

Collaborative Cthulhu Risus

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The main Risus site is here:

<http://www222.pair.com/sjohn/risus.htm>

You can get the basic Risus rules by S. John Ross for free from this link:

<http://www222.pair.com/sjohn/downloads.htm>

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OK friends here's a truly insane version of Cthulhu Risus (appropriate, eh? Heh heh) that's no-prep and even more collaborative than usual. I've playtested it once with good success. Please let me know if you give it a try or if you have any feedback!

(1) Setting: Where and when? Decide as a group when and where you'd like the story to take place: ancient times, Roman empire, dark ages, 19th century, the 20's, 30's, present day, a sci-fi future, etc. in America, Europe, Japan, or elsewhere. Don't be constrained by gaming tradition - make your own setting! You could decide to set the game in a 5th century viking village, for example. Also, decide who's going to be the GM.

(2) Chargin

Come up with a name and a description, and then pick your clichés. Any profession or typical Cthulhu trope is appropriate (see end of document for examples). You have 10 points to

spend on clichés for your character, with a max of 4 in any one. You may get an extra point to spend on clichés by taking one point of insanity (describe the phobia or quirk and its history). Finally, describe your character's relationships to the other player characters.

After you've picked your clichés, look them over with the following tips in mind:

- At least one cliché should be your main profession, e.g. doctor, archaeologist, occultist, Sufi mystic, FBI agent, etc.
- One cliché **must be** investigative in nature, i.e. something that helps you find, analyze, or interpret clues. This can be a cliché that is helpful for perceiving or noticing things (i.e., to do the job of spot hidden in CoC), but also something like historian, occultist, or even geologist can be considered investigative.
- It will also be helpful to have at least one cliché that's primarily physically oriented (bodybuilder, wrestler, pro sprinter, etc.), for combat and other such events;
- And it's advisable to have one cliché that's primarily mentally or spiritually oriented (psychologist, theologian, spiritual guide, yoga instructor, zen meditator, etc.) for sanity checks and the like.
- And yes, one particular cliché can fill two of these roles [e.g., bodybuilder (4) can be a profession and a physical cliché] but any more than that and you're probably being too much of a munchkin :-)

Example:

Name: Sally Simpson

Description: Sally is one of the best private eyes in her area. She disdains traditional garb for black clothes and a motorcycle, and specializes in weird cases no one else wants.

Clichés:

Cute and Perky Private Investigator Extraordinaire (4)
 Svelte and Agile Kickboxing Contender (3)
 Amateur but Passionate Chess Player (2)
 Reluctant Student of the Occult (1)

Cliché Adjectives and How to Use Them

We all know that it's a good idea to add a bit of quirkiness or personality to your cliché description [e.g. "Ornery old doctor (4)" instead of just "doctor (4)"], but CCR has some rules for how to use these game mechanically (see the "rolling dice" section below). Basically, they let you reroll or add a die.

Hey munchkins: each cliché should only be a sentence long, and please keep your sentences smaller than the typical paragraph :-)

Clichés that allow you to use spells or supernatural powers (such as sorcerer or psychic) *cost double*, are indicated by brackets [], and allow you to *double-pump* (see below).

Example with Sally:

Cute and perky Private Investigator Extraordinaire (2)
 Svelte and Agile Kickboxing Contender (2)
 Subtle and Inconspicuous Psychic Mind Reader [3]

Relationships: finally, describe your character's relationship to each of the other PCs. Relationship in this context is almost anything, including just "I think she's a jerk".

(3) Set the Climax: one by one, everyone adds a detail about what their character is seeing, doing, or otherwise experiencing at the start of the game's climax (think of the start of the movie *The Usual Suspects*). These should be things you think would be cool or fun to have happen. Keep going around the table adding details until satisfied. The GM or a

volunteer note-taker should record all these so that they're readily available. Note that this is setting up the *start* of the climax, not its result.

Examples: "I've got my hands up, and a cloaked figure is pointing a gun at me", "I see a car hurtling off a pier towards a giant octopus", "A fire burns around me as I'm crawling towards a bound and gagged figure", and so on.

(4) Opening Scene: Rewind back to the opening scene. Establish how the characters get together. Are they an old team of investigators? Do they happen to be all taking the same subway train together when something strange happens? Or do they all start off separately with their own opening scenes, only getting together as the game progresses? Decide as a group on how the opening scene begins. Based on the climax you're headed towards, the GM decides what kind of opposition or challenge to add. Then go ahead and play!

(5) And Onwards:

In CCR, the responsibility for getting to the climax is not just the GM's, it's shared. So instead of the GM making clues and the players rolling dice to see if they find the clue as happens in other games, in CCR *players use their investigative clichés to add clues*. Pick a clue that you think is interesting or fun, that other players can riff off of, and that is at least tangentially related to the climax. There is no strict definition of 'clue': it can be almost anything from finding a physical item, some event occurring ("you get a phone call", "there's a knock on the door, it's a police officer", etc.), to someone remembering something.

For example, suppose you know that in the climax there'll be a cloaked figure, a bound person, and a pier. You can add the clue, "Jackie comes over; she's worried about Mary, who didn't

show up for her lunch date.” Another player might then add, “Jackie mentions seeing a curious cloaked figure around town.” And so on.

So, when wanting to add a clue, roll your investigative cliché, and the result is as follows:

Roll

1-3: Go ahead and add your clue, but the GM is required to add something bad happening. This can be connected to the clue itself (“as you take the old tome from the shelf, a trapdoor opens”) or (at least apparently) unrelated (“as you examine the strange sculpture, John becomes aware that someone is pressing the muzzle of a gun into his back”).

4-6: Add your clue, nothing special happens.

7: Add your clue, and get one bonus die. This die must be attached to one particular cliché, and is used up after one roll. You can decide what the nature of the bonus die is: an extra bullet, an insight into a person's nature, etc. You can wait to decide until you use the bonus die (but must assign it to a cliché right away).

8: as 7, but get two such bonus dice.

9: as 7, but the bonus die is general, i.e. it can be used on any roll.

10: as 9, but get two such dice.

11-14: choose any of the above, or find a +1 bonus item (or a spell or other special magic thingy).

15+: as above, but the bonus item is +2.

The GM will of course play all NPCs and throw in obstacles and challenges, including but certainly not limited to cultists, completely insane antagonists (human and otherwise), and tentacled horrors from beyond who will attempt to beat, capture, dismember, ingest, and generally be unpleasant to the characters, as well as other sentient life (especially cute cuddly animals). What fun! :-)

Rolling Dice & Rules Stuff

Roll a number of dice equal to the value of the cliché most applicable to the action you're trying to do. The value of the roll equals the highest die rolled, plus any multiples of the high die if present. Ex. 6,5,5 = 6; 4,4,1 = 8; 5,4,4,2 = 5.

If your roll is equal to or greater than the target number (rolled or assigned by the GM), you succeed, otherwise you fail. *Every 5 points above the TN is an additional degree of success.* Note: investigative rolls are an exception, obviously.

A fumble happens when you get a failure, and where your failing roll has nothing higher than a 2 (or 1 if rolling only a single die).

If none of your clichés are appropriate, roll just one die (which loses on a tie, i.e. you'll need to beat the TN, not just equal it).

How to get more dice on a roll:

Use an adjective: a cliché adjective can be used to add a die to a roll or reroll a die once a session (and only when you're using the cliché the adjective describes). Bring the adjective into your narration to show how it makes a difference in the context. You can use a max of 3 adjectives per cliché per session.

Example: A cultist is trying to grab Sally, the *Young, Svelte, and Agile Kickboxing Contender* (3). The cultist gets a 5, and Sally rolls a 4, 3, 3. Her player says, "but Sally is agile, and twists out of the way!" She checks off agile on her character sheet, and decides to reroll the 4; it comes up a 2, which means she now has 3, 3, 2, for a total of 6 from the multiple of the high die. Her player says she twists out of the way and trips the cultist.

Another example: Boney Coy, *Ornery Ugly Old Codger of a Doctor* (2) is trying to revive the cultist his friends have captured so that he can be interrogated. The cultist has 7 wounds, and the doctor gets a 3, 3. His player says, "but Old Boney is so experienced he knows how to handle this!", checks off 'old' on the character sheet, and chooses to add a die to the roll, as rerolling one die can't help. Luckily, the new die also comes up a 3, giving him a total of 9, so he wakes up the cultist.

In addition, if you have a *double-pump cliché*, two adjectives (of the three that can be used to reroll or add a die) per cliché may be used once per session to choose to take any multiple rolled instead of the high die.

Example: Sally, *Subtle and Inconspicuous Psychic Mind Reader* [3], is trying to read the mind of a Cultist (1). The cultist gets a 6 to resist, and Sally rolls a 5, 4, 4. Her player says, "but Sally is subtle, and sneaks in when he's distracted" (checks off 'subtle'), and chooses to take the multiple of 4 as her result, getting a total of 8. She successfully reads the cultist's mind.

Use a relationship: Each relationship can be invoked to reroll one die, once per session. Narrate the relationship's influence on the outcome.

Push your cliché: take a point of fatigue for each additional die you want to add to the roll, or reroll one die. If you're using a double-push cliché, you get two dice to add or reroll for every fatigue.

Team up: appoint a point PC; everyone in the team rolls; dice that match the point PC's high die get added in; but if losing, everyone in the team takes a hit (or one PC can volunteer to take 2 hits).

Get an extra bonus die for especially apropos, entertaining, or tactical actions, or using a *bonus item*.

Combat: Roll dice as above. Winner successfully defends and does damage to the loser.

Wounds:

Write your cliché and it's value followed by a number of boxes equal to your cliché's value, and then a damage track, like this:

My Cool Cliché (4) [] [] [] [] (3) (2) (1) Out

if you lose a round of combat you take one point of *fatigue* per degree of success of the opponent for less lethal attacks (indicate fatigue with one stroke per box, like: [/]), or one *wound* per degree of success for lethal attacks (indicate a wound with one X per box, like: [X]).

These are to the cliché being used. Once your cliché has taken damage (either fatigue, wounds, or both) equal to its value, subsequent damage lowers the cliché value (until healed).

Example: Sally using kickboxer (3) is in a fight and takes one wound and two fatigue. Her track looks like this:

Kickboxer (3) [X] [/] [/] (2) (1) Out

The next hit she takes will bring kickboxer (3) down to kickboxer (2).

Fatigue recovers quickly (usually right after the scene, or sometimes within the scene), while wounds stay until healed.

Sanity Checks:

Roll dice as above; *the GM adds a # of dice = any insanity points you already have to the opposing roll.* If you succeed, you may be horrified but you have control of yourself. **If you failed by:**

1 degree of success (<=5 points): you *Flee*. Run, screaming away from the terror for 1-6 rounds. You can defend yourself if necessary, but not attack or do anything else useful. +1 insanity point.

2 degrees of success (<=10): you *Freeze* in place for 1d6 rounds. You can defend yourself, but not attack or flee. You can move if another person leads you. +1 insanity point.

3 degrees of success (<=15): you have a *Catatonic Break* for 1-6 rounds, plus a phobia when recovered. Will not move or react no matter what, but can come out of it in half the time at the cost of an additional insanity pt. +1 insanity pt.

4 degrees of success (>15): you have a *Complete Psychotic Break* for 1-6 rounds, plus a phobia or other illness when recovered. Basically act crazy under GM's direction while psychotic. +2 insanity points.

The following clichés are just examples to get you started - players should feel free to make up their own Clichés (subject to GM approval). In particular, Note that the GM will require the "fine tuning" of any Cliché that he considers too broad.

SOME SAMPLE CTHULHU CLICHÉS (AND WHAT THEY'RE GOOD FOR)

Antiquarian (knows history, art, and lots about old things)

Athlete (working out, staying healthy, annoying others by jogging)

Biker (Riding Harley, brawling, being Invisible to other motorists)

Bimbo (Available in both genders. Distracting, teasing, *not* teasing...)

Bodybuilder (being strong, being muscled, being Governor)

Book Dealer (having a lot of books, knowing about books)

Computer Geek (Hacking, programming, fumbling over introductions)

Con Artist (Convincing other people to give you money, evading cops)

FBI Agent (intimidating, shooting, having

inside knowledge)

Gambler (Betting, cheating, winning, running very fast)

Gangster (Shooting, speaking with an accent, intimidation)

Geezer (Wheezin', cursin', bitter reminiscin', failin' to understand kids, knowing local history)

Hairdresser (Dressing hair. If anything.)

Journalist (being nosey, persuasive, writing, having sources)

Latin Lover (Seducing, loving, running from irate husbands)

Librarian (knowing books, able to get to rare books)

Linguist (knowing another language)

Mad Cultist (Raving, world-domination, sacrificing people, cackling)

Martial Artist (Fancy hand-to-hand combat, out-of-synch speech)

Magician (Palming things, sawing ladies in half, public speaking)

Mechanic (knowing cars, fixing cars)

Medical Doctor (diagnose diseases, patch up wounds, give big bills)

Novelist (Drinking, brawling, cut-rate world traveling, introspection, writing)

Occultist (knowing about weird and occult things, recognizing Mythos texts and creatures)

Olympic Athlete (Running, swimming, jumping, skiing, javelin-tossing)

Outdoorsman (Following tracks, building shelters, finding wild food)

Parapsychologist (doing research, knowing about psychic phenomena)

Pastor or **Priest** (praying, sermonizing, performing liturgies)

Pilot (flying planes or helicopters)

Policeman (Eating donuts, writing tickets, arresting people)

Police Detective (noticing clues, doing research, shooting)

Private Investigator (following people, doing research, noticing clues)

Professor (knows a lot about their specialty, doing research)

Psychologist (knows a lot about people, can treat insanity)

Race Car Driver (driving real fast, looking good on TV)

Soldier (Shooting, hiding, partying, catching venereal diseases)

Sorcerer (Casting spells, looking

mysterious)

Special Forces (Following orders, looking stern, following orders)

Student (learning things, partying, mooching off others)

Thief (Sneakin' around gaining access and objects they shouldn't have)

Writer (doing research, knowing about their latest topic, communicating, writing)