
CTHULHU DARK



GRINDHOUSE EDITION

Written by Graham Walmsley

thievesoftime.com

Art & Layout by NM

satanisjoy.tumblr.com

DARK EXPERIMENTS.



H. P. LOVECRAFT (1890-1937)



CTHULHU DARK.

Cthulhu Dark is a rules-light system for Lovecraftian roleplaying games. One person is the Keeper, who plans the scenario. The others are Investigators. You'll need some six-sided dice.

YOUR INVESTIGATOR.

Choose a name and occupation. Describe your Investigator. Decide what drives them to investigate the Mythos. Then ask each other questions to flesh out your characters. Where did you grow up?

Do you enjoy your job? How do you feel about where you live?

Finally, take a green Insanity die.

INSANITY.

Your Insanity starts at 1.

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

As your Insanity increases through the game, roleplay your increasing fear.

CONTACTS.

NOTES.

UNSPEAKABLE FATE.

NAME.

OCCUPATION.

INSANITY.

WHAT DRIVES YOU.

POSSESSIONS.



DOING THINGS.

To know how well you do at something, roll:

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

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

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

For example: you're escaping from the window of an Innsmouth hotel. On a 1, you crash on an adjoining roof, attracting the attention of everyone around. On a 4, you land quietly on the roof, but leave traces for pursuers to follow. On a 6, you escape quietly, while your pursuers continue searching the hotel. When you investigate, the highest die shows how much information you get. On a 1, you get the bare minimum: if you need information to proceed with the scenario, you get it, but that's all you get. On a 4, you get whatever a competent investigator would discover. On a 5, you discover everything humanly possible. And if there is a possibility of glimpsing beyond human knowledge, you do so on a 6. (And probably make an Insanity roll.)

For example: you're investigating your great-uncle's manuscripts. On a 1, you find the address "7 Thomas Street" (the next location in the scenario).

On a 6, you find that, from February 28 to April 2, many townspeople had dreams of gigantic nameless creatures. Simultaneously, a California theosophist colony donned robes for a "glorious fulfilment". The dreamers included Mr Wilcox of 7 Thomas Street.

FAILING.

If someone thinks it would more interesting if you failed, they describe how you might fail and roll a die. (They can't do this if you're investigating and you must succeed for the scenario to proceed). If their die rolls higher than your highest die, you fail, in the way they described. If not, you succeed as before, with your highest die showing how well you succeed.

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

TRYING AGAIN.

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

As before, the highest die shows how well you do. Reroll as many times as you like. Each time your Insanity Die rolls higher than any other die, make an Insanity roll.

CO-OPERATING AND COMPETING.

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

To compete: everyone who is competing rolls their dice. The highest die wins. On a tie, compare second highest dice (then third, fourth etc). If everything is tied, reroll.

As before, if your Insanity die rolls higher than any other die you roll, make an Insanity roll. If anyone is not happy with their roll, they may reroll as above, but only once.



THREE ROLLS.

Split important rolls, that the investigator might lose, into three. The investigator must succeed in two rolls out of three. If they succeed in the first two, don't bother rolling the third.

CAMPAIGNS.

For campaign play, reset Insanity to 1 at the beginning of each game session. If you like, find a narrative reason for this: perhaps the investigators take a moment to recover or simply have a moment of clarity.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS.

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

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

Do let me know how Cthulhu Dark works for you. My email is graham@thievesoftime.com

SUPPRESSING KNOWLEDGE.

When your Insanity reaches 5, you may now reduce it by suppressing Mythos knowledge: for example, burning books, stopping rituals or destroying yourself. Each time you do this, roll your Insanity die. If you get less than your current Insanity, decrease your Insanity by 1. And you may continue suppressing Mythos knowledge when your Insanity drops below 5.

GOING INSANE.

When your Insanity reaches 6, you go incurably insane. This is a special moment: everyone focusses on your character's last moments as their mind breaks. Go out however you want: fight, scream, run or collapse. Afterwards, either make a new character or continue playing, madly, but retire the character as soon as you can.



OTHER CLARIFICATIONS.

If you fight any creature you meet, you will die. Thus, in these core rules, there are no combat rules or health levels. Instead, roll to hide or escape.

Things within human capabilities include: picking locks, finding Ry'leh, deciphering carvings, remembering something, spotting something concealed, rationalising something horrific.

WHERE IS

Things outside human capabilities include: casting spells, understanding hidden meaning, doing things in dreams. You can try such things if you have the opportunity: for example, if you sense patterns, you can try to follow them. However, you won't get the "within human capabilities" die, and might just roll your Insanity die.

A high success never short-circuits the investigation: that is, it never takes you to the end of the scenario, skipping everything in between. Thus, in the example above: even if you rolled a 6 while searching your great-uncle's personal effects, you would not find the co-ordinates to Ry'leh, where Cthulhu sleeps.

When you make an Insanity Roll to succeed, getting your Insanity or lower, this means you keep it together, not that you are fine. When you fail, getting higher than your Insanity, you fail to keep it together.

To play without a character sheet, use your Insanity Die to keep track of your Insanity, by keeping the highest face turned to your current Insanity.

GUIDANCE ON DESCRIBING INVESTIGATIONS.

Here are further tips on describing the results of investigations.

On a 4, the investigation succeeds. Describe whatever is there to discover, with some detail. For example, if the investigator is deciphering carvings on a box, they might discover the box is an incubator, holding an egg. They might also realise the carvings are in an extinct African language.

AZATHOTH

On 3s, 2s and 1s, describe the same thing, but with progressively less detail. Thus, on a 3, your description should be brief. On a 2, it should be a sentence. On a 1, it might just be a word ("It's an incubator").

On a 5, the investigation succeeds wildly. Describe what there is to discover, but throw in extra details. Connect the discovery to folktales, writings and scientific discoveries.

You'll find these are easy to invent. Simply throw in connections to legends and books. For example, from deciphering the carvings, the investigator realises the box is an incubator. They remember similar boxes described in the dread manuscript "Tears of

Shub-Niggurath". One, in the Middle Ages, was taken to an Abbey, which was later destroyed in a freak earthquake.

On a 6, add a touch of eeriness. Draw on Lovecraft, ghost stories or whatever comes to mind. For example, when the investigators decipher the carvings, they seem to shift and change in front of their eyes. The carvings hint, mockingly, at strange patterns beyond human understanding. The box exudes unnatural life, as

though it were a form of incubator.