

Call of Cthulhu Quick-Start

Quick Start Rules for the
Call of Cthulhu Role-Playing Game
Includes the popular adventure “*The Haunting!*”
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The Great Old Ones ruled the earth aeons before the rise of humankind. Originally they came from the gulfs of space and were cast down by even greater beings. Remains of their cyclopean cities and forbidden knowledge can still be found on remote islands in the Pacific, buried amid the shifting sands of vast deserts, and in the frigid recesses of the polar extremes. Now they sleep — some deep within the enveloping earth and others beneath the eternal sea, in the drowned city of R'lyeh, preserved in the waters by the spells of mighty Cthulhu. When the stars are right they will rise, and once again walk this Earth.

Call of Cthulhu is Chaosium's classic roleplaying game of Lovecraftian horror in which ordinary people are confronted by the terrifying and alien forces of the Cthulhu Mythos. *Call of Cthulhu* uses Chaosium's *Basic Roleplaying System*, easy to learn and quick to play. This bestseller has won dozens of game-industry awards and is a member of the Academy of Adventure Game Design Hall of Fame. In 2011 *Call of Cthulhu* celebrated its 30th anniversary. In 2003 *Call of Cthulhu* was voted the #1 Gothic/Horror RPG of all time by the Gaming Report.com community. *Call of Cthulhu* is well-supported by an ever-growing line of high quality game supplements.

You Too Can Cthulhu!

All you need to play *Call of Cthulhu-Quickstart* is this book, some dice, imagination, and your friends.

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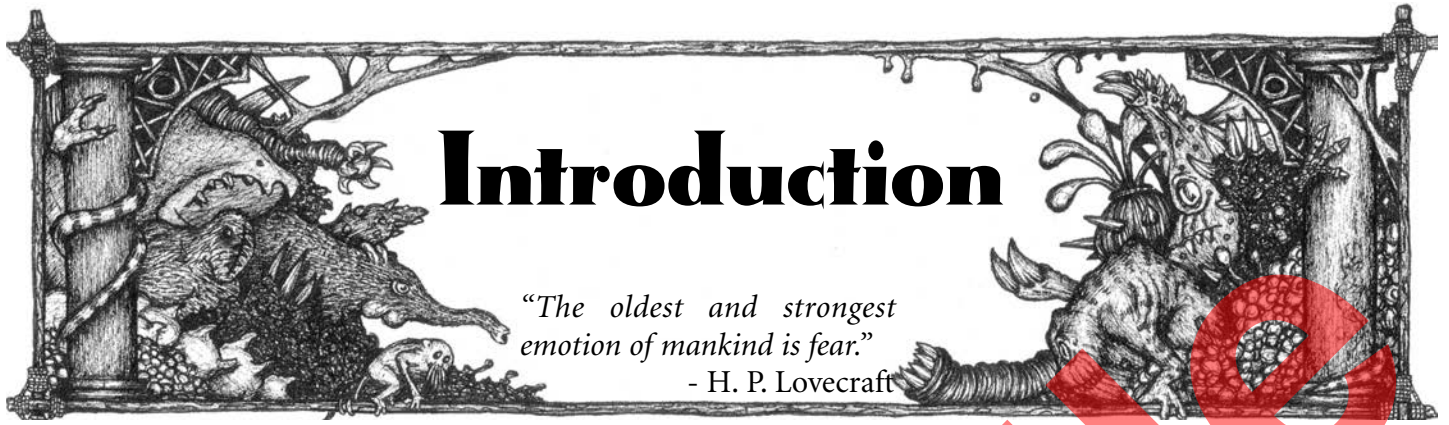
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Introduction

"The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear."
- H. P. Lovecraft

Horror. Terror. Fear is at the core of our existence. Horror stories are a catharsis for the dread we hold in our souls on a day-to-day level. *Call of Cthulhu* is a game that lets you explore that fear, bringing monsters and terrors out into the daylight, and fighting against them for the sake of soul and sanity.

If you've played other roleplaying games (RPGs) before, then you have an idea of how it works: A group of players sit around a table and describe the actions of their characters, while one player (the game master, or "keeper" as he is known in *Call of Cthulhu*) guides the story along. It is like an interactive novel where one person tells the story, and the players take part in the story. However, *Call of Cthulhu* is different from most other RPGs. In *Call of Cthulhu*, the players portray ordinary people cast into extraordinary circumstances. You have no magic weapons with which to assault the dark things of the world. You cannot count on the local king sending armies of minions to your aid. You simply have your wits, your courage, and your skill to fight the horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos. In its simplest form, *Call of Cthulhu* is a game about heroes: heroes who realize that the world is crawling with alien terrors bent on the destruction of humanity, and who take that fight back to the abyss itself.

The simplest metaphor for a game of *Call of Cthulhu* can be likened to the fairy tale of the Little Dutch Boy. The dam had a crack and the Little Dutch Boy had to stand there with his finger in the hole to keep the water from flooding out and destroying the nearby town. However, instead of how the original tale played out, imagine that on the other side of that dam is a bloodthirsty shark, which is gnawing away at the Dutch Boy. He loses one finger, so he must put another one in. Then he

loses another finger, and another. The hole is getting bigger, and he must stick his entire arm in, and the shark keeps biting. But if he fails, if he leaves his post, the dam will collapse, and many lives will be lost. And so he stays, resolute in his convictions. He may die, but humanity will live because of him.

This booklet gives you all the information you will need to create a character for the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game, as well as a brief overview of how to play the game. Many of the game's details are glossed over here simply because

What's a Cthulhu?

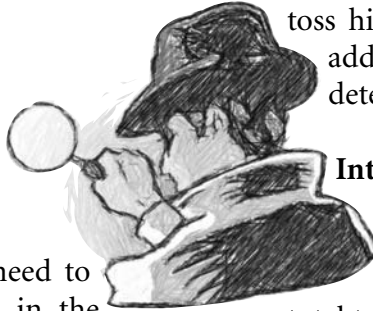
The *Call of Cthulhu* game is inspired by the "Cthulhu Mythos" stories of Depression-era author H. P. Lovecraft and his imitators. Cthulhu is the name of a tremendously evil, alien priest/god/monster which features in many of Lovecraft's works, most notably, "The Call of Cthulhu". Countless stories have been written over the years expanding on his creations. Pulp authors such as Robert E. Howard and Robert Bloch extrapolated Lovecraft's ideas into their own. Current horror writers such as Clive Barker, Stephen King, Kathe Koja and Caitlin R. Kiernan show a clear influence from Lovecraft.

If you've never read any of Lovecraft's work before, you have missed out. Penguin Books has two collections of his work that should get you started. "The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Tales" and "The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Tales" should give you a good introduction to his work.

Call of Cthulhu is a game of mystery. If the players understand too much of the goings-on behind the rules, this can break the atmosphere of tension necessary for a good mystery.

Once you've played a game or two, you will probably want to take a look at the full rules for *Call of Cthulhu*, which are available from any good game store, most large bookstores, or directly from us at www.chaosium.com. To create your character, you will only need three ordinary six-sided dice. To play the game, you should invest in a full set of polyhedral dice. At least one of 4, 6, 8, 10 and 20-sided dice are needed to play the game.

Creating An Investigator



To play *Call of Cthulhu* you need to create a character. Characters in the game are called “investigators” because they primarily spend their play time investigating the horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos. Creating your character is simple, and outlined below. It will be helpful for you to have a piece of scratch paper handy, or ideally a *Call of Cthulhu* character sheet. There is one located on page 311 of the rulesbook or you can download one for free at www.chaosium.com. Click on “Free Downloads” then “Character Sheets, Keeper Forms, and more.”

The Primary Attributes

To begin, a *Call of Cthulhu* character has seven primary attributes. Each of these attributes is described below, as well as the number of dice you roll to determine the value of each attribute.

Strength (STR) measures the raw physical power your investigator can bring to bear. It influences the amount of damage he can deliver with a punch or kick, as well as his grip, or ability to lift heavy items. Roll 3 six-sided dice and add them together to determine the value for STR.

Constitution (CON) is a measure of the hardness of your investigator. It influences the amount of damage you can take before going unconscious or dying as well as how resistant you are to diseases

and poison. Roll 3 six-sided dice and add them together to determine the value for CON.

Dexterity (DEX) is a measure of your investigator's agility and speed. Roll 3 six-sided dice and add them together to determine the value for DEX.

Size (SIZ) is a measure of your investigator's physical mass. It influences how much damage you can take, as well as how much you can deliver. Also, as a measure of your investigator's weight, it influences the ability of horrible monsters to pick him up and toss him around the room. Roll 2 six-sided dice, add them together, and add 6 to that total to determine the value for SIZ.

Intelligence (INT) is an indicator of your investigator's cunning and ability to make leaps of logic and intuition. Roll 2 six-sided dice, add them together, and add 6 to that total to determine the value for INT.

Power (POW) is a combination of personal magnetism, spirit, and mental stability. It influences your character's ability to cast magical spells, as well as his resistance to the sanity-blasting horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos. Roll 3 six-sided dice and add them together to determine the value for POW.

Appearance (APP) measures the physical charm and appeal of your character. Roll 3 six-sided dice and add them together to determine the value for APP.

Education (EDU) is a measure of the knowledge which your investigator has accumulated through formal education, or the venerated “School of Hard Knocks.” Roll 3 six-sided dice, add them together, and add 3 to the total to determine the value for EDU.

Before play begins, you may swap around any attributes which use the same dice to determine their value. In other words, you could swap any of the values for Strength, Constitution, Dexterity, Appearance or Power with each other. You could only swap Size and Intelligence with each other. Education remains static. If the rolls you get for your investigator are abysmal, you should consider rerolling a few. The average attributes should be around 10-11, if you have too many lower than

that, you should pick one or two to reroll. Note that often playing a character with substandard attributes can be just as satisfying as playing one with exceptionally high attributes. It all comes down to creating a character with whom you are comfortable.

The Secondary Attributes

There are a number of attributes which are determined after you have figured the attributes above. These are *Idea*, *Knowledge*, *Luck*, *Damage Bonus*, *Magic Points*, *Hit Points*, and *Sanity*.

Idea is simply your INT score multiplied by 5. This score is used as a percentile roll to give your investigator information, or to make leaps of deduction in certain situations. Percentile rolls will be explained later in the "Game Systems" chapter.

Knowledge is your EDU score multiplied by 5. This score is used as a percentile roll to show how your investigator's education and training gives insight certain situations.

Luck is your POW score multiplied by 5. The Luck roll is often used to give your character a last chance in a crisis situation, or to cause bad things to happen to the only investigator in the group to fail the roll.

Damage Bonus (DB) is how much extra damage your investigator does with a successful close-combat attack. Add your STR and SIZ and consult the Damage Bonus Table to find your damage bonus.

Magic Points (MP) are equal to your POW. MPs fluctuate up and down as you cast spells or activate arcane alien devices. If your investigator's MPs ever fall below 0, he or she is rendered unconscious.

Hit Points (HP) are determined by adding SIZ and CON together, then dividing the total by two

and rounding up. As your investigator takes damage from combat or other events, your HPs will drop. If you drop to only 2 HPs, your investigator is rendered unconscious. If he hits -2 or lower, he or she is dead.

Sanity (SAN) begins at a level equal to your POW score multiplied by 5. Circle the value that corresponds to this number on the character sheet. This score is used as a percentile roll that presents your investigator's ability to remain stoic in the face of horrors. As you face the horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos your SAN score fluctuates. It can rise above its starting level, but can never be higher than 99 minus the value of your Cthulhu Mythos skill (*q.v.*).

Occupation and Skills

At this point, you should have an idea of what your investigator does for a living. This choice of occupation will influence the selection of skills for your character. To begin with, choose an occupation. Anything you think would be interesting to play is valid, but you should confirm this with your keeper. Some favorite occupations in *Call of Cthulhu* are Professor, Treasure Seeker, Occultist, and Archaeologist. However, the occupations are only limited by your imagination.

Once you have select an occupation, you should look at the list of skills on you character sheet. Choose 8 skills which are appropriate for your character's chosen occupation. These are your Occupation Skills. The *Call of Cthulhu* rulesbook contains a fuller explanation of occupations and occupation skills.

You now have to assign percentile points to the skills on the character sheet.

NOTE: no skill can start play with a rating higher than 75. No character can add points to the Cthulhu Mythos skill during character creation. It is assumed that all beginning characters are ignorant of the threat of the Mythos.

You multiply your EDU score by 20 to get the number of points to spread among your Occupation Skills. Add any number of these points to the eight skills you chose. Each skill on the character sheet also has a number in parenthesis next to it. This is the Base Chance that every investigator has with that skill. Any points you add to a skill add to its



Damage Bonus Table	
STR + SIZ	DB
2 to 12	-1D6
13 to 16	-1D4
17 to 24	+0
25 to 32	+1D4
33 to 40	+1D6

Base Chance. For example, if you add 15 points to the Conceal skill (Base Chance of 15) you would have Conceal: 30.

After selecting Occupation Skills, select your character's Hobby Skills. These are skills that your investigator has acquired over the course of his or her life. To determine how many points you have to spend on them, multiply your INT score by 10. Divide those points among any skills on the sheet you would like (again, you can't put points into Cthulhu Mythos). Note that you may wish to save a few skill points to buy combat skills such as Gun, Sword, etc.

Final Touches

You now have something that looks like a finished character. Go back to the top of the sheet, make sure you have a name, sex, age, and all the other information filled in. Look over the character sheet and taking one last look at all the skills, attributes, etc. which you have generated. From looking over all this material, you will begin to get an idea of who this character is.

You might want to fill out some notes on your investigator's background and personality. Who is he or she really? Where did she grow up? What is his family like? The more time you spend thinking about your character, the more he develops a personality.

The Game System

Playing the Game

In a roleplaying game, there is no winner or loser. You all win if everyone has fun telling a good, moving tale. You lose if no one has fun. To keep things moving along during the course of the game, and to add that spice of risk and improbability, you occasionally will be called on to roll dice to determine the outcome of critical events. Generally, Skill Checks may be called for by the keeper in stressful situations. Walking down a clear hallway on a pleas-

ant evening is not a stressful situation. Running down a rubble-strewn corridor in pitch black darkness while being chased by howling, slaving ghouls is.

The following section outlines the basics of playing a game of *Call of Cthulhu*.

Dice Rolling & Skill Checks

Different types of polyhedral dice are used to determine the outcome of events in a *Call of Cthulhu* session. You should be able to purchase a set of these dice in any good game store. You will want at least one each of 4-, 6-, 8-, 10-, and 20-sided die. You will also want to pick up dice referred to as "percentage" dice. These dice will have ten sides numbered "10, 20, 30, etc." Dice notation in the game is simple.

You will always know what type and number of dice to roll when you see something like "1D6" or "3D10."

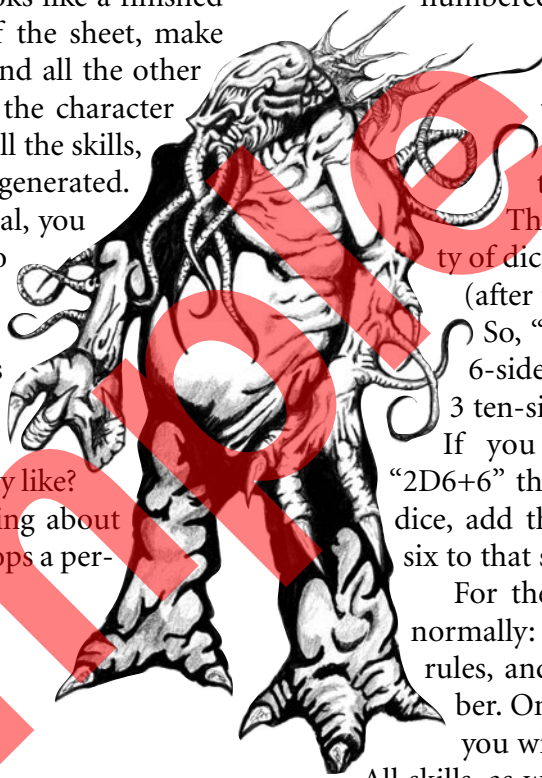
The first number is the quantity of dice to roll. The second number (after the "D") tells you what type. So, "1D6" means to roll a single 6-sided die. "3D10" tells you to roll 3 ten-sided dice and add the values.

If you ever see something like "2D6+6" that means to roll 2 six-sided dice, add them together, and then add six to that sum.

For the most part, dice are rolled normally: roll the dice called for in the rules, and read the uppermost number. One of the most common rolls you will make is a "percentile" roll.

All skills, as well as Idea, Know, Luck, and Sanity rolls start with a percentile roll. To do this, roll a percentile die as described above, and a regular ten-sided die. Then simply add the two numbers together. If the number you rolled is equal to or under the skill listed on your character sheet, you have succeeded.

Example: *Jane is rolling to see if her character spots a zombie sneaking up on her in a dark graveyard. She has a "Spot Hidden" skill of 45%. She rolls the two dice, getting a 60 on the percentile die, and 3 on the ten-sided die. Adding them together, she gets a total of*



63, well over her skill of 45%. She never sees the zombie coming.

Generally, the keeper for your game tells you when you can attempt a skill roll.

Additionally, when you successfully roll a given skill, put a check mark in the box next to it on your sheet. You can only get one check per skill per game session. At the end of the evening's session your keeper generally will tell you to "roll for skill increases". At this time, roll percentile dice against any checked skills. If you roll over the value of the skill, you can add 1D6 points to the skill's value. In other words, the more you know about something, the harder it is to learn anything new, or get any better.

The Resistance Table

On occasion, you may need to roll a test that's not covered by the skills on your sheet. In this instance, you will look at your characteristics and determine which is best to use, and then match them against a value set by the keeper on the resistance table below.

For example, let's say your character with a STR score of 13 is arm-wrestling with Burly Bob, who has a STR of 18. You look up your STR of 13 on the Resistance Table as the "Active Characteristic" then look up Burly Bob's as the "Passive Characteristic." The value where both axes of the graph meet is the number you need. If you roll equal or under that number, you have succeeded.

However, let's say your character is barreling down a rubble-strewn hallway in a musty tomb. A pack of ghouls are running behind him, hungry for his tasty flesh and organs. The keeper might tell you that you have to make a resisted DEX test against a difficulty of 14 or your trip and fall. In this case, match your DEX as the active characteristic against the passive value of 14. If you succeed, you keep running. If you fail, you fall, and are probably doomed.

The keeper could also call for a test of your DEX against the DEX of the ghouls to see if they overcome you. In this case, you'd roll just as when facing off against Burly Bob, but using DEX instead of STR.

Sanity

The horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos threaten the mind as much as the body. The psychic shock from encountering the alien terrors of the Mythos is one of the primary dangers that characters in the game will endure. Investigating mysteries in a *Call of Cthulhu* game takes a dreadful toll on the sanity of investigators, and eventually leads to madness.

Whenever you encounter the horrors of the Mythos, or come across something mundane yet horrific (such as stumbling across your best friend's mutilated corpse) you make a percentile roll against your current Sanity score. If you roll over your current Sanity, you lose a greater amount of Sanity points. If you roll under, you will lose less, or none. The Sanity loss is generally described for an event as something like "0/1D6" or "2/1D10." The number before the slash mark tells you how much Sanity your character loses if he rolls under his current SAN score; the number after the slash is how much your character loses if you roll over your current SAN.

When confronted with sanity-blasting events your keeper will ask you to roll the percentile dice, and then will let you know how much SAN you lose depending on whether you succeed or fail.

Regaining lost Sanity is a long, arduous process. You may have to check your character into an asylum, or seek other forms of psychotherapy to get those points back. Generally, at the successful end of each scenario you should get a few points back as a reward. Additionally, when you raise a skill above 90% through experience, you get a few points added to your Sanity as well.

As your SAN score slips lower, your character becomes less and less stable and his ability to function decreases. Full rules for Sanity are not included here, but your keeper will let you know the effects of this degradation when you play the game.

Combat

Combat in *Call of Cthulhu* is dangerous. When confronting the horror of the Mythos it is generally a good idea for your character to run away. Avoid confrontation all together. Sometimes there is no

