

THE OUTER PRESENCE

VENGER AS'NAS SATANIS

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Venger As'Nas Satanis

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This book contains rules for an old school, investigative horror roleplaying game, as well as, a Lovecraftian scenario that takes place in the 1970's.

Many times I've wanted to run a one-shot in this genre, but the whole character creation and game mechanics always seemed to put me off. Noobs prefer simplicity so they can focus on their character and what's going on rather than all their character's numbers and systemic fiddly bits. As a Game Master, I'm the same way. That's why I created my own system. It's very similar to Crimson Dragon Slayer, but even more simplified.

Game Masters are free to use "The Outer Presence" adventure with any RPG they choose with minimal conversion. The most important things are mood, exploring a strange environment, interacting with larger than life personalities, the exciting possibilities that come with facing death head-on, pulse-pounding action, and coming face to face (or tentacle) with the untenable monstrosities lurking just beneath the worn veneer of reality.

The Outer Presence is an investigative horror paper & pencil roleplaying game and scenario for the Old School Renaissance. It is meant to be a stand-alone product yet still compatible with several RPGs, allowing characters the opportunity to investigate the strange and sinister.

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QUICK AND DIRTY RULES FOR AN INVESTIGATIVE HORROR ROLEPLAYING GAME

CHOOSE A CAREER

Basically, this is like the character's "class". Choosing a career will define your character, what kind of person he is, what he's good at, and what he has experienced. This profession informs the character's capabilities, skills, and talents. He's the epitome, the ideal, the consummate professor, occultist, mercenary, or whatever a player chooses.

We'll get into the specifics of what a character's career does regarding game mechanics later, but here's a snapshot. If the career makes it more likely that the detective would be able to tail a suspect without being noticed (and it should), then his attempt would be considered favorable. However, a scientist would not. He'd have an average chance of shadowing a potential cultist, unless there were extenuating circumstances. If the cultist had been wise to being followed, he might have a few surprises planned. At the very least, trying to give his pursuer the slip. In that case, the detective would drop down to an average chance and the scientist's chances unfavorable.

Professions

Here's a list of 20 career paths. Players should feel free to decide what they want to play unless they or the Game Master would rather roll randomly. Also, GMs may want to roll on this table if there's a non-player character coming into the story.

Note that these are general categories. Players may want to narrow their field of specialty and, in so doing, should be allowed to combine one or more aspects of another career. For instance, an artist who exclusively deals in

1	Doctor
2	Professor (anthropology, archaeology, and history)
3	Scientist
4	Mercenary
5	Artist
6	Occultist
7	Journalist
8	Detective
9	Explorer
10	Mechanic (handyman, gadget creator, driver, and pilot)
11	Law Enforcement
12	Military
13	Politician
14	Psychiatrist
15	Gangster or con man
16	Priest
17	Author
18	Eccentric (think Kramer from Seinfeld, Murdock from The A-Team, or Exidor from Mork and Mindy)
19	Dilettante
20	Businessman

forgeries. Such a character would be able to paint exceedingly well and know his art history, but in truth he's a con man. Yet, his connection to the criminal underworld is limited because of his specific skill-set.

EVERYONE IS AVERAGE UNTIL PROVEN OTHERWISE

This is the easiest system I could come up with and still have it compatible with the game mechanics I've been working on for the last few years.

Characters get a dice pool of 2d6 unless there's a reason not to. If there's one or more reasons for that character to have a favorable advantage when attempting his action, he gets to roll a dice pool of 3d6, instead. If there's one or more reasons for that character to have an unfavorable disadvantage, he rolls 1d6. If there are reasons on both sides, they effectively cancel each other out and revert back to 2d6.

However, there are some things the average person just doesn't know. For instance, virtually every character would have serious trouble flying a plane without assistance. At least the dilettante, priest, and politician get to roll 1d6. That's better than nothing. Of course, a player might ask if his character can jump in the air, fly to the moon, and kick the cheese out of it. Just because it's verbalized doesn't mean it should be considered. Even giving something like that an unfavorable dice pool is ridiculous. Unless you want your game ultra gonzo, learn to say no when it's beyond the realm of believability.

The minimum dice pool is 1d6 and the maximum is 3d6, except when using bonus dice (see Bonus Dice section). When in doubt, you can't go wrong with the standard 2d6.

KNOWN AND SECRET ASSOCIATIONS

Exactly how you've become involved with the following organizations is up to the player and GM. Just because you're associated with a group, that doesn't mean you're a part of that group or share their belief system. The tables below identify the type of group and the nature of your relationship to them. Randomly rolling can be more fun (and is generally quicker), but it's up to the GM.

Organization

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1 | Military or para-military |
| 2 | Government agency |
| 3 | Scientific team |
| 4 | Magic circle |
| 5 | Sinister cult |
| 6 | Society of rare book and artifact collectors |
| 7 | Fringe political group |
| 8 | Rich and powerful family |
| 9 | Well-connected and influential law firm |
| 10 | Criminal syndicate |

The Nature of your Relationship to the Organization

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Former member |
| 2 | Colleague or valuable resource (symbiotic - you scratch their back, they scratch yours) |
| 3 | Current member |
| 4 | Casual Acquaintance or friend of a friend |
| 5 | Spying on them for some unknown purpose |
| 6 | Blood brother |

WHAT DRIVES YOU ONWARD

This is your character's primary motivation for investigating. Why does he do the things he does, risking life and limb, reputation, and sanity?

- 1 The quest of knowledge and discovery
- 2 Righting wrongs and avenging the fallen
- 3 Thrill of the hunt
- 4 Looking for something (could be a family member, relic, cure to some rare tropical disease, etc.)
- 5 Power... ultimate power!
- 6 Love, sex, and romance (maybe the girl you like has a thing for the Indiana Jones type)
- 7 Cold hard cash (occasionally, these jungle treks really pay off)
- 8 Sense of duty and obligation (for country, loved ones, or humanity as a whole)

FINISHING TOUCHES

Each player should come up with something interesting about his character. It could be an off-beat hobby, favorite beverage, unfashionable hat, or how much you want to have sex with your first cousin (I'm not here to judge). Not only will this help you get a sense of your character, who you're pretending to be for the next few hours, it also gives your fellow players something to go on as well. They'll need to react to other characters as part of their own characterization.

HUMAN WEAKNESS

One thing I like about the horror genre is its characters. They're flawed, sometimes deeply. While every comedy, drama, or fantasy film will show a protagonist's imperfections, horror embraces it to such an extent that the "heroes" can doom themselves (and others) just by their own humanness. It shows us that cosmic terror is like a farmhouse doused with gasoline but it is man himself that is the match. Without his ignition of

personal failure, there would be no apocalypse, no revelation, no Hell.

Pick or roll randomly on the following table to see what type of human frailty your character suffers from. Every time a player roleplays his character's flaw, the GM should assign him a bonus die to be used as he sees fit [see section entitled Bonus Dice].

Weaknesses may also be enforced by the Game Master when opportunities present themselves. First, allow players to utilize their character's flaw before stepping in. Prompt them if you, the GM, notice an occasion that would lend itself to roleplaying a character's weakness.

Flaws

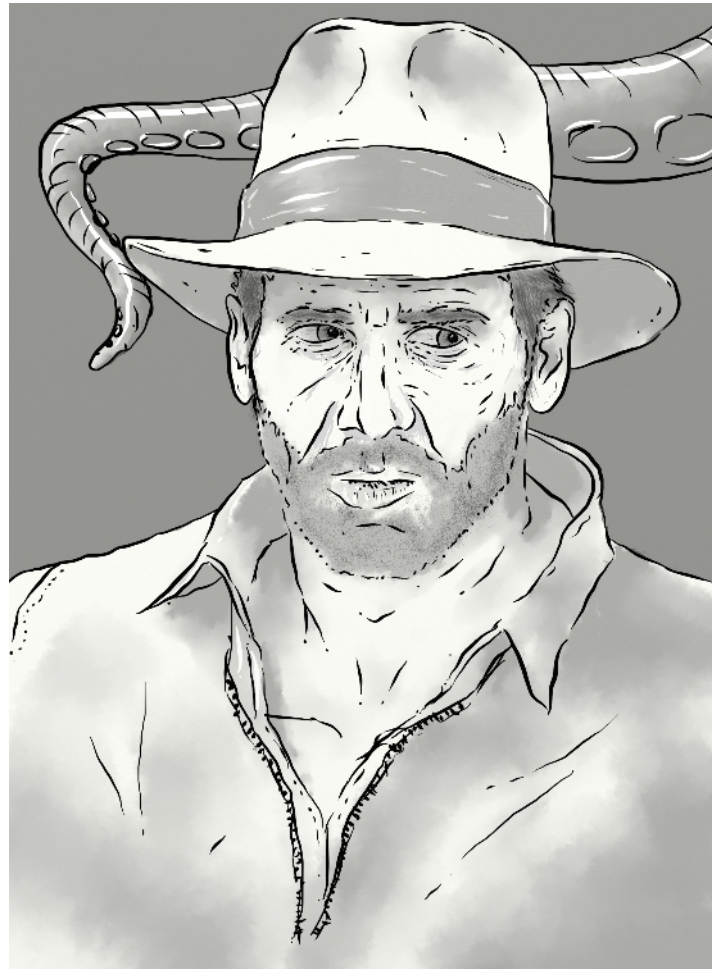
- 1 Alcoholic
- 2 Drug addict
- 3 Rude and condescending
- 4 Angry and bitter
- 5 Haunted by the past
- 6 No accountability, playing the blame game
- 7 Cowardice
- 8 All horned up
- 9 Won't stop stealing
- 10 Refuses to take anything seriously
- 11 Gives up when things get hard
- 12 Lazy
- 13 Impatient
- 14 Compulsive liar
- 15 Will do anything for power
- 16 Can't sit still
- 17 Constantly blaming others for their own failures
- 18 Believes he deserves more than his fair share
- 19 Has a death wish
- 20 Sociopath (anti-social behavior and no conscience)

YOUR CHARACTER IS SPECIAL

Players may choose or randomly roll three (!) flaws in exchange for rolling on the table below. With so many weaknesses, the GM and fellow players should probably have a hand in developing situations via roleplay so as to make that character's life as uncomfortable, awkward, or amusing as possible.

However, there is an alternative option. Instead of taking a trio of weaknesses (he still has to take one), the player may choose to become a second-rate version of his profession, instead. In this case, he is not the ideal but a hack, charlatan, or rank amateur. Mechanically speaking, such a character will receive a dice pool of 2d6 when another sharing the same career would roll 3d6. Similarly, he'd roll 1d6 when normally his dice pool would be 2d6, and instead of 1d6, the character would roll 2d6 and take the lower of the two numbers.

Take note: special characters are not rewarded with bonus dice when they succumb to the human condition. The fact that they're special is benefit enough.



What Makes You Special

- 1 **Psychic abilities** - some are latent, others at the forefront. Rather than designating specific psychic powers, it's best to leave it vague so that the story defines what the character is capable of.
- 2 **Sorcery** - you know a few spells already and can easily master those you encounter along the way. Again, nothing is defined ahead of time. When magic is needed, the character should be able to contribute something sorcerous to the situation.
- 3 **Only appears to be human** - really, he's an alien, android, hard-light hologram, or something else... perhaps he's from the far future, distant past, or a parallel dimension.
- 4 **Hard to kill** - even when he dies, good odds he'll keep fighting. Every time the character is killed, have the player roll a d6. Anything but a 1, he survived and will be good to go in 2d6 rounds. If the result is a 1, then it was just his time to go.



THE DICE POOL

Whatever action you're trying to perform, whether it's computing the square root of pie in your head or aiming for the high priest's forehead with a sniper rifle, you'll be rolling a pool of dice. All the dice are six-siders. If the GM determines your chances are unfavorable, roll 1d6. If it's standard, roll 2d6. If they're favorable, roll 3d6.

If you're unsure about what to have the players roll, think of it like this. Should the character have an average chance of succeeding based on what you know? Then it's 2d6. Slim chance? That's 1d6. Pretty good chance? 3d6 is what you tell him. When in doubt, go with the standard dice pool of 2d6.

Only consider the top number when rolling your dice pool. That means if your dice pool is 2d6, and your results are a 2 and a 4, then only pay attention to the 4. Ignore all the lower numbers.

DICE POOL INTERPRETATION

How should a GM determine if there are favorable or unfavorable chances of success? By looking at the following three indicators: a character's profession, circumstances surrounding the attempted action, degree of difficulty and improbability of said action. A doctor trying to give medical attention to a wounded comrade has favorable chances to do so. But what if the doctor is working in near total darkness or being shot at? Then his chances drop down to ordinary, with a standard dice pool of 2d6.

If the occultist attempts to use magic or cast a spell, the odds are in his favor. His dice pool would be 3d6. But what if he were to try jumping from a helicopter into the ocean a hundred feet below and then swimming to half a mile to a nearby island? Not easy, but not that hard, either. Still average chances. His dice pool would be 2d6. Now, what if this occultist was attempting the jump and swim while lugging a large, heavy idol? That would give him an unfavorable chance of succeeding, for a dice pool of 1d6. But, if there was an inflatable raft a few yards

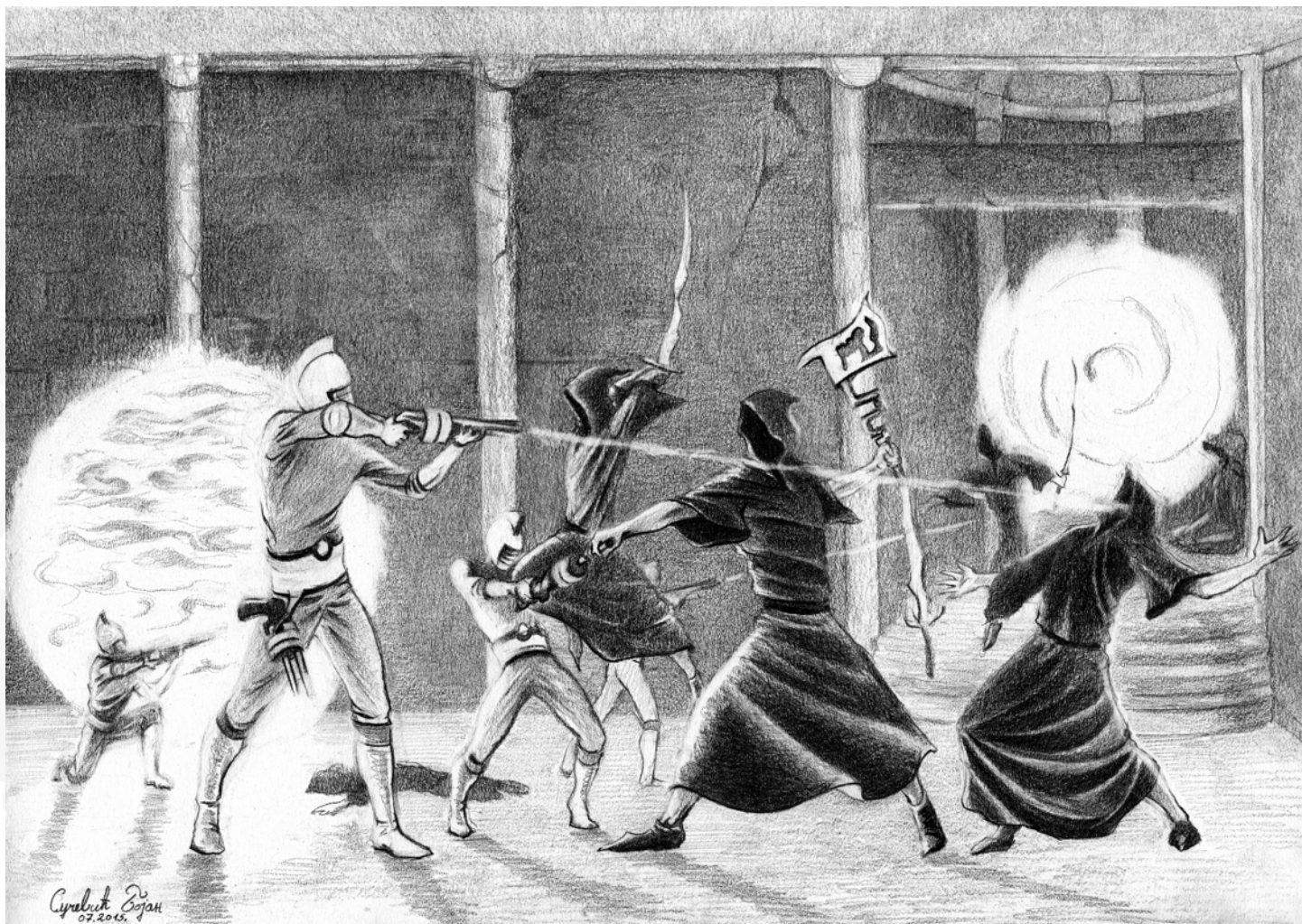
away from where he jumped into the water, this would bring the occultist back to average odds of surviving with the idol in tow.

As a GM, if you're not sure, go with 2d6. Whatever's going on probably isn't a cakewalk, nor is it mission impossible. Most likely, it falls somewhere in the middle. Players can always make their case for why they should get that extra d6. If their argument seems reasonable, give them the benefit of the doubt. The dice themselves will decide their fate.

What the Numbers Mean

- 1 **Critical failure** - You screwed up bad, buddy boy.
- 2 **Failure** - Whatever you wanted to do? You didn't do it at all or did it wrong.
- 3 **Partial failure** - Could have been a lot worse, but you didn't quite get the result you wanted.
- 4 **Partial success** - Somewhere between almost there and practically perfect. You did something right, but maybe it wasn't enough or there'll be repercussions immediately or down the road.
- 5 **Success** - Job well done, let's go home.
- 6 **Critical success!** - Congratulations are in order. You went above and beyond.





Optional Rule: Doubles

If a character rolls doubles (two 3s for example), he may change his luck. This means that either something unexpected will go his way or something unfortunate will happen to his antagonists. Game Masters should do their best to imagine a scene change based on present circumstances and contributing factors.

For example, the party's occultist is attempting to hurl a sickly-greenish flame from his hands at an enemy. He rolls 3d6 and gets a 1, 1, and 2. Since he rolled doubles, the occultist flubs the spell but now the natives saw emerald sparks harmlessly shoot out from his fingers into the air. Even though the fireball was a dud, these tribespeople are now too afraid to attack this obvious wizard.

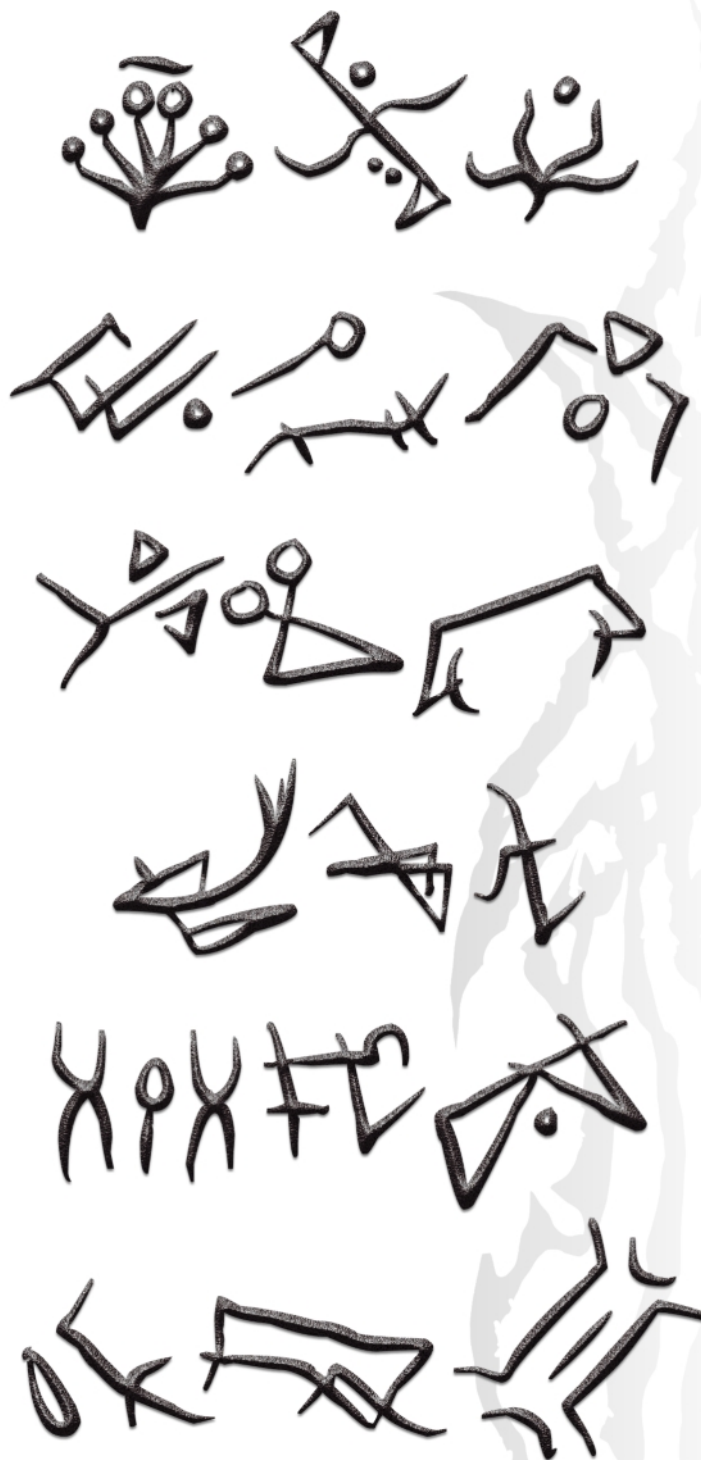
A second example would be a winged horror swooping down to devour an investigator. The GM rolls two 4s - the business man is wounded. Because of the doubles, any one of the following could be chosen:

- 1 A gateway could suddenly appear in the sky, releasing another winged horror.
- 2 The business man is not only wounded but infected with venom - the bite area is now pinkish-purple and pulsating.
- 3 The villainous sorcerer who summoned the winged horror receives an impression of where the characters are and what they're doing.
- 4 The next time this winged horror attacks, it'll get a dice pool of 3d6.
- 5 The creature is impervious to bullets or non-magical weapons.
- 6 Now it can breathe fire!

Example number three might look something like the following. A journalist is attempting to pick a lock. Giving him the benefit of the doubt (he's had to break into an office building prior to this in order to get a juicy story), the GM tells the player to roll 2d6. Two 6s are rolled! Not only does the journalist jimmy the door open in no time...

Should a player-character roll doubles and, shortly after, an antagonist rolls doubles, a scene might refuse to change or may change back to the way things were, if possible. Otherwise, GMs are encouraged to invent new and creative reversals of fortune.

In conclusion, the result is still the result - interpreted by the GM. The nature of rolling doubles doesn't affect the specific outcome of whatever was being attempted. Nevertheless, doubles can influence the reality surrounding a situation or alter the scene via unanticipated conditions that have either just now come into play or were already there, unbeknownst to the characters.



"Cosmic terror is like
a farmhouse doused with
gasoline but it is man
himself that is the match."

COMBAT

This section works along the same lines as what the numbers mean. Since combat is life and death, I've given you some hard and fast rules rather than let you interpret what happens every single action.

The attacker simply rolls his dice pool and the following results occur, determined by the Game Master. The defender does nothing but hope his opponent rolls low. If it's not a person attacking, but some force (such as an earthquake or poison) at work, the GM rolls as if it was some kind of armed assailant. Mildly dangerous forces get a dice pool of 1d6, moderate gets 2d6, and extreme gets 3d6.

exploration, character interactions, encountering strangeness, and solving mysteries. Everything else - including trying to kill people - should take a backseat.

Who Goes There?

Initiative? This may seem unorthodox, but whichever player says what his character is doing first... goes first. And then second, third, etc. Use common sense. If it seems natural for Hank to act before Gary, then proceed accordingly.

GM note: obviously, you can abuse this to no end - so don't go overboard. If some cultist, tribesperson, or

Result	What that means
1	Rolled a 1? Not only couldn't you hit the broad side of a barn, your opponent immediately counters, taking some sort of reflexive action (like fleeing) or attack of opportunity.
2	If you roll a 2, it's a clear miss.
3	If it's a 3, you've only grazed him. He shakes it off, but at least he knows you mean business.
4	If you get a 4, your victim is wounded. Just one more of those and he's unconscious or incapacitated. This condition resets after an hour of rest or three hours of continual adventuring.
5	If the result is a 5, you've knocked the victim out or incapacitated him. Your opponent will regain consciousness or the ability to act in 2d6 minutes. When you attack (intend to kill) an unconscious or incapacitated opponent, he's toast.
6	When attacking, if you score a critical success (roll a 6), then your victim is dead, barring immediate medical attention. This can only occur if the assailant actually has some kind of weapon besides his fists, feet, or blunt object. All it takes is a sharp rock, pointy stick, or pocket knife in order to murder someone in a single round. If an attacker is merely punching and the like, a result of 6 knocks his opponent unconscious.

Now, if you're intentionally trying to knock someone out rather than kill them, a result of 4 or above is good enough to do the job. The victim will wake up in 2d6 minutes.

Weapon type doesn't matter, armor doesn't matter, and we're certainly not going to care about weapon speed, hit points, levels, feats, ability modifiers, or attack bonuses. Investigative horror isn't about optimizing your character to the point of godhood. No, roleplaying in the genre of investigative horror is about

A round is 20 seconds long. That's just enough time to move a little, say a few words, and take an action before something else happens. Everyone able to act will make their attempt in a single round before the next one occurs.

shadow-demon is hiding in the dark, just waiting for adventurers to walk into his trap, then it's a clear-cut case of the villain getting the drop on those poor, unsuspecting investigators. Especially, if there's a single bad guy against a group of four or five investigators - that foe probably won't last more than a round or two. Better let him get a shot off or a stab in right away.

Killing the Nigh Unkillable

Gods and their spawn, avatars, guardian entities, demon lords, gigantic unspeakable horrors, and occasionally high priests are not subject to the same rules as mortal animals (such as humans). It takes a special kind of weapon to kill supernatural creatures beyond our comprehension; usually magic or something especially rare and potent. Although, three or more adventurers

unloading their firearms at point blank range can also do the job... or fire, hydrochloric acid, TNT, etc. Game Masters should use their own best judgement.

Results that yield wounds and unconsciousness do absolutely nothing to such creatures. If investigators end up "killing" the unkillable with a critical success, the wounded creature merely appears dead and is in a motionless sleep-state for 2d6 minutes before rising up to accost the characters anew.

Immersion

If a player is really going into character, going the extra mile to make his portrayal and actions stand out (in the good way) or simulate the kind of story that Lovecraft or a Cthulhu Mythos author might have written, this could also be construed as favorable circumstances. Reward that player if possible. Not only is this a chance to recognize good roleplaying, it's an incentive for players to explore their character's shortcomings, weaknesses, fears, and noble yet ultimately doomed attempts to save humanity.

Bonus Dice

At the beginning of each session, characters get a single bonus d6 to be used whenever they want. That means fresh characters will start with an extra 1d6 in their back pocket. If they live past that first adventure, they get another 1d6. If the previous bonus die hasn't been used, it gets stored up for a rainy day. That means at the start of the fifth game session a character might have 5d6 in bonus dice... if he hasn't used any up to this point.

Bonus dice are awarded to characters with longevity just as they are portraying human frailty. Act on a character's alcoholism and get an extra d6!

There is no dice pool maximum when adding in bonus dice. For instance, a dice pool of 3d6 can be boosted to 5d6 if two bonus dice are used.

Unfortunately, bonus dice cannot be used to re-roll crappy results on previously rolled dice. Use bonus dice before rolling to ensure a greater likelihood of success. Once the dice have been rolled, it's too late to change them.

Let's say a character named Freddy has 2d6 in bonus dice. He got one for playing in his first scenario and the second for whispering something inappropriate to the secretary

outside Henry Bile's office (he took the "all horned up" flaw). Later, he attempts to shoot a very large spider that's coming for him in the water. It's extremely dark and they're splashing around wildly; however, he's also at point-blank range (the disadvantage is canceled out by the advantage). So, the GM assigns the task 2d6. Freddy really wants to kill that spider before it bites him. However, he also wants to have a bonus die in reserve... just in case. Freddy's player rolls 3d6. His results are 1, 2, and 2. The player and GM work out that Freddy missed the spider but leapt to high ground, away from the giant, furry marauders.

Encountering the Weird

Slightly strange stuff happens all the time. Usually, we ignore it or find a way to justify what's going on. Occasionally, characters will be confronted with an idea, event, creature, or realization that shatters their worldview. In such a time, roll on the insanity table below:

Insanity

- 1 The character fully embraces the horror, turning into a desperate and fanatical cultist or devotee of whatever it is that drove him insane.
- 2 The character assumes the fetal position, rocking back and forth in a catatonic state.
- 3 The character starts ranting and raving about whatever is going on or just happened (probably attracting unwanted attention).
- 4 Faints, remaining unconscious for 2d6 minutes.
- 5 Immediately develops an appropriate phobia.
- 6 Nothing happens. Must be that iron will... or half-bottle of whisky.



THE OUTER PRESENCE

INTRODUCTION

This story is meant to take place in the 1970's, but can easily be modified by the Game Master. I was influenced by such great films as Cannibal Holocaust, Cannibal Ferox, and Jungle Holocaust, as well as, the 1960's Jonny Quest television show.

There's precious little preventing the Game Master from swapping New Guinea out for the jungles of South America or similar locale. This scenario could take place at any period of the 20th century. If the 70's don't resonate with you, feel free to change it. Some conversion will be necessary, but the majority should play just fine as it is.

A native tribe in New Guinea is disturbed by a group led by Doctor Karl Steiner, anthropologist, ego-maniac, and frequent contributor to the quarterly anthropology journal Culturally Speaking. With the help of Dr. Steiner and his team, the Meepie tribe has regressed to cannibalism and human sacrifice in order to appease something that lives in the nearby temple... the outer presence.

"A religion of blood,
slime, darkness,
sorcery and tentacles."

NATURAL PROGRESSION

It's easy to get turned around, not knowing what information to give where and whom the characters should encounter first. Below is a basic guide (an outline, really) of how things might logically progress. Definitely feel free to play around with the narrative if you're an experienced Game Master, bored with the usual way things go, or simply see a better way yourself.

- I. What the characters were doing when the scenario opens.
- II. The characters get a call from Henry Bile who is organizing the second expedition.
- III. The characters take some time to investigate the first expedition.
- IV. The characters travel to New Guinea.
- V. The characters meet with Dr. Steiner and he takes them to the Meepie tribe.
- VI. During their welcoming ceremony, the Meepie village is ripped asunder by an earthquake.
- VII. The characters learn more about their surroundings before turning in for the night.
- VIII. The characters head for the temple, foreshadowing what's to come.
- IX. The characters deal with the things within the temple.
- X. The inner-sanctum reveals its climactic contents.
- XI. The aftermath or denouement

HISTORY

Aeons ago, a meteor fell from the sky... though it was no ordinary meteorite that landed in the Papua territory. Rather, it was the remnants of an alien spacecraft that malfunctioned during its planetary orbit. Like all things from Yuggoth, the debris was beyond anything human beings could comprehend. Those believing Yuggothian technology to be merely technologically advanced would be mistaken - for there is an organic component to their machinery - it is all part of a malign organism that responds positively to chaos, pain, and suffering.

The intervening years have either scattered or destroyed most of the crashed spaceship, except for the ship's energy core - the most primal and responsive of the wreckage. For millennia, the core has been sealed up in the Papua temple of dark secrets. The temple is called Nafu Aata by the natives and it has existed since before recorded history, dormant. Now, it has awakened thanks to Dr. Steiner's interference... and sorcery!

If this nigrescent relic is allowed to successfully latch onto a human being, absorbing his essence, it will bridge the two worlds - this and the one from outside. We all know this reality (or, at least, we think we do), but none of us are wholly prepared for that outer realm of frothing black alienage. After the outer presence has bonded with an individual, a cyclopean monolith shall rise, piercing the heavens and unleashing an ancient, unfathomable evil upon the world.



THE PREVIOUS EXPEDITION

This section provides a little background information and explains what the principal members of the first expedition have been up to since their arrival.

Karl Steiner

Dr. Steiner traveled with his team in order to study the Meepie tribe in the Papua region of New Guinea, off the northern coast of Australia. While there, the outer presence drove him stark raving mad, influencing the rest of Steiner's team...

Steiner had been to that area of New Guinea once before, approximately 10 years ago. He was inappropriate during his visit, possibly having a 9 year old son by a woman of the Meepie tribe, if the Game Master so wishes.

"That Steiner...
he's not exactly
a 'people person'."

Investigators will be able to dig up a few of Dr. Steiner's articles. He's not just an academic but has gone to remote regions to study less-developed peoples and cultures. There's certainly a note of bias in his articles regarding the superiority of America and European nations. Occasionally, he can become quite patronizing.

There was an article published by another anthropologist, Dr. Zachary Stevenson, alleging impropriety and possibly something scandalous, though investigators can't find anything substantiating these claims nor are they ever brought up again.

Asking about Dr. Steiner around Miskatonic University will dredge up a couple details. First, his on-again, off-again affair with Vanessa Hargrave. Second, his authoritarian streak which has soured a few faculty on the idea of working alongside him as colleagues. At least one calls him, "emotionally unstable," based on a heated argument with another professor. Steiner wanted to consult one of Miskatonic's forbidden books that are locked away in the library's basement. Most likely the Necronomicon!



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Vanessa Hargrave

Vanessa Hargrave is Steiner's former anthropology student, secretary, and mistress.

A year before the expedition, Steiner broke his affair off with Vanessa because of guilt (at the time, he was married). Shortly before the expedition began, Steiner renewed their relationship.

After discovering what was in the temple of dark secrets, Steiner enjoyed terrorizing Vanessa, threatening to feed her to the cannibals. She tried to reveal Steiner's activities to Henry Bile and Miskatonic University: trespassing on sacred ground, encouraging the Meepie to go back to their former cannibal ways, and emotional abuse towards the other members of his team. Game Masters are encouraged to create one of these desperate telegrams, if they want to reveal how awry the first expedition has gone.

Steiner found out about her betrayal, cut out her tongue, and threw her down into the pit where the temple's guardian crawls. Now, thanks to the guardian, Vanessa is pregnant with its spawn. It's up to the Game Master to decide just how pregnant Vanessa appears to be (assuming it comes up during play). The characters may be led to believe that she was impregnated by Steiner months ago if it looks third trimester time. If Vanessa gets rescued, the story's conclusion is the perfect time for her to give birth to some hideous travesty of nature!

Zachary Stevenson

Short, thin, dark haired, and spectacled, Dr. Zachary Stevenson was a skeptic and rival of Steiner's. However, Steiner had to bring Stevenson along in order to secure funding for his expedition. Years ago, there was a rumor that Steiner had impregnated one of the native girls in New Guinea. Dr. Stevenson's aim is to interfere with Steiner's exploitation of New Guinea as much as possible.

Unfortunately, when the investigators arrive Steiner confesses that "the jungle killed him". Stevenson never believed that something extraterrestrial resided in the temple. But once Steiner began to go mad, Stevenson obviously had to be put out of the way - he fed Stevenson to the cannibals.

Perhaps there's even a souvenir or memento in or just outside one of the Meepie huts, something to clue the characters in that Stevenson met with a bad end.

Elliot Richelieu

Mediterranean complexion, wavy dark hair, average height and build, impressive moustache, Elliot Richelieu is Steiner's favorite student. He is currently working on his doctorate in anthropology. Though he's never seen what's inside the temple, the outer presence has had a detrimental effect on his sanity. Elliot is the Renfield to Steiner's Dracula. The man considers Steiner to be nothing less than the hand of God and will serve him faithfully no matter what.

Soft spoken and earnest, Elliot is terribly serious-minded. If Steiner tells a joke, the young man might fake a courteous laugh. He's polite like that. Or he might not. Humor isn't one of Elliot's strong suits and he can be a bit socially awkward.

As a boy, Elliot's mother doted on him. He was an only child. It wasn't until adolescence that his behavior towards a young lady, a high school crush, prompted mother to beat him unconscious. Elliot murdered his mom before he graduated and made it look like an accident.

When the investigators arrive, Elliot is Steiner's right hand man. He carries a rifle everywhere he goes. Elliot is hesitant to shoot anyone based on his own desires, but won't waste a nanosecond if ordered to kill by Dr. Steiner.

Jasper Johnson

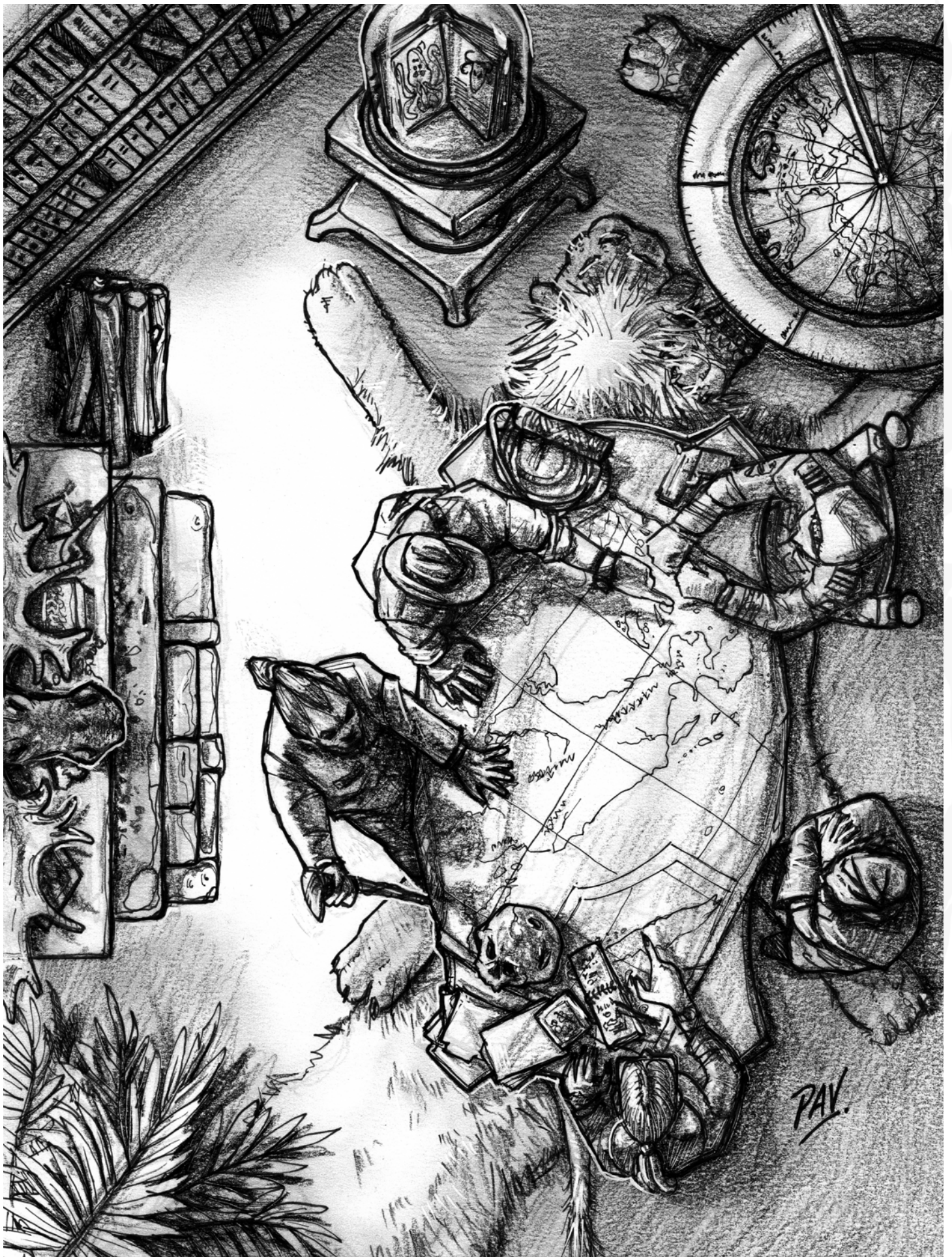
Youthful-looking, frail, and ginger, Mr. Johnson is an archaeology student who always went out of his way to conform. Jasper never wanted to stick out, so he did whatever he could to draw attention away from himself. His formative years were plagued by a crippling insecurity. However, as a freshman in college he came into his own... or as much as a shy, wallflower could. Losing himself in the study of ancient civilizations allows Jasper to really come alive.

Jasper Johnson caught a glimpse of the thing inside the temple of dark secrets and fled into the jungle once he realized Steiner went insane from his discovery. However, he kept a journal. I encourage the Game Master to leave the journal lying around Steiner's hut or somewhere out-of-the-way but accessible.

If a character only manages to quickly glance or skim over the contents, I've made bold key words and phrases that will certainly catch an investigator's eye.

- I. The Meepie tribe knows something - they **fear the temple** and rightly so. I have glimpsed something of what's inside. Not as much as Steiner... perhaps that's why I'm only frightened and not **stark raving mad!**
- II. I've learned that the natives call Dr. Steiner Eneso a Mavani. It means **High Priest** of the thing that came from outside. They give him that title because of his own claims backed up by his **flagrant abuse**, as well as, Steiner's preoccupation with whatever is in that accursed temple.
- III. The Meepie have a legend about **something black**, slick like water, and writhing that fell out of the sky generations upon **generations ago**. Whatever arrived on earth was taken to the temple and left there... perhaps for us to find.

"I've already told you:
the only way to
a woman's heart
is along the path of torment.
I know none other as sure."
- Marquis de Sade



WHEN FIRST WE MEET

I decided it would be more cinematic if there was an opener besides, "You've all been contacted by an acquaintance named Dr. Henry Bile regarding a second expedition to New Guinea." Such a beginning is indeed serviceable, but dry.

What were the characters doing when the call came? Not necessarily a phone call, remember this is the 1970's. Notification might be a better word. Where they are and what they're doing at the time should not only be helpful to the players, giving them a detail or three upon which to hang their characterization hat, it also grounds the story, providing a foundation for the adventure yet to come.

Additionally, it should provide some levity. I've found there is no better ice-breaker than humor. Even though The Outer Presence is not meant to be played for laughs, a light-hearted tone at the start and periodically as things move along is encouraged. It'll make the darker aspects stand out that much more.

Have each player roll a d12 to see just what his character was up to at 10:30pm. There's no rush to stop what they're doing as Dr. Bile is most likely in bed asleep at this hour (he has kids, you know). However, don't let any player showboat for more than 5 minutes (10 tops) or the adventure won't get anywhere.

If duplicate or even triplicate results occur, run with it. That's how those investigators know each other. They were at the same place at the same time. Why would a doctor be delivering pizzas? For that matter, why would a mercenary be interviewed on the news about the occult? Funny story that! Let the table brainstorm for a few

seconds, making what they will of the results. What, a hit-man can't have a hobby? Perhaps they're incognito.

If you're short on time or prefer cutting to the chase, feel free to begin the adventure en route. Upon arrival to New Guinea, the investigators have learned the barest of details. Basically, that this is a follow-up team to help out the first expedition that may or may not have found something exciting. Dr. Karl Steiner is leading the expedition and he'll explain everything when the adventurers arrive.

What They Were Doing

- 1 At a cock fight, managing Rooster Rex the King of all Cocks! You've got his towel and spit bucket at the ready.
- 2 Being interviewed for a local news segment about the occult on Channel 11 Arkham News by Ron Burgundy.
- 3 Stunt cock for a triple X movie titled The Dirtier the Better. (This is the last one about cocks, I swear!)
- 4 Analyzing a glowing green liquid found at a recent crime scene.
- 5 Delivering a pizza. (Delicious pepperoni, all-girl slumber party, and \$3.25 an hour - jackpot!)
- 6 Skulking around Arkham cemetery.
- 7 At a party enjoying some recreational cocaine... and sucking cock (just kidding - unless your character is actually into that).
- 8 On a hot date with Miss Massachusetts. (Yes, she's still wearing her sash)
- 9 Cramming for your Advanced Placement non-Euclidean geometry, quantum theory, and folklore final exam tomorrow morning.
- 10 Knocking over a liquor store with ski-mask and Saturday Night Special. (The cash register has \$150... a considerable sum in those days)
- 11 Dancing at a nightclub called Fuzzy Pink Boogie. You know the bouncer - his name is Chip.
- 12 Spending the night in a haunted house. (It's not going well as you're about to shit your pants - literally! The house doesn't have a working toilet and you've looked everywhere!!!)

FIRST CONTACT

Investigators first hear of the second expedition from Dr. Henry Bile, a professor of archaeology at Miskatonic University. Henry Bile is a tall, thin man with spectacles and a moustache; constantly drinking tea (and having to excuse himself in order to urinate).

Dr. Bile relates to them the initial expedition which was to study the Meepie tribe in New Guinea. The expedition was led by Dr. Karl Steiner, head of the anthropology department at Miskatonic University and frequent contributor to the quarterly anthropology journal, *Culturally Speaking*.

Last week, Steiner requested another team of archaeologists, anthropologists, and explorers in order to fully study an ancient temple, Nafu Aata, and how the lost tribe interacts with it. Steiner indicated that there were wondrous finds within Nafu Aata. Mr. Harrison has been collecting these telegrams in the university's administration office.

Besides Dr. Steiner, there were four principle members of the expedition: Vanessa Hargrave, Zachary Stevenson, Elliot Richleau, and Jasper Johnson.

Not only are there scientific discoveries to be made, but possibly treasure and adventure, too. Henry is most interested in Nafu Aata. Steiner alluded to its many secrets, but never divulged any details about the temple. In one communiqué, he mentioned possible signs of Zor'raev Tsog worship. When pressed for details, Steiner refused to answer.

However, after funding for the second expedition was approved, Steiner sent a telegram containing the following: I must become one with the thing living in Nafu Aata, whatever it may be... deliciously loathsome, exquisitely hideous, and awe-inspiringly depraved. It's within reach yet somehow keeps me at bay... I must have more men!

Incidentally, for some comic relief, I had that last telegram, innocently laying upon the administration office paper shredder, labeled with a post-it note for the characters to stumble upon. The note read, "Holy crap! Do not show this to Henry Bile or anyone else - probably best to shred this and the sooner the better." It's signed Mr. Harrison.

The expedition will be flying out within 24 hours.

If the investigators ask Bile about Dr. Steiner, such as what preparations were made, he'll mention that Steiner

asked to consult the university's one and only copy of the witch-haunted *Necronomicon* kept under lock and key in the library's basement. Reluctantly, Dr. Bile can make arrangements for the investigators to have about an hour with the book before their departure.

FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research of the area, tribe, or temple won't turn up much, except for an article in *Astounding Anthropology*, sandwiched between a sighting of Bigfoot and what it's like to be probed by aliens. Within the relevant article are several incidents of temporal interference. Explorers mention blacking out, having episodes where they couldn't remember what had happened, short-term memory loss, etc. In the nine-year old account of New Guinea, Dr. Steiner reinforces this anomaly by mentioning that he "lost time" for a while, but concluded it was merely a combination of stress and dehydration.

Additionally, a treasure-hunter trekking through that area of the jungle swears that he saw himself, like looking into a mirror. This incident allegedly took place near an ominous and very old structure that had been there since before there were people.

The Miskatonic library is headed by Ms. Karen Conrad, she's a pale, fragile woman of average height, black-framed glasses, a sage-green and magenta scarf, and wearing a lemon-yellow sweater and long sage-green skirt. At first, Ms. Conrad might come off as autocratic and cold (especially to other women), but once someone takes the time to warm her up with flattery and conversation about something she's passionate about (books, for instance), she's quite personable.

Karen will allow the investigators to see the *Necronomicon*. One at a time and under her supervision, assuming they've done nothing to improve her disposition. If there's some kind of disruption or diversion in the library stacks upstairs, Ms. Conrad will leave them alone with the forbidden tome for a few minutes. Switching the *Necronomicon* with a similar volume will not be easy - it's oversized, bound in human skin, numbering a thousand parchment-like pages, and inked in blood. It would take ingenuity and balls to steal the dreaded tome from that windowless, basement room. But then the party would have it with them... because you never know.

Breaking into the small, locked room after hours is also possible. There's a single security guard patrolling that quadrant of campus from 10pm - 4am. If there's any evidence of a break-in, Henry Bile will be forced to use his one and only method of recovering the book. Bile is acquainted with an oriental mystic who dabbles in mentalism, alchemy, phrenology, acupuncture, crystals, and lesser-known esotericism. Doctor Poho is no slouch in the psychic department, either.

It will only take him about an hour to discover the exact location of the dreaded tome and its current owner... "Sim sim sala-bim!" Rather than call the police, Bile prefers to handle this matter internally. He'll ask Dr. Poho to dispose of the thief via mind-crushing force. Whoever is reading the book when Dr. Poho performs his ritual (or shortly thereafter) will have a bad case of the head-explosions!

Why isn't the good Doctor joining Henry's follow-up expedition? Because he's a real sorcerer and far too valuable to Miskatonic University. However, if the entire party is wiped out, a third expedition could be assembled with the aid of Poho... who only now understands how much danger the world is in!

TRAVELING AND ARRIVAL

If the GM wishes to pad the adventure, this is one of the places for him to do so. Maybe there are snakes on the plane. Or perhaps it's carrying the remnants of an abbey, stones used by druids for the purposes of human sacrifice.

Both times I ran this scenario, I simply told the players that their characters board the plane, have a relaxing flight, and arrive safely in New Guinea where Hector, their guide from Australia, is waiting. Hector finds them easily enough and drives them in his jeep to the jungle clearing where they'll meet Dr. Steiner.

Steiner, a fat man wearing a fez, waits at the edge of the jungle with the machete he used to clear a path to the

rendezvous point. He is amiable but distant, approachable but guarded, and excited by the prospect of adventure and new discovery yet cautious and restrained in his enthusiasm. The doctor is a complex fellow.

On the way to the Meepie village, the investigators come across a monkey. This monkey is curious and playful. Any who take a liking to the monkey will find that he wants to come along. He'll quickly grow attached to the first person who shows him kindness, either playing with or feeding him. For the rest of the adventure, this monkey will act as the investigator's pet, friend, or even familiar. Mechanically, the monkey will allow an investigator a one-time reroll of his dice pool per session.

MEET DOCTOR STEINER

Even though his beliefs and behavior of Dr. Steiner are loathsome for the 1970's, they are particularly distasteful by today's standards. The player characters will probably want to kill him.

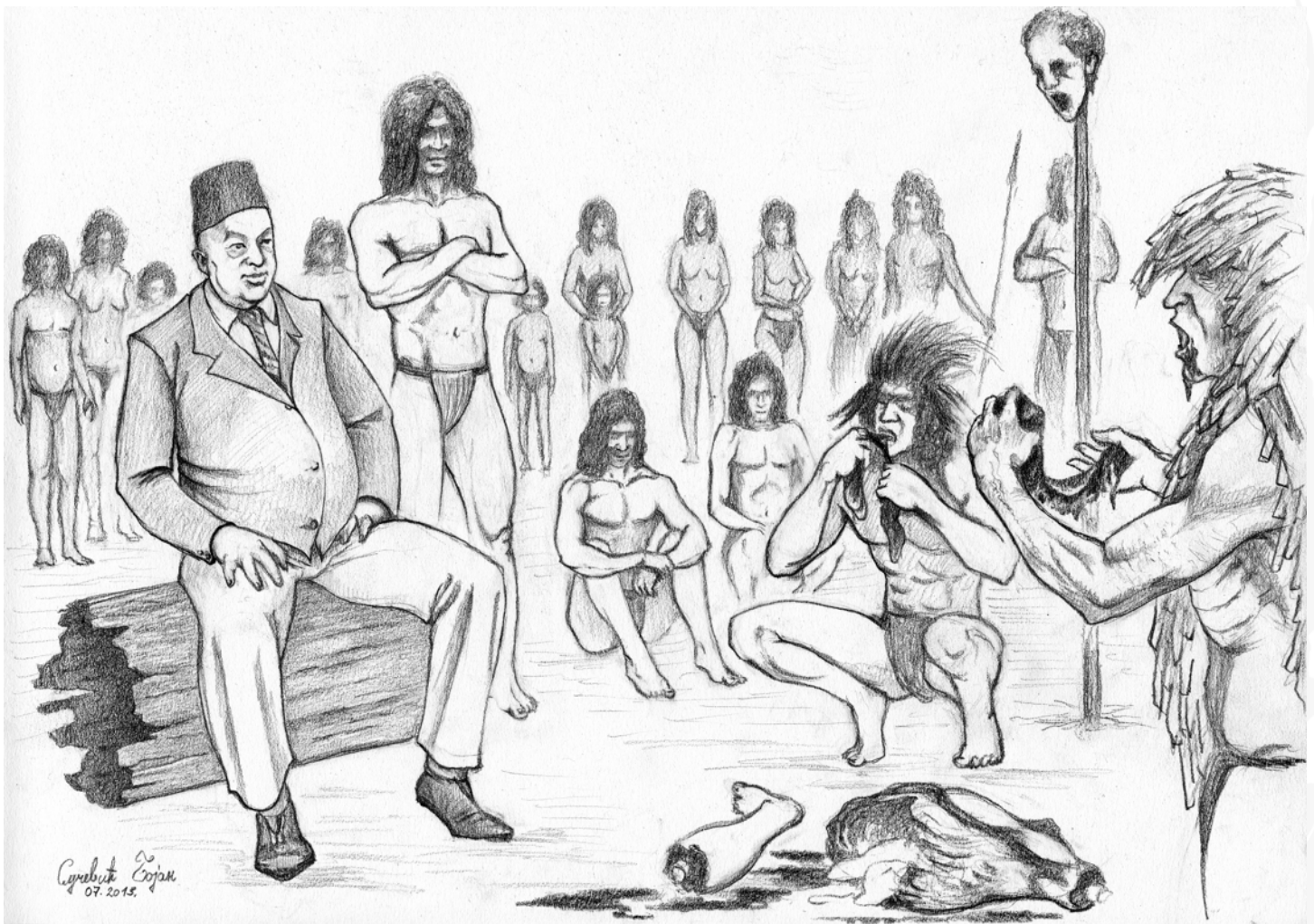
Good. Let them try. In fact, encourage the adventurers! The shocking result signals that something even weirder is going on. Dr. Steiner cannot die. He's currently under the protection of Zor'raev Tsog, having stumbled upon this Dark God a decade ago and has faithfully worshiped it ever since. If asked, Steiner might reply: "I have followed the seven-eyed beast for many years... and it has rewarded my devotion with godlike immortality!"

It may amuse the GM to let the investigators believe that Steiner is simply lucky, but after a round or two, the obviousness of his invulnerability should sink in.

"You may be a god
to these primitives, Steiner,
but you'll always be
a son-of-a-bitch to me."

If or when Dr. Steiner allows himself to become absorbed by the outer presence, all bets are off. Zor'raev Tsog no longer recognizes Steiner as its high priest.

Elliot will usually be found by Steiner's side, but is frequently sent off to run errands for his master. After all, Steiner doesn't need the protection of Elliot's rifle.



WELCOMING COMMITTEE

The Meepie tribe look as you'd expect them to in a 1970's Italian cannibal film: black hair; dark reddish-brown skin decorated with some kind of white chalk, paste, or paint; the men and women wear a loincloth but nothing else; many of them carry spears that resemble sharpened sticks or sharp rocks wielded like daggers.

Dr. Steiner has set up a fancy tribal welcome for the new expedition. He has a few men on all fours with their back's straight enough to be used as a table for Steiner's tea party. Inappropriate acts on display between women as Steiner looks on, pleased at his power over the Meepie tribe. "Look at how I've domesticated these barbaric savages."

At this point, the Meepie bring out a tribesperson with dissimilar markings upon his face and body. He's a member of the Kahli tribe, hostile to the Meepie. "I told them it's important to send the right message to their neighbors," Steiner says to the characters. "What they'll

do next is a traditional practice that died out years ago - until I revived it."

The Meepie bludgeon the Kahli tribesperson's head with a large, ceremonial stone and cut him open with the sharpest rock available. Several of the tribe pull various bits out of the dead Kahli and hold them near to the flame before eating. Many flavorful bits and pieces are offered to the investigators.

As the characters are reeling from that, Steiner gives each member of the expedition a tribal name and baptism with some foul, brackish liquid found near the temple. "Quite harmless, I assure you."

Soon enough, there's an earthquake. Tribespeople run screaming and shout, "Utok!"

A chasm opens up. A few of the natives look at Steiner and cry out, "Eneso ako mavani."

Steiner shouts something in response, evidently ordering one of the natives to jump into the earth's gaping maw. When a tribesman refuses, Steiner turns almost purple with rage and shouts, "Heathen monkey, you will fall to

your death at my command!" The tribesman throws himself into the fissure; several seconds later, the tremors cease. Did his sacrifice have anything to do with it? Perhaps... perhaps not.

After the excitement is over, Steiner says, "Just in case," to the newcomers. If an investigator asks, "Just in case of what?" he responds, "These are a superstitious people... if you can even call them that. If the earthquake persists and I do nothing, the Meepie might wonder if my claims are true."

Steiner has been claiming that he's been appointed by God to rule the world. It's up to the GM how forthright Steiner will be at this early stage. He might own it right from the start or it might amuse him keep the investigators guessing a bit longer.

LATER THAT NIGHT

Steiner has insomnia and walks throughout the Meepie village while they sleep. If any of the second expedition are also awake, he'll come talk to them, reassuring that this will be a most important find.

Steiner encourages members of the new expedition to take their frustrations and appetites out on the natives. "Sometimes when I have trouble sleeping, I'll use one of the female savages for my amusement or force a couple of the males to fight each other to the death.

On this particular night, Steiner is not in his hut. He's probably out having his way with a woman from the tribe. It's likely that an investigator or two will want to rummage around Steiner's quarters. Close examination will reveal three things.

- I. **Jasper's Journal.** (see page 17).
- II. **A skull painted black as the void.** Steiner used the ichor welling up all over the place to discolor it. Occasionally, he will talk to the skull, asking it questions or whispering to it in a loving manner as if it were his child. The skull is purported to belong to the Marquis de Sade.
- III. **A papyrus scroll.** This scroll contains the Ritual of Ascension, allowing a worshiper of Zor'raev Tsog to become its High Priest and, therefore, invulnerable. The party's professor will be able to decipher the ancient writing; others will require a day spent alone with the Necronomicon. If used, the new High Priest is expected to murder the old one. However, that can only be done under a full moon (several nights from now). Until the previous High Priest has been dispatched, the current one is not invulnerable.

I allowed the adventurers to find a "medicine man" or shaman who knew a little bit of English and wasn't tied to Steiner. Alternatively, this tribesman could be an occasional mediator between his tribe and white explorers. If the characters need a friend within the Meepie tribe, this is their best bet.

Have every investigator roll a d6. Those who score a critical success have an intense dream - everything is bathed in a greyish light. Stumbling out of the jungle, there's something down below. A preternatural hunger, a subterranean appetite that will not be sated until it bursts forth, devouring the world as humanity falls to its knees in despair.



THE NEXT DAY

One of the tribesmen brings Steiner a message based on the antediluvian glyphs carved below a statue three days walk from the Meepie village. If asked, Steiner reveals that it looks like modern art met with an octopus - though the statue is over a thousand years old.

The message states that an offering of man's life-force is key to opening the way. Steiner immediately realizes that spilled blood is required to pass into the temple's inner-sanctum.

However, that tribesman also tells them a neighboring tribe (the Kahli) are planning on attacking the Meepie for their recent tribal custom of cannibalism. "I was afraid of that. Well, that's one of the reasons I sent for you." This is Steiner referring to the characters. "I also needed a second expedition to force our way into the temple's inner-sanctum. The outer presence calls to me. It has been calling since the first time I walked through this green inferno ten years ago."



WHAT THE MEEPIE KNOW

The tribespeople can confirm Steiner's relationship with Vanessa Hargrave. They were romantically linked early on in the expedition, but then go on to say Steiner was abusive towards her and one night the two of them were seen going into the temple, though only Steiner came back out and there was blood on his shirt, appearing black in the moonlight.

Dr. Zachary Stevenson was sent by a rival deity, according to Steiner. Basically, Stevenson was likened to an agent of the Devil. It took little effort to convince the Meepie that he had to be disposed of. The tribesmen ate him a week ago.

When asked, they also tell investigators that Steiner takes one tribesperson per month in the direction of the temple and he or she is never seen again.

Journey to the Temple

Though it is morning when the expedition leaves the Meepie's tribal lands for Nafu Aata, the sky is darkening and there's a disquieting vibration in the air.

A giant snake has almost finished swallowing an unlucky tribesman. The process takes hours and the serpent is poisonous, so he is quite dead.

It'll take a little time to reach Nafu Aata. GM: roll a d6 for everyone in the party. Those who get a 1, fall into some kind of trance; they sleepwalk the rest of the way and can't remember the journey from that point on after they arrive at the temple. Those getting a 6 think they catch a glimpse of someone vaguely resembling themselves several yards away. Although, closer examination shows that there's nothing there.



THE MOUNTAIN

Behind and above the temple, stretching high up into the clouds and as far back as the jungle will allow one to see, is the mountain. An ominous quiet surrounds the mountain, as if the entire area was somewhere else, out of phase with this world and guarding a terrible secret.

There are various caves a few hours hike up a rocky trail. One or more of these caves could be tenanted by the Kahli tribe or Buddhist monk brought to the area by strange and dark vibrations or some cultist tainted by the outer presence and is now a horrid, shambling perversion of nature.

Besides primitive mutant priests, there is another special encounter for the explorers. Before seeing anything, they will hear distant tones like a wind-chime. A thin, 6' tall rhombus (diamond-shape) is barely visible until it gets close. Even within 30', the thing is difficult to discern. The entity is a translucent, tentacled, jellyfish-like creature drifting over the mountain's surface as if it were swimming through water. Occasionally, the thing disappears into the mountain, returning within a few minutes or hours, depending on its whims. Though it is see-through, this being subtly radiates bright orange, lime-green, sky blue, and florescent pink illumination. Not directly, but visible out of the corner of one's eye.

Its motivation and reason for being here is unknown. If provoked it will "attack". Essentially, the entity is only trying to communicate - unfortunately, its very consistency is detrimental to organic life. As soon as it touches an investigator, he dies.

Like the mountain itself, this being has almost nothing to do with the outer presence or Zor'raev Tsog, the abhorrent deity opposed to it. However, it's extremely likely that the mountain - wherever it's from - draws strangeness to itself. Perhaps the mountain is a beacon for cosmic influences.

GMs wanting to make this scenario even pulpier should imagine this small mountain an active volcano. Perhaps various tribes throw their sacrificial victims into its hot lava (when they aren't eating them). Increasing the mountain's strangeness, it could occasionally

disappear completely from time to time - swallowed and then vomited back up by some unseen force that holds sway over the mountain's dimensional coordinates.

If the scenario is limited to a 3 or 4 hour one-shot, it's probably best to skip the mountain entirely. You can mention it, but don't draw undue attention to the thing. Exploring the mountain may result in an unexplored temple. In order to extend this scenario into a campaign, I recommend various groups operating in and around the mountain. I've outlined the following three factions...

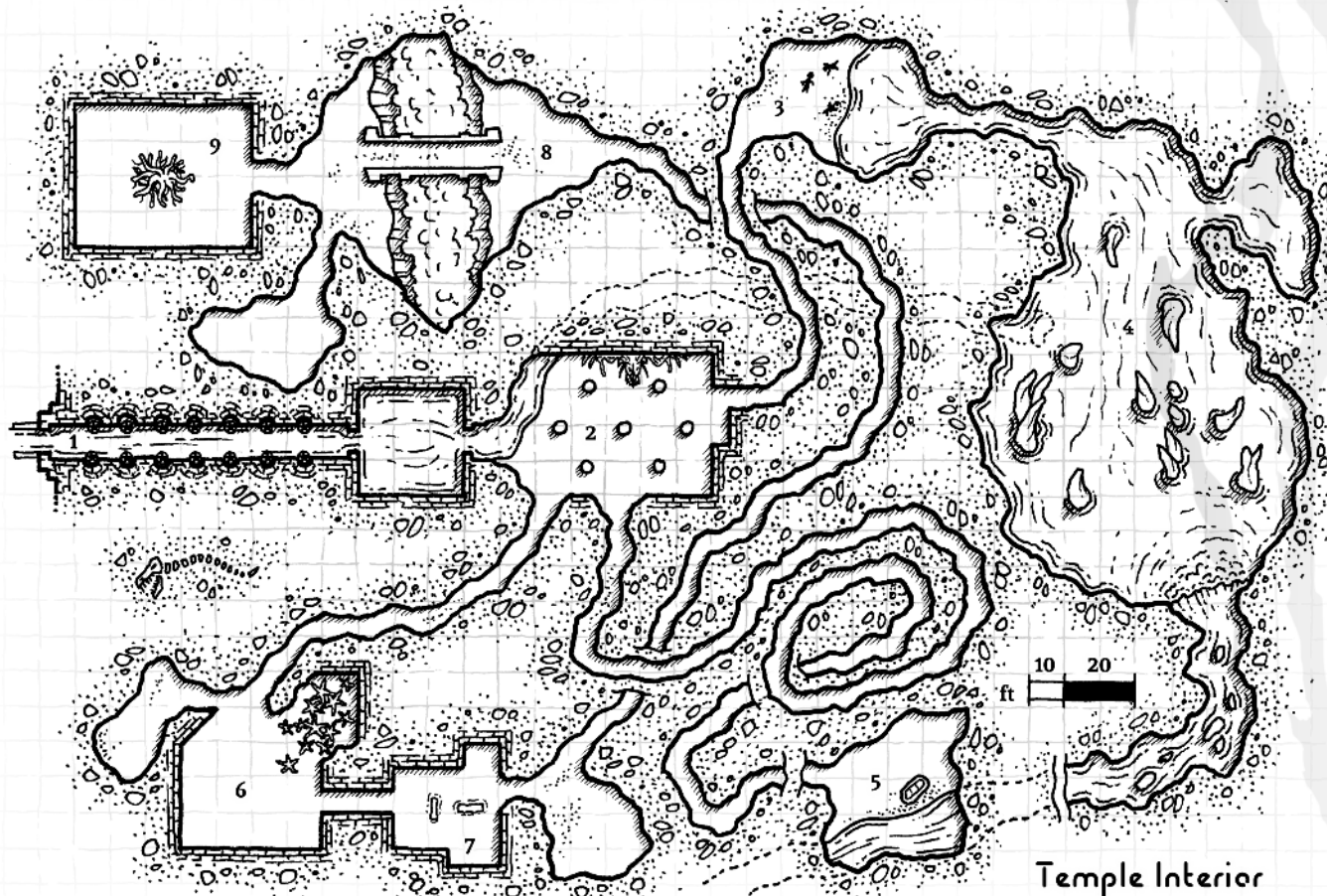
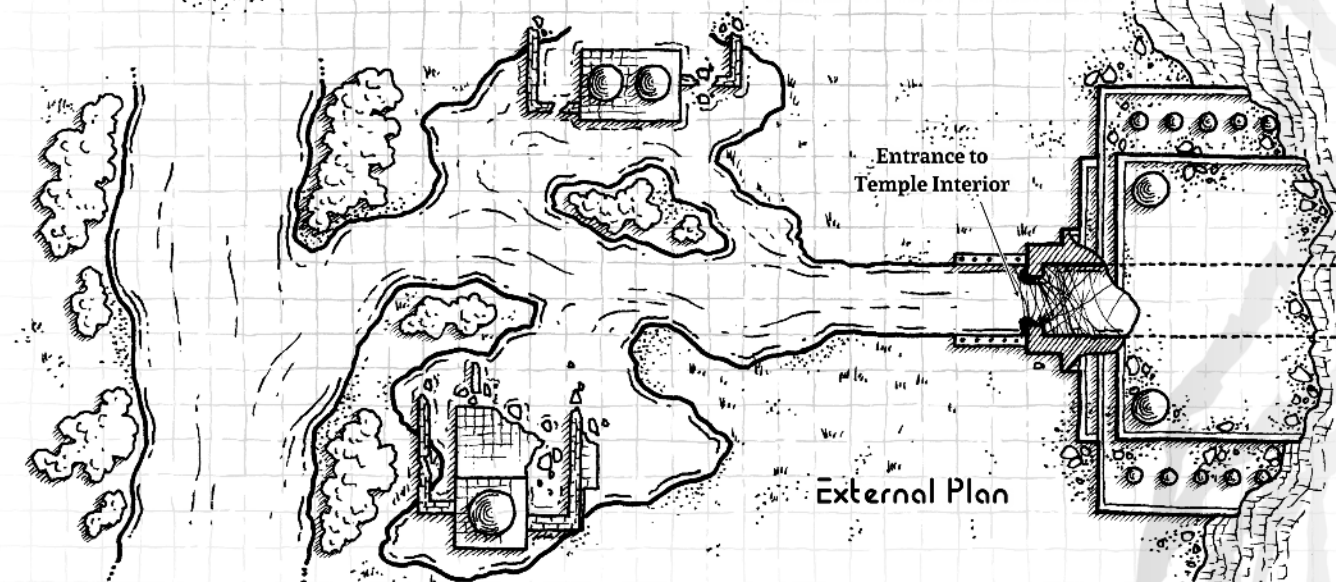
- I. There's a group of Europeans studying the weird, floating entity. This expedition is led by Dr. Gruber. His team has attempted communication twice, both times ending in tragedy. According to Gruber, the thing gives off unusual electromagnetic radiation. They hope to learn where it came from and what it can teach them about electromagnetism. Gruber's expedition calls it die Verrücktheit (the weirdness).
- II. The second group worships it. Local tribesmen living in caves within the mountain view it as an inscrutable deity, neither benevolent nor malign. While physically avoiding the entity, the tribe will do what they must to protect it from harm. They refer to the thing as Olong ba kahl (meaning the truth that is difficult to see). Anyone intruding upon the mountain will be taken prisoner and "fed" to Olong ba kahl as a sacrifice.
- III. The last group is commanded by Cornelius Putnam, a big game hunter who has been traveling all over the Australian outback and came to New Guinea to "see what all the fuss was about regarding this funny mountain". Mr. Putnam encountered the entity weeks ago. It killed one of his guides, as well as, his right-hand man John

Casper. Now, the fight is personal between Cornelius Putnam and the thing. Putnam has a plethora of dynamite tucked away in his cave. He intends to blow the damned thing up very soon - which will destroy half the mountain with it. Assuming, of course, that the entity is harmed by the blast at all.

"It came down
from the mountain...
a floating, shimmering entity
not of this world.
Like something from
a child's nightmare."

The Temple of Dark Secrets

ft 5 10 20



THE TEMPLE OF DARK SECRETS

Nafu Aata is a half-sunken temple just off the river, one of the oldest structures in New Guinea. It rests at the base of a small mountain.

Academics cannot account for its existence, nor determine who built it or why. The temple is full of snakes, monkeys, statues, and giant spiders crawling upon expansive cobwebs. The temple's entrance is the mouth of a stream. The likeness of malevolent spirits - possibly demons or angry gods - frame the entryway, as does a thick curtain of spider webs.

At some point during their investigation, there will be another earthquake (before the finale). Whenever it occurs, the earthquake will be one more thing to deal with. It creates another fissure in the ground - whatever is down there seems to be shrouded in an impenetrable blackness. Disturbing vibrations emanate from the things below. Nothing definite can be perceived, it's just a feeling one or more investigators have.

Refer to map for numbered locations.

1: Spider attack!

The investigators are attacked by gigantic spiders. It's up to the GM exactly how large, vicious, and numerous these arachnids are. I envisioned them as bird-eating spiders but they could just as easily be alien in form and biology. Certainly, their bite should be poisonous. A medical doctor among the investigators will successfully draw the poison out with a decent roll. Without treatment, said poison could take an hour or more to actually kill a man. Instantaneous death is frowned upon... unless it means sacrificing non-essential NPCs. You want as many PCs to make it to the climax as possible. After that, let them die from whatever fate has decided.

As the explorers move inward, some receive a flash of something... The GM should roll a d6 for each investigator. On a result of a 6, they have an out-of-body experience. Suddenly thrust into an empty, black void with one of four possible scenes to gaze upon briefly before returning to normal.

- 1 Going back to their introduction to the Meepie, watching themselves take part in the festivities. In this vision, Dr. Steiner appears more demon than man.
- 2 Black robed priests sit in a circle, discussing some entity named Zor'raev Tsog. Each priest is holding a strange bladed weapon. One of them speaks in bizarre guttural tones as the air before them crackles with energy.
- 3 Their future selves entering the inner sanctum and looking upon something alien and horrible.
- 4 The guardian obtaining unnatural carnal knowledge of Vanessa as she lays in the mist-laden cavern, missing her tongue.

2: Chamber of Zor'raev Tsog

This large and irregular-shaped chamber was crudely constructed from large stones. Veins, weeds, and fungi outline the stones, giving it an overgrown appearance.

The chamber houses seven load-bearing pillars. Each of the seven pillars is fashioned out of some kind of dark grey marble with lavender and magenta veins. Several tentacles are etched out in relief upon every pillar. It is unclear what the tentacles belong to.

Upon an entire wall of the chamber is a massive carving of some hideous creature. The monster appears insectoid, as well as, octopoidal and slightly draconic. Men are depicted as a tenth of the thing's size, a few being lifted off the ground by its massive tentacles. It clearly dominates the artwork and is meant to be impressive; painstaking work went into detailing the creature's scales, suckers, and less identifiable aspects. The eyes dance in the torchlight. The artist embedded semi-transparent, cloudy-blue stones with tiny sparkling, flecks of gold into the wall. There are seven eyes, each the size of a man's palm. The creature is depicted with its head low to the ground so that its eyes are within easy reach.

The crumpled blue vestments and skeletal remains of some long-dead priest reside on the edge of the chamber, near the mural. If Steiner is there, he may mutter "My predecessor," under his breath. Though he won't furnish details, except to say that the mural depicts the tentacled harvester. The skeleton's bony hand grips a ceremonial dagger. For as old as the dagger must be, it appears to be in excellent condition - keen blade and a smaller version of the blue stone with gold flecks as its pommel. This



weapon is magical and capable of dispatching supernatural beings, especially if it's in the name of Zor'raev Tsog. Mechanically, the wielder will always use a dice pool of 3d6 when using the blade.

Each blue eye-stone corresponds with a pillar, so touching one makes the other glow. The eyes give off the pillar's lavender-magenta hue, as if weird light emanates from behind the wall. The pillars glow with blue energy from somewhere within their marble exterior.

If anyone touches the seven eyes in a certain order, the precious stones stay illuminated, sending out a barely audible vibration like a muffled tuning fork - individual stones contain a particular tone and frequency. For those looking to play this out, the order is: 3, 7, 1, 4, 2, 6, and 5. Investigators who spend time playing around with the stones, touching various ones, or searching for a certain combination will find what they seek within a couple minutes.

At that point, reality melts away, revealing what truly exists beneath our fragile and illusory universe - a realm of unutterable chaos and demoniacal horror that feels like fire screaming and shadow devouring everything virtuous and pure and comprehensible. In the distance, a Cyclopean form moves as if through an ocean of time and space.

Zor'raev Tsog is breaking through! Everyone except Steiner rolls on the insanity table.

Each character present should roll a d6. On a 1, some tentacle emerging from a nearby abyss snatches him. The tentacle creature gets a 2d6 dice pool. It will only disengage if "killed" by the magical dagger.

After this initial tentacle attack, the tentacled harvester reveals itself, striking with outstretched, suckered tentacles yet again. At the start of round three, Steiner gestures wildly and speaks the name of his deity. The world returns to normal soon after.

3 and 4: Underground Lake

This cavern leads to a sandy beach, beyond is a rocky bottleneck that leads to an underground lake if anyone travels 40 to 50' upstream to have a look.

Upon the beach are several corpses. They look oddly familiar. In fact, closer examination concludes that the adventurers are investigating themselves - their own dead bodies. Cause of death is drowning with a couple of the bodies showing signs of blunt force trauma as well. There are a few subtle differences between doppelgangers, though. One will have his ring on the "wrong" hand. Another may have a slightly different tattoo, different clothing, a beard (or lack thereof), the absence of a scar, etc.

Roll a d6 for each character. If the result is anything but a 6, an adventurer's body has washed up on the shore. These are the adventurers themselves while simultaneously being not actually them. Some kind of slip in the time-stream or crossing of parallel dimensions is at play here.

In another reality, the characters discovered the rapids and went down the waterfall. This beach is where the dead eventually wash up. It just so happens that the characters in this dimension happened upon their alternative selves before coming across the rapids. Perhaps this will serve as a warning not to follow the rapids when they reach that cave. In any case, it should leave the adventurers scratching their heads and, hopefully, more than a little creeped out.

Those investigators who find their own dead body washed up on the shore have a chance of going nuts because of their discovery. Roll 1d6 for each individual who sees his own water-logged corpse lying there in the sand. A result of 1 means that you should roll on the insanity table.

Trudging and splashing through the water leads to the body of this underground lake. Sticking out of the water are giant fragments of bone. It's as if some gargantuan creature died here - swallowed by the lake itself - thousands of years ago and is still slowly decomposing. The protruding bones dwarf the natural, subterranean beauty of these caverns.

5: Stream, Rapids, and Waterfall

It takes a half-hour of hiking upwards to reach this cave. The side of it is the start of a fast-flowing river. The sounds of rushing water make casual conversation impossible. There's a yellow inflatable raft next to the water.

Adventurers who use the raft to traverse the river find that it quickly turns into rapids, soon followed by a raging waterfall that drops them onto the rocks of an underground lake within a gigantic cavern. Only the best and luckiest swimmers have a chance of surviving. Players going over the falls should roll a dice pool of 2d6, only those with a result of 4, 5, or 6 make it out alive.

Survivors eventually wash up on the beach [see Underground Lake].



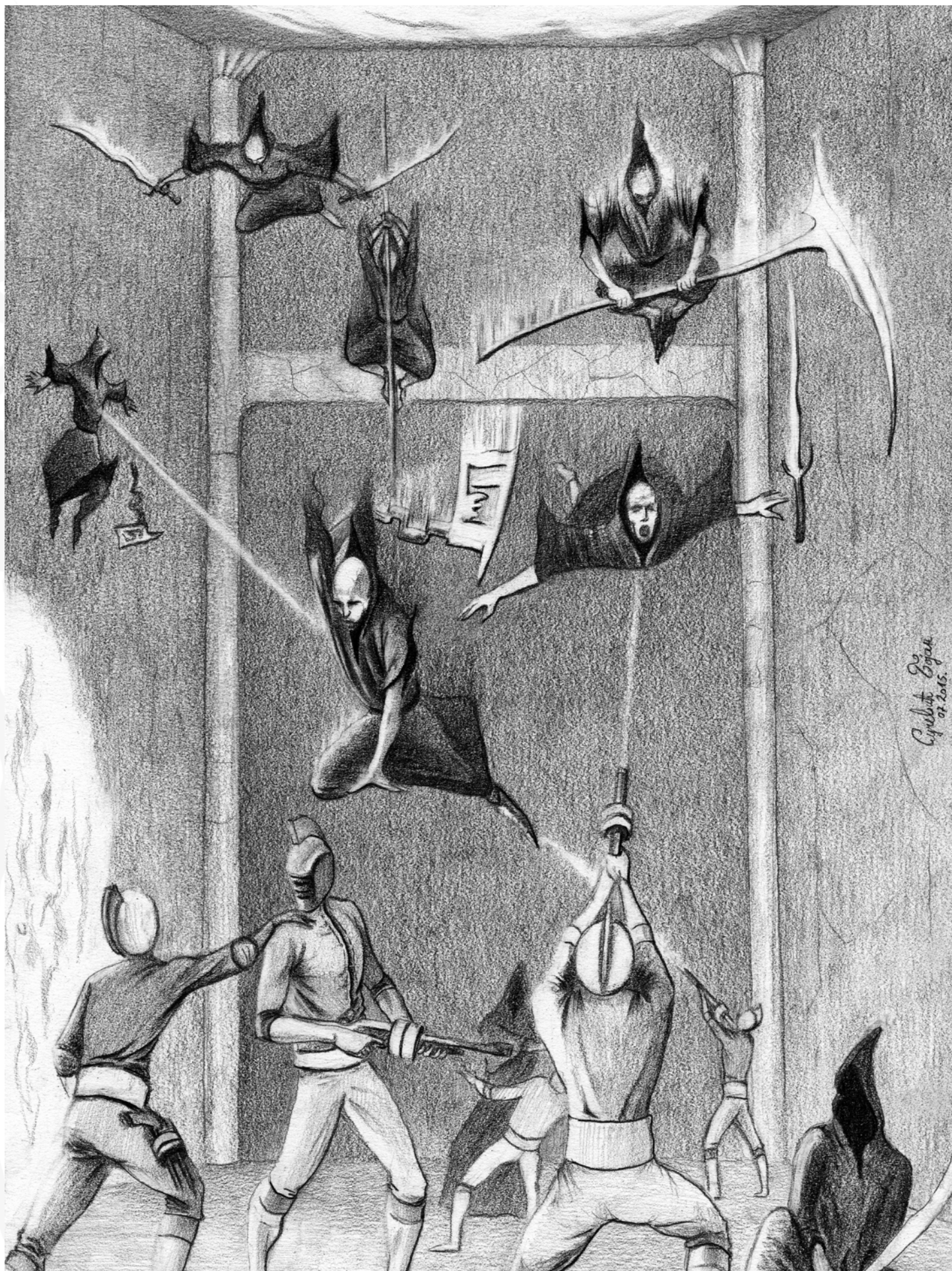
6: Cavern of Star Shamblers

The cave is full of greyish-green star-shaped organic matter with electric-blue pulsating veins; each entity is roughly the size of a bean-bag chair. Most of them appear to be huddled in the north-east corner of the cavern. The star shamblers show signs of subtle movement if watched for more than a few seconds at a time.

These shamblers will not attack unless provoked. Any poking and prodding results in a full-scale smackdown.

The star shamblers surround an off-white tube lying on the ground, fashioned out of a hollow femur. Inside, there is a rolled up page of parchment. Closer examination reveals it to be a scroll with strange symbols written in blood. Those who successfully decipher its language realize that this temple was built millennia before the earliest records of human life in New Guinea, and that Nafu Aata was constructed in order to receive the blessings of the Dark One.

Critical success allows one to learn a spell - the power to become like an unseen demonic force (lasting for 3d6 minutes). This incantation is only usable once per day and its initial use may drive the spell-caster mad. When the spell is cast, have everyone roll a 1d6. Witnesses with a result of 1 must roll on the insanity table, as should the spell-caster who gets either a 1 or 2.



7: Gateway Drug

There are worshipers of Zor'raev Tsog living in various dimensions, including the past, present, and future of earth. Five cultists devoted to Zor'raev Tsog exit a dimensional portal that looks like floating water, luminous and strange. The cultists are carrying energy weapons, their sickly yellowish-green blasts illuminating the claustrophobic temple walls.

Not more than 20' away, a second portal opens. Nearly a dozen humanoids in black robes exit their gateway, carrying medieval weaponry - yet there's something alien about their design. These humanoids worship the outer presence.

As soon as each group sees the other, combat ensues. These darkness-loving devotees are on opposing sides of an endless war. It's cultist versus cultist as they see who can triumph over the unquiet void. Most likely, the investigators will want to get the hell out of their way as weird-looking swords and axes clash with laser fire.

The battle rages on for several minutes. However, when it comes down to one or two survivors, adventurers might want to sit down for a little chat. As long as the main characters are non-threatening, remaining cultists will be exhausted from their dimensional journey and the fighting to exterminate non-believers.

One is named Kapaki and he can tell the investigators that this time, this place is where the final battle comes down between Zor'raev Tsog and the outer presence, also known as, the destroyer of worlds. Worshipers of both sides knew enough to journey here to fight and die in the unholy war. Regarding the conflict, Kapaki knows that the outer presence wishes to consume the world, whereas the harvester of many tentacles is determined to enslave humanity and feed off its suffering.

Kapaki (and possibly one of his brothers) is either on one side or the other. It's up to you, or simply roll randomly to decide. He can be used as cannon fodder by the adventurers, as a source of information, a lead to other adventures down the road, pitted against Dr. Steiner, or destined to assist him in awakening the destroyer of worlds.

8: The Mist-Shrouded Bridge

In order to access the temple's inner-sanctum, explorers must first cross a bridge. On either side of the bridge is a crevasse. A dense fog or mist obscures whatever is down there - "the guardian." The guardian is a creature that has some strange symbiotic link with the outer presence.

The guardian will whisper unintelligible things to those who tarry along the bridge. There's a chance that its susurrations drive an investigator temporarily insane. Have each player roll a d6. Characters with a 1 result roll on the insanity table.

Vanessa Hargrave, tongue torn out and pregnant, is also down there. She'll make desperate noises if she hears people above. If rescued, Vanessa looks pregnant. Any kind of physician or woman will realize she's at the end of her second trimester or beginning of her third. Did Vanessa become pregnant from that shambling thing down there or from Dr. Steiner? If rescued, there's always a chance (if the GM wishes) that present circumstances cause contractions leading towards a messy delivery of God knows what!

Climbing down the 30' rock wall shouldn't be too difficult. Jumping down will result in characters being wounded.

The guardian is awful to behold. It appears to be a huge worm with vestigial wings and a dozen tentacles growing out of its gaping, circular mouth. The creature's coloring is ichor-green with magenta accents. Viewing it requires that players roll a d6, on a result of 1 or 2, they must roll on the insanity table.

The guardian gets 3d6 versus one unlucky adventurer each round. It's a slow beast, almost always attacking last. If "killed", the creature vanishes into a cloud of noxious vapor, reforming in 2d6 minutes to attack whoever is down there with it and Vanessa if it looks like she might be rescued.

"Just one more...
...one last kiss
before I introduce you
to your new lover...
...that thing in the pit."

9: Inner Sanctum

The inner-sanctum is protected by an invisible barrier. Steiner was able to breach the threshold once because of the fresh human blood upon his clothing. But he doesn't know that's the reason and has been trying to regain access ever since.

The inner-sanctum contains the obscene living relic perched upon a crumbling stone altar. It resembles a mass of slimy black tentacles. The tentacles have plasticity to them or an elastic quality. They twitch and undulate in between long stretches of stillness, almost as if it were taking a shallow breath every minute or so.

Seeing it might drive investigators insane. Have each character roll a d6, on a result of 1 or 2, they must roll upon the insanity table.

Touching it will allow the outer presence to absorb a human being. The entire horrifying process takes 1d6 minutes. Interrupting this absorption (by executing the intended) is the only way to prevent Armageddon. Those who run in fear or stand back to watch it happen are in for quite the spectacle.

Upon completion, the ground shakes. An earthquake begins to take the temple down, the earth opening up to swallow it - while something else rises from below.

A gigantic black monolith breaks through and erupts into the sky. Through swirling mist, lightning, and eerie clouds, the black monolith calls to the Dark One - and it answers with bluish-grey tentacles curling around the sanity of onlookers, caressing it. This is the end of the world.

On the plus side, the individual who successfully bonds with the black relic shall become nearly godlike in his understanding of the universe... right up until the time when those slimy black tentacles gouge out his humanity and skull-fuck his consciousness. Yep, that's definitely a silver lining.

However, those who kill the individual that the slimy black tentacles latch onto (before the process is complete) are also able to destroy the outer presence with fire or a ridiculous amount of bullets (chopping it into a dozen pieces also works). At that point, an earthquake still occurs but there's no black monolith reaching towards the hideously awaiting heavens.

Those looking back on the temple as they flee watch it crumble into nothingness.





CONCLUSION

Now that Dr. Steiner is out of the way, the Meepie should be more amenable. The tribe will assist the adventurers in returning home.

In this author's opinion, the adventurers have suffered enough. Assuming they haven't helped bring about the end of the world, making their way to civilization and a plane back to wherever they came from is only fair.

Will anyone believe their wild tale? It's entirely possible. Perhaps yet another expedition is in order...

Further Adventures of the Outer Presence Alumni

Where do you go from here? Assuming you want to take the same characters into uncharted territory, I have a few suggestions...

- I. There are cultists out there in the world who worship both the outer presence and Zor'raev Tsog. The gateways might have closed after those cultists entered the temple, but that doesn't mean they can't be reopened.
- II. An unknown benefactor may be willing to pay for knowledge of Nafu Aata. Is it because he's discovered something similar? Another temple, perhaps, or an object linked to the original crash millennia ago. Maybe this mysterious figure has been tracking a High Priest who once called Nafu Aata home.
- III. There's a lost world type of civilization deep within the earth and directly below the temple. Do its people worship the black monolith? Are they aware of surface dwellers? What great and terrible secret do its priests harbor?
- IV. Is Henry Bile under Dr. Poho's mind-control power? Perhaps Poho wants Ms. Karen Conrad for his personal plaything... his private pleasures. Their carnal union will result in a magickal child who will one day grow up to become a super-being. Miskatonic's Necronomicon is the key! The book's very existence deteriorates the walls of reality and those in close contact are especially vulnerable to its corrupting influence!

MEEPIE WORDS

In order to lend the Meepie a shred of authenticity, here's a bunch of words I totally made up (but in my head, they kind of sound like something the Meepie might say).

Okuta: stranger; foreigner

Nafu: dark; darkness; evil

Utok: magic; sorcery; unnatural occurrence

Aata: secrets

Hovachu: marked one, servant of the Outer Presence

Gugako: guardian; the thing that guards the Outsider

Eneso: High Priest

Ako: of, for, from, by, at, with (any preposition, really)

Mavani: the one who came from outside

Achu: the outer presence; outsider; thing from outside

Nabate: sacrifice

Olong: the truth

Ba: difficult or difficulty

Kahl: sight, too see, or perception

Hoomba: kill them

Varo: explain yourself

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[illegible]

[illegible]





THE OUTER PRESENCE

This book contains rules for an old school, investigative horror roleplaying game, as well as, a Lovecraftian scenario taking place in the 1970's.

Many times I've wanted to run a one-shot in this genre, but the whole character creation and game mechanics always seemed to put me off. Moobs prefer simplicity so they can focus on their character and what's going on rather than all the fiddly bits. As a Game Master, I'm the same way. That's why I created my own system. It's very similar to Crimson Dragon Slayer, but even more simplified.

Game Masters are free to use "The Outer Presence" adventure with any RPG they choose with minimal conversion. The most important things are mood, wandering around a strange environment, the exciting possibilities that come with life-threatening danger, pulse-pounding action, and coming face to face (or tentacle) with the untenable monstrosities lurking just beneath the worn veneer of reality.

