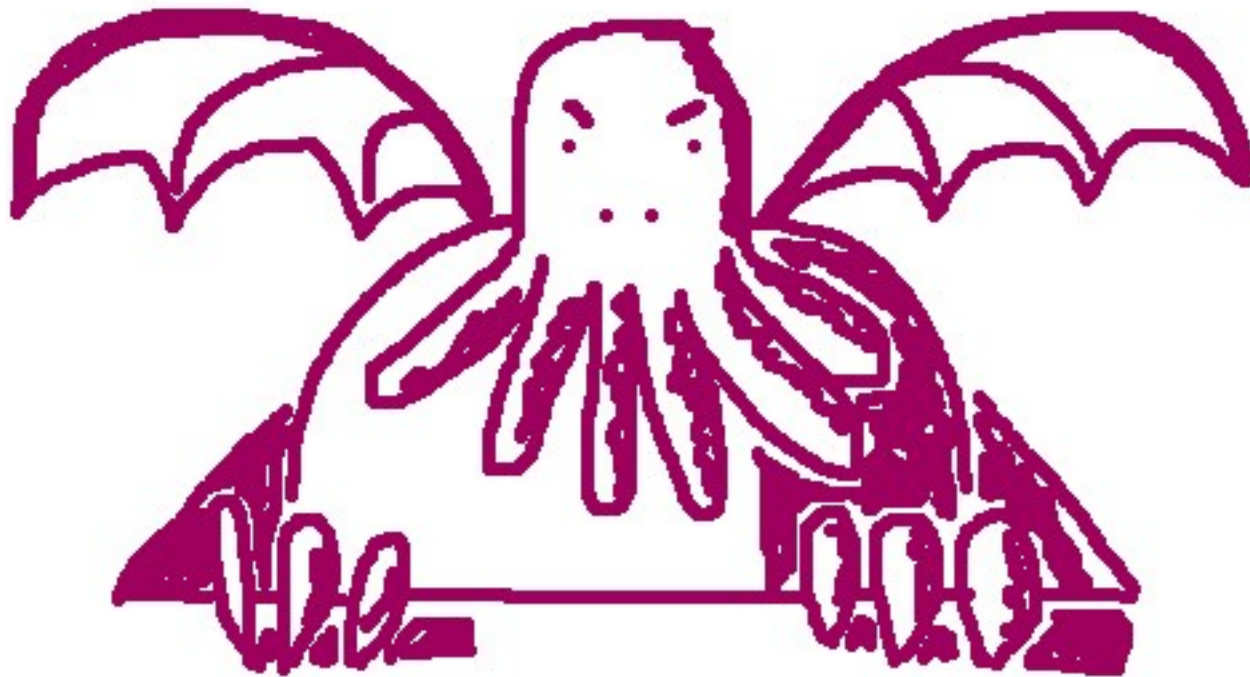


CTHULHU RISUS



by

Manu Saxena

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Rules Summary	p. 6
Character Generation	p. 7
Game System	p. 12
Combat	p. 14
Tools	p. 20
Experience and Advancement	p. 22
Sanity and Insanity	p. 24
Spells	p. 26
Monsters	p. 31
Options	p. 33

CTHULHU RISUS

(When you think about what Risus means in Latin, that title should fill you with fear!)

The main Risus site is here:

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

This is a recast version of Risus written for gaming in the Cthulhu universe. This means that I (Manu Saxena) basically took some of the original rules and twisted them (almost but not quite beyond recognition), but much of the rules on this site are unchanged, and you should know that material was written by S. John Ross. All those portions of the rules taken from the original Risus are copyrighted by S. John Ross (Risus, including those portions of it on this page, is Copyright © by S. John Ross 1993-2000) - but he still lets fans do sites like this, which I think is really cool.

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

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

By the way, I am a proud member of the International Order of Risus, and if you like Risus or just want to support more imaginative work like it, I highly recommend that you order the Risus Companion and become one, too.

Note: no copyright or trademark challenge is intended to anyone by my posting this material.

The Risus-style art used here was done by Francisco Vogel, a nice fellow who's also translated Cthulhu Risus into German. Thanks, Francisco!!!! Here's to you keeping your sanity and all your limbs for a while yet!

Before I talk about the game, I want to talk about something a little more important, namely the results of this past Presidential election. When it comes to Presidential candidates, I've learned my lesson: we should no longer be satisfied with settling for the lesser of two evils. I really have grown sick and

tired of it. Thus, I can't help but think the **Cthulhu for President** movement has a lot going for it.

Cthulhu's political positions can be found at <http://www.cthulhu.org/>, which has such gems as:

“**Q**)How will Cthulhu deal with a strongly bipartisan Congress?”

“**A**) Cthulhu will have no problem dealing with Congress, as they will be the first to be eaten.”

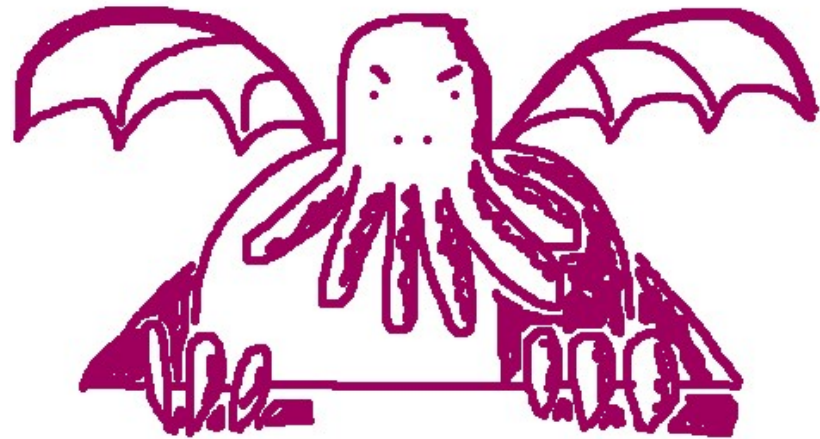
And:

“**Q**)Will he, as president, go jogging?”

“**A**) The Great Cthulhu is in perfect health, and due to its high metabolism and steady diet of human flesh, has no pathetic human need for exercise. In fact, those humans caught jogging will be destroyed immediately.”

If you're the type who'd like to support these kinds of positions (and who isn't?), why not check out:

<http://www.cthulhuforpresident.com/>



Now, about the game!

I love gaming in a Cthulhuesque universe, but something one quickly learns about such a setting is that the lifespan of a typical character is quite short, and sooner or later they'll wind up either drooling-at-the-mouth insane, gorily sacrificed by a cultist, or ingested by some nameless tentacled horror. It is hard to spend an hour creating a character

knowing the great likelihood of their eventual fate, and even harder to justify spending another hour on a new character after your previous one has just been rent limb-from-limb by a shoggoth while on his first adventure.

Hence, here is my proposed solution: use Risus as the gaming engine! It is hard to find a setting better suited for 30 second character creation than the Cthulhu mythos. Even if your character just got eaten, sacrificed, or pulled into an alternate dimension, a new character is just a few seconds away. The advantages of this should be clear.

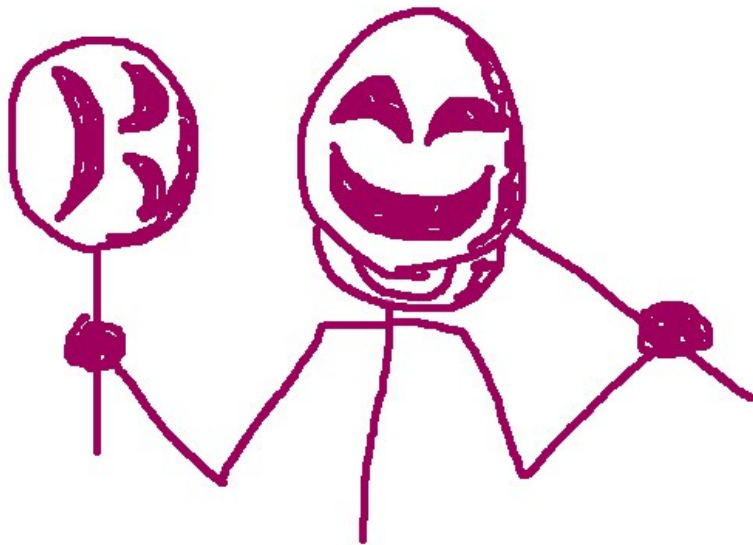
I must rush to point something out however: please be warned that **Risus** is no longer freeware; it's actually shareware with a trial period of 97 years. If you haven't registered by that time, you will be ignominiously disintegrated by S. John Ross (the illustrious author of Risus) with the touch of a button. Or so I'm told. :-) I, of course, am proud to be an official member of the International Order of Risus, and

thus will most likely not be disintegrated, at least not by S. John Ross.

Of course, if Cthulhu wins the election you don't really have to worry about personal disintegration (more like personal dismemberment and total body mastication), so I suppose you can try to get out of the shareware deal that way.

What follows below is my own copying, paraphrasing, extensive revising, etc. of the original Risus rules to adapt it to Cthulhuesque gaming. I've left a fair portion of the original rules out, but what remains should work for a Cthulhu Risus game (and of course you can get the original rules from the link above and use however much of them you like).

If you already know Risus and just want the quick summary of the main differences in Cthulhu Risus, here they are:



Rules Summary for Cthulhu Risus

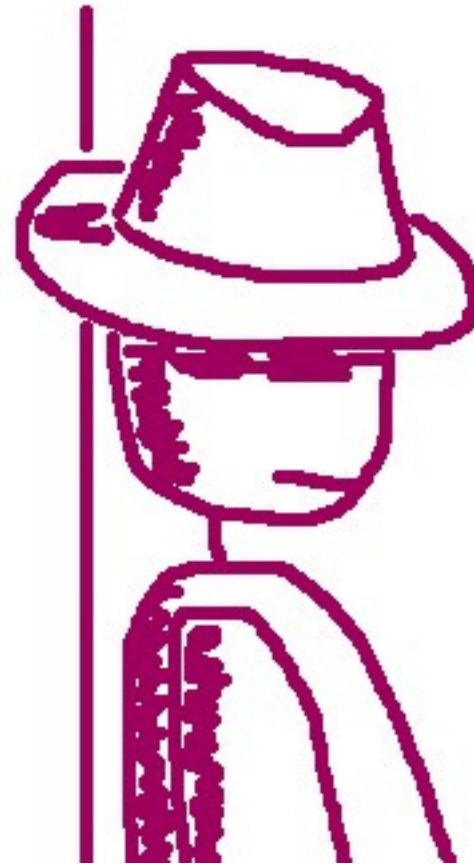
1. We will use the “high dice” variation for all checks, which means the value of a roll is equal to the highest single die rolled; multiples of the high die are also added in. The GM's roll (instead of picking a target #, the GM selects a # of dice to roll to oppose the player) is the target # to equal or beat (otherwise consider it a tie).
2. We will not use the inappropriate cliché rule (but exceptions can be

made if what you want to do is really, really funny). If none of your clichés are appropriate for what you want to do, use just one impaired die (it loses on a tie).

3. Especially entertaining, appropriate, or clever actions (or descriptions of them) get bonus dice.
4. **Sanity Rule:** when asked, make a Sanity Check using an appropriate cliché (the most “mental” cliché the character has). The GM will decide on the number of opposing dice (proportionate to the horror of the situation). You may gain points of insanity during the game; to pass the Sanity Check, you need to beat the GM's roll + your current insanity points.
5. **Trauma Rule:** instead of having your cliché dice reduced immediately, you gain a wound when you lose a round of combat (mark whether it's lethal (like from a gunshot, stab wound, or monstrous bite) or if it's a less lethal

wound, such as from a naked punch or a grappling attack or the grasp of a tentacle). Once the total of your wounds is equal to your cliché, then any subsequent wounds lower your cliché dice.

6. **Risus points:** Characters start with 2 free bonus dice, which can be spent for extra dice on checks at any time, or to reroll any die.
7. **Grunt rule:** To make record keeping easier for the GM, the GM can define some NPCs as grunts, which means it takes only 1 hit (or up to 3 or more hits, depending on how the GM defines the grunt) to take the grunt out in combat. A *leader* is an NPC who's basically just like a PC. And then of course there are monsters...



CTHULHU RISUS RULES*

CHARACTER CREATION!

Characters are defined by Clichés (sometimes several of them). Clichés are a

* Pun intended! :-)

shorthand which describe what a character knows how to do. The ``character classes" of the Neolithic Period of RPGs were Clichés: Fighter and Magic-User, Space Marine and Star Merchant. You can take Clichés like that, or choose a more contemporary one, such as Biker, Spy, Computer Nerd, Supermodel, or William Shatner (formerly an actor - now just a Cliché). Which Clichés are permitted are up to the GM.

Clichés are defined in terms of Dice (by which we mean the ordinary six-sided kind you can scavenge from your old **Yahtzee** set). This is the number of dice that you roll whenever your skill as a Fighter, Supermodel, or William Shatner (for instance) is challenged. See ``Game System," below. Three dice is professional. Six dice is mastery. One die is a putz.

Characters are created by naming them (and describing them if you have the time), and listing their Clichés. When designing your character, you have 10 dice with which to define his Clichés (a Normal

Schmoe would be built on anywhere from 3 to 5 dice). A straightforward Cthulhu character might look like this:

Greg Vainsson the Investigator

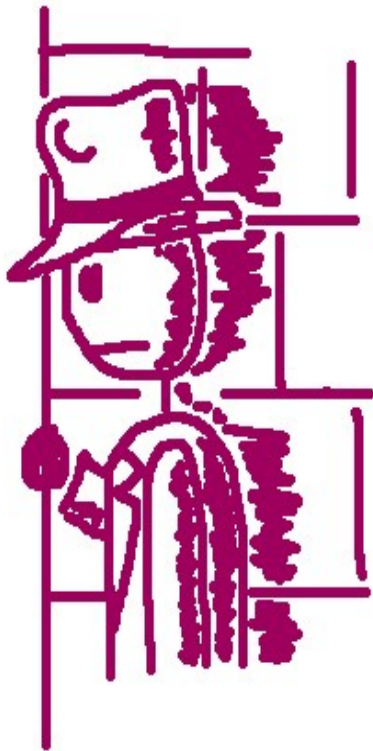
Description: Tall, blond, and frowning. Once Greg gets on someone's tail, it's tough to shake him. He gets tired of dealing with the routine divorce case, but occasionally something weird and unsettling shows up that makes him long for them.

Clichés: Grim-faced Private Detective (4), Tough-Looking Biker (2), Computer Geek (3), Reluctant Occultist (1)

A character may have any number or combination of Clichés, but more than 10 different Clichés would be odd, considering the number of dice you get. Characters shouldn't begin their career with more than 4 dice in anything, but just because you're creating a character today doesn't mean that he's beginning his career! The GM will

tell you if he's requiring ``beginners" for the game. It's not our business.

Note: it's highly recommended that at least one of your clichés be clearly physical in nature, and another one be clearly mental in nature. This makes it more likely that you will have an appropriate cliché to use in most situations.



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)

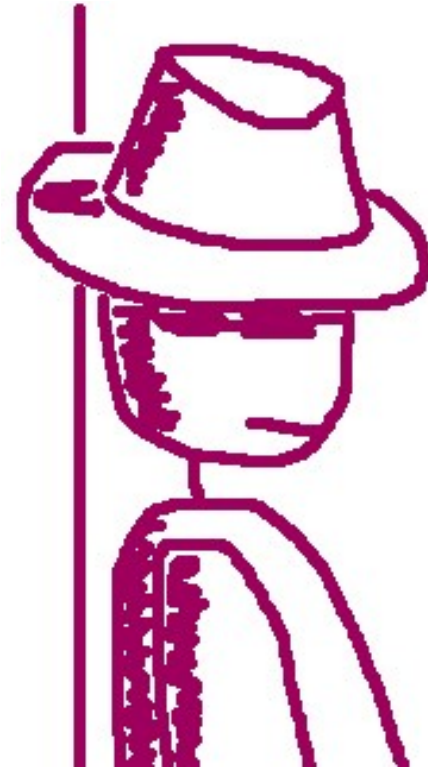
Sorcerer (Casting spells, looking mysterious)

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)



These 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.

THE GAME SYSTEM

Whenever anybody wants to do something, AND the GM doesn't think that success would be automatic, the player rolls dice. If the total rolled beats (equals or exceeds) the opposed roll made by the GM, success! If not, failure!

In Cthulhu Risus, we will use the “high dice” variation for checks, which means the value of a roll is equal to the highest single die rolled; multiples of the high die are also added in (look at it this way: roll the dice and see what's high; take away all your other dice that don't show that same number).

So instead of picking a target #, the GM selects a # of dice to roll to oppose the player. The value of this roll is the target # the player needs to equal or beat. Otherwise, if it's player vs. player consider it a tie.

For example, Jeff Lord, Antiquarian (4), is trying to determine the nature of the writing on an unidentified clay tablet found at a new archaeological site. The GM decides

this is going to be a tough job and assigns 6 dice to the difficulty – unidentified tablet (6). Jeff's player rolls a 6, 5, 5, and a 4, giving him a 6. The GM rolls a 4, 4, 2, 3, 2, and a 1, giving him a total of 8 (for the two 4s). Jeff cannot identify the writing on his own.

The reason for using this variation is to make the curve less “lumpy”, so that those clichés with fewer dice will have some chance against those with more dice.

In Cthulhu Risus, everything is rolled as an opposed check, even if no one is actively trying to stop the character from doing something. For example, suppose a character is trying to climb a wall: use whatever character cliché is appropriate, vs. a cliché for the wall, like High Wall (3).

So instead of picking a target number, the GM picks an opposing cliché and assigns a number of dice to it. If a character is trying to throw something at a target, use the appropriate character cliché vs. a cliché like Range (2) or Distance (4); if a librarian (3) is trying to find a rare book, it

would be the librarian cliché vs. Rare Book (4), and so on.

The reason for doing this is because we're going to use the High Die option for combat, so why not use it for everything?

Another advantage of this is that now it no longer matters what kind of dice you use: you can use d6, d8, d10, whatever, as long as everyone uses the same kind of dice.

The values picked for opposing clichés can be subjective, but anybody can still *try* anything: Crossing a chasm – say, a Chasm (2) - by swinging on a rope, vine or something similar would be child's play for a Swashbuckler or a Lord of the Jungle with a 6 dice cliché, easy for a Pulp Archaeologist with 4 dice, and challenging but definitely doable for a Gymnast, Barbarian, or Thief with 2 or 3 dice. Even a Wheelchair-Bound Eccentric Occultist with 1 die could try it, but the consequences (and likelihood) of failure are likely to be high.

Note: remember that you can use a Risus point to add a die to your roll or reroll any one die. You can wait to use a Risus point until after you've rolled. This is a powerful thing.

For example, Jeff's roll, above, was 6, 5, 5, and a 4, giving him a 6, since 6 is the high die. Jeff's player could choose to use a Risus point to reroll the 6. If it comes up 4 or less then Jeff would instead get a 10 for the two fives; if it comes up a 5 he'd get a 15!

Option: Narrative Risus Points

This option was inspired by the FATE version of FUDGE, in particular the Aspect concept. This option is an addition to the regular uses of Risus points. To use this option, it helps if you have colorful adjectives with your clichés, for example “Grizzled, cynical private eye (3)” or “Dashing young soldier (3)” or “Greedy gambler (2)” or “Curious history student (4)”, etc.

With this option the GM can call on one of your clichés and offer you a Risus point to do a specific action in accordance with it; you can choose to do the action and accept the point or refuse to do the action and thus reject the point.

For example, the GM might say, “John, the Curious history student (4), notices what appears to be a very old manuscript in his uncle’s library – and he’s curious about it. Here’s a Risus point if you open it and read the first few pages.” John’s player can accept the point and open the book, or ignore the book and not get the point.

Players can also do the same thing to the GM. For example, Kate’s player can say, “Kendra [Cute Reporter (3)] uses her sexy smile to win the clerk over, and he lets her into the rare book section” and offer one of her Risus points to the GM. The GM can accept it and let her character in, or not (in which case the player doesn’t have to pay the Risus point).

THE COMBAT SYSTEM

“Combat” in this game is defined as any contest in which opponents jockey for position, utilize attacks, bring defenses to bear, and try to wear down their foes to achieve victory. Either literally or metaphorically! Some examples of combat include:

ARGUMENTS: People using whatever verbal weapons they have at hand to make their points. Truth is the first casualty.

HORSE-RACING: People on horses running around and around a dirty track, trying to get nowhere first.

DOGFIGHTS: People in airplanes or spaceships flying around and trying to blow each other out of the sky.

ASTRAL/PSYCHIC DUELS:

Mystics/psionics looking bored or asleep, but trying to rip one another's egos apart in the Otherworld.

WIZARD'S DUELS: Sorcerers using strange magics and trying to outdo the other.

DUELING BANJOS: Banjo players using strange melodies and trying to outdo the other.

SEDUCTION ATTEMPTS: One (or more) characters trying to score with one (or more) other character(s) who is(are) trying to resist.

COURTROOM ANTICS: Prosecution vs. Defense. The goal is victory. Justice is incidental.

ACTUAL PHYSICAL COMBAT: People trying to injure or kill each other.

The GM decides when a combat has begun. At that point, go around the table in rounds, and let each combatant make an attack in turn. What constitutes an "attack" depends on the sort of combat, but it should ALWAYS be roleplayed (if dialogue is involved) or described in entertaining detail (if it's physical and/or dangerous and/or normally requires contraptions). Especially entertaining actions (or descriptions of them) get bonus dice.

Attacks require rolls against character Clichés. The GM must, at the outset of combat, determine what TYPE of Clichés are appropriate for the fight. In a physical fight, Clichés like Viking, Barbarian, Soldier, Swashbuckler, and Novelist are appropriate. Clichés like Hairdresser and Latin Lover are not. The GM can penalize an inappropriate cliché by a few dice, or rule that it just can't be used.

An attack must be directed at a foe. Typical physical attacks are punching, kicking, grabbing, holding or pinning, hitting with a weapon, and shooting or throwing something. Both parties in the attack (attacker and defender) roll against their chosen Cliché. Low roll loses.

Note: *for ranged combat, the GM may decide to assign opposing dice based on the difficulty of the shot rather than any of the opponent's clichés. For example she may assign 2 opposing dice because of*

the range, one die for the target's speed or cover, etc.

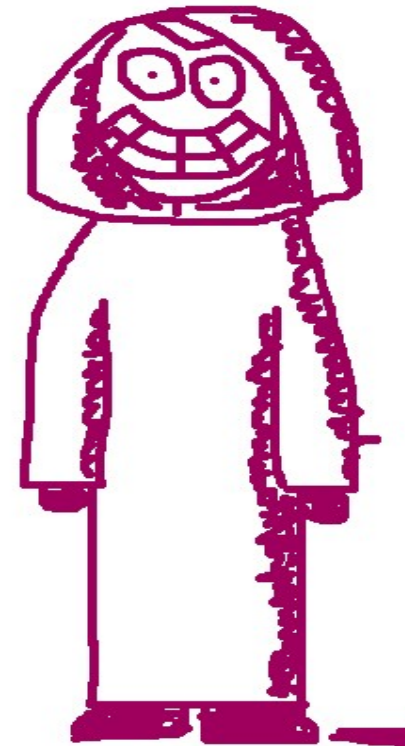
The loser of the combat round has their attack deflected or avoided, while they are affected by the winner's attack. *In Cthulhu Risus, the loser does not automatically subtract from a cliché*: instead the loser gets a **wound**.

For attacks with weapons like knives or guns or Tindalos teeth the wound is considered “lethal” in nature; it’s “less lethal” if the attack was more like a punch, kick, or a grappling attack. Mark the type of wound you get so you know how quickly it heals. If using boxes on a character sheet, one way to indicate the type of wound is to put one diagonal line in the box for less lethal wounds and put an “X” for lethal wounds.

Once the total of your wounds is equal to your cliché, only then do any subsequent wounds lower your cliché dice.

The reason for this rule is to mitigate the death spiral and lengthen combats, so they aren't as brutally quick as Risus usually is.

Option: Degree of Success. For every 5 points the loser lost by, they get 1 additional wound. This adds excitement and incentive to get those really high rolls.



Example of Combat: *George Masters [English Gunplay (3), English Boxing (2), Intrepid Investigator (4), Sorcerer (1)] in desperately trying to put out a fire in a barn drenches the straw with buckets of water. Unfortunately a couple of convalescent Deep Ones were under the straw, and the water revived one of them. A small Deep One (5) rises out of the straw and starts lumbering towards George, who draws his revolver and shoots.*

*The GM assigns the shot a difficulty of (2) for the range and rolls a 3 and a 2 for a result of 3; George rolls a 5, 4, and a 2 (from English Gunplay (3)) for a result of 5, and hits the Deep One, who takes one wound. The Deep One groans but keeps moving forward. George shoots again while calling out for help; this time the GM gives the difficulty a (1) because the Deep One is even closer, and rolls a 5; George rolls a 5, 5, and a 4 for a total of 10, so hits and does an extra wound (they're using the **Degree of Success** option), so the*

Deep One takes 2 wounds (it now has taken a total of 3).

The Deep One has now reached George, and bashes at him while he ducks and jabs. It's English Boxing (2) vs. Deep One (5); the Deep One gets a 6, 6, 5, 4, and a 1 for a result of 12, while George rolls a 1 and a 2 for a result of 2. The Deep One does 2 (less-lethal) wounds to George, and the next hit he takes will lower his boxing cliché. George had better do something clever quickly, or he's going to be lunch for this Deep One...

TEAMS:

These are useful for players ganging up on a powerful opponent, say, for example, a monster. When a bunch of cultists are bent on ganging up on a player, use the Grunt Squad rules instead.

The team leader is the one with the highest most appropriate cliché. Everyone in the team describes their action and how it coordinates with or otherwise is a part of the collective effort. Everyone rolls their

cliché. Any die equal to the Team leader's high die gets added in.

For example, suppose the team leader has a 4 dice cliché and rolls 4, 3, 2, and a 2 (so his high die is 4) and suppose team member A gets a 5, 4, and a 3 while team member B gets a 6 and a 5. Only team member A's 4 gets added in, so the total for this team of 3 members is 8 (team leader's 4 plus member A's 4).

If the team wins the round, great; if it loses, one member of the team takes 2 wounds. Determine who takes the hit by volunteer, randomly, or by having everyone roll their cliché and having the low roller get hit.

GRUNT SQUADS: This is just special effects for dealing with multiple opponents. When you want the heroes to be attacked by a horde of 700 rat-skeletons inside the lair of the Wicked Necromancer(5), but don't feel like keeping track of 700 little skeletal sets of dice, just declare that they're a team, fighting as Skeletal Rat-Horde(7). Mechanically, the Rat-Horde is

the same as any other single foe - except it has more dice!

Grunt-Squads can have any level of cliché the GM feels is appropriate. Grunt-Squads stick together as a team until they're defeated, at which point any survivors will scatter (though at least one will always remain to suffer whatever fate the victor decides).

Eventually, one side will be left standing, and another will be left beaten. At this point, the winners usually decide the fate of the losers. In a physical fight or magical duel, the losers might be killed (or mercifully spared). In Courtroom Antics, the loser gets sentenced by the judge, or fails to prosecute. In a Seduction, the loser gets either a cold shower or a warm evening, depending on who wins.

You needn't use the same Cliché every round. If a Viking/Swashbuckler wants to lop heads one round, and swing on chandeliers the next, that's groovy, too.

Wounds are lost at a "healing" rate determined by the GM. In physical combat, the cause of the wounds will affect the healing rate: stab wounds or bullet wounds heal slower than if the "wounds" were just representing the loss of position in a wrestling match instead of actual physical damage, for example.

If the combat was in vehicles (space fighters, mecha, wooden sailing ships) then the vehicles themselves are likely damaged, too, and must be repaired.

Option: Another way to *fight multiple opponents*:

All combatants roll their clichés. Everyone rolling higher than the outnumbered fighter can cause one wound; the lone fighter can hit any one opponent he rolled higher than. Highest roll goes first.

Example: Three cultists, Fred, Ned and Ed - each a Fanatic Cthulhu Cultist (2) - are

attacking Nancy, the intrepid investigator: Antiquarian (4), Crouching Tiger Kung Fu (3), Occultist (2), Yoga Meditator (1). The fanatic cultists roll 2 dice each getting a 4 (for Ned) and a 2 (for Ed, and also Fred); Nancy rolls 3 dice for her Kung Fu, but only gets a 3.

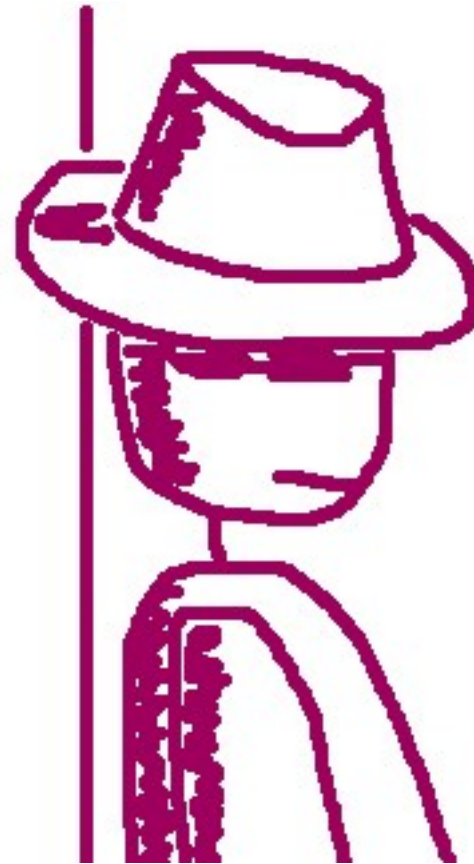
Cultist Ned, who got the high roll, grabs Nancy with the intent of subduing her (throwing her to the ground and tying her up), which means she gets one "less lethal" wound representing the influence of Ned's grab. Nancy's Kung Fu (3) is higher than that, so she's not disadvantaged yet - although Ned's grabbed her he hasn't been able to affect her yet (but once she gets two more wounds - a total of 3, her current combat cliché - then further wounds will start lowering her cliché).

Nancy has the next highest roll and she can hit any one opponent who got worse than she did, in this case either Ed or Fred – so she says she hits Ed with a Kung Fu kick. Since Ed was just a 1 hit grunt, the

GM says Ed falls unconscious, knocking over a filing cabinet on the way down. Fred isn't able to do anything, since his total was lower than Nancy's.

Option: *Separate Attack and Defense*

When it's your turn to attack, you describe your action and use the appropriate cliché as usual, and the target of your attack describes how they defend and with which cliché - which needn't be the same cliché as they use to attack. If the defender loses, a wound is taken to the cliché they defended with. And the same applies when you are attacked.



PROPER TOOLS

Every character is assumed to be equipped with the Tools of His Trade (at least the portable ones). Warriors are wearing armor and wielding good weapons. Cowboys have leather chaps,

lasoo, a couple of pearl-handled six-guns and some chaw. Netrunners have an expensive jack-in laptop and funny clothes. If, through the course of an adventure, a character LOSES any of these vital totems, his Cliché operates on half the normal number of dice (or not at all, if the GM rules that the equipment was REQUIRED) until they are replaced.

A Barbarian(5), for instance, can fight without his sword as a Barbarian(3), but a Netrunner can't run the net without his cyberdeck. If the Netrunner manages to find another computer to play with besides the kind he's used to, he can operate at half-dice.

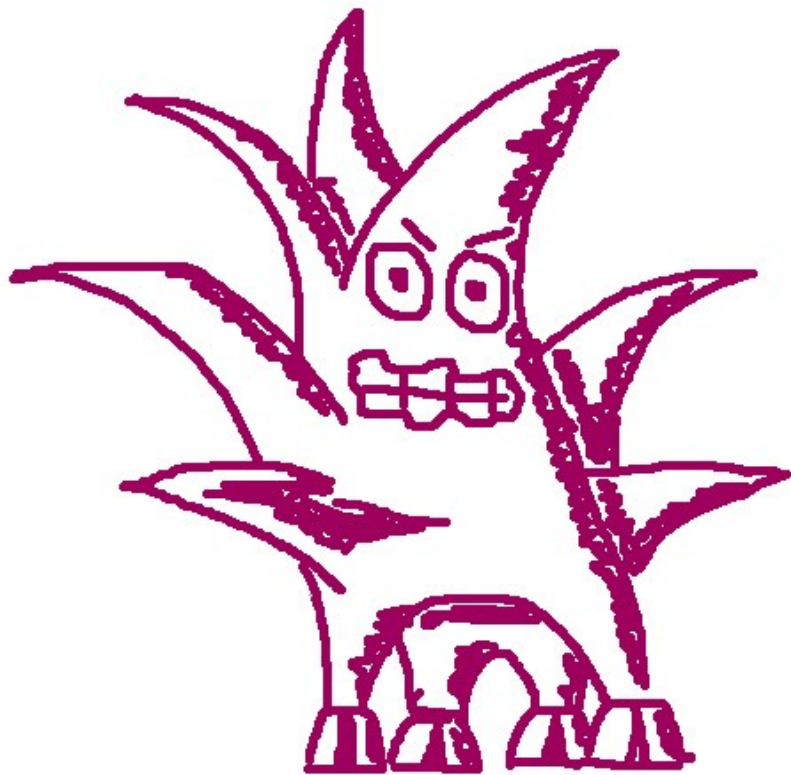
Some special tools (magic wands, hot-off-the-line military cyberdecks, better or cooler weapons, and so on) may give bonus dice to your Clichés when used. Characters never begin the game with bonus-dice gear; they must be acquired in adventures.

GUNS

For the most part these should be treated like tools, or bonus die items if they're special.

OPTIONAL AMMO RULE: if while shooting you roll just 1s and 2s and fail the check, you've fumbled the reload, and have to spend the next round reloading. If rolling just 1s and the check is a failure, the gun has jammed and is useless until repaired.

OPTIONAL AUTOMATIC FIRE RULE: when firing a gun on automatic, add one die to the roll and discard one die of your choice. However, if the reload is fumbled it takes two rounds to reload instead of one.



INAPPROPRIATE CLICHÉS

Will not be used in Cthulhu Risus, unless you really, really want to and it's going to be really, really funny. If none of your clichés are appropriate for what you want or need to do, you get one free impaired die (which means you lose on a tie) to use

on the roll instead. And you can always use bonus dice or pump a cliché.

CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT

At the end of a session, the GM will give out 1 to 3 experience points to all surviving characters. 4 experience points can be traded in to raise 1 cliché by one point, or to add one new cliché with a value of 1. Also, at the start of each new session you begin with a number of additional Risus points equal to the experience you were assigned at the end of your last game.

For example, in Lilly's first game she started with 2 Risus points like everyone else. She used one point during the game. At the end of the session the GM assigned her 2 XP. At the start of the next session she starts with 3 Risus points – the one that she didn't use last time, plus 2 for the 2 points of XP she received.

Note: some may wonder about the value of having a character advancement rule in a game specifically designed to be compatible with a high degree of character attrition through death, dismemberment, ingestion & digestion, insanity, and other such unpleasantness.

Well, of course just because the game is *compatible* with such outcomes doesn't mean one has to play the game in such a way that those outcomes are inevitable: there's no reason one can't use the system simply to take advantage of the easy character creation. But, since you brought it up...

Inheritance Option: As an option for those games where character attrition will be (or winds up being) high, you can allow the carry over of experience from a recently lost character to a newly created one, plus the inheritance of any Mythos texts or other valuable items if this makes sense in the story. This helps take the sting out of losing a character and can help

keep players motivated to have their new characters continue to take chances and adventure.

For example, suppose Greg the investigator survived 3 sessions and earned 8 experience points, which were used to raise his private detective cliché by 2 points. Now suppose Greg is eaten by a Hound of Tindalos in the beginning of the fourth session. With the inheritance option, Greg's player can create a new 12-point character (by using the 8 XP), instead of a regular 10-point starting character. And if Greg had found any special items the new character might be able to inherit those as well, if together with the GM the player can find a way for this to make sense in the story.

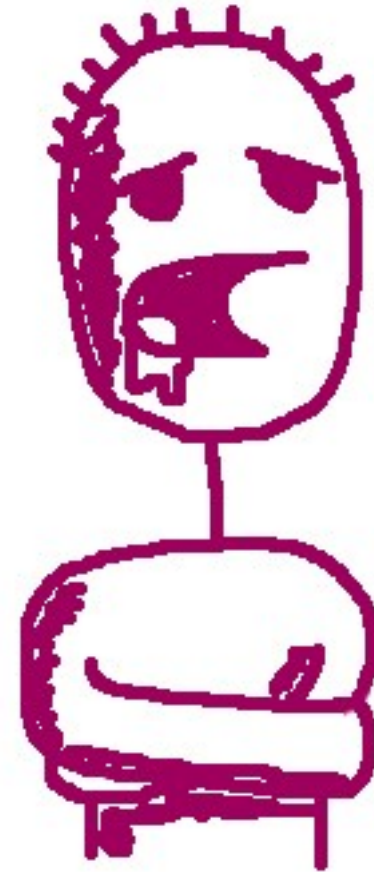
“But why bother? We’re doomed no matter what we do!”

This comment occasionally comes up: why bother adventuring in a Cthulhuesque universe at all, if the inevitable result is

going to be unfortunate and rather messy for your character? Well, of course it doesn't have to end that badly – it depends on what kind of story the players and GM enjoy. But yes, usually there is a good chance that a player character will meet with an unpleasant end. So why bother?

You may not want to if your goal is just to rack up XP and treasure – but if the goal is to, say, solve a mystery and save the world (or maybe even to save just one innocent person from a grisly, unspeakable end) then if your character dies or loses his sanity in pursuit of such an end, well then maybe that's OK.

So it all depends on your goal. If your goal is to conquer the world by summoning Cthulhu, you have only yourself to blame for what happens ☺



SANITY AND INSANITY

You may gain points of insanity during the game, either by failing a Sanity Check or because what you encounter is so horrible the GM just assigns you an insanity point.

You make a Sanity Check by using an appropriate character cliché vs. a number of dice determined by the GM (either equal to a monster's cliché or otherwise proportional to the horror of the situation), plus a modifier equal to your current insanity points.

For example, suppose your character Jane Intrepid has 2 insanity points when she suddenly feels grasped around the leg by a tentacle. She looks behind her to see the horror of a Shoggoth (6) rising up from the ground to eat her. The GM calls for a Sanity Check, and will most likely make her opposing roll using 6 dice (give or take a few for situational modifiers): let's say she rolls and gets one 5 as the high die. You the player must beat the GM's roll (of 5, in this case) + 2 (because of Jane's two insanity points), i.e. get a 7 or above in order to make the Sanity Check.

If another character, Jack, is also grasped by the shoggoth but has 4 insanity points, his player would need to beat a 9 (5 for the

GM's roll plus 4 for the insanity points) to pass the check.

If you succeed, your character is able to keep their fear from dominating them and can act normally (although even if you succeed you may still get an insanity point if the GM determines it's a horrible enough situation).

If you fail the Sanity check, you get an additional point of insanity and you are temporarily insane. This usually means you'll run screaming from the area as fast as you humanly can, followed by gibbering in a corner for a period of time (but the GM may feel free to assign you something else equally bad or even worse, if it'll be more fun or appropriate). The period of time your character is temporarily insane is equal to how much he or she failed the check by, in rounds (or minutes or hours or days, if the GM judges it more appropriate to the story).

If while temporarily insane you fail another Sanity check, your character is really in trouble! The GM gets to assign your

character a permanent phobia or other appropriate mental illness, in addition to detailing the immediate unpleasant effects of the failure. If you keep getting more and more insanity points, you'll eventually wind up a gibbering lunatic.

Insanity points and associated mental illnesses can be healed by appropriate therapy or therapeutic actions, as the GM dictates.

Appropriate clichés for a Sanity Check are things like Calm Meditator, Cool and Collected Hostage Negotiator, Centered Qi Gong expert, etc. - anything that would help make the character calm under pressure. If more than one cliché is appropriate, use the highest one and add +1 die for each additional appropriate cliché.



SPELLS & SCARY STUFF

Learning a spell usually requires study from a Mythos text that lists the spell and

its instructions, and depending on the spell may require an elaborate ritual involving knives, fire, blood, and all sorts of mind-bending messiness. Some spells just require an incantation, and once practiced for awhile a spell can be done without the original text. First learning a spell from a text requires multiple Sanity checks, the more powerful the spell the more checks. In fact, one usually needs to make a Sanity Check (typically against an opposed roll of 2 to 4 dice by the GM) every few pages while reading a Mythos text.

Some Mythos texts to learn spells from:
The Book of Dzyan, *The Book of True Magick*, *De Vermiis Mysteriis*, *The Eltdown Shards*, *Monstres and their Kynde*, *The Necronomicon*, *The Pnakotic Manuscripts*, *The R'lyeh Text*, *Unausprechlichen Kulten*, *The Zanthu Tablets*.



General spells:

Contact a specific type of monster (see monster section below); takes 3 Sanity checks to learn.

Summon a specific type of monster; takes 6 Sanity checks to learn, plus gain 1d3 insanity points automatically.

Bind a specific type of monster; takes 8 Sanity checks to learn, plus gain 1d6

insanity points automatically. Once bound, the creature obeys all commands of the master who it's bound to; however, it will often try to escape if it can (usually by taking advantage if commands are phrased ambiguously).

Command a specific type of monster; takes 4 Sanity checks to learn. One needs to cast this spell each time one gives a command (unlike **Bind**, which only needs to be cast once).

Dispel a specific type of monster; takes 2 Sanity checks to learn.

Note: *Contact Byakhee* is a completely separate spell from *Contact Shoggoth*, which is also different from *Contact Deep One*, etc. Each such spell needs to be learned separately. The same is true for all the other spells listed above.

For the above spells, make a check (with appropriate clichés, like Sorcerer, Occultist, etc.) against the monster's cliché

value to succeed. For *Contact*, just use half the monster's cliché value. You can add 1 die to your roll for every wound (represents draining some of your blood, or the like) or every point of insanity you are willing to gain. Also, others can help by adding to the dice total in the same way.

Once cast, the GM will require a Sanity Check for all the above spells except *Dispel*. For *Summon*, depending on what's being summoned you may automatically get an insanity point.



Other Spells:

Space Elixir (enables travel through space without a spacesuit); takes 4 Sanity checks to learn.

Open Gate (opens a portal to another place on earth or another world); takes 6 Sanity checks to learn, +1d3 automatic insanity points.

Elder Sign Circle of Protection (when the sign is drawn inside a circle, monsters can't cross the circle); takes 2 Sanity checks to learn.

Enchant/Bless item (adds bonus dice to item, and now item can affect monsters normally immune to that type of item); takes 4 Sanity checks to learn.

Dust of Ibn Sultan (makes the invisible visible); takes 2 Sanity checks to learn.

Powder of Abu Rumi (damages monsters from beyond, one wound per dose); takes 4 Sanity checks to learn, +1d3 automatic insanity points.

Sign of Healing (sign drawn in the air, heals wounds); takes 3 Sanity checks to learn.

Sign of Harm (sign drawn in the air, causes wounds); takes 6 Sanity checks to learn, +1d3 automatic insanity points.

Transference (transfers a wound or insanity point from target to caster); takes 2 Sanity checks to learn.

Projection (transfers a wound or insanity point from caster to target); takes 8 Sanity checks to learn, +1d6 automatic insanity points.

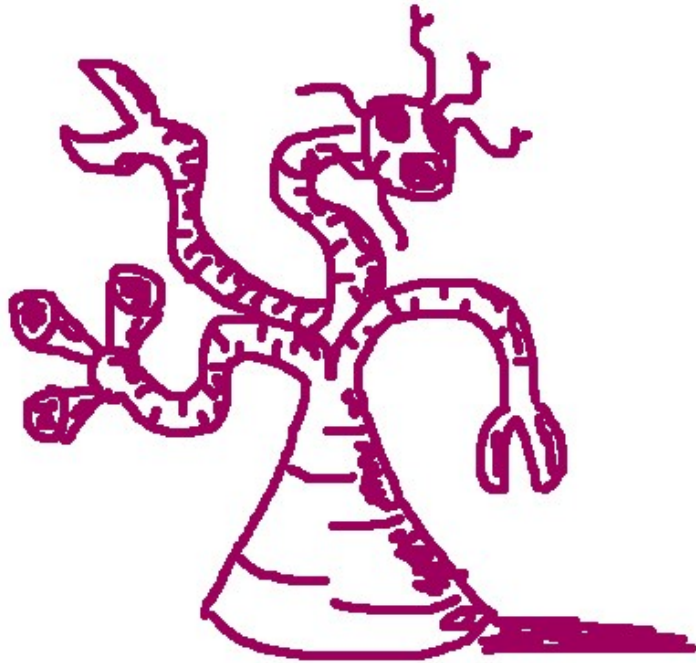
For all the above spells, the GM will determine an appropriate number of opposing dice based on the power of the effect desired or on what it's being cast on: one opposing die for each wound you're trying to heal or cause, one die for each die of blessing attempted, one die for each dose of powder, dice for how far the gate goes, how far the space elixir is to last, the value of the cliché of the monster it's being cast on, etc. You can add additional dice to

the roll as described above. A Sanity Check is also usually required after casting each spell (except for the **Sign of Healing** spell).

For a spell like the **Elder Sign Circle**, the opposing roll can be made when a monster tries to cross the circle instead of when the circle is first drawn.

For the **Powder of Abu Rumi**, make a check when creating the powder in the lab, basement, or other appropriate location (it takes one hour per attempt to make the powder).

For the **Dust of Ibn Sultan**, make one check to make the dust; the monster it's used on doesn't get a chance to resist it. The same is true for the **Space Elixir**; if made successfully, the user doesn't need to make another kind of check (except perhaps a Sanity check at the GM's discretion).



MONSTERS YOU'RE LIKELY TO WISH YOU HADN'T SEEN

Byakhee (see in the dark, fly through space, bear messages, carry riders)

Color Out of Space (amorphous translucent rainbow-colored blob, parasitizes all life, drains will to live over

time, immune to normal weapons, creates larva, repelled by magnetism)

Cultist (knows occult things, knows ceremonies, likes to sacrifice people & summon monstrous entities)

Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath (bunch of walking tentacles, drains life, immune to most spells, hates cold)

Deep One (amphibious, likes to breed with humans, usually lives in the sea, likes Massachusetts)

Dimensional Shambler (can shift through time and space, likes to grab and abduct people, hard to hurt)

Ghoul (walking undead, unaffected by normal weapons, grabs and eats people, has no brains)

Hound of Tindalos (teleports through time and space, likes to eat humans, hard to hurt, regenerates)

Rat-Thing (intelligent unusually big rats, may cast spells, eat people)

Shoggoth (huge amorphous amoeboid, unaffected by normal weapons, hates captivity)

Terror from Beyond (predatory tendrils with a big mouth, hard to hurt, immune to most spells, usually invisible)

A particular monster's cliché value can differ from that of others of its kind, depending on the specific creature's size, malevolence, etc. Some examples: Baby Shoggoth (5), Small Shoggoth (10), Medium-sized Shoggoth (15), Typical Deep One (7), Big Byakhee (5), Big Ghoul (4), Typical Hound of Tindalos (8), Typical



Cthulhu Cultist (2), Small Dimensional Shambler (6).

Here's an idea on how to interpret “hard to hurt” and “regenerates”:

Hard to hurt: the creature ignores every other wound.

Regenerates: once reduced to apparent death, the creature begins to heal one wound per round (or whatever time period the GM likes). True destruction requires drastic measures, like complete dismemberment, a dispel, etc.



MORE OPTIONS:

Because we like to have options...

To make monsters weaker: one way to do this is instead of using the trauma rule

for monsters the GM can use regular Risus damage (i.e., the monster loses one die for each wound it takes).

Attacking multiple opponents in one round: the attacker gets a penalty of one die per opponent in their attack.

Example: Continuing the combat above, Nancy decides she wants to punch Ned off of her and hit Fred in the same round. Since she's attacking both cultists at once, she gets a two-die penalty to her roll. This would leave her with only one die left (from her Kung Fu (3)), so she decides to pump her cliché (see options below), getting 2 extra dice (getting back to her original total of 3) for this round, but she automatically takes two wounds. If her player rolls high enough, Nancy will be able to hit both remaining cultists in the same round.

Use unopposed checks as in original Risus. If the total rolled beats (equals or exceeds) the Target Number the GM sets, success! If not, failure!

Target numbers follow this scale:

5: A cinch. A snap. A challenge for a Schmuck. Routine for a pro.

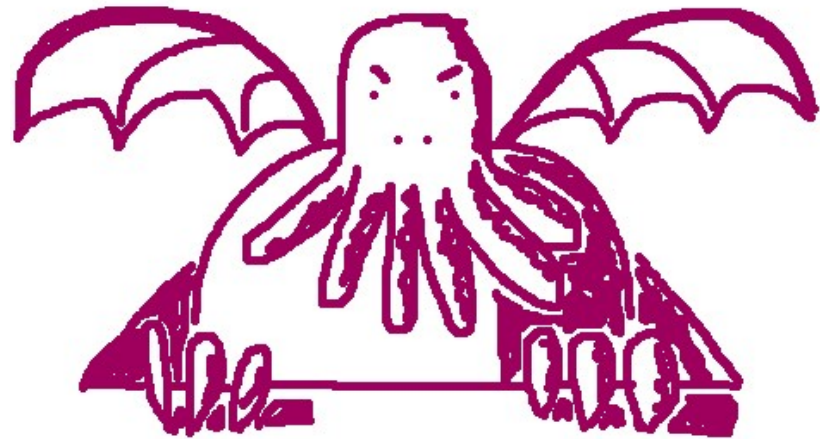
10: A challenge for a Professional.

15: An Heroic challenge. For really inventive or tricky stunts.

20: A challenge for a Master. Nearly superhuman difficulty.

30: You've GOT to be Kidding. Actual superhuman difficulty.

For Sanity checks, multiply the number of wounds or points of insanity by 5 to get the required target number.



ADVANCED OPTION: HOOKS and TALES

Normally, a character is created using 10 dice. With this Advanced Option, players can bargain for extra beginning dice by giving their character a Hook and/or a Tale.

A Hook is some significant character flaw - an obsession, a weakness, a sworn vow, a permanently crippling injury - that the GM agrees is so juicy that he can use it to make the characters life more interesting (which usually means less pleasant). A

character with a Hook gets an extra die to play with.

A Tale is a written "biography" of the character describing his life before the events of the game begin. The Tale needn't be long (two or three pages is usually just fine); it just needs to tell the reader where the character is coming from, what he likes and dislikes, how he became who he is, what his motives are. Some Tales are best written from the player's omniscient perspective; others are more fun if written as excerpts from the character's own diary. A character with a Tale provided before gameplay begins gets an extra die to play with.

ADVANCED OPTION II: PUMPING CLICHÉS

In an emergency, any character may pump his Clichés. If the Ninja(3) comes face to face with a Monster(6), it might be necessary.

When a Cliché is pumped, it receives a temporary boost in dice. This boost lasts

for a single round of combat, or a single significant roll otherwise. However, after that round or roll is resolved, the character gets a number of wounds equal to the number of dice he gave himself in the pump. This is treated like "injury" to the Clichés sustained in combat, and must "heal" in the same fashion. If in doubt about what kind of wound the character takes, use the interpretation that yields the harshest result (i.e., the more lethal wounds). Unless you'd rather not (i.e., the less lethal wounds – fatigue).

I recommend that these wounds be interpreted as fatigue, unless the GM has a special reason for wanting them to be more deadly.

ADVANCED OPTION III: DOUBLE-PUMPS

If this option is used, characters may be created with double-pump Clichés. These Clichés, when pumped, give you TWO dice in the pumped roll for every die you'll lose at the end of it. Thus, a Sorcerer(5) could

be a Sorcerer(11) for a single combat round, at a cost of three dice. This option is appropriate for any Clichés based on supernatural powers, such as wizards, telepaths, and humanoid-torch style superheroes. They're also appropriate for any other Clichés the GM approves them for.

Double-pump Clichés cost twice as many starting dice to buy. Thus, the following would be a legal starting character:

Sinsibilus the Sorcerer

Description: Thin, spindly and mysterious, with a tired cat on his shoulder. Likes to poke around where Man Ought Not, turn people in to toads and the like. Likes the woods.

Clichés: Sorcerer [3], Alchemist (2), Outdoorsman (2)

The hard [square brackets] indicate a double-pump Cliché. Since it costs double, Sinsibilus is effectively a 10-dice character.

ADVANCED OPTION IV: CLICHÉ SPECIALTIES

With this option, a character's cliché can have a specific specialty. When that specialty is in use, the player can add an extra die to the roll and discard any one die of his choice. For example, A cliché of Chef (3) can have a specialty of Sushi, or a Soldier (4) can have a specialty of Rifle. When making sushi, the chef (3) player would roll 4 dice and discard one of the 4 dice after rolling.

The specialty should be fairly specific and not too broad, for example a Martial Artist (3) should not have a specialty of Kung Fu since that's too broad – in fact, as broad as the original cliché! Instead a specialty of striking, grappling, or ground fighting could be appropriate.

Each character can get a maximum of one free specialty to start with. More specialties cost 1/2 a point each.

Thanks for reading and happy Cthulhu gaming!

