We are all unique little snowflakes

Unlike many other roleplaying games Call of Cthulhu tends to focus on the story being told and roleplaying over character progression and combat. We have all heard that a million times I am sure but what does that really mean for the player. As a Keeper I know that the most interesting games are the ones in which the players truly become their characters and act accordingly. I get the ability to converse with a PC and have scenes that make sense as if we were watching a movie or listening to a radio drama. There are players out there who excel at this type of on your toes roleplaying that provides a rich and interesting atmosphere for the scenario and keeps the other players interested while waiting for their chance to take the spotlight. It is always great to play with someone who stays in character most of the time and maybe even does accents or alters their normal voice to fit the character. That is all well and good but I would say that a larger number of roleplaying game enthusiasts who have played many games for many years do not play in this manner. Which is totally understandable and acceptable, it is rare to find full blown actors and actresses out there who enjoy the theater of it and are willing to take the stage as it were. For some players it could be that they feel a bit embarrassed or shy about getting out there even though they play in a totally accepting environment. I understand that and that is what this article is all about. How can you provide good roleplaying simply by building your character with flaws?

The first thing a Call of Cthulhu player must get passed is the idea that their cherished character will live on forever gaining power and knowledge eventually to retire after a long adventuring career. That just is not going to happen. More than likely you will be dead after the first few sessions and rolling up another character trying to figure out a good tie in for your new persona. It’s ok really, just let go and hope that your investigator has a truly epic and memorable death. The most you can hope for is to go out with a bang, maybe a literal bang, and take a few bad guys with you. If the players at your table remember your characters death after a few sessions have passed, then you have achieved a truly great thing. You now live on in the hearts and minds of the players you roll next to, session after session, it brings a tear to my eye.

So if your character is not going to live long and gain power and knowledge then what will set them apart? Well let’s take a look at many of the common characters that people build when they come to the table. Coming from other games make selecting a character a bit challenging because initially, we do not see what we are used to. There is no clear fighter, caster or healer types that help us fall into the role we would like to play. We see professions which call out to some of these roles but nothing that is as clearly defined. So what are the most popular beginning professions? I would say Private Investigator, Soldier, Doctor, Author/Journalist.

A lot of players new to the game will start with a Private Investigator. This is actually a great choice for a new character, they are generally tough, have weapons, and have a purpose. As a Keeper it is easy to integrate a P.I. you just give them a case to solve. Even if it’s not specific to the case the other investigators are on it is easy to have them cross paths. Most people have seen the movie P.I. and know what is expected of them. It’s an easy character to build and play.

The Soldier, much like the P.I. is tough, has weapons skills, and is generally easy to send off on a task or mission. Soldiers are a good beginner profession because they can transition into another profession with time. If there is no war to fight they are going need some kind of job so they can then mix the soldiers skills with skills from a new profession.

The Doctor is an obvious choice if you like playing a healer. In Call of Cthulhu this will not be what you are expecting. Doctors have the ability to pass out first aid and medicine rolls but are definitely not the healing machines that are present in other game systems. You can heal during combat but in most cases you will be stabilizing others so that you can get them to the hospital.

The Author or Journalist comes up as a choice for first timers I think because it is identifiable. Much like the P.I. we generally have our notions of a intellectual author who has the keen instincts to solve the case, or the hard nosed journalist who does what it takes to get the story. Again these are a good choice for the beginner because it is pretty open as to what these characters would have interests in. It wouldn’t be unheard of for them to pack some heat and they also have the social skills to talk there way into and out of situations.