

OCT.
10¢

MACABRE Tales



A Role-Playing Game
of Lovecraftian Horror
by CYNTHIA CELESTE MILLER

REQUIRES TWO SETS OF DOMINOES!



The Lovecraftian Horror Role-Playing Game

MACABRE

Oct. 10¢

Tales

Vol. 1

October 1931

Number One

Game Design

Cynthia Celeste Miller

Additional Design & Development

Eric Hudson

Editing

Norbert Franz

Graphic Design and Layout

Cynthia Celeste Miller

Artists

Scott Harshbarger, Nicholas Shepherd, Ward Donovan, Jiří Dvorský, Sam Inabinet, Krum

Playtesters

Lindsey Babineaux, Shelly Bateman, Michael Fienen, Troy Greene, Roy Hatcher, Eric Hudson, Robert Lynch, Shea McLaughlin, Diana Nash, Rob Nash, Shauna Nash, Caleb Reeves, Joe Shallington



www.spectrum-games.com

2807 Grand Ave., Parsons, Kansas 67357

Copyright 2011 by Spectrum Games. All Rights Reserved. This material (art, logos, illustrations, character concepts, text and game mechanics) is protected by the copyright laws of the United States of America. Any reproduction or unauthorized use of the material or artwork contained herein is prohibited without the express written consent of Spectrum Games, except for the purposes of reviews and for the blank sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. The reference to any companies or products in this book is not meant to challenge the trademarks or copyrights concerned.

Table of Contents

"The Statement of Randolph Carter" 5

Ch. 1: Welcome to the Arkham Cycle 9

The Macabre Tales Difference 10
Preparation 11
What is a Role-Playing Game? 11
Lovecraftian Horror 13

Ch. 2: The Game Rules 15

Before the Games 15
Types of Characters 15
The Three-Act Structure 15
Stats and Aspects 15
Checks 18
Tension Scenes 22
Perilous Checks 28
Healing and Recovery 30
Genre Points 32
Supporting Characters 33
The Narrator Using Doubles 34
Multi-Player Rules (Optional) 34

Ch. 3: Character Creation 37

Lovecraft & His Protagonists 37
Primary Characters in Macabre Tales 37
Creating Your Primary Character 38

Ch. 4: Player's Section 41

The Necessity of This Chapter 41
Becoming Familiar w/ the Source Material 41
Moving the Story Along 41
Contributing to the Narration 42
Making the Most of Tension Scenes 42
Earning Genre Points 42

Ch. 5: Narrator's Section 45

Narrator's Overview 45
Preparing the Tale 45
Creating Supporting Characters 52
Narrating 58
Rules Management 63

Ch. 6: Lovecraft's Reality 67

Lovecraft & His World 67
Locations 68
Tomes 70
Great Old Ones 71
The Other Gods 72
Creatures 73

Ch. 7: "The Cursed House" 77

A Tale of Terror 77
The Summary 77
The Three Acts 78

Designer's Notes 91

NEVER LOSE AT MARBLES AGAIN!

Introducing the amazing self-shooting shooter marble! You've never seen anything like it. Your friends will be amazed as you defeat each and every one of this without even trying. Don't delay! Order yours today!

25 cents Apt.121 RE Howard Dr. Seattle, WA

Are You Lonely?

Are you sick of being shunned by the opposite sex? Now you can kiss those days goodbye. I will arrange for you a CONFIDENTIAL mail correspondence with another lonely individual of your dreams. This is a dignified and healthy way to find that special someone in your life. You don't have to be alone ever again. Write for more information.

Z. Bishop P.O. Box 1890 Mason, Florida

Raise Your Own Turtles!



Turtles can be the greatest pets a boy can have! Don't just take our word for it... order an exotic Oriental turtle from us today. Our founder, a zoologist who specializes in turtles, will give you a money back guarantee that his turtles are smarter, faster and more loving than any other turtle you can own!

Free booklet!

106 W. Wandrei St. Pickton, MO.

For the nature lover in all of us!

BEARS AND WOODS

15 cents/copy

Every Month!

THE FUTURE IS HERE

Tiny telephones that can be carried with you? Portable thinking machines? Futuristic robots? Flying cars? Death ray guns? Radios with moving pictures?

You may think it's impossible, but it's not! Our top scientists are developing these things as we speak. And you - yes, YOU - can get involved too! Send \$1 to the following address to learn more!

PO Box 1937 Providence, Rhode Island



“The Statement of Randolph Carter”

A tale of terror by H.P. Lovecraft

I repeat to you, gentlemen, that your inquisition is fruitless. Detain me here forever if you will; confine or execute me if you must have a victim to propitiate the illusion you call justice; but I can say no more than I have said already. Everything that I can remember, I have told with perfect candour. Nothing has been distorted or concealed, and if anything remains vague, it is only because of the dark cloud which has come over my mind—that cloud and the nebulous nature of the horrors which brought it upon me.

Again I say, I do not know what has become of Harley Warren; though I think—almost hope—that he is in peaceful oblivion, if there be anywhere so blessed a thing. It is true that I have for five years been his closest friend, and a partial sharer of his terrible researches into the unknown. I will not deny, though my memory is uncertain and indistinct, that this witness of yours may have seen us together as he says, on the Gainesville pike, walking toward Big Cypress Swamp, at half past eleven on that awful night. That we bore electric lanterns, spades, and a curious coil of wire with attached instruments, I will even affirm; for these things all played a part in the single hideous scene which remains burned into my shaken recollection. But of what followed, and of the reason I was found alone and dazed on the edge of the swamp next morning, I must insist that I know nothing save what I have told you over and over again. You say to me that there is nothing in the swamp or near it which could form the setting of that frightful episode. I reply that I know nothing beyond what I saw. Vision or nightmare it may have been—vision or nightmare I fervently hope it was—yet it is

all that my mind retains of what took place in those shocking hours after we left the sight of men. And why Harley Warren did not return, he or his shade—or some nameless *thing* I cannot describe—alone can tell.

As I have said before, the weird studies of Harley Warren were well known to me, and to some extent shared by me. Of his vast collection of strange, rare books on forbidden subjects I have read all that are written in the languages of which I am master; but these are few as compared with those in languages I cannot understand. Most, I believe, are in Arabic; and the fiend-inspired book which brought on the end—the book which he carried in his pocket out of the world—was written in characters whose like I never saw elsewhere. Warren would never tell me just what was in that book. As to the nature of our studies—must I say again that I no longer retain full comprehension? It seems to me rather merciful that I do not, for they were terrible studies, which I pursued more through reluctant fascination than through actual inclination. Warren always dominated me, and sometimes I feared him. I remember how I shuddered at his facial expression on the night before the awful happening, when he talked so incessantly of his theory, *why certain corpses never decay, but rest firm and fat in their tombs for a thousand years*. But I do not fear him now, for I suspect that he has known horrors beyond my ken. Now I fear *for* him.

Once more I say that I have no clear idea of our object on that night. Certainly, it had much to do with something in the book which Warren carried with him—that ancient book

in undecipherable characters which had come to him from India a month before—but I swear I do not know what it was that we expected to find. Your witness says he saw us at half past eleven on the Gainesville pike, headed for Big Cypress Swamp. This is probably true, but I have no distinct memory of it. The picture seared into my soul is of one scene only, and the hour must have been long after midnight; for a waning crescent moon was high in the vaporous heavens.

The place was an ancient cemetery; so ancient that I trembled at the manifold signs of immemorial years. It was in a deep, damp hollow, overgrown with rank grass, moss, and curious creeping weeds, and filled with a vague stench which my idle fancy associated absurdly with rotting stone. On every hand were the signs of neglect and decrepitude, and I seemed haunted by the notion that Warren and I were the first living creatures to invade a lethal silence of centuries. Over the valley's rim a wan, waning crescent moon peered through the noisome vapours that seemed to emanate from unheard-of catacombs, and by its feeble, wavering beams I could distinguish a repellent array of antique slabs, urns, cenotaphs, and mausolean facades; all crumbling, moss-grown, and moisture-stained, and partly concealed by the gross luxuriance of the unhealthy vegetation. My first vivid impression of my own presence in this terrible necropolis concerns the act of pausing with Warren before a certain half-obliterated sepulchre, and of throwing down some burdens which we seemed to have been carrying. I now observed that I had with me an electric lantern and two spades, whilst my companion was supplied with a similar lantern and a portable telephone outfit. No word was uttered, for the spot and the task seemed known to us; and without delay we seized our spades and commenced to clear away the grass, weeds, and drifted earth from the flat, archaic mortuary. After uncovering the entire surface, which consisted of three immense granite slabs, we stepped back some distance to survey the charnel scene; and Warren appeared to make some mental

calculations. Then he returned to the sepulchre, and using his spade as a lever, sought to pry up the slab lying nearest to a stony ruin which may have been a monument in its day. He did not succeed, and motioned to me to come to his assistance. Finally our combined strength loosened the stone, which we raised and tipped to one side.

The removal of the slab revealed a black aperture, from which rushed an effluence of miasmal gases so nauseous that we started back in horror. After an interval, however, we approached the pit again, and found the exhalations less unbearable. Our lanterns disclosed the top of a flight of stone steps, dripping with some detestable ichor of the inner earth, and bordered by moist walls encrusted with nitre. And now for the first time my memory records verbal discourse, Warren addressing me at length in his mellow tenor voice; a voice singularly unperturbed by our awesome surroundings.

"I'm sorry to have to ask you to stay on the surface," he said, "but it would be a crime to let anyone with your frail nerves go down there. You can't imagine, even from what you have read and from what I've told you, the things I shall have to see and do. It's fiendish work, Carter, and I doubt if any man without ironclad sensibilities could ever see it through and come up alive and sane. I don't wish to offend you, and heaven knows I'd be glad enough to have you with me; but the responsibility is in a certain sense mine, and I couldn't drag a bundle of nerves like you down to probable death or madness. I tell you, you can't imagine what the thing is really like! But I promise to keep you informed over the telephone of every move—you see I've enough wire here to reach to the centre of the earth and back!"

I can still hear, in memory, those coolly spoken words; and I can still remember my remonstrances. I seemed desperately anxious to accompany my friend into those sepulchral depths, yet he proved inflexibly obdurate. At one time he threatened to

abandon the expedition if I remained insistent; a threat which proved effective, since he alone held the key to the *thing*. All this I can still remember, though I no longer know what manner of *thing* we sought. After he had secured my reluctant acquiescence in his design, Warren picked up the reel of wire and adjusted the instruments. At his nod I took one of the latter and seated myself upon an aged, discoloured gravestone close by the newly uncovered aperture. Then he shook my hand, shouldered the coil of wire, and disappeared within that indescribable ossuary. For a moment I kept sight of the glow of his lantern, and heard the rustle of the wire as he laid it down after him; but the glow soon disappeared abruptly, as if a turn in the stone staircase had been encountered, and the sound died away almost as quickly. I was alone, yet bound to the unknown depths by those magic strands whose insulated surface lay green beneath the struggling beams of that waning crescent moon.

In the lone silence of that hoary and deserted city of the dead, my mind conceived the most ghastly phantasies and illusions; and the grotesque shrines and monoliths seemed to assume a hideous personality—a half-sentience. Amorphous shadows seemed to lurk in the darker recesses of the weed-choked hollow and to flit as in some blasphemous ceremonial procession past the portals of the mouldering tombs in the hillside; shadows which could not have been cast by that pallid, peering crescent moon. I constantly consulted my watch by the light of my electric lantern, and listened with feverish anxiety at the receiver of the telephone; but for more than a quarter of an hour heard nothing. Then a faint clicking came from the instrument, and I called down to my friend in a tense voice. Apprehensive as I was, I was nevertheless unprepared for the words which came up from that uncanny vault in accents more alarmed and quivering than any I had heard before from Harley Warren. He who had so calmly left me a little while previously, now called from below in a shaky whisper more portentous than the loudest shriek:

“God! If you could see what I am seeing!” I could not answer. Speechless, I could only wait. Then came the frenzied tones again: *“Carter, it’s terrible—monstrous—unbelievable!”*

This time my voice did not fail me, and I poured into the transmitter a flood of excited questions. Terrified, I continued to repeat, “Warren, what is it? What is it?”

Once more came the voice of my friend, still hoarse with fear, and now apparently tinged with despair:

“I can’t tell you, Carter! It’s too utterly beyond thought—I dare not tell you—no man could know it and live—Great God! I never dreamed of THIS!” Stillness again, save for my now incoherent torrent of shuddering inquiry. Then the voice of Warren in a pitch of wilder consternation:

“Carter! for the love of God, put back the slab and get out of this if you can! Quick!—leave everything else and make for the outside—it’s your only chance! Do as I say, and don’t ask me to explain!”

I heard, yet was able only to repeat my frantic questions. Around me were the tombs and the darkness and the shadows; below me, some peril beyond the radius of the human imagination. But my friend was in greater danger than I, and through my fear I felt a vague resentment that he should deem me capable of deserting him under such circumstances. More clicking, and after a pause a piteous cry from Warren:

“Beat it! For God’s sake, put back the slab and beat it, Carter!”

Something in the boyish slang of my evidently stricken companion unleashed my faculties. I formed and shouted a resolution, “Warren, brace up! I’m coming down!” But at this offer the tone of my auditor changed to a scream of utter despair:

“Don’t! You can’t understand! It’s too late—and

my own fault. Put back the slab and run—there's nothing else you or anyone can do now!" The tone changed again, this time acquiring a softer quality, as of hopeless resignation. Yet it remained tense through anxiety for me.

"Quick—before it's too late!" I tried not to heed him; tried to break through the paralysis which held me, and to fulfil my vow to rush down to his aid. But his next whisper found me still held inert in the chains of stark horror.

"Carter—hurry! It's no use—you must go—better one than two—the slab—" A pause, more clicking, then the faint voice of Warren:

"Nearly over now—don't make it harder—cover up those damned steps and run for your life—you're losing time— So long, Carter—won't see you again." Here Warren's whisper swelled into a cry; a cry that gradually rose to a shriek fraught with all the horror of the ages—

"Curse these hellish things—legions—My God! Beat it! Beat it! Beat it!"

After that was silence. I know not how many interminable aeons I sat stupefied; whispering, muttering, calling, screaming into that telephone. Over and over again through those aeons I whispered and muttered, called, shouted, and screamed, "Warren! Warren! Answer me—are you there?"

And then there came to me the crowning horror of all—the unbelievable, unthinkable, almost unmentionable thing. I have said that aeons seemed to elapse after Warren shrieked forth his last despairing warning, and that only my own cries now broke the hideous silence. But after a while there was a further clicking in the receiver, and I strained my ears to listen. Again I called down, "Warren, are you there?", and in answer heard the *thing* which has brought this cloud over my mind. I do not try, gentlemen, to account for that *thing*—that voice—nor can I venture to describe it in detail, since the first words took away my consciousness and created a mental blank which reaches

to the time of my awakening in the hospital. Shall I say that the voice was deep; hollow; gelatinous; remote; unearthly; inhuman; disembodied? What shall I say? It was the end of my experience, and is the end of my story. I heard it, and knew no more. Heard it as I sat petrified in that unknown cemetery in the hollow, amidst the crumbling stones and the falling tombs, the rank vegetation and the miasmal vapours. Heard it well up from the innermost depths of that damnable open sepulchre as I watched amorphous, necrophagous shadows dance beneath an accursed waning moon. And this is what it said:

"YOU FOOL, WARREN IS DEAD!"



Chapter One: Welcome to the Arkham Cycle

A Chapter for Both the Narrator and Player

Introduction

H.P. Lovecraft died in 1937, yet here we are --- more than 70 years later – trying to replicate his horrifying vision of reality through role-playing games. That speaks volumes about his uncanny ability to craft timeless stories that have kept us shivering for decades. His yarns are as chilling and spine tingling today as they were when he first unleashed them upon the world. The same cannot be said of the stories penned by most of his contemporaries.

His use of words to create a terrifying mental image of the unknown is second to none. He gave us a glimpse into a reality that is both frightening and uncomfortable, using his mastery of the English language to describe the indescribable, to draw us ever closer to the heart of stark, unimaginable horror. The world he paints such a vivid picture of is one of cosmic horror, wherein human emotion, and indeed humanity as a species, has no validity in the grand scheme of the universe. We are but insignificant insects in an endless cosmos filled with things beyond our comprehension. And in the darkest recesses of our world and minds, these things lurk, ready to be awakened from their aeons-long slumber by those who delve too far into that which they cannot possibly fathom.

Lovecraft's appeal certainly wasn't lost on the role-playing masses, even in the hobby's formative years. Various games integrated elements of his work and eventually, an entire game, *Call of Cthulhu*, was based on it. Other games followed, ranging from the serious (such as *Trail of Cthulhu* and

CthulhuTech) to the baroque (*De Profundis*) to the silly (such as *Pokethulhu*). Given the steady supply of games that focus on Lovecraft's distinct brand of eldritch horror, one might wonder if there's room for yet another. We feel that, as long as such a game offers a unique viewpoint and engaging game-play, there will be an audience for it.

Hopefully, you'll agree that *Macabre Tales* brings something new and exciting to the table.

"Mythos" Versus "Cycle"

The term "Cthulhu Mythos" is widely bandied around to describe the implied setting found in Lovecraft's stories. Ironically, Lovecraft never used that term. In fact, he didn't really go out of his way to establish true continuity at all, aside from the implementation of certain shared entities and tomes (as well as multiple appearances of Randolph Carter).

He sometimes referred to many of his stories as being part of the "Arkham Cycle". Given that it's the term Lovecraft himself utilized, it's the one we utilize as well.

The *Macabre Tales* Difference

In the text that follows, you will be given a quick summary of the qualities that set *Macabre Tales* apart from other Lovecraftian horror RPGs. We're not indicating that the game is better than the others; we simply want you to get a handle on its unique features.

One-On-One Gaming

The majority of Lovecraft's most memorable stories revolved around a single protagonist encountering horrors, strange antagonists, and making terrible discoveries. As such, *Macabre Tales* assumes that one narrator and one player will be involved. Optional rules for adding more players can be found in this book, but the default assumes a one-on-one style of play.

Player-Centric

Even though one of Lovecraft's recurring themes was that humanity is insignificant in the grand scheme of the universe, the central character was almost always the driving force behind the momentum of the story. He was the one who investigated the unknown. He was the one who narrated the tale. He was the one who moved the plot forward by reading that forbidden tome or by looking in the darkest recesses for answers to the unexplainable.

From a game mechanics standpoint, only characters controlled by the player make checks to see if they succeed or fail. The success of supporting characters depends on the needs of the story unless directly opposed by player-controlled characters. This means that the narrator isn't spending a large portion of the game making checks, which puts the focus back on the primary character of the story.

Source Material

Over the years, other authors have contributed to the Arkham Cycle by adding their own philosophies, angles and entities to the mix. Much, if not all, of this material has been accepted as Cycle canon by fandom and gamerdom at large. In *Macabre Tales*, only the material written by Lovecraft himself is considered canon. This includes the revision work that he essentially penned himself (such as "The Mound", "The Horror at Martin's Beach", etc.) as well as stories that he ghostwrote for other authors (such as "Under the Pyramids").

All this may sound pretty cut and dried. However, there are instances where the line is blurred somewhat. For example, The Book of Eibon wasn't created by Lovecraft, but was mentioned by him on several occasions. This may lead to some slight spillover in the game, but we have tried to keep everything as Lovecraft-centric as possible. The bottom line is that if Lovecraft used it in his fiction, it's fair game.

It's also worth noting that the game doesn't deal with Lovecraft's Dream Cycle in any detail. Certain elements of it may be mentioned here and there, but we wanted to make this book as focused as we could and the Dream Cycle is a whole different beast entirely.

The Domino Effect

Few things in Lovecraft's stories were random. Everything was meticulously orchestrated and planned out. The momentum in any given story was driven primarily by the protagonist's skill, intuition and research rather than arbitrary randomness. This is fine for fiction, wherein the author knows precisely what's going to happen, but for a role-playing game, there needs to be plenty of surprises for the participants. Otherwise, what's the point of playing the game? Still, this aspect of his fiction can't simply be ignored in a game that seeks to emulate it. As a result, we have minimized the amount of chance involved in the game.

Fortunately, we have developed a method of maintaining suspense and a sense of uncertainty, despite having played down the randomness. This was accomplished by doing away with dice-rolling altogether and implementing the use of dominoes. In essence, the player gets to choose his own “die rolls” from the dominoes he has in his possession. The details of how this works will be explored in later chapters.

One-Shot

Lovecraft was never big on recurring protagonists and neither are we. *Macabre Tales* was designed to accommodate one-shot adventures rather than facilitate long-term campaigns. For this reason, we have gone to great extremes to ensure that getting a game up and running takes very little time and effort. After all, who wants to invest a lot of time prepping for a game that’s only going to last one session?

In a similar vein, the game doesn’t facilitate character advancement. In *Macabre Tales*, the reward isn’t in beefing your character

up; it’s in taking part in a memorable horror story.

Preparation

In order to play the game, you’ll need to acquire a few simple things – pencils, paper, a copy of the character sheet, and two sets of standard “double-six” dominoes. Sets of dominoes can be obtained inexpensively at almost any store.

Upon obtaining the dominoes, remove all the doubles and blanks from one set. They will not be used in the game.

What is a Role-Playing Game?

For those of you who have role-played before, feel free to skip over this section. This will be old hat for you. However, if you’re new to the hobby, you’re probably wondering how this all works. If this is the case, this section is a must-read.

Let’s start with a quick definition. A role-playing game is an interactive storytelling game. Now, let’s expand upon that definition with some explanations.

The Narrator and the Player

There are two types of participants in the game: the narrator and the player. One participant acts as the narrator and one acts as the player. In other role-playing games, there can be more than one player, but in *Macabre Tales*, there’s only one (unless the optional rules on pages 34-35 are used).

- The narrator is the participant who set the game up and knows the overall framework of the story. In fact, the narrator usually writes it. He plays the roles of any characters not portrayed by the player (called the supporting

Personal Pronouns

The decision was made to exclusively use male pronouns in this rulebook when referring to the narrator, player and characters (though creatures are sometimes referred to as “it”). The reason for this is that Lovecraft always wrote from a very male point of view, even on the rare occasions that he included females in his stories, and we felt that had he been a game designer, he would have used male pronouns. As such, we followed suit.

This does not mean that we are discouraging females from playing. Nothing could be further from the truth. After all, the primary author of the game is a female.

characters) and also adjudicates the game rules.

- The player takes on the role of a character of his own creation (known as the primary character). He isn't privy to what's going on in the game and must find out as the story unfolds, often via his character's own investigative efforts.

Tales

Each game is known as a tale. A tale can be played in one full-length session or divided up into several shorter sessions; whichever is more convenient for the participants. Like any of Lovecraft's own fiction, a tale ends when the story is resolved in some fashion.

How it Works

The narrator kicks a tale off by describing the opening scene. This scene involves the primary character in some capacity. The player describes what his character is doing. In most cases, this doesn't require any rules. It's like verbal improvisational theater. The narrator tells him the results of his character's actions using common sense and his notes about the flick as his guide. This verbal interplay goes back and forth, spinning a story in the process.

If the primary character does something that could result in failure (climbing a cliff, conning a shop owner, sneaking around, etc.), the rules must be used to determine if the character can pull it off.

Below is a brief example of a typical scene. We have omitted any usage of the game rules, as this is simply meant to let you see how a role-playing game plays out. Mentioning game rules at this point would likely confuse a new player.

Narrator: You wake up in the middle of the night, sweating profusely. It's your first night in this new second-story room that you've rented and to say that it has been unrestful would be a gross understatement. This is

the third time you've awakened so far, but this time, bits and pieces of the nightmare that plagued you has clung to your memory. You recall two grotesque creatures, vaguely rodent-like in appearance, entering your room from a hole in the wall and whispering unfathomable secrets in your ear before scurrying back to whence they came. You know it was just a dream, however, because you know that there is no hole in the wall. But as your eyes gain focus, you notice something... something disturbing. There... on the wall. Something is there. It's... a hole, just like the one in your nightmare.

Player: I rub my eyes to make sure that I'm not just imagining things.

Narrator: After rubbing your eyes, you see that the hole is still there.

Player: Grabbing my slipper in case I need to whack something, I go over to the hole and position myself on the ground so that I can peer into it.

Narrator: It's very dark back in there, preventing you from seeing anything. However, you begin to hear barely audible whispers from within the hole, though they are in another language... one that you don't recognize.

Player: I'll go fetch my electric lantern so that I can shed some light on the hole.

Narrator: You find it easily enough. But when you turn it on and reposition yourself on the floor, the whispering ceases immediately. Whatever is in there knows that you're nearby.

See how it works? It's just a verbal give-and-take, with both the narrator and player doing their respective parts to tell a scary story.

Lovecraftian Horror

Lovecraftian horror is a sub-genre that takes elements of science fiction and melds it with more traditional horror to create what Lovecraft himself has described as “weird fiction”. This is an oversimplification, to be certain, but it’s an adequate way to summarize Lovecraftian horror. Perhaps we should look to his own words for a deeper explanation:

“The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain -- a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.”

Since we now have the generalizations taken care of, we can delve heartily into the specifics of what makes this particular sub-genre so unique and intriguing.

Pessimistic Outlook

The protagonists of Lovecraftian horror may occasionally push back the forces of malevolence, but it’s usually temporary. Darkness is all around us and there’s no real way to eliminate it. Our actions aren’t enough to make a big difference, which creates a sense of bleak hopelessness. Characters seldom walk away unscathed... mentally or physically. That is, if they walk away at all. In short, humanity is seemingly always under threat by these insidious beings and there may be no way to stop them.

Forbidden Knowledge

The world as we know it is but a thin veil draped over a profoundly abstract and alien

reality. The truths of the universe are such that the human mind cannot comprehend them. Whenever we learn even the most meager scrap of the truth, it chips away at our sanity. And the more we discover or witness, the more damaged our mental fabric becomes and the more we risk losing our minds entirely. The forbidden knowledge can be supplied in any number of ways, though one constant staple in Lovecraftian horror is the use of crumbling, ancient tomes as a means to spread it.

Hidden Horrors

Things beyond our wildest and most crazed imaginings dwell just out of sight in the darkest corners of the world, where hapless humans sometimes tread. These humans find themselves immersed in a world of vile cults, indescribable creatures and entities from beyond time and space. More often than not, the dark corners of the world are right under our noses – deep in the woods, beneath an old house or even in the middle of town. All it takes is one misstep for someone to be plunged into a world he never thought possible.

Unspeakable Monstrosities

Many of the staple creatures in Lovecraftian horror are nearly impossible to describe. They tend to have shockingly grotesque appearances – tentacles, pulsating husks, gaping maws, numerous eyes, slime-coated bodies, and so forth. As an example, read this excerpt from “At the Mountains of Madness”, which describes a Shoggoth: “It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train — a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and un-forming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the frantic penguins and slithering over the glistening floor that it and its kind had swept so evilly free of all litter.”

Human Insignificance

In a letter to Farnsworth Wright, Lovecraft wrote: "Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos at large... To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all." This quote sums up his stories' viewpoints on how important the human race is... which is to say not at all.

Influence Over Mankind

While humanity has little to no significance to the universe, the foul beings from beyond often assert their influence over weak-minded mortals. These souls become mere pawns of the deities in question, doing their bidding without even understanding their true place in the grand scheme of it all. A few humans were less unwitting, actively seeking out the unknown and becoming a part of the chaos willingly. Between the witting and unwitting, cults are formed; cults devoted to acting as servitors to their indescribable masters.

Vagueness and Contradiction

Lovecraft delighted in giving misinformation, even to the point of contradiction, in his effort to convey a sense of cosmic vastness and to reinforce the fact that we cannot fathom the truths behind what these entities truly are and what place they hold in the universe. He used many of his creations as simple name-drops in order to create the impression of an overarching theology or pantheon. In truth, he never developed a true theology, at least not in any detail. Later "contributors" to the Arkham Cycle quantified and categorized the beings he envisioned and even added their own to the mix.

Genetic Degeneration

Another common theme of Lovecraft's stories was having an isolated pocket of humanity

fall into decadence and atavism of its own accord. The degenerates became cannibals, barbarics or even something entirely less than human. In almost every instance, they remained tucked away in relative seclusion from the prying eyes of modern civilization.



New England

The New England area of the United States was very near and dear to Lovecraft's heart; often to the point of an emotional and spiritual dependency. Thus, it should come as no surprise that it was utilized as the default setting for most of his stories. He explained his fascination with including New England in his fiction himself: "It is the night-black Massachusetts legendary which packs the really macabre 'kick'. Here is material for a really profound study in group neuroticism; for certainly, none can deny the existence of a profoundly morbid streak in the Puritan imagination." He employed numerous real-world locations (such as Ipswich, Massachusetts and Danvers State Hospital) as well as those of his own creation (such as Arkham, Dunwich, Innsmouth and Miskatonic University, all located in Massachusetts). Not all of his tales were set in New England, however. In fact, rather sizable portions of them were set elsewhere, ranging from New York City to Kilderry, Ireland and just about everywhere in between. But when it came down to it, New England was the standard setting for Lovecraft's fiction.

Chapter Two: The Game Rules

A Chapter for Both the Narrator and Player

Before the Game

When the game session begins, all the dominoes should be placed facedown and scrambled up. This is known as the *domino pool*. The player takes three random dominoes from the pool and places them so that only he can see them. These are collectively referred to as his *hand*. Additionally, you need to set aside a bit of space for the *discard area*.

All these things will be described later in this chapter. For now, all you need to know is that they exist.

Types of Characters

There are two main types of characters in *Macabre Tales*: *primary characters* and *supporting characters*.

The primary character is the central character in the story. In many of Lovecraft's tales, this is the character that recounts the events that take place – the narrator of the story, if you will. In short, the primary character is the one controlled by the player.

Supporting characters represent everyone the primary character encounters. In most cases, they are controlled by the narrator. Generally speaking, supporting characters are divided up into two categories – *normal* and *creatures*.

The Three-Act Structure

Each tale follows the three-act structure that has been used in fiction of all mediums for a very long time.

- *Act One* is the tale's setup. It's where we meet the protagonist and establish who he is, what he does and what his situation is. It's also where the inciting incident (an event that sets the rest of the story in motion) occurs.

- *Act Two* is where the protagonist tries to deal with the ramifications of the inciting incident and make things right... or at least survive the ordeal with his mind intact. This act makes up the bulk of the tale.

- *Act Three* is the climax of the tale, where the main tensions of the story are brought to their most intense point and resolved, either leaving the protagonist alive and well, dead and buried or insane and committed.

These acts are very important to the game, as things become more and more dangerous and challenging with each successive act. This is carried forth in the game rules themselves.

Stats and Aspects

Every character in *Macabre Tales* has three *stats* -- characteristics that cover various areas of general ability. These stats are: Body (the character's physical aptitude),

Mind (the character's cerebral attributes) and Soul (the character's more introspective and spiritual qualities).

For primary characters, every stat has a *grade*, reflecting how good or bad the character is in that given area. Let's examine the three grades.

- **Normal:** About like an average person
- **Good:** Higher than average ability
- **Excellent:** Intensive degree of aptitude

Supporting characters do not have grades; they have challenge ratings (see page 18). The challenge rating determines how hard it is to thwart the supporting character in that area if directly opposed by the primary character.

As you have probably ascertained by now, stats paint the character's abilities in broad strokes. That is, they are very generalized. In order to faithfully replicate the feel of Lovecraft's stories, this alone simply will not do... which is why *aspects* come into play.

Aspects represent the more specific facets of the character's abilities, such as skills and talents. Unlike stats, not every character will possess all the aspects. The aspects a character has are given a *rating* that determines how well versed or trained he is. The ratings are expressed as numbers, as described below.

- **Rating 1:** Novice or marginally trained
- **Rating 2:** Basic level of training or ability
- **Rating 3:** Professional level of efficiency
- **Rating 4:** Expert or master
- **Rating 5:** Amongst the best in the world.

Each aspect is directly linked to one stat.

There are five aspects (Vehicles, Knowledge, Languages, Art and Performance) that cover a lot of ground. Too much ground, in fact. Since aspects are meant to be specific, these particular aspects must be more precisely defined. As such, characters with these

aspects have to be given a *specialization*. For this reason, it's possible for a character to have one of these aspects more than once, each with a different specialization. For example, a character might have "Vehicles (Automobiles)", indicating that he may utilize it only for driving cars. If he also had "Vehicles (Aeroplanes)", he could pilot air vehicles as well.

Let's investigate the aspects individually, shall we?

BODY

Athletics: The ability to perform feats of athleticism, such as running, jumping, climbing, swimming, balancing and so forth.

Coordination: Fine motor skills; often referred to as hand-eye coordination.

Fighting: The art of close combat, ranging from fisticuffs to fencing.

Marksmanship: The skill of hitting a target with a ranged attack, such as rifles, pistols, grenades, bows and so on.

Reflexes: The ability to react quickly to danger; often used to avoid incoming attacks.

Stealth: The act of sneaking, hiding or concealing.

Strength: The application of raw muscular power.

Toughness: A measure of endurance, stamina and the ability to shrug off damage.

Vehicles: The operation of vehicles. *Sample Specializations* – Automobiles, Motorcycles, Aeroplanes, Small Watercraft, Naval Ships, Industrial, etc.

MIND

Ingenuity: Skillfully and promptly dealing with new situations and obstacles using whatever means one has at his disposal; otherwise known as being resourceful.

Knowledge: Topics and subjects the character has acquired information on during his lifetime. *Sample Specializations* – Forbidden Truths (see sidebar), Occult Lore, High Society, Chemistry, Military History, Colonial History, Astronomy, Politics,

Forbidden Truths

The “Forbidden Truths” Knowledge specialization requires a little more explanation in that it functions differently than other specializations. First of all, the specialization represents the knowledge of the universe’s horrid truths involving the existence of the Great Old Ones, mankind’s true place in the cosmos and other such horrors that the human mind cannot comprehend without ramifications.

The primary character cannot begin the game with a rating in the “Forbidden Truths” specialization; it must be acquired over the course of the tale as he digs through books of immemorial centuries and encounters indescribable horrors from other galaxies.

Physics, Literature, Architecture, etc.

Languages: Speaking and reading languages beyond the character’s native language. *Sample Specializations* – Spanish, English, Portuguese, Latin, German, Italian, etc.

Perception: Using one’s senses or gut instinct to observe their surroundings in order to gain information (such as looking for clues, detecting a person in hiding, figuring out if someone is lying, etc.).

Research: Doing legwork to obtain information from libraries, old newspapers, and other such sources.

SOUL

Art: Expressing oneself by creating something tangible and creative. *Sample Specializations* – Painting, Writing, Sculpting, Photography, Drawing, etc.

Guile: Using cunning, manipulation, seduction or lies to get what you want from others.

Intimidation: Causing fear by using threats, physical pain or other bullying tactics.

Luck: The force that seems to operate for good or ill in a person’s life.

Performance: To entertain or inspire others by performing. *Sample Specializations* – Dancing, Oration, Comedy, Piano, Singing, Acting, etc.

Persuasion: Convincing others by means of reasoning or bargaining with them.

Resolve: Staving off persuasion, manipulation, or madness by using one’s willpower.

Perfunctory Perception

Perfunctory Perception is a secondary stat that represents the character’s passive observational abilities.

It is a tool for the narrator to use for determining if the character picks up on something even though he isn’t actively looking for it (or listening for it or smelling for it, etc.).

For example, if a clue is nearby and the character isn’t attempting to spot it, the narrator can look at said character’s Perfunctory Perception rating and compare it to a challenge rating. If the rating equals or exceeds the challenge rating, he notices it; if it is lower than the challenge rating, he fails to detect it.

Conversely, if the character states that he is looking for clues, a Mind [Perception] check is made instead.



Checks

Mundane actions – such as walking across the room, engaging in idle chitchat or driving a car under normal circumstances – have very little chance of failure. So little, in fact, that they should be automatically successful. The rules should only become involved when success or failure is important to the story. Ultimately, the narrator is the arbiter of deciding whether or not the rules should come into play.

Determining whether or not an action is successful requires a *check* on behalf of the primary character. Supporting characters never make checks; in most cases, the narrator determines whether or not they are successful based on what would best serve the story.

Making Checks

When a check is in order, the narrator tells the player which stat is being used and also if one of the aspects linked to the stat would be helpful to him. The narrator then selects a *challenge rating* based on how difficult he feels the task is to accomplish. This rating is not divulged to the player, creating a sense of uncertainty and suspense.

2-3	Easy
4-6	Moderate
7-9	Hard
10-12	Very Hard
13+	Nigh Impossible

Once the narrator chooses the rating, the player must select a domino from his hand and reveal it. The grade of the stat being tested determines which side of the domino is used for calculating the result.

- **Normal:** Lowest side
- **Good:** Highest side
- **Excellent:** Both sides added together

Should one of the character's aspects

logically be of assistance to the character, add its rating to the result.

- If the final result equals or exceeds the task's challenge rating, the character is successful.
- If the final result is lower than the challenge rating, the character fails.

EXAMPLE: James' character is attempting a task. The responsible stat has a grade of Good. He plays a 4/2 domino, using the highest side, which is 4. Thus, his result is currently 4. However, the narrator states that one of the character's aspects would be of use to him. The character has a rating of 3 in that aspect, which is added to the result. Therefore, the final result is 7 (4 + 3 = 7). The Difficulty Number for the task was 5. The final result is equal or higher, so the action is successful.

After a check is made, the domino used is placed face-up in the discard area, with one exception.

As soon as the discarding occurs, the player then draws dominoes from the pool so that his hand is replenished back to three. When the narrator decrees it appropriate (usually at the conclusion of a scene), turn the discarded dominoes facedown and mix them back into the domino pool.

Special Dominoes

There are three types of dominoes that require special rules. In this section, we look at these in depth.

Doubles

Doubles are not placed in the discard pile after being played, but instead are given to the narrator, who can use them to make life more difficult for the primary character (see page 34). Blanks played as enhancers (see "Blanks" and "Double Blanks" below) are still given to the narrator.

It's not entirely negative for the primary

character, however. To reflect that he is making headway, he earns a genre point (see pages 32-33), or two genre points for double blanks (see below). The earned genre point cannot be spent to affect that check.

Blanks

The player can use dominoes with blanks on them (e.g., 0/2) in two different ways:

- The player can play it for a test, treating the blank side as a 3. If you play a 0/3 in this way, the domino is not considered a double and therefore doesn't need to be given to the narrator.
- The player can play it for a test in addition to another domino, adding half of its non-blank value (rounded up) to the result. This is known as *playing it as an enhancer*.

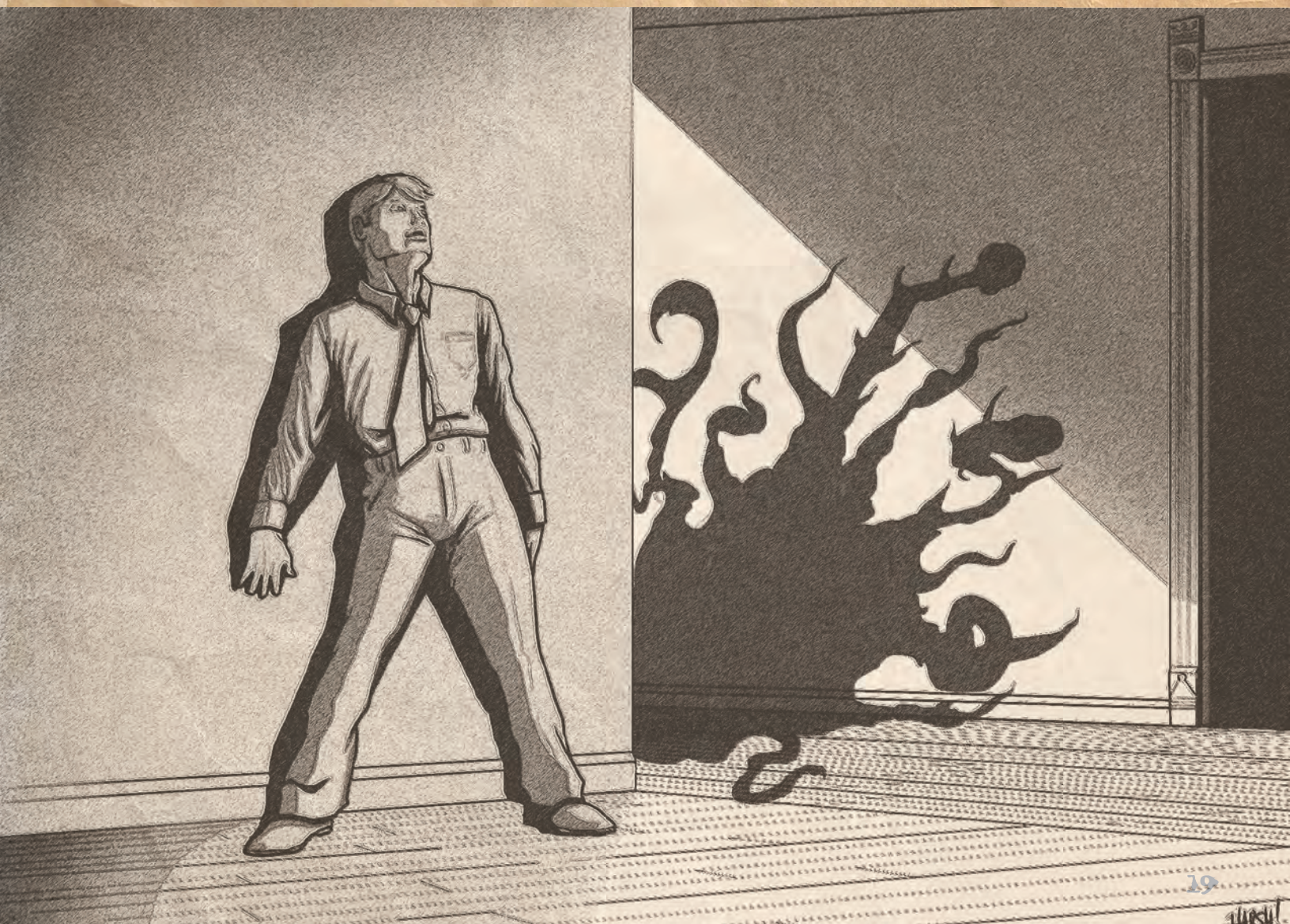
EXAMPLE: Joe's character is making a Body

check and his character's Body grade is Normal. He plays a 4/5, which would net him a result of 4. That's not very good. So, he plays a 0/6 as an enhancer. Half of 6 is 3, so 3 is added to his result, making it 7.

Double Blanks

The double blank (i.e., 0/0) is the most powerful domino available in the game. Here's what you can do with it:

- The player can play it for a check, treating each blank side as a 7. This domino is still considered a double and therefore must be given to the narrator when played this way.
- The player can play it for a test in addition to another domino, adding 4 to the result. This is known as *playing it as an enhancer*.
- Whenever the double blank is played (either as normal or as an enhancer), the player



receives 2 genre points instead of the normal 1. The earned genre points cannot be spent to affect that check.

Opposed Checks

As mentioned earlier, the narrator is never required to make checks for supporting characters. He can choose whether they succeed or fail in a given task, based on what's best for the story. If the action targets or is directly contested by the primary character, the primary character must make an *opposed check*. This is only necessary if the narrator has decided that the supporting character's action will succeed unless it is thwarted by the primary character.

An opposed check is carried out identically to a regular check. Almost. The only difference lies in the challenge rating. Rather than using the challenge ratings listed earlier in this section (page 18), the narrator utilizes the supporting character's challenge rating for the stat he's attempting to use for the task. If one of the supporting character's aspects would affect things, its rating is added to the challenge rating.

EXAMPLE: Troy's character is attempting to sneak past a cultist. The narrator determines that it will be an opposed check pitting the character's Body stat (which is Normal) and Stealth aspect (which is 2) against the cultist's Mind (which is 5) and Perception (which is 1). Adding the cultist's 5 and 1 together, we have a challenge rating of 6. Troy plays a 4/6 domino, giving him a check result of 6 ($4+2=6$). He barely succeeds in slipping by the cultist.

Extended Checks

Not every task can be completed instantaneously. Some require more time to complete, whether successful or not. This is handled in-game by *extended checks*. An extended check functions as a normal check except that once the check has been made (whether successful or not), the player must determine how much time the task took. This is done by the player flipping over a

random domino from the pool and using one of the following formulas, as chosen by the narrator:

- Low Side*
- High Side*
- Both Sides*
- Both Sides* x2
- Both Sides* x3
- Both Sides* x4
- ... and so on

* count blanks as 1s.

The narrator also chooses a unit of time (seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc.), as best fits the situation.

In many circumstances, the narrator may let the player try again if he fails, though more time will elapse as described above.

It must be noted that extended tests are unsuitable for most tension scenes. There are two instances in which they could be integrated effectively. The first instance is if the unit of time is only seconds. The final instance is if each turn of a tension scene represents larger units of time (minutes, hours, days, etc.).

EXAMPLE: Lindsey's character is trying to search an old abandoned house for clues. The narrator states that this will be an extended Mind [Perception] check. He sets the challenge rating at 8, but doesn't tell the player, of course. He also figures that combing the entire house for clues could be time consuming, so he decides that the unit of time is "hours" and that it'll take a number of hours equal to the low side of a random domino. Lindsey succeeds in the check and then flips over a domino to determine how long it takes. The domino is a 2/5. The low side is 2, so that's how many hours it takes for her to find a clue.

Researching

One of the most common uses for extended checks is the act of gathering information

from libraries, witnesses, public records and so forth. Unless the narrator states otherwise, an extended Mind [Research] check is required for each source. A source is defined as one location, witness, etc.

Success indicates that the character has exhausted that source of information. Failure indicates that no information was gleaned from the source (or alternatively, the character was unable to locate the source).

Assisting

In many situations, it's possible for more than one character to pitch together to increase their chances of success. This is called *assisting*. Logic should prevail when the narrator determines whether or not to allow assisting for a given check. For example, a character attempting to lift a sarcophagus could certainly benefit from other characters

lending a hand. Conversely, a character attempting to jump over a broken bridge in a roadster probably wouldn't need other characters to grab the wheel with him and help out.

If the primary character is involved in the assist, his stat grade is always the one used, even if a supporting character is the main one performing the action. This is the primary character's story, after all. Just as with any check, an appropriate aspect rating may be added to the result. Each supporting character helping him adds half its appropriate aspect rating (rounding up) as well. If the supporting character doesn't have an aspect that would prove useful, add 1 to the result instead.

EXAMPLE: Jon's character is trying to batter down a door with his shoulder. This is a

Check Shorthand

In the game text, we use shorthand when instructing players to make a check.

The stat is listed first, with the applicable aspect (if any) listed in brackets immediately thereafter. Here's an example:

"Make a Mind [Perception] check."

Sometimes, multiple aspects are listed, separated by slashes. This means that any single one of the aspects provided will suffice. For example:

"Make a Body [Athletics/Reflexes] check."

Oftentimes, the challenge rating is also provided. When this occurs, the challenge rating is found in parenthesis. For example:

"Make a Soul [Luck] (6) check."

If an opposed check is called for, it will be noted. Also, the challenge rating will be replaced by which of the secondary character's stat and aspect(s) are used to calculate the challenge rating. The stat is separated from the aspect(s) by a semicolon. For example:

"Make an opposed Body [Fighting] (Body; Reflexes) check."

Body [Strength] check. The narrator decides that the supporting character will help him out by ramming the door simultaneously. The primary character has Normal Body and Strength of 2. Jon plays a 3/6 domino, which would normally give him a check result of 5. However, the supporting character was lending a hand (or a shoulder). His Strength is 3. Half of three, rounding up, is 2. So, two is added to the check result, boosting it up to a total of 7.

Assisting and Opposed Checks

Assisting works as described above for the primary character. For the supporting character in opposition to the primary character, things are handled a bit differently. The narrator chooses which supporting character is acting as the main character (if it's not obvious). That character's challenge rating is used, modified by his own appropriate aspect. Each supporting character helping him adds half its appropriate aspect rating (rounding up) as well. If the supporting character doesn't have an aspect that would prove useful, add 1 to the result instead.

Situational Modifiers

Certain situations can make a task easier or harder to accomplish. For example, it's going to be more problematic to spot a lurking creature while outside on the blackest of nights than it would be under normal circumstances. On the opposite end of the spectrum, spotting a creature in a particularly well-lit room is going to be significantly easier.

The narrator determines if the situation warrants a positive or negative situational modifier. It's possible for more than one situational modifier to be in effect simultaneously. By default, each positive modifier decreases the challenge rating by 1 to 3, while each negative modifier increases the challenge rating by 1 to 3. The narrator selects the exact number based on how much impact the situation would logically have on the outcome of the task. When in doubt, use 2 as the default number.

Tension Scenes

Combat isn't something that Lovecraft emphasized in the fiction he created. And when it *did* occur, it was hardly the drawn-out affair presented by most role-playing games. In other words, combat (and we're using the term very loosely here) wasn't a big showdown between the protagonists and antagonists wherein both sides repeatedly exchange attacks in an effort to whittle each other down. It tended to be a very sudden, decisive segment of the story... and most of the time, it didn't take up much space in the text. A fine example of this can be found in this excerpt from "The Unnamable":

Then came a noxious rush of noisome, frigid air from that same dreaded direction, followed by a piercing shriek just beside me on that shocking rifted tomb of man and monster. In another instant I was knocked from my gruesome bench by the devilish threshing of some unseen entity of titanic size but undetermined nature; knocked sprawling on the root-clutched mould of that abhorrent graveyard, while from the tomb came such a stifled uproar of gasping and whirring that my fancy peopled the rayless gloom with Miltonic legions of the misshapen damned. There was a vortex of withering, ice-cold wind, and then the rattle of loose bricks and plaster; but I had mercifully fainted before I could learn what it meant.

The entity simply attacked Randolph Carter and Joel Manton, and they were out like a light until they woke up in the hospital some time later. Some sequences lasted longer (namely the climax of "The Dunwich Horror"), but most of them were over about as soon as they began.

What is a Tension Scene?

A tension scene can best be described as any scene in which things get extremely dramatic and it becomes clear that the situation could prove detrimental or even

fatal to the character. It's when the reader (or player) moves a bit closer to the edge of his seat in anticipation of how the scene is resolved.

In game terms, a tension scene is defined as a series of checks connected by narration. In this way, it doesn't really seem all that different than regular scenes. However, the inclusion of *momentum points* is what sets a tension scene apart from ordinary scenes. Momentum points are used to gauge how well (or poorly) the tension scene is going for the character; if the character reaches a certain number of these points (see "Momentum Threshold" on page 25), the scene will end on a positive note... but if the total drops to zero or less, things end disastrously.

Continue reading for the details on how tension scenes work.

Tension Scene Basics

This section grants you an overview of how tension scenes function.

- Step One: Starting Momentum Points
- Step Two: Order
- Step Three: Narration
- Step Four: The Check
- Step Five: Momentum Point Adjustment
- Step Six: Examination

Step One: Starting Momentum Points

When the narrator declares that the tension scene has begun, the player draws a random domino from the pool and looks at its high side. That number is the character's starting momentum points (minimum of 1). The tension scene is now ready to commence in earnest.

Step Two: Order

It's important to first determine whether the primary character or the supporting character(s) declare their actions first. The keeper can use logic as his compass, simply stating which side declares first if the situation is rather clear-cut. As an alternative, he could call for a Body [Reflexes]

(6) check. The choice is his.

Step Three: Declaration

If the supporting character(s) goes first, the narrator describes what any supporting characters he controls are attempting to do. If the primary character declares first, the player tells the narrator what the character in question attempts to do (though the narrator may veto anything that he deems inappropriate). This will inevitably lead to the narrator calling for a check from the player.

Step Four: The Check

When the narrator requires a check, the action pauses briefly so that the check can be made.

Step Five: Momentum Point Adjustment

If the check is successful, the primary character's momentum point total will increase. If, however, the check is unsuccessful, his momentum point total will dwindle.

Regardless, the player draws a random domino from the pool and looks at the low side. That is the amount added to or subtracted from the character's momentum points. If the low side is a blank, then nothing is added to or subtracted from the momentum points.

The domino is then discarded.

Step Six: Examination

During this step, the momentum point total must be examined to see if the tension scene continues or ends. The scene ends under two circumstances:

- 1) If the momentum point total is zero or less, the scene ends unfavorably for the character. The player flips over a random domino from the pool and adds both sides together. The total will determine if the unfavorable outcome will result in the game ending or not. The determining factor is what act the

tale is currently in, though the game cannot end during Act One, so you needn't draw a domino if that is the act in progress.

Act Two:

0-4: Game-Ending

5+: Non Game-Ending

Act Three:

0-7 Game-Ending

8+ Non Game-Ending

A game-ending result usually means death or madness. Or madness followed by death. This is up to the narrator, based on his best judgment. A non game-ending result can be virtually anything – the character is captured by the cultists, fails to drive away the monstrosity, enables the humanoid to escape, etc.

If the game doesn't end and the flipped domino has a blank side (or two, in case of a 0/0), the character suffers a -1 penalty to all further checks made during the game. This is cumulative, so if it happens a second time, the character will suffer a -2 penalty. Penalties remain in effect until the tale's end or until he recovers (see pages 30-32) and should be noted on the character sheet.

The flipped domino is placed in the discard pile as soon as the outcome is determined.

- 2) If the momentum point total is equal to or higher than the *momentum threshold* (a number set by the narrator), the

scene ends favorably for the character -- he escapes the cultists, drives off the monstrosity, captures the fleeing degenerate humanoid, etc. All accrued momentum points are lost after the scene ends and he will start anew should another tension scene arise.

Step Seven: Narration

Based on the outcome, the narrator narrates what transpired.

If the tension scene doesn't end, a new round begins. During each round after the first, repeat Steps Three through Seven. The side that declared last round will declare first this round.

Crucial and Non-Crucial Checks

By default, checks made during a tension scene will cause the character's momentum points to fluctuate. Such checks are often referred to as *crucial checks*.

However, the narrator may call for a *non-crucial* check if he doesn't feel that the task is particularly impacting to the overall success or failure of the tension scene as a whole. A non-crucial check is simply a check that doesn't increase or decrease the character's momentum point total.

An example of the distinction between a crucial check and a non-crucial check might be the character noticing a hard-to-see exit at the far end of a room during pursuit; the mere act of noticing it is far less relevant (and exciting) than being able to reach it before the pursuers see the character. As such, the narrator may decide that the check to spot the exit is non-crucial, while the check to reach it is crucial. Ultimately, it is the narrator's choice to make.

Unless the narrator says otherwise, any check should be considered crucial. Sanity checks (see pages 29-30) are always non-crucial.

Flipping Random Dominoes

Unless stated otherwise, whenever a random domino from the pool is flipped over, it is placed in the discard area.



Momentum Threshold

The momentum threshold is a number selected by the narrator that reflects how involved the tension scene is. The higher the number, the tougher the scene is going to be for the primary character. Generally speaking, the momentum threshold will depend on two factors: which act the tension scene is in and how important the tension scene is.

- **Act One:** 7-9
- **Act Two:** 9-11
- **Act Three:** 11-13

Narrator advice for setting the momentum threshold can be found on page 63.

Multiple Characters

Nail-biting sequences aren't always a matter of having one protagonist contend with one antagonist. It's not uncommon for one protagonist to face several antagonists in a tension scene. Or for several protagonists to face one antagonist. Or even for several protagonists to face several antagonists.

First of all, one thing should be kept in mind: No matter how many characters are involved, there is only one primary character and tension scenes always revolve around him. Everything else is a matter of narration.

Enemies

The number of enemies involved is more or less irrelevant to how tension scenes work. It doesn't change anything at all, rules-wise.

In extreme cases, the narrator may incur a -1 or -2 penalty to the primary character's check result if the situation drastically favors the outnumbering enemies.

The narrator declares all enemies' actions together during Step Three.

Allies

For the primary character's allies, the narrator can choose what they're doing without the need for dominoes to determine if their actions succeed or fail. If the allies are directly helping the primary character, the narrator may grant a +1 or +2 bonus to his check.

In short, the narrator describes what happens to the supporting characters, based on what works best for the story, unless the primary character affects the matter somehow. For example, if the narrator wants one of the supporting characters to die, then he should die.

The narrator declares all allies' actions together in Step Three, either before or after the player declares the primary character's actions.

Prematurely Ending a Tension Scene

The narrator always has the option of ending a tension scene before the momentum threshold is met if it makes sense within context of the narration or the story, though it must end favorably for the primary character.

Tension Scene Example

Tension scenes may seem like an awful lot to take in, but rest easy. Once you see how it all comes together, you'll find them to be easy and intuitive. To give you a sense of how a tension scene works, we have provided you with a full example of one. The example begins a scant few minutes prior to the tension scene, as to show you how everything blends together.

In this example, the player is playing a

well-educated historian named Carver S. Peerson who has been investigating a circle of standing stones located on the summit of Torren Hill, deep in the Massachusetts wilderness. His purpose has been to put to rest the numerous local legends about the place. Unfortunately for him, there's more to it than mere backwoods folklore. It is Act Three and is now close to midnight. Carver is approaching the hilltop after an arduous climb.

Narrator: Carver reaches the summit of the hill and the thick woods that blanketed the ascent end abruptly. Standing in the clearing are seven megaliths that reach roughly ten feet into the air. They are arranged in such a way as to form a circle. In the center of that circle is a large stone slab that covers an area about six feet wide by eight feet long. The slab seems to have something carved into it, but it's too far away to see any details.

Player: Carver slowly walks over to the slab to check out the inscriptions.

[The narrator takes note of Carver's Perfunctory Perception rating of 7, comparing it to a challenge rating of 6. Success!]

Narrator: Just as you begin to examine the inscriptions, you hear someone approach from the opposite side of the hill.

Player: Oh, man. This could be really bad. Carver will hide behind one of the standing stones.

Narrator: Make a Body [Stealth] check.

[The narrator sets the challenge rating at 8. The player plays a 3/4 domino. His Body is Normal, so he uses the low side (a 3). He has a Stealth rating of 2, giving him a final check result of 5. Failure!]

Narrator: You step behind a stone before you can even see who's coming. Unfortunately, some rocks crunch under your feet as you do so, alerting the individual to your presence.

Tension scene time! First, determine your initial momentum points.

[The narrator determines that the momentum threshold is 11. The player draws a random domino from the pool and gets a 4/1. The high side is used, thus the player has 5 initial momentum points.]

Narrator: Not bad. Since the individual heard you, but can't see you, you declare first, giving you a chance to do something about the situation.

Player: Carver first peeks around the stone to see what he's dealing with. Then, he'll try to stealthily dart behind the next stone.

Narrator: The guy is going to be trying to find the source of the noise you made. Make an opposed Body [Stealth] (Mind; Perception) check.

[The supporting character has a Mind challenge rating of 6 and a Perception rating of 1. This means that the final challenge rating is 7. The player plays a 5/6 domino. His Body is Normal, so he uses the low side (a 3). He has a Stealth rating of 2, giving him a final check result of 7. Barely enough to succeed!]

Narrator: Whew, that was close! You succeed! That means your momentum point total will increase. Now, draw a domino from the pool to see by how much.

[The player draws a random domino from the pool and gets a 0/1. The low side is used, thus the player still has 5 momentum points.]

Player: Crap! Nothing gained after all.

Narrator: Now, for the narration. You look around the corner of the stone to get a quick glance. The person in your midst is a tall, lean man with arms that seem too long for his body. He's wearing a long coat and slightly rumpled pants and shirt. His face looks peculiar too, with narrow, menacing

eyes, protruding cheekbones and a narrow mouth. His hair is disheveled and is mostly gray with some brown still remaining. Luckily for you, he's looking for the source of the sound in the opposite direction, so you take advantage by zipping over the adjacent stone.

Player: At least he didn't spot me.

Narrator: It's a new round and I get to declare first this time. The man is going to start moving around among the stones, actively looking for you. What does Carver do?

Player: Is there anything of note in the immediate area that might be of interest?

Narrator: You'll need to make a Mind [Perception] check, though it's a non-crucial check, so it won't affect your momentum points.

[The narrator sets the challenge rating at 6. The player plays a 4/6 domino. His Mind is Good, so he uses the high side (a 6). He has a Perception rating of 2, giving him a final check result of 8. Success!]

Narrator: Carver looks around and sees that there's a path leading off into the woods. It's a bit overgrown, but it's really close to where you're standing.

Player: Which direction is the trail leading?

Narrator: North, toward the road.

Player: Hmmmm. That's the same road Carver parked his car on, right?

Narrator: Yes, it is.

Player: He's going to hit the trail and run back to his car, since he has a good head start. So, even if the creepy guy sees me, I should be able to outpace him.

Narrator: Since he's looking for you, you need to make an opposed Body [Athletics]

(Mind; Perception) check.

[The supporting character has a Mind challenge rating of 6 and a Perception rating of 1. This means that the final challenge rating is 7. The player groans at his lousy hand and plays a 4/3 domino. His Body is Normal, so he uses the low side (a 3). He has an Athletics rating of 1, giving him a final check result of 4. Not enough to pull it off!]

Narrator: Not a chance. Draw a domino to see how many momentum points you lose.

[The player draws a random domino from the pool and gets a 4/4. Since both sides are the same, he loses 4 momentum points, bringing him down to a very precarious 1 momentum point remaining.]

Narrator: The tall, gaunt man steps out of the circle of stones and obviously spots you. Seeing this, you charge toward the trail. Unfortunately, the underbrush and the steepness of the hill cause you to trip and fall face-first onto the ground. It's a new round. You get to declare first.

Player: I'm going to get up and keep running down the path.

Narrator: The man is walking toward you at a steady pace. He's going to try to grab you. His face seems to be changing somehow though. Okay, make an opposed Body [Athletics] (Body; Fighting) check.

[The supporting character has a Body challenge rating of 6 and a Fighting rating of 2. This means that the final challenge rating is 8. The player plays a 4/6 domino. His Body is Normal, so he uses the low side (a 4). He has an Athletics rating of 1, giving him a final check result of 5. Failure!]

Narrator: Carver fails the check. You're at 1 momentum point, so the only way you can pull this off is if you draw a blank when determining how many you lose.

[The player draws a random domino from the pool and gets a 6/2. This means he loses 2 momentum points, which drops his total to -1, ending the tension scene.]

Player: Yeah, Carver's toast. [chuckles]

Narrator: Not necessarily. Now, we have to see if it's a game-ending result or not. Draw a random domino and add both sides together.

[The player draws a random domino from the pool and gets a 5/1 -- total of 6. Since the game is in the third act, an 8 or higher is required for a non game-ending result.]

Narrator: The man's face now looks inhuman. His eyes are solid black and have widened considerably. His face has elongated slightly and seems oddly narrower than before. The skin itself seems stretched tightly over his bones and has an ashen look to it. Carver tries to rise to his feet as he approaches, but they are tangled up in the underbrush. He now looms ominously over Carver and his mouth opens wider than should be possible. Five tendrils writhe forth from his gaping mouth and start squirming toward him. One final scream escapes his lungs as his whole world fades to black.

Perilous Checks

A character needn't be in a tension scene in order to find himself in grave danger. There will likely be times in which a character's life or sanity will be at stake without a prolonged sequence of dramatic proportions causing it. Maybe a rickety wooden staircase gives way as he makes his way down into a hidden subterranean shaft. Or perhaps he's pouring over a forbidden book filled with sanity-shattering truths. Situations such as these call for a perilous check.

The narrator should always announce when a particular check is perilous before the

player plays a domino. A perilous check can be either a normal check or an opposed check.

No checks made during a tension scene can be perilous, as the entire tension scene is considered a single extended experience that is cumulatively grueling and dangerous. The outcome for a tension scene isn't done "per each individual check", but is instead handled at the conclusion of the scene as a whole.

If the character succeeds in the perilous check, the game continues as normal. If he fails the check, there will be repercussions. The degree of severity depends on the flip of a random domino from the pool and which act the tale is currently in. If the tale is currently in Act One, there is no chance that the game will end as a result of the failure, so the player needn't flip over a domino at all. Once the domino is flipped over, add both sides together.

Act Two:

0-2: Game-Ending
3+: Non Game-Ending

Act Three:

0-5 Game-Ending
6+ Non Game-Ending

A game-ending result usually means death or madness. Or madness followed by death. This is up to the narrator, based on his best judgment. A non game-ending result can be virtually anything – the character is captured by the cultists, fails to drive away the monstrosity, enables the humanoid to escape, etc.

If the game doesn't end and the flipped domino has a blank side (or two, in case of a 0/0), the character suffers a -1 penalty to all further checks made using the stat that was used for the failed perilous check. This is cumulative, so if it happens a second time, the character will suffer a -2 penalty. Penalties remain in effect until the tale's end

or until he recovers (see pages 30-33).

The flipped domino is placed in the discard pile as soon as the outcome is determined.

EXAMPLE: Shelly's character is attempting to leap across a puddle of bubbling tar-like ooze during Act Two. The narrator determines that it will be a perilous Body [Athletics] check and that the challenge rating will be 5. The character's Body is Normal and has an Athletics rating of 1. She plays a 4/3, which gives her a check result of 4... not enough to succeed. Shelly flips a random domino from her pool and gets a 4/0. Since it's during Act Two, all she needed was a total of 3 or more to avoid a game-ending result, thus the 4 is enough to keep it going. However, the domino Shelly flipped over had a blank side, which means that her character's further Body checks will suffer a -1 penalty.

Things Man Was Not Meant to Know

Upon reading much of Lovecraft's works, you'll quickly detect a strong theme regarding how fragile the human mind is when it comes to experiencing the unknowable. By reading mouldering tomes of ancient knowledge or by coming into contact with gibbous, tentacled monstrosities from the depths of outer space, one is bound to have his sanity stripped from him. Sometimes, this is a gradual thing; other times, it's very sudden.

Sanity Checks

Whenever a primary character learns of the true nature of the universe or encounters something that is otherworldly in nature, the narrator may ask the player to make a *sanity check*, which is a slightly modified perilous Soul [Resolve] check with a challenge rating based on how horrific or unnerving the source is. It is treated the same as a normal perilous checks, with the following exceptions:

- Regardless of whether the sanity check succeeds or fails, the character gains a +.5 bonus to his rating in the "Forbidden Truths" Knowledge specialization. The .5 does not affect checks in any way. But if the character

receives another +.5, then the aspect rating increases by +1. In some rare circumstances, the narrator may declare that the bonus is +1 instead of +.5.

- A sanity check is triggered upon reading at least a portion of a tome relating to the universe's true reality, upon encountering a creature with the "Unspeakable Visage" special rule, upon being told about what lurks beyond time and space or otherwise learning things man was not meant to know. Being startled by a gruesome body or something similar does not warrant a sanity check – only things involving the true nature of the universe can trigger one.

- If the character fails the sanity check, the game doesn't end and the flipped domino has a blank side (or two, in case of a 0/0), the narrator can choose to forego the -1 penalty to the character's further Soul checks. Instead, the character has acquired some manner of mental glitch (a phobia, a strange compulsion or whatever else he deems appropriate to the situation) that lasts until the narrator says otherwise... usually for the remainder of the tale).

- Unlike standard perilous checks, sanity checks can be made during tension scenes, counting as non-crucial checks. When a sanity check is made during a tension scene, the game cannot end as a result of the character failing said check. Even still, failure requires the player to flip a random domino from the pool anyway, just to see if the domino has a blank side (or two, in case of a 0/0) and thus causing the character to suffer a -1 penalty to further Soul checks.

Incantations

Magic (for want of a more accurate term) exists in Lovecraftian horror, though it's hardly the type of magic associated with the fantasy genre. In *Macabre Tales*, magic is a frightening and dangerous beast; something that can be used... but usually at a terrible price to whomever wields it. That price is the loss of one's sanity.

An incantation is, for all intents and purposes, the equivalent of a "magic spell". They are usually found in old tomes, manuscripts or ancient etchings. Furthermore, they are rare and difficult to find.

Casting an incantation requires the caster to:

- Memorize the incantation itself (a Mind [Perception] check) or have the book (or whatever) on hand to read from.

- Know the language the incantation is written in by having a rating of at least 1 in the "Languages" aspect with the appropriate specialization.

He must first make a Mind [Perception] check. The check's challenge rating is equal to the incantation's "casting challenge rating".

Whether or not the incantation is successful, the character must make a sanity check. The check's challenge rating is equal to the incantation's "sanity check challenge rating".

Healing and Recovery

When the supporting character receives long-term penalties to his stats during tension scenes and from perilous checks, it is representative of him suffering injury and trauma. In most cases, these penalties will persist through the rest of the tale.

Recovering Body and Mind

Penalties to Body and Mind are much easier to recover from than penalties to Soul. To recover, the character will have to spend some time resting. The player must make an extended check using the appropriate stat (Body or Mind). Aspects play no role in this check. The challenge rating depends on how much of a penalty the stat is plagued with.

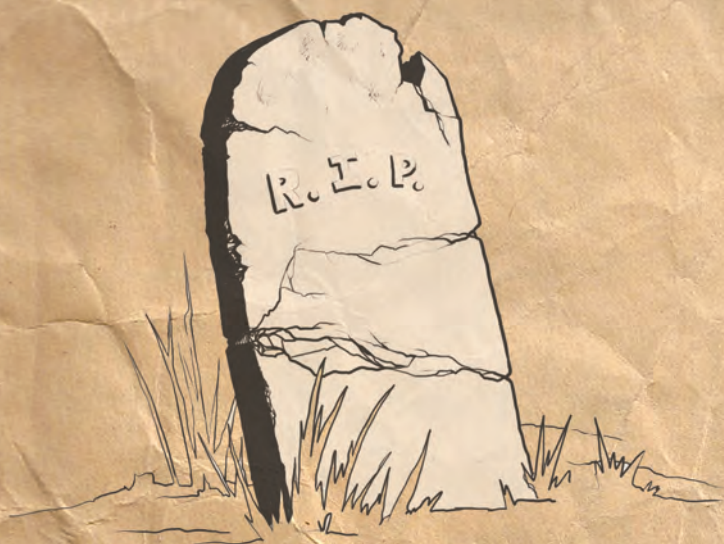
- -1 penalty: Moderate
- -2 penalty: Hard
- -3 penalty: Very Hard
- -4 penalty or more: Extremely Hard

As per the extended check rules, the unit of time will be “days”. The number of days will be equal to both sides of a randomly flipped over domino.

If a supporting character has an appropriate Knowledge specialization (“Medicine”, “Doctor”, “Healer”, etc.) of at least 1, they can assist in the check (see pages 21-22).

The primary character can attempt to recover from the penalties attached to both Body and Mind simultaneously if the player wishes. This requires him to make an extended check for each stat separately, including the random draw to determine how long it takes. However, the player doesn’t add both of the flipped over dominoes together when determining how long it takes – he just uses the highest of the two dominoes instead. For example, if he flips over a 2/5 (7 days) after the Body check and a 4/6 (10 days) after the Mind check, the total recovery time is 10 days.

If the narrator feels that the nature of the injury is too severe to be healed in the matter of days, he can increase the unit of time to weeks or even months.



Recovering Soul

The human soul is a far more difficult thing to mend than the human body. You can’t just relax and wait for it to heal. It requires more intense treatment, such as a psychiatrist or even being treated at a psychiatric hospital. The latter option should be considered a last resort, as the asylums of the 1920s and ‘30s were almost always hellholes that patients were seldom released from.

In order to rid the character’s Soul of any acquired penalties, the character must have the aid of another character with an appropriate Knowledge specialization (“Psychologist”, “Psychiatrist”, etc.) of at least 1 or be institutionalized in an asylum (which will have staff with the “Psychologist” Knowledge specialization of 3).

Once one of these two conditions has been met, the player must make an extended Soul check. Aspects play no role in this check. The challenge rating depends on how much of a penalty the stat is plagued with.

- -1 penalty: Hard
- -2 penalty: Very Hard
- -3 penalty or more: Extremely Hard

As per the extended check rules, the unit of time will be “months”. The number of months will be equal to both sides of a randomly flipped over domino.

The rules for assisting (pages 21-22) *must* be used. Otherwise, the character cannot even attempt the check.

It is possible that the character has acquired one or more unwanted mental glitches (see page 30), such as phobias, obsessions, etc. For purposes of getting rid of these, each glitch counts as a -1 penalty when determining the challenge rating. For example, if the character has a -1 penalty and a “fear of the dark” (a mental glitch), the challenge rating would be Very Hard because the glitch counts as a -1 penalty.

If the narrator feels that the nature of the mental damage is too severe to be healed in the matter of months, he can increase the unit of time to years. He may also declare that a mental glitch cannot be eradicated at all.

Genre Points

Horror, by its very definition, requires the characters to do things that would be considered unwise or even downright foolish. This is especially true in Lovecraftian horror. After all, if the character prudently shuts that ancient tome before he gets himself in too deep, there probably won't be much of a story to tell. The same can be said for the character getting in his automobile, speeding away from that creepy old mansion and never going back. Or for the character refusing to investigate the dark, primordial woods where he thought he saw shadowy shapes moving about. Or... well, you get the idea.

The point is this: the narrator sows the seeds for a memorable horror experience, but the player should lend a hand in harvesting those seeds. This is accomplished by following the conventions of the genre, even if that means doing something that would be ill advised by most.

The game system rewards this with *genre points*.

Earning Genre Points

Genre points act as the narrator's means to actively encourage the player to drive the story forward. Whenever the player does something that accomplishes this, the narrator tells him that he is awarding him a genre point. Once earned, genre points can be spent by the player to help his character out later on (see "Spending Genre Points", below). In Chapter 4, we discuss earning genre points in great detail, but we'll give a brief summary of ways to earn them here.

- Doing something that will probably put the character in danger (going into the slightly-glowing barn, chasing after a creature, confronting a group of cultists, etc.).

- Coming up with a clever idea.

- Having the character's personal factors (see page 40) disadvantage him in some way. Sometimes the narrator will be the one to impose this, but you can choose to do so of your own accord as well.

- Using evocative descriptions of the character's actions, especially if you use words that Lovecraft himself was so fond of using (see the list on page 60).

Spending Genre Points

The player has numerous options for how to spend the genre points he has earned. Each option costs a certain amount of genre points.

Exertion (1 genre point)

The character puts forth extra effort to accomplish his goal. Add 1 to the result of a check. This must be done immediately after playing a domino for the check, but before the narrator declares whether or not the character was successful. This option is cumulative (up to a maximum of a +3 bonus), but cannot be used in conjunction with the "Extraneous Exertion" option (see below).

Option Examination (2 genre points)

The character carefully assesses his options at hand and chooses to make some changes. Immediately after drawing one or more new dominoes into your hand, choose one of the newly drawn dominoes to discard. Replace that domino with a new one. This option is cumulative, so if the player spends 2 genre points, he can discard two dominoes and replace them with two new ones.

Recuperation (2 genre points)

The character rests or otherwise soothes his wounds. Choose one of the character's three

stats that suffer from a penalty resulting from tension scenes or perilous checks. Lessen the penalty by one (e.g., from -2 to -1). This can only be done once per scene and only if the character is not involved in anything terribly pressing or rigorous. The narrator may require the character to rest for at least an hour or two before this option can be used.

Extraneous Exertion (2 genre points)

The character puts everything he has into the task at hand at the cost of exhausting himself. Give one of your stats a -1 penalty (cumulative with already-existing penalties) and then draw a domino from the pool. The low side of that domino is added to the result of a check. This must be done immediately after playing a domino for the check, but before the narrator declares whether or not the character was successful. This option can only be used once per check and cannot be used in conjunction with the "Exertion" option (see above).

Scene Alteration (1-3 genre points)

The player can spend genre points to make modifications to the scene. Perhaps the player wants the dead body he found to have a handgun on him or maybe he wants to have a trashcan to hide behind. The possibilities are almost limitless. The exact amount of genre points it costs is up to the narrator. The bigger the alteration, the more it will cost. The narrator may veto the change you wish to make if he feels it's detrimental to the story.

Supporting Characters

Supporting characters are set up differently than the primary character. The degree to which they are different depends on what category the supporting character belongs in. As mentioned earlier, there are two categories:

- **Normal:** Normal supporting characters are almost exclusively humans.

- **Creature:** Creatures are the various monsters and non-human entities that populate the world's darkest nooks and crannies.

For the most part, the two categories of supporting characters are handled identically. Sometimes, though, there will be distinctions.

The big question is, "How do supporting characters differ from the primary character?" Read on.

Stats, Aspects and Checks

First off, supporting characters never make checks... the narrator determines whether they succeed or fail based on what's best for the story. The primary character can oppose their actions in many cases, at which point he will need to make an opposed check.

Unlike the primary character, supporting characters' stats aren't measured by grades. Instead, each of their stats has a challenge rating. When the primary character opposes a supporting character (or vice versa) in an opposed check, the former must go up against the latter's appropriate challenge rating. If the supporting character has any helpful aspects, the rating is added to the challenge rating.

EXAMPLE: Joe's character is trying to sneak past the library security guard so that he can access the room where they keep the ancient tomes. Joe's Body is Normal and he has the Stealth aspect. The challenge rating for the security guard's Mind stat is 4 and he has a Perception rating of 2. This means that Joe will need to get a check result of 6 or higher (4+2). He plays a 5/4 domino. Since his stat grade is Normal, he has to use the lowest side: 4. His Stealth is 2, so that's added as well. His final check result is 6... barely enough to succeed.

Should two supporting characters oppose each other (without the involvement of the primary character), the narrator uses logic

and the needs of the story to dictate who comes out victorious.

Special Rules

Creatures seldom conform to the limitations of mankind or even to reality as we know it. They can do things far beyond anything we have ever witnessed. To reflect this, creatures possess special rules that translate these unimaginable abilities (and even weaknesses) into game terms. Chapter 5 contains an exhaustive list of special rules... and there's nothing keeping narrators from devising their own too.

Some special rules require the narrator to spend one of the double dominoes he has acquired from the player. This will be noted in the special rules' descriptions.

The Narrator Using Doubles

As you already know, when the player plays a double, he must give the domino to the narrator. The narrator may then use it to stymie the primary character or bolster the supporting characters during the game. When spent, the domino is removed from the game entirely. Below is a list of what the narrator can do with one of these dominoes.

Denial

The narrator spends a domino when the player plays a domino for a check. The player's domino is discarded and he must use a random domino from the pool for his check instead. This can only be done once per check. Furthermore, if the player had played a domino as an enhancer, the enhancer remains in effect, thus enhancing the new domino instead.

Activate Special Rule

Certain special rules possessed by creatures will not work unless activated. To activate the special rule, the narrator must spend a domino. The narrator can spend more than

one domino to trigger different special rules.

Bolster

The narrator spends a domino to add 2 to one of its challenge ratings for the duration of one opposed check made by the player. This must be done before the player plays a domino for the check. This can only be done once per check.

Tension Alteration

The narrator may spend a domino when the player flips over a random domino during a tension scene to determine how many momentum points he gains or loses. The player must then draw another domino and use it instead.

Multi-Player Rules (Optional)

We have previously discussed the fact that Lovecraft's stories, almost without fail, featured one main protagonist. That is why we designed the *Macabre Tales* system to cater to the same format. Sometimes, however, you may have several people wanting to play and it's never fun having to turn away eager participants. For this very reason, we have developed a set of alternate rules that will allow the game to accommodate a narrator and multiple players.

Dominoes

Each player will need to have two sets of dominoes with all the doubles and blanks removed from one of the sets.

Additionally, each player will use his own pool of dominoes. If space is limited, pools can be kept in opaque containers (large butter tubs are perfect!), so that players can reach in and draw them without being able to see what he's grabbing.

Sharing

Players are not allowed to know what dominoes the other players have in their

hands. This ensures that they cannot strategize with each other to maximize their hands, as that sort of thing not only slows the game down to a crawl, but also goes against the spirit of the game.

Furthermore, players may not spend dominoes for other players' checks. Similarly, players may not spend genre points to directly help other characters.

Time

In ordinary games of *Macabre Tales*, the domino system works in a brisk fashion. When more players are added to the equation, though, that same system tends to bog down. Fortunately, this can be prevented easily enough by the narrator, with one or more of the following options.

- The narrator can limit the amount of time for performing checks. This can be a set amount of time (one or two minutes is ideal) or it can be played by ear ("You're taking too long, so you need to decide which domino to play.")
- The narrator can set aside some time before the game to familiarize the players with the game rules, even going so far as to run a sample tension scene for them. Knowing the rules thoroughly will allow players to use them in a less time consuming manner.
- The narrator can keep the number of tension scenes to a bare minimum, as tension scenes take more time than any other aspect of the game. He can save them exclusively for Act Three. Most situations that might normally use a tension scene can be handled with perilous checks.
- The narrator can run shorter tales to compensate for the game itself taking longer. Moreover, this is perfect for the genre, as most of Lovecraft's fiction was relatively short.

Assisting

It is entirely possible for primary characters to help one another, using the normal

assisting rules. The only difference is that the primary character with the highest pertinent aspect rating is the one who actually makes the check.

Tension Scenes

If more than one primary character is involved in a tension scene, the following rules should be in effect:

- For purposes of determining order, the players may select which primary character's Body [Reflexes] to use.
- All primary characters should declare their actions together, but in whatever order they wish between them. For example, if the players get to declare first in a round, all primary characters declare actions before the supporting characters can declare theirs.
- Each primary character's momentum points are tracked separately. If a character's total equals or exceeds the momentum threshold, the narrator must decide whether the tension scene is over for everyone or just that character. This is largely circumstantial. If, on the other hand, one of the primary character's momentum points drop to zero or less, the scene ends only for that character; it continues for the other characters.

Game-Ending Results

Both perilous checks and tension scenes can end in "game ending" results. Obviously, in a group dynamic, one primary character being removed from the game by death or insanity will not end the game for the other primary characters. That character's fate will not cause the game to conclude. Instead, the tale carries on for the remaining protagonists.

The Narrator and Doubles

The narrator should keep the doubles he acquires separated into stacks – one stack for each player. He may only spend a domino to directly affect the player who played it in the first place, except when using it for the "Activate Special Rule" option.



Chapter Three: Character Creation

A Chapter for Both the Narrator and Player

Lovecraft and His Protagonists

Lovecraft's view of the human race's complete and total insignificance affected nearly every aspect of his tales. This is never truer than with the development of his characters. More to the point, the *lack* of development of his protagonists. It's true that his characters were almost universally bland and lacking in detail. They were merely vessels used to propel the story forward and little effort was made to make them terribly interesting. Many of them weren't even given names. That's how little thought Lovecraft put into them.

The truth is that the majority of his protagonists were thinly veiled versions of himself, or at least they embodied certain aspects of himself. Sometimes, they were almost identical to the author in every way. They tended to be bookish, scholarly fellows with more brains (and curiosity) than brawn. Sound familiar?

All that having been said, not all of his protagonists were carbon copies of himself. Some, like Thomas Malone from "The Horror at Red Hook" who had been a New York police detective, step outside the boundaries to one degree or another.

The one area that Lovecraft didn't always skimp on was giving a select handful of characters intriguing (and sometimes intricate) histories. This typically involved the

character in question's lineage and ancestry more than his own life events though. Still, he did fill in some of the blanks involving his protagonists' pasts on occasion, even if the details are simple, sketchy or vague. For the most part, he left the intricacies to the ancestry.

It should also be mentioned that none of Lovecraft's central protagonists were of the female gender. In fact, he seldom included females in his stories at all. When he did utilize them, they were almost exclusively background characters, the most notable exception being Asenath Waite from "The Thing on the Doorstep".

Primary Characters in Macabre Tales

So, what does the preceding text mean to you when making your primary character? Everything. Or nothing. It all depends on how true to Lovecraft's tales that you and the narrator wish to be. You can stay extremely close to the kinds of characters Lovecraft utilized by ensuring that your character is very learned and intelligent, with little true development of his past or personality. Or you can step boldly off the beaten path and create a character that bucks one or more of the traditions set by Lovecraft. If you choose the latter option, you risk dissolving much of the flavor that his tales conveyed, so be careful.

Creating Your Primary Character

Creating the primary character is intentionally a very fast process that will generate a protagonist in a matter of minutes. Follow the steps below.

Step One: Stats

It is of utmost importance to know what your character's inborn abilities are. Choose one of the stat grade packages below and assign the three grades to your three stats (Body, Mind and Soul).

- Normal, Good, Good
- Normal, Normal, Excellent
- Normal, Normal, Normal (and 10 extra points for aspects)
- Good, Good, Good (and 10 less points for aspects)

Step Two: Aspects

Once your character's stats are determined, you may quantify his various aspects. You receive 30 points to spend on his aspect ratings (unless you selected one of the last two options in Step One). Below is a table that tells how many points each rating costs.

Rating:	Point Cost:
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	6
5	9

The bulk of the aspects are very straight forward, but there are five of them (Vehicles, Knowledge, Languages, Art and Performance) require specializations to make them a bit more specific. When putting points into one of these aspects, you must devise a specialization and write it beside the aspect's name. The aspect descriptions below list sample specializations, though you are free to come up with your own if none of them are

appropriate. You must first get the approval of the narrator for any specialization you create yourself.

It is, therefore, possible to have the same aspect multiple times, but with different specializations. For example, a character might have "Performance (Dancing)" and "Performance (Piano)". Each rating must be purchased separately, thus treating both as separate aspects altogether.

Characters do not need to have a "Languages" rating for his native language.

It's important to note that the primary character cannot begin the game with a rating in the "Forbidden Truths" Mind specialization (see the sidebar for more information on page 17). The following information is duplicated from Chapter Two for your convenience.

BODY

Athletics: The ability to perform feats of athleticism, such as running, jumping, climbing, swimming, balancing and so forth.

Coordination: Fine motor skills; often referred to as hand-eye coordination.

Fighting: The art of close combat, ranging from fisticuffs to fencing.

Marksmanship: The skill of hitting a target with a ranged attack, such as rifles, pistols, grenades, bows and so on.

Reflexes: The ability to react quickly to danger; often used to avoid incoming attacks.

Stealth: The act of sneaking, hiding or concealing.

Strength: The application of raw muscular power.

Toughness: A measure of endurance, stamina and the ability to shrug off damage.

Vehicles: The operation of vehicles. *Sample Specializations* – Automobiles, Motorcycles, Aeroplanes, Small Watercraft, Naval Ships, Industrial, etc.

MIND

Ingenuity: Skillfully and promptly dealing with new situations and obstacles using whatever means one has at his disposal; otherwise known as being resourceful.

Knowledge: Topics and subjects the character has acquired information on during his lifetime. *Sample Specializations* – Forbidden Truths (see sidebar), Occult Lore, High Society, Chemistry, Military History, Colonial History, Astronomy, Politics, Physics, Literature, Architecture, etc.

Languages: Speaking and reading languages beyond the character's native language. *Sample Specializations* – Spanish, English, Portuguese, Latin, German, Italian, etc.

Perception: Using one's senses or gut instinct to observe their surroundings in order to gain information (such as looking for clues, detecting a person in hiding, figuring out if someone is lying, etc.).

Research: Doing legwork to obtain information from libraries, old newspapers, and other such sources.

SOUL

Art: Expressing oneself by creating something tangible and creative. *Sample Specializations* – Painting, Writing, Sculpting, Photography, Drawing, etc.

Guile: Using cunning, manipulation, seduction or lies to get what you want from others.

Intimidation: Causing fear by using threats, physical pain or other bullying tactics.

Luck: The force that seems to operate for good or ill in a person's life.

Performance: To entertain or inspire others by performing. *Sample Specializations* – Dancing, Oration, Comedy, Piano, Singing, Acting, etc.

Persuasion: Convincing others by means of reasoning or bargaining with them.

Resolve: Staving off persuasion, manipulation, or madness by using one's willpower.

Step Three: Perfunctory Perception

To determine your character's Perfunctory Perception rating, consult the table below, using his Mind grade as the basis:

Mind Grade:	Perf. Perception Rating:
Normal	Perception rating +3
Good	Perception rating +5
Excellent	Perception rating +7

Step Four: Starting Genre Points

All characters begin the game with two genre points.

Aspect Point Allocation Advice

While there's no right or wrong way to allocate your points among the aspects, you should consider having at least one in the majority of the aspects. Even such a low rating can make a huge difference and most of the aspects are things that the common person would at least have some basic aptitude in.

Here is a list of the aspects that you should consider allocating at least one point to in order to cover what average people have: Athletics, Coordination, Reflexes, Stealth, Strength, Toughness, Ingenuity, Knowledge (with a specialization to reflect the character's occupation), Perception, Research, Guile, Luck, Persuasion and Resolve.

It's perfectly fine to have some high ratings, but keep in mind that ratings of 4 and 5 are very costly indeed. Taking too many aspects at these ratings will cause you to suffer severely in all the other aspects. You have been warned.

Step Five: Items

At this point, you should mull over what items the character would logically have on his person at any given time. For the most part, these should be small, mundane things, but there may be exceptions. You must get the narrator's approval on the items you wish for your character to have on his person. And please resist the urge to carry weapons unless it fits your character idea. For example, if the character is a police officer, he would probably have a gun, but if he's a philanthropist, he isn't likely to pack a weapon.

Step Six: Personal Factors

During this step, you should list up to five *personal factors*, pieces of information about the character that could make the game more intriguing. Should these factors ever cause complications for the character during a tale, the narrator will award you with a genre point. Sometimes, it will be the narrator who will initiate the inconveniences brought on by the factors. But you can purposely initiate them yourself in the right situation. For example, if your character has a personal factor called "Bundle of Nerves", you could choose to have him freeze up in the face of danger in order to obtain a genre point. Be careful in over-doing, though, as most narrators will cut you off if you try using the factors constantly.

Step Seven: Final Details

This last step of the character creation process has nothing to do with rules or points or anything else of that nature. Rather, it involves breathing life into your character by giving him a name and an occupation. You should also consider describing what he looks like and perhaps even his personality. The character's personal factors could be of some help with this.

Sample Personal Factors

Here is a short collection of personal factors for you to use verbatim or simply draw inspiration from.

- Aristocratic
- Born and Raised in [insert city or region]
- Bundle of Nerves
- Collector of [insert whatever he collects]
- Compulsive
- Connoisseur of [insert whatever he is a connoisseur of]
- Dark Secret (explain elsewhere)
- Daydreamer
- Devoted to [insert person, cause or movement]
- Dislikes [insert what he dislikes]
- Doesn't Believe in the Supernatural
- Educated at [insert University]
- Has a Disease (explain elsewhere)
- Has a Weird Friend (explain elsewhere)
- Has a Weird Relative (explain elsewhere)
- Has Seen Something Unexplainable
- Has Vivid Nightmares
- Haunted by Past (explain elsewhere)
- Irrational Attraction to [insert what he's attracted to]
- Loves [insert person]
- Member of [insert organization or group]
- Neurotic
- Old-Fashioned Gentleman/Lady
- Owns a Strange Object (explain elsewhere)
- Philanthropist
- Phobia (explain elsewhere)
- Police Detective
- Possesses Extensive Library of Books
- Profession/Doctor of [insert subject]
- Reclusive
- Rivalry (explain elsewhere)
- Served in the Military
- Sheltered
- Skeptic
- Strong Family Ties
- Superstitious
- Throwback to an Earlier Time
- Unusual Ancestry (explain elsewhere)
- Works at/for [insert job place/employer]
- Writes for Pulp Magazines

Chapter Four: Player's Section

A Chapter for the Player

The Necessity of This Chapter

It is true that few role-playing games contain a section catering to players, but this is certainly an injustice of a minor magnitude. It is just as important for the player to have guidance as it is for the narrator.

Furthermore, *Macabre Tales* is structured differently than other role-playing games. This is not to say that it's better or worse... merely different. To these ends, it becomes even more crucial for the player to be given some advice to help them immediately get a firm grasp on how things work.

Becoming Familiar with the Source Material

While Lovecraftian horror certainly shares a lot of traits with other styles of horror, there are numerous traits that make it distinctive. Many of these elements have been discussed in Chapter 1 (pages 13 – 14), so you should go back and read it now if you haven't already done so.

Even still, no description we could provide in this book would compare to reading some of the stories written by the man himself. While some of his tales are rather long, most of them are short enough to be enjoyed in under an hour.

Luckily, most libraries and bookstores carry collections of Lovecraft's fiction. Failing that, his stories can be read online. A quick search of the Internet will lead you to them.

He left behind over a hundred stories as his literary legacy, including tales that he had co-written, ghostwritten or revised. This can be rather intimidating for those looking to start reading his work for the first time, considering there are so many to choose from. Here is a list of five stories that we feel are crucial to understanding the Lovecraftian horror sub-genre: "The Shunned House", "The Call of Cthulhu", "The Colour Out of Space", "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" and "The Haunter of the Dark".

Moving the Story Along

A good player is a player who is self-actualized. That is, he needn't be constantly poked and prodded into action and is perfectly capable of using creativity to enrich the game itself. Spontaneity and independent thought is of utmost importance.

Don't sit around and do nothing; that's boring. Take matters into your own hands the same way most of Lovecraft's antagonists did in his tales. If a clue comes your character's way, have him follow up on it. If someone is seen creeping about, let your character investigate further. If your character thinks someone could provide much needed information, send him to talk to them. As long as your character does *something*, the story will be in motion. Inactivity is the quickest way to drag a game down into the muck.

Contributing to the Narration

The narrator is called “the narrator” for a reason – he’s the main storyteller. However, that’s not to say that he’s the only one who can do any narrating. You can add so much to the feel of the game by doing some narrating of your own.

When it comes time to tell the narrator what your character is going to do, spice it up with vivid descriptions. Why say, “I’ll read through the tome” when you can say, “I gently open the musty-smelling tome and leaf through its dusty, yellowed pages, looking for anything that seems pertinent”? The first narration gets the job done adequately, but it lacks atmosphere and creativity. The second narration not only gets the job done, it gets it done with style, thus contributing to the effectiveness of the scene.

You don’t have to be a master orator to pull it off either. Just think things through and do your best to convey your character’s actions in a fashion that is both interesting and evocative.

Making the Most of Tension Scenes

If there’s one morsel of advice to be given regarding tension scenes, it is this: Run! While this goes against the tenets of traditional role-playing games wherein fighting is the main course, you must realize that many of the horrors in Lovecraftian horror just can’t be slain with a handgun. Or even a Thompson submachine gun, for that matter. The only way to be rid of them is either to remove oneself from their vicinity or to use one’s mind to discover or invent a way to send them back into the shadows. Either way, conventional weapons will be a waste of time.

Not all threats are impervious to physical harm. Some enemies are simply normal humans (such as cultists or insane men of science). Others are lesser creatures who act as servitors or harbingers. In short, fighting back against some things is a viable option, but pick and choose your battle wisely. Slugging a Shoggoth in the face (well, the closest thing it has to a face, that is) will probably not do you much good, but doing the same to a cultist might very well do the trick.

When a threat seems overwhelming or too powerful, don’t hesitate to beat feet. Not only will it keep your character alive longer, it also plays into the conventions of the type of horror Lovecraft conceived.

Another point that should be made is that you, as the player, aren’t always chained to the physical abilities during tension scenes. With a little thought, you can utilize just about any of your stats and aspects. The Ingenuity aspect is particularly useful. If your character is being chased by a squamous, abomination of grotesque proportions, you can perhaps use Ingenuity to try to lead it toward a gaping chasm and trick it into falling in. Your imagination (and the narrator’s good judgment) is the only limit.

Earning Genre Points

Without genre points, your character is likely doomed or at the very least will be very ineffective. This may sound harsh, but it’s the truth. For this reason, it is imperative that you earn as many of them as possible during the game.

As we touched upon already, there are several reliable ways to earn genre points. In this section, we shall look at them in greater detail.

Embrace Danger

Robert Blake could have simply ignored the deserted church that the birds refused to go

near ("The Hunter of the Dark"). Thurber could have refused to go to Richard Upton Pickman's dilapidated personal art gallery ("Pickman's Model"). Dr. Elihu Whipple and his nephew could have ignored the strangeness of the creepy old house on Benefit Street ("The Shunned House"). All the aforementioned individuals would have had much better lives had they played things safe. But they *didn't* play things safe and, as a result, we as readers, were treated to fantastic tales.

The same is true of the protagonists in the game. You can have your character shirk anything that could possibly lead to danger, but the story would not be nearly as entertaining as a result.

Taking actions that plunge your character toward potential hazard will most likely result in you being awarded a genre point. Does this mean that you should always have your character behave in a foolhardy fashion? Of course not. There will be times that you should do your best to preserve your character's well-being... such as if he comes face to face with a mi-go, for example.

Exercise Cleverness

The protagonists in Lovecraft's stories often used ingenuity and resourcefulness to overcome obstacles. A prime example of this is when Henry Armitage, Warren Rice and Francis Morgan devise the plan to defeat the monstrosity by making it visible with the powder of Ibn Ghazi and then using an incantation to strike it down with a lightning bolt.

If you demonstrate this kind of inventiveness, you'll not only be playing to the conventions of Lovecraftian horror, you'll earn genre points too.

Use Personal Factors

Every primary character has several personal factors (see page 40), some of which might be disadvantageous to him. The narrator



may dredge these things up to complicate things during the game or you can dredge them up yourself. Either way, you receive a genre point for your troubles.

Use Evocative Narration

As mentioned in the "Contributing to the Narration" section (see page 42), you should make an effort to describe your character's actions in a way that keeps the game from feeling dry and uninteresting. Please read the aforementioned section for further details.

The narrator may reward you for evocative narration, but he shouldn't do so every single time you deliver in that regard. Strive for excellence and you'll be rewarded fairly.



Chapter Five: Narrator's Section

A Chapter for the Narrator

Narrator Overview

Acting as the narrator is a challenging endeavor. Of that there can be no doubt. However, it is also astoundingly enjoyable and rewarding. In this section, we will give an overview of each of the “jobs” associated being the narrator, starting with the jobs that must be accomplished before the game begins and ending with those handled during the game itself. Each summary will be elaborated upon in great detail in the sections that follow.

Pre-Game Tasks

Before you can actually sit down and play, there are some things you must do. Let's look at them, shall we?

Preparing the Tale

It falls upon your capable shoulders to create the bare bones of the tale in which both yourself and the player will participate. This can be a very elaborate ordeal or nothing more than a handful of notes on scratch paper. There is no right or wrong method of preparing a tale. More information can be found in the “Preparing the Tale” section (pages 45 – 51).

Creating Supporting Characters

The world can't be populated only by the primary character. There needs to be other characters for him to interact with on some level. These characters can serve numerous different purposes – sources of information, allies, enemies and even otherworldly creatures. They all fall into the “supporting

character” category and it's up to you to create them. More information can be found in the “Creating Supporting Characters” section (pages 52 – 58).

In-Game Tasks

These are the tasks you must perform while playing *Macabre Tales*.

Narrating

We realize this is an obvious one, but there's quite a lot that goes into verbalizing a great tale of terror. You must learn to act as all the character's senses in order to bring the story to life for the player (and yourself, for that matter). More information can be found in the “Narrating” section (pages 58 – 62).

Rules Management

It's essential that you know the rules thoroughly so that you can quickly use them to cover anything that comes your way during the game. More information can be found in the “Rules Adjudicating” section (pages 63 – 65).

Preparing the Tale

H.P. Lovecraft spun many eerie and riveting stories during the course of his all too brief lifetime; stories that raised the hair on the back of the readers' necks and tingled their spines. *Macabre Tales* gives you the chance to follow in his footsteps. Certainly, the player has a hand in this as well, but make no mistake – creating the framework for the tale is your domain.

This section will help you construct your own tales of terror for you and your player to experience and even alter as it goes along.

We have developed a method of tale creation that is comprised of several steps. You should feel free to modify it as you see fit. There is no right or wrong way to devise a tale. The steps are:

- Step One: Basic Premise
- Step Two: Development
- Step Three: Organization
- Step Four: Loose Ends

Step One: Basic Premise

Every tale needs a basic premise. There can be no exception to this rule. A tale without a premise isn't a tale – it's just a mishmash of random weirdness with no coherency. Fortunately, this step doesn't have to be overly complex. In fact, it should be downright simple.

Start off by jotting down a sentence that sums up the tale's core idea. Keep in mind that this needn't be a comprehensive look at the story as a whole. It's just meant to provide a starting point for your imagination; the details come later. Here are some examples, based on Lovecraft's stories:

- A man becomes sees an abandoned old church in the far distance from his upper floor window and feels compelled to find it... but something terrible is waiting for him inside the building. ("The Haunter of the Dark")
- A mad scientist invents a machine that allows one to perceive things in other

planes of existence, revealing unspeakable creatures. ("From Beyond")

- An old musician uses his strange music to keep back unseen creatures outside his window, which appears to be a black abyss. ("The Music of Erich Zann")
- A man learns that his ancestors maintained a city of cannibals beneath the family estate. ("The Rats in the Walls")
- A man visits a dilapidated town that turns out to be inhabited by people who have a certain fish/frog casts to their appearance. ("The Shadow Over Innsmouth")

As you can see from the snippets above, we're not yet dealing with fully formed plots. They are merely seeds from which the rest of the tale will grow. This is all you need to kick your creativity into motion.

Should Every Tale be Steeped in the Arkham Cycle?

Lovecraft fabricated a wonderfully bizarre and colorful pseudo-mythology, chock full of creatures and deities loosely connected to one another in some way. But not all of his stories involved it. In fact, most of them didn't.

For this reason, we suggest that you don't base each of your tales on his pseudomythology. Shake things up by inserting tales that feature other horrors. Not everything has to tie into the Arkham Cycle. Variety is, as they say, the spice of life... even in Lovecraftian horror.

Step Two: Development

Now that you have a basic premise in place, it's time to add some meat to it. Create a bullet-point list of things you'd like to include in the tale. Again, you don't need to aim for fully formed ideas. Let's take the first story listed in the previous step ("The Haunter of the Dark") and develop it for this step:

- A strange artifact called the Shining Trapezohedron had been used by a cult to summon a vile entity from the depths of time and space.
- The entity can be banished with light and remains trapped in the steeple of the old church due to the surrounding street lights.

- The locals near the church know that something awful is in the church and live in fear of it.
- A reporter tried to get to the bottom of the mystery some time ago and he came up missing – his skeletal remains are inside the church.
- The entity somehow causes the protagonist to become obsessed with entering the church. It even causes him to sleepwalk his way to the church after a while, once it fully takes hold of his willpower.
- During a storm of unprecedented intensity, the street lights go out, allowing the entity to escape from the church – it goes after the protagonist.

There's no need for much organization at this time. Just jot the entries down as you think of them. As long as they're recorded, you can pick through them and bring order to the chaos a bit later.

Step Three: Organization

The three-act structure is a format that has been used for writing novels, short stories, films, television shows, comicbooks and stage plays for a very long time. The reason for its continued use is simple: it works. Best of all, it works for role-playing games as well, which is why we have adopted it in *Macabre Tales* and made it a vital part of the game.

Because the structure is indeed so crucial, it is important for you to fully grasp the three-act structure and learn to use it as an organizational framework for your tale. It will allow you to take the tidbits you developed in Step Two and organize them into something more cohesive. This is how the tale starts to take shape.

Take a piece of paper, turn it sideways and make three columns, one for each act. Then, take the tidbits and write them into the appropriate column where applicable. At

this point, you can start fleshing the tidbits out a bit more so that they are more detailed and robust.

You have to turn the tidbits into actual story elements and events. "A reporter tried to get to the bottom of the mystery some time ago and he came up missing – his skeletal remains are inside the church" is a fine tidbit, but what good is it if the protagonist never knows about it? You have to figure out how he comes across the information in order for it to be worth anything. In "The Haunter of the Dark", the protagonist finds the skeleton in the church when he first goes there. Furthermore, a pocketbook with the investigator's notes in it is found on the body. This allows the protagonist to learn about the Shining Trapezohedron's history, the cult that operated out of the church, the entity that was summoned and more. See how Lovecraft tied one tidbit several others? This is a great example of turning the tidbits into events.

Now it's time to explain the three acts in detail so that you can utilize the structure effectively. Keep in mind that the information given in the text that follows reflects how the three acts work in most tales. It is not the be-all-end-all of structure. You can alter it as you see fit in accordance with the tale you wish to present to the player.

Act One: Setup

For organizational purposes, Act One is divided up into two broad segments: "The Exposition" and "The Inciting Incident".

The Exposition represents roughly the first half of the first act. It introduces the primary character, the premise and the situation.

- The primary character is the person in the tale whose actions drive the story.
- The premise is what the story is about... or at least what you want the character to think it's about – this is Lovecraftian horror, after all!

- The situation reflects the circumstances surrounding the tale.

The Inciting Incident is the event that sets everything in motion. The rest of the tale usually revolves around resolving the inherent conflict created by the inciting incident. In Lovecraftian horror, the inciting incident isn't typically as obvious or as explosive as in other genres, though this isn't always the case. Let's look at some examples of the inciting incident from the pages of Lovecraft's own stories:

- In "The Colour Out of Space", the meteor slamming into Nahum Gardner's farmland is the inciting incident, even though it occurred in a flashback style sequence (as was most of the story as a whole).
- In "Cool Air", the inciting incident was the unnamed protagonist having a heart attack, which led him to crawl up the stairs to Dr. Muñoz's apartment. It is this event that introduces him to the good doctor and thus involves himself in the story to come.
- In "The Haunter of the Dark", the inciting incident is rather subtle indeed: it's when Robert Blake spots the old church across the city. Without his subsequent obsession with the structure, there is no story.

The end of Act One is almost always the "point of no return". At this point, the protagonist's life will never be quite the same again (something important was taken away from him, he learned a horrible truth, etc.).

Applying Act One to Your Tale

When designing your tale, three things must be done during Act One:

1. The primary character must be established – who he is, what he does, why we should care, etc.
2. The core premise should be established – what the story is going to be about, what the general situation is, etc. This

can later be changed as per the tenets of Lovecraftian horror, but the player needs to at least *think* he knows what the tale is going to be about.

3. The inciting incident should be established -- the initial ramifications of the event may be felt as well. As long as it spurs the character into action, the goal is accomplished.

Act One is also something of a "safe zone" for the primary character. The rules are designed so that it is impossible for him to die or go insane until Act Two.

Act Two: Rising Tension

Act Two is the meat and potatoes of the story, which is why it tends to be the longest segment. It's when the protagonist takes his first steps into the unknown and begins truly acting upon the things that came his way in Act One. He learns what must be done in the previous act and sets out to do it in this act, giving impetus to the unfolding plot.

In traditional stories, Act Two is where the antagonist's plan is challenged by the protagonist's actions. In Lovecraftian horror, though, there often isn't an antagonist in the traditional sense, so this isn't always the case in *Macabre Tales*. Things are typically too skewed to follow in the "good guy versus bad guy" vein. For example, in "The Dunwich Horror", the adversary is pretty clear-cut at first, but when Wilbur Whately perishes, the protagonists are no longer entirely certain as to what they're up against. And that tale is considered Lovecraft's only true "good versus evil" story. So, even when there is such a dynamic, it should be contorted so that things just aren't as they seem.

A sizable portion of Act Two will likely involve a good deal of finding and following clues and then piecing them together. This is especially true of the first half of the act. Whether it's talking to people with knowledge, scouring libraries, reading old newspapers or investigating scenes of weirdness, sleuthing

is an integral part of Lovecraftian horror. The trick is for you to make it interesting and keep it from becoming dull. Player handouts can be really useful here (see page 50), as they give the player something tangible to examine or read. It increases the immersion level drastically.

Act Two doesn't have to be exclusively devoted to investigation. In fact, it's recommended that you add diversity to the mix in order to make it a more entertaining story. You'll want to create a strong sense of tension at least once during the act and quite possibly more than once. Act Two is the most freeform act in the tale. You can do anything you'd like within its framework, so use that to your advantage.

Applying Act Two to Your Tale

When designing your tale, three things must be done during Act Two:

1. The primary character must be drawn into the events of the story and given the opportunity to act upon them.
2. The primary character must struggle to deal with the conflicts created in Act One... and possibly some unrelated conflicts as well.
3. The tension must escalate as the act progresses, cumulating in the set-up for the final climactic sequence that will come in Act Three.

Act Two is where the stakes get higher and the danger is more omnipresent. The rules are designed so that it is possible for the primary character to die or go insane in this act.

Act Three: Climax and Resolution

At its core, Act Three is the grand finale. Sometimes, this means a final confrontation between the protagonist and whoever or whatever the main antagonist is. More often than not, though, things aren't that simple. And just because the term "confrontation"

was used, it doesn't necessarily indicate that there's going to be a "fight scene" involved as the climax. The truth of the matter is that there seldom is such a scene in Act Three. In other genres, it's a shoe-in, but not in Lovecraftian horror.

Lovecraft had some delightfully abnormal third acts in his fiction. That is, he seemed to relish stretching the boundaries of how Act Three can be structured. A fine example of this can be found in "The Tomb". In it, there is no real antagonist at all, unless you count the narrator's father and he certainly doesn't fit the "antagonist" moniker. The third act takes place entirely in the narrator's imagination... or does it? The point is that there's no conflict between a protagonist and an antagonist, yet the climax still feels riveting and exciting.

The closing scene of Act Three is often called the denouement and it's generally defined as a period of calmness, where a state of equilibrium returns. Once again, Lovecraft didn't always follow the rules and would often end the story in unusual and even unsettling ways – the character gets carted off to an asylum, the character dies, reality is blurred, etc. Another tactic he employed was to end things with one last "big reveal" that left readers with their jaw on the floor; stories such as "The Whisperer in Darkness", "Cool Air" and "The Statement of Randolph Carter" all do this exceedingly well.

Applying Act Three to Your Tale

When designing your tale, two things must be done during Act Three:

1. The climax must happen, whether it involves a traditional antagonist or not.
2. The denouement must occur, where we see the results of the now-finished climax.

Act Three is when the primary character is in the most danger. The rules are designed

so that it is very, very possible for him to die or go insane in this act.

Step Four: Loose Ends

This step is devoted to tidying up and essentially filling in the blanks. It's the step in which you create the supporting characters, incantations, tomes and relics that appear during the tale. For information on doing this, read pages 52 – 58. You'll also need to create maps of important locales and devise handouts to give to the player during the game.

Lastly, look over the tale as a whole with a critical eye. Can it be improved? Is something critical missing? Should things be organized differently? Could you do something to make it scarier? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes", set out to make the needed improvements.

Advice For Creating Tales

What follows is a selection of tips for creating entertaining tales that would make H.P. Lovecraft proud.

Tension Scene Frequency and Placement

Tension scenes are most effective when used sparingly. If you over saturate your tale with tension scenes, the player will become so accustomed to them that the sense of urgency will be greatly diminished.

An average tale should probably contain between one and three tension scenes, though exceptions are unquestionably possible. It's perfectly acceptable for a tale to have absolutely no tension scenes at all ("The Statement of Randolph Carter" is a testament to that fact). Conversely, a tale can exceed three tension scenes, though the tale will run the risk of becoming too action-oriented for Lovecraftian horror.

Most tension scenes should take place in Act Three or the last half of Act Two. Tension scenes in Act One should be very, very rare occurrences, as that act is intended to establish the status quo of the tale and,

by their very nature, tension scenes tend to shatter the status quo. The shattering is best saved for the last two acts, unless you have something amazingly unique in mind.

Player Handouts

When it comes to giving the characters information, it's best to show rather than tell. That's when player handouts come in handy. A player handout can be something as simple as a hand-written letter or as elaborate as a few pertinent pages from a tome.

The idea behind player handouts is two-fold. For one thing, they give the player something physical to handle, thus increasing the immersion value. Involving other senses (in this case, touch) helps this along quite sufficiently. For another thing, the player won't have to rely on his memory for recalling important info, as it will be on paper right in front of him.

You can spend as much or as little time on creating player handouts as you'd like. In most cases, typing the info and printing it off will suffice if you don't have any interest in doing anything more involved. That having been said, going to greater lengths to creating more aesthetically pleasing handouts will pay off in the flavor they add to the game.

The Era

The default era for *Macabre Tales* is the period between 1920 and 1935. This span of time offers you the most authentic Lovecraftian horror experience and it's the one that this rulebook caters to. There's nothing keeping you from setting your tales in other eras, though. The Victorian era and the modern era are both popular choices among Lovecraftian gamers, so you might want to consider one of those. Alternatively, you can take a road less traveled and choose another era. Perhaps a game set in the dark ages, the 1950s or even the future.

Flashback Tales

A great number of Lovecraft's stories were formatted as after-the-fact accounts by the protagonist who experienced the terrible events of the tale. He's giving his statement to the authorities, recounting the events to a friend, writing about the incident in his journal or whatever. While this is an easy thing to handle when writing fiction, it can be challenging as hell to set up in a role-playing game. It's challenging, but not in any way impossible.

The simplest way to do this is to prepare a short script to read to the player at the very beginning of the game, letting it act as a setup to the tale itself. Here's a sample script:

"It may seem like gibberish from a madman to you, but I swear to you that everything I'm about to tell you is unequivocally true. I will recount to you everything that happened on that awful night, though I'm certain that you will not believe me and will have me committed to Butler Hospital upon the completion of my statement. I do not blame you, for had I not experienced it myself, I would never have believed such a far-fetched story either. You should probably have a seat though, because I'm confident that what I'm about to tell you is far more shocking than anything you have ever heard before."

If you're particularly ambitious, you can even write a closing script to be read after the tale's conclusion. You might even consider writing several variants to cover multiple ending possibilities. For example, you could

write one standard ending script, another script in case the character goes insane and another one in the supposition that the character actually dies. The latter two may sound odd to you at first. After all, how can the character do an ending narration if he's completely insane or deceased? This is weird fiction, so anything is possible. Furthermore, it opens up a great potential for really bizarre "twist" endings. Maybe the character doesn't realize he's dead and is telling his account a reporter or investigator, thinking he can actually hear him? Or maybe the whole tale never even happened at all? The possibilities are endless.



Creating Supporting Characters

Creating the characters the protagonist will interact with is one of your most important jobs. The protagonist cannot exist in a vacuum, which is why the supporting characters play such a critical role in the tale.

The task of creating the tale's supporting cast falls upon your shoulders, but you needn't feel overwhelmed, because the process is astoundingly simple. In fact, it's so simple that it's not even really a process per se. You simply give the supporting characters whatever you feel they should have.

Stats

A supporting character has the same three stats that the primary character has. The only difference is that instead of a grade, each stat is given a challenge rating. The challenge ratings are used for opposed checks with the primary character.

Here are some guidelines to help you select challenge ratings for the supporting character's stats:

- 2: Poor
- 3: Underdeveloped
- 4: Below Average
- 5: Average
- 6: Above Average
- 7: Very Good
- 8: Great
- 9: Phenomenal
- 10: Beyond Human Potential
- 11-13: Supernatural
- 14-16: High-Level Supernatural
- 17+: Godlike

Aspects

Think about what the supporting character is like and give him the aspects and their respective ratings that make sense for him. For human characters (or even near-human characters), this is an easy chore. But for the grotesque, ancient beings that populate the cosmos' darkest corners, a bit more thought is required due to their innate strangeness.

- **Rating 1:** Novice or marginally trained
- **Rating 2:** Basic level of training or ability
- **Rating 3:** Professional level of efficiency
- **Rating 4:** Expert or master
- **Rating 5:** Amongst the best in the world.
- **Rating 6+:** Inhuman range of effectiveness

The Great Old Ones and the Other Gods

In the stories of H.P. Lovecraft, there exist godlike alien entities in the cosmos that are simply unimaginable to mankind. These deities do not manifest themselves to the lowly human race readily. In fact, it is a very, very rare occurrence indeed. Many of them never do it at all.

The Great Old Ones and Other Gods remain hinted at in lurid stories, dusty tomes and from the mouths of crazed lunatics. And that is, by and large, where they are most effective. They are the unknowable deities that lurk in the minds of those who have heard of them – completely out of reach by mere humans.

Because they are meant to be enigmatic, they do not have game stats in *Macabre Tales*. They are gods and can do virtually anything you want them to do.

Items

Jot down the objects that the secondary character carries on his person.

Special Rules

Special rules are designed to accommodate beings that aren't normal humans – from near-human foes such as possessed cultists to massive alien monstrosities such as shoggoths. These are collectively referred to in the rules as “creatures” as a way of differentiating them from “normal” supporting characters.

What follows is a list of common special rules. Keep in mind that it is not a list of every possibility imaginable. It simply provides you with ones that are rather all-purpose in their nature. When creating your own creatures, you should consider creating some of your own special rules as well in an effort to keep creatures from seeming too homogenized.

You can also customize existing special rules by adding a small wrinkle to them. This can be placed in parenthesis beside the special rules' name. For example, if you want your creature to have “Clinging” but don't want it to be able to use it on extremely smooth surfaces, you could write down “Clinging (doesn't work on smooth surfaces)”.

Deities and Special Rules

The Great Old Ones and the Other Gods do not have special rules, as they are usually not seen at all... and if they are seen, they are all but impervious to anything humans can do to them. If they do manifest in a physical form, you can give them any of the special rules that you deem applicable to the situation. These beings are simply too powerful to be defined in a neat little package. In short, if you need them to be able to do something, they can do it.

Aquatic

Some of the most terrifying creatures dwell not on land, but beneath the darkest waters.

Aquatic creatures can breathe in water as well as on land. Some aquatic creatures may only remain on land for a certain amount of time, while others can live indefinitely in either environ. This should be specified in parenthesis beside the special rule's name – either “Aquatic (Limited)” or “Aquatic (Unlimited)”.

The exact amount of time a creature with “Aquatic (Limited)” can remain out of water is based on the needs of the story and is up to the narrator.

Burrowing

The creature can tunnel through dirt or perhaps even tougher substances such as stone, wood or metal.

The creature is capable of traveling through the ground, using its Body [Strength] as the default challenge rating. If you'd like the creature to burrow more capably or incapably than its stat and aspect would otherwise indicate, list a positive or negative modifier to the final challenge rating in parenthesis. For example, “Burrowing (+2)” or “Burrowing (-3)”.

Clinging

Walls, ceilings, trees – there are few places that this creature can't reach.

The creature is capable of easily traversing vertical surfaces and even moving about on ceilings and the like. It uses its Body [Athletics] as the default challenge rating. If you'd like the creature to climb more deftly or more clumsily than its stat and aspect would otherwise indicate, list a positive or negative modifier to the final challenge rating in parenthesis. For example, “Clinging (-1)” or “Clinging (+3)”.

Dark Influence

The creature can exert his will upon hapless humans, forcing or coercing them to do its bidding.

This special rule is listed with an effect number (usually ranging between 2 and 13) and a measure of time (half-hour, hour, 6 hours, 12 hours, 1 day, etc.). For example, "Dark Influence 7 (half-hour)". To attempt to use Dark Influence on the primary character, you must spend a double to use the "Activate Special Rule" option. Upon doing so, the character must make a Soul [Resolve] check to avoid it. The check's challenge rating is equal to this special rule's effect number.

If the check is successful, the character is unscathed by the attempt. If the check is a failure, the character falls under the creature's influence. The player retains control of the character, but you can inform him that the character must do certain things ("You must find a way to summon a shoggoth") and tell him he can't do certain things ("You cannot go in that door.").

If the primary character is under the influence of the creature, he can periodically make another Soul [Resolve] check. The unit of time listed with the special rule dictates how often the check can be made. So, for example, if "hour" is listed, the check can be attempted every hour.

Dark Vision

Darkness imposes no disadvantages for this creature.

The creature suffers no penalties to its challenge ratings for being in darkness.

Dimensional Travel

The creature can move as easily between planes of existence as we move between rooms of a building.

The creature is capable of shifting in and out of our reality at will, using its Body [Reflexes] as the default challenge rating. If you'd like

the creature to dimension hop more or less proficiently than its stat and aspect would otherwise indicate, list a positive or negative modifier to the final challenge rating in parenthesis. For example, "Dimensional Travel (-1)" or "Dimensional Travel (+3)".

Drain

The creature saps its enemies of their natural abilities, slowly but surely weakening them until they can no longer function effectively.

When giving this special rule to a creature, you must decide how the Drain is accomplished and write it in parenthesis. It can be anything your imagination conjures up ("touch", "aura", "beam", etc.) or it can even be linked to an Innate Attack. You must also select one or more stats for it to affect. Thus, the final special rule may look something like this: "Drain (touch; Body/Mind)" or like this "Drain (Innate Attack-Bite; Body)".

During a tension scene, if the creature's actions a) match up to how the Drain is accomplished and b) cause the primary character to lose momentum points, you can spend a double for the "Activate Special Rule" option, immediately imposing a -1 to all of the stats that it affects. The Drain's effects last for as long as you deem appropriate.

Flight

Be it by wings or self-actualized flight, this creature can soar through the air with ease.

The creature is capable of atmospheric flight, using its Body [Athletics] as the default challenge rating. If you'd like the creature to fly more nimbly or more awkwardly than its stat and aspect would otherwise indicate, list a positive or negative modifier to the final challenge rating in parenthesis. For example, "Flight (-2)" or "Flight (+1)".

Hindering Presence

So vast is the creature's presence that it can immediately halt a foe's momentum.

When the primary character succeeds in

a crucial check during a tension scene involving this creature, you may spend a double to use the "Activate Special Rule" option. Upon doing so, the player flips over three random dominoes and finds the lowest low side of the three. His momentum point total is only increased by that amount.

For example, if the player flips over a 1/3, 2/4 and 4/6, the low side of the 1/3 would be used, which means that his momentum points would only be increased by 1.

Immunity

This creature cannot be affected by one specific source of damage or effects – fire, magic, cold, radiation, disease, poison, electricity, acid, etc. A few rare creatures may even have an immunity to physical damage (which would include firearms, blunt attacks, bladed attacks, etc.).

The ability will be listed with what the creature is immune to. For example, "Immunity (fire)". Under no circumstance can the creature be thwarted by the chosen source. If, during a tension scene, the primary character succeeds in a crucial check in which he was attempting to use the source against the creature, the character gains no momentum points.

Innate Attack

This creature possesses some form of attack that increases its ability to successfully cause harm to foes -- grasping tentacles, razor-sharp claws, dagger-like teeth, spiked tails, etc.

The ability will be listed with the name of the attack and an effect number (usually between 1 and 4). For example, "Innate Attack 2 (bite)". If, during a tension scene, the primary character fails a crucial check in which this creature used its Innate Attack, the momentum point loss will be increased by the effect number.

Interstellar Travel

Traveling between planets is an impossibility for most beings... but not this one.

The creature is capable of flying in outer space, using its Body [Athletics] as the default challenge rating. If you'd like the creature to travel more nimbly or more awkwardly than its stat and aspect would otherwise indicate, list a positive or negative modifier to the final challenge rating in parenthesis. For example, "Interstellar Travel (-2)" or "Interstellar Travel (+1)".

Invisibility

The creature either cannot be seen or can normally be seen, but can vanish at will.

Decide whether this special rule is "permanent" (i.e., the creature is always invisible) or "activated" (i.e., the creature is normally visible but can vanish from sight at will) and write it in parenthesis. For example, "Invisibility (permanent)". Characters cannot target an invisible creature unless they know exactly where it is or they simply get lucky. Any checks that target the invisible creature suffer a -4 penalty.

Malleable

The creature is made of slime, ectoplasm, ooze, goo or other substances that can compress in order to fit in smaller places.

First of all, the creature can move into spaces that it would not otherwise be able to (under doors, into small nooks, etc.). If the creature is huge, however, the spaces it can fit into may not be quite as small as the examples listed, but would still be much smaller than what a creature of a comparable size would be able to.

Mental Protection

Some creatures have minds that are nearly impenetrable by incantations, trickery or other forms of mental assault.

The ability will be listed with what it represents and an effect number (usually ranging from 1 to 4). For example, "Mental Protection 2 (alien brain)". If, during a tension scene, the primary character succeeds in a crucial check in which he was attempting to trick,

confuse, control or cause mental damage to the creature, the momentum points gained will be reduced by the effect number. The momentum points gained cannot be less than zero. That is, the gain cannot become a loss in this way.

Monstrous

The creature is extremely powerful and difficult to overcome. This should be reserved for the larger and more dangerous creatures that the primary character might come into contact with.

If, during a tension scene, the primary character fails a crucial check in which this creature was involved, you may spend a double to use the "Activate Special Rule" option. If you opt to do so, the player uses the high side of the random domino to determine his momentum point loss. This can be used in conjunction with the Innate Attack special ability.

Overwhelming

Some creatures come on strong as soon as a confrontation commences, making it difficult for foes to get much momentum at first. It might be that the creature uses ambush tactics or that it's an actual swarm of small critters rather than just one. It's also possible that the creature is just extremely aggressive or fast.

When this creature is involved in a tension scene, the primary character's initial momentum point total is determined by using the low side of a randomly drawn domino rather than the high side. If the primary character gets the drop on this creature, however, the creature does not benefit from this special rule.

Physical Protection

From gelatinous bodies and hardened natural armor to protective auras and partly tangible husks, there are numerous things that can keep a creature from being harmed.

The ability will be listed with what it represents and an effect number (usually ranging from 1 to 4). For example, "Physical Protection 1 (scaly skin)". If, during a tension scene, the primary character succeeds in a crucial check in which he was attempting to cause physical harm to the creature, the momentum points gained will be reduced by the effect number. The momentum points gained cannot be less than zero. That is, the gain cannot become a loss in this way.

Resilience

This creature is usually able to shrug off the effects of one specific source of damage – fire, magic, cold, radiation, disease, poison, electricity, acid, etc.

The ability will be listed with what the creature is resilient to. For example, "Resilience (radiation)". If, during a tension scene, the primary character succeeds in a crucial check in which he was attempting to use the source against the creature, the character gains no momentum points unless the player spends 2 genre points.

Telepathy

The creature can speak with other sentient species mentally.

It must be noted that the recipient cannot telepathically respond (unless the recipient also has this special rule).

Teleportation

This creature can instantly travel from one point to another.

The creature is capable of teleporting from place to place, using its Body [Athletics] as the default challenge rating. If you'd like the creature to teleport less or more efficiently than its stat and aspect would otherwise indicate, list a positive or negative modifier to the final challenge rating in parenthesis. For example, "Teleportation (-1)" or "Teleportation (+2)".

Unspeakable Visage

There are alien things in this universe that the human mind shouldn't hear about, read about or, especially, lay eyes upon. This creature is one of those things.

The creature is of an absolutely alien nature and any confrontation with it by a human will trigger a sanity check. This sanity check is only made the first time the primary character comes into visual contact with the creature, unless you feel that a later meeting with it warrants another one.

This special rule is listed with an effect number (usually ranging from 2 to 13). That number represents the challenge rating of the sanity check.

Weakness

The creature is negatively affected by a particular substance, condition or damage source. It could be something that doesn't normally negatively affect creatures – bright light, salt, lead, etc. It might just as easily be something that causes harm to most creatures, but causes even more harm to this one – fire, acid, silver bullets, etc.

When you give the creature this special rule, you must decide what the creature has a weakness to and write it in parenthesis beside the special rule itself. If, during a tension scene, the primary character succeeds in a crucial check in which this creature's weakness played a part, the momentum points will be increased by an amount equal to the high side of a random domino instead of the low side.

Special rules that offer protection cannot protect against sources the creature has a Weakness to.

Stock Supporting Characters

Below are game stats for archetypal supporting characters for you to use in your games.

Antiquarian

Body 5: Reflexes 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2

Mind 5: Ingenuity 1, Knowledge (Antiques) 3, Knowledge (History) 3, Languages (Latin) 3, Perception 1, Research 3

Soul 5: Persuasion 1, Resolve 1

Archaeologist

Body 5: Athletics 1, Reflexes 1, Stealth 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2

Mind 6: Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Archaeology) 3, Knowledge (History) 3, Languages (Latin), Languages (Spanish) 3, Perception 2, Research 3

Soul 5: Persuasion 2, Resolve 2

Cult Leader

Body 5: Athletics 2, Fighting 1, Reflexes 1, Stealth 2, Strength 1, Toughness 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2

Mind 6: Ingenuity 1, Knowledge (Forbidden Truths) 2, Knowledge (Occult Lore) 3, Languages (Latin) 1, Perception 2

Soul 6: Guile 2, Intimidation 1, Performance (Oration) 3, Persuasion 2, Resolve 2

Cultist

Body 5: Athletics 1, Fighting 1, Reflexes 1, Stealth 2, Strength 1, Toughness 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2

Mind 6: Knowledge (Forbidden Truths) 1, Knowledge (Occult Lore) 2, Perception 1

Soul 6: Guile 1, Persuasion 1, Resolve 1

Detective (Police or Private)

Body 6: Athletics 2, Fighting 2, Reflexes 2, Stealth 3, Strength 2, Toughness 2, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2

Mind 6: Ingenuity 2, Perception 4, Research 3

Soul 6: Guile 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2, Resolve 2

Doctor of Medicine**Body 5:** Athletics 1, Coordination 3, Reflexes 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2**Mind 7:** Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Medicine) 3, Perception 2, Research 2**Soul 5:** Persuasion 1, Resolve 2**Professor****Body 5:** Vehicles (Automobiles) 2**Mind 6:** Ingenuity 1, Knowledge (*narrator's choice*) 4, Perception 1, Research 3**Soul 5:** Performance (Oration) 3, Persuasion 1, Resolve 1**Psychotherapist****Body 5:** Vehicles (Automobiles) 2**Mind 6:** Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Psychology) 3, Perception 2**Soul 6:** Guile 1, Persuasion 4, Resolve 3**Rustic****Body 5:** Athletics 1, Toughness 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2**Mind 5:** Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Local Folklore) 3, Knowledge (Farming) 3, Perception 1**Soul 5:** Persuasion 2, Resolve 3**Thug****Body 5:** Athletics 2, Fighting 3, Marksmanship 2, Reflexes 2, Stealth 2, Strength 2, Toughness 2, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2**Mind 5:** Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Criminal Activities) 3, Perception 1**Soul 5:** Guile 3, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 1, Resolve 1

Narrating

Describing what's going on in the game world (especially what's going on near the characters) is critical to the success of your tale. If you fail to set the scene for the player, he will inevitably grow tired of trying to piece together sloppy narratives and give up on the game. The good news is that, by following the basic advice below, you should have no problem keeping the game lucid and interesting.

Tip #1: Don't Over-Describe... But Don't Under-Describe Either

The last thing you should do is drone on and on about the scene at hand. Over-describing a scene is a quick way to make the player lose interest. Lovecraft was often guilty of furnishing readers with excessive descriptions, but the role-playing game is a different medium than the one he was a master of. Nobody wants to sit through a long-winded description. On the other hand, you shouldn't be so brief that it's boring or that important information is left out. Find a happy medium and stick to it.

Example #1: *"You approach the creepy old house and it looks empty."*

While the above description adequately tells you the most important information, it lacks atmosphere, drama or anything else that might make it interesting. It's utilitarian at best; staggeringly boring at worst. Let's try this again.

Example #2: *"As the large, menacing house comes into view, it becomes obvious that no one has lived here for a very, very long time. The structure itself is of Colonial Georgian design, though it uncharacteristically has a sagging gambrel roof. Four tall, relatively narrow, windows can be found on the second floor, with two similar windows located on the ground floor. There are undoubtedly more windows on the other sides of the house, but these are the only one in view. The porch is somewhat wide and the door, which was once white, looms ominously like a mouth waiting to swallow you up should you get too close. Getting that close may be difficult, however, as the yard looks to be a treacherous stretch of land to traverse. It is plagued by tall weeds and tangled underbrush and it's obvious that rocks of varying sizes are strewn randomly about. Creeping vines climb ever so slowly up the sides of the house, threatening to swallow it whole. Encasing the entire lawn is a rusted wrought iron fence, aside from where the creaky front gate allows entrance."*



While it certainly sounds like something Lovecraft might have written (though he would have assuredly done so more eloquently), it doesn't work as well in a role-playing game context. Not only would it bore the hell out of the player, it also has an even worse effect: it sucks the mood right out of the situation at hand. The narrator wasn't entirely off the mark, though. He definitely had some things right – he mentions the architecture (something Lovecraft was fond of) and he made the house seem sinister. His only real problem is he overloaded his description with needless information. If the player needs to know how many windows the house has, he can ask.

Let's have one more whack at it.

Example #3: *"The large, abandoned house comes into view, giving you a distinct feeling of discomfort. It is of Colonial Georgian design,*

boasting a now sagging, gambrel roof, tall, narrow windows and a wide once-white door. The waning crescent moon casts an eerie light on the structure and the weed-choked lawn that surrounds it. With but a single glance, it becomes obvious that this is not just another dilapidated house – it is something far more malicious."

See? The above example provided all the necessary information without bogging the game down. Moreover, it was told with a sense of drama and pacing, which we'll discuss later. The player would be able to quickly get a feel for the house and still understand that the most critical part of the description is that the house has something sinister about it.

Tip #2: Learn To Pace a Scene

Pacing is the art of keeping the game moving at an appropriate speed. If you're running

a scene wherein an elderly hermit is telling the primary character the backstory of the old mansion that he is investigating, don't rush through it. You can't make something like this feel poignant if you don't maintain a slow but steady pacing.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, if you're running a frantic, edge-of-your-seat tension scene, keep the pace brisk and tense. Keep the descriptions minimal in order to reflect the fact that the primary character wouldn't realistically have much time to notice that much about his surroundings. Make it snappy and don't let the player have a whole lot of time to ponder his characters' actions or which domino he wants to play.

Most scenes should be somewhere in between these two extremes. You'll need to cultivate a sense of forward momentum without making it feel rushed. Over time, you'll develop a natural instinct for determining how to properly pace any given scene.

Tip #3: Evoke a Mood and Create Suspense

Use Tips #1 and #2 to help you evoke an appropriately eerie atmosphere. If you're building suspense (e.g., when the character thought he heard a noise in the basement and is carefully moving down the stairs to see what's going on), speak softly and slowly, pausing between certain words for effect. Then, when something startling happens, suddenly get loud!

Choosing the right words can go a long way toward evoking a mood with your narration. Lovecraft had this down to an art form. He would meticulously choose

words that would convey a sense of terror and discomfort. Many of his critics chide him for using certain words repeatedly over the course of his stories. But what they don't seem to realize is that he did it for a reason. He wanted those words to sear themselves into the readers' minds in order to create a vivid and horrifying impression. And, by and large, he succeeded in that.

Below is a list of some of his signature words, along with their definitions. Slipping them into your descriptions will go a long way toward making your tale feel Lovecraftian. And don't hesitate to use them often. Lovecraft certainly didn't.

Cosmic: Vast or limitless in scope

Cyclopean: Gigantic

Eldritch: Eerie, weird or creepy

Foetid: Having an offensive odor; stinking

Ghastly: Shockingly frightful; dreadful

Gibbous: More than half but less than fully illuminated; used of the moon or a planet

Grotesque: Odd, disgusting or unnatural in appearance

Ichor: Foul-smelling, watery discharge; slime-like substance

Immemorial: Extending back beyond memory, record or knowledge

Indescribable: Too extraordinary or odd for description

Loathsome: Disgusting; revolting

Mouldering: Decaying or crumbling with age

Noisome: Noxious odor; possibly harmful to one's health

Primordial: Existing from the very beginning of time

Rugose: Rough and wrinkled

Squamous: Covered with scales; scalelike

Tenebrous: Dark; gloomy; obscure

Unholy: Wicked; not sacred or hallowed

Waning Moon: The moon



at any time after full moon and before new moon (so called because its illuminated area is decreasing)

Tip #4: Improvise Wildly

There's simply no way to predict what the player is going to come up with. This often means that his ideas and actions will threaten to derail your carefully created plot. How do you deal with it? By improvising! The worst thing you can do is to tell the player that he can't do something because it goes against your plot. Give the player some rope and see what he comes up with. It may end up being better than how you originally envisioned the tale. Plus, it offers a challenge for you, which is always a good thing. If there aren't any surprises for you, then there's little point in even participating. You might as well just write a short story instead.

When the player deviates from the plot, run with it. Make stuff up on the fly and let him carry out his ideas. You can always nudge him back on track eventually if he goes too far off course, but don't let him know that's what you're doing.

Tip #5: Utilize Gore Sparingly

Lovecraft didn't often describe excessive gore in great detail, but when he *did*, he made it memorable. The reason it was so memorable wasn't solely because he was such a capable writer, but it was also because he didn't use it at every turn. Familiarity breeds comfort, so had he poured on the blood and guts too often, none of the gory scenes would have had much impact because the readers would have become desensitized to it.

The same applies to *Macabre Tales*. If you splatter nearly every scene with entrails, organs, blood and other such nastiness, the player will become too familiar with it and much (perhaps all) of the horror will dissipate. Don't be afraid to employ extreme gore on occasion, but only do so if it will heighten the horror and leave a lasting impression.

So, does this mean you shouldn't allow any gore except for when it's really poignant? Certainly not. There are ways to allude to it without having to amp up the gross descriptions. The act of obscuring the gore with shadows and random objects is one effective way to do so. For example, if the primary character comes across a corpse that has been stripped of its skin, you could say, "In the far corner of the study, you see what appears to be a human body on the floor amidst the shadows created by the nearby desk and bookshelf. Jutting out of the shadows is the corpse's fleshless lower arm and hand."

In the example above, the shadows hid most of the brutal gore. The only thing visible was the forearm and hand, which was enough to let the player know that the cadaver had no skin. Not only did the description minimize the gore, it also added a layer of mystery. The human imagination is more than capable of filling in the blanks and what it fills the blanks with is usually more terrifying than any description you could possibly describe.

Tip #6: Portray the Supporting Characters

Supporting characters can be a great amount of fun to play. More importantly, they fulfill several critical roles in the game.

First, they act as your voice in the game. That is, they are your key to communicating with the primary character, giving him information, clues and even red herrings. They can be great tools for conveying whatever it is you wish to convey.

Secondly, supporting characters are perfect victims. They are, quite frankly, expendable resources. Having supporting characters perish, go mad or otherwise suffer horrendous fates is a longstanding Lovecraft tradition. Doing so can be used to let the player and his character realize that bad things can happen to anyone; nobody is safe. It also can be used as a way to motivate the primary

character. After all, he was just speaking to his younger brother yesterday... and now he's dead. Something must be done!

Thirdly, supporting characters pose threats to the primary character and even the rest of the world too. This is particularly true of creatures, though normal humans can stir up quite a ruckus too if properly motivated to do so. Playing creatures is always a tricky proposition because many of them have completely unfathomable motives that humans can't possibly grasp... and guess what? You're a human. This means that you have to fake it and somehow make the creature *seem* like its actions are incomprehensible.

Tip #7: Ending the Tale

Every good story must come to an end and your tale is no exception. In traditional fiction, this is as easy as coming up with a pre-defined ending and writing it. It's not that simple in a role-playing game, as you have no way of knowing for certain exactly what's going to transpire. The primary character may go insane when he finally learns that his father had mated with an extraterrestrial being and he was the result. Or perhaps he will perish at the hands (or tentacles) of some ancient being from beneath the ocean. Or maybe – just maybe – he will emerge from the tale alive and mostly unscathed. The point is that the tale could conclude in any number of ways, making it almost impossible to devise a definitive ending ahead of time.



For this reason, you will need to develop a knack for nailing a satisfying ending on the spot. This is no easy feat, but it can be done. You could prepare ahead of time by pondering some of the more likely endings and coming up with ways to wrap things up should those endings come to pass. Doing this will at least give you a head start.

One thing that must be stressed here is that when the character receives a game-ending result on a perilous check or tension scene, the game doesn't have to end at that very moment. You don't have to say, "your character dies" and walk away from the table. While that's always a possibility, you have the option of moving the narration a bit further in order to finish the tale in a more entertaining manner. For example, let's say that the character received a game-ending result while in a cave, trying to banish a vile alien creature from our reality with an incantation. "Your character dies" is an acceptable ending, but you should ask yourself if it's the one that's the most interesting. You could instead do something more along these lines:

"The darkness closes in around you little by little until it's all that remains. You wake up some time later in a hospital room. Judging by the stubble on your face, you think you've been here for at least a few days. The doctor is in the room and tells you how lucky you are to be alive because when your friend found you in your living room, you were almost dead... almost dead and clutching some old book like it was your firstborn child."

This ending is more thought provoking than simply informing the player that his character dies. It indicates that the entire tale was nothing more than a dream or hallucination... and yet the book that contained the incantation was found in the character's hands. Whether or not it actually happened is irrelevant; it's the possibility that nothing is as it seems that's important.

Rules Management

As the narrator, one of your primary jobs is deciding when to use the rules, when to bend them and when to throw them out the window entirely. But it's also your job to implement the rules into your tale. This section is intended to give you some direction on these matters.

Adjudicating the Rules

While the rules in a role-playing game aren't as rigid as they are in other types of games (just try moving a rook diagonally in chess and see what your opponent says!), they're still a very important part of the experience. And it's up to you to enforce them whenever such a thing is needed.

This requires you to know the rules in as thorough a manner as possible. How can you enforce rules that you don't even know? Does this mean that you have to strictly adhere to them without fail?

Not even close.

Your goal is to help create a collaborative story with your player and sometimes, the rules get in the way of that. In such cases, the "good of the story" should prevail. The rules are simply tools to help you do that.

Tension Scenes

The only part of the game that has a lot of structure is the tension scene system. While it shouldn't be used often, this system is an intrinsic part of *Macabre Tales* and requires some extra attention in this section of the book.

Selecting a Momentum Threshold

When a tension scene first breaks out, you have to determine an appropriate momentum threshold. This decision breaks down to two factors: what act the tale is currently in and how important the tension scene is.

Each act is given three numbers and it's up to you to decide which one to choose as the momentum threshold.

- **Act One:** 7-9
- **Act Two:** 9-11
- **Act Three:** 11-13

The first number is the low number. You should consider this if the tension scene isn't very crucial to the story. Perhaps it's a random run-in with a minor creature or a race against time to find some information in the library before it closes for the night.

The second number is the medium number. It covers most tension scenes that will arise during the game. This should be considered the default momentum threshold.

The third number is the high number. This should be reserved for really dramatic and crucial tension scenes. If it seems like the entire remainder of the game revolves around this tension scene, you should select this number.

The rule of thumb is: when in doubt, choose the medium number.

Getting Creative with Tension Scenes

Once you wrap your head around the concept of tension scenes, you will find that it can be extremely fun to get creative with them. The most orthodox way to think of tension scenes is to simulate the character confronting foes and then dealing with them (fighting them, fleeing from them, etc.). While this type of situation certainly falls within the parameters of the tension scene rules, it is certainly not the only type of situation that does.

There are many ways for you to throw some variety into your tension scenes. Here are some ideas for you to ruminate upon:

- You can set the tension scene up without any foes to deal with, instead relying upon alternate sources to create the required

sense of apprehension and dread. Perhaps the character must locate a friend who is in danger... but time is running out. Or maybe the character must escape from a volcano that is nearing eruption. Or what if the character has to find his way out of a treacherous, trap-filled pyramid without an electric lantern?

- You can tinker with the ramifications of failure. The rules of the game are intentionally vague when it comes to what a “game-ending” or “non game-ending” result entails (especially the latter). This means that you have a great deal of wiggle room in determining what’s at stake. It doesn’t always have to be the character’s life or sanity that is threatened, though they should probably be considered the default. It could be that you’re attempting to spare the life of a comrade and failure means he dies or goes insane. Or perhaps what’s at stake is the fate of a rustic, rural town... or possibly even the world itself.

- You can make tension scenes play out over the course of a longer (or even shorter) time than normal. Most tension scenes will represent a span of time ranging from a few minutes to maybe fifteen minutes, though there are no hard, fast rules that set this in stone. This gives you plenty of leeway to alter the time frame. Perhaps the tension scene involves the character attempting to find a certain incantation in Arkham while being sought by members of a cult that’s trying to prevent him from doing so. Such a tension scene could represent hours of time, as the character evades them while moving from location to location around town.

You’ll find many unorthodox tension scenes in Lovecraft’s fiction. In fact, the final sequence in “Cool Air” integrates all three of the aforementioned techniques for adding variety to tension scenes. In the story, the ailing Dr. Muñoz has a condition that requires him to keep his body very cold... and his primitive air conditioning machine has just stopped working at 11:00 at night. His friend, the

unnamed protagonist, must do something to save him, thus signaling the beginning of the tension scene. The protagonist starts by trying to fix the machine (a Mind [Knowledge – “Repair”] check), but fails to do so. Then, he tries to locate a mechanic (a Research check) and convince him to come fix it (a Persuasion check). The repairman analyzes it and determines that a new piston would be required. Unfortunately, the shops wouldn’t be open until morning. The doctor frantically asks the narrator to continually bring back ice to put in the bathtub with him, in an effort to keep him cold until morning (an Athletics check). When the shops opened up, he had to devise a way to keep him cold while fetching the required piston (an Ingenuity check). The idea he concocted was to hire someone to continue fetching the ice for him (a Persuasion check), so that he could procure the part (a Research check).

The above scene involved absolutely no adversaries to speak of. The ramification of the tension scene is the potential death of Dr. Muñoz rather than the protagonist himself. And lastly, the tension scene unraveled over the course of many, many hours. And yet it was still an astoundingly dramatic tension scene. This simply illustrates that the tension scene rules are far more flexible than they might at first seem.

Challenge Ratings for Sanity Checks

In most cases, it’s pretty cut and dried as to what the challenge ratings are for sanity checks... but not always. Let’s investigate the matter further.

Creatures

When humans experience the existence of a creature first hand, it can do bad things to their minds. When the primary character first encounters a creature that has the “Unspeakable Visage” special rule, he must immediately make a sanity check. The challenge rating for the check is equal to the creature’s Unspeakable Visage effect number. Great Old Ones and Other Gods inherently have Unspeakable Visage 11-14.

Depending on the circumstances, you may require the character to make another sanity check on subsequent encounters with the creature... if you feel that it would be truly traumatic for him. For example, if the second encounter takes place when the character wakes up late at night from a dead sleep only to see the creature hovering above him, you should probably require another check.

Tomes

Tomes tend to be fonts of forbidden knowledge regarding what the universe is really all about -- knowledge that can eat away at one's sanity. When a character reads at least a decent amount of a tome, he must make a sanity check. Each tome should be given

a *Sanity Check Challenge Rating*, based on how damaging the knowledge within is. That number is the challenge rating used.

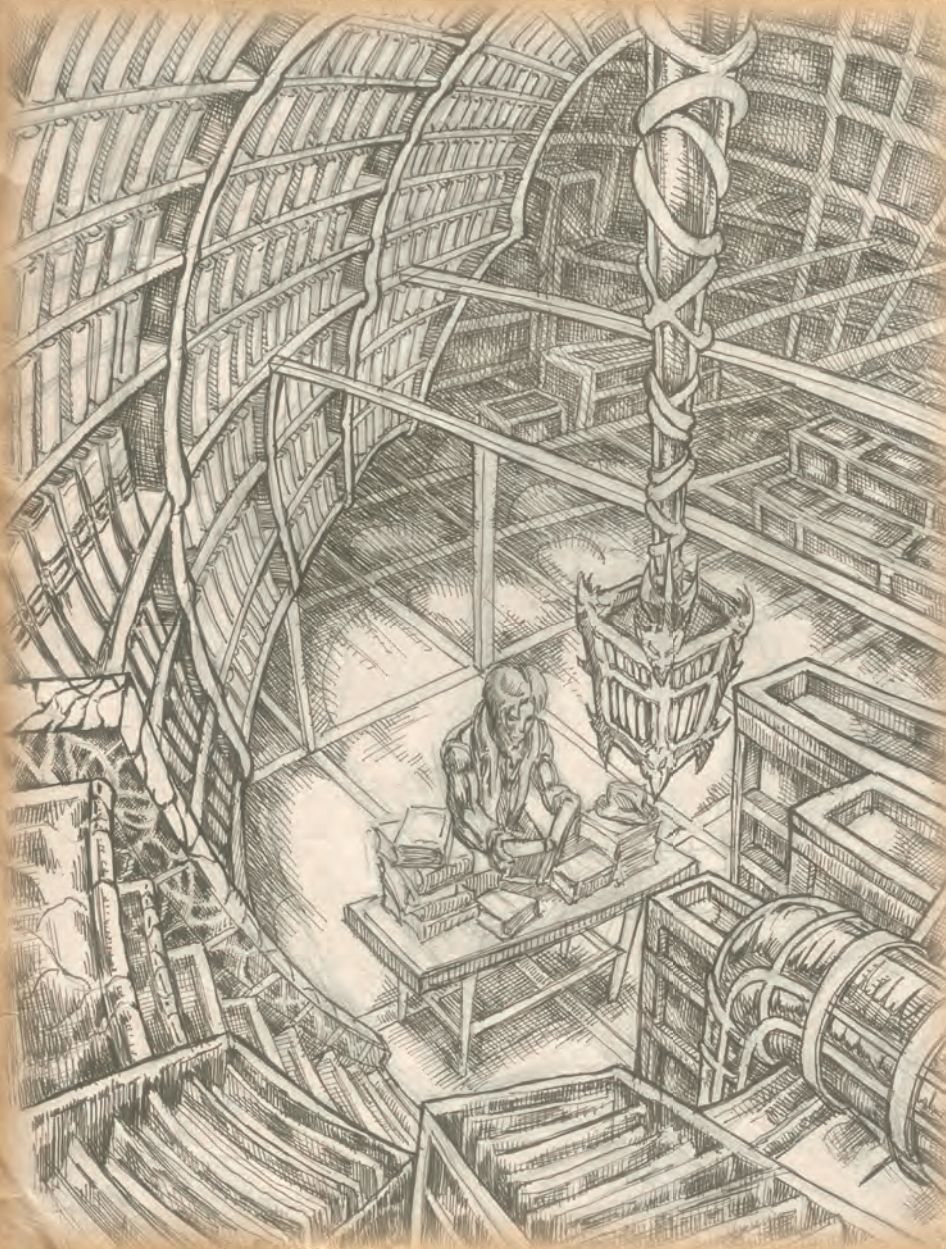
Here is a rough guideline for assigning a Sanity Check Challenge Rating to a tome:

- If the tome has only marginal information about the truths of the universe, it should have a Sanity Check Challenge Rating between 4 and 6.
- If the tome has a decent amount of information about the truths of the universe, it should have a Sanity Check Challenge Rating between 7 and 9.
- If the tome has a lot of information about the truths of the universe, it should have a Sanity Check Challenge Rating between 10 and 12.
- If the tome has an insane amount of information about the truths of the universe, it should have a Sanity Check Challenge Rating between 13 and 15.

Other Sources of Knowledge

It is possible to learn forbidden knowledge from other sources as well -- eyewitnesses, codes/ciphers, riddles, etc. You will need to more or less eyeball this when determining a challenge rating. Again, it should be based on how infernal the knowledge is and also how much of it is learned from the source.

If you're unsure, go with a challenge rating between 7 and 9.





Chapter Six: Lovecraft's Reality

A Chapter for the Narrator

Lovecraft and His World

One question that may have come to your mind at some point is: "Did Lovecraft painstakingly create a detailed alternate world?" The answer is not a simple yes or no, but something in between.

While it is indeed true that, throughout the course of his stories, an alternate version of our world developed, it wasn't something he strove for. It can't be denied that the underlying themes he was so fond of using (namely cosmicism) were maintained betwixt the tales and many names of entities, locales and tomes were peppered judiciously in the pages of his fiction... but he rarely made an attempt to tie everything together into something so all encompassing as a coherent setting.

Lovecraft was more of a name-dropper than anything. If he had the opportunity to toss in reference to Shub-Niggurath or Azathoth, you can bet your bottom dollar that he would jump at the chance. He admittedly found it endlessly amusing to make readers think that he invented a detailed pantheon for his fiction, when, in fact, he had done nothing of the sort. To further the gag, he even encouraged his correspondents to name-drop his entities in their stories as well.

You'll find that Lovecraft was wildly inconsistent with his entities, often giving scraps of information that partly or wholly

contradicts what has already been stated about them. This was his attempt to establish an aura of mystery surrounding them and to heighten his concept that these beings are complexly incomprehensible to the human race.

Lovecraft was also well known for the use of ancient tomes in his stories. The most famous of them, of course, was the *Necronomicon*. As with his vile and loathsome creatures, he enthusiastically approved of his peers inserting his tomes into their own fiction, believing that such allusions built up "a background of evil verisimilitude". This ruse was so successful that readers were attempting to find the *Necronomicon* in bookstores and libraries all across the globe. It wasn't until many years later that various book publishers began releasing books carrying the same title.

When it came to re-using his made-up locations, Lovecraft's motive seemed to be that of convenience rather than any true effort to create the illusion of a shared universe. Miskatonic University and the city of Arkham were probably the two locations that he came back to the most. This should come as no surprise, given that Arkham represents the archetypal New England city. It is an amalgamation of most, if not all, of the traits that he loved about New England civilization.

When it came to characters, Lovecraft wasn't fond of repeating them, aside from mentioning them again in later stories. Curiously, though, he included Randolph Carter (who, like many of his protagonists,

shared most of his own traits) in numerous stories, though the continuity between some of these tales was a bit sketchy.

What we attempt to accomplish in this chapter is to give you everything you need to know about the loose "setting" that Lovecraft wove into his stories over the years. As with the rest of the book, we have omitted anything created by later authors, unless it was a collaboration involving Lovecraft. Furthermore, you will not find an exhaustive list of creatures, tomes, relics and critters. Rather, we give you a small sampling of the ones that Lovecraft used most often. We would rather you follow in Lovecraft's footsteps and create new ones than just rehash the ones he already invented.

Locations

While his tales weren't entirely confined to the New England region, Lovecraft certainly favored it. This makes sense, as he was born and raised there and knew it intimately and thoroughly. Add to that the region's puritanical mystique of witchery and superstition, and you have a recipe for a great backdrop for weird fiction.

In this section, we will present you with a brief overview of some of Lovecraft's most important locales.

Arkham, Massachusetts

"... the ancient, mouldering, and subtly fearsome town... witch-cursed, legend-haunted Arkham, whose huddled, sagging gambrel roofs and crumbling Georgian balustrades brood out over the centuries beside the darkly muttering Miskatonic."

Arkham is the very embodiment of everything that fascinated Lovecraft about New England. It was a convenient locale for him to utilize in just about any story that required a sizable city that was not urban in scope. According to him, Arkham was a fictional analogue to

Salem in terms of atmosphere and style of houses, though he envisioned it as being much more hilly.

Geographically speaking, Arkham is located north of Salem, somewhat near Manchester. It is slightly set away from the Atlantic Ocean, but still connected via the Miskatonic River.

Occupying an impressive tract of land between Church Street and College Street is the campus of the highly prestigious Miskatonic University. The college is one of the premiere universities in the country and is famous for its collection of ancient occult books, including one of the few genuine copies of the Necronomicon as well as Unaussprechlichen Kulten and the Book of Eibon.

Dunwich, Massachusetts

"Across a covered bridge one sees a small village huddled between the stream and the vertical slope of Round Mountain, and wonders at the cluster of rotting gambrel roofs bespeaking an earlier architectural period than that of the neighbouring region. It is not reassuring to see, on a closer glance, that most of the houses are deserted and falling to ruin, and that the broken-steepled church now harbours the one slovenly mercantile establishment of the hamlet. One dreads to trust the tenebrous tunnel of the bridge, yet there is no way to avoid it. Once across, it is hard to prevent the impression of a faint, malign odour about the village street, as of the massed mould and decay of centuries. It is always a relief to get clear of the place, and to follow the narrow road around the base of the hills and across the level country beyond till it rejoins the Aylesbury pike. Afterward one sometimes learns that one has been through Dunwich."

Dunwich is a small, ramshackle town located in Miskatonic River Valley. It is an impoverished place populated largely by uneducated, superstitious folk, many of which are inbred. Those that are inbred are often referred to as belonging to the "decayed" branches of their respective families.



The village has an indescribable unwholesomeness to it that causes outsiders to avoid going near it unless absolutely necessary, though no one can seem to pinpoint exactly why that is the case.

The area surrounding Dunwich is, by and large, very scenic. Numerous gorges and ravines are scattered amongst the region as well, creating some truly inspiring vistas. There is no shortage of thickly wooded hillsides either, many of which have rings of stone columns thought to have been built by Native Americans. Sentinel Hill boasts a sizable table-like rock at its summit instead. One of the most prominent features of the area is the Devil's Hop Yard, a "bleak, blasted hillside where no tree, shrub, or grass-blade will grow."

Innsmouth, Massachusetts

"And why is everybody so down on Innsmouth? Well, young fellow, you mustn't take too much stock in what people around here say. They're hard to get started, but once they do get started they never let up. They've been telling things about Innsmouth—whispering 'em, mostly—for the last hundred years, I guess, and I gather they're more scared than anything else."

At the mouth of the Manuxet lies the coastal town of Innsmouth, a dreary, shabby berg that was once a thriving port city, but is now a mere shadow of its former self. It is largely cut off from the nearby cities by tangled marshes and winding creeks, causing many people to forget that it even exists. The fact that it doesn't even appear on maps is a testament to that.

The entire town is run down and decaying, but it appears to get progressively worse the closer one travels toward the waterfront.

About a mile out into the ocean is a low, black, ragged reef known as Devil's Reef. Needless to say, it is the subject of much legendry. Folks have claimed to see "a whole legion of devils" on its uneven surface, darting in and out of caves near the top.

But what is truly unsettling about Innsmouth isn't so much the town itself... it's the town's denizens. They have an unusual manner and appearance that is described thusly: "Some of 'em have queer narrow heads with flat noses and bulgy, stary eyes that never seem to shut, and their skin ain't quite right. Rough and scabby, and the sides of their necks are all shriveled or creased up." This is often referred to as "the Innsmouth look".

The Esoteric Order of Dagon is the predominant religion in Innsmouth, though it's concealed as more of a Masonic organization than an actual religion. Through the Order, the town has long ago entered into a contract with the Deep Ones, a race of humanoids that strongly resemble both fish and frogs. The terms

of the contract are simple: the Deep Ones provide bountiful fish and gold in exchange for periodic human sacrifices. Members of the Order must take three oaths. The first is an oath of secrecy. The second is an oath of loyalty. The third is an oath to marry and mate with a Deep One. It is the last oath that is responsible for the deformities and mutations that plague the populace. These hybrids slowly become more and more fish/frog-like until they become full-fledged Deep Ones and swim out into the ocean, where they live in pseudo immortality.

Tomes

The mental imagery of someone pouring over an ancient leather-bound book with tattered, yellowed pages filled with archaic spells, scratchy illustrations and information about indescribable beings from other worlds is truly evocative of Lovecraftian horror. Such tomes do exist in the world of Lovecraft and each one contains forbidden knowledge the likes of which the human mind has no business learning. But we are curious creatures that thirst for knowledge, especially knowledge of an arcane nature.

By and large, Lovecraft used tomes as a quick and easy means to get secret, arcane information into the hands of the

protagonist. Other times, though, they served as important plot devices, such as when Dr. Armitage used an incantation from a tome to destroy the monstrosity in "The Dunwich Horror". Regardless of their usage within context of his tales, he actually gave very little information about them, usually reducing them to a mere name. There are a few exceptions, most notably the *Necronomicon* (of which he actually devised a complete history), but he preferred to keep them vague and enigmatic. He once stated, "... one can never *produce* anything even a tenth as terrible and impressive as one can awesomely *hint* about. If anyone were to try to *write* the *Necronomicon*, it would disappoint all those who have shuddered at cryptic references to it."

So, what does a tome contain? Whatever you *want* it to contain. Incantations, formulas, esoteric information and obscure symbols – if you need something to be in a tome, it's in there.

In this section, we will present you with a brief overview of some of the most notorious tomes from Lovecraft's stories.

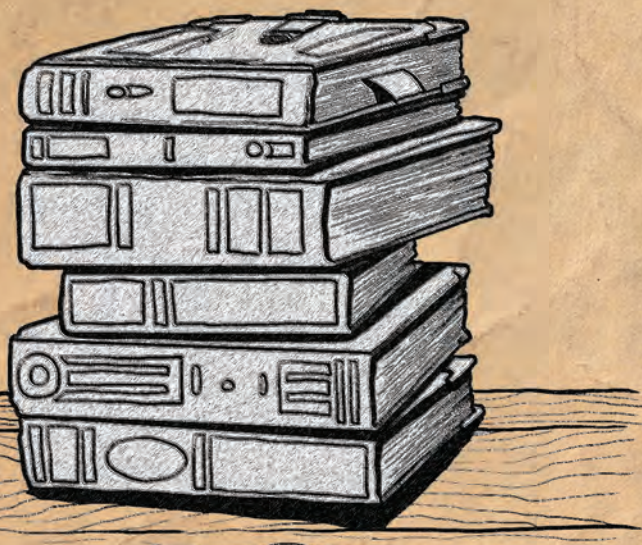
The Book of Eibon

The Book of Eibon is an impressively large text of cryptic knowledge that was written by a Hyperborean wizard named Eibon. It contained a detailed account of Eibon's exploits, his veneration rituals of Zhothaquaah and his magical formulae – including ones used for banishing various otherworldly monstrosities.

Only fragments of the original are believed to still exist, though there are translations in English, French (*Livre d'Eibon*) and Latin (*Liber Ivonis*).

Cultes des Goules

The Cultes des Goules (or Cults of Ghouls) is a book of black magic penned by François-Honoré Balfour in 1702. After being published in France, the church denounced it as heresy. Very few copies are known to



exist. One copy was maintained for 91 years by the Church of Starry Wisdom, but was taken by an artist named Robert Blake. After Blake's demise in 1935, Dr. Ambrose Dexter placed it in his own personal library.

The Necronomicon

*That is not dead which can eternal lie.
And with strange aeons even death may die.*

Written by the "Mad Arab" Abdul Alhazred in 730 A.D., the book (which was originally titled *Al Azif*) contains some of the most hideous secrets imaginable. Alhazred resided in Damascus, though he "is said to have been seized by an invisible monster in broad daylight and devoured horribly before a large number of fright-frozen witnesses" in 738 A.D. Theodorus Philetas translated the *Al Azif* into Greek, giving it the name "Necronomicon". A Latin translation was penned by Olaus Wormius in 1228. Both the Greek and Latin versions were banned by Pope Gregory IX in 1232. According to Wormius, the Arabic version was lost by that point in time. Dr. John Dee translated it into English, but only fragments of it still exist.

The Pnakotic Manuscripts/Fragments

Supposedly written before the appearance of mankind, these texts are named after the city of Pnakotus, the primordial metropolis constructed by the Great Race of Yith. It contains descriptions of numerous entities/creatures as well as rituals of varying complexity.

Great Old Ones

These extraterrestrial monstrosities are ancient entities of immense power and cyclopean size. While they apparently possess a physical shape, they are from beyond our space-time continuum and thus are not based on matter in our definition of the concept. Still, their forms are similar enough to those of true matter that they appear to be material in nature.

The Great Old Ones are imprisoned at the present time -- within the earth, beneath the oceans, in distant planetary systems or even in other dimensions altogether. The reason for their imprisonment is not known, though various theories have been bandied about for a very long time. These entities impatiently await their release and often manipulate human cultists into attempting to free them.

One theory suggests that the Great Old Ones are intentionally dormant, resting in some kind of hibernation for the length of an unknown-to-humans cosmic cycle, much like animals hibernate during the winter months. The theory holds that they will awaken when the planets are in a certain alignment... or as they say, "when the stars are right."

Even as they slumber, the Great Old Ones use their dark influence to taint a small portion of the human race. Those touched by them in this way tend to become worshipers, servants or something even more sinister.

The truth is that player characters in your collective tales should not encounter any of the Great Old Ones directly. They are best used as name-drops or as masterminds behind the scenes of various dark conspiracies and plots. With one exception (Nyarlathotep), these entities view us in much the same way that we view ants. We are insignificant and they barely even notice us. The human race can make pretty effective tools to them on occasion though.

What follows are two of the more iconic Great Old Ones from Lovecraft's fiction.

Cthulhu

"If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary

wings... It represented a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind. This thing, which seemed instinct with a fearsome and unnatural malignancy, was of a somewhat bloated corpulence..."

Cthulhu is the most well known of the Great Old Ones, but he isn't the most powerful, nor is he at the center of Lovecraft's pseudomythology. He presently lies dead but dreaming in the sunken city of R'lyeh, located somewhere in the southeast Pacific Ocean. When the stars are right, the city will rise from the ocean floor and Cthulhu will lay waste to the earth and all its inhabitants.

Yig

"Yig was a great god. He was bad medicine. He did not forget things. In the autumn his children were hungry and wild, and Yig was hungry and wild, too. All the tribes made medicine against Yig when the corn harvest came. They gave him some corn, and danced in proper regalia to the sound of whistle, rattle, and drum. They kept the drums pounding to drive Yig away, and called down the aid of Tiráwa, whose children men are, even as the snakes are Yig's children."

Yig is the serpent god who is worshipped by the central-plains tribes of Native Americans. He appears as a large snake-like humanoid, though he can take any form should he choose to. What is certain is that he's not entirely evil and was "and was usually quite well-disposed toward those who gave proper respect to him and his children, the serpents; but in the autumn he became abnormally ravenous, and had to be driven away by means of suitable rites".

The Other Gods

More powerful and cosmic in scope than even the Great Old Ones, the Other Gods are ruled by the "Blind Idiot God" Azathoth at the center of ultimate Chaos and are reviled by nearly everyone that knows about them, for they truly are vile and unknowable entities whose motivations only they can fathom.

Below is a list of the most iconic Other Gods from Lovecraft's fiction.

Azathoth

"...that last amorphous blight of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the centre of all infinity—the boundless daemon-sultan Azathoth, whose name no lips dare speak aloud, and who gnaws hungrily in inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond time amidst the muffled, maddening beating of vile drums and the thin, monotonous whine of accursed flutes; to which detestable pounding and piping dance slowly, awkwardly, and absurdly the gigantic ultimate gods, the blind, voiceless, tenebrous, mindless Other Gods whose soul and messenger is the crawling chaos Nyarlathotep."

Although blind and mindless, Azathoth possesses immense, and perhaps infinite, power. He lords over his fellow Other Gods from beyond normal time and space, at the center of the universe. It is there that he sits upon a black throne in a dimly lit chamber, surrounded by the "maddening beating of vile drums and the thin, monotonous whine of accursed flutes."

Nyarlathotep

"And it was then that Nyarlathotep came out of Egypt. Who he was, none could tell, but he was of the old native blood and looked like a Pharaoh. The fellahin knelt when they saw him, yet could not say why. He said he had risen up out of the blackness of twenty-seven centuries, and that he had heard messages from places not on this planet. Into the lands

of civilisation came Nyarlathotep, swarthy, slender, and sinister, always buying strange instruments of glass and metal and combining them into instruments yet stranger. He spoke much of the sciences—of electricity and psychology—and gave exhibitions of power which sent his spectators away speechless, yet which swelled his fame to exceeding magnitude. Men advised one another to see Nyarlathotep, and shuddered. And where Nyarlathotep went, rest vanished; for the small hours were rent with the screams of a nightmare.”

Nyarlathotep, often known as the Crawling Chaos, is the only Outer God with a personality. And unlike the others, who have no interest in humans at all, Nyarlathotep seems to be quite taken by them, often walking amongst their masses in various guises and forms, of which he supposedly has more than a thousand.

This detestable entity is manipulative, clever and deceptive, delighting in acts of cruelty and causing madness at every turn, even among those who worship him. Above all else, though, he enacts the will of his fellow Other Gods and functions as their messenger. He is also a servant of Azathoth, whose wishes he immediately fulfills.

Nyarlathotep doesn't have game stats himself. However, his various forms that interact with humanity should be stat'd out as needed. In most cases, these manifestations should be extremely potent.

Shub-Niggurath

“One squat, black temple of Tsathoggua was encountered, but it had been turned into a shrine of Shub-Niggurath, the All-Mother and wife of the Not-to-Be-Named-One. This deity was a kind of sophisticated Astarte, and her worship struck the pious Catholic as supremely obnoxious.”

Shub-Niggurath is a cloudy mass that roils and festers as it floats about. She is likely the most-worshipped being in the world,

and is even worshipped by non-human species, such as the Mi-Go. Often referred to as the “The Black Goat of the Woods with a Thousand Young”, she can give birth to Dark Young, horrifying, pitch-black monstrosities the size of a tree. These creatures act as proxies for Shub-Niggurath, accepting sacrifices and presiding over rituals.

Yog-Sothoth

“Yog-Sothoth knows the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the key and guardian of the gate. Past, present, future, all are one in Yog-Sothoth. He knows where the Old Ones broke through of old, and where They shall break through again. He knows where They have trod earth's fields, and where They still tread them, and why no one can behold Them as They tread.”

Yog-Sothoth appears to be an ever-shifting conglomeration of glowing spheres. He is one with all of time and space, and he knows all and sees all... yet he supposedly remains inexplicably locked out of our universe.

Creatures

Our reality consists of far more than just the unfathomable Great Old Ones and Other Gods. It is laden with other beasts, monsters and entities as well. This section presents you with a selection of Lovecraft's signature creatures, complete with game stats. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list. The idea is to give you some staples to work with and use as inspiration for creating your own creatures.

Byakhee

“There flapped rhythmically a horde of tame, trained, hybrid winged things ... not altogether crows, nor moles, nor buzzards, nor ants, nor decomposed human beings, but something I cannot and must not recall.”

Byakhees are interstellar beings that could best be described as a hybrid of a bat, a bird

and an insect. They are vaguely humanoid beasts with an insect-like segmented bodies, membranous bat wings and avian-esque legs. They can be summoned from outer space (where they dwell) in an expedient manner; so expedient, in fact, that it appears to be a form of teleportation.

Body 9: Athletics 1, Fighting 2, Strength 2, Toughness 1

Mind 6: Perception 2

Soul 6: Resolve 1

Special Rules: Flight, Innate Attack 2 (claws), Innate Attack 1 (bite), Drain (Innate Attack – Bite; Body), Interstellar Travel, Physical Protection 2 (rough skin and fur), Unspeakable Visage 6

Deep Ones

"I think their predominant colour was a greyish-green, though they had white bellies. They were mostly shiny and slippery, but the ridges of their backs were scaly. Their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid, while their heads were the heads of fish, with prodigious bulging eyes that never closed. At the sides of their necks were palpitating gills, and their long paws were webbed. They hopped irregularly, sometimes on two legs and sometimes on four. I was somehow glad that they had no more than four limbs. Their croaking, baying voices, clearly used for articulate speech, held all the dark shades of expression which their staring faces lacked."

These fish/frog humanoids dwell in cave cities located on the ocean floor, though they can remain on land for extended periods of time. It is said that Deep Ones never die of natural causes, effectively making them immortal. They are capable of mating with humans, resulting in offspring that slowly develop the "Innsmouth Look" (narrow heads, bulging eyes

and flat noses). Eventually, these offspring will transform into full-blown Deep Ones and return to the sea.

Deep Ones are deceptively intelligent, boasting their own societies all over the world. They worship Cthulhu, Father Dagon and Mother Hydra (the latter two of which are star-spawn of Cthulhu).

Body 7: Athletics 2, Fighting 1, Stealth 1, Strength 2, Toughness 1

Mind 6: Ingenuity 1, Perception 1

Soul 5: Resolve 1

Special Rules: Aquatic (limited), Innate Attack 2 (claws), Innate Attack 1 (spear), Physical Protection 1 (rubbery, scaly skin), Unspeakable Visage 5

Ghouls

"It was a... nameless blasphemy with glaring red eyes, and it held in bony claws a thing that had been a man, gnawing at the head as a child nibbles at a stick of candy. Its position was a kind of crouch, and as one looked one felt that at any moment it might drop its present prey and seek a juicier morsel. But damn it all, it wasn't even the fiendish subject that made it such an immortal fountain-head of all panic—not that, nor the dog face with its pointed ears, bloodshot eyes, flat nose, and



drooling lips. It wasn't the scaly claws nor the mould-caked body nor the half-hooved feet—none of these, though any one of them might well have driven an excitable man to madness."

Inhabiting vast networks of subterranean tunnels and crypts, these canine-like humanoids eat carrion for sustenance, often raiding cemeteries for this purpose. Ghouls are generally non-confrontational creatures, preferring to feed on the already dead to killing the food themselves. They communicate with one another through a series of verbal "meeps" and gibbers known as Ghoul Speech or Pnathic.

Ghouls are not exclusive to our plane of existence. By means of special tunnels, they can travel between the waking world and the dreamlands. In fact, the latter is the epicenter of ghoul activity.

Body 5: Athletics 4, Fighting 1, Reflexes 3, Stealth 5, Strength 4, Toughness 2

Mind 6: Ingenuity 2, Perception 2

Soul 6: Resolve 1

Special Rules: Burrowing, Dark Vision, Dimensional Travel (only via underground tunnels; can only travel between the waking world and the dreamlands), Innate Attack 1 (teeth and claws), Unspeakable Visage 6

Mi-Go

"They were pinkish things about five feet long; with crustaceous bodies bearing vast pairs of dorsal fins or membraneous wings and several sets of articulated limbs, and with a sort of convoluted ellipsoid, covered with multitudes of very short antennae, where a head would ordinarily be.... As it was, nearly all the rumours had several points in common; averring that the creatures were a sort of huge, light-red crab with many pairs of legs and with two great bat-like wings in the middle of their back. They sometimes walked on all their legs, and sometimes on the hindmost pair only, using the others to convey large objects of indeterminate nature. On one occasion they were spied in considerable

numbers, a detachment of them wading along a shallow woodland watercourse three abreast in evidently disciplined formation. Once a specimen was seen flying—launching itself from the top of a bald, lonely hill at night and vanishing in the sky after its great flapping wings had been silhouetted an instant against the full moon."

Despite being known as "Fungi From Yuggoth", these alien creatures resemble crustaceans more than true fungi. As their moniker suggests, they come from the planet Yuggoth (the dwarf planet humans refer to as Pluto), or at least that's where their closest outpost is situated. They visit earth to secretly mine its mineral resources, usually in the remotest locations possible.

Aside from their odd, otherworldly appearances, the Mi-Go's bodies have two other fascinating aspects. First of all, they cannot be properly photographed – they end up looking like misshapen blurs. Second of all, their corpses disintegrate within hours of their death.



The Mi-Go are highly intelligent and have mastered various fields of science. They are particularly adept at surgery, performing amazing feats such as extensively modify their own bodies and remove human brains while keeping both body and brain alive. This enables them to transport humans back to Yuggoth, as the brains can see and communicate when placed in special canister-like containers.

As strange as these aliens are, they have learned to mimic human languages, albeit with unnatural buzzing noises. They communicate amongst themselves by quickly shifting the colors of their brain-like heads. At longer distances, they project multicolored beams of light.

Mi-Go primarily worship Shub-Niggurath and Nyarlathotep, but have been known to perform rites to other entities as well.

Body 6: Athletics 2, Coordination 2, Fighting 1, Stealth 3, Strength 2, Toughness 1

Mind 8: Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (All Sciences) 3, Knowledge (Surgery) 3, Languages (All Human Languages) 2, Perception 1

Soul 6: Guile 1, Persuasion 2, Resolve 2

Special Rules: Dark Influence 6 (hour), Flight (-4), Innate Attack 1 (pincer talons), Interstellar Travel, Unspeakable Visage 7

Shoggoths

"We were on the track ahead as the nightmare plastic column of foetid black iridescence oozed tightly onward through its fifteen-foot sinus; gathering unholy speed and driving before it a spiral, re-thickening cloud of the pallid abyss-vapour. It was a terrible, indescribable thing vaster than any subway train—a shapeless congeries of protoplasmic bubbles, faintly self-luminous, and with myriads of temporary eyes forming and unforming as pustules of greenish light all over the tunnel-filling front that bore down upon us, crushing the frantic penguins and slithering over

the glistening floor that it and its kind had swept so evilly free of all litter."

A shoggoth is a cyclopean, oozing, multi-cellular mass of protoplasm that looks somewhat like an amoeba. Although their size shifts with their ever-changing body, shoggoths, on average, measure about fifteen feet across when assuming a mostly spherical shape. Much larger ones supposedly exist as well.

Although quite intelligent, shoggoths tend to rely on their size and bulk to solve problems. When not being controlled by another race, these monstrosities are aggressive, usually attacking by forming appendages, engulfing their prey and sucking them apart.

Shoggoths primarily live underwater, their amorphous nature making them perfectly suited for such environs. Over time, they adapted to living on land and can now do so just as easily as they can live undersea.

Body 9: Fighting 2, Strength 5, Toughness 4

Mind 5: Ingenuity 2, Perception 4

Soul 6: Resolve 2

Special Rules: Aquatic (unlimited), Dark Vision, Immunity to Cold, Immunity to Blindness, Innate Attack 3 (engulf and rend), Malleable, Monstrous, Physical Protection 4 (amorphous body), Resilience (fire), Unspeakable Visage 9



Chapter Seven: "The Cursed House"

A Chapter for the Narrator

A Tale of Terror

Since 1812, every resident of the Hindley House has come up vanishing, never to be seen again. When the primary character digs deeper into the mystery, it quickly becomes apparent that something of the most sinister nature is afoot.

This chapter offers a full-length tale for you to run for your player. It is perfect for your first foray into narrating the *Macabre Tales* game, as it features many of the iconic elements Lovecraft was so fond of utilizing in his fiction. It's also perfect for new players and those who aren't that familiar with Lovecraft's stories.

These tales are perfect for your first three forays into the world of *Macabre Tales*. We strongly suggest using one of them when introducing a new player to the game.

The Summary

This section gives you the rundown of what is really going on in this tale. The player and his primary character must find all this out through old fashion investigation.

A man of wealth named Solomon Hindley constructed the Hindley House five miles southwest of Arkham in 1765. His wife was in poor health, so he desired a one-story structure, ensuring that she wouldn't have to contend with traversing any stairs. This is of little consequence to later events, however,

as nothing sinister was afoot at that point in time.

In 1807, a veteran of the Revolutionary War named Malibus Vanlund, along with his wife and six children, moved into the house. His brother moved to Arkham around the same time. A few months later, Malibus stumbled across something peculiar deep in the woods: a group of Mi-Go, gathering minerals. A deal was made between him and the aliens. He would protect the Mi-Go, allow them to mine his land indefinitely and provide sustenance for them while they were on earth... in return for immortality for him and his family.

The way to immortality was for the aliens to mate with the family, creating offspring that were less and less human with each passing generation. Malibus dug a very hidden cavern beneath the Hindley House, using it as a place for the family to reside in secrecy and for the hybrid eggs to hatch.

As mentioned, the Mi-Go also require sustenance. To these ends, Malibus and his family devised a liquid chemical that can be poured or splashed on humans to reduce them to a black, tar-like puddle of ooze. The ooze will dissipate in the matter of minutes unless stored in an airtight environment.

Meanwhile, Malibus' brother, Thaddeus, watched as his family began its descent into depravity. Eventually, he ceased any association with them and began his own family. Thaddeus would go on to die of natural causes many years later, but his children had children and so on. Still, he made sure to warn them of his "other branch" of his family.

On the other hand, Malibus is still alive to this very day. He and his family are not entirely human now, as they have degenerated into something vastly more hideous and awful. They remain hidden away in their cavernous dwelling, though they have maintained contact with key individuals throughout Arkham. These individuals help lure people to the Hindley House to be used as foodstuffs for the Mi-Go.

Their efforts have not been without interference, however. One of Thaddeus' descendents, a man by the name of Felix Vanlund, has devoted his life to thwarting the twisted deeds of his vile relatives. He continues in his efforts to this day.

The current year is 1930.

The Three Acts

The bulk of this tale is divided up into the Three Act format for your convenience.

Act One

A man named Johansen K. Walsh has recently purchased the old Hindley House, which is located five miles southwest of Arkham. His intention was to restore it and sale it for a sizeable profit. Not being from around the Arkham area, however, he had no idea that the locals wouldn't even go near the house (let alone purchase it) because it's considered to be cursed.

Frustrated that he spent money on a house that can't be readily sold, Walsh is looking for someone who can find out why it's supposedly cursed and somehow prove that it's not. That's where the primary character comes into the picture. He approaches him about assisting in clearing things up, offering eight hundred dollars for his troubles. Obviously, this tale works best for a character who is a detective or who has knowledge of history, science or matters of the occult. If the primary character doesn't

meet any of those requirements, you'll have to devise a way to draw him into the tale in an investigative role.

He offers them three pieces of information he gleaned from the people he talked to about purchasing the house from him:

- A kindly old drugstore owner named Morton Halliger mentioned that there's simply no way that anyone in their right mind would ever buy the house after what happened there. He wouldn't grant more information.
- One young man named Sol Brecken mentioned that he went out to the house on a dare a few years ago and saw strange lights in the window. He managed to get as far as the porch before being unnerved by strange, buzzing noises coming from within the house.
- One old lady, whose name he does not know, told him that the house's history should be well documented at the Joseph L. Stach Library.

Take some time to role-play the conversation between the primary character and Walsh. If you truncate it, the whole scene will seem half-cocked. And don't just present the three parcels of information to the player like a grocery list; that would sound so very contrived. Blend them into the conversation as seamlessly as possible. This is your chance to establish a creepy tone for the tale. Through the mouth of Walsh, play up how fearful the locals are of the Hindley House. Try to build a sense of apprehension and dread, so that when the character finally sees the place, it will be a more dramatic experience. By the time Act One has concluded, the house should be established as a place that no sane person would ever visit. The player should be left wanting to learn more about it.

Johansen K. Walsh

Body 5: Athletics 1, Reflexes 1, Vehicles (Automobile) 1

Mind 5: Ingenuity 1, Knowledge (Real Estate) 3, Perception 1

Soul 5: Guile 2, Persuasion 2, Resolve 1

Act Two

Act One established several leads for the primary character to follow up on in Act Two: Morton Halliger, Sol Brecken and the Josheph L. Stach Library. There is also a chance that the player will want to go directly to the Hindley House. Or he might come up with something entirely different. All these things should be allowed. Plus, other leads could pop up while following up on the already-presented leads.

The investigative element is a very important aspect of *Macabre Tales* and it can be very enjoyable if you bring the scenes to life with interesting descriptions, solid portrayals of supporting characters and intriguing clues. So, make sure to keep the investigation lively and fun, so that this part of the game is an entertaining as the more horrific part.

Let's consider the most likely leads, shall we?

Morton Halliger

This affable old fellow can usually be found at Halliger's Drugs, the family business he inherited from his father. He's in his mid to late sixties and has snow-white hair, a droopy mustache and a big, toothy smile.

When the character first enters, he will greet them in a friendly manner and it's obviously genuine. When they ask about the Halliger House, his demeanor changes somewhat. He doesn't become unfriendly, but seems a little suspicious, mentioning that a rather pushy fellow (Walsh, no doubt) was questioning him a couple days ago. He wonders why the house has suddenly started piquing people's interest again.

The character will have to convince him to give them more information than he gave Walsh. Ideally, this will be an opposed Soul [Persuasion] (Soul; Resolve) check. The player may decide to manipulate him or threaten him, but he's not such an easy mark for such tactics as one might think. If they attempt one of these two approaches, they'll need

to use Guile or Intimidation, respectively, instead of Persuasion. Furthermore, the challenge rating should be increased by 2, as he doesn't take kindly to this manner of treatment.

If the check is successful, he will reveal the following information:

- He was born in 1864 and he was always warned by his parents not to go near the house because it had a curse on it.
- When he was nine years old, a family vanished from the house and, to his knowledge, they were never seen again.
- The house was empty until around 1900 or so, when a doctor by the name of William Schmelling bought it. Two years later, he vanished too.
- Schmelling had a brother named Helmut Schmelling who continued to look for him long after the authorities had given up. He thinks Helmut is still alive and living in Arkham. He doesn't know where, though.
- In 1918, a young couple (whose names escape Halliger) purchased the house, but within a few months, they disappeared too. No one has lived there since and it has fallen into a state of disrepair.

Morton Halliger

Body 3: Coordination 2, Vehicles (Automobiles) 2

Mind 5: Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Drugs) 3, Perception 3, Research 2

Soul 5: Luck 1, Persuasion 1, Resolve 2

Sol Brecken

Finding Sol Brecken will prove to be a relatively tricky affair. It will require a successful extended Mind [Ingenuity] (6) check. The time it takes (in hours) is equal to the low side of a random domino. A blank counts as a half-hour. When they do find him, he's hanging out with four of his friends in an empty, weed-choked lot.

Sol is a young man of twenty. His brown, somewhat curly hair is slicked back, but is rather shaggy in front, causing much of it to fall down into his eyes. He has big, brown eyes and no stubble on his face. His clothes are slightly ill fitting. When approached, Sol and his pals seem on guard, as if ready to pull knives if necessary. But once the character states his reason for being there, they loosen up and Sol suggests that they go talk away from his pals.

Despite being something of a hoodlum, Sol is a friendly guy. He freely gives out all the information he has, which is as follows:

- As far back as he can remember, he was told that the Hindley House had some kind of curse. He remembers when the young couple (whose names he says were James and Marie Wellington) disappeared in 1918. He was eight years old at the time, but recalls it vividly, because the whole town went into a panic that lasted months.
- Sol's mother, who passed away a few years back, was a friend of Dr. Schmelling before he vanished in 1902. He said that in the months leading up to his disappearance, the doctor complained of a strange buzzing noise coming from the cellar on occasion, but when he checked it out, he couldn't find the source.
- Three years ago, he was dared to go inside the house by his buddies. He saw strange

lights in the windows, almost like softly glowing candles. When he neared the porch, however, he heard buzzing noises coming from inside. At first, he wasn't bothered by it... until he started realizing that they weren't random buzzing sounds... but were actually forming words! That's when he panicked and ran away. If the primary character asks what the buzzing voices said, he'll tell them that it sounded like it was chanting something. He recalls a word that was used repeatedly: Shub-Niggurath.

Sol Brecken

Body 6: Athletics 1, Fighting 2, Reflexes 1, Strength 1, Toughness 2, Vehicles (Automobiles) 1

Mind 4: Ingenuity 1, Perception 1

Soul 5: Guile 1, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 1, Resolve 2

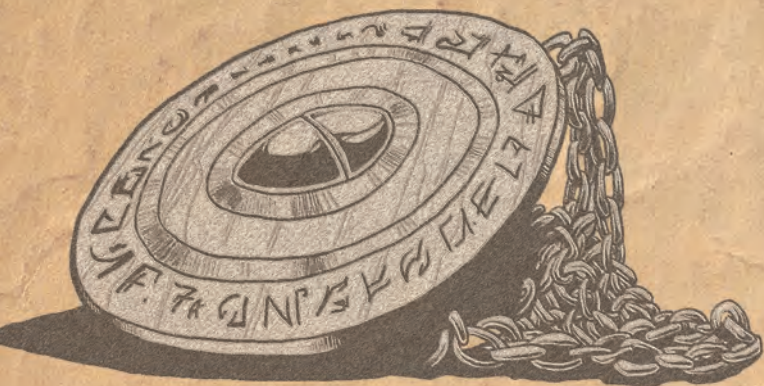
Joseph L. Stach Library

This stately library is housed in a very old but well-maintained building in central Arkham. It's three stories tall and is of a Colonial design, complete with four large, monolithic columns. Surprisingly, there aren't very many patrons today.

As the primary character walks up the wide steps that lead up to the building, he sees a peculiar man in his early fifties start to come out the library door. But when he sees the character, he acts nervous, gets an odd look on his face and then suspiciously goes back inside. He has brown (but graying hair) and a very long, square-ish shaped face and large nose. He wears a long brown coat and a nice hat.

By the time the character gets inside the library, the man is gone. Further attempts to find him will fail. You can allow the player to make a Mind [Perception] check, but it will not work. At this point, he is merely a red herring.

In truth, the man's name is Felix Vanlund, a descendant of the family that disappeared in 1812. We'll learn more about them a bit



later. The player will probably suspect that the guy is up to no good, but this is far from the truth. He knows that the character has been asking around about the Hindley House and doesn't want anyone else to end up "vanishing"... so he will try to sabotage the investigation to keep the character from going to the house.

The librarian is a small-framed woman in her early forties with mousy brown hair and a crooked, but pleasant, smile. She'll prove to be quite helpful should the primary character need information on where things are situated in the library.

The "Rare Books" Section

If the character already visited Sol Brecken, he may want to investigate the name "Shub-Niggurath". The only place this can be found is in the "rare books" section, which is actually a separated room on the dusty, little-used third floor. In order to gain access to the room, the librarian will have to let them in via a key, as it's always kept locked.

The room itself (which is roughly twenty feet wide and 15 feet deep) is even dustier than the rest of the third floor. Three of the walls are lined with bookshelves and there are two freestanding bookshelves as well.

A successful Mind [Research] (6) check taking a number of hours equal to the low side of a random domino (a blank indicates a half hour) will turn up a book called *Libri of Cosmic Fortuna*. Should the character read much of the text (which has been translated from Latin to English), he gains +.5 to his "Knowledge (Forbidden Truths)" rating and must make a sanity check with a challenge rating of 7.

The only relevant passage, though, is the following:

"Throughout all known time and space, there exists species that, wholly or in part, worship the deity of perverse fertility – Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat of the Woods

with a Thousand Young. From her cloudy, tentacle laden mass comes her blackened young, acting as her proxies in all things. Many humans do her bidding as do others, such as the Fungi from Yuggoth and the Yug-Soth."

After reading this, the player may seek to obtain information about the Fungi from Yuggoth and the Yug-Soth. A successful Mind [Research] (6) check taking a number of hours equal to the low side of a random domino (a blank indicates a half hour) will turn up a book called *Blaspheme Libra*. Should the character read much of the text (all in English), he gains +.5 to his "Knowledge (Forbidden Truths)" rating and must make a sanity check with a challenge rating of 7.

There is nothing to be found regarding the Yug-Soth, though the following passage about the Fungi from Yuggoth is included:

"Spread all among the stars and multiverses, there exists a race of insectoid beings called the Mi-Go or, as they are sometimes known, the Fungi from Yuggoth. They come to earth to collect minerals that cannot be found on their own worlds, often utilizing human servitors to aid them."

At some point, if the character has a Perfunctory Perception of 6 or higher, he will hear a curious noise outside the door. It's actually Felix Vanlund propping a chair under the exterior doorknob in an attempt to trap the character in the room. A Body [Strength] (9) will allow the character to break through or dislodge the chair. The player may concoct another method of dealing with the situation as well. Either way, Vanlund is long gone by the time the character can release himself.

The "Newspaper" Section

The local newspapers are on file here, though many of the older ones are absent. The section is located in the back of the first floor, occupying an area about thirty feet wide by forty feet deep.

Searching the issues will require successful extended Mind [Research] (7) checks, and each check will take a number of minutes equal to the sum of both sides of a random domino multiplied by 2. Each successful check will reveal a new bit of information, starting with the first one and moving down the list below (you can rearrange the order if you wish):

- On April 25th, 1812, a veteran of the Revolutionary War named Malibus Vanlund and his family (all residents at the Hindley House) was reported missing after Malibus' brother entered the house and found "suspicious evidence" indicating that they had vanished. The "suspicious evidence" is not explained in the article. According to the reporter, the local constables were launching an investigation. Two weeks later, the case was declared closed, but still unsolved.

- On October 23rd, 1860, it was reported that a widower named Bartholomew Rueben and his two children were last seen by friends at a local festival. He was said to be "of a sour disposition" because of "perplexities with his residence", which happened to be the Hindley House. An investigation update appeared twenty days later, stating: "The unexplained disappearance of Mr. Bartholomew E. Rueben and his children has yet to be solved, but rest assured, the constabulary will not cease the search until they have no options remaining."

- On October 26th, 1873, an article states that on the previous night, the then-current resident of the Hindley House, small-time railroad tycoon Rayburn Clancy and his wife, Amelia, vanished without a trace. As Rayburn was frequently known to be cruel to Amelia, the authorities at first suspected that he killed her, disposed of her corpse and fled the country. Five days later, this theory was ruled out entirely. Further investigation revealed that Rayburn's friends feared for his sanity ever since he moved into the house, as he was claiming to see strange insect-like creatures flying into and out of the nearby woods.

- On April 24th, 1902, general physician Dr. William Schmelling was reported missing after not coming to work for two days. A co-worker traveled to his house (the Hindley House) to check on him, only to find him missing. His brother, Helmut, was quoted as saying, "As long as I breathe, I will spend my days and nights turning over every rock and looking in every nook and cranny until I find my beloved brother."

- On October 27th, 1918, James and Marie Wellington, a young couple originally from upstate New York, disappeared from the Hindley House, where they were living. Both were highly thought of by the locals, primarily because they donated a copious amount of money to various fundraisers and charitable organizations in the area. The only clue left behind was James' pair of spectacles, found in the kitchen, near the door to the storage room.

By the time the character finishes up at the library, it's almost closing time. If it was actually earlier in the day when the character arrived, it's closing because of an impending storm of great magnitude (a common practice for businesses in that era). The point is that there should be no one else in the library, aside from the primary character. When he sees the librarian's desk, he realizes that she's gone, leaving behind her purse and automobile keys. Should he look in her purse, he'll find her driver's license, which reveals that her name is Elizabeth Monsigore and that she resides at 1147 E. Postam Avenue (attempts to locate her there come up short). They also find a hastily scrawled note that reads as follows: "Beth, it is crucial for you to direct more specimens to the house. Surely, some people ask about the place from time to time. They need more raw materials and we cannot provide that without more specimens. We must make haste for the hatching." The note is signed "Malibus".

If the character looks around, he finds that the back door is ajar. Outside, lies the

librarian's corpse, a knife protruding from her abdomen. This is Felix's doings. He has learned that the woman was a minion of Malibus and acted accordingly and vanished into the night before anyone could find him.

The character may contact the police, but they'll do little more than question him and promise to get to the bottom of the murder. It's obvious that they aren't going to pursue the matter much further.

Felix Vanlund

Body 5: Athletics 2, Fighting 1, Marksmanship 1, Reflexes 1, Stealth 2, Strength 1, Toughness 1, Vehicles (Automobiles) 1

Mind 6: Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Vanlund Family History) 3, Perception 2, Research 2

Soul 6: Luck 1, Persuasion 1, Resolve 3

Helmut Schmelling

Finding Helmut will require a successful extended Mind [Ingenuity] (5) check. The time it takes (in hours) is equal to the low side of a random domino. A blank counts as a half-hour. He lives in a tiny, squalid upstairs apartment in a rather rough neighborhood.

Helmut is probably closing in on sixty years of age, though he's still a nicely built man with some muscle tone to his physique. His brown hair has lost a lot of ground to gray hair over the years and he has a weary, worn down look to his face... like a man who has lost all hope. He wears stained clothes and obviously isn't concerned with his appearance.

The player will quickly learn that Helmut is a guarded fellow, thinking that the character is a snoop reporter. A bit of role-playing and an opposed Soul [Persuasion] (Soul; Resolve) check or opposed Soul [Guile] (Soul; Resolve) check will convince him otherwise. If the check is failed, he will not talk about what he knows, though the player should be given another chance to convince him. If the character succeeds at the check, he invites him into his apartment.

The apartment looks dingy and cluttered, but otherwise normal... except for one thing. There is an old desk sitting against one wall of the living room. It is piled with papers, files, newspaper clippings and folders, all pertaining to his brother's disappearance.

Helmut's demeanor changes once he finds out that the character is interested in getting to the bottom of things and helping him solve the case. His gruffness fades away in favor of optimism and enthusiasm. It's like he's a whole different person. He gladly shares his information with the character and lets him look through his files.

This is the perfect opportunity for you to give the player a chance to learn any pertinent information that he may have missed by skipping other leads. No Mind [Research] check is necessary, as all the data is right there at his fingertips. Still, it will take some time, so have the player flip a domino for the total amount of time it takes to go through all the files and such. The number of minutes it takes is equal to the sum of both sides x4.

He also offers to accompany the player to the house to investigate.

Helmut Schmelling

Body 5: Athletics 1, Fighting 2, Marksmanship 1, Stealth 1, Strength 1, Toughness 1

Mind 5: Ingenuity 2, Perception 2, Research 1

Soul 6: Guile 1, Resolve 2

The Hindley House

Hopefully, the player has waited to come out to the house until he's gathered a few clues. If that's the case, you might have the sheriff out there, checking on things. He'll let the primary character know that nobody is allowed out here. And he won't believe the character if he tells him that the owner gave him permission.

When the character goes to the Hindley House, after obtaining some information about the goings-on, read or paraphrase the following passage:

You travel five miles southwest of Arkham until you reach a long, winding driveway jutting through the countryside. Trees border both sides of the bumpy drive, the limbs reaching across as if they were fingers trying to strangle it. The sky momentarily lights up with streaks of lightning and rain begins its rhythmic pitter-patter that will inevitably lead to a downpour. You cannot yet see the Hindley House, but just knowing that it lies somewhere up ahead fills you with dread and apprehension.

The player can proceed however he wishes. Perhaps he will drive all the way to the house in his automobile. Or maybe he will continue forth on foot in order to remain stealthy. If he chooses the latter, have the player make a Body [Stealth] check just to keep him on his toes; nobody will spot him either way... but he doesn't need to know that.

When he approaches the house, read or paraphrase the following passage:

The trees seem to be thicker as the driveway goes on... and all of a sudden it gives way to a clearing. In that large clearing stands a medium-sized single-story house, obviously of great antiquity. The structure, while still decently maintained, is beginning to decay considerably; its roof is drooping in the middle, the porch is half-collapsed and the paint has long since peeled away both from age and weather. You can see a long porch that spans the majority of the right-most portion of the house. Atop it is the front door. Six or seven windows can be seen as well.

If the character looks in through the windows or otherwise examines the house's interiors, they find that no one is there. Or at least, that's how it seems, for in truth, the Vanlund family is in the cavern under the house.

You should study the map of the house. Most of the rooms on the ground level are devoid of any furnishings, aside from the stray broken chair or crumbling desk. The only one of any interest to the investigation is the study, which is why we have described it, unlike the other rooms. Of course, you shouldn't come right out and tell the player there's nothing of interest. Let his character poke around a



bit. You can describe the rooms and make them interesting even though nothing is to really be found there.

Let's look at the pertinent rooms:

Storage Room

This room contains several heavy wooden crates filled with old jars of vegetables and such and a large freestanding metal safe with its door wide open; neither of them have anything of interest to the player. A couple of rats scurry about the floor amidst the hay that is still scattered there. The most important feature of the room is the trapdoor style hatch on the floor. Lifting it up is easy enough and the character will see that there is a series of iron rungs attached to the wall of the chamber below (the cellar), allowing people to move between the two levels. No check is necessary to traverse the ladder.

The Cellar

The cellar is a long room made of stone blocks. There is a dilapidated old desk against the west wall and several wooden crates are stacked all along the east wall. Hay covers much of the earthen floor, especially in the southern portion of the room.

If the character checks the desk out, have him make a Mind [Perception] (5) check. Alternately, you can fudge the challenge rating and just allow him to succeed. Success indicates that the character notices that the top drawer isn't quite as deep as it should be and that there appears to be a secret compartment the back of the drawer. Inside that compartment is a rather small book bearing the title, *Of the Cosmos and its Inhabitants*.

Within its crumbling pages, the character finds a large quantity of information about beings beyond written description; beings so unknowable that the human mind simply should not contain any knowledge of them. There is also a selection of incantations and formulae in the back, mostly involving the creation of a chemical called "X'niar" (which

What if Helmut Schmelling Comes Along?

If the primary character accepted Helmut's offer to accompany him to the Hindley House, it will be up to you to decide what his fate is. He could prove to be a huge asset to the primary character in numerous ways.

He could very well make it out of the house alive. On the other hand, having Helmut die in Act Three could make for a very poignant moment. This is entirely up to you. Do whatever you think is most dramatic.

can apparently turn human flesh into something digestible to other beings), the summoning/banishment of alien beings and the like. Should the character read much of the text (which is handwritten in English), he gains +.5 to his "Knowledge (Forbidden Truths)" rating and must make a sanity check with a challenge rating of 8.

If so, have him make a Mind [Perception] (8) check. Whether he fails or succeeds, he'll find bags of flour and rotten potatoes in the crates. If he succeeds, however, he will also see that behind one stack of crates, the wall is comprised of slightly different colored stone blocks. That's right – it is a secret door.

However, before the primary character can attempt to open the secret door, he feels some dust fall on him from the ceiling and hears a scooting sound coming from above. In truth, it's one of the family members pushing the safe on top of the hatch. It's likely the player will think that Felix Vanlund is responsible, but it's not. The character is unable to budge it by pushing up on the hatch. Unless he finds the secret door (or comes up with something truly inspired), he's trapped in this room.

Shortly after the safe is in place, the character sees some kind of liquid seeping through the ceiling and sizzling when it hits the dirt floor. It's as if someone is pouring it on the floor from above. That's because that's exactly what is happening. The liquid is the chemical that melts human flesh into material digestible by the Mi-Go. This signals the beginning of a tension scene with a momentum threshold of 9. When it's your turn to declare actions, simply state that some of the liquid is dripping down toward the character. Avoiding the liquid requires a successful Body [Reflexes] (7) check and making progress on budging the very heavy secret door requires a successful Body [Strength] (9) check (the door will not be open enough to go through it, though, until the tension scene ends favorably for the character who has been pushing it).

Act Three

As soon as the primary character moves from the cellar into the cavernous area, Act Three begins.

Let's look at the various rooms in the area.

The Main Chamber

This large chamber is very, very dark (the degenerated Vanlund family and their offspring have developed the ability to see in pitch darkness over time). Without an electric lantern or torch, the character will be unable to see more than a foot or two away. If the character doesn't have one, you can tell him that he can have one handy if he spends a genre point for the "Scene Alteration" option.

There is a pool of moss-covered water with moss by the southern wall. A small tunnel (5 feet in diameter) leads into the wall itself. A little bit of water trickles through it and into the pool. A human can fit in the tunnel if need be and it does lead above ground eventually.

Even in the glow of a lantern, details are hard to make out. The character can see

what looks like at least a dozen odd-shaped boulders, roughly 4 feet in diameter, strewn across the chamber. A Mind [Perception] (7) check will reveal that they aren't normal rocks and that they are pulsating slightly. These are Mi-Go/human hybrid eggs... and they'll be hatching within the next hour. They can be destroyed without any checks, as they are very brittle. Still, destroying them all will take a number of minutes equal to the high side of a random domino, multiplied by 2 (or by 3, if the character has no light source). Most ways of destroying them will require a Body [Stealth] (5) check. Should the check fail, the Vanlund hybrids in the sleeping area will awaken and attack (see the "Creatures" sidebar), triggering a tension scene with a momentum threshold of 10

The Sleeping Area

This is where the Vanlund family sleeps. Fortunately, all of them except Malibus is in deep slumber when the character first enters the main chamber. This can change, however, if he gets too noisy.

The area itself is only a fraction of the size of the main chamber, but it's still quite roomy. If the hadn't already been awakened, the player will see dozens and dozens of the hybrids (see the "Creatures" sidebar) on the floor and hanging from rocky outcroppings above the floor. Moving around the room will require a successful opposed Body [Stealth] (Mind; Perception) check to keep them from waking up. If they wake up, it will trigger a tension scene with a momentum threshold of 11.

He can set the whole room on fire if he has the right materials for the job (the chemicals in the worship area would be perfect). This will require no check aside from the aforementioned opposed [Body] Stealth (Mind; Perception) check. They are completely vulnerable while they're asleep.

The Worship Area

This area is larger than the sleeping area, but not as large as the main chamber. It

Creatures

This is where you'll find information on the creatures that can be found beneath the Hindley House.

Human/Mi-Go Hybrids

The Vanlund family has degenerated over the years, thanks to breeding with themselves and with the Mi-Go. While they vary drastically in appearance with each other, there are enough similar features to warrant them having uniform game stats. Over all, they tend to look like humans with insectoid features, including wings, pincers and large multi-faceted eyes. They can speak English, but it's very rudimentary, due to the mental decay that has occurred. Their voices sound like buzzing noises that form words.

Body 6: Athletics 3, Coordination 1, Fighting 1, Stealth 1, Strength 1, Toughness 1

Mind 4: Perception 1

Soul 4: Persuasion 2, Resolve 2

Special Rules: Dark Vision, Flight (-2), Innate Attack 1 (pincers), Unspeakable Visage 6

Malibus Vanlund

Malibus is the patriarch of the Vanlund family. Although the others have degenerated more drastically than him, Malibus has changed in other, even more sinister, ways. While wearing long robes (which he normally does), he looks like a normal human. Beneath the robes, however, he has chitinous skin that provides him with protection. He also has numerous insect-like limbs folded beneath his clothes. Unlike his family, Malibus remains highly intelligent and quite articulate.

Body 6: Athletics 2, Coordination 1, Fighting 2, Stealth 2, Strength 2, Toughness 2

Mind 6: Ingenuity 2, Knowledge (Arcane Chemistry) 3, Knowledge (History) 3, Knowledge (Mi-Go Culture) 2, Languages (Latin) 2, Perception 3, Research 2

Soul 5: Guile 3, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 1, Resolve 3

Special Rules: Burrowing, Dark Vision, Innate Attack 1 (insect limbs), Physical Protection 1 (chitinous armor plating), Unspeakable Visage 6 (only when people see beneath his robes)

is separated from the main chamber by a sturdy wooden door. Painted on the floor is a series of circles with strange symbols inside them. They look rather like astrological symbols, yet not entirely. On the east side of the room is a very long table that contains all manner of chemistry equipment and beakers full of black, tar-like ooze. This is where Malibus Vanlund mixes the materials to make foodstuffs for the Mi-Go.

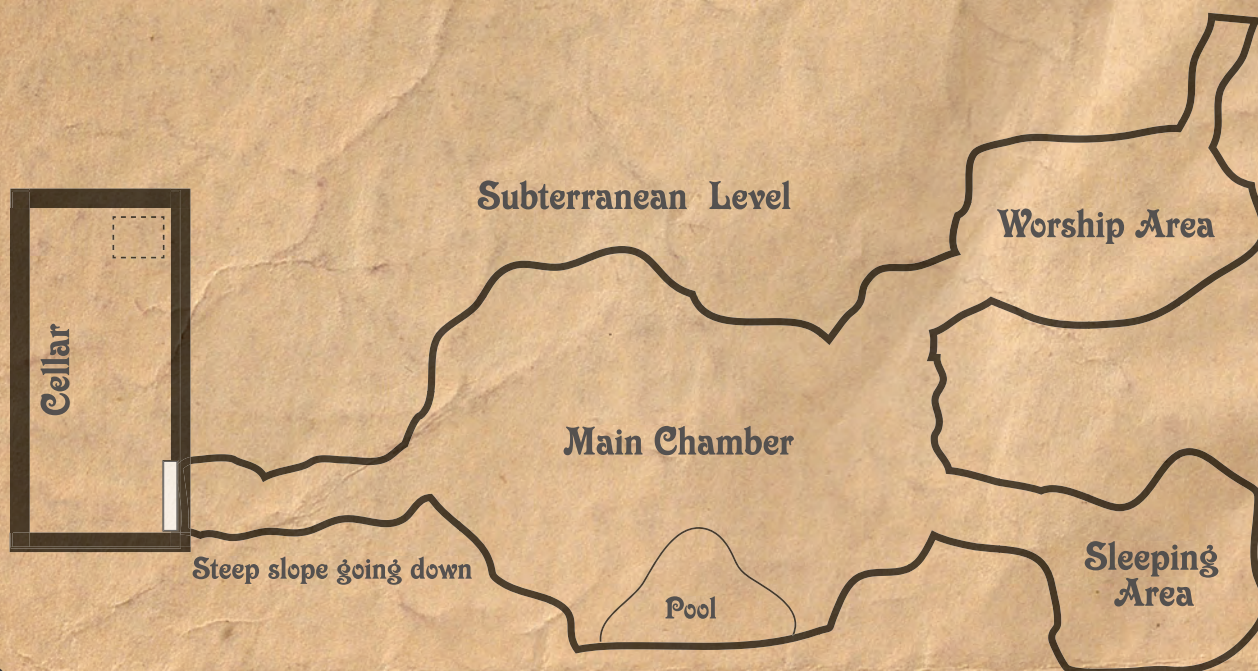
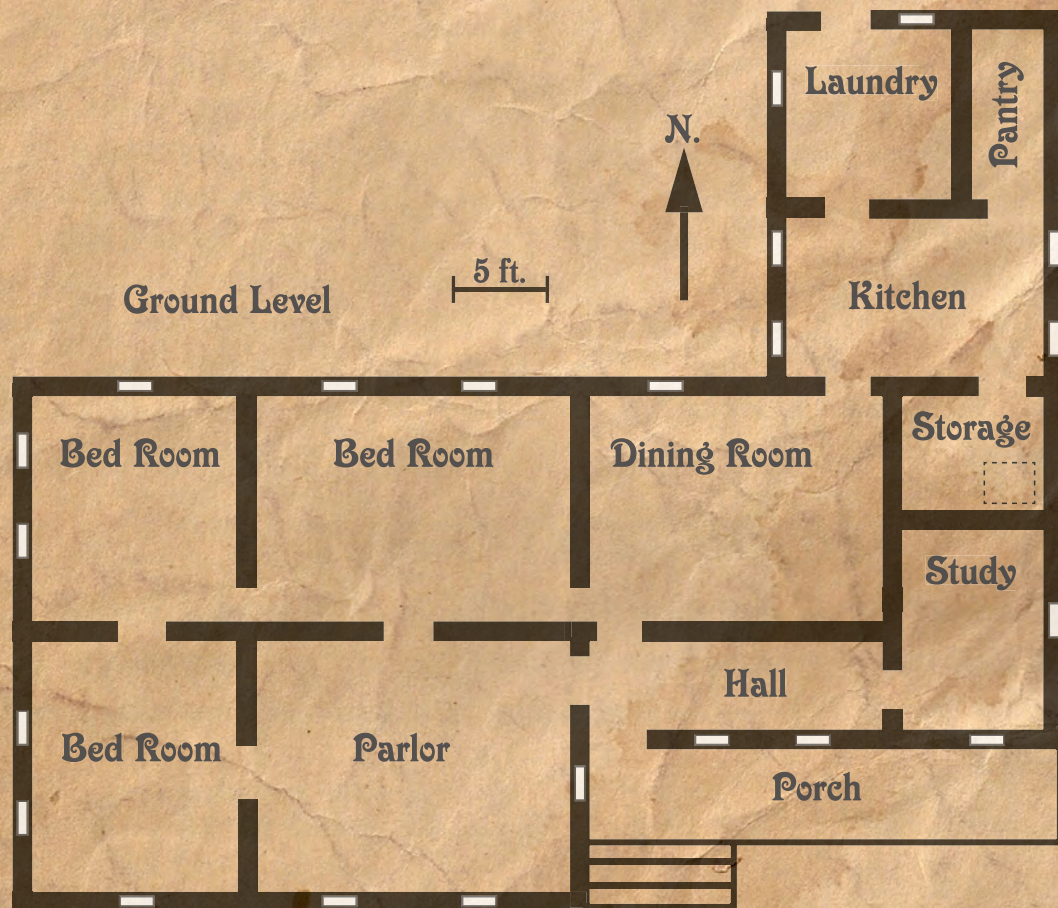
The northeast area of the room has a tunnel leading to what appears to be a shaft going

skyward. Moonlight spills into the room from the shaft. This is where the Mi-Go enter the caverns.

If the players enter the chamber, they will find Malibus finishing up one of the symbols on the floor. He stands up and says, "Greetings, interloper. It's so very nice of you to join me for tonight's momentous occasion."

Should the primary character ask for an explanation, Malibus tells him: "Ah, yes, tonight is to be the hatching of a new

Hindley House Map



generation of my family. You've no doubt seen the eggs in the large chamber on your way here."

If the character destroyed the eggs and mentions it to him, he will fly into a rage and attack, thus triggering a tension scene (momentum threshold of 12). If the character didn't destroy the eggs or at least doesn't tell Malibus that he has destroyed them, he will boastfully explain the history of how his family came to be the way they are (the deal with the Mi-Go, the interbreeding, the feeding of the Mi-Go, etc.). He then mentions that the Mi-Go are on their way to oversee the hatching and to receive a fresh batch of food. In the far, far distance, the character can indeed hear a distinct buzzing sound coming in through the shaft. In truth, the Mi-Go are a very long distance away and won't arrive for another half-hour or so. As such, they likely won't play a role in the climax, but if the character is still around when they arrive, they will not hesitate to attack.

If the character doesn't become aggressive, hostile or threatening, Malibus will eventually grow bored of bragging to him and will simply say, "Well, it appears that your time on this earth has come to an end. Let me show you the way to sweet oblivion". At that point, he attacks with his appendages that were hidden beneath his robes. This triggers a tension scene.

There are numerous ways to defeat or escape from Malibus. On the aggressive side of the coin, physical damage can work, but his "Physical Protection" special rule will make it rather hard to hurt him.

- If the character found the book in the cellar (*Of the Cosmos and its Inhabitants*), there is an incantation that can be read aloud, reducing Malibus and his family to piles of gray ash. This will be tricky, though, because the character will have to continue reading with very little pause... and Malibus isn't going to sit back and let that happen without a fight. If the character starts

reading it before a tension scene breaks out, Malibus will immediately start one. To read it aloud without being distracted will require a successful opposed Soul [Resolve] check; the challenge rating will depend on what action Malibus takes.

- The chemicals on the table can be used to hurt Malibus as well. It requires a successful opposed Body [Marksmanship] (Body; Reflexes) check to hit him.

Escaping will not be easy either.

- The shaft attached to this room is about twelve feet in diameter and offers decent hand/footholds. Climbing it requires a perilous Body [Athletics] (8) check, unless being opposed directly. In that case, the challenge rating depends on how the action is being opposed. Malibus is perfectly willing to follow him outside and continue the confrontation.

- Another means for escape is the small tunnel above the pool of water (see the description for the main chamber). Traversing it requires a perilous Body [Athletics] (6) check, unless being opposed directly. In that case, the challenge rating depends on how the action is being opposed. If the character enters the main chamber again after encountering Malibus, the eggs start making cracking sounds (unless the character already destroyed them) and the slime-coated hybrids emerge. They are harmless right now, though, as they can't even stand or fly at this age. Malibus is perfectly willing to follow him outside and continue the confrontation.

Of course, the player may come up with another solution entirely. That solution may even be more satisfying than one of the aforementioned solutions. In that case, roll with it and let him try (unless it's really implausible).

Wrapping it Up

The final confrontation between the player and Malibus is the tale's grand finale. The outcome of that tension scene will determine how the tale ends. Let's examine the possibilities.

Failure

If the tension scene ends negatively, the character wakes up outside where the Hindley House is supposed to be... but it's not there. In fact, no signs of it ever having existed can be found. It's as if it had never been there. An old man drives up in a battered Model T automobile and, seeing the character on the ground, acts concerned for his well-being. He tells him that he was coming out to check on his land when he spotted the character.

If the character asks about or mentions the Hindley House, he looks at him confusedly and tells him he has no idea what he's talking about. He goes on to say that this land has been in the Belshire family for five generations and there has never been a house here.

Did the character just imagine all of the events that transpired? Or did it really happen? Did reality somehow become altered? If so, did the Mi-Go play a role in it? The questions go entirely unanswered. The truth is yours and yours alone... and it's your choice as to what that truth actually is.

Success (Killing Malibus)

The character escapes the premises in his car (or however), leaving that nightmarish house

far behind. A few days later, after receiving his money from Johansen K. Walsh, he finds a letter on his doorstep. It reads as follows:

"Dear Mr. [insert character's name], I must commend you on doing what I have been unable to do my entire life: rid the world of the decayed branch of my family tree. I tried to keep you from going to that hellish house so that they could not obtain the raw material necessary to feed those fungal aliens from the stars. You, my friend, could have been that raw material. I am glad, in the end, that I failed to cease your activities, for you have proven that you could rise to the occasion and do what needed to be done. And that is exactly what you accomplish. I am grateful. – Felix Vanlund"

Success (Without Killing Malibus)

The character escapes the premises in his car (or however), leaving that nightmarish house and its vile denizens far behind. A few days later, after receiving his money from Johansen K. Walsh, he finds a letter on his doorstep. It reads as follows:

"Dear Mr. [insert character's name], I applaud your efforts to rid the world of the decayed branch of my family tree. I tried to keep you from going to that hellish house so that they could not obtain the raw material necessary to feed those fungal aliens from the stars. You should have taken the hint and steered clear of the situation. My advice to you is to walk away from it and hope beyond hope that my family doesn't find you. You were lucky enough to escape once. It won't likely happen again. – Felix Vanlund"

Designer's Notes

I am obsessed with Howard Phillips Lovecraft.

There. I said it.

It's true. His stories captivated me when I was a teenager and they captivate me now even more. Lovecraft's verbose descriptions and masterful conveyance of mood sucked me in from the very beginning and never let go. I still shiver at the atmosphere he established during the climax of *The Haunter of the Dark* – the violent storm, the locals surrounding the old church with their lanterns, the creature busting free of the building and the horror the protagonist felt at the very end. It's absolutely spellbinding! The same can be said of most of his other stories as well, but since *The Haunter of the Dark* was the first one that I read, it stands out the most to me.

But it's not just his fiction that I'm obsessed with. I'm also obsessed with H.P. Lovecraft as a human being. That's why I've read everything about him that I could get my grubby hands on, including the exhaustive biography, *H.P. Lovecraft: A Life* by S.T. Joshi. Hell, I've read it three times now and recommend it to anyone interested in learning more about this very complex and eccentric man.

So, why am I obsessed with Mr. Lovecraft as a person? There are numerous reasons, but I think the largest one is because to understand his stories to the fullest, one really has to understand *him*. His tales were very much extensions of who he was, for better or worse, and knowing a great deal about him brings forth additional insight about them. His views on human insignificance, for instance, came to light in almost every story he'd ever written. The same can be said for his love of the New England region. And his passion for antiquarianism. And, yes, at times, his racism crawled out from the dark shadows in his tales too. Well, nobody's perfect, I suppose.

Whatever the reasons are that I'm obsessed with H.P. Lovecraft, it is this obsession that

has driven me to design *Macabre Tales*. I wanted to devise a role-playing game that emulates all of the elements that make Lovecraft's fiction so enthralling to me (and hopefully other fans as well). I want to emphasize two particular words in the previous sentence: "Lovecraft's fiction". Not August Derleth's, not Brian Lumley's, not Clark Ashton Smith's... *Lovecraft's*. For this reason, I have done my best to strip out the other authors' "contributions" to Lovecraft's pseudo-mythology. The line becomes a bit blurry in spots, though, because Lovecraft participated in collaborations and revisions of others' stories that were essentially total rewrites. Despite all this, my intention was to create as pure of a Lovecraft role-playing experience as possible.

Another important aspect of the emulation of Lovecraft's tales is the use of dominoes. From the very beginning, they created a very meticulous and focused pacing mechanism that required the player to make choices rather than simply rely on whatever die roll fate threw his way. Oh, sure, there's still randomness to the game, but in the end, it's mostly about the decisions the player makes. I feel this mirrors Lovecraft's stories quite efficiently.

It has taken me close to a year and a half to finish this game, because I refused to settle for anything less than complete emulation. I completely rewrote everything but the core task resolution system so many times that I lost count. I tinkered with the numbers over and over and over again until I damn near pulled my hair out. I hammered out the rules to maximize their capacity to emulate the source material more efficiently. After all, this was about more than just putting any old game out onto the market. It was about crafting a role-playing game that I felt Lovecraft himself would approve of. Hopefully, I've succeeded in that lofty goal.

Cynthia Celeste Miller
Oct. 27th, 2011

Index

Act One 15, 47-48
Act Three 15, 49
Act Two 15, 48-49
Aquatic 53
Arkham 68
Aspect Points 38
Aspect Ratings 38
Aspects 15-17, 38, 52
Assisting 21-22, 35
Azathoth 71-72
Blanks 19, 34
Body 16, 30, 38
Book Eibon 70
Burrowing 53
Byakhee 73-74
Challenge Ratings 18, 52, 64
Checks 18-22
Clinging 53
Creatures 33, 64-65, 73-76
Crucial Checks 24
Cthulhu 71-72
Cultes de Goules 70-71
Dark Influence 54
Dark Vision 54
Deep Ones 74
Dimensional Travel 54
Double Blanks 19
Doubles 18, 34
Drain 54
Dunwich 68-69
Era 50
Extended Checks 20
Flashback tales 51
Flight 54
Forbidden Truths 17, 38
Game-Ending Result 24, 29, 35
Genre Points 32-33, 42-43
Ghouls 74-75
Great Old Ones 52, 71-72
Hand 15
Healing and Recovery 30
Hindering Presence 54-55
Immunity 55
Incantations 30
Innate Attack 55
Innsmouth 69-70
Invisibility 55
Malleable 55
Mental Glitches 30, 31
Mental Protection 55-56
Mi-Go 75-76
Mind 16, 30, 39
Miskatonic University 68
Momentum Points 23, 35
Momentum Threshold 25, 63
Monstrous 56
Multi-Player Rules 34-35
Narrator 11
Necronomicon 71
Non Game-Ending Result 24, 29
Non-Crucial Checks 24
Nyarlathotep 72-73
Opposed Checks 20, 22
Other Gods 52, 72-73
Overwhelming 56
Perfunctory Perception 17, 39
Perilous Checks 28-29
Personal Factors 40
Physical Protection 56
Player 11
Player Handouts 50
Pool 15
Primary Character 15, 37, 38-40
Researching 20
Resilience 56
Role-Playing Games 11-12
Sanity Checks 29-30
Shoggoths 76
Shub-Niggurath 73
Situational Modifiers 22
Soul 16, 31, 39
Special Rules 34, 53-57
Specializations 16, 38
Stat Grades 38
Stats 15-17, 38, 52
Stock Supporting Characters 57-58
Supporting Character 15, 52-58
Tale 12
Telepathy 56
Teleportation 56
Tension Scenes 22-28, 35, 63
Three-Act Structure 15, 47-49
Tomes 65, 70-71
Unspeakable Visage 57
Weakness 57
Yig 72
Yog-Sothoth 72

Character Information

Name: _____

Occupation: _____

Player: _____

Personal Factors

Items

Spending Genre Points

Exertion (1 genre point)

Add 1 to the result of a check. Max. +3

Option Examination (2 genre points)

Immediately after drawing one or more new dominoes into your hand, choose one of the newly drawn dominoes to discard. Replace that domino with a new one.

Recuperation (2 genre points)

Lessen the penalty to a Sta's check by one (e.g., from -2 to -1). Max. once per scene. Must rest.

Extraneous Exertion (2 genre points)

Give one of your stats a -1 penalty (cumulative with already-existing penalties) and then add low side of random domino to the result. Max. once per check.

Scene Alteration (1-3 genre points)

The player can spend genre points to make modifications to the scene.

Stats and Aspects

Body

--	--

Grade

Penalty

Athletics: _____
 Coordination: _____
 Fighting: _____
 Marksmanship: _____
 Reflexes: _____
 Stealth: _____
 Strength: _____
 Toughness: _____
 Vehicles: _____

Mind

--	--

Grade

Penalty

Ingenuity: _____
 Knowledge: _____

Languages: _____

Perception: _____
 Research: _____

Soul

--	--

Grade

Penalty

Art: _____

Guile: _____
 Intimidation: _____
 Luck: _____
 Performace: _____

Persuasion: _____
 Resolve: _____

Perfunctory Per.

Genre Pts.