Istanbul Discovery

Call of Cthulhu, 7th Edition

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Much of the information is available from the Internet.

# Forward

It is again time to think about writing another horror filled adventure for Call of Cthulhu. The keeper has just finished a year campaign and is now preparing for another long campaign. I need to fill-in with a few games of horror.

This time the year is about 1926 and the setting is one of my favorite places: Istanbul. I have decided to have a problem with one of the most terrifying creatures I have read about in H.P. Lovecraft’s writing: The Colour Out of Space[[1]](#footnote--1).

No story has scared me more than this one. The publication data is close to my time line for the adventure and the creatures are one of the most deadly in the rules. Sounds just perfect!

I was able to purchase an old copy of a travel guide from 1925 with a nice section on “Constantinople.” This allows for some more correct details for the adventure.

Michael R Wild

22 June 2015, “Summer solstice,” Aloha, Oregon

**This document is meant for the Keeper’s eyes-only.**

# Introduction

The investigators are summoned for their expertise to Istanbul. They take the Orient Express or other ways to get there and find the locals have officially banned ancient horrors and legends. The local official, Mustafa, needs them to sort three mysteries and look into a possible copy of the dreaded and now officially non-existent Necromonican. It is 1926 in Turkey and there are many horrors afoot![[2]](#footnote-0)

# The Story

The new government of modern Turkey is proud of it modern thinking. Ancient legends and terrors are for the ignorant as far as the new government is concerned. Ankara, a freshly minted new capital city, does not want to be bothered by people who give away the blue eye for protection.

The investigators are asked to travel to Istanbul by the Orient Express to appraise a suppose copy of the dread book Necromonican. There they meet their local agent Mustafa. He will make the introductions and allow them to examine the book. He is using the investigators as experts as this involves ancient horrors that the new central government says do not exist. The book is a fake, but an excellent one. The investigators may pursue the forger to learn what he knows and how he learned it. Mustafa would like no more books of ancient horrors to appear.

While enjoying the sights of Istanbul there is another issue and Mustafa again needs the investigators’ special knowledge, skills, and discretion to avoid again facing things that the government has declared imaginary. A local artisan has created impossible colors and amazing glowing plants and buildings in small shop. A Colour Out Of Space egg has hatched and it has started to drain the area of life. The artisan has used the creature in his insanity to make the new art. The investigators will need to find the creature and the other eggs before part of Istanbul’s old city is burned out.

There is a group of importers of antiquities that seems to acquire amazing treasures. Mustafa is sure that the investigators will find this worthy of investigating. The importers are using magic to travel back in time and bury valuables so they can recover them. The hounds are also on the track!

A cistern hides unspeakable horrors. The area was sealed by powerful magic. The construction of a new sewer pipe had disturbed the magic. Things are getting loose! Can the investigators repair the magic or worse face what should not be disturbed. Mustafa again asks one more time for their unique skills.

So four chances of unspeakable horrors and intrigue in 1926 Istanbul are presented.

## History Lessons—Istanbul after The Great War

The setting is about 1926 in Istanbul. A travel writer of this time, the Rev. Donald Edward Lorenz, writes, “all pre-war guide books of Mediterranean lands are now practically obsolete” in the introduction to his seventh “post-war” edition[[3]](#footnote-1). The fall of the Sultanate is now complete and Turkey has been a Republic since October 1923. The Ottoman Caliphate was abolished in the next year and most of the leaders and families forced to leave. The secular laws are now changing Turkey. The fez is banned in 1925 and the leader of Turkey, President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, is leading reforms to modernize the Turkish Republic. Turkey is now a country where religion is carefully regulated by harsh laws to protect the people from ever returning to the failures and slavery of the Sultanate.

Just a decade earlier Turkey under the Sultan joined Germany in war against the Allies[[4]](#footnote-2). The story of the amazing political stunts made by Germany to befriend Turkey in 1914 makes fascinating reading—articles are available from the Internet. In summary the German warships *Goeben* and *Breslau* are accepted into the Sultan’s navy—replacing ships purchased from Britain but never delivered as the would-be Turkish ships are requisitioned for the war and enter the British Navy. The German crews of *Goeben* and *Breslau*, the ships renamed to Turkish names, dressed in incredible and fancy Turk uniforms raise the Ottoman flag on the former German ships and are ordered by the Sublime Porte, Sultan’s government, to attack Russia. Turkey enters The Great War in fall of 1914 at war with the Allies. Soon Churchill, frustrated by no progress on the front in France and Belgium, creates a second front by invading Turkey’s Gallipoli Peninsula in 1915-1916. The attack is a failure with great loss of life and material (included in the losses is the mining and sinking of the *Titanic*’s sister ship *Britannic,* the largest ship in the world, remodeled as a hospital ship for the Gallipoli campaign). Four years of war with the British and French and the disruption of trade and taxes bring economic chaos to the Sublime Porte. In fall of 1918 and before the surrender of Germany a treaty is signed on a British battleship that is the surrender of Turkey under the Sultan. Like the Kaiser in Germany, the Sublime Porte is overthrown and a new republic created; the Sultan and family are exiled.



Surrender of *Goeben* now called *Yavuz Sultan Selim*[[5]](#footnote-3)*.*

In the setting’s time, about 1926, the western armies are no longer occupying Turkey or Istanbul (the British ship H.M.S. Dreadnought, the first “Dreadnought” styled modern battleship, served in Istanbul in 1918[[6]](#footnote-4)). Turkey is now a country with a border that ends in the Anatolian plain—the modern borders of Turkey. The larger Ottoman Empire is gone. Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and other counties that appear too often in reports modern warfare and terrorist news are created from the partitioning of the empire. Westerners, who only know the names for the various areas from the bible references, assign these names to many new countries created by treaties. These borders and names are meaningless to most people who live in the area. The names of “Orient” or “East” to describe this area are forgotten and replaced the modern names of Turkey and Middle East. Saudi Arabia rises too from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and the failed revolts of Laurence of Arabia. Israel will rise from the terrors of the next world war in the former territories Ottoman Empire in 1947 and claim to be the successor of the Ottoman Empire. The twentieth century and the next century will burn with wars and terrorism from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and the Western treaties to partition the Ottoman Empire.

Returning to the city where the story is set, the name for the city in the early twentieth century is still Constantinople for the authors of travel books and also used on many maps and material from the period in English, French and German. The use of “Istanbul” by Westerners becomes more normal in the mid-twentieth century after the next world war. Turkey is treated in 1926, and the Turks would say even today, as a stepchild of Europe instead, as the Turks see it, as a gateway to the Middle East and Asia. Moving to race, the ethicality of the Turks is “white”[[7]](#footnote-5) The German Kaiser—interviewed in 1908 but not published until 1934—said, “The future belongs to the white race.”[[8]](#footnote-6) Germany’s support and later alliance with the Ottoman Empire must also be viewed through a white supremacist lens. Europe saw the “white” people of Turkey as following the false religion and needing to be directed back to the Western values and religion. The aforementioned travel writer, Rev. Lorenz, writes in his “Constantinople” chapter about he fall of Christendom: “Christendom was given over to the faith of the false prophet.”[[9]](#footnote-7) Jim Crow still burns in southern United States, racism is still accepted in the 1920s, and tolerance for religious differences is yet to be even declared as a goal until World War 2 brings forward more horrors. The people of 1920s are products of their times as are we.

Death and destruction rule the start of the twentieth century. The Great War toll is seventeen million lives lost. The Turks deny the Armenian and Greek Genocides that happened near the time immediately before the founding of the Republic—the numbers of death and the count of people displaced are disputed. The Spanish Flu (1918-1922) kills 3-5% of the world’s population. All the great powers are still trying to explain the great loss of life and material to their people from what was then called The Great War and most ruling government change or fall. Japan’s empire will rise as part of its alliance with the Allies and Japan learns Navy building and Empire building from Britain. USA becomes isolationist. Britain and France try to recreate their Empires. Belgium atrocities in Africa are defended. Germany is blockaded and will starve until it agrees to war reparations costing half a million or more lives plus those lost to the Spanish Flu; Germans will not forget this. The League of Nations and Washington Treaty are created tries to prevent another Great War.

The war-tired world turns away from these horrible events at this point in time: The times are called the “Roaring Twenties” by Americas, a time of economic growth and over indulgence—for the wealthy. Germany and Europe are finally recovering from war and the “Golden” or “Crazy” years start in Europe as they are remembered. The twenties in Europe while not innocent are at leased filled with enthusiasm for the future and peace.

The seeds of hate and horrors-to-come that are buried in the ashes of the Great War begin to grow. In 1926 Hitler, still on parole and forbidden to speak publically in much of Germany, becomes “Führer” or “Leader” of the Nazi party. He publishes the second part of *Mien Kampf* in December.

The keeper should keep the recent events in Turkey of 1926 and the general outlook of Westerners towards the Turks in mind as he or she tries to recreate Istanbul in the minds of the players.

## The City of the 1920s

Istanbul is a city that sits on two seas and two continents. It is at the joining of the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea. The Marmara Sea leads to the Mediterranean. The Bosporus separates the sections of the city as does the Golden Horn, a channel with many bridges over it in the 1920s. The old city is sometimes called Stanboul in the 1920s. Across the Golden Horn is Pera on the hills and Galata near the water with the new quay. Scutari is on the Asian side of the Bosporus. See picture below[[10]](#footnote-8).



The Internet has plenty of maps and information on Istanbul and Turkey. One interesting map of “Constantinople” is a French and German map of 1922. It is extremely detailed and perfectly shows all the sights and shape of the city. It is available on the Internet as an image and printed copies can even be purchased. It can be a great help.

According to Rev. Lorenz travel book there are 1,125,000 people residing in the city in 1925. He claims that half are Turks, less a quarter are Greek, with the rest being made up of various ethic groups including Armenians and Jews. He counts 379 mosques in what we call now Istanbul. Rev. Lorenz also recounts the economics of Turkey showing a negative trade balance of more than 10M Turkish lira. Exports consist of tobacco, dried fruit, wool, and of course carpets[[11]](#footnote-9).

According to Rev. Lorenz in his “Practical Notes” on Constantinople[[12]](#footnote-10) the currency is the Turkish pound (£T, though it is actually called the Turkish lira, it is pegged to the pound in the 1920s; “pound” is not far from the truth) and worth in gold units $4.32 in 1925 (This is close to the exchange rate for British pounds in the same year). The £T is divided into 100 piasters managed as silver coins of various dominations. A piaster divides into 40 para and managed as bronze coins. Paper money is depreciated now and worth only 1/7 its gold value.

Let us be more formal for those who like better facts. The currency of Turkey is the Turkish lira and was pegged to the British pound and French franc in 1926. The British pound converts to $4.86 in 1926. The lira again pegged to 2.8 lira to a USA dollar in 1946 and thus a British pound converts to 11.2 lira. In 1926 the Ottoman lira is still in circulation as are newer notes from the republic. The Ottoman lira notes will be out of circulation in 1927[[13]](#footnote-11). The symbol is ₺ and the symbol entered the Unicode standard in 2012[[14]](#footnote-12).

Returning to the travel guide and its practical notes, a carriage costs fifteen piastres an hour or eighty for a day (costing 60 cents and $3.20). For game purposes a discount can be as much as 1/7 the cost in Constantinople for locally produced items but this requires manipulating currency and bartering for a better price. Services, such as carriages and guides, will always be discounted. Imported items will be more expensive and thus full price (or much higher priced if exotic or military). Critical failures of trying to reduce prices will bring the attention of the local police and fines will be levied. Local officials are unhappy when rich Westerners try to shakedown their merchants.

Trying to make a profit on exchange rates and manipulating currency, while possible, is not what the players should be focused on and would like upset the locals.

The Pera Palace Hotel is the best western styled hotel in 1926 and is just a walk from the British Embassy. It is of course in the center of the Pera section of the city that is often called the Europe section of the city. Hotel Bristol is also available—a less expensive hotel (and now the Pera Museum). Various competent restaurants serve French food and of course fine quality Turkish food is available. Basic services are available in Pera for Euopeans such as tailors for making suits. Unlike Shanghai in China—many Keepers have played setting in China, Pera is not controlled by the Western powers and so Turks keep the peace and laws are modern, Turkish and little corruption exists to violate these laws. The corruption was swept away with the Sublime Porte overthrow and the officials are aware of the consequence of corruption. Fines will be high and justice swift for crimes that threaten the peace of the city in Pera or other parts of the city.

## Sight Seeing

This information is available on the Internet or any guidebook. Notes are made here on how the setting of 1926 works. Some of these locations appear in the adventures.

Istanbul is an amazing city that has much to see. To reach the city by the Orient Express in the 1926 it is necessary to connect to a boat to finish the journey. The trip from Varna is via a steamer that travels the Black Sea and then into the Bosporus to dock at the quay at Galata in the city. From there on the docks a carriage is taken to Pera and a hotel. This is already an amazing trip and that is just to get to the hotel! On the shores of the Bosporus and quite noticeable is the disused palace of the Sultan: **Dolmabahce Palace**. It is not open for tours in 1926.

The old town, Stanboul to many, contains most of the amazing treasures, but near the hotels in Pera is the **Galata Tower**, built by Italian traders, and gives a great view of the city. The convent of the **Whirling Dervishes** is in the same area, near the top of the hill in Pera and also near all the foreign embassies. Many schools and churches here to service the European living in this area—all part of the “European Quarter.”

The **Hagia Sophia** is still a mosque in 1926. It will become a museum in 1935. It is an amazing sight with its huge dome and marble and other stonework. The huge disks of camel leather painted in gold and black calligraphy fill each bend of the structure high above the floor proclaiming the faith practiced here[[15]](#footnote-13).

The tour of the **Hippodrome** seems to be a means to distract the tourists from other more interesting topics. **The Obelisk** from Egypt, the **Serpent Column** and the **Built Column** are not as interesting as the rest of the city. The stands and other stonework from the ancient times were taken and used to build other structures leaving just the three columns. Rev. Lorenz states that all of the magnificent bronze statues once stood with the Hippodrome were lost in the Crusaders sack of the city[[16]](#footnote-14). The author finds the there is very little see and the columns seem sad without meaning now.

The **Mosque of Ahmed I** directly faces the Hagia Sophia and during calls to prayer the call the call is done in turns. This mosque is a masterpiece of religious architecture and beauty and is known in this time the “china mosque” as it has blue tile as one of it main themes inside—much like the china plates sold in Europe by such as Wedgewood and Royal Doulton. It is now known as the **Blue Mosque**.

The **Spice Market** is a small market that is filled with stalls that sell spices, candies, pastries, and all sorts of exotic items. The citizens of the city use this market so prices are reasonable and bargaining is more for fun than to reduce prices. The Spice Market is just across the Golden Horn and near the **Galata Bridge** that is only about a decade old in 1926. The bridge is floating wooden bridge built by a German firm and is a toll bridge. A white uniformed local collects tolls: 5 para for pedestrians, 10 para for pedestrians with backpacks, and 100 para for carriages (between a few cents and a nickel).[[17]](#footnote-15)

The **Grand Bazaar** is near the center of the old city and at this time is not the tourist trap it has become in the Twenty-first century. It is the model of everyone fantasy of a exotic eastern bazaar. Windy path lead to more and more exotic products, colors, smells, and items. The old court of the Sultan seems to be still in place as eunuchs attending their ladies and the ladies’ children mix in the crowd in 1926. The bazaar is separated into different trades and items. There are textiles, gems, gold, metal work, junk, and antique areas. The 1926 version was much more windy streets and alleyways. Over the years since more and more of the Grand Bazaar was enclosed. It is very easy to get lost and very hard to find the same shop again.

The locals do not shop here unless looking for an exotic item or an old item.

The **Suleymaniye Mosque** is one of the great mosques in the city. It is on a hill with in a ten minutes walk of the Grand Bazaar. Its clean line, white stone and huge dome make it bright building in the skyline. The colors of white and stained glass in the design make it inviting to the tourist or the worshipper. The graveyard includes Suleymaniye and his wife’s graves in elaborate mausoleums.

Rev. Lorenez gushes: “Here may be bought Oriental perfumes and cosmetics; curiously shaped weapons, whose handles are often encrusted with gems and inscriptions from the Koran, together with others whose handles are beautifully carved in ivory, sandalwood and mother of pearl.” He ends with “it seems as though the wealth of the Indias were concentrated in these Bazaars.” [[18]](#footnote-16)

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The **Subterranean Cisterns** is huge and appear to many to be another Haga Sophia built underground filled with water. It is over 330 feet long and over 180 feet wide in 1926. It is an amazing place. Its entrance, there is a small fee, is near the Haga Sophia in the courtyard of a Turkish house[[19]](#footnote-17).

There are many other things to see and do in 1926 Istanbul. This should be a good start for the Keeper and players.

# The Scenes

Below are the scenes to use with the players. Each contains a short description, some text to read or paraphrase, and elements to play through the scene. All creatures are supplied with skills so the Keeper can know what to value to use. The author feels that a base set of skills should always be supplied to enable better play.

## Scene 00: Reaching Istanbul

The investigators, it is assumed, reach Istanbul by taking a train, usually the Orient Express from Paris or Vienna or connecting to the train. Without events they reach Varna on the Black Sea and transfer to a small steamer that will take them for a day trip along the coast of the Black Sea to the Bosporus and to the Galata Quay.

Read or paraphrase:

*The travel was the usual hustle and bustle intermixed with long boring and discomfort of long journeys. It takes days to cross Europe and to reach the Black Sea and Varna. Again there is the repacking and removal of same to the ship, a small steamer that cannot be as old as it looks, and off again. Food is poor and the movements of the ship after the forward movement of the train for a week does not make food more appealing. The trip finally reaches the moving but calm waters between Asia and Europe: The Bosporus.*

*The romantic look and gaze, the tourist being out cameras and snap, and the crew suddenly panic as the voyage ends once again with out expectation as if all the crew are new to the passage. Chaos runs the length of the ship.*

*The boat docks with more skill and less churning that you would expect but the boat bounces up and down more than you would expect when tied to the quay. The current of the Bosphorus and the Marmara Sea are strong. In the normal moments of panic and relief you and your lugge are delivered to your hotel up a large hill in the European Quarter known as Pera.*

The investigators may select the Pera Palace or the cheaper but still European styled Hotel Bristol. They are to meet man wearing a white carnation and called Mustafa. He has arranged for a tea at Pera Palace for the travelers.

The rates for the hotels are high, but Mustafa has arranged a deep discount for the investigators. Assume the hotel and food costs will be normal for 1926 in any city.

## Scene 01: Mustafa

The investigators are working with a local official they know only as Mustafa.

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1. Please see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Colour_Out_of_Space> for more information on this story first published in 1926 by H.P. Lovecraft. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. With apologies to Sir Conan Doyle. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. Lorenz, D.E., *The New Mediterranean Traveller*, Eleventh (1925 Revised) Edition, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1925), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
4. The Allies include Britain, France, Russia, Japan and USA. The Central Powers include Germany, Austria-Hungaria, and Turkey. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
5. See <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AYavuz_Sultan_Selim_1919_painting.jpg> .  
   By Connard, Philip RA [Public domain or Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons from Wikimedia Commons [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
6. See in the British Imperial War Museum website <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/5472> for sketch of ship in Constantinople. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
7. See <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg_race-ethnicity> . [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
8. Hale, William Hale, “The Future Belongs to the White Race,” *The Atlantic: World War I*, Summer 2014, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
9. Lorenz, *Mediterranean Traveller*, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
10. This is from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Constantinople_map_German.png> and is allowed to appear here as long as it is referenced. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
11. Lorenz, *Mediterranean Traveller*, 131-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
12. Lorenz, *Mediterranean Traveller*, 154-155. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
13. This is from various sources in the Internet including finding the exchange for British pound to USA dollar in 1926. The currency rates for major countries were pegged to precious metals and did not float in the 1920s. Some of this information can be found in Wikipedia articles on Turkey and its currency and bank notes. Historical currency exchange rates are found here <http://www.measuringworth.com/> . [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
14. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Turkish_lira_sign> . [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
15. Picture is of the Hagia Sophia’s dome and is from the author’s collection and was taken in 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
16. Lorenz, *Mediterranean Traveller*, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
17. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galata_Bridge> for more information on the bridges and tolls. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
18. Lorenz, *Mediterranean Traveller*, 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
19. Photo is from the author’s collection. The notes are mostly my recollection. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)