Knives and Guns and Bombs, Oh my!

It is inevitable that if you play a role playing game, regardless of what type, you will have players that are gonna bring the weaponry and bring it heavy. Not to say this is a bad thing, in fact many games are based on exactly that, bring a big gun and shoot it, often. In Call of Cthulhu however this is not really the style of play that gets results. Well I shouldn’t say that, it gets results, just not always the ones you wanted. Now it is well known that Call of Cthulhu is not a combat based game and that if focuses more on story than combat. I agree, but at the same time you will eventually have combat in a CoC game. There are times that it is unavoidable and so, out come the guns. In most cases there are probably ways to avoid violence but when given the chance players will generally pull the guns before trying any other solution. Maybe it’s just human nature, it’s not like we as humans have a rich history of not resorting to violence.

That being the case we know that there will be some combat and that it will involve weapons of some sort, maybe it will be effective and maybe not. It is reasonable to expect the players to have weapons either on their person, or available, in a car or back at home. If they don’t have any, they will eventually find something in which to stab, bash, poke, shoot, slash, maim and otherwise cause bodily harm, to those who have bodies. That is not what this article is about however. The occasional hand gun or shotgun is reasonable and believable in most settings. Knives, sure lots of people carry knives, utility knives, pocket knives, and some people walk around with a big knife in a sheath on their belt, really its a thing. What we are talking about here though, is the excessive use and stock piling of ridiculous and uncommon weaponry.

Have you ever had a player who has a passion for guns or knives, heck maybe even bombs. If so you probably have had to tell said player no on more than one occasion. They may know more about their specific weapon fetish than you and so you can’t just hit them with a “they didn’t have those at this time.” If you do, you may get, “Well in 1918 the first bla bla bla was made by Sir William bla bla bla and so I can have one.” OK, now we are getting into the territory I am talking about. There are times when a weapon can be a huge detraction and really take away from the fun of the game. Most of the time weapons add to the game, and can cause some serious hilarity as the investigator attempts to use said weapon, and does so very poorly. There are times though when it just gets in the way.

For example lets say you allow someone to have a very high powered, fully automatic, belt fed, water cooled monster of a gun. It may be fun for that player to mow down the four ghouls you have hiding in the secret chamber of the house, but if that was your big climax for this scene, well now its over and none of the other investigators got to engage with them, on top of that all of the building tension is now just “meh.” So as much as you wanted to make that player happy with their super gun, you have now allowed the story to become less interesting. If we are of the mind that in Call of Cthulhu the story is king, well then we have just made a bit of a mess of it. Now the other players may be, cheering and enjoying the carnage, but have that same thing happen over and over and soon the game is no longer a horror game, it is just a hack and slash dungeon crawl. If that is what you came to the table for them maybe CoC is not the game for you, please catch the next Byakhee back home.

It is not enough that a weapon is available in the time period you are playing in, or that your characters profession would afford them the opportunity to access said weapon, if it is going to take away from the tension and by extension the horror of the game, don’t allow it. This is a horror game after all and we are supposed to be setting up some spooky scenes for the players to interact in, bring in a bazooka and it can take away from that. Again, that is not to say that some powerful weapon would not add to the story in a positive way, if so I say let the investigators have at it. I do not believe in limitting the players enjoyment or creativity. For the most part, in my games, I let them do whatever they want. That has bitten me in the back side more times than I can count however and it is not always easy to try and recover from a game going off the rails. A good rule of thumb is to take a look at the story you have going, if some weapon will take center stage at a moment where you have some other key plot point which are supposed to be the main focus, then it is probably not something you want to allow. On the other hand if you have a situation where there is something that needs to be accomplished and it is beyond the abilities of the groups itself but a bomb might do the trick, well then bombs away.