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THE ARMED INVESTIGATOR

Negotium perambulans in tenebris ... The old librarian rehearsed the formulae he had memorised, and clutched the paper containing the alternative one he had not memorised. He saw that his electric flashlight was in working order. Rice, beside him, took from a valise a metal sprayer of the sort used in combating insects; whilst Morgan uncased the big-game rifle on which he relied despite his colleague's warnings that no material weapon would be of help.

– H.P. Lovecraft, “The Dunwich Horror” (1928)

SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME, man has armed himself for protection against the risks of life, be they other men or nasty creatures. With the advance of technology, one type of weapon appeared that is more powerful than all the muscle-powered weapons developed before it, yet easier to use and capable of being employed at a safe distance – the gun. Many investigators of the Unknown will want to arm themselves, especially with a firearm, either from the start or during the course of their investigations.

In the “Roaring Twenties” and “Threadbare Thirties,” guns and other weapons are everyday items for most people around the world. While many countries, especially in Europe and North America, have started to regulate the possession and use of arms, most citizens have no problem in acquiring a weapon of some sort. The most convenient and most desirable weapon is often a gun. Guns are seen as tools, for hunting or protection, but also for target shooting and other sport activities. People possess firearms from a young age just like they own waterproof rain coats; it is no coincidence that Colt's praises its handguns in advertisements as the ideal addition to an insurance policy. Ordinary folks, especially young boys in the country, hunt to add meat to the menu – times are lean. Many famous gunfighters have learned shooting that way – from war hero Sergeant Alvin York to outlaw punk Clyde Barrow. Some sort of hunting weapon can be found in almost every rural home. H.P. Lovecraft himself inherited a considerable collection of handguns and rifles from his grandfather at age 14 and, by his own account, enjoyed shooting. Professional gun users in the military, police, and criminal underworld are always armed as a matter of course. In the 1920s, American citizens alone have an estimated 100 million firearms at hand. US gun makers churn out 5 million guns annually throughout the decade, and cheap foreign-made handguns outnumber US products by a large margin.

Also, firearms have already started to receive some of the mystique that often surrounds them today. The “gumshoes” of the hardboiled detective stories popular at the time, such as Carroll Daly's Race Williams or Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op, use their “gats” with gusto. The myths of the gunslingers of the Wild West, a historical era which had ended just a few years earlier, have already left a profound impact on American culture and well beyond that. Gun enthusiasts revel in owning a genuine Colt revolver or Luger pistol, or pay several months' salary to own a bespoke English-made double-barrelled shotgun or a Mauser big-game repeating rifle. While most veterans returning from the Great War had seen enough of violence for a lifetime, quite a few brought back with them a keen interest in guns for sport, hunting, or to keep away the nightmares.

To most of H.P. Lovecraft's protagonists, weapons are mere tools – a defence against the lesser dangers, against cultists and evil men, and against some of the creatures that such men consort with. Guns are comforters to clutch during the dead of night, even when their ineffectiveness against the Unknown is certain. And sometimes, they are the last resort in a world gone mad, to depart with dignity from the insanity that cannot be explained. Policemen like Inspector John Legrasse or the Federal agents that raid Innsmouth are naturally armed, but even bookish academics like Henry Akeley, Dr Francis Morgan, Dr Elihu Whipple, or Albert Wilmarth have taken up arms in their investigations, from the ever-present handguns to flamethrowers. And while their use is never at the centre of attention in Lovecraft's stories, they most definitely are used, however ineffective they might prove in the end. "Avoid gunfights" is sage advice – but when investigating the Unknown, it is better to be prepared for them nevertheless. Like it says in the *Keeper's Companion*: "A gun has a wide assortment of uses. No investigative team should be without one ..."

The material in this book aims to aid the Keeper in providing gun-related realism. It examines and expands the rules for the use of firearms and other weapons. In a few instances, this means ignoring rules found in official books, but in general the optional rules described here are directly based on published material, attempting to gather all of them together and to insert them into the matrix of reality. Just like detailing the clothing, cars, music, politics, and spirit of the time can help to

PAGE REFERENCES

Open up the gates to Yog-Sothoth with the long chant that ye'll find on page 751 of the complete edition ...

– H.P. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror" (1928)

This book has been written as a companion to Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu, Sixth Edition* (2005), but is compatible with other editions. Frequent reference is made to the 1920s *Investigator's Companion* (2007) and the 1990s *Handbook* (1995), as well as the *Keeper's Companion* (2000) and *Keeper's Companion 2* (2002). Various other supplements are also referenced. Some of these books were written for older editions of the basic rules, which occasionally makes adjustments necessary.

immerse the players into the setting, so can detailing the kind of weapons that their investigators carry and how to use them. There is a lot of detail on the historical use and proliferation of many guns and gadgets, to allow the Keeper to arm investigators (and their opponents) in a realistic way – whether they are ordinary men stumbling upon a local Horror, private eyes following a suspicious trail to the Unspeakable, or Federal agents assigned to Project COVENANT unravelling a terrible Secret.

REALISM

Inconceivable events and conditions have a special handicap to overcome, and this can be accomplished only through the maintenance of a careful realism in every phase of the story except that touching on the one given marvel.

– H.P. Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction" (1933)

There is a tendency to equate realism in *Call of Cthulhu* games with a boring nerdiness that threatens the feel and atmosphere. This is not necessarily so. Used effectively, realism can be the Keeper's friend. The more realistic the world is in which the investigators struggle towards their often untimely and horrible end, the more unreal and thus terrifying and sanity-threatening will be their encounters with the Unknown.

This certainly applies to combat as one of the predominant ways to model action and conflict in *Call of Cthulhu*. Unlike the carefully choreographed fights in many movies, *real* combat is confusing, frightening, and often deadly. Sound familiar? Those are exactly the states of mind that the Keeper should try to instil in the investigators.

CONFUSION

... put on a dark piece of clothing and take along an electric torch, but do not switch it on until the crucial moment, holding it at arm's length to the side of the body.

– Gerhard Bock, *Pistol Shooting in Self-Defence* (1925)

Combat is chaotic. Unless caught in the open in the unlikely event of a *High Noon*-style pistol duel, the participants will often find it difficult to even locate their

opponents due to darkness, adrenaline-induced tunnel vision, or concealed attackers who "put them on the spot." Gunshots are extremely loud, making communication between combatants difficult or impossible. Adrenaline reduces fine motor skills, which can cause an investigator to drop his pistol while drawing it, fumble with reloading his shotgun, or prevent him from hitting anything even though he is a good shot on a quiet range.

The Keeper can enforce this confusion by employing the rules to their maximum:

- Investigators will often be caught by surprise by an attack or will try to surprise others themselves. Typical situations include a shot from a pistol hidden in a coat pocket, a sniper shot from a concealed position, a burst of submachine gun fire from a passing automobile, a full-fledged military ambush using an emplaced machine gun, etc. Employ a **Resistance Table** roll between the surprising attacker's **Conceal**, **Hide**, or **Sneak** (as applicable), and the surprised defender's **Listen** or **Spot Hidden**, to find out whether the surprise works. Divide the skills by 5 (rounding up) to get the active and passive characteristics. If the roll fails, apply the penalties outlined under "Surprise" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 59) to the defender.
- Require **Spot Hidden** rolls to locate opponents, especially in broken terrain such as woods and jungles, but also in many urban situations where shooters can snipe from cellars, upper-story windows, automobiles, etc. Enemies that cannot be located cannot be attacked.
- Always apply the rules under "Dimness, Darkness, Invisibility" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 60) and note that almost all fights, even those *not* involving creatures of the night, occur in low-light conditions. These will make the **Spot Hidden** rolls noted above even more difficult.
- Taking cover in a firefight is both natural instinct and sound tactic. In contrast to the statements under "Partial Concealment" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 60), it actually matters a lot whether an opponent is partially hidden. The smaller the (visible) target, the more difficult it is to hit him. The Keeper should at least halve the attacker's **firearm skill** roll if the defender is partially concealed – but note that many firearms will blast right *through* cover, including furniture, doors, walls, and automobiles (see "Armour Penetration," p. 15). If such a halved roll misses, the investigator can make a **Luck** roll to see whether the *shot* hit the target through the cover – provided it penetrates the Armour Value. For a different approach that specifies how much of the target is covered, see "Taking Cover" (*Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity*, p. 291).
- Many shooters lose their cool in a shootout and shoot *much* faster and *more* often than is required or even advantageous. Reasons for this include excitement, adrenaline kick, fear, lack of training, limited visibility, etc. In combat, it is hard to keep track of the number of shots fired, and it is often difficult to assess the results of the shots – whether the target was hit at all or whether a *hit* has the desired effect. The Keeper could rule that unless the investigator is a seasoned gunfighter, he will always fire the maximum number of shots allowed by his "Rate of Fire" (p. 30). At the beginning of an engagement, the Keeper could even require a **POW*5** roll for shooters to keep their heads. Failing the roll means a

shooter fires "Unaimed Shots" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 63) at twice his ROF but 1/5 his **firearms skill** – until the fight ends, he runs out of ammunition, or he succeeds with a halved **POW*5** roll to control himself again, at which point he can shoot normal aimed shots. He can repeat the roll once per combat round to try to snap out of it. This rule has the realistic result that many investigators will quickly expend their ammunition, likely without hitting much. The definition of "gunfighter" in this context would include anyone who has taken part in at least a couple of real shootouts. Combat veterans count, but most police officers or ordinary military personnel probably do not – let alone civilians. Keeper and player should decide on this while creating the investigator as part of his background (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 50).

FRIGHT

Then, in spite of my daze of fright and disgust, my morbid curiosity triumphed; and as the last of the monstrosities oozed up alone from that nether world of unknown nightmare, I drew my automatic pistol and shot it under cover of the thunder.

— H.P. Lovecraft, "The Lurking Fear" (1922)

Seeing people getting injured can be traumatic. Sometimes it is not even necessary for anybody to get hurt – the sheer shock of having to fight for one's life can be quite enough. There is good argument for requiring a SAN roll every time an investigator takes part in a real fight, with a SAN cost of 0/1 if nothing happens except for the adrenaline rush and a lot of shots being fired, up to 0/1D6 for seeing a friend killed. For suggestions of the SAN costs for killing people, see "Murder" (*Delta Green: Eyes Only*, p. 138). The rules under "Getting Used to Awfulness" (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 78) certainly apply. There are several ways to model this callousness in the game:

- A soldier, policeman, or criminal used to violence does not have to roll unless a reasonable interval has passed between incidents. See "1920s Occupations: Special" (*1920s Investigator's Companion*, p. 19).
- If the Keeper does not want to give out such an advantage to certain occupations for free, any investigator who is supposed to have gotten used to violence prior to play (at the creation of the investigator) should deduct the maximum amount of SAN cost from such experiences (e.g., -1 SAN for combat, -4 SAN for having killed in self-defence, -6 SAN for having seen a friend killed, etc.). The player should decide on the details of the situation.
- More flexibly, the Keeper could not allow investigators to get used to violence at all, and instead require a SAN check from all investigators, but allow them to add half of their highest **combat skill** increase over Base Chance to the SAN roll (round up). Suitably trained and motivated fighters are often less affected. This has no effect on Mythos-related SAN rolls!

EXAMPLE: Robert Ritter has SAN 60 and Submachine Gun 75% (increased by +60 skill points). He can add $60 / 2 = 30$ to his SAN roll, for $60 + 30 = 90$.

A failed SAN check can result in temporary or permanent psychological damage. In modern terms, this is called “post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) or “combat stress reaction” (CSR), but in the 1920s, many of the phenomenon are already known to psychiatrists and doctors of war veterans as “shell shock” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 131). Statistically, one in five of all participants in violent encounters of any kind eventually suffer from psychological problems, ranging from instantaneous breakdown to nightmares that only manifest years later. For a detailed description of common issues and treatments of trauma as well as self-medications, see “Stress Disorders” (*Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity*, pp. 295-299).

DEATH AND INJURY

When pistols are used by people who know how to use them there are only two classes: the quick and the dead.

– Hugh Pollard, “The Pistol in Practice” (1931)

Most weapons, especially guns, are quite capable of killing a man. Whenever an investigator draws his weapon, he must be prepared to kill and accept that the situation can also get him killed (1920s *Investigator's Companion*, p. 119). Unlike movie heroes, investigators can lose their life through a single bullet – which is both dramatic and realistic. Although the remarkable resilience of the human body and the doctors of the day are often capable of saving a man even if shot, death or serious injury is always a possibility when weapons are used. This truth should be imparted on the players in no uncertain terms. Even a flesh wound hurts like hell and can mean the temporary end of an investigation, and people get regularly retired permanently by weapons as silly as a pocket knife or a .22-calibre peashooter. See “Blood & Guts” (*The Unspeakable Oath* 13, pp. 9-11) for a detailed game-mechanical discussion of injuries. The section on “Disabling Wounds” (*Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity*, p. 290) provides an alternative treatment for severe injuries.

Receiving even a slight injury can mentally stun a man. If the wound is not severe enough to result in actual shock per “Physical Injury” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 54), the Keeper could require a POW*5 roll to check whether the target is not at least stunned and cannot attack for 1D6 combat rounds. Subtract -5 percentiles per hit point lost from the POW roll and add half of the target's highest combat skill increase over Base Chance (round up) – trained and motivated fighters will often push on despite being wounded.

*EXAMPLE: Robert Ritter has POW 12 and Submachine Gun 75% (increased by +60 skill points). He can add $60 / 2 = 30$ to his POW*5 roll, for $60 + 30 = 90$. A light wound costing 2 hit points would reduce this by $2 \times -5 = -10$ to 80.*

COMBAT CONSEQUENCES

There was a vibration as if the wood had fallen farther than it had fallen before. After that followed a sharp grating noise, a shouted gibberish from Pickman, and the deafening discharge of all six chambers of a revolver, fired spectacularly as a lion-tamer might fire in the air for effect. A muffled squeal or squawk, and a thud.

– H.P. Lovecraft, “Pickman's Model” (1926)

Beyond the obvious results of a firefight for friend and foe, a shooting fray invariably has other consequences as well. These are often overlooked, but can bring added realism and drama to the game:

- Gunshots (and explosions) are extremely loud – a large-calibre handgun generates more than 150 decibels, a sound level well above what is painful to the human ear, especially indoors. Just one shot can be enough for a shooter and any bystanders to suffer from ringing ears, and the effects of repeated shotgun blasts or machine gun bursts can be worse, often ultimately resulting in permanent ear damage. If the investigators have recently fired their guns, then their Listen rolls should be halved – at least temporarily. See also “What Did You Say?” (*Keeper's Companion* 2, p. 96). Serious gunfighters or veteran soldiers with permanently damaged hearing should not be allowed to increase Listen skill above 60%.
- As well, gunshots can lead to unwelcome attention from the neighbours, the authorities, or, worst of all, more of the opposition. Shots can be heard for many hundreds of metres. Hearing a gunshot is either automatic or, at worst, requires a doubled Listen roll. A high background noise level might mask a shot. “Sound Suppressors” (p. 75) make hearing or at least identifying a shot as such more difficult.
- Shots that miss are a considerable problem. Any bullet that does not find its target can hit someone or something else – including after going through a wall or travelling a couple of blocks down the road. See “Armour Penetration” (p. 15) and “Base Range” (p. 29). In situations where it could matter, for example on a busy street or in an inhabited building, the Keeper could have the shooter make a Luck roll for each shot that misses to avoid hitting innocent bystanders! A successful Idea or firearms skill roll will indicate to a gunman that there is possible danger to the background so that he has the option to hold his fire.
- Gunshots leave a number of clues to anybody trying to investigate a shooting – spent cartridge cases; bullets recovered from a body or from where they impacted otherwise; even the smell of gun lubricants or burnt firearm propellants lingering in the air or in a recently fired weapon. Such clues can be located with a Forensics or Spot Hidden roll. See “Criminal Investigations” (p. 22).

OPTIONAL RULES

He hates It – probably because he’s afraid of what It will come to mean. He carries a pistol all the time to protect himself – fool, as if there were human protection against It!

– Hazel Heald and H.P. Lovecraft, “The Horror in the Museum” (1932)

The following rules address specific situations that are either not covered by *Call of Cthulhu, Sixth Edition*, or are covered in a way that has been found to be unsatisfactory. The Keeper should decide which, if any, of these rules are to be used in his games.

SKILL COMPETENCY

The prowess of the so-called “Gun Men” of New York and other large cities is greatly over-estimated. These criminals do not practice shooting with the fire arms they use but operate by stealth and intrigue which makes them dangerous. They are, in fact, very poor marksmen, few of them being able to hit an object of the size of a man more than [4.5 or 6 metres] away.

– Abraham Himmelwright, *Pistol and Revolver Shooting* (1922)

Combat proficiency varies widely. Many civilian gun owners including criminals acquire a weapon for protection, but never practise with it, their combat skills remaining at “Base Chance” (p. 28). Others target-shoot and/or hunt extensively, some achieving world-class abilities. The training of police officers ranges from superb to non-existent. During the 1920s and 1930s, a lot of American cops receive no instruction at all, and especially in rural areas even have to furnish their own sidearm! These have firearms skills at Base Chance. However, the majority of law enforcement agencies provide limited training. For example, British coppers get a token annual pistol practice and are encouraged to train on their own in police shooting clubs. The firearms skills of policemen nevertheless usually remain at “novice” level (25% and better), unless they are already proficient prior to becoming officers. Only a few agencies like the US Bureau of Investigation, New York State Police, or Shanghai Municipal Police provide modern, in-depth training to their officers, sometimes even including advanced “kill houses” (realistic shooting ranges like those used by special ops today) and how to shoot from moving automobiles. These men will typically have at least one firearms skill at “professional” level (50% and better). Military firearms instruction during the 1920s and 1930s is reasonably good, and soldiers can be expected to have one or several firearms skills at “professional” level.

Using the rules for “Skill Points” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 50), investigators may find it difficult to achieve a “professional” level in even just one combat skill. It is easier to become a good academic (who has to put points in two or three broad skills) than a good fighter (who has to put points in several narrowly defined skills, including Dodge) – and failing a combat skill roll usually results in more immediate problems than failing Library Use.



- If the Keeper prefers more competent investigators, he could allow an alternate approach to character creation that results in more skill points overall. See “EDU and INT Multipliers” (*Call of Cthulhu*, p. 141).
- A more biased way to prevent incompetence in combat skills is to assign additional skill points to investigators belonging to occupations like the Mercenary, Soldier/Marine, and Western Lawman. See “1920s Occupations: Special” (*1920s Investigator’s Companion*, p. 19). This gives undue preference to certain professions, and the Keeper might at least wish to extend this to other combat-oriented occupations, such as the Bank Robber, Federal Agent, Hit Man, Military Officer, Police Detective, Police Officer, Private Eye, etc.
- An even more biased method to increase competency is to assign both additional skill points and minimum skill levels to members of the military only. See “Generating Military Characters” (*1990s Handbook*, p. 39). Another method to give soldiers additional skill points is outlined in “Generating Soldier Characters” (*No Man’s Land*, p. 7). A final way to improve skills at least of veterans is given in “War Experience” (*London Guidebook*, p. 13).