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Risus

Risus R'lyeh

I love Chaosium's Call of Cthulhu scenarios and campaigns, but am a bit weary of the game rules. I plan to run a few CoC session with Risus rules. This the first draft, and has not been playtested.

Character keywords

I prefer to say keyword instead of cliché. These are just examples, of course. Most of them are typical character professions. The Keeper may want to limit each character to one or two professional traits.

- Policeman (spot thefts, direct traffic, arrest criminals)
- Police Detective (science of deduction, forensics, interrogate suspect)
- Pilot (fly airplane, repair airplane, know languages and countries)
- Bookshop owner (evaluate books, know unknown authors, find a book on every imaginable topic)
- Antiquarian (know about hermetic magic, know about greek battles, know about druids)
- Historian (interrogate students, tell anecdotes, ...)
- Dandy (recite poems, swing walking stick, get bored)
- Athlete (run, jump, dodge)
- Stage magician (sleight of hand, pick pockets, wear top hat, draw rabbit from hat)
- Occultist (know about UFO landings, remember weird names, ...)
- Linguist (speak french, speak dutch, speak mandarin chinese)
- Librarian (find misplaced books, find newspaper articles, dust shelves)
- Hobo (steal cheap wine, drink cheap wine, sing country songs)
- Physician (cure disease, find antidote, calm patient)
- Psychiatrist (cure mental illness, ...)
- Soldier (clean rifle, fire rifle, know about tactics and strategy)
- Clergyman (preach long sermons, forgive sinners ...)
- University student (chat up girls, learn stuff by heart, carouse)
- Millionaire (buy firearms, buy liquor, buy anything)
- Parapsychologist (tell stories about supernatural occurrences in Nepal, know a Japanese from a Korean, anthropophagic recipes)
- Circus clown (eat fire, tell jokes, fall down without taking damage)
- Criminal
- Private Investigator
- Engineer
- Journalist
- Lawyer

Sanity Rules

Instead of a sanity stat, all characters have a sanity threshold. That is a difficulty level against which monsters and horrible occurrences roll -- not other way round. All characters start at level 30, but instead of one die they can buy five extra points of sanity threshold if they like. (The sanity threshold should probably be limited to a maximum of 40.)

When a monster rolls against a character's sanity level, points may be lost even if the monster fails. Horrible occurrences grind you down in the long run. Therefore, sanity losses are denoted as two figures separated by a slash, like 1/1D. That means that the player must deduct 1 point from sanity if the monster fails, but 1D if the monster's roll surpasses the player's current sanity level. If the player loses 5 points or more, he goes temporarily insane, i.e. succumbs to catatonia or something similar. He will pick up a lasting phobia besides.

When a character loses more than 10 per cent of his remaining sanity, he goes indefinitely insane and needs to be treated in an asylum. When the sanity level reaches 0, the character goes permanently insane, i.e. becomes an NPC.

Some examples of sanity losses:

- find a body part or corpse: 1/1
- awake in a coffin 1/2
- meet someone you know to be dead 1/1D
- see great Cthulhu 1D/5D

Generous GMs can award increases to sanity thresholds for psychoanalytical therapies, for personal successes (preventing another summoning of mighty Yog-Sothoth) and for keywords (cliches) raised to 6 (reflecting increased self esteem as per CoC rules).

Tomes and spells

Even the minor mythos monsters have high fighting skills. A byakhee may have a keyword like "winged creature with muscles like steel" at a value of 5 dice or so. How can a fearless investigator win against these beings? He might find an ancient tome with a spell in it: How to summon and dispel a byakhee. If that character learns that spell by heart and chants it in the presence of the monster, he will get to roll a keyword like "professor of parapsychology" or "paleolinguist" against the creature. Furthermore, most mythos books give a bonus of 1 die for spellcasting -- the Necronomicon gives 2 dice bonus, even. Other players with similar skills may join the fight. And finally, if the monster had attacked the investigator physically in the first place, fighting back with a spell is considered inappropriate and can be pumped.

Risus

Just in case you didn't know, Risus is a free roleplaying game by S. John Ross. Check it out by clicking on the header of this section.

[\[S. John's official Risus page\]](#)
[Call of Cthulhu](#)
[E-Mail](#)

Risus is ideal if you prefer common sense to do the bookkeeping in your roleplaying campaign. But Risus goes even further. It encourages the players to add detail to the narrative. In an ordinary RPG, players will not try an action that they haven't got the skill for. In Risus, they will take yet another look at their keywords or cliches instead and come up with an original solution to the problem.

Call of Cthulhu

If you don't know Call of Cthulhu, this page will not hold much of interest for you, so better visit Chaosium first and buy "Masks of Nyarlathotep" or another of their fine products.

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