**Thou shalt not suffer a murder hobo to live**

Though I have played various different RPGs in my time I have found that my favorite is Call of Cthulhu. I love the atmosphere and I have always loved the stories of H.P. Lovecraft. I love the investigation over combat aspect of the game and the idea of descending into madness as you progress. Truly a game that says, hey don’t get attached to your character because the longer they last the closer they get to death and insanity. I love the idea of playing a real person faced with cosmic horrors, which they never could have believed possible. It is the realism that draws me in, the idea that you can play a person in various situations in which the only sane action would be to run. This is the key that makes Call of Cthulhu such a great game; there is no need for the valiant warrior or fireball wielding wizard to get you through. The bookish and scrawny professor can save the day with a bit of focused research and a few well placed Latin phrases. This is what I truly love about the game.

Unfortunately it is hard to translate that love to players more accustomed to hack and slash style games where you are building a hero who will become stronger as time goes on. What I find is a lot of players who come to Call of Cthulhu and want to create a P.I, police detective or some sort of criminal. These are all fine and valid professions however it seems that new players are looking to select some sort of killing machine instead of a character to roll play. So we end up with the character that has far too many guns for their own good and brandishes them at any chance they get. This a fun scenario does not make. In my opinion the fun in CoC is in the roll playing and not the combat. You may need a gun but it is more entertaining to play the bumbling professor who needs to use the gun but has no skill at it. We cheer each time the professor finally makes a hit instead of shooting wildly about the room. Or even better when she throws the gun at the aggressor after missing several times then simply flees the scene. There is a time and place for the experienced and well-equipped enforcer type character but they generally are not the ones who offer the memorable scene that everyone talks about for days to come.

So as a keeper who has many new players come and go from the game table I thought I would offer some ideas on how to silence the murder hobo and let the feeble unlikely hero emerge from your sessions. The first thing to take into consideration is the players experience with other game systems. You may be able to spot your murder hobo before the first die is rolled in character creation. If you do you can inform the player of the play style involved in CoC. This is a high roll play / research and low combat style game. Combat is deadly and should be avoided in most cases. This may end the issue before it starts, it could get the player to think a bit differently or maybe they decide that this is not the style of play they want to be involved with. That’s fine it’s not for everyone. They may however decide they want to play a character that is more down to earth and strong in different ways. Get them thinking of their background and motivation to investigate the unknown. Maybe there is a desire for knowledge, knowledge is power after all, or maybe they are searching for something. What is the characters drive, is it money, love, family, power or something sinister, these things create a character with depth and intrigue who has more options in situations besides pulling a trigger. Creating a character that has many possibilities promotes a play style that is not just a one trick pony but a wealth of possibilities.

Another way to create characters that are not so focused on combat is to not allow choose your own attributes. What I mean by this is that you offer the player the list of attributes and they must roll for each of these in turn and must take the roll that they make. This allows for flaws to be introduced into a character template that the player is making which goes against their initial ideas. For example I am making a boxer who can really fight, he is going to take down everything the GM throws at him, the only problem is I rolled a low strength and size and so I have no damage bonus. Most players would see this as a failed character, I see it as an opportunity to play a down on his luck boxer who could never quite hold his own in the ring but had a hell of an ability to evade. Here is a defensive fighter dodging and waiting for an opening. This boxer needs to develop other skills along with his ability to fight so that he can be viable. Since he is more inclined to evasion maybe he is stealthy as well. So now we have a good stealth and ambush style character that was initially intended to be a straight up fighter.

This is all well and good if we are in control of the characters being rolled. I however let my players roll their own characters and just let me know what the profession is so that I can tie them into the scenario. So what can we do with characters that already have an arsenal of weapons and a mind to use them? Well as a keeper this can be frustrating, because you are going to run into situations where location you need to investigate has been closed to you because your fun loving murder hobos have gotten everyone barred due to brandishing weapons in a public place. Never fun you have to keep the realism so you can’t just let some lunatic wander around brandishing their firearm but you need to let the other players have access to the area. Well there is nothing wrong with having one of your party gets locked up for the night. The Police are always available to give your loose cannon a reality check. If they begin to engage the police well it is looking like you will be asking this player to roll another character soon. The Police are not going to just give up if someone starts firing at them. There will definitely be more of them and they are police so they know how to use their weapons. Someone is going to end up in the morgue.

Another technique I have found is to simply take the guns out of the equation. Have the threat be immune to them. That will end the guns blazing good times right away. After taking a few shots without slowing the thing down it will be quickly obvious that a new approach is needed. Guns can also be stolen, confiscated or implicate the player in other criminal activity. If everyone is playing fast and loose with the hardware then give them real and painful consequences. A player going up the river for a murder wrap is definitely going to give them pause in the future about being so bold with the old Smith and Wesson. Of course there is also good old bouts of insanity. After a player has one of these and too many firearms in ready reach things can go bad quickly. It might stall the game for a bit as everyone has to roll now characters but it will definitely put the point across that guns are to be respected for the devastating power they have. All it takes is one bad sanity roll to have the entire party killed and the character responsible sent off to maximum security as a mass murderer.

With all that said it is good to have combat style characters in your game and they are needed. The thing about Call of Cthulhu that is a bit different is that the players are interacting in a real world situation. They are not great valiant heroes who are expected to brandish their weapons and engage at the drop of a hat. They are normal people doing normal things its just that sometimes a Shoggoth shows up. In the end it is our duty as CoC players and keepers to create great atmosphere and compelling stories. Ultra violence can distract from the subtle building horror of a game session, and after all that’s what we are playing the game for is it not? So when the murder hobos come calling, let them know that they can do what they wish but beware the keepers boom stick.