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Sample file

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PROLOGUE

It is early morning at the docks of Cambridge. A young man leans against a rail and watches the sun rise from the sea. An old sailor approaches.

Listen Sonny,

I've known you since you were a babe, and I can see the change in you. You have the look of one who envies the Philosophers: the brooding mien, the distant gaze into the depths of the sea.

I know you've seen the bones they dredged out of the deep.

The Philosophers pore over them in the flickering, electric lights of Cambridge and Portsmouth. They poke and they scrape, trying to know a world removed by a thousand years and ten thousand leagues.

But understand this: the ancient world was a dark and terrible place. People clung to life in blistering deserts, scrounged amidst barren crags, and covered in black crevices. There were bloody sacrifices to ancient, unknowable beings.

Today, we have little history of those peoples. A tablet here, a bronze there. Almost as though their records were destroyed. Systematically. With purpose. Nobody asked questions about the past. Nobody, that is, until the Philosophers. They use their

arts to unearth ancient temples and draw strange artifacts out of the deep. Not once did they consider that those who destroyed and hid this knowledge... well, they might have had the right of it.

Listen! Don't go. I know you fear the Queen, son. And you think the Philosophers sleep soundly at night. Their phlogiston batteries and their consequence engines are too useful. At least until the Kmir's armies lay down their arms, and he bows before our Queen.

They're fools. That's what you must understand. They intrude into a domain undisturbed since the time of the Pharaohs, but to them, it's just a game. A search for knowledge. And the time is coming when they will find what they seek.

You'd best pay me heed. I may be an old man, but I've spent my life upon the darkening seas. I've seen things. Things I couldn't explain. Things I couldn't comprehend. Real. Alive.

Boy, don't join with the Philosophers. That way lies madness. Go back to the country. You might be able to weather the storm.

Or, would you do something about it?

Perhaps I know someone you should meet.



Two Philosophers cloaked in black, academic robes stand on a cliff overlooking the ocean. Half submerged by the waves, a massive boulder blocks the entrance to a cavern. Nearby rests an imposing device of wood and brass. Deep within its gears and pipes, a metal claw clutches a faintly glowing crystal.

VALEN Dmitry, we must have the engine ready. It is nearly time.

DMITRY This isn't going to work, Valen. We don't have enough chemical reactant to unseal that grotto. And even if there were some ancient mechanism...

VALEN Not a *mechanism*, Dmitry. They had mighty thaumaturgy, better than we've been able to manage. And thaumaturgy does not corrode in seawater.

DMITRY That boulder must weigh over eighty tons! There's a limit...

VALEN You saw the tomb near Luxor. We were both there.

DMITRY The Egyptians' work was unprecedented. They had wealth and countless slaves. This is the New World, Valen. We'll be lucky to find the smallest hex.

VALEN This isn't just some grotto. We have two independent sources. There's that journal you translated by Leaf something.

DMITRY Leif Gunnarson, Viking captain of the lost ship Tegnir.

VALEN Yes, him. And then the indigenous stone beacon. We don't find much stone construction in New England. It's obvious they wished to draw attention to the spot.

DMITRY I don't think they built it with archaeologists in mind.

VALEN Dmitry, I've had about enough of your doubts. If we find something big, our positions in the Queen's court are assured. If not, we've wasted some time...

DMITRY And an expensive reactant crystal.

VALEN Enough! Power up the consequence engine. I'll be mainline.

DMITRY [sigh] Okay, here are the electrodes. Engine coming online in three, two, one, now.

VALEN Ah, very nice. It's like opening a set of eyes you never knew you had.

Dmitry, why the thaumaturgical ward? We're exploring a cave, not facing down the Kmir's mind thieves.

DMITRY Your job isn't to study *me*, Valen. And if you want to move that boulder, you'll need all the charge you can get.

VALEN Very well, very well. Let's see. The rock is round from this side, but it looks like the inner surface is eroded. There is definitely some sort of thaumaturgy still active here. I can see it around the edges of the boulder and more faintly through the center. I can't see past it. It's some type of barrier. Not familiar with it. I'm taking a spectrograph.

DMITRY Got it. Let's take this page back to the tower and check it against the books.

VALEN I've still got three fourths of the charge left. I will not waste a good crystal! I'm going to phase out the barrier for a moment to see what's behind it.

DMITRY Valen, please! Let's just come back later.

VALEN Synchronized... and... phased. By the Queen, it's vast in there! *Huge* area, mostly underwater. Wait. What's that?

DMITRY Valen, what do you see? What?

VALEN Impossible, it's... No. No! [Valen begins to choke.]

DMITRY Valen!

The, the boulder! It's moving! Put the barrier back, Valen! Valen!



A messenger hurries into the audience chamber, bows deeply, and deposits a slim, metal case in Elaine's hand. The scroll within is water-stained and yellowed. Its wax seal bears the emblem of the Queensguard. Elaine cracks the seal and begins to read.

Your Majesty Elaine, Lord of Manhattan and High Queen of America,

Per your instructions, I set out to investigate the rumors of unrest among the Philosophers. At first, I was most skeptical. While the Philosophers have indeed grown in wealth and influence in recent years, they have little to gain and much to lose through any sort of insubordination. Independently, at least, they pose no threat to the Crown.

However, I remain deeply concerned about the possibility that the organization may have been infiltrated by the enemy. The Philosophers have a strict hierarchical structure, not unlike your own military or Queensguard. Knowledge of their projects, particularly knowledge with implications for the security of the realm, is often highly compartmentalized. If the Kmir could buy but a few key natural philosophers and thaumaturges within the Tower, it is possible the entire strength of the Philosophers could be turned against us in a time and manner chosen by the enemy. Needless to say, we must prevent this eventuality at all costs.

Unfortunately, I did not reach the Tower on schedule. A terrible, bitterly cold nor'easter has been ravaging the coastline, quite unusual so early in the Fall. It has grounded all airships, and even electric carriages are experiencing significant difficulties due to flooded roadways. I was able to secure a large courser and make my way cross-country, ultimately arriving in Cambridge on the 27th of September. The city has endured tremendous flooding, and the people of the town are suffering greatly. However, the Tower of Cambridge is constructed on a rise, and the floodwaters do not approach its base.

Despite the downpour, black smoke billowed from the building's many chimneys. Neither the fury of the heavens nor the misery of the people can stop the Philosophers' furnaces and laboratories.



I rode up to the great, steel doors and demanded to be let inside. It was ten minutes before any heeded my calls.

At last, the gateway was opened by the tower warden, a bear of a man clad in heavy chain. He recognized the symbol of the Queensguard on my breast and welcomed me inside. I was tired from the ride and angry over the delay. I dismounted and immediately asserted my authority to requisition food and lodging and to conduct an investigation into the Tower's activities.

This, perhaps, was a mistake.

I was provided with fine quarters and dry clothes before being led to a large dining hall. There, I met Valen Albrecht, a Philosopher who recently assumed leadership of the Tower following the death of the old Chancellor, Martin Rochelle. Valen is an interesting man, very calm and confident, yet driven with an inner fire. He spoke eloquently of the Tower's recent projects, including several that may be of great use in the southern campaign.

After dinner, I was beset with drowsiness. I retired to my quarters and slept for twelve hours. The next day, Valen provided me with a tour of the Tower's facilities. I must admit that everything seemed to be in order, and the projects appeared just as Valen described. I privately interviewed several Philosophers, selected randomly, and they all seemed preoccupied by their work and, so far as I could tell, loyal to Manhattan.

The most unsettling aspect of my visit may have been Valen himself. He watched me with disturbing acuity, and though he asked few questions, I often caught myself explaining to him my background and the purposes behind my investigative activities. By the end of the day, I had the odd feeling that he had learned more about me than I had learned through my exploration of the Tower.

Having identified no wrongdoing at Cambridge, I bid Valen farewell and rode out into the howling gale. I am sending you this letter before I carry on to Portsmouth, the Philosophers' smaller facility.

Although I felt unsettled by my visit, there is a long distance between unsettling and treasonous behavior.

I suspect that, as a man of arms, I am made uncomfortable by the single-minded pursuit of the arcane arts, and as a man of conscience, I find the Philosophers' complete ambivalence toward the people of Cambridge distasteful. However, if this is the manner in which they best serve the realm, so be it.

I anticipate a return to the High Court of Manhattan by the end of October. Should you have additional instructions for me, you may leave a message at any of the places on the enclosed list of addresses, which I shall visit on my return journey.

Your will be done,

Sigfried Falk

Inspector General
Second Captain of the Queensguard

Sample file



RULES OF THE STEAM-POWERED AGE

Introduction

Welcome to Queensguard! Queensguard is a short campaign for the Call of Cthulhu roleplaying game published by Chaosium Inc. It is set in an alternate version of America in which steam technology and magic are woven into the fabric of society.

Queensguard is divided into two acts, each of which should consume approximately two four-hour game sessions. The campaign strives to be consistently fast-paced and exciting, and it takes advantage of the unusual setting. Investigation, clever planning, and physical combat are all important. For a plotted scenario, Queensguard grants players a large degree of freedom. Key tasks within each act may be completed in any order, frequent “Contingency” sections help the keeper adapt the plot to varied player choices, and players may succeed or fail in Act 1 without foreclosing opportunities in Act 2.

The four-session campaign detailed in this book need not be the end of your adventures in the Kingdom of America. A substantial amount of information about the politics, history, technology, and magic of the setting is provided in the next chapter, “A Tour of the World of Queensguard.” The two

campaign chapters contain many additional ideas and characters. Using this information and a little creativity, Queensguard can be a steampunk setting for Call of Cthulhu adventures of your own devising.

How to Use This Book

This book consists of a Prologue, five chapters, and an index. The Prologue and the first two chapters (“Rules of the Steam-Powered Age” and “A Tour of the World of Queensguard”) may be read by the players and the keeper. The final three chapters (“Act 1: Valen’s Tower,” “Act 2: The Queen and the Kmir,” and “Reference Materials”) are intended to be read only by the keeper, as they contain details of the campaign plot, which the players must discover.

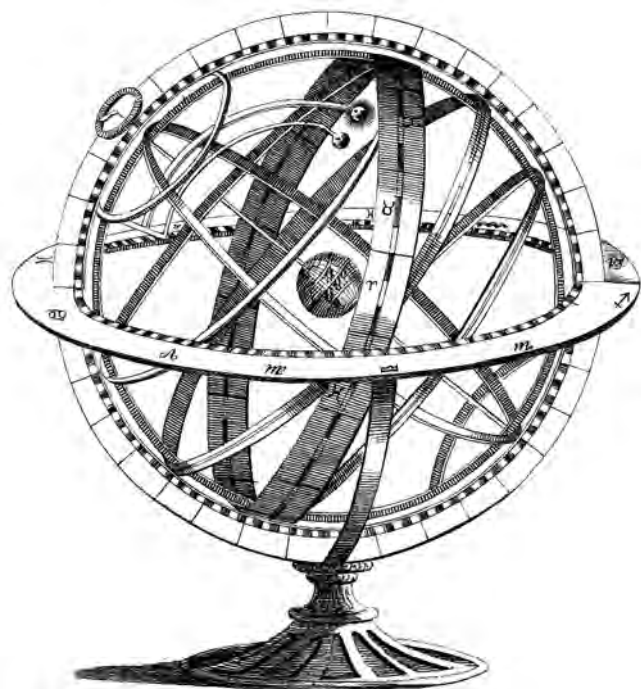
If you are the keeper and you are short on time, it is possible to get a complete overview of the plot of Queensguard by reading fewer than eight pages. First, read the Prologue, then read the one-page summary of each Act that appears at the beginning of each corresponding chapter. Finally, read the two-page section called “Behind-the-Scenes Plot Elements” near the end of the Reference Materials chapter.

If you have more time, you can smoothly read this book from front to back. It is best if you have read most of the book before starting the game, although you should be able to safely put off reading Act 2 until your players have completed Act 1.

At times, you will see the words “section” and “subsection” referenced. Sections use headers like “How to Use This Book” (above). Subsections use headers like “Chapters of the Book” (below).

Chapters of the Book

The Prologue is a piece of fiction that introduces both the world and the plot of Queensguard. Think of it like a movie trailer. It is useful for people who are deciding whether or not they would like to play in the campaign, and it may provide players with ideas they can use when creating investigators. Note



that the investigators will not be aware of all of the plot elements revealed in the Prologue.

The first chapter, which you are reading now, is helpful for understanding the rules and character creation considerations that are unique to Queensguard.

The second chapter, “A Tour of the World of Queensguard,” provides a political and historical overview of the world. It also details the magic and technology that are prevalent in the Kingdom of America and four other great states. This material is public knowledge for citizens of America, although how much any particular investigator knows is a function of how learned or well-traveled she is. Information about nations that do not play a part in the campaign plot of Queensguard may be useful to a player who wishes to create a character from a foreign land or to a keeper who hopes to broaden the investigators’ adventures beyond the included four-session campaign.

The third and fourth chapters discuss the plot of Queensguard in detail. Each chapter begins with a one-page summary of the events contained within. These summaries exist primarily to help the keeper get a sense of the entire plot at once without a large time investment. Sections inside the campaign chapters are organized according to major locations and tasks. Investigators may explore locations and complete tasks in more than one order, so you will likely need to skip around. Some scenes include “Keeper’s Scene Notes,” paragraphs that explain the purpose of a scene in the context of the larger game.

The final chapter provides helpful reference materials for the keeper. Most of these lists and play aids should not be seen by the players. The exception is the last item, a Call of Cthulhu character sheet that has been customized for the world of Queensguard. You probably will wish to photocopy this character sheet for the players rather than use one from the core rulebook.

Character Creation in Queensguard

As Queensguard is not set in the everyday world, players will likely need to create new investigators.

The game assumes that the majority of the investigators are members of the Queensguard, an elite arm of the government that has both investigative and police authority within the Kingdom of America. The Queensguard needs individuals with a wide range of skill sets, so there are few constraints on the types of investigators that players may create.

In particular, investigators may have possessed different backgrounds before joining the Queensguard. One may have been a soldier in the Royal Army, another may have been a low-ranking Philosopher, while another may be a Nordic rune-caster who moved to America a decade ago. The Queensguard is eager to hire individuals with diverse experiences and abilities, so you should encourage players to be creative.

It is also possible for investigators not to be members of the Queensguard, so long as there is a plausible reason why the Queen should entrust them with an important mission. One investigator could be the crown prince, for instance, or a childhood friend of the Queen. It is preferable for you to avoid any character concept that involves tricking the Queen (e.g. “my investigator is a spy for the Central Asian Empire who has gained the Queen’s trust”), because the presence of a disloyal investigator can be disruptive to the party and the campaign plot.

The ranks and structure of the Queensguard are detailed in the next chapter. Investigators may all hold positions of the same rank within the Queensguard, or one investigator could possess greater authority and be the leader of the group. This choice should be made by the keeper and the players during character creation, as some player groups work best with an official leader and others work best without. Either way is compatible with the game’s world and plot.

Once players have character concepts, an effective way to rapidly generate the stats for a Queensguard character is to perform the following steps in order:

Character Statistics in Queensguard:Rolled Attributes:

- Roll 3d6 each for STR, CON, POW, DEX, and APP. Reroll if the total is below 46. Rearrange the scores at will.
- Roll 2d6+6 each for SIZ and INT. Reroll if the total is below 25. Swap the scores if desired.
- Roll 3d6+3 for EDU. Reroll if the result is dissonant with your character concept.

Age:

- Your age is EDU+6 years or 18 years, whichever is higher.
- You may (repeatedly) add 10 years to increase EDU by 1 each time.
- For every 10 years over age 40, subtract 1 from STR, CON, or DEX (your choice)

Derived Stats:

- SAN and Luck are both set to POW x5.
- Idea is set to INT x5.
- Know is set to EDU x5.
- Determine damage bonus (db) (CoC core, p. 43)

Point Totals:

- Starting Sanity points are set to SAN.
- Maximum and starting Hit Points equal the average of CON and SIZ. Round up.
- Maximum and starting Magic points equal POW

Skills:

- Allot EDU x20 skill points among occupation skills for a member of the Queensguard (those marked with asterisks (*) on the Queensguard character sheet). (Skills are capped at 99%.)
- Allot INT x10 skill points to any skills except Cthulhu Mythos. (Skills are capped at 99%.)

Starting Equipment

Investigators each possess 15 gold (equivalent to \$150 US). They may choose to begin with any weapons or armor they wish, selected from what is available to all members of the Queensguard:

Armor:

- Leather (-1 HP lost per hit)
- Chain (-2 HP lost per hit)
- Full Plate (-3 HP lost per hit)

Weapons:

- Sword (1d6+2+DB, 1-handed, 12 HP, touch range)
- Halberd (1d6+3+DB, 2-handed, 12 HP, 2 yd range)
- Crossbow (1d6+2, 2-handed, 3 HP, 30 yd range)

The crossbow represented here is rapid-firing with a low draw weight. A readied crossbow fires first in a round, and the weapon can be reloaded and aimed during that round. Therefore, a crossbow may fire one shot per round at no penalty. It is generally best to assume that a crossbow has plenty of ammunition for normal combat situations.

A character who wishes to use a different weapon or armor may do so. For simplicity, it is suggested that the keeper use the properties of the most similar standard Queensguard weapon or armor listed above to represent a new item. (For instance, a mace has the same damage code, range, and number of hit points as a sword.) This method of handling combat items allows players flavorful equipment choices without providing an incentive to loot fallen enemies, go shopping, or engage in other activities that interrupt the flow of the story.

Philosophers and Magic Users

A player creating a former Philosopher should select two pieces of alchemical or steam technology from the list in the next chapter. Neither a consequence engine nor any vehicle may be chosen by an investigator as a starting possession.

Each player who is creating a magic user should select four points worth of spells from the appropriate spell list (in the following chapter). Magic users have the option to use the Willful Ruthlessness rule (CoC core, p. 101, right-hand box, third bullet point) after determining derived stats but before determining point totals.

Rule Modifications

In order to better fit the steampunk setting and fast pace of this campaign, several modifications to the standard Call of Cthulhu rules are suggested here. Some of these changes (particularly those affecting the healing rate and insanity duration) serve two purposes. First, they help to make investigators slightly less averse to combat, so they act more confident and heroic, as befits members of the Queensguard. Second, they allow the story to move ahead without long periods of downtime, promoting a sense of urgency and avoiding delays at points when a delay could cause the investigators to miss out on important plot events.

Armor (CoC core, p. 59): A disadvantage to wearing the heavier types of armor has been added. Users of chain armor halve their Climb, Jump, Sneak, and Martial Arts skills and may not Swim or spellcast. Users of full plate armor halve their Dodge and Throw skills and may not Climb, Jump, Sneak, use Martial Arts, Swim, or spellcast. This information is noted on the Queensguard character sheet.

Combat Skills (CoC core, p. 70-74): Combat skills have been simplified. The four category skills for firearms (*Handgun*, *Machine Gun*, *Rifle*, *Shotgun*) and the melee skill *Head Butt* have been eliminated. The distinction between weapon skill and weapon category skills (CoC core, p. 61) has been removed. Instead, all weapons of a given type now have the same “base chance” to hit (starting skill %) and use the same skill. Thus, all swords use the *Sword* skill (which begins at 15%), all polearms use the *Halberd* skill (which begins at 10%), and so forth. Each weapon type’s starting skill percentage is indicated on the Queensguard character sheet in the “Reference Materials” chapter. If an investigator possesses a different sort of weapon (such as a mace or a bow), that weapon has its own skill with a base chance identical to whichever Queensguard weapon skill is most similar. For instance, a *Mace* skill would start at 15%, like the *Sword* skill, and a *Bow* skill would start at 10%, like the *Crossbow* skill.

Healing Rate (CoC core, p. 54): The healing rate for physical injuries has been hastened from 1d3/2d3 hit points per week to 1d3/2d3 hit points per day. (The use of *Medicine* or *First Aid* to immediately heal 1d3

hit points following an injury is unchanged.)

Insanity Duration (CoC core, p. 83-84): Under standard CoC rules, there are four insanity durations: short temporary, long temporary, indefinite, and permanent. In Queensguard, temporary insanity (triggered by losing 5 or more Sanity points due to a single roll) is always short temporary insanity with a duration of 1d3+1 combat rounds. Losing at least one fifth of current Sanity points within one game hour may result in either long temporary insanity with a duration of 1d4x10 game hours or indefinite insanity, at the keeper’s discretion. In either case, the disorder selected should not prevent the player from continuing to control her investigator and progress through the adventure. Reaching zero Sanity points still results in permanent insanity.

Skimming a Mythos Book (CoC core, p. 93): It is possible to learn spells and increase one’s *Cthulhu Mythos* skill by skimming a Mythos book. What can be obtained from a book and the time required is included with that book’s description in the “Reference Materials” chapter.

Spell Learning (CoC core, p. 101): It is possible to gain ranks in the *Cthulhu Mythos* skill and lose Sanity points by learning a Mythos spell. Costs are noted in the “Reference Materials” chapter.

Spell Resistance: Many spells that affect others call for a resistance test in which the caster’s remaining magic points are compared to the target’s current magic points. This causes many high-cost spells to be relatively ineffective, and it makes spellcasters who have previously used magic much easier to affect with spells than other people. In Queensguard, all spell resistance tests that involve magic points are instead made by comparing the POW of the caster to the POW of the target on the resistance table.

Weapon Breakage (CoC core, p. 59): A weapon used to parry only breaks if its hit points are equalled or exceeded by a single blow. Weapons do not accumulate damage.

