

CTHULHU DARK

A RULES-LIGHT SYSTEM
FOR LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR

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CTHULHU DARK.

YOUR INVESTIGATOR

Choose a name and occupation. Describe your Investigator. Take a green Insanity Die.

INSANITY

Your Insanity starts at 1.

When you see something disturbing, roll your Insanity die. If you get higher than your Insanity, add 1 to your Insanity and roleplay your fear.

DOING THINGS

To know how well you do at something, roll:

- ▶ One die if the task is *within human capabilities*.
- ▶ One die if it's *within your occupational expertise*.
- ▶ Your Insanity die, if you *will risk your sanity to succeed*.

If your Insanity die rolls higher than any other die, make an Insanity roll, as above.

Then your highest die shows how well you do. On a 1, you barely succeed. On a 6, you do brilliantly.

For example: you're escaping from the window of an Innsmouth hotel. On a 1, you crash on an adjoining roof, attracting the attention of everyone around. On a 4, you land quietly on the roof, but leave traces for pursuers to follow. On a 6, you escape quietly, while your pursers continue searching the hotel.

When you investigate, the highest die shows how much information you get. On a 1, you get the bare minimum: if you need information to proceed with the scenario, you get it, but that's all you get. On a 4, you get whatever a competent investigator would discover. On a 5, you discover everything humanly possible. And, on a 6, you may glimpse beyond human knowledge (and probably make an Insanity roll).

For example: you're investigating your great-uncle's manuscripts. On a 1, you find the address "7 Thomas Street" (the next location in the scenario). On a 6, you find that, from February 28 to April 2, many townspeople had dreams of gigantic nameless creatures. Simultaneously, a Californian theosophist colony donned robes for a "glorious fulfilment", The dreamers included Mr Wilcox of 7 Thomas Street.

FAILING

If someone thinks it would more interesting if you failed, they describe how you might fail and roll a die. (They can't do this if you're investigating and you *must* succeed for the scenario to proceed).

If their die rolls higher than your highest die, you fail, in the way they described. If not, you succeed as before, with your highest die showing how well you succeed.

Returning to the example above: you're escaping from the hotel window. This time, someone thinks it would be more interesting if your pursuers caught you. When you both roll, they get the higher die. You are caught.

REROLLING

If you included your Insanity die in the roll and you're not happy with the result, you may reroll (all the dice). If you didn't include your Insanity die before, you may add it now and reroll.

Afterwards, look at the new result. As before, the highest die shows how well you do.

If your Insanity Die rolls higher than any other die, make an Insanity roll, even if you made one after your previous roll.

CO-OPERATING AND COMPETING

To cooperate: everyone who is cooperating rolls their dice. The highest die, rolled by anyone, determines the outcome.

To compete: everyone who is competing rolls their dice. Whoever gets highest wins. If it's a tie, the person with highest Insanity wins. If Insanity is tied, reroll.

As before, if your Insanity die rolls higher than any other die you roll, make an Insanity roll. And, if anyone is not happy with their roll, they may reroll, using the rules above.

SUPPRESSING KNOWLEDGE

When your Insanity reaches 5, you may now reduce it by *suppressing Mythos knowledge*: for example, burning books, stopping rituals, destroying yourself or impeding investigation.

Each time you do this, roll your Insanity Die. If you get *less* than your current Insanity, *decrease* your Insanity by 1. And you may continue suppressing Mythos knowledge when your Insanity drops below 5.

GOING INSANE

When your Insanity reaches 6, you go incurably insane. This is a special moment: everyone focusses on your character's last moments as their mind breaks. Go out however you want: fight, scream, run or collapse.

Afterwards, either make a new character or continue playing, madly, but retire the character as soon as you can.

OTHER CLARIFICATIONS

- ▶ If you fight any creature you meet, you will die. Thus, in these core rules, there are no combat rules or health levels. Instead, roll to hide or escape.
- ▶ Things within human capabilities include: picking locks, finding Ry'leh, deciphering carvings, remembering something, spotting something concealed, rationalising something horrific.
- ▶ Things outside human capabilities include: casting spells, understanding hidden meaning, doing things in dreams. You can try such things if you have the opportunity: for example, if you sense patterns, you can try to follow them. However, you won't get the "within human capabilities" die, and might just roll your Insanity die.
- ▶ A high success never short-circuits the investigation: That is, it never takes you to the end of the scenario, skipping everything in between. Thus, in the example above: even if you rolled a 6 while searching your great-uncle's personal effects, you would not find the coordinates of Ry'leh, where Cthulhu sleeps.
- ▶ When you make an Insanity Roll and succeed, getting your Insanity or lower, this means you *keep it together*, not that *you are fine*. When you fail, getting higher than your Insanity, you fail to keep it together.
- ▶ To play without a character sheet, use your Insanity Die to keep track of your Insanity, by keeping its highest face turned to your current Insanity.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Who decides when to roll Insanity? Who decides when it's interesting to know how well you do something? Who decides when something disturbs your PC? Who decides whether you might fail?

Decide the answers with your group. Make reasonable assumptions. For example, some groups will let the Keeper decide everything. Others will share the decisions.

These rules are designed to play prewritten scenarios, run by a Keeper. If you try improvising scenarios or playing without a Keeper, let me know.

FINALLY

If you write Cthulhu scenarios and you'd like to turn them into standalone products, by including Cthulhu Dark free of charge, email me at graham@thievesoftime.com.

Let me know how these rules work for you. My email is graham@thievesoftime.com. On www.thievesoftime.com, you'll find more Cthulhu Dark rules.

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