

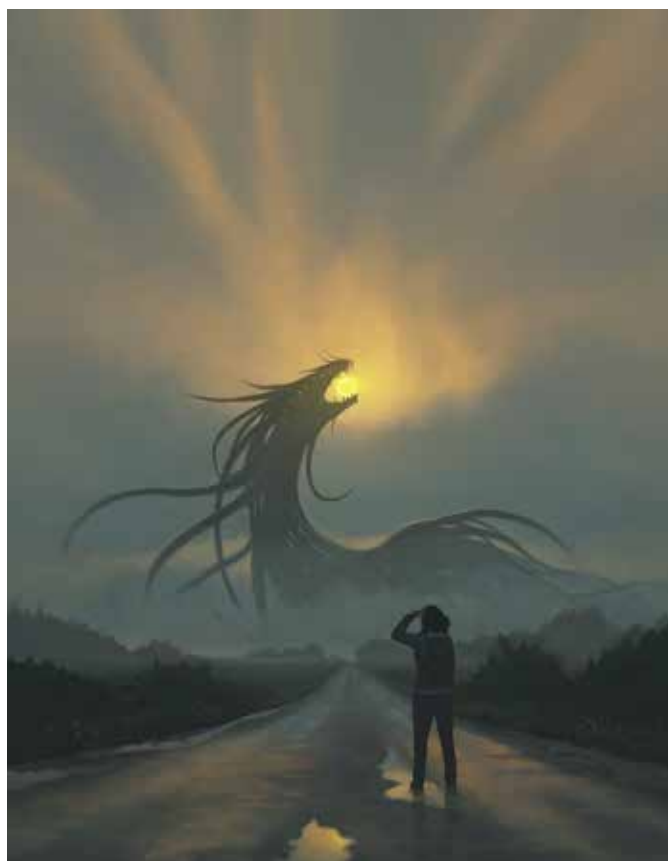
Bayt al Azif

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Cover Art

Holly Humphries

I find a lot of inspiration in the scenery of my local countryside, and I've always liked to imagine there's something very 'other' lurking out there, things that humans weren't meant to see. That's the main feeling I want to communicate in my art. I wanted to paint something with a massive, incomprehensible scale that still has a sense of intangibility to it, so I came up with this otherworldly leviathan-like creature that's made of several flowing strands, and placed it on a very average country lane that could be anywhere.

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New issues of *Bayt al Azif* are published when the stars are right.

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Cthulhu in 2021

A Retrospective

by Dean Engelhardt

This article is my humble attempt to try to summarize everything that was newly released in 2021 to gibber and thrash about within the terrifying sub-genre of tabletop roleplaying games we call “Lovecraft-inspired.” If you’ve read any of the previous Year-in-Review articles I’ve written (both for *Bayt al Azif*, and also for my own blog cthulhureborn.com), you’ll know that these summaries always unearth a broad range of diverse and intriguing Mythos-fuelled releases. The tabletop RPG world is, after all, a constantly bubbling cauldron of creativity – so it’s no surprise that many weird things, quite a few of them Cthulhu Mythos-themed, crawl forth from it each year.

It must be acknowledged that 2021 was the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic (still ongoing at the time of writing), and in some ways it was the year when its effects on game companies became most obvious in the marketplace. In 2020, when many parts of the world went through lockdowns and international trade became much harder, there were already stories being shared about how the economics of such essential measures impacted on the game industry. Back then, it was mostly talk about how projects that were launched pre-COVID were impacted by the changed financial landscape. In 2021, the impacts seemed a little different – changes to the willingness and capacity of publishers to launch brand new projects, especially via Kickstarter.

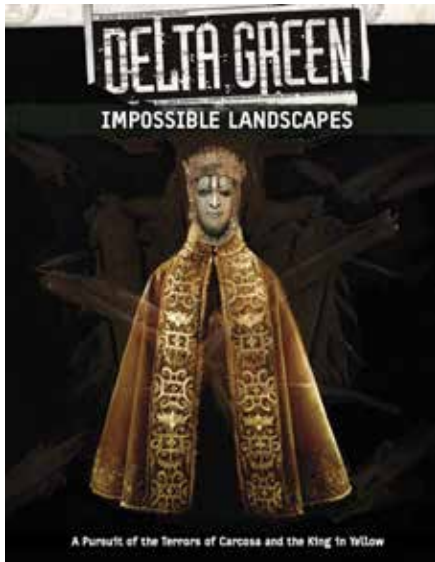
Print publications in particular were greatly affected by ongoing cost pressures (and availability issues) relating to printers’ abilities to source paper and ship finished products through overloaded shipping ports. Those factors no doubt contributed to fewer physical books being released in 2021. But one of the great things about the gaming industry is that creativity never stops but instead shifts, when it needs to, to different formats. So, side-by-side with this slowdown in print books we saw an uptick in electronic (and, to a lesser extent “print on demand”) titles. This was most pronounced in Chaosium’s *Miskatonic Repository* (which was in hyperdrive throughout 2021), but many other publishers also embraced similar approaches to getting fresh content out to gamers.

Highlights of 2021

Each year the number and diversity of new Lovecraft-inspired TTRPG titles is overwhelming... but each year there are also a few absolute highlights which demand special attention. In 2021 there were four such “special events”, namely:

- Arc Dream released what is perhaps the most innovative (if bizarre) new type of Lovecraftian game “campaign” seen in years – *Impossible Landscapes* for the *Delta Green* RPG;
- Chaosium’s venerable *Call of Cthulhu* game celebrated its 40th birthday with a degree of restrained pomp and ceremony;
- Modiphius’ WW2 game *Achtung! Cthulhu* rose from the ashes as a standalone game wrapped around the company’s house (2d20) system; and
- Cash-strapped Petersen Games went hard at accelerating their TTRPG publication output for the (inaccurately-titled) *Dungeons & Dragons 5e/Pathfinder* game *Sandy Petersen’s Cthulhu Mythos*.

I will describe each of these notable trends in the sections which follow, as well as mentioning the myriad other titles that also came out in 2021. When viewed together, it’s easy to draw the conclusion that quite a bit of cool stuff got released... and I think that is an entirely accurate summation of the year. A productive year with a balance of both forward-looking and backward-looking releases.



Throughout 2021 Arc Dream continued steadily releasing titles for their superb modern-day Lovecraftian techno-spy-conspiracy RPG, *Delta Green*. In all they released five titles for the game during the year, but one of them really overshadows everything else – the gargantuan (370 page) surreal horror campaign *Impossible Landscapes*.

Impossible Landscapes is a Delta Green themed riff on the King in Yellow ‘mythology’ invented by Robert W. Chambers and sketched out in his much-celebrated stories written in the late 19th Century. This is a subject that has been explored many times over in TTRPGs, but this particular treatment of the strange and decadent King in Yellow is weirder than most. It is made unique by virtue of its commitment to atmosphere and surreal insanity as a core gaming experience, an end unto itself rather than a piece of set-dressing in a larger investigative or action-driven plot. While there have been many great scenarios written over the years which start with similar ideas, never has a writer pushed forwards so single-mindedly with the goal of writing something where player characters (and maybe players themselves) feel adrift in a sea of surreal visions and suggestive but elusive information. For this reason alone, I would class *Impossible Landscapes* as a “genre-expanding” book.

This is not to say that it is necessarily a campaign that everyone will enjoy running or playing. In fact, I can imagine that some types of gamers would hate the nebulous, liminal, and unstructured experience it creates. I say this not as a criticism of the campaign but rather as an observation that *Impossible Landscapes* is not necessarily for everyone ... but if you are the kind of person who is attracted to either portraying freeform weirdness (if you’re a GM) or finding your character suddenly adrift in such bizarreness (if a player), then you probably will love the campaign more than anything similar you’ve encountered before. The way I describe it to people is that I imagine playing *Impossible Landscapes* would feel a lot like waking up one day inside a David Lynch film built around your everyday reality. Yes, on the surface things seem normal but the more you dig at the niggling inconsistencies the more you are drawn down rabbit-holes that make increasingly less and less sense, with the logical thread binding it all together seeming perpetually just out of reach. If you think that kind of experience would be enjoyable to your gaming group, you should run (don’t walk) to get this campaign.

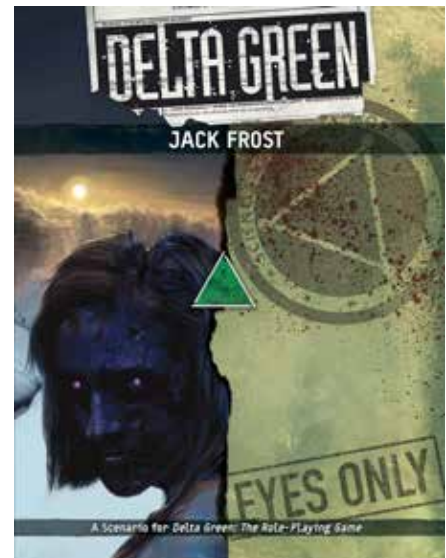
As well as releasing the main *Impossible Landscapes* campaign in 2021, Arc Dream also released an accessory volume called *STATIC Protocol* that adds even more Byzantine interconnected campaign backstory elements. Given the brain-bending web of people, places, and historical events that is already in the core book this might seem like overkill, but if you’re the kind of GM who can never have enough suggestive factoids to throw at the players as “rewards” for successful research – this book definitely gives you a major resource to deliver that.

Other Arc Dream Releases

Although overshadowed by the titles I have just described, several other products also got released in 2021 for the Delta Green game:



ARCHINT is a short volume which describes ten or eleven unnatural artifacts that you could drop into your Delta Green game.



Jack Frost is a lengthy (90+ page) scenario set in a rural Alabama location during a major winter storm in 1998. It comes with a wealth of richly detailed handouts.

The Evidence Kit for John Tynes’ 2019 book *The Labyrinth* provides a collection of excellent handouts and prop documents.

Die Not Ingloriously

(Trojan War scenario)

by Rina Haenze



La Prise de Troie

by the anonymous Brygos Painter
delineated by Evrard

As the plague that is the curse of Apollo rages through the Greek camps in the tenth year of the Trojan War, terrifying nightmares and a rash of disappearances torment the servants of King Agamemnon, the Lord of Men. Loyal vassals have been chosen by the gods to find the source of this strange curse, but can they end this nightmare and bring glory to their names before it's too late?

Author's Note: I would like to thank my valiant playtesters, Michael Diamond, Bridgett Jeffries, Scott Dorward, Anthony, Matt "Doc" Tracey, Teagan Gilbert, Michael Percival-Maxwell, John Hall, Graeme Patrick, David Eastwood, Kathryn Edmonds, Lonnie, Miranda, Graham Walmsley, M-Niclas Heckner, and Perry Clark for their invaluable insights and all of the roleplay they brought to this game.

Die Not Ingloriously is a scenario meant to be played in three to four hours. Four pregenerated characters are included.

A live playthrough of this scenario, run by the author, is [available online](#) recorded by the Old Ways Podcast.

Die Not Ingloriously is a Trojan War one-shot scenario. It can be played with *Cthulhu Dark* or *Call of Cthulhu* (using the specifics for *Cthulhu Invictus* or *Cthulhu Dark Ages*). Stats are shown as **Cthulhu Dark** [**Call of Cthulhu**].

Ave et Salve

Why Should You Be Playing *Cthulhu Invictus*?

by Oscar Rios

If you are reading this article, you are presumably already either a fan of the setting or interested in exploring it. But perhaps you want to know more of what it has to offer. Maybe your players have questions about why they should try fighting cosmic horror in the time of the Roman Empire.

Truth be told, I'm a huge fan of the setting. It was love at first read, as I was lucky enough to be a playtester for *Cthulhu Invictus* when Chad Bowser was just finishing up work on the original monograph that came out in 2004. In fact, of the first five *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios I ever wrote, two of them were for *Cthulhu Invictus*. So when it comes to talking about *Cthulhu Invictus* and why you should play it, I have a lot to say.

So, what follows are a lot of bullet points. Some of these are excerpts from *The 7th Edition Guide to Cthulhu Invictus* (of which I was the primary author) and some are from *Britannia and Beyond*, as part of the Why should you take your *Cthulhu Invictus* campaign to Britannia and Beyond. Some are completely original, just for this article, mostly my personal takes on the setting and why it's amazing.

Why Play Cthulhu Invictus?

Magic is Real

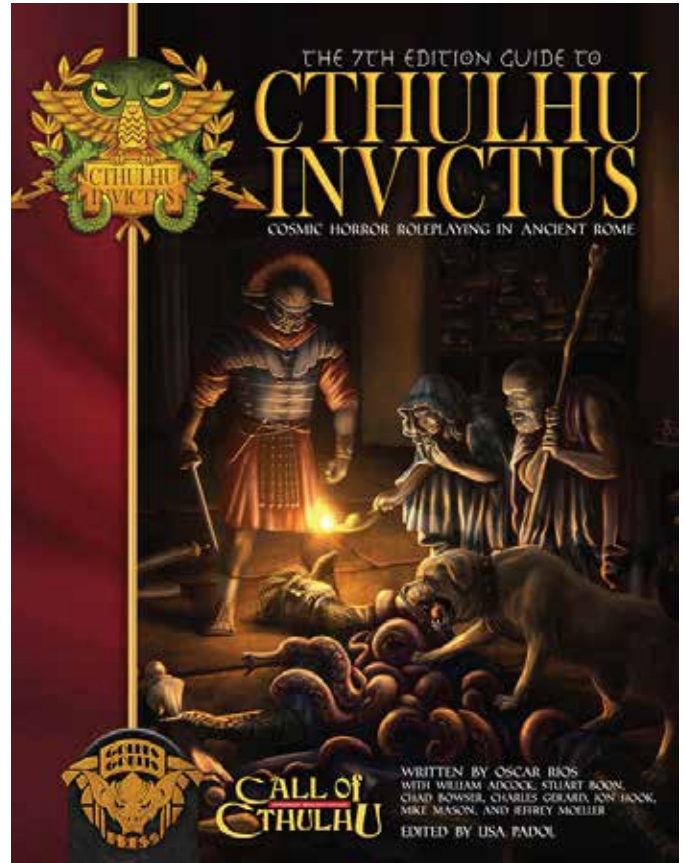
In many settings, if investigators revealed what they knew and what they dreaded, most would consider them insane. But here, the setting supports the typical investigator's view of the world. No one thinks you're crazy if you accuse someone of casting a spell on you, and if you can prove it, you can have the wizard arrested. Some professions even start with a spell or two. But be careful—most magic is illegal, and those performing it are subject to very stiff legal penalties.

International Appeal

The empire is a vast place, home to lots of different kinds of people. It encompasses many different provinces, each with its own histories and folklore. Travel is also pretty easy due to well established shipping lanes and a well-maintained road system. Your group can be in Egypt one adventure, Britannia the next, and at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains after that.

Pulp or Purist, No Problem

Cthulhu Invictus is perfectly suitable for many different styles of play. You can run a sword-and-sandals game, with flashing swords and loads of combat. You can also run it as a heavily investigative mystery game, with loads of witnesses and clues, and multiple layers of intrigue.



Weapons and Armor

Who doesn't like the security of a sturdy shield, a suit of chain mail, and a gladius when going up against deep ones? Of course, these things won't save you, but they will make you feel more secure before the end comes.

Scrolls and Artifacts

While the *Necronomicon* won't be written for another 500 years, there's plenty to read! The empire has many large and ancient libraries, some of which contain scrolls from Atlantis (home of Dzyan) and Hyperborea (home of Eibon). These ancient pre-human empires also left behind loads of other items lost to history, items infused with enchantments—and curses.

The Monsters of Mythology

Want to fight the minotaur, gorgon, or a cyclops? Want to chase dryads, party with satyrs, and try to catch and ride a pegasus? Sure, you can do all that—but heed our warning. These creatures are now grounded in the Cthulhu Mythos, and the stories people tell may not match what you encounter in the field!



GRAVE SPIRITS

BY EVAN JOHNSTON



Designers & Dragons Next

Arc Dream Publishing: 2007–Present

by Shannon Appelcline

Designers & Dragons: The '00s includes the story of the foundation of Arc Dream Publishing by Dennis Detwiler and Shane Ivey, focusing on its support for ORE-driven RPGs such as *Godlike* (2002), *Wild Talents* (2007), and *Monsters and Other Childish Things* (2008). At the time of the publication of *Designers & Dragons: The '00s*, Arc Dream had just begun their return to the world of Pagan Publishing's *Delta Green*, a topic that has dominated their output of the last several years.

For the first part of this story, read pages 230–240 in *Designers & Dragons: The '00s* (Evil Hat Productions). What follows replaces the Horrific Expansions sections on pages 240–242 and continues the story from there.

That is Not Dead

2007–2015

Though Arc Dream's initial focus was on the *Godlike* and *Wild Talents* superhero RPGs, the company's principals remained interested in the Cthulhu Mythos. In fact, Shane Ivey notes that many of Arc Dream's ORE-driven RPGs were ultimately influenced by Lovecraft: the superhero RPGs pondered on the very nature of heroism, while *Monsters and Other Childish Things* (of course) featured Lovecraftian protector-monsters.

Ivey's partner, Dennis Detwiler, was working even more directly on the Cthulhu Mythos — not at Arc Dream, but through Armitage House, the fiction publishing arm of Pagan Publishing. There, he wrote new stories set in Pagan's 1990s setting of Delta Green. He'd started writing fiction while working for Pagan, when he authored *Drowning in Sand* for Armitage's *Alien Intelligence* (1997) anthology. But even after beginning work on *Godlike*, Detwiler continued with the short story *Night and Water* for Armitage's *Dark Theatres* (2001) anthology and (more notably) his first novel, *Denied to the Enemy* (2004).

In the mid '00s, Detwiler and Ivey's interest in the Lovecraftian Mythos and Arc Dream's own design and development work more fully merged when Arc Dream worked with Adam Scott Glancy at Pagan to prepare

two new *Delta Green* roleplaying supplements, both to be published under Pagan Publishing's *Call of Cthulhu* license from Chaosium.

"We suffered under the yoke of a very difficult licensing agreement from Chaosium — it cost in the order of \$1000 in licensing fees to release a single book."

—Dennis Detwiler
"Interview"
Fullmoon magazine
2003

The first was *Delta Green: Eyes Only* (2007), a compilation of Detwiler's old *Eyes Only* chapbooks on the conspiracies of Delta Green. They'd previously been sold direct-only, to avoid Chaosium's high licensing fees, so this was the mass market's first chance to see them. Arc Dream's publication of the new *Eyes Only* collection was contemporary with a new edition of *Delta Green* (2007) produced by EOS Press and Pagan, and so represented a large-scale revival of the property.

Arc Dream followed up a few years later with a new RPG supplement called *Delta Green: Targets of Opportunity* (2010), by Dennis Detwiler, Shane Ivey, Adam Scott Glancy, and a few others, which detailed five new organizations in the Delta Green universe. It was the first new roleplaying material for Delta Green in over a decade but would also mark the end of Pagan Publishing as anything more than a rights holder: Arc Dream would more explicitly fulfill the role of their heir in the years to follow.

That's because the successful creation of those two *Delta Green* sourcebooks led Arc Dream to leap more directly into Cthulhu publication. That began with the acquisition of a license from Pagan for their Cthulhu magazine, *The Unspeakable Oath*, which like Delta Green had trailed off publication about a decade earlier. Arc Dream began producing the magazine with issue #18 (December 2010). They'd manage eight new issues of the venerable periodical, petering out after *The*



A Living Nightmare

An Interview with John Scott Tynes

by Jared Smith

Delta Green is a covert group within the US government that attempts to deal with the Cthulhu Mythos. You previously explained you created Delta Green to give “a narrative framework that would justify and explain why you had a disparate group of people who were interested in the occult and so on, and how you could bring in more people over time, as well.” How long had you been pondering this problem for Cthulhu Mythos games?

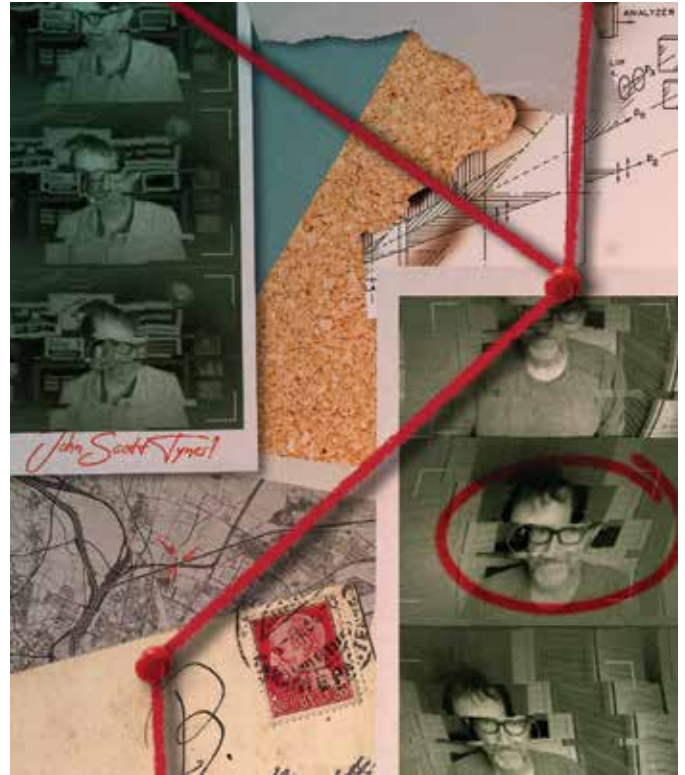
John Scott Tynes: Like most players, I had experienced this problem firsthand. Our college gaming group played through the entirety of *Masks of Nyarlathotep* and we frequently lost characters and had to roll up new ones who then needed to join the group. (My first character in the campaign died about five minutes into our first session.) Narratively, this made no real sense. We were a rootless band of desperate, murderous investigators who were both deeply paranoid and also willing to embrace any random person who walked up to join us. It's a wonder we never had a double agent infiltrate us.

A few years later, I wanted to address this problem. We had agreed with Chaosium that we would put more of our energy into the 1890s and 1990s instead of piling on the core 1920s setting they were mostly supporting, so we created two projects: *Delta Green* for the 1990s and *The Golden Dawn* for the 1890s. Both solve this problem by creating an organization who served as the narrative framework the game needed, but each of those organizations had their own problems and dramas so they weren't just a source of cannon fodder.

All of this was grounded in my first horror game experience with Pacesetter's original RPG *Chill*. *Chill* was an investigatory horror game playable in either the 1890s or the modern day and in both cases a secret society of monster-hunters, known by the acronym S.A.V.E., was their narrative framework. This organization functioned much like Delta Green or our Golden Dawn and when I began playing *Call of Cthulhu* I was struck by the game's lack of a S.A.V.E. equivalent.

Delta Green is much loved but I fear our book *The Golden Dawn* is mostly forgotten these days. We had some drama in its creation but I'm very proud of how it turned out.

Way back in the early '90s, Blair Reynolds ran a scenario set in Cambodia that turned out poorly



John Scott Tynes
by Paula "Orca" González Delgado

for the characters, where you ran Adolph Lepus. This retroactively became part of Delta Green lore as “Operation OBSIDIAN”. Who else was running games in your circle at that time? What other characters or content from those early missions would later become part of Delta Green lore?

JOHN: We went directly from that Cambodia game to Delta Green's creation and my original scenario "Convergence". I think I ran it within a few months of Blair's session and wrote it up for *The Unspeakable Oath* #7 in 1992. There were other characters from that Cambodia op who persisted into Delta Green including Dennis [Detwiller]'s Curtis McRay (Agent Cyrus) and Brian Appleton's Donald Poe (Agent Charlie) both of whom appear in *Delta Green: Eyes Only*. I don't recall the characters played by John H. Crowe III or Jeff Barber but I don't think they carried forward.

Call of the Fang

Vampires in Cthulhu Mythos Games

by Jo Kreil

For centuries, vampires have been a terrifying part of folklore which haunts humanity's collective imagination. With stories and legends from all over the world, the vampire cemented itself even further into this collective imagination with the publication of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in 1897. Today hundreds, if not thousands, of writers, artists, and directors have contributed even further to vampire lore as each brings their own interpretation of the vampire into modern media. Even Lovecraft, who eventually became famous for turning away from the classic Gothic tropes so popular in *Weird Tales* at the time, introduced us to his own version of the vampire with 'The Shunned House'. Vampires have become a staple of tabletop roleplaying games as well, whether the secretive vampires of *Vampire: The Masquerade* (White Wolf), the masterminds of *Night's Black Agents* (Pelgrane Press) or the brooding Count Strahd Von Zarovich of *Ravenloft: Call of Cthulhu*, a game largely focused on Lovecraftian cosmic horror, has not escaped the grasp of the vampire, introducing us to several vampires, the most popular being the decaying, simulacrum obsessed Comte Fenalick. In this article we'll cover options for not only customizing your vampires but also tying them into the entities of the Cthulhu Mythos. There are also Keeper and Investigator options to expand the role of vampires in your campaign, whether it is through player organizations, cults or Mythos tomes.

Using Vampires in a Cthulhu Mythos Campaign

As a result of the popularity of the vampire within modern culture, it is possible that Keepers might consider adding these bloodsucking undead creatures to their own games, whether as minor antagonists or even the masterminds behind world spanning plots. However, when one says the word "vampire" it is very possible that everyone will have their own thought as to what this means. Keepers may be hesitant based off of their players' preconceived notions or because they feel these gothic horror monsters do not belong in a bleak and uncaring universe of cosmic horror. Furthermore, while the entry for vampires does cover a few options to customize these creatures, it does not go beyond the standard tropes of vampirism. For those Keepers looking to expand the role of vampires within your game, this article is for you.

While the traditional vampire conjured up images of a well dressed man or woman with fangs, seducing their victims, the original vampire was far different. A ghost, spirit

or demon, the vampire was an entity able to possess a dead body causing it to rise from the grave in search of blood. In other European cultures, it was the spirit of a dead person who left the grave while leaving their physical body behind. The spirit would drain the life, or blood, from its victim before returning back to its resting body. This creature, a disgusting and grave-clad monster, is a far cry from the suave vampire in formal evening clothes. These monsters are often intelligent and long-lived, able to craft plans which may stretch out over centuries. However, vampires are also a diverse species with each culture having their own unique versions. Folklore is filled with hundreds of unique samples such as the water turtle goblin kappa of Japan, the vampire pumpkins of the Balkans, the seafaring draugr of Scandinavian lore or the jiangshi (more commonly known as hopping vampires) of China. Each of these vampires are drawn from very different cultures with a variety of beliefs with a vast array of powers, weaknesses and origins. With such varied origins, an entire campaign can be crafted around hunting and destroying these creatures.

Creating Your Own Unique Vampires

There are several key elements that must be considered when making your own vampire in a Cthulhu Mythos game. Vampires are a vast and varied species, as a result there is plenty of inspiration to be drawn upon as stated in the previous section. While the vampire is often seen as of the occult, often being connected to demons, witchcraft and other such Christian beliefs, vampires are so much stranger than that. As each culture has their own vampire traditions, it is very much possible to find the truth of the vampire within the Cthulhu Mythos.

In each of these pieces of folklore, they do share some common similarities that can be used when creating a vampire for a Cthulhu campaign. When broken down, these categories are as follows: each of these vampires subsist off of humans by draining a vital substance (such as blood or the soul). Each of these vampires have their own origins on how they are created as well as how to defeat them. Lastly, many of these creatures are infectious. Vampires are like a disease, passing their curse onto their victim in some manner however the way they differ is how their infection is passed on to create new vampires. Keepers can use each of these to decide how to make their own vampire unique, keeping players on their toes as they do not know what to expect. Each of these options is detailed below along with a chart allowing a Keeper to roll or choose from a variety

Three Clue Rule

by Justin Alexander

Mystery scenarios for roleplaying games have earned a reputation for turning into unmitigated disasters: The PCs will end up veering wildly off-course or failing to find a particular clue and the entire scenario will grind to a screeching halt or go careening off the nearest cliff. The players will become unsure of what they should be doing. The GM will feel as if they've done something wrong. And the whole evening will probably end in either boredom or frustration or both.

Here's a typical example: When the PCs approach a murder scene they don't search outside the house, so they never find the wolf tracks which transform into the tracks of a human. They fail the Search check to find the hidden love letters, so they never realize that both women were being courted by the same man. They find the broken crate reading DANNER'S MEATS, but rather than going back to check on the local butcher they spoke to earlier they decide to go stake out the nearest meat processing plant instead.

As a result of problems like these, many people jump to what seems like an obvious conclusion: Mystery scenarios in RPGs are a bad idea. In a typical murder mystery, for example, the protagonist is a brilliant detective. The players are probably *not* brilliant detectives. Therefore, mysteries are impossible.

The players aren't Sherlock Holmes, after all.

The good news is that this conclusion is, in fact, wrong. But there is an element of truth to it. For example, in *A Study in Scarlet*, the first Sherlock Holmes mystery, Holmes is investigating the scene of a murder. He discovers a small pile of ashes in the corner of the room. He studies them carefully and is able to conclude that the ashes have come from a Trichinopoly cigar.

Now, let's analyze how this relatively minor example of Holmesian deduction would play out at the game table:

1. The players would need to successfully search the room.
2. They would need to care enough about the ashes to examine them.
3. They would need to succeed at a skill check to identify them.
4. They would need to use that knowledge to reach the correct conclusion.

That's four potential points of failure: The PCs could fail to search the room (either because the players don't think to do it or because their skill checks were poor). The PCs could fail to examine the ashes (because they don't think them important). The PCs could fail the skill check to identify them. Or the PCs could fail to make the correct deduction.

If correctly understanding this clue is, in fact, essential to the adventure proceeding — if, for example, the PCs need to go to the nearest specialty cigar shop and start asking

questions — then the clue serves as chokepoint: Either the PCs understand the clue or the PCs slam into a wall.

Chokepoints in adventure design are always a big problem and need to be avoided, but we can see that when it comes to a mystery scenario the problem is much worse: Each clue is not just one chokepoint, it's actually *multiple* chokepoints.

So the solution here is simple: Remove the chokepoints.

The Breadcrumb Trail

A popular piece of GM advice is that the players should never have to make a check to find an essential clue. The entire GUMSHOE system, designed by Robin D. Laws and used in games like *The Esoterrorists* and *Trail of Cthulhu*, for example, is built around this concept, and you can easily graft it onto almost any system. In each "scene" of a GUMSHOE investigation scenario, there is a "clue." It's automatically assumed that the investigators will find this clue.

This removes three of our four chokepoints, leaving only the necessity of using the clue to make the correct deduction (i.e., the deduction which moves you onto the next "scene" where the next clue can be imparted). And, in the case of the GUMSHOE system, even this step can be tackled mechanically (with the players committing points from their character's skills to receive increasingly accurate "deductions" from the GM).

This is a mechanical solution to the problem. But while it may result in a game session which superficially follows the structure of a mystery story, I think it fails because it doesn't particularly feel as if you're *playing* a mystery.

The fundamental mistake, I think, is in assuming that a mystery story is fundamentally about following a "bread crumb trail" of clues. Here's a quote from a design essay by Laws on the subject:

"I'd argue, first of all, that these fears are misplaced, and arise from a fundamental misperception. The trail of clues, or bread crumb plot, is not the story, and does not constitute a pre-scripted experience. What the PCs choose to do, and how they interact with each other as they solve the mystery, is the story. As mentioned in *The Esoterrorists* rules, we saw this at work during playtest, as all of the groups had very different experiences of the sample scenario, as each GM and player combo riffed in their own unique ways off the situations it suggested."

Ruining Perfectly Good Cheese

An Interview with Shanna Germain and Sean K. Reynolds

by Jared Smith

Monte Cook Games published your *Consent in Gaming* in 2019 as a guide to “accomplish a safe, supportive, and inclusive group” in a roleplaying game. How did this come about?

Sean K. Reynolds: I was writing *Stay Alive!* (our Cypher System sourcebook on horror gaming), and had put together a good-sized chapter about the need for consent when dealing with horror. When Monte did his creative director review of the book, he realized it was something we should talk about for all genres, so we spun off that chapter into its own free PDF, and Shanna and I added more explanatory material to it (approximately doubling its size).

What did you do next to research and develop this?

Shanna Germain: As a writer, activist, and human being, I've long been interested in safety and consent, so I'm always trying to learn more and grow in that regard. A lot of what I learned prior to working in the game industry, I included in my non-fiction book about sex, *As Kinky As You Wanna Be: Your Guide to Safe, Sane and Smart BDSM* [Cleis Press, 2014]. Helping bring those concepts into our games, and into the gaming space in general, just seemed like the obvious next step.

SEAN: And I've always had an interest in psychology, and have had a lot of discussions with friends about trauma, PTSD, and horrible gaming stories that went too far into disturbing topics. I'm a fan of the horror genre, but even I have topics that I don't want to visit (such as harm to animals or sexual assault) even in a horror setting, so I wanted to explain my ideas and feelings about “good uncomfortable” versus “bad uncomfortable.”

Since *Consent in Gaming* came out, have you gotten any feedback that you wish you had included? Is there anything you would change?

SHANNA: We'll probably update the document in the future not based on any specific feedback, but just based on the fact that thankfully the culture and conversation continues to grow and evolve. And there are so many people out there doing great work on this topic now that I don't think a single document needs to be comprehensive. The real point of *Consent in Gaming* isn't to be someone's end goal, but rather a starting point and a guide that they can then move on from into their own version of what safety and consent mean for them and their group.



Photo courtesy of Shanna Germain

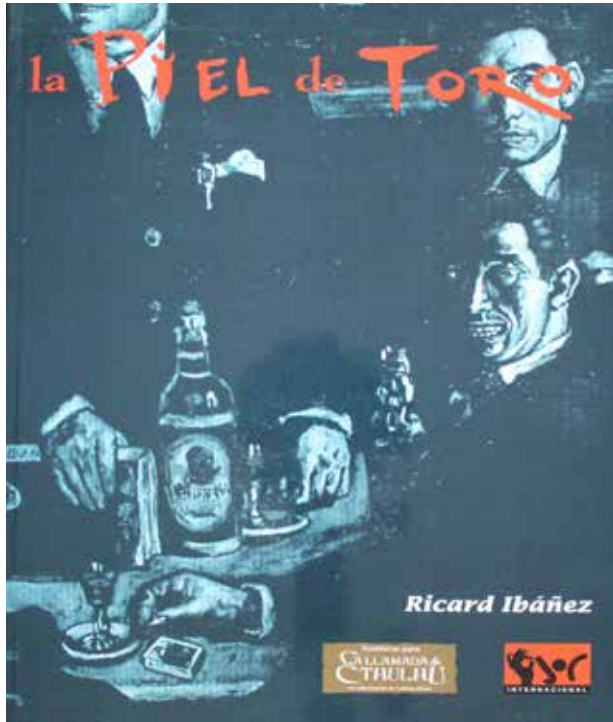


Photo courtesy of Sean K. Reynolds

Tentáculos

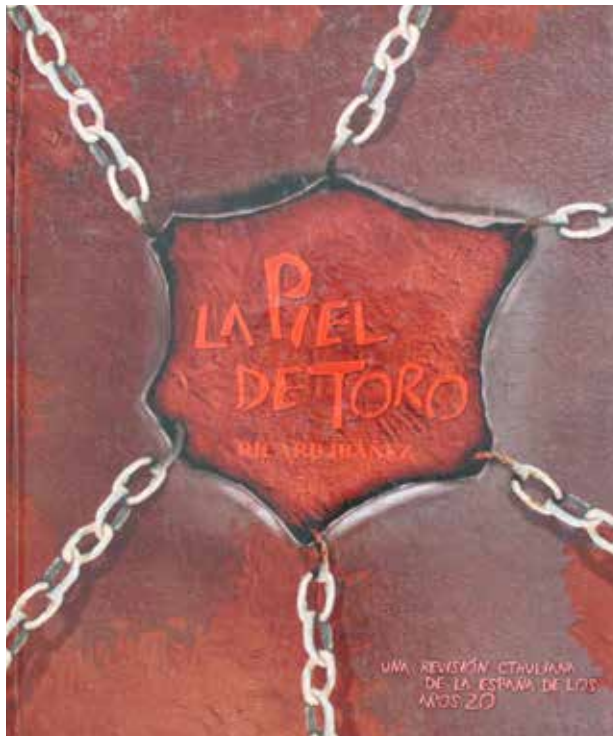
The History of Cthulhu in Spain

by Ricard Ibáñez



The many skins of a bull.

The art below shows how Spain gained its nickname from its shape.
La Piel de Toro, 1st edition, published by Joc Internacional, 1997 (above)
La Piel de Toro, 2nd edition, published by La Caja de Pandora /
Proyectos Editoriales Crom, 2004 (below)
La Piel de Toro 1920, 3rd edition, published by Shadowlands, 2022 (right)



The *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game was published in Spain in 1988. It was the second roleplaying game published in the country (the first was the *Dungeons & Dragons* starter box, in 1985). It quickly became a bestseller, and even today, 35 years later, it remains one of the best-selling roleplaying games in the Spanish language. Perhaps its success is due to the fact that H.P. Lovecraft was by no means an unknown author for the Spanish fandom of the eighties. We owe that to psychiatrist, essayist and translator Rafael Llopis (1933–2022), who published (at his own expense) the now famous anthology *Los Mitos de Cthulhu* in 1969, in the midst of Francisco Franco's dictatorship, when this type of literature was viewed, at least, with suspicion (if not openly subversive — we must not forget the fervent Catholicism that the dictatorship displayed throughout its existence). Precisely for this reason, reading Lovecraft and his circle of friendly writers became a form of rebellion. A small gesture, but one that gave the author and his particular literary worldview great popularity in Spain.

The Barcelona publisher Joc Internacional published the 3rd edition of the game (which was reprinted 14 times, until the company closed in 1998). Interestingly, they published the 5th edition only in Catalan (the publisher's native language) in 1996. The publisher produced little original material: only the adventure *Cristal de Bohemia* and the supplement *La Piel de Toro* ("The Bull Skin"), which allowed adventures of the Mythos to be played in Spain in the 1920s.



Dead Man's Chest

(Golden Age of Piracy scenario)

by Stefan Droste
translated by Jared Smith



Captain Bartholomew Roberts with two ships, viz. the Royal Fortune and Ranger, takes in sail in Whydah Road on the coast of Guinea, January 11, 1722
by Benjamin Cole, 1724

If your pirate ship can ride out the hurricane, shore leave awaits in the secret port on a remote island! But what other dark secrets are concealed by the storm's fury?



Dead Man's Chest was originally printed in *Cthulhus Ruf* #1 in 2012, and published by the Deutsche Lovecraft Gesellschaft.

Dead *Man's Chest* is a scenario meant to be played in three to four hours. Four pregenerated characters are included.

Dead Man's Chest is a "Golden Age of Piracy" one-shot scenario. Stats are shown as *Call of Cthulhu* [**Pirate Borg**].