of Mount Damavand in Persia.<sup>1</sup>

From locals, they hear tales of vampires and living fire at the heart of the mountain. They hear of an ancient temple, high up on the steepest face.

When the Investigators travel there, their camp is besieged by fire. Rocks are blackened and trees charred.

In the temple, they find survivors of a fire-worshipping sect. These worshippers tell tales of something at the heart of the mountain, which they fear and revere. Whatever the thing is, they have attempted to seal it beneath great trapdoors.

As the Investigators go deeper, they find the trapdoors sealed shut and surrounded by curious markings. The Investigators' clothes begin to char and occasionally catch fire.

Deeper still, they find an open trapdoor. Beside it are scraps of charred paper, describing legends of Cthugha, a thing of fire summoned from distant stars.

Finally, living fire rushes towards them and they must flee.

This plot is stolen wholesale from *The Shadow Out of Time*, with descriptions changed, fire replacing wind. So, fire attacks the camp; there are signs of fire around the temple; the Great Race are replaced by fire worshippers (who might

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1. Always use specific geographical locations: not just a volcano, but Mount Damavand. I discovered Mount Damavand by searching Wikipedia for active volcanos. Even Wikipedian levels of research add richness to the setting.

alternatively be alien). And, exactly as in *The Shadow Out of Time*, the elemental emerges from trapdoors and chases the Investigators out.

Try a "living water" plot, featuring Cthulhu or the Deep Ones, or "living earth", featuring the Cthonians. Try other themes, too. Run a "living nature" plot, with Shub-Niggurath, in which a rushing mass of vines, earth and bile chases the Investigators. Do the same with ice, disease, insects, crystals or darkness.<sup>1</sup>

This, then, is the best thing to steal from the Polyps. They let us make any element, theme or intangible quantity into a scenario.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Whatever your theme, riff on it throughout the scenario. Thus, your "living disease" plot might have plague villages, rotting plants and a leper colony.  
2. Try, also, replacing the Polyps with other intangible creatures. Put a Lloigor or Colour into *The Shadow Out of Time* plot, tweak it and rerun it.



No GHOULS? That's a shame. Steal PICKMAN'S MODEL with other inspirational monsters, or have Ghouls who salvage human brains (like Mi-Go) or infest a town (like Deep Ones).

## THE GREAT RACE OF YITH.

Story: *The Shadow Out of Time.*

Synopsis: *While giving a lecture, the protagonist falls unconscious, then reawakens after five years. He gradually discovers that an alien mind had occupied his body. Meanwhile, his mind was imprisoned, in an alien body, in prehistoric times. He dreams about an underground desert city and, by researching, locates it. Within, he discovers that the aliens are now dead, having been killed by Flying Polyps. The Polyps then chase him out.*

Some have jumped to the insect race that inherits the Earth after humanity which is a wonderful touch.

THE GREAT RACE give us mind possession. It is their Unique Selling Point, their calling card, the thing they do well. Great Race stories are about time-travel and possession. When they appear in a scenario, someone must get possessed.

Let's go through the possession process. It begins with premonitions.

Brief, glimmering, chaotic visions.

A feeling someone is trying to seize your thoughts.

A headache.

Then, hours later,<sup>1</sup> the victim:

Wanders in thoughts and speech.

Sees strange shapes and visions of the place to which they will be transported.<sup>2</sup>

Slumps to the floor.

1. Consider setting a scenario in these intervening hours, during which the Investigators know someone is trying to seize their thoughts. Whether or not they can stop the possession is up to you.
2. Try using these premonitions repeatedly, making them eerier each time.

And CHARLES DEXTER WARD, likewise. Ward's obsessions - travel, black magic, hidden lore - are the Great Race's obsessions too. Even Curwen's "body-jumping" has a time-jumping aspect. Or rather vice versa. Steal it all!

The victim is now possessed. Their mind travels to the prehistoric past, to be imprisoned in a Yithian<sup>1</sup> body. Meanwhile, the Yithian's mind awakes in the victim's body, which shows:

A masklike face, with different expressions from the previous occupant.

Odd use of facial muscles.

Clumsy use of vocal organs, with an alien pronunciation.

Stilted, archaic speech, as if learned from books.

Unnatural movements, as if relearning how to walk.

Note, especially, the changed voice. This is a Lovecraftian theme: whenever an alien-in-human-form speaks, it sounds inhuman.<sup>2</sup> Probably, when someone is possessed by the Shan or Cthonians, their voice becomes indefinably monstrous.

The possession lasts years,<sup>3</sup> in which the victim:

Shows signs of brilliant intelligence, apprehending complex concepts instantly.

Obsessively studies obscure backwaters of history, science, art and folklore.

Studies Mythos tomes, turning the pages incredibly quickly.

Travels to remote foreign parts.

Takes peculiar courses of study.

Casually mentions events of the distant past and future, as if they had been there.

1. I use "Yithian" as useful shorthand for "a member of the Great Race". Be careful, however: Lovecraft never used this word. Try describing "aliens" or "creatures".
2. Thus, Mi-Go agents have buzzing voices, Deep One hybrids have gurgling voices and Wilbur Whateley, from *The Dunwich Horror*, spoke in a "strange, resonant fashion which hinted at sound-producing organs unlike the run of mankind's".
3. Most Lovecraft stories describe a particular event in the protagonist's life. Here (and in *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*), Lovecraft describes events that last many years. Try scenarios that span long periods of time.

Eventually, the creature tires of its human body and:

Seems bored.

Hints that the previous personality may come back.

Burns everything it has written.

Builds a strange machine of rods, wheels and convex mirrors.

Then the Yithian returns to the past and the original occupant returns. The victim's body:

Breathes irregularly.

Mutters some strange and alien words.

Resumes a normal human facial expression.

Attempts to continue whatever it was doing before it was abducted.

Afterwards, the victim normally forgets their period of possession. Some, however, retain full memory of the prehistoric past, while others experience:<sup>1</sup>

Disordered sense of time and history.

Premonitions of how current events turn out.

A dread of seeing one's own body, leading to a fear of mirrors.

Fleeting visions or dreams of the Yithian city.

Steal these experiences for other possessive creatures. For example, a Shan possessee could mutter alien words and glimpse alien cities. A brain, newly placed in a Mi-Go cylinder, could sleepily mumble human words.

1. Experiment with different sorts of victims. Lovecraft's protagonist has *partial* memory of his abduction, through visions and nightmares. So use possesseees who have *entirely* forgotten their abduction or those with *complete* memory of it. Or invent your own twists on possession: for example, put the wrong mind back into the body.

The sequence of possession, described above, lets you play tricks with Shifting Time. Try beginning a scenario:

Before someone is possessed.

In the early stages of possession, while the victim travels and studies.

In the later stages of possession, when the victim is preparing to leave.

After the possession.

Now, who will be possessed? If it's an NPC, then your scenario is about meeting a victim of possession. But this creates a problem. The horrors in *The Shadow Out of Time* are personal ones: discovering that you were possessed by a monster; finding yourself in a monstrous body.<sup>1</sup> If the Investigators discover that that *someone else* was possessed, it seems less horrific. *And perhaps they shll owe.*

So how can you possess an NPC and make it horrific? There are three broad answers: make the possession affect the Investigators, make it affect someone close to the Investigators, or make it affect so many people that the Investigators cannot ignore it. Here are some examples.

The possession affects the Investigators.

*The possessed NPC wants to harm the Investigators.*<sup>2</sup>

*The NPC's possession foreshadows the Investigators being possessed.*<sup>3</sup>

The possession affects people close to the Investigators.<sup>4</sup>

*The Investigators are related to the possessee, by marriage or blood.*

*The possessee knows an Investigator's relative is, or has been, possessed.*

The possession affects many people.

*An entire hospital, family or village is possessed.*

1. Note the parallels with *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*.
2. Perhaps, like the Elder Things, the NPC wants to dissect the Investigators, for research purposes.
3. The foreshadowing works as follows: later in the scenario, the Investigators find themselves experiencing the symptoms that the NPC reported.
4. Using people close to the Investigators is a powerful trick. I referred to this briefly in *Cthulhu* (page 93) and I'll return to it under *Hastur* (page 123).

Again, steal these ideas for other creatures that possess humans. Let the Shan possess an Investigator's sister. Let the Cthonians manipulate an entire town.

If it's an Investigator that gets possessed, you have two options: possess one Investigator or possess them all. When you possess one, you create a challenge: will the others realise the Investigator is possessed? This won't be the central plot,<sup>1</sup> but adds another layer to a Great Race scenario.

If you possess all the Investigators, you essentially rerun the *Shadow Out of Time* plot. Simply start the scenario after the possession and let the Investigators discover what happened.

Alternatively, you can let Investigators *experience* the possession, sending their minds into alien bodies in prehistoric times.

They start in a huge room, with:

High vaulted ceilings, the roofs lost in the darkness.

Vast shelves of dark wood, with books engraved with hieroglyphs.

Mathematical engravings of mind-blasting meaning.

Massive octagonal flagstones.

Monstrous granite masonry, with convex and concave blocks fitting into each other.

Jars of purplish metal.

Globes of luminous crystal.<sup>2</sup>

Inexplicable machines of vitreous tubes and metal rods.

1. Partly because the Investigators might discover it early, partly because discovering a colleague is possessed is not horrific enough.
2. Note the glowing beauty. Where the Elder Things' city was oppressive, the Great Race's home is dreamlike.

### Outside that room are:

- Huge, sloping stone corridors instead of stairways.
- Colossal caverns of intricate machinery.
- Droning machines to study the hieroglyphs.
- Black vaults below, with trapdoors sealed with metal bands.
- Other abductees, both human and alien, from various epochs.

### When they venture outside, the Investigators find:

- Paved roads, two hundred feet wide, on which boat-like vehicles move, using atomic engines.
- Gardens, with pallid fernlike growths, immensely tall plants and colourless flowers, arranged in geometrical beds.

### Even further afield, the Investigators see:

- Moist, cloudy skies, in which the sun is bigger than it is today.
- Constellations that only faintly resemble those visible today.
- Steamy forests of prehistoric plants.
- Great shapeless suggestions of shadow.

### And many forms of transport:

- Long causeways over dark swamps.
- Gigantic submarines with searchlights.
- Enormous, fast, many-decked boats.
- Titanic, projectile-like airships moved by electrical repulsion.

---

1. Steal these droning machines for other creatures: most obviously the Elder Things or Mi-Go. They needn't study hieroglyphs: they could do anything. I will discuss technology further under *Mi-Go* (page 145).

Thus, there is a whole world to explore.<sup>1</sup> Steal these descriptions for other prehistoric cities.

Note, especially, that the Investigators can investigate within this world. They can travel, read books and question people from their past and future.<sup>2</sup> Thus, you can set an investigative scenario in this prehistoric city.

What does this do to narrative distance? In one sense, it throws it out the window. After all, the Investigators converse with monsters and explore an alien city. Perhaps, then, the Investigators' abduction should occur late in the scenario, when the story is ready for some weirdness.<sup>3</sup>

In another sense, however, the prehistoric city cannot be the full horror. After all, it is curious, but relatively benign. It promises a greater horror to come.

What is left to steal? Start with tantalising signs that someone has been possessed:

Marginal notes and corrections in Mythos tomes, which are either strange hieroglyphs or in the archaic language of the original text.

Cases of abduction from medical, psychological or folkloric sources, which occur throughout history.

Stockists' records of orders for strangely-shaped mirrors.

Use these details as clues, which the Investigators can follow to find a possessed NPC. With minor changes, these clues work for any creature that possesses humans. Thus, Investigators could track a Shan thrall through marginal notes in the *Revelations of Glaaki* or a Cthonian servitor through old auction records.

---

1. Of course, the Investigators need not travel in time to see this world. Let them explore it in dreams or through an archaeological dig.  
2. And not just *people*.  
3. Try starting a scenario with curious events in modern times. Then transport the Investigators to a prehistoric era. There, they can investigate the modern events through the Great Race's libraries and by questioning other abductees. Finally, return the Investigators to the present day, to put things right (or not).



Steal the Marsh family's Faustian bargain with the Deep Ones for a Yithian agent's deal with the Great Race: aid in exchange for wealth and power.

Next, some distinctively Yithian twists on possession:

When a Yithian is dying, the mind can project itself forward to possess a human. The human mind then finds itself in the past, trapped in a dying body.

If a Yithian dies in a human body, the human mind becomes trapped in the past. Similarly, if a human dies in a Yithian body, the Yithian mind remains trapped in the future.

The Great Race possess people briefly, on the way to the past or future. The temporary occupants experience glimpses of horror.

Use these twists to inspire scenarios or as inspiration for your own take on possession. Similarly, the following Yithian trivia can inspire scenarios or add colour to them:

They reproduce through spores, which develop underwater.

They use camera-like electrical weapons.

The Yithian police use "major emotion wrenching" as a punishment.

Perhaps most interesting, however, are the Yithian agents: humans who assist the Great Race in their time travels. Unlike most Lovecraftian servitors, they are remote and secretive, operating through brief visits and telephone calls. They even seem benevolent. Use this remote manipulation for other cults. Imagine what the Esoteric Order of Dagon could do with a good telephone connection.

Steal it all. But, most importantly, steal stories about humans possessed by monsters. Any creature might control humans: Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, the Mi-Go. And nothing is worse than a possessive alien.

1. Although Great Race possessions are accompanied by "fresh and evil waves of cult activity", so perhaps they're not all good. Try progressing, throughout your scenario, from benevolent to sinister or vice versa.
2. There are parallels with the agents of the *Mi-Go* (page 145), although those agents seem more obstructive and destructive than the Yithian helpers.

Idea: A PC discovers he's an exiled Yithian mind, who had his power of time travel ripped away as punishment.

## HASTUR.

Robert Chambers' collection *The King in Yellow* contains four Mythos-like stories, which are listed below.

*Synopsis of The Repairer of Reputations:* After reading the play *The King in Yellow*, the protagonist believes he is king and his brother will betray him. He is captured, clearly insane.

*Synopsis of The Mask:* The protagonist uses a white liquid to transform living creatures to marble. Later, he finds the woman he loves similarly transformed. Just when he has given up hope, everything changes back.

*Synopsis of In the Court of the Dragon:* The protagonist is pursued by a malevolent figure. Finally, he falls into a dreamworld, where he is captured by the spectral King in Yellow.

*Synopsis of The Yellow Sign:* An artist and his model are tormented by visions of death and a malevolent figure.

FOR HASTUR, we stop stealing from Lovecraft and rob Robert Chambers instead. His four stories in *The King in Yellow*, dreamlike and beautiful, don't just give us a new creature. They give new ways to structure Cthulhu scenarios.

Firstly, they show how to do scenarios without a central monster.<sup>1</sup> Rather than using a single malevolent creature, Chambers spins stories around a constellation of symbols, objects, people and places. These items themselves are only partially explained, giving an overall effect of unreliability and obfuscation.

1. Hasturian scenarios aren't actually about Hastur. They revolve around the King in Yellow, the Yellow Sign, Carcosa and similar mysterious things. Hastur is a useful label.

In roughly decreasing order of importance, the items are:

*The King in Yellow*, a play, published as a book.

The Yellow Sign, a symbol from no known alphabet.

Carcosa, a mysterious land. — or city. Carcosa's the ultimate Ancient city.

The King in Yellow, a demonic figure, who wears a scalloped mantle in fantastic colours.<sup>1</sup>

The Pallid Mask, which is unidentified but associated with the King in Yellow. Often, someone will have a white, thin, dead-looking face.

So, to build a Hasturian scenario, simply scatter these elements, with increasing horror. And, for other creatures, use similar weird constellations. Try building a Mi-Go scenario around unexplained vibrations, watery corpses and peculiar offers in buzzing voices, but don't introduce the creatures themselves.

Next, Chambers shows us stories without a Final Horror. Instead of terrible climaxes, he gives us these endings:<sup>2</sup>

The protagonist goes insane and is captured.

The protagonist's love returns to life.

The protagonist falls into a dreamworld and is captured by the King in Yellow.

The protagonist and his wife die, apparently mad.

Thus, the final moment is eerie, not horrific. At first, these stories resemble those of Lovecraft, with weirdness gradually increasing. Then, rather than a climactic peak of terror and revelation, we get illusion, insanity or eerie happiness.

1. If you do want a central monster, try the King In Yellow. You might also try Joseph Payne Brennan's alternative Hastur from *The Feaster From Afar*: black, shrivelled, iridescent and airborne, with knifelike talons to penetrate the skull and consume the brain.
2. Taken, in order, from the four stories listed on the previous page.



Steal the personal persecutions from Chambers. Have the Mi-Go act like the Questioner in THE YELLOW SIGN, or have the Great Race Possession convince someone that they are actually a king or emperor.

Steal these endings for Lovecraftian scenarios. Trap the Investigators in dreams of R'lyeh. Have the Mi-Go return an Investigator's love to life.<sup>1</sup>

Chambers also shows us a new type of insanity. When Lovecraft's protagonists go mad, they scream, run and tremble, but remain reliable narrators. Cthulhu is horrifying, but there is little doubt he genuinely rises from R'lyeh.

Chambers' protagonists, however, are unreliable narrators. They see things *wrongly*: biscuit tins as steel safes, toy crowns as gold, corpses as living people. The things they perceive might or might not be true. Thus, it is unclear whether the Repairer of Reputations exists or whether malevolent figures, who pursue the protagonists, are real.

Steal this trick. As Investigators go mad, describe things inaccurately.<sup>2</sup> Try, as a final revelation, demonstrating that the horror was in the Investigators' minds.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Chambers shows how to put loved ones into scenarios. Where Lovecraft dooms his protagonists, Chambers spreads the horror to family and friends.

The deluded protagonist, believing he is king, accuses his cousin of attempting to steal the crown.

The protagonist turns living things into marble statues, then finds the woman he loved similarly changed.

The protagonist finds his lover reading *The King in Yellow* and knows she is doomed.

So, in any scenario, doom the people your Investigators love. Let an Investigator discover that her husband has Deep One ancestry. Have an Investigator's daughter read

1. Probably in cylinder form. Still, it's better than nothing.
2. Try describing different realities to different Investigators. For example, describe a Colour to one Investigator and an empty room to all the others.
3. Thus, it is a horror of self-revelation: you realise you are mad.

→ This is perilously close to 'it was all a dream'. Make sure there's something in the scenario to drive the PCs insane.

the Pnakotic Manuscripts. Let the Elder Things dissect an Investigator's family.

Beyond giving us new ways to tell stories, Chambers gives some fascinating specific items. Start with his fictional book, *The King in Yellow*.

It is banned in various countries, having spread like an infectious disease.

It is found on bookshelves without having been placed there.

Reading it gives a terrible and clear insight into reality.

The author is clearly diabolical and evil.

The fun, here, lies in the *unspecified* malevolence. What is so dangerous about *The King in Yellow*? We don't know, because anyone who reads it goes mad.<sup>1</sup>

Here, try basing scenarios around aspects of *The King In Yellow* that Chambers left unexplored. Let the Investigators encounter the book's author or its victims. Write a scenario about the book being banned.

Next comes the mystical land of Carcosa, where:

Black stars hang in the heavens.

The towers of Carcosa rise behind the moon.

The twin suns sink into the Lake of Hali.

Awful words echo through the dim streets.

Cloud-waves break against the shore.

Unfamiliar moons and constellations glide across the sky.

1. *The Yellow Sign* is the graphological cousin of the book *The King in Yellow*. They are interchangeable. Note how both can appear suddenly, anywhere, without explanation.

These images are not just dreamlike, but discordant. Towers rise *behind* a moon, suns sink *into* a lake and *black* stars are visible. For Hastur scenarios, steal these descriptions. Give the Investigators visions, dreams and perhaps a visit to Carcosa. For Hastur-free scenarios, steal the discordance, describing things that seem impossible.

Next, and beautifully, there is a milk-white liquid.

It is a solution, made with a newly-discovered element.<sup>1</sup>

It turns living things to stone, with veins like marble.

As it does, there is a golden ray of serene light, like a sunbeam.

Much later, the stone things return to life.

With this liquid, Chambers transforms *progressively greater* living things into marble: first a flower, then a rabbit, then a human being.<sup>2</sup> It is a meditation on life and death: the golden ray seems to symbolise their dying. Then, when everything is thought dead, it returns to life.<sup>3</sup>

So steal this liquid. Try switching protagonists: perhaps, for example, the Investigators must stop someone who transforms things to marble. Switch creatures: make the liquid a Mi-Go invention or the sap of Shub-Niggurath. Or shift time: let Investigators discover marble statues, which were once living beings.

More broadly, steal the themes of life and death. In an Ithaqua scenario, have living humans encased in ice. In a Mi-Go scenario, have humans preserved in component parts, ready to be reassembled. In a Cthulhu scenario, have someone in a permanent, dreaming coma.

1. When Chambers wrote, the elements were just being discovered, so this was a cutting-edge description. For a more modern take, try a substance of *unknown origin*, similar to that found in the Colour's meteorite.
2. Thus, he increases harm.
3. This happens in the same order, which creates a narrative crescendo to end the story. First the flower turns back, then the maid complains of a rabbit running around the house. Finally, the protagonist realises his love will return to life. And then she does.

Here are some final specifics. Drop them into any scenario, Hasturian or otherwise:

A man with soft, mushy flesh, with fingers that come off the hands.

People who have been dead for years.

Someone following you, staring with venomous hatred.

Discordant, unpleasant music, which sounds as though something is being hunted.

A sense of responsibility for something long forgotten, which will now rise and confront you.<sup>1</sup>

A sense that you *deserve* your punishment.

And some mysterious phrases, which Chambers scatters without explanation. Use them directly or scatter your own.

The Phantom of Truth.

The Hyades and the mystery behind them.

Aldebaran.

The story of the Lost King.

Cassilda and Camilla.

The cloudy depths of Demhe.

Yltill  
Aldones  
"I wear no mask"

Lastly, note Hastur's parallels with Nyarlathotep. Both are male and villainous. Both are associated with dreamlike worlds. And, unlike many Lovecraftian monsters, both warp perception. Try substituting each into the other's story. They play well together.<sup>2</sup>

1. Thus, although the protagonist does not know what he has done, he knows he deserves his fate. *The Dreams In The Witch House* has a similar horrific inevitability, which I will discuss under *Nyarlathotep* (page 152).
2. I'll return to this, too, under *Nyarlathotep* (page 152).

Try dropping cryptic phrases  
and poems into a  
scenario - Blake poems  
and Vavro paintings.



## ITHAQUA.

*Story: Algernon Blackwood's The Wendigo.*

*Synopsis: While exploring the Canadian forest, the protagonists are haunted by supernatural forces. One explorer is kidnapped. When the others search for him, they hear his distant voice and find fiery footprints. Finally, the kidnapped explorer returns, haunted and physically changed.*

ITHAQUA takes us into the wilderness. As depicted in Algernon Blackwood's *The Wendigo*,<sup>1</sup> he is a creature of desolation, personifying the vast, lonely outdoors. He is:

The Call of the Wild.

The seductive power of vastness, which sends explorers mad.

The Enticement of the Desolation.

Thus, Ithaqua is a creature of madness. He resides in icy wastelands and forests, preceded by eerie portents. He is perfect for a Lovecraftian scenario.

First and foremost, he is an abductor, whose victims return *changed*. The sequence of abduction runs:

People go somewhere desolate.

They notice signs of Ithaqua approaching.

Someone is abducted.

The others search for the abductee.

The abductee returns, changed.

---

1. Blackwood calls his creature the Wendigo. August Derleth then renamed the creature Ithaqua. For simplicity, I call Blackwood's creature by Derleth's name.

In fact, Blackwood barely calls the phenomenon "The Wendigo". August Derleth stole from Blackwood, riffing on WHISPERER IN DARKNESS to create "The Thing that Walked on the Wind."

You can begin the scenario at any point in this sequence. The Investigators could arrive before the abduction, letting them witness it. They could arrive before the abductee returns, so that they investigate the disappearance. Or they could meet a returned abductee, probably as a precursor to the Investigators being abducted.

Let's go through the abduction sequence in detail. We start in the forest, which is:

Immense. It reminds the Investigators how insignificant they are.

Ancient and primeval. It has survived long before the Investigators and will live long after.

Merciless. It is indifferent to human life.

Utterly still and desolate.

In particular, it is *mysterious*:<sup>1</sup>

It contains places that nobody will ever see, with creatures nobody will ever know.

It is dark, with shifting shadows.

There are legends and superstitions about evil things in the forest.

The natives avoid it.

And it appears to be *alive*:

It seems to be listening.

It presses around you.

There are living things beyond your field of vision.

---

1. Note how closely these four points parallel Lovecraft: unknown, dark, the subject of folktales, avoided by natives.



Vast, ancient, merciless, mysterious and alive: this forest makes an excellent quasi-Lovecraftian location. Try putting an Elder Things scenario here: replace *At the Mountains of Madness*'s icy plateau with this icy forest.<sup>1</sup> Or move the forest, making it tropical or temperate. Try a Mi-Go scenario, replacing Lovecraft's wooded hills with Blackwood's forest. Try a Shan scenario, with a temple hidden deep in the trees.

As his protagonists explore the forest, Blackwood describes them gathering around a campfire. This is a beautiful set-piece, which plays clever tricks with light, colour and danger. Steal it.

Around the campfire, people sing songs and tell stories of ancient horrors.

Beyond the firelight, the forest is black, with things moving in the darkness.

The light is unreliable and dreamlike, casting shades of red, black and bronze.

The smoke masks any odours from the surrounding forest.<sup>2</sup>

At its edge, there is a zone of uncertain light, where fire and shadows mix.

Thus, the campfire divides the surroundings into three zones of light, danger and reality:

Within the ring of firelight, you are safe, although everything appears dreamlike and unreal.

At its edge, nothing is certain.

Beyond the firelight, danger lurks and everything is dark.

- 
1. Note the parallels between *At The Mountains of Madness* and *The Wendigo*. Both centre around expeditions in the icy wastes. Swap details between them.
  2. That is, it masks signs of Ithaqua approaching.

You can use these descriptions in three, increasingly broad, ways. Firstly and simply, when you have a campfire in a Lovecraftian expedition, describe it like this. Secondly, whenever you have a *fire* in a scenario, steal the descriptions to create zones of light and danger.

Best of all, use these descriptions whenever you have *artificial light* in a scenario.<sup>1</sup> In 1920s scenarios, let Investigators' flashlights create zones of light: within the light, everything is harshly illuminated; beyond it, danger waits. In Victorian scenarios, do the same with gaslight. Within the light, everything is yellow, sickly and unreal.<sup>2</sup> At its edges, nothing is certain. Beyond the gaslight, in the dark alleys, your life is in danger.

And now Ithaqua approaches. First comes an odour:

Curious, acrid and thin.

Strangely sweet.

Reminiscent of decaying leaves, earth and all the scents of the forest.

Musky, like an odour of lions.

Next, there is a voice. At first, it's a mere impression of speech, a trick of the wind. Later, it calls a name, although only the named person hears it. This voice is:

High above.

Soft and roaring on the wind.<sup>3</sup>

Seductively sweet, calling the name of the person to be captured.

Composed of all the sounds of the forest: wind, water and animal cries.

- 
1. More generally: when describing a location, ask yourself how it is lit, then use the light (and darkness) to inspire your descriptions.
  2. When gaslight arrived in Victorian London, people described it as bright and unnatural, rather as we think of neon lighting today.
  3. In Brian Lumley's *The Burrowers Beneath*, Ithaqua controls the weather. Steal this.

Note how passive these early stages are: the horror comes to the explorers. Make them active. The Investigators must pursue something: a disappearance, a folktale or Ithaqua himself. They must unearth Ithaqua's legend, even as he pursues them.

That night, Ithaqua drags away the person whose name was called. Now, as with the Great Race, you must decide whether to abduct an NPC or Investigator. If you abduct an NPC, there are two options: start the scenario after the abduction or start with an NPC earmarked for abduction.<sup>1</sup> If you abduct an Investigator, find a way of choosing the victim.

If the Investigators see the abduction attempt, be ready for them to stop it. Thus, your scenario must work whether or not the abduction succeeds. This is easy: you could run an entire scenario with something *trying to* drag the Investigators away.

Whomever Ithaqua abducts, he leaps with them over the treetops. When their feet drop off, they grow new feet, like those of Ithaqua.

Back at camp, the Investigators find traces of the abduction.<sup>2</sup> First, they find footprints:

Large, round footprints, unlike those of any animal, tinged with fire and the eerie odour.

Alongside those footprints, the footprints of the abductee, which gradually become smaller versions of the fire-tinged footprints.

Strides of increasing and impossible length.

1. If you use the earmarked NPC, be ready for the players to spot the trick. Your scenario must work, even if the players guard against the abduction. If they do, this gives you a wonderful final scene: the players defending the NPC, while unknown forces close in.
2. This is where the investigation becomes active. It's a good point to begin a scenario.

Or try your hand with indirection:  
Something about the Investigators is changed.  
Hand, foot. Maybe eyes, or liver.

The Investigators may also hear the abductee's voice. It is:

Overhead.

Moving at speed.

A terrified, delighted wail.

Complaining of burning feet and immense height.

Finally, the Investigators find the abductee. They may seem possessed:<sup>1</sup>

Hanging skin and distorted features, as though they have been subjected to immense speed.

A faint, wailing voice.

A personality more animal than human.

A dark, monstrous and twisted aspect.

An impression of something diabolical beneath the face.

Huge, changed, dark feet.<sup>2</sup>

Or they may merely seem changed:

Mindless and catatonic.

Having no memory of their previous life.

Unable to eat food.

Frozen feet and bleeding beneath the eyes.

Exhausted to the point of emaciation.

1. It's unclear whether this is actual possession. Try assuming that it is: let the Investigator be possessed by the spirit of Ithaqua. Steal tricks from other creatures, perhaps the Great Race or Shan, to play this possession.
2. This verges on comedy. You could omit the changed feet or change them to bleeding, bony stumps, with shreds of flesh hanging on. Or steal the wider theme of being *infected* by Ithaqua.

See the Crocker Land Expedition, 1913.  
Murder, horror, hubris, chaos.

What is the final horror?<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is the returning victim: if so, try stepping up the shock, stealing the crumbling human from *The Colour Out of Space*. Perhaps, alternatively, the final horror is a sight of Ithaqua, as the Investigators pursue him into the woods.<sup>2</sup>

Here is some final Ithaquan trivia, to inform or spawn scenarios:

Ithaqua runs along the tops of the trees.

He eats moss. — Or it dies and dessicates around him. Steal from the COLOUR.

When he passes overhead, you feel a huge mass of air moving.

He takes people outside the atmosphere, where they recall being surrounded by stars.

To kill people, he drops them from a height.

This last gives us mysteriously-deceased corpses, which always go down well. — Frozen corpses.

Finally, try switching locations.<sup>3</sup> Traditionally, Ithaqua is confined to the Arctic Circle, which gives us Siberia, Finland, Canada and the sea. All make good, and different, settings for a scenario.

Alternatively, try exploring the theme of desolation elsewhere. Set scenarios in isolated jungles, deserts or mountains. Use Ithaqua himself or an Ithaquan clone, with descriptions changed to suit the new environment.

Try a desert Ithaqua, who whispers on the Saharan winds, or an Antarctic Ithaqua, who haunts explorers' camps. Ithaqua is about desolation. You can find that anywhere.

1. It may depend on the players. If, in your game, the returning victim seems horrific enough, then that is the final horror. If not, let them go to find Ithaqua.
2. Blackwood doesn't tell us what Ithaqua looks like. Make it up or try him as a "living wind" creature.
3. Although, since the story is little-known, this is not essential. Few players immediately associate the Canadian jungle with Ithaqua.

Even in a big impersonal city, Ithaqua dwells up along the cloud line, up above the skyscrapers

## LLOIGOR.

Story: Colin Wilson's *Return of the Lloigor*

*Synopsis: After deciphering the Voynich manuscript, the protagonist arrives in a Welsh town, where he unearths legends of a creature lying under the soil. A threatening gypsy warns him not to investigate further, telling him of the creature's power. He is one of many gypsies who serve the Lloigor. Finally, a vast explosion destroys the gypsy and his home.*

THE LLOIGOR are intangible,<sup>1</sup> invisible and malevolent. Thus, they give the bleakest kind of horror: when the scenario ends, the Lloigor remain, and the Investigators can do nothing.

In many ways, they resemble Colours. Both are everywhere and nowhere. Both harm people and property. Thus, you can switch Lloigor and Colour plots freely.<sup>2</sup> Here is *The Colour Out of Space* with a Lloigor:

The Investigators arrive on blasted farmland, with trees flattened and buildings reduced to rubble.

They find skeletons of animals, torn apart as if by an explosion.<sup>3</sup>

The locals seem ill, as if drained of energy.

They tell tales of a powerful, invisible being, sleeping beneath the soil.

The Investigators uncover bizarre, cruel acts, committed by the locals.<sup>3</sup>

In the upstairs room of a farm, they find a human, with many tentacles growing from their body.<sup>3</sup>

At the end, the Investigators see the farm blasted apart, destroyed by the Lloigor.

1. In many Cthulhu scenarios, the Lloigor manifest in visible, tangible form. This doesn't happen in Wilson's story (although the possibility is briefly mentioned). Think twice before having a Lloigor materialise. After all, being invisible and intangible is what makes the Lloigor unique.
2. And try switching elements between the creatures. Give the Lloigor dazzling light displays. Give Colours servitors.
3. The exploded skeletons, cruel locals and ententacled humans are all victims of the Lloigor. They replace the decayed victims of the Colour.

And here is *The Return of the Lloigor* with added Colour:

After deciphering an occult manuscript, the Investigators come to an Arkham farm.

There, they find the animals and plants strangely changed.

The locals tell them folktales of a creature from a meteorite, which sits beneath the earth, sucking the life out of the land.

Farmhands<sup>1</sup> approach the Investigators, warning them not to investigate further. They explain the Colour's power and history.

In the final scene, the Colour destroys the farmhands and their farm, which crumbles to the ground.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, all the tricks we played with Colours work well with the Lloigor. Try shifting timelines, letting Investigators arrive post-destruction. Try switching locations, putting a Lloigor beneath a wood, Antarctica or New York City.

Yet the Lloigor are not just big, invisible Colours. They destroy towns. They push people down stairs. They send servitors after Investigators. Thus, they produce horrifically exciting scenarios, which temper bleakness with adrenaline.

There are many places a Lloigor scenario could start:

A plane or boat passes through a mist and disappears. Later, when it reappears, the passengers have no sense of time having passed.<sup>3</sup>

Horrific crimes – murder, cruelty, sexual perversions – are concentrated in an area. The criminals show no remorse and even amusement.

A great noiseless explosion destroys a settlement, leaving only a pool of green and blue-grey water.

People suffer influenza-like symptoms and die of minor infections.

1. These replace the Lloigor's gypsy followers. And note that we have given the Colour servitors.
2. Thus, we give Colours the power of sudden, rather than gradual, destruction. It's an interesting variation.
3. Try swapping protagonists, so that the Investigators lose a chunk of time. Alternatively, let the vehicle disappear, Bermuda Triangle-style.

*Lloigor pessimism might also help explain all those mysterious suicides in Lovecraft.*

Use one to start the investigation; use the others as early moments of horror. For example, begin with a ship's disappearance, then introduce reports of murders on the ship.

From now on, three chains of events unfold in parallel. One: the Investigators investigate the legend of the Lloigor. Two: the Lloigor's servitors take reprisals against the Investigators. Three: the Lloigor itself menaces the Investigators.

Let's start with the legend of the Lloigor.

The Lloigor are fundamentally pessimistic: they understand the uncaring cosmos. The young Earth, which cannot support their pessimism, weakens the Lloigor.<sup>1</sup>

They have retreated underground, where they change the basic structure of the rocks to support their pessimism.<sup>1</sup>

Their ancient chief is Ghatanothoa, depicted on engraved green stones.

Within this legend is a strong theme of slavery:

The Lloigor created the human race.

They ruled the lost continent of Mu, with humans as their slaves.

They punished human slaves by amputating limbs and inflicting cancer-like tentacular growths on them.

They are preparing to take the Earth back and enslave humans again.

Today, the Lloigor revenge themselves on their former slaves by destroying their cities.

The Grand Canyon is the former site of Nam-Ergest, an ancient human city.

1. What do these things mean? It doesn't matter.

Photos can be a way of bringing the horror close to the characters without jumping right to the endgame. If the investigators take photos, then when they develop the images, they see strange ghostly forms and monsters that were invisible in person.

Try showing things that Wilson only described. Thus, let the Investigators feel the Lloigor's pessimism, find structurally-changed rocks, discover engravings of Ghatanothoa, unearth maps of Mu, meet people with mysteriously amputated limbs<sup>1</sup> and explore destroyed cities.

Next, the servitors take reprisals. These servitors:

Are related to each other by blood.<sup>2</sup>

Watch and follow the Investigators.

Warn against enquiring further.<sup>3</sup>

Attempt to frame Investigators for crimes.<sup>4</sup>

Sometimes seem possessed by the Lloigor.

Are strangely old, as if they had extended lifespans.

Are destroyed, by the Lloigor, when they talk too much.

Thus, the servitors warn the Investigators, then say too much and are destroyed. Steal this sequence for other Lovecraftian creatures. Let the Mi-Go send agents who warn the Investigators and are later found with brains removed.

Simultaneously, the Lloigor menaces the Investigators:<sup>5</sup>

Their compasses become demagnetised.

Photographs come out black.

The Investigators suffer flu-like symptoms.

They have moments of paranoia, believing people are about to attack them.

They suffer sudden accidents, such as being pushed down stairs.

1. Or tentacles. Or give the *Investigators* tentacular outgrowths and amputated limbs. That'll get their attention.
2. As mentioned above, Wilson describes them as gypsies. You should probably lose the racial reference, but keep the idea of a family or dynasty of servitors.
3. Interestingly, although the servitors are menacing and threaten harm, they do not attack.
4. An unusual, combat-free form of reprisal. Steal it for servitors of other creatures.
5. As with the Ckthonians, this occurs especially on low ground.

These three chains of events run side-by-side: *investigation*, *reprisals* from servitors, *menace* from the creature. There is a rhythm here: after an investigative scene, there are reprisals or menace.

Steal these three chains of events for any creature. Put investigation, reprisals and menace<sup>1</sup> into your scenario, then switch between them. For example, in a Deep One scenario, switch between investigation, reprisals from hybrids and dreams of the sea. For a Cthonian scenario, switch between investigation, warnings from brains-in-filth and tremors. By using all three, you create a complex, interesting story.

Towards the scenario's end, the Investigators may discover a Lloigor victim. Let's summarise, then, the harm that Lloigor do to humans. They: <sup>3</sup>

Cause people to commit bizarre crimes.<sup>2</sup>

Enrage people, causing a "tearing madness": "tearing" as you might tear chicken with your teeth.

Drain people of energy, causing flu-like symptoms.

Destroy settlements in noiseless explosions.

Amputate limbs or cause tentacles to grow on people.

So what is the climax? Try stealing a chase scene from the Cthonians: as the Investigators drive away, things explode behind them. Alternatively, steal from the Mi-Go and let servitors chase the Investigators away.

Lloigor haunt whole family lines. They are eerily timeless in this respect - steal the strange lineages of Deep Ones, Whateleys, or Ward-Curwen for more generational hauntings.

1. "Menace", here, encompasses harm, obstruction and general weirdness. Crucially, it is *remote* menace: for example, Cthullhu sends you a dream, rather than grabbing you with a feeler.
2. Perhaps by possessing them, perhaps through a subtler form of influence. It is unclear, so use either.
3. Most of these have been discussed already, but they are listed here for convenience.



Perhaps the best ending, however, is the noiseless explosion. It is simultaneously awesome, destructive and eerie.<sup>1</sup>

It is a combination of explosion and earthquake.

Three miles away, people are thrown out of bed.

Still farther away, people feel a minor earth tremor.

Trees are flattened.

After the explosion, the ground appears torn or split open.

There are clefts and cracks in the earth.

Fragmented bodies are found scattered, in shreds of skin and pieces of bone.

This is the most destructive piece we have seen so far. Steal it for the Lloigor or steal the destruction for other creatures. Let the Mi-Go tear down a farmhouse. Let Cthulhu smash towns. Never miss an opportunity to smash a building.

Two other isolated facts, about witches and ghosts, could inspire scenarios by themselves:

The Lloigor are connected with the Lancashire Witches, including Liz Southern, executed in 1612.

The Lloigor are connected with, or are the true explanation for, poltergeists.

This leaves one fascinating item: the Voynich manuscript. It is a real-life manuscript, coopted into the Mythos, superbly blurring history with fiction.

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1. This how the Grand Canyon was created. Thus, the aftermath of the explosion looks like a slightly less grand canyon.

It is a masterpiece of obfuscation. Its meaning is hidden behind layers of encryption and mystery, which the protagonist must laboriously peel away.<sup>1</sup> Steal these layers for your Mythos writings. They are:

The lettering appears, at first, to be an indecipherable shorthand.

On closer inspection, the letters are half peeled off.

Photography enhances the colours, revealing the complete letters.

...but only when you look indirectly at the photographs.

By tracing the photographs, then transferring the tracings to heavy drawing paper, you can see the letters properly.

The lettering is medieval Arabic.

The language, however, is a mixture of Latin and Greek.

When translated, the manuscript is found to be part of a larger work. Other fragments are rumoured to exist.

This larger work is a digest or summary of other books.

One of the summarised books contains “a code within a code”.

That “code within a code” is, of course, the Necronomicon. Beneath all that obfuscation is the most mysterious book of all.

*People become obsessed with the Voynich manuscript, in fiction and reality.*

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1. Although tomes in Lovecraft’s stories are confusingly written, they rarely require active investigation to decipher. Wilbur Whateley’s diary, in *The Dunwich Horror*, is an exception: it is written in code. Wkhuh duh vlpodu hqfrghg gldulhv lq wkh kdxqwhu ri wkh gdun dqg wkh fdvh ri fkdudhv ghawhu zdug.



## MI-GO.

*Story: The Whisperer in Darkness.*

*Synopsis: After reading reports of unidentifiable corpses, the protagonist begins exchanging letters with a man called Akeley. Akeley reports being pursued by alien creatures, who intercept mail and cut off lines of communication. Finally, a strikingly different letter invites the protagonist to Akeley's farmhouse. There, the protagonist meets a strangely-acting man, who shows him a metal cylinder. When connected to speakers, the metal cylinder explains that it contains a living human brain. That night, the protagonist sneaks out of the house and drives away.*

WITH everything we've learned from other creatures, the Mi-Go are strikingly straightforward. Let's run, at speed, through a potential scenario.

Begin with a hook to draw the Investigators in.<sup>1</sup> From *The Whisperer In Darkness*, we have the following:

Alien corpses, found after flooding: pinkish, crustacean and about five feet long. They do not show on photographs and evaporate within hours.

Someone who lives in remote parts undergoes an unexplained mental change.

A child is frightened by something in the forest.<sup>2</sup>

A buzzing voice, on a deserted road, makes surprising offers to travellers.<sup>3</sup>

1. Or, as always, simply let the Investigators arrive.

2. Children are unusual in Lovecraft, so this is worth exploring.

3. Lovecraft does not specify what these offers are. Either make them up or riff on a Mi-Go theme. For example, offer to show the Investigators the universe. How could they refuse that?

Unusual stone occurs in CALL OF CTHULHU, AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS and COLOUR OUT OF SPACE,

among others.

Lovecraft uses the first, so the others are ripe for expansion. In the early stages of the scenario, add some narrative distance: for example, let them *read about* whispered voices on deserted roads.

As the Investigators explore, they unearth folktales.

There are creatures, high in the hills, looking for an unusual type of stone.<sup>1</sup>

They are connected to leprechauns and the Yeti.

The forested tops of some mountains, where nobody has lived for centuries, are feared and avoided.

Mountain dwellers, or those living too close to a particular valley, suddenly disappear.<sup>2</sup>

Eccentric recluses and hermits are thought to be in league with the creatures.

These are good folktales, so use them with other creatures. Have people disappear near Deep One cities. Spread rumours about reclusive families being Lloigor servitors.

Note especially the leprechaun and Yeti connections: by connecting Lovecraftian creatures to legendary beings, you make them seem ancient and mystical. Use this with other creatures, choosing something plausible. Connect Deep Ones with mermaids and Sirens, Cthulhu with the Kraken, the Medusa with Ghatanathoa and the Mi-Go with kobolds.

Ithaqua with Sasquatch, Flying Polyps or Mi-Go with UFOs...

1. *The Whisperer in Darkness* barely explores these mining operations. You should do so.
2. Another possible beginning for the scenario.

... In fact, steal everything from UFO mythology for the Mi-Go. Weird lights, contactees, enigmatic traces, aliens, abductions, Men in Black (who buzz)

Next, the Investigators find ambiguous evidence of the creatures:

Alien clawprints, with pairs of saw-toothed nippers protruding from a central pad.

Circles of stones, with grass worn away around them.

Caves of unimaginable depth, their mouths sealed by deliberately-placed boulders.<sup>1</sup>

A great black stone with worn hieroglyphics.

Note that, at this stage, everything the Investigators discover is beyond rational explanation, but not definitively supernatural.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the clawprints are described as *strange*, rather than *alien*. Note, also, that Lovecraft only mentioned the items above. Let your Investigators find them.

Gradually, the Investigators get closer to the creatures:

They glimpse something monstrous in the twilit forest.

They see many of the things, wading in disciplined formation.<sup>3</sup>

They see a creature carrying an unknown object.

They glimpse a flying creature, silhouetted momentarily against the full moon.

They sense an indefinable rhythm or vibration in the air.

Someone speaks with a buzzing voice.

1. Which, of course, let the Investigators go underground later in the scenario.
2. See *Increasing Certainty* (page 43). We are at Point 2 in both lists, not Point 3.
3. Be careful about narrative distance here. This sighting should be distant, obscured by trees or merely reported to the Investigators.

Around now, the Mi-Go or their agents begin taking reprisals against the Investigators. They:

Cut off lines of communication, stealing packages, blocking roads and cutting telephone wires

Plant spies in local towns.

→ The difficulty of doing this depends on the era in which the game is set.

As with the Lloigor, the interplay of investigation, reprisal and creature menace makes the story richer. Switch regularly between the three. Try swapping details between the Mi-Go and Lloigor: make Mi-Go agents malevolent and threatening; let Lloigor servitors disrupt communications.

Perhaps, now, the Investigators observe the Mi-Go rituals. Again, Lovecraft only describes this, so let your Investigators see the following:

They worship in the forest, especially on May Eve and Sabbat Night.

Their human associates join them in the worship.

They worship Shub-Niggurath.

Towards the end of the scenario, the Investigators should see the harm that Mi-Go do to humans. It is a strikingly specific harm: they encase brains in metal cylinders.<sup>1</sup>

Some victims are willing, some are not.

The cylinders connect to sensors and loudspeakers, letting victims talk and hear.

The encased brains travel to other planets, where they are connected to similar sensory equipment and experience alien life.

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1. Try tweaking this. Let the Mi-Go keep entire bodies alive or merely capture the soul.

With aid, the cylinders can also go backwards and forwards in time.

Many brains are stored under Round Hill, Massachusetts. Some are from other planets.

The brainless bodies are kept alive under Round Hill.

Try exploring these, especially the final three, in scenarios. Let Investigators visit Round Hill. Let them speak to a brain that travelled to, or comes from, another planet.

What is the final horror for your scenario? In *The Whisperer in Darkness*, there is no crowning terror. There are brains-in-cylinders, a conversation with the Mi-Go and a chase, but none of these events is climactic.

You could, if you like, try a scenario without a climactic moment. Alternatively, try the standard horrors. Let the Investigators see the Mi-Go: Lovecraft's protagonist never sees them directly, which means your Investigators should. Or let Investigators find humans harmed by the Mi-Go: perhaps they discover many brains-in-cylinders or brainless bodies. Try stealing from Chambers and let the Investigators find the encylindereed brains *of their loved ones*.

Finally, there is probably a chase. Steal the ending from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, sending a Mi-Go horde after the Investigators. Or, if the Investigators ventured into the mines, steal the underground pursuit from *At the Mountains of Madness*, replacing the Shoggoth with Mi-Go.

And, as always, we can play narrative tricks. Try switching creatures: let Cthulhu's cultists patiently explain the joys of killing. Switch locations, placing Mi-Go mines in Antarctica, forests or desert.

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1. "I expect to go backward and forward in time, and actually see and feel the earth of remote past and future epochs", says the encylindereed brain in *The Whisperer In Darkness*. Thus, the Mi-Go can do time travel.

There are two more themes, rare in Lovecraft, which we can steal for other creatures. The first is technology, which Lovecraft describes in unusual detail:

Cylinders of an unknown, shiny metal, about a foot high.

Three curious sockets set in an isosceles triangle.

Intricate instruments with attached cords and plugs

A tall machine with glass lenses in front.

A box with vacuum tubes and a sounding-board.

A machine with a metal disc on top.

Dials, turned to the extreme right.

A grating and whirring noise.

Thus, it is *large*.<sup>1</sup> It is *mechanical*, not electronic: it grates, whirs and uses vacuum tubes and cords. To modern eyes, it resembles an old valve radio. If you use technology in Lovecraftian scenarios, this is what it looks like.

The second theme, incongruously, is happiness. At the story's end, the Mi-Go *happily* explain the secrets of the Mythos. They are *eager* to outline their plans.<sup>2</sup> And the brain-in-a-cylinder *welcomes* Lovecraft's protagonist, even offering him his own cylinder.

Try taking this niceness at face value. Just as the Great Race want to learn (by possessing people) and the Elder Things want to study (by dissecting people), so the Mi-Go want to show humans the universe (by putting brains in cylinders). It is deeply eerie.

1. Lovecraft wrote before the transistor was invented.

2. This runs close to *Being Nice* (page 64). Here, however, we consider the possibility that the aliens actually *are* nice. But not in a good way.

Seem weirdly primitive now! It was cutting edge in Lovecraft's day. Modern Mi-Go doubtless have touch-screens and quantum bubble computing. OR - the machinery is actually human "Cargo Cult" machinery, trying to imitate Mi-Go devices working by laws even its builders don't understand.<sup>150</sup>

More generally, try letting creatures talk to Investigators.<sup>1</sup> Let Deep Ones *explain* why they must mate with humans. Let Nyarlathotep *demonstrate* how Cthulhu's rule will set humans free. Keep some narrative distance: remember that the Mi-Go talked in darkness and disguise.

But try letting the creatures explain themselves. After all, the Mythos is not just horrific: it can be seductive and persuasive.

The Deep One deal is actually a pretty good one - fish and gold and immortality for your kids? What's not to like?

1. This, admittedly, contradicts my earlier warnings about allowing Investigators to chat to monsters. But this is slightly different. This isn't a chat. This is the creatures, at the end of the scenario, explaining their dark plans.



## NYARLATHOTEP.

*Story: The Dreams in the Witch House, Nyarlathotep.*

*Synopsis of The Dreams in the Witch House: After studying abstruse mathematics and folklore, a student's dreams become increasingly tangible and horrific.<sup>1</sup>*

*Synopsis of Nyarlathotep: The protagonist hears stories of a showman. After seeing the show, he sees the world as a post-apocalyptic landscape.*

NYARLATHOTEP is overused. In many Cthulhu scenarios, he is a villain in human form: a Lovecraftian Lex Luthor. From Lovecraft's stories, however, a more interesting Nyarlathotep emerges. He appears in three forms: the keeper of Mythos knowledge, the showman and the harbinger of the apocalypse.

Nyarlathotep the knowledge-keeper appears in *The Dreams in the Witch House*. When the protagonist meets Nyarlathotep, in dreams, he realises the price of his learning:

He must accompany Nyarlathotep to the throne of Azathoth.

He must sign the book of Azathoth, in his own blood, and take a secret name now that his independent delvings have gone so far.

He knows that the name "Azathoth" stands for an indescribable primal evil.

Thus, investigating the Mythos is *seductive*, it *comes with obligations*, but it remains *repellent*. And it is a slippery slope: once you start, you must learn more.

1. There's much more to the story than this, but this is what we need for Nyarlathotep.

Steal these descriptions for other Mythos knowledge. Explain that, having met the Mi-Go, the Investigators are *obliged* to visit their planet. They *must* take the third Dagonic Oath, be the Lloigor's slave or accept Yithian possession.<sup>1</sup>

And make these things repellantly attractive. Make the Shan's memories hypnotically beautiful. Make the Lloigor's amputations intensely pleasurable. Have the Mi-Go describe the beauty of the stars.

Nyarlathotep the showman appears in the story *Nyarlathotep* itself. His shows contain:

Static electricity, making people's hair stand on end.

Talk of electricity and psychology.

Images of ruin, projected on screens in darkened ruins.

Glass and metal instruments and combining them into machines.

And the showman himself exerts strange power:

People kneel before him, but do not know why.

He gives commands, which people forget when they leave.

For this showman role, try stealing a Nyarlathotep figure from history. In Victorian times, try P. T. Barnum or Charles Dickens. In the 1920s and 1930s, try Nikola Tesla or the villains of Hollywood movies. In modern times, try a figure resembling Glenn Beck, in the United States, or Derren Brown, in Britain.<sup>3</sup>

1. This isn't a railroad. It's simply presenting them with an impossible choice: do they do the unspeakable thing or renege on their promises<sup>2</sup> and face reprisals?  
2. Promises which, of course, they didn't know they had made.  
3. Or, indeed, the Barack Obama of 2008.

This is a really poor use of Nyarlathotep, reducing him to Satan without the charm.

Nyarlahotep the apocalyptic harbinger appears in both *Nyarlahotep* and *The Fungi from Yuggoth*. Even before he arrives, the world seems apocalyptic:

The seasons alter, so that winter never comes.

It is stiflingly hot.

There is political and social upheaval, with the threat of physical harm.

When Nyarlahotep comes, people scream in the middle of the night.

Through his shows, he causes people to see apocalyptic scenes. It is unclear whether these are real or imagined.

A destroyed city, with the pavement broken by the grass.

Crumbling, half-fallen buildings.

A weed-choked subway entrance.

Vast, glittering snowdrifts, which seem inexplicably evil, in which no footprints show.

How can we use this remarkable imagery in a scenario? Try stealing and lengthening the *Nyarlahotep* plot, adding a slow increase of eeriness.

The Investigators hear of a showman, coming to Kingsport,<sup>1</sup> whose shows are remarkable and terrifying.

When they arrive in Kingsport, the weather is hot and stifling. For days, the sun has not fully set.<sup>2</sup>

They meet those who have seen Nyarlahotep and followed him ever since. These people see visions of the city destroyed and endless snow.

1. Or use any iconic location. San Francisco, Paris, Cairo, Shanghai.

2. An analogue of “winter never comes”.

At night, they scream endlessly.

They see Nyarlahotep’s equipment being unloaded: unknowable, monstrous creations of glass and metal.

Now, the Investigators begin to see visions of the city destroyed, around the theatre where Nyarlahotep’s show will take place.

If Investigators see the show, they then perceive the world as crumbling and decayed. If they do not, they see the population of Kingsport screaming and mad.<sup>1</sup>

Note that, for the Final Horror, we see the harm that Nyarlahotep does: he sends people mad with knowledge. It’s an intriguingly different horror, which you can steal for any creature. Perhaps, after dreaming of Cthulhu, the Investigators begin to perceive his apocalypse. Perhaps, after studying the Lloigor, the Investigators see the world as it will be, when humans are slaves.

Perhaps the best thing to do with Nyarlahotep, though, is mix him with Hastur. The two are remarkably similar. Hastur’s book, *The King in Yellow*, resembles Nyarlahotep’s sideshow: both give incredible knowledge that sends people mad.

So swap ideas between the two. Replace Nyarlahotep with a Hastur figure, showing electric pictures of Carcosa. Replace *The King in Yellow* with Nyarlahotep’s show, shown on a home projector. Blur the lines between knowledge, illusion, sanity and insanity.

1. *Nyarlahotep* contains one of Lovecraft’s best illustrations of the maddening power of Mythos knowledge. The people in the story literally cannot handle the truth.

Nyarlahotep's other major avatar, the eponymous  
HAUNTER OF THE DARK, also reveals evil  
lore in visions

## THE SHAN.

*Story: Ramsey Campbell's The Insects from Shaggai*

*Synopsis: The protagonist hears folktales about a wood connected with witch cults. He explores the wood. Becoming lost, he finds a metallic creature, then a temple. Suddenly, an insect-like alien flies into his brain. He experiences its memories, then enters the temple. Deep within, he finds Azathoth. After running away, he realises the insect remains inside his brain and wants him to lure others to the temple. He kills himself.*

RAMSEY CAMPBELL'S Shan are the best Mythos creature that Lovecraft never wrote.<sup>1</sup> We can steal three main things from them: witches, possession and world domination.

Take these in reverse order, starting with world domination. Many Mythos creatures have no clear strategy for ruling the world. Cthulhu wants to enslave everyone, while Deep Ones will do something with a Shoggoth,<sup>2</sup> but neither is clear on the details.

By contrast, the Shan have detailed plans.<sup>3</sup> They start by luring people to their temple, whom they possess and use to lure others. When they have possessed enough people, they build more temples. Repeat until the Shan rule the world.<sup>4</sup>

This is horrific because it is *comprehensible*<sup>5</sup> and *inevitable*. Steal this plan, suitably adapted, for other creatures. Perhaps the Lloigor will drain more and more humans, until all are enslaved. Perhaps the Deep Ones will systematically breed with humans, until all share their taint. (Perhaps they already have.)

1. So are the Lloigor.
2. It is not clear what. Perhaps they are still deciding that part.
3. For a plausible alternative Shan, who do not want to rule the world, steal from the Mi-Go. These Shan simply want to be left alone, in their woodland temple, and take reprisals against those who investigate.
4. It is unclear how this connects to the Shan's other interests: witch cults and bringing Azathoth to Earth.
5. Incomprehensible plans, such as the Deep Ones' Shoggoth scheme, are horrific in a different way.

Steal possessed Shan cultists for Deep One hybrids – their alien DNA hasn't quite erased their humanity yet.

Next, the Shan give us a new way to possess humans. Their victims retain abilities, reason and, partially, free will. Thus, this is a “soft” possession:<sup>1</sup> the victim feels human, but feels urges to follow Shan orders. It runs as follows.

The insect flies straight into your head. (It is not wholly material.)

You feel it crawling in your brain.

Your vision ripples, melts and distorts.

You feel ecstatic pleasure.

Once possessed, the victim might see the creature's memories. Perhaps they see its previous victims, alien homeland or occult secrets. For players, this is a fascinating double-edged sword: they get information, but at the price of being possessed. For you, it is a tool for narration: it lets you feed information and give tantalising, horrific visions.<sup>2</sup> Steal this for other creatures: for the Deep Ones and Cthulhu, feed information through dreams; for the Great Race, give information through recovered memories.

Here, from *The Insects from Shaggai*, are some particularly fruitful memories:

A subterranean plant, with purple blossoms and reaching tentacles, demands living sacrifices.

In an endless ocean, a pillar projects through green mist. A leathery hand reaches from the sea.

A glowing red globe drifts closer to a planet. When it fills the sky, it explodes, filling creatures and buildings with its crimson glow. The glow turns yellow, then white, and the creatures writhe and die.<sup>3</sup>

1. The Cthonians do something similar, although, in fact, they only implant suggestions. The Great Race's possession, meanwhile, is a “hard” possession”: it involves complete control.
2. Campbell uses this to tell the creature's backstory (as Lovecraft uses carvings).
3. This memory is of the Shan's planet being destroyed, shortly before they teleported their temple to Earth. They are the victims in all this, really.

Injecting memories gives many, many possibilities. Perhaps the Shan killed the Investigator's parents.

Use these memories to inspire scenarios. Put the plant under London, with a cult to feed it. Bring the destructive globe to Earth.

Now, after a period of possession, the victim may:

Start thinking like the insect, seeing the world with cruel dispassion.<sup>1</sup>

Begin luring people to the temple.

Go insane or commit suicide.

In *The Insects from Shaggai*, the protagonist goes mad and kills himself. Try switching protagonists: let the Investigators meet a possessed NPC or investigate a possessee's suicide.

Next, steal the witch cults. Campbell gives us an entire backstory, set in the 1600s, which could easily be updated:

A meteorite falls to Earth, in a clearing previously occupied by a Roman temple.

It is a temple of the Shan.

It gains worshippers, who make blood sacrifices to the Shan.

In return, the Shan inject memories into the worshippers, which gives them a drug-like euphoria.

These worshippers entice others to the clearing.

As the cult grows, the community realises the threat and kills the witches.

This is a ready-made scenario. Let the Investigators arrive in the final stages (just before “As the cult grows”, above) and discover the cult. This gives the Investigators a choice: do they murder the cult or, knowing the Shan's plans, leave it

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1. For an odd and horrifying scenario, steal from Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, and let the Investigators begin *physically* transforming into insects.

to grow? Try showing things that Campbell left unexplored: the blood sacrifice, the witches' rituals, the memory-addicts.

Having stolen the Shan's best parts, let's go through *The Insects from Shaggai* and steal imagery. We start in the woods, which are ill-reputed, dreamlike and full of legends.<sup>1</sup> It is a wood of dark English fairytales: a perfect Lovecraftian location.<sup>2</sup>

The woods are:

Dark, with the sun barely visible.

Filled with flashes of movement and light seen through trees.

Misty and dripping with moisture.

Confusing to navigate.

Reputed, in local legends, to be evil.

Thickest in the centre.

As the Investigators venture deeper, things get darker. There might be:

A dry, approaching rustling.

Moving lights, seen dimly through the trees.

Creatures seen in the distant wood.

Paths that seem to lead out, but lead deeper into the wood.

Something that seems to hide behind the trees, pursuing you.

Visions of people, perhaps those you know, which turn out to be the shapes of trees.

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1. For the following woodland horrors, I have also stolen from Campbell's *The Darkest Part of the Woods*.  
2. It is subtly different from Ithaqua's forest. Where his forest is agoraphobic and forbidding, the Shan's wood is claustrophobic and eerie.

Now, the Investigators may meet the Daytime Guardians. These extraordinary creatures:

Try replacing them with human slaves.

- Resemble sixteen-foot-high metallic trees.
- Have thick cylindrical tentacles, which look like branches.
- Walk on two metallic cylinders, which each divide into six circular extensions.
- Are tortured by the Shan for pleasure.
- Have heavy, metallic-sounding footsteps.
- Have a featureless oval for a head. At the top is a mouth-like orifice, which they bend over to use.

Don't let the Investigators meet these creatures too early: if they see them on entering the woods, it turns the weirdness straight up to 11.<sup>1</sup> So add narrative distance. Let Investigators hear *tales* of these creatures, find a *dead* creature, or discover an oddly metallic tree trunk.

Now, the sun sets<sup>2</sup> and the Shan emerge. It is a routine: they worship by day and hunt humans by night.<sup>3</sup>

Then, in a clearing, the Investigators find the temple, which:

- Is a thirty-foot-high metallic cone.
- Is made of a non-reflective grey mineral.
- Has a rectangular, blood-stained hollow, for human sacrifices.
- Has a circular trapdoor on the side, with strange carvings depicting the Shan's history.

1. Which is what happens in *The Insects From Shaggai*. It is one of the weaker parts of the story.
2. A Lovecraftian rule: before the scenario ends, the sun must set.
3. There is no indication that, as in many Cthulhu games, the Shan are *afraid* of or *harmed* by sunlight. It would be understandable, given that their planet was destroyed by a glowing sphere, but it is not mentioned. Certainly, there is no suggestion that a possession victim can be cured by unorthodox methods such as trepanning (an idea popularised by *Delta Green*).

It's a good temple. Use it, adapted, for other creatures. Change the material to black stone and it becomes a Mi-Go shrine to Shub-Niggurath. Change it to green soapstone and it's a Deep One temple.

When the Investigators go inside, they descend through the following levels:

Grey slanting corridors, with bas-reliefs on walls.

Corridors lined with the cells of enslaved Guardians.

A souvenir room, with eyeless corpses of all the races enslaved by the Shan.

Finally, behind ominous doors, they find Azathoth. He takes the Shoggoth role, chasing the Investigators out. This is the final horror of *The Insects from Shaggai*.

Try changing the ending. Perhaps the Shan give chase instead. Perhaps the temple teleports away, giving a beautiful, mystical ending like that of *The Colour Out of Space*. Perhaps, even, deep within the temple, the Investigators must prevent a multidimensional Azathothian gate opening.

The plot above, then, gives many scenarios. Switch locations: a Californian desert, a German forest, the Arkham sewers. Switch creatures: try rerunning the scenario with the Deep Ones, the Elder Things, even the Great Race.

At its heart, the *Insects from Shaggai* plot is simple and iconic: hear about a temple, find it, look inside, run away. You can use that plot for anything.

1. Note the interesting double descent: into the woods, then into the temple. In *The Haunter of the Dark*, there is a double climb: up a hill, then up a steeple. Both suggest the protagonist is heading deeper and deeper into danger.

For a one-shot, change the timing. The temple has already landed, the Shan are already abroad. All but one of the PCs are already possessed; the goal of the possessed characters is to lure the lone victim to the temple.



## SHOGGOTHS.

*Story: At the Mountains of Madness.*

*Synopsis: See Elder Things, above.*

SHOGGOTHS play an important role in *At the Mountains of Madness*: they appear at the end, as the Final Horror, and chase the Investigators. Other creatures take the Shoggoth role too: in *The Shadow Out of Time*, it's the Flying Polyps; in *The Insects from Shaggai*, it's Azathoth.

It's an easy, effective ending, which works in any scenario: introduce a monster, send it after the Investigators. Even if it makes little sense, the adrenaline rush ends the scenario.<sup>1</sup>

But Shoggoths are more than eldritch tanks. They:

Are faintly luminescent.

Are covered in strangely-coloured, perhaps green, lights.

Are covered in eyes, which continually form and unform.

Are a mass of protoplasmic bubbles.

Ooze a fetid black iridescence.

Thus, they are not just terrifying and large, but *eerie*. Even a stationary Shoggoth would be scary: glowing faintly, its eyes winking in and out of existence, oozing steadily.

The traces they leave behind, too, mix eeriness with horror:

They leave tunnel walls greasily shiny, as if polished.

They bite victims' heads off, leaving them mauled, compressed, twisted, ruptured and (of course) decapitated.<sup>2</sup>

1. If you're improvising a scenario and get stuck, send a monster at the Investigators.
2. One of Lovecraft's most horrific moments. Enjoy it. Linger over it.

*Shoggoths' slavery makes them  
oddly pitiable — and worthy of  
respect for breaking their chains.*

They also have skills. Being designed as labourers, they can:

Be commanded hypnotically, producing specific organs on demand.

Be tamed and broken.

Push stones into place to erect Cyclopean cities.<sup>1</sup>

Use these organ-producing skills in scenarios. Make Shoggoths into spies, by producing eyes; pumps, by producing hearts; or incubators, to keep human brains alive. Try changing their size and shape: use tiny Shoggoths, flying Shoggoths or wire-like Shoggoths in connected networks.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond this, the Shoggoths have three fascinating abilities. Firstly, they *evolve*. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, they gain both intelligence and resistance to hypnotic command. So invent new forms of Shoggoth: chameleon Shoggoths, slime-like Shoggoths, gaseous Shoggoths and more. Try letting them evolve throughout a scenario.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, they *think*. Perhaps they make plans. Perhaps they want to rule the world. Certainly, they are more than mindless killers: they kill *mindfully*.

Lastly, they *imitate*. They:

Grow organs to imitate other races.

Imitate the voices of other creatures.

Make carvings, roughly imitating other carvings they find.

There is an obvious opportunity here: let them imitate humans. Let them grow human organs, imitate human voices and mimic human writing.<sup>4</sup>

1. Let the Investigators see this.
2. In *At The Mountains of Madness*, Danforth mentions many things that might be types or forms of Shoggoth. Thus, you can invent freely.
3. Since *Elder Things* created life as a mistake, try stealing the tainted lineage trope from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. Reveal that humans evolved from a breed of shoggoths who became fixed in form.
4. Recall the imperfect human writing in *The Shadow Out of Time*.

Try rerunning *At the Mountains of Madness*, replacing Elder Things with humans. Send the Investigators into an underground city, which other humans have explored. Let them find decapitated humans and imitated human writing. Finally, they hear human screams and are chased out by a Shoggoth.

Finally, try moving Shoggoths. Use them in sewers, subways and backstreets. Use them in deserts, forests and the sea.<sup>2</sup> Nobody said Shoggoths had to stay underground.

Remember, Shoggoths scared Abdul Alhazred. He denied ("shriekingly") that there were any left on Earth. Think about that - what scares Abdul bloody Alhazred? Steal that - have your tome hysterically deny the horror, not explain it.

It's fascinating that Abdul Al-hazred denies the existence of the Shoggoths, claiming they only appear in the dreams of those who have chewed a certain alkaloidal herb.

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1. In *The Burrowers Beneath*, Brian Lumley uses a Sea Shoggoth.

## AFTERWORD.

WRITING horror stories is creative. So the ideas in this book are not prescriptive: they are not a guide to How To Write A Scenario. They are a toolset, a bag of suggestions, a prompt for your own ideas.

Perhaps you like to start scenarios with gory horror. Perhaps you prefer to invent your own creatures. Perhaps you think my interpretation of the Lloigor is completely wrong. If so, then some ideas in this book won't work for you. Throw away the ideas you don't like and use the ones you do.

The most important idea in this book, however, is: nothing is sacred. Nothing is canon. You need never, ever be faithful to something you've read.

Thus, if a scenario defines the Dagonic Oaths, you can redefine them. If a rulebook tells you about the Mi-Go, you can redesign them. Make your creatures different. Make your stories different. Accept nothing. Play with everything.

The other important idea is: players love Lovecraft. They love bleak hopelessness. They love not being able to fight. Most of all, they love genuine horror. I've seen hardened *Dungeons and Dragons* players reduced to delighted insanity. I've had experienced *Call of Cthulhu* gamers happy to go mad.

So don't be afraid to steal from Lovecraft. He is your best, easiest, eeriest source of stories. He will put the horror back into your game.

# APPENDICES.

## A: MISCELLANY.

THESE are notes that didn't fit anywhere else.

Give many clues, not just those needed to pursue the investigation.

Give rich clues. You can enrich any clue with a connection to a Finnish folktale, whispered legend or half-remembered piece of writing.

Draw links between history and fiction. By adding real people, events or times, the horror becomes more tangible.

Give choices. Do you kill the Deep One hybrid or let it live? You must sacrifice one person: who will it be? (Not very Lovecraftian, but fun.)

Scenarios divide into three sections.

*The beginnings of scenarios are usually fun. Everything is exciting. The Investigators enjoy exploring the world.*

*The middle sections of scenarios are often difficult. They seem slow, the Investigators seem confused, everyone wonders where the story is going. Don't worry about this. Let everyone get a little frustrated, then drive towards the ending.*

*Then the endings of scenarios are usually fun again. If you end a scenario well, everyone will forget any earlier frustration.*

Do horror that genuinely creeps you out.

Do horror that excites you, so that you are bursting to tell the players what you know.

Base scenarios around one simple, horrific idea. The Deep Ones are breeding with humans. A tablet that makes dreams come true, but badly. Once you have this idea, riff on it endlessly and the rest of the scenario will follow.

Look for endings. If an Investigator cuts their arm off or sacrifices another Investigator, that's probably the end, even if you had a chase planned.

Escalate ideas. Begin with glasses shaking, then earth tremors, then earthquakes.

I need exact coordinates.

There is a "Yog-Sothoth role", which is like a bomb counting down. If the Investigators don't do something, Yog-Sothoth will come, and boom! Azathoth often fills the Yog-Sothoth role.

Time sunset right.

Ask the Investigators why they are here.

Finish sentences with "what do you do?".

Ask the Investigators how they meet up.

Let the Investigators talk to each other.

Let them narrate their own epilogue.

If you are reviewing this book, please mention the word "catacomb". If not, please don't mention that you saw this sentence.

Ask Investigators how they know each other. Build complex webs of relationships.

Ask Investigators how they feel about each other. Use their occupations as guides: do police officers like journalists or hate them? Either works.

→ Try pointed questions.  
"Why do you hate her?"  
"How did he save your life?"

## B: BIBLIOGRAPHY.

THESE are the six Lovecraft stories to which I've referred throughout the text. Read one or read them all. I'd recommend them in roughly this order.

*The Whisperer in Darkness.*

*The Shadow Over Innsmouth.*

*The Shadow Out Of Time.*

*The Colour Out Of Space.*

*At The Mountains Of Madness.*

*The Call of Cthulhu.*

The following Lovecraft stories are also worth reading for their descriptions of particular Mythos entities:

*Nyarlathept.*

*The Fungi from Yuggoth.*

*The Dreams In The Witch House.*

*Dagon.*

*Pickman's Model.*

*Pickman's Model*, in particular, contains a wonderfully detailed description of ghouls. Indeed, it contains so much information that I found it impossible to condense into a chapter. Read it and steal the ideas.

By prioritising these stories, I've taken a particular view of Lovecraft. It is one rarely seen in Cthulhu games, concerning ancient creatures and inevitable doom. Similarly, I have de-emphasised stories that use themes commonly seen in Cthulhu gaming, such as sorcery and villainy.

Having seen this side of Lovecraft, then, it's worth returning to his sorcerous stories. Start with *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. Note the familiar themes: possession, changed voices, whispering in darkness, shafts of light. Steal the catacombs, the body-snatching, the magic.

Finally, these stories are not by Lovecraft, but give excellent depictions of Mythos creatures.

*The King In Yellow*<sup>1</sup> (but only the stories *The Repairer Of Reputations*, *The Mask*, *In The Court Of The Dragon* and *The Yellow Sign*), by Robert Chambers

*The Wendigo*, by Algernon Blackwood.

*The Return of the Lloigor*, by Colin Wilson.

*The Burrowers Beneath*, by Brian Lumley.

*Cold Print*<sup>1</sup>, by Ramsey Campbell.

*Cold Print* is particularly worth mining for descriptions of lesser-known Mythos entities: not just the Shan, but Daoloth, Y'golonac and many more.

I have largely ignored August Derleth's work, for reasons similar to those that led me to select the six stories above. Many Cthulhu games stick close to Derleth's vision of Lovecraft horror. Return to Lovecraft and you get something new.

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1. Both these are collections of short stories.

## C: CTHULHU DARK.

Cthulhu Dark is a rules-light system for Lovecraftian roleplaying games. One person is the Keeper, who plans the scenario. The others are Investigators. You'll need some six-sided dice.

### YOUR INVESTIGATOR.

Choose a name and occupation. Describe your Investigator. Decide what drives them to investigate the Mythos.

Then ask each other questions to flesh out your characters. Where did you grow up? Do you enjoy your job? How do you feel about where you live?

Finally, take a green Insanity Die.

### INSANITY.

Your Insanity starts at 1.

When you see something disturbing, roll your Insanity die. If you get higher than your Insanity, add 1 to your Insanity and roleplay your terror.

As your Insanity increases through the game, roleplay your increasing fear.

## DOING THINGS.

To know how well you do at something, roll:

One die if the task is *within human capabilities*.

One die if it's *within your occupational expertise*.

Your Insanity die, if you will *risk your sanity to succeed*.

If your Insanity die rolls higher than any other die, make an Insanity roll, as above.

Then your highest die shows how well you do. On a 1, you barely succeed. On a 6, you do brilliantly.

For example: you're escaping from the window of an Innsmouth hotel. On a 1, you crash on an adjoining roof, attracting the attention of everyone around. On a 4, you land quietly on the roof, but leave traces for pursuers to follow. On a 6, you escape quietly, while your pursers continue searching the hotel.

When you investigate, the highest die shows how much information you get. On a 1, you get the bare minimum: if you need information to proceed with the scenario, you get it, but that's all you get. On a 4, you get whatever a competent investigator would discover. On a 5, you discover everything humanly possible. And if there is a possibility of glimpsing beyond human knowledge, you do so on a 6 (and probably make an Insanity roll).

For example: you're investigating your great-uncle's manuscripts. On a 1, you find the address "7 Thomas Street" (the next location in the scenario). On a 6, you find that, from



February 28 to April 2, many townspeople had dreams of gigantic nameless creatures. Simultaneously, a Californian theosophist colony donned robes for a “glorious fulfilment”, The dreamers included Mr Wilcox of 7 Thomas Street.

#### FAILING.

If someone thinks it would more interesting if you failed, they describe how you might fail and roll a die. (They can't do this if you're investigating and you *must* succeed for the scenario to proceed).

If their die rolls higher than your highest die, you fail, in the way they described. If not, you succeed as before, with your highest die showing how well you succeed.

Returning to the example above: you're escaping from the hotel window. This time, someone thinks it would be more interesting if your pursuers caught you. When you both roll, they get the higher die. You are caught.

#### TRYING AGAIN.

If you included your Insanity die in the roll and you're not happy with the result, you may reroll (all the dice). If you didn't include your Insanity die, you may add it and reroll.

Afterwards, look at the new result. As before, the highest die shows how well you do.

Reroll as many times as you like. Each time your Insanity Die rolls higher than any other die, make an Insanity roll.

#### CO-OPERATING AND COMPETING.

To cooperate: everyone who is cooperating rolls their dice. The highest die, rolled by anyone, determines the outcome.

To compete: everyone who is competing rolls their dice. The highest die wins. On a tie, compare second highest dice (then third, fourth etc). If everything is tied, reroll.

As before, if your Insanity die rolls higher than any other die you roll, make an Insanity roll. If anyone is not happy with their roll, they may reroll as above, but only once.

#### SUPPRESSING KNOWLEDGE.

When your Insanity reaches 5, you may now reduce it by suppressing Mythos knowledge: for example, burning books, stopping rituals or destroying yourself.

Each time you do this, roll your Insanity Die. If you get less than your current Insanity, decrease your Insanity by 1. And you may continue suppressing Mythos knowledge when your Insanity drops below 5.

#### GOING INSANE.

When your Insanity reaches 6, you go incurably insane. This is a special moment: everyone focusses on your character's last moments as their mind breaks. Go out however you want: fight, scream, run or collapse.

Afterwards, either make a new character or continue playing, madly, but retire the character as soon as you can.

## OTHER CLARIFICATIONS.

If you fight any creature you meet, you will die. Thus, in these core rules, there are no combat rules or health levels. Instead, roll to hide or escape.

Things within human capabilities include: picking locks, finding Ry'leh, deciphering carvings, remembering something, spotting something concealed, rationalising something horrific.

Things outside human capabilities include: casting spells, understanding hidden meaning, doing things in dreams. You can try such things if you have the opportunity: for example, if you sense patterns, you can try to follow them. However, you won't get the "within human capabilities" die, and might just roll your Insanity die.

A high success never short-circuits the investigation: That is, it never takes you to the end of the scenario, skipping everything in between. Thus, in the example above: even if you rolled a 6 while searching your great-uncle's personal effects, you would not find the co-ordinates of Ry'leh, where Cthulhu sleeps.

When you make an Insanity Roll and succeed, getting your Insanity or lower, this means you keep it together, not that you are fine. When you fail, getting higher than your Insanity, you fail to keep it together.

To play without a character sheet, use your Insanity Die to keep track of your Insanity, by keeping its highest face turned to your current Insanity.

## GUIDANCE ON DESCRIBING INVESTIGATIONS.

Here are further tips on describing the results of investigations.

On a 4, the investigation succeeds. Describe whatever is there to discover, with some detail. For example, if the Investigator is deciphering carvings on a box, they might discover the box is an incubator, holding an egg. They might also realise the carvings are in an extinct African language.

On 3s, 2s and 1s, describe the same thing, but with progressively less detail. Thus, on a 3, your description should be brief. On a 2, it should be a sentence. On a 1, it might just be a word ("It's an incubator").

On a 5, the investigation succeeds wildly. Describe what is there is to discover, but throw in extra details. Connect the discovery to folktales, writings and scientific discoveries.

You'll find these are easy to invent. Simply throw in connections to legends and books. For example, from deciphering the carvings, the Investigator realises the box is an incubator. They remember similar boxes described in the dread manuscript *Tears of Shub-Niggurath*. One, in the Middle Ages, was taken to an Abbey, which was later destroyed in a freak earthquake.

On a 6, add a touch of eeriness. Draw on Lovecraft, ghost stories or whatever comes to mind. For example, when the Investigators decipher the carvings, they seem to shift and change in front of their eyes. The carvings hint, mockingly, at strange patterns beyond human understanding. The box exudes unnatural life, as though it were a form of incubator.

### THREE ROLLS

Split important rolls, that the Investigator might lose, into three. The Investigator must succeed in two rolls out of three to succeed. If they succeed in the first two, don't bother rolling the third.

### CAMPAIGNS

For campaign play, reset Insanity to 1 at the beginning of each game session. If you like, find a narrative reason for this: perhaps the Investigators takes a moment to recover or simply has a moment of clarity.

### UNANSWERED QUESTIONS.

Who decides when to roll Insanity? Who decides when it's interesting to know how well you do something? Who decides when something disturbs your PC? Who decides whether you might fail?

Decide the answers with your group. Make reasonable assumptions. For example, some groups will let the Keeper decide everything. Others will share the decisions.

Do let me know how Cthulhu Dark works for you. My email is [graham@thievesoftime.com](mailto:graham@thievesoftime.com).

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I hope you enjoyed the book. Do get in touch and tell me what you thought. Summon me with the words “Sthakhnr Egyri” or email me at [graham@thievesoftime.com](mailto:graham@thievesoftime.com).