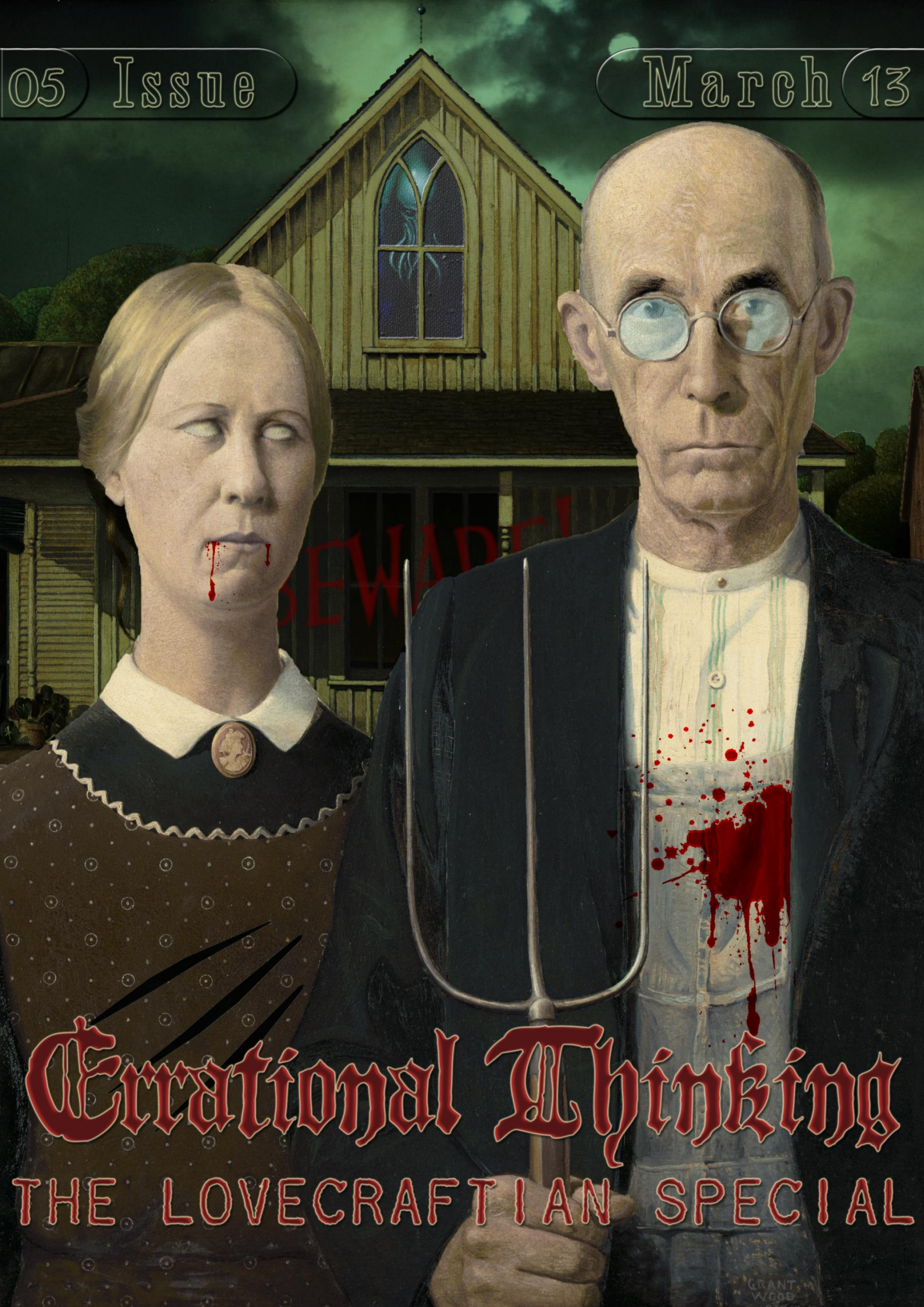


05 Issue

March 13



# Errational Thinking

THE LOVECRAFTIAN SPECIAL

GRANT WOOD



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Dear Unfortunate Readers,

This month you have had the misfortune to stumble across our H.P. Lovecraft-themed issue of Errational Thinking. We celebrate the anniversary of his death with a casual traipse through the mythos and games that stem from the imaginings of Lovecraft and his Cthulhian world. Each article we have in store for you links back to the works of Lovecraft and his re-animation in modern-day tabletop gaming,

We have, for your reading dis-pleasure this month: a gaze into the all-seeing eyes of Yog'Sothoth in the Call of Cthulhu TCG, a Dimension-Shambling battle between Gloom and Cthulhu Gloom to win your servitude, Nalathotep's writing words of wisdom, as translated by Stuart Boon and interpreted by his loyal cultists, Y'Golnac's favourite Magic: The Gathering card, and a Shoggoth's next Call of Cthulhu: Britannica supplement.

Alas, Cthulhu has deigned me the role of informing you, poor readers, that next month there shall be no Errational Thinking. We shall be so busy preparing the rituals for the return of our woe-spreading masters we feel there isn't nearly enough time to make Issue 6 the best it could be. However, we will be back, as ungainly as ever, in May, so be sure to watch out for Mi-go until then.

Enjoy,

- Editor Emma

# MAGIC

The Gathering

## Card of the Month

By Tom Coppinger

Way out in the middle of the ocean, long forgotten by man, frozen solid by the ice cold judgement of Coldsnap, the card this month is the suspended animation of Magic's own Eldritch Abomination: Dark Depths.

### Dark Depths



#### Legendary Snow Land

Dark Depths comes into play with ten ice counters on it.

3: Remove an ice counter from Dark Depths.

When Dark Depths has no ice counters on it, sacrifice it. If you do, put an indestructible legendary 20/20 black Avatar creature token with flying named Marit Lage into play.

—Stephan Martiniere

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Now a lot of creatures in Magic can be seen as homages to H.P. Lovecraft, the annihilator mechanic of the ever-so-titan-like Eldrazi could be interpreted as causing the planeswalker to lose parts of his sanity the longer it's around.

Though nothing would cause me to lose my marbles more than knowing there's a giant, indestructible kraken on the way that could take out a regular planeswalker with one flick of its tentacle.

Dark Depths debuted in 2006, in Coldsnap, and is a Legendary Snow Land which, unlike others, does not tap for mana. What it instead has in store is a 20/20 indestructible flying creature token hidden behind ten counters of solid ice.

However, getting this devastating leviathan out costs 3 mana per removal of an ice counter, resulting in a large investment of 30 mana

throughout the game. This is by no means an easy task, since by putting all of your mana into this card alone would leave you utterly defenceless for ten whole turns.

Of course, there are certain combinations that can break Magic the Gathering, and Dark Depths is no exception. Three years after Coldsnap, the most proficient card in tundra-melting appeared from Zendikar; the Vampire Hexmage. This wicked witch of the winters is an uncommon 2/1, First Strike Vampire Shaman for two black mana, and could sacrifice itself to remove all counters from target permanent. At first it seems like a neat trick to cause enemy planeswalkers to take a hike, but the eldritch kraken of the deep dark sea loves all too much to burst free from its ice cage in a single no-mana gesture. With the right lands, this could be done as early as turn two. No doubt this was the combo that got Dark Depths banned in the modern format; it was simply too easy to pull off with four of each in a deck.

A card this demanding of such a large mana investment requires building around, but is perfectly legible in several colours. In black, Liliana of the Veil acts as a great source of mana ramping to ensure more lands will hit the field and her -6 emblem ability will drastically speed up the melting of ice counters. Alternatively, one of the few, but noteworthy, infinite mana combinations in Magic would be well spent on this card. You can also search for this card much earlier with non-basic land search cards like Expedition Map to ensure it reaches the battlefield early.

As for the mighty kraken that lies at the bottom of the ice prison, there's not many creatures that can stand up to the 20/20, flying, indestructible



Marit Lage token and live to tell the tale. While its legendary status unfortunately restricts it from populating, and the possibility of exile and bounce-themed removal spells nullifying its indestructible nature, building a deck around supporting this card can ensure its victory once the kraken is unleashed. Prepare some counter spells for responses to its arrival, and a Rogue's Passage will ensure the 20 damage gets through even if blocked in the air.

Overall, Dark Depths is a card that will most likely require a lot of support, considering the many options Magic the Gathering has to deal with this card's threat. But rest assured that, once the creature of the deep is released, your opponent will know the meaning of fear.



# Liam's Ace Card Games

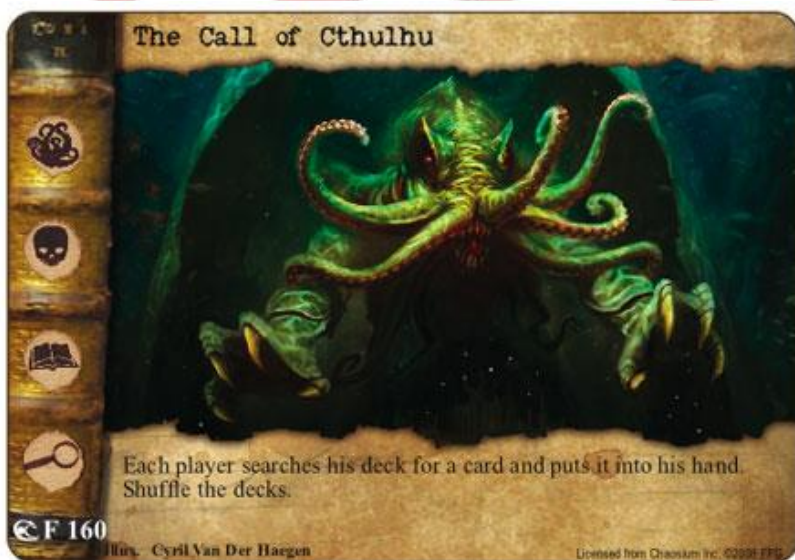
By Liam Wright

## Call of Cthulhu the LCG

Hello and welcome to another Liam's Ace Cards Games. With this month's issue being a tribute to H.P Lovecraft I felt it appropriate to review a card game based on the world he created: a card game dubbed Call of Cthulhu. This is one of the few card games I have had very little experience of; this is due to it being from a line of cards games created by Fantasy Flight Games known as Living Card Games (LCG). Before playing Call of Cthulhu I played another LCG, based on Game of Thrones, which I didn't particularly enjoy because it felt very much like a board game with cards involved. I put my feelings from my previous experience of LCGs aside though so I could play, test, and review the Call of Cthulhu card game objectively.

My first thought when I received the starter kit was: 'why is the box so big?' The box was what you would expect a board game to be in, not a card game; with only three decks of cards. I opened the box to find, to my dismay, a complete waste of packaging. Inside was a cardboard panel which held three decks around the outside, a small board on top, and a collection of small tokens. I was wondering why the box was so big and discovered under the panel six plastic models of Cthulhu, the use of these I'll come back to later.

So after my discovery, I moved onto learning to play. Instead of life points like those found in most trading card games (TCGs), Call of Cthulhu has the two players battle to win story cards; once a player has succeeded in winning three stories they win the game. Each player has three resource pools, which they use to pay the cost of



*One of the story cards*

their cards in the game. The players can either play as the monsters from Lovecraft's world (such as Cthulhu and Yog-Sothoth) and their cultist followers, or as the humans (such as those from The Agency or those from Miskatonic University). Players are able to build decks that are combinations of the different factions within the game, for instance build a deck of Cthulhu and Yog-sothoth cards. This is where LCGs excel in deck building; expansions are released regularly throughout the year containing new cards that can be added to the decks and, unlike TCGs where these expansions would be sold in small randomised boosters, the expansions in LCGs are sold as complete sets.

Back to the Call of Cthulhu card game though. I bet you're wondering what the tokens, board, and plastic models are for, right? Well, to be perfectly honest, they're just there for aesthetics and nothing more. The board is there to place the story cards be fought over on, the tokens are there to show how much progress each player has made in winning a story, and the plastic



Cthulhu are there to mark when each players resource pools are exhausted.



Character card

So on to the good and the bad:

The game has a different play style compared to those found in other cards games, such as incorporating story cards, which work really well, and certainly make it very appealing if you want to play something different. It is also very easy to learn to play, it is a simply matter of comparing the quantity of one symbol on your card to the quantity of that symbol on your opponents' cards, and learning the very descriptive text on the cards.

On the flip side, it does have a number of things going against it. The resource pools require you, in some cases, to over-pay for a card, this is because each pool can only be used to pay for one card; so if you have 4 resource values in the pool and the card only costs 2, you waste 2 resources which could have been used to pay for something else. There is also the fact that you are supplied with useless, cosmetic additions, like the plastics models and board. The board could have easily been omitted, and the plastic

models could have easily been a smaller, more convenient token. Better yet, the resource pools could have just been turned sideways when they had been used. Another factor I found worked against it was that, in every game I played, any player that got an early start was guaranteed to win the game, though this issue may have been solved in the expansions that have been released since the game was first developed.

To sum up, Call of Cthulhu certainly has some interesting mechanics and, if it was done correctly, I feel it could have gone a long way, but, in my opinion, I feel Fantasy Flight Games should stick to making board games, which they are brilliant at. It is rather obvious their hand in board game creation has directly influenced this card game - the extra pieces needed and the story card board.

My final rating for this card game is a lowly 2 out of 4 suits because of its poorly executed, albeit interesting play style, and the inclusion of an unnecessary board and models.



# Submissions

## Gloom Verses Cthulhu Gloom

By Emma Johnson

Gloom in itself is a card game that requires its players to kill off a family of quirky, ridiculous characters, who have suffered through a myriad of trials and horrors in their life; only to meet a traumatic, often painful demise. Players work against each other to make the opposing family's lives happier and more fulfilling, killing them off in their prime to cause a detrimental, positive score. Combined with ingenious clear, plastic cards that allow you to see your victim's woeful expressions through the various modifiers they are besieged with, Gloom makes for a particularly enjoyable game where death is the highlight of their life.

All-in-all, it's a fantastically well-conceived game, with innovative characters, playing cards, art, and design; with plenty of story-telling potential and hours of enjoyment. It's no surprise then that Gloom branched out into the lore of Lovecraft, incorporating Cthulhian mythos into another set of cards.



you kill your own characters after they lead miserable, demeaning lives and make your rivals' Lovecraftian protagonists lead altogether much more merry ones. However, in true Lovecraft style, Cthulhu Gloom also includes a variety of new mechanics in the form of 'Story' and 'Transformation' cards, and modifier cards with

immediate, on-going, response or visibility-dependant effects. Each of the modifiers has some reference to events, creatures or themes within Lovecraft's stories. Characters may find themselves learning 'Loathsome Lore', getting 'Minced by Mi-go', or even touching a Trapezohedron (a reference to 'The Hunter of the Dark').

However, despite all the fun to be had for pure Lovecraft fans, those who don't have quite as much experience in the lore, or who only enjoy the odd tidbit, the game can be quite intimidating. If you don't know what a 'Mi-go' or a 'Sepulchre' are, you spend half the game trying to make up a story about things you know nothing about and it slows down the game, leaving players lost and confused, or just plain impatient. Additionally, the extra mechanics in the game are equally confusing. The requirement for certain symbols for certain abilities, the different symbols on action cards that you have to keep looking up in the instruction manual, the confusion over when and how you can play interception cards, all serve to throw the enjoyment of Gloom right into the gaping maw of a rather amused Shoggoth, who really was expecting more.

Overall I'd say the original Gloom is far superior to Cthulhu Gloom – it's not overly complicated, the characters are interesting and whimsical and the events they are subjected to are simple enough to encourage enjoyable story-telling without missing a crucial piece of Lovecraftian lore that would have explained it all.





## Writing for Roleplaying Games, the Stuart Boon Way

*By Thomas Rycroft*

If you don't know Stuart Boon, you hate RPGs, have never left Dungeons and Dragons or were once struck by lightning, giving you the inability to use Google for risk of turning into a super-villain. Stuart Boon is the author of the multi-award winning Call of Cthulhu supplement Shadows over Scotland, bringing the tentacled horrors of everyone's favourite mythos to the beautiful northern country. Since publishing this fan/critic favourite, Boon has become line editor over at Cubicle 7, where he has continued to publish for Cthulhu, co-writing the recent Cthulhu Britannica release Folklore, detailing the wondrously weird wives tales of the Limey Isles, and what they mean for your campaign.

Boon recently gave back to future RPG writers by giving a lecture and running an adventure-writing workshop at Edge Hill University. During this he went through everything needed for writing a great supplement for any RPG of your choice. What follows is a translation of some of his key notes into an article.

### 1. Why?

One of the main things you need to ask yourself before you start writing for roleplaying games, is exactly why do you want to do it? Yes, it's cool, and yes, it's fun, but to have a little more chance at success you need to have a strong desire to do this that extends beyond simply having fun with your friends. Perhaps you have something to say, something that you feel is best expressed through gaming. Whatever it is, find it, then exploit it. Use it as your personal tweak, something you have that nobody else does.

### 2. How?

With that purpose in mind, you need to find your system. There are more systems at this point than there are cars on the road (this isn't true), so you need to find the right one. A simple perusal of RPGgeek.com will probably give you all the information to need to begin, such as the themes of major systems. But to write for a system you need to know a system. You need to be able to look at what you're writing from every angle conceivable within the system.

With your system in place and your idea well-fleshed it should then be fairly easy to find publishers to approach with your product. A quick search will bear the fruits of pretty much every publisher working with your game today. These are the people you need to see.

Now, obviously, you need to be writing for a system that is a current system. You'll have a tough time selling a supplement for 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Paranoia. Granted, there are companies keeping older editions of games alive, just look at Goodman Games with their Dungeon Crawl Classics range.

### 3. On Writing Your Material.

Research is the name of the game. Especially in an (almost) real-world setting such as Call of Cthulhu or World of Darkness, you need to understand the place and the themes of what you are writing. Are you writing a sourcebook for a town in Kansas? Drag up every record you can for it. Visit it. Read everything you can about it. And note down everything that may be even close to useful for you. For Call of Cthulhu, this will be anything that can be exploited to promote the mythos. But remember, it's details that bring a place to life. Having a famous mass-suicide can sound perfect for your World of Darkness book, but so

can knowing that the place spawned a specific type of airplane.

Researched to hell? Good. Now it's time to figure out what you can add to the past to make it suit your needs. This may feel counter-intuitive after making your place as genuine as possible, but it's important not to forget that RPGs are essentially works of fiction. The fact that they are fiction opens them up for ANYTHING. You are limited only by your imagination (and possibly a heavy ruleset).

#### 4. On Writing In General.

It is important when writing anything, but especially important when writing something so densely informative as an RPG supplement, that you are wholly immersed in your work. Finding the key to unlock this, is finding the key to unlock any writing. You must find a way that works for you. For many, it is simply having suitable music on, for others it requires an hour of reading time before writing. Whatever it may be, it is essential you find a way to keep your attention focused on what you're doing.

If your work is gripping enough, you'll find yourself being immersed naturally. This may, however, not come for a while. Don't forget, if you're not immersed, your reader (the GM) won't be, nor will their players.

Never. NEVER submit a first draft. Even if you think what you've written is the best thing you will ever write, it's not. Redraft, again and again. Make sure that every screw is in tight. Have you used two words where one will do? Books have been written on the subjects of writing and redrafting. I don't have that kind of space. All I will say is that nothing is perfect. That's part of what drives writers insane. But you can only get it to close-

perfect by constantly going-over and fixing. A final note, make sure you can look at any point, any sentence in what you've written and when you ask 'Does this work?' be sure you can answer 'Yes'.

#### 5. Pimping.

So! You have your idea; you may even have a draft. Applause if you do. Now what you need to do is tell people why they should care. This can be as easy as you make it. Roleplayers are a hungry people for their hobby. If you've gotten this far, you know this already. They want everything they can have. And they're given a lot. So why should they want what you have over what they're being given? If you followed the 'Why?' section closely, you should have your answer. You have your uniqueness to draw upon.

You now need people to pay attention to you. In the past, you had to stand in the village square and wave your arms and shout to get people to pay attention to you (I did anyway). Luckily, you can do that from the comfort of your own home. Simply drum up excitement by posting on RPG websites and forums, social media, free online magazines, anything. Let people know what you're doing. If you have adventures or scenarios written in your setting, say, post them. Let people play them. Let people experience what you're offering first-hand. Not only will they love it (if it's good) they will also feel as though they're part of something underground. Never underestimate hipsterism. Get in touch with Errational Thinking, we will more than likely help promote through Twitter, at least. The world is full of people who want to help you out.

#### 6. Closing Tips.



Never forget what you are writing for, or who you are writing for. If you're writing a campaign, you're not writing a novel. If you're writing an adventure, you're not writing a short story. You are writing for roleplaying games. What you're writing will be enacted by a group around a table. This should be at the forefront of your mind all the way through the process.

What you are writing is to be read by a GM, so write for the GM. Write what you want to read as a GM, but bear in mind what you want to play as a player, too. You have two audiences, if you fail to keep hold of one, you've lost both.

It's also important to note that RPGs are a collaborative enterprise in every possible sense. When you do gather interest in your material, you need to work with your audience. Get a happy medium between what you and they want, and, to be honest, those two things

should be pretty damn close to start with. Once that's done, you then need to work with your editor, getting a happy medium there too. If you don't play well with others, chances are, you don't play.

Of course, there is far more to writing for roleplaying games than is covered here, this is simply an outline. However, if this sounds like something that could be your bag, chances are it is. And if you're serious about writing in this medium, there are some fantastic books to continue your education on the subject; my personal recommendation would go to Wolfgang Baur's Complete Kobold Guide to Game Design.

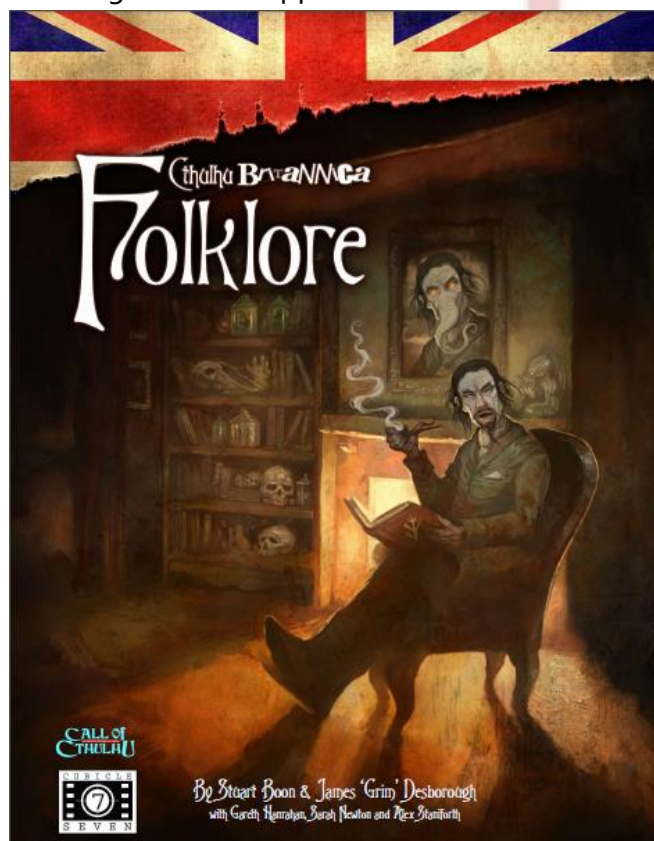
Be sure to check out Stuart Boon's work if you haven't already, as well as everything currently being put out by Cubical 7. Their work is some of the best about, both in terms of quality and for sheer fun. Get writing.

## Call of Cthulhu Britannica: Folklore

By Emma Johnson

Courtesy of Cubicle 7, in February of this year (2013) avid Call of Cthulhu fans were able to get their mitts on a British Folklore sourcebook outlining and detailing critters from the darkest depths of myth. From fairy folk to dragons, this guide details a whole host of beautifully conceptualised beasts that can be placed in any pre-existing or under-construction Cthulhu Britannica campaign. They create excitement through realism and that well-deserved break from the same old, under-the-stairs Shoggoth that features every other play session.

As is typical of Stuart Boon's work, there's more lore than you could shake an oak tree at. Every aspect of British folklore included has been thoroughly and meticulously researched, allowing GMs and intrepid adventurers to imagine and place them within the given setting. And, if you can't think of one, there are nine short scenarios to slot into any running session that incorporate and thrive on the mythos throughout the supplement.



If that wasn't enough, the artwork throughout the book is enough to keep you occupied for hours. The cover sets the trend, with an intriguing, gothic-style picture, populated with little snippets to spot and smile at from the obvious, eerie portrait; to the bizarre, jarred specimen in the background. Each picture throughout this text is a joy to wonder at; every time I flick to a new page I can't help but play 'Where's Wally: Cthulhu Edition' with the illustrations. I really can't sing their praises enough – they have to be seen to be believed.

Perhaps the only qualm I have with the supplement is the sheer amount of information there is to trawl through. I know, as with any Call of Cthulhu supplement, you have to know what you're going on about when you summon a Mi-go, or a scion of Nyarlathotep. But, there again, it's the same for the famed Kelpie or 'Water Horse'. They're both sides of particularly subjective coin: for those who enjoy reading everything there is to know about a particular beastie there's every bit of information you could find on Wikipedia (and more), and for those who only care for the mechanics and aesthetics of a creature, there are convenient boxes with all you need to know. So, really, my problem wasn't a problem, it was really me trying to find some fault with Folklore. Though, really, I love every page of it.

Stuart Boon and co-author James 'Grim' Desborough have created a truly in-depth, comprehensive guide to British Folklore that anyone would be proud to own. The information contained within is well-researched, thought out and put together, the illustrations are superb works of intrigue and atmosphere, and, simply, the idea of a British Folklore supplement for Call of Cthulhu is brilliant regardless. For any Call of Cthulhu player, Britannica or not, this is a must-have.

The PDF and a real-life, stroke-able copy can be brought from here:

[http://shop.cubicle7store.com/epages/es113347.sf/en\\_GB/?ObjectPath=/Shops/es113347\\_shop/Products/CB7351](http://shop.cubicle7store.com/epages/es113347.sf/en_GB/?ObjectPath=/Shops/es113347_shop/Products/CB7351) for a paltry £16.99.



# Biographies

**Tom Copping** – Tom is an aspiring slacker who has found a way to stay 12 years old forever, despite his passport saying otherwise. But good luck prying the secret of eternal youth from him.

**Emma Johnson** – Editor, writer, cultist, crochetier: Emma's got a hand in everything, even your cookie jar.

**Joey Thomas** - 'Joey rules now where They ruled once; They shall soon rule where Joey rules now. After summer is winter, and after winter summer. They wait patient and potent, for here shall They reign again...'

**Liam Wright** - Up until his stumbling upon the secret cult meeting in his first year of university, Liam had never heard of Cthulhu. Since then he has been a devoted follower and all for the low low price of £7.85 a month.