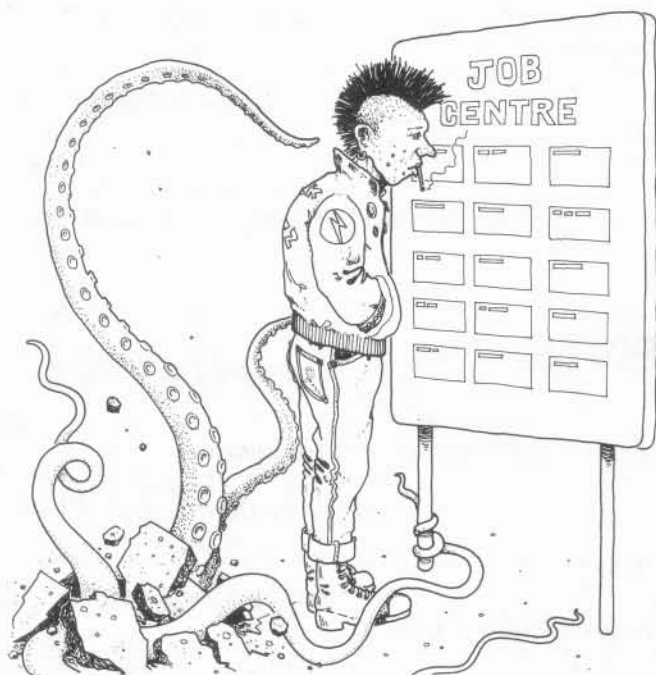


CTHULHU NOW!

Part 1: Skills and Weapons by Marcus L Rowland

How to play Call of Cthulhu campaigns set in the 1980's, including new skills and weapons.



Call of Cthulhu is set in the cosy world of the 1920's, and much of the game's charm lies in its period setting. However, it is possible to run adventures or campaigns set in the present day, and still produce situations as horrific as any that might arise in the heyday of the Cthulhu mythos. The power of the beings of the Cthulhu mythos may not be a match for the more violent examples of modern weaponry, but it has never been suggested that they would wish to begin any open confrontation. Their evil has always been exerted by carefully concealed routes, traps for the occasionally unwary individual or a slow gathering of strength for a rare and secretive use of power.

One problem of a modern campaign is the possibility that players will not take the games events seriously. Their first exposure to a Cthulhu-inspired mass murderer, or to a cult's random terrorism, should change their minds...

Character Generation

The standard methods used in *Call of Cthulhu* produce a character well-equipped for the 1920's but less suitable for the 1980's. The following additional and modified skills should be made available to players - some are essential, most are useful:

Computer Programming (Knowledge). The player character is familiar with the use of one or more computer languages. Since there are a vast range of languages it is essential that one specific type be selected initially, with further languages added for each 10% skill attained. If a previously unknown language is to be used the attempt is made at 5%. (Example: Eric Potter has 30% computer skill, in the form of *BASIC 30*, *FORTH 20*, *COBOL 10*. He wishes to attempt to gain access to a system operating *FORTTRAN*, rolls 02, and succeeds). Obviously, those languages which are either subsets or simplified forms of a parent language can be used as the parent language, less 5%

for lack of familiarity. (Example: Compiler *BASIC* is a subset of *BASIC* and of Machine Code, and can be used with 5% less skill proficiency than either - if a character has skills in both these languages their skill in Compiler Basic would be 5% less than the better of these skills).

Variants of the same language (Example: *PET Basic* and *APPLE Basic*) are used without skill penalties provided a few minutes are available for familiarisation. Unless otherwise stated, it should be assumed that a character's first proficiency is with *BASIC*.

The ability to extract information from open data bases such as Ceefax or Prestel is covered by library research skills, and not Computer Programming skill unless some programming is required.

Data gathering (Knowledge). The character is able to make effective use of devices such as video cameras, tape recorders, electronic 'bugs', and the like, and knows how to perform routine servicing if they malfunction.

Electronics (Knowledge). The character can identify electronic parts, trace circuitry, etc and use this knowledge to determine the function and probable origin of electronic devices, make repairs, etc.

Nuclear Physics (Knowledge). The character has theoretical and/or practical knowledge of this subject, which can be applied to problems such as decontaminating irradiated Investigators, the defusing (or assembly) of home-made weapons, etc.

Pharmacy (Knowledge). Includes the ability to identify narcotics and hallucinogens.

Treat Poison (Knowledge). Includes the ability to deal with those suffering from drug overdoses, 'bad trips', etc.

Drive Automobile/Motorcycle (Manipulation). Characters may prefer to specialise in Drive Motorcycle rather than Drive Automobile. Both skills are used in the same way. Possession of one skill does not imply possession of the other. A minimum of 20% skill is required for safe road operation of either vehicle under normal conditions, and is available for one of the two forms of vehicle without point cost in the character generation process. Characters may, of course, choose both skills, but the full point cost must be paid for the second skill.

Parachute (Manipulation). Possession of this skill allows the Investigator to make landings under normal conditions without injury, and gives a roll against injury in difficult or unusual conditions. If characters do not have parachute skill they must make a roll under $2 \times \text{DEX}$ to avoid injury in any use of a parachute. Characters with parachute skill make a skill roll to avoid any chance of injury in adverse conditions, then a DEX roll if the skill roll fails (Example: John Castle has 20% parachute skill and 12 DEX, and has to make a freefall jump into a mountainous area. The referees rules that these are unusual conditions. Castle rolls 25 for skill, a failure, but then rolls 22, under $\text{DEX} \times 2$, to avoid injury). If skill and DEX rolls fail the user takes 3d6 injury. If skill rolls or DEX rolls are above 95 a luck roll should also be made to avoid a parachute malfunction for an additional 6d6 injury.

Pilot Aircraft (Manipulation). Normal skill applies only to propeller driven craft. If skill with helicopters or jets is desired a prerequisite is a minimum of 30% normal skill. A minimum of 20% skill is required to use any form of modern aircraft, regardless of type (Example: Joe Meades decides to become a pilot and selects 50% normal aircraft skill, 20% jet aircraft, and

30% helicopter). Wholly unfamiliar forms of aircraft are piloted with 20% of the total of all forms of aircraft skills (Example: Joe Meades is trapped aboard a hovercraft by cultists, and decides to escape by piloting the vessel out to sea. He has a total of 100 points aircraft skill, giving a 20% chance of mastering the controls, but rolls 87 and is still trying to start the engines as the cultists break in. Sorry, Joe...). It should be remembered that it may be physically or technically impossible to perform some aircraft skills single handed - for example, some modern airliners require a ground crews' help to start their engines.

Referees will probably find that players wish to gain other skills (eg Scuba Diving). Such ingenuity should not be discouraged, but the referees should not allow characters extra skill points for the acquisition of other abilities. Some skills may, however, be incorporated into existing skills (Example: Hang-gliding into parachute skill, Truck Driving into Drive Automobile) with some loss of proficiency. If a Prior Experience skill generation procedure is used the referees will need to control the options available to players with great care. While it may seem like a good idea to allow a character to serve with the SAS or Green Berets, in practice Investigators with the skills likely to result would seriously unbalance the game. As a general guideline, the increase in technical training inherent in almost all modern jobs and professions should give an additional 20% skill for each five years in an occupation. (Example: To Enlisted Man add a second skill from the alternatives Drive Auto, Electrical Repair or Operate Heavy Machine, double the level of these skills to 10% and add another 5% to one combat skill). Some new prior careers follow:

Engineer: Chemistry or Geology (10), Computer Programming (15), Electronics or Electrical Repair or Mechanical Repair (15), Operate Heavy Machinery (20), 30% chance of Nuclear Physics or Pilot Aircraft (30), players choice.

Rock Musician (Only available to characters of CHA 11+): Electronics (20), Pharmacy (10), Drive Automobile (10), Credit Rating (10), Bargain (10), Fast Talk (10), Sing (5), 10% chance of Pilot Aircraft (30). It is not usually practical to allow player characters to be active in this profession during a campaign.

Criminal (White Collar): Read/Write English (5), Accounting or Computer Programming (20), Law (15), Listen (5), Psychology (5), Bargain (10), Fast Talk (10). For each period in this occupation a luck roll should be made, if unsuccessful the character spends the next 5 years in prison.

Convict: Any two knowledge skills except Cthulhu mythos (20), Library Use (10), Hide (10), Move Quietly (10), Pick Pockets (10), Credit Rating (-10), 15% chance of any one weapon skill (10) or two hand-to-hand skills (5).

Income

Since income can vary considerably in different countries it is almost impossible to produce a single standard formula for the calculation of Investigators wealth. For British characters in the 1980's a roll of d4+3 multiplied by a thousand pounds should give a useful range, assuming that this is income after taxes and other deductions have been made, with professionals earning £1000 x d6+2 and authors £1000 x d8. These figures should not be considered to be especially close to the true income of these groups - they are simply convenient values for accounting purposes.

Firearms

In order to simplify conversion to modern conditions it is assumed that all types covered by the original rules retain their power, range, etc - in effect, these designs are still made because they are suitable for the uses for which they were originally produced. However, there are also several new designs and types which are not covered by the original rules:

Weapons Table for the 80's						
Weapon	Shots	Damage	Base	Range	Break	Notes
Light SMG ¹	1	1d10+3(x1d3)	12%	30 yards	7	Impales
9mm Machine Pistol ¹	1	1d8+3(x1d3)	10%	15 yards	7	Impales
Heavy SMG ¹	1	2d8(x1d3)	15%	30 yards	10	Impales
Revolver, .357 Magnum	2	2d8	15%	20 yards	12	Impales
Automatic, .357 Magnum	2	2d8	15%	20 yards	10	Impales
Autoloading Rifle, .22 ²	2	2d4	10%	25 yards	8	Impales
Autoloading Shotgun, .22 ²	2	2d4	30%	10 yards	8	
	2	1d4	30%	20 yards	8	
Autoloading Rifle, 9mm ²	2	2d8	10%	75 yards	12	Impales
Light Anti-Tank Rocket ³	1	5d6(1 yard radius)	5%	300 yards	5	Impales
Heavy Anti-Tank Rocket ³	1	8d6(3 yards radius)	0%	600 yards	5	Impales

Notes

1. Fired as automatic weapons (see *Sourcebook for the 1920's*).

2. Modified military designs. A competent gunsmith can convert them to full automatic operation.

It should be remembered that it is extremely difficult to buy firearms without various official permits in most modern countries, and that full auto machine guns are illegal almost everywhere. Prices have not been listed since there are a wide variety of weapons in each specification.

3. Disposable launcher, no guidance system. Uses shaped charges for impaling explosive penetration. Weapon is carried in a pack, unfolded, fired, launcher discarded. Wire or laser guided, usable by trained personnel only. Launcher can be reused (after several rounds).

Even the least powerful heavy military weapons of today could probably destroy any creature of the Cthulhu mythos with relative ease. A single anti-tank missile, for example, would probably inflict over a hundred points of damage on any creature it struck at a range of several miles. Since such weapons could seriously upset a campaign's balance it is suggested that they be kept in the background for mopping-up operations after the main action has ended. However, it is possible that some of the events of a campaign may be motivated by factors relating to such weaponry.

The most 'advanced' weapons, such as atomic bombs, cause extreme damage over a large area. The following (simplified) table gives the ranges for various results of their use.

Nuclear Weapons

Power	Total	Radius of damage	Secondary	Fallout
1Kt	100 yards	500 yards	1 mile	5 miles
5Kt	500 yards	1 mile	5 miles	25 miles
10Kt	1000 yards	2 miles	10 miles	40 miles
50Kt	5 miles	10 miles	20 miles	75 miles
100Kt	8 miles	20 miles	35 miles	100 miles
1Mt	12 miles	40 miles	75 miles	200 miles

Kt = Kilotonnes Mt = Megatonnes

Total refers to the radius within which it is impossible to survive regardless of a character's skills or physical characteristics. Objects within this radius will either be vaporised, burnt, or reduced to pulverised rubble.

Blast refers to the radius within which all structures are subjected to severe damage, and all living creatures take 10d100 damage. Any investigator within this radius will almost certainly receive a lethal radiation dose.

Secondary is the radius within which structures and people take significant damage (from shockwaves, falling rubble, flying splinters of glass, etc.) and within which most electronic equipment will become useless, due to magnetic erasure of data (in computers), radiation damage to transistors, etc. Any living creature within this radius will take 5d20 damage, which may be halved by a successful luck roll.

Fallout indicates the radius within which characters will need to take precautions against drifting radioactive dust and gas, for a period of several months after a nuclear explosion.

It should be remembered that some conventional weapons are nearly as powerful as tactical atomic weapons. Under certain circumstances (eg the player characters are a mile underground in a lead-liner bunker) the referee may wish to modify these results.

An additional possibility referees should consider is that the unannounced use of atomic weapons may trigger a worldwide nuclear conflict. This might, of course, be the reason for their use by cultist groups.

Other weapons which might enter a campaign on a similar basis are military gases, toxins, and beam weapons, but there is too little data available to allow a hard and fast description of their effects.

Bibliography

John Brunner	- <i>The Atlantic Abomination</i>
Dr Christopher Evans	- <i>Cults of Unreason</i>
James Gunn	- <i>The Magicians</i>
Dave Langford (and others)	- <i>The Necronomicon</i>
Fritz Leiber	- <i>Our Lady of Darkness</i>
Eric Frank Russell	- <i>Sinister Barrier</i>
Bob Shaw	- <i>An Uncomic Comic Book Story</i>
John Sladek	- <i>The New Apocrypha</i>

Referees may also find episodes of the TV series *The Prisoner* and *The Avengers* helpful in suggesting plot ideas for their own campaigns. □

Next Issue, Part II will be scenario and campaign outlines utilising some of the skill and weaponry mentioned above.

CTHULHU NOW!

Part 2: Mini-scenario Outlines by Marcus L Rowland

Three scenario outlines for *Call of Cthulhu* in the 1980's, using new skills and rules from *WD42*'s article.

DIAL 'H' FOR HORROR

Mini-scenario for 3-5 beginning player characters

*'It's Kildare – he's in shock.'
'I'm not surprised. What on earth was that thing?'*

Players Information

Jim Kildare, a well-known TV personality who presents the weekly programme *Psychic World*, has offered the team jobs as researchers for his show. The team have been invited to his London home one evening in early November, to dine and sign their contracts. When they arrive they find that the house is completely dark and the front door is slightly ajar. Strange crashes and croaking noises can be heard.

Referees Information

A British cult worshipping Nyarlathotep covers its activities by posing as a crank philosophical movement, *The Sons Of The Earth*, who claim to renounce all forms of technology. A few months ago they decided to speed their operations by transferring some of their occult lore to a computer data base. The purchase should not have been noticed, since it was arranged via a third party, but a journalist happened to pass their headquarters while the machine was being delivered and wrote a short article which appeared in several computer magazines, speculating on their reasons for the purchase. The data transfer was successful, and the files created retained the full potency of the original volumes, possibly by Nyarlathotep's direct intervention. Kildare saw one of the articles, and was sufficiently intrigued to try and find out the reason for the purchase, since he thought it might make a good story for his programme. When the cult refused to answer any



questions he called a contact at the computer company, who told him that the machine was a multi-user device which could communicate with home machines by telephone. Kildare had the necessary equipment on his own home computer (used for word processing and research) and managed to discover several unlisted telephone numbers for the offices. He decided to try to interrogate the machine by phone to learn more about the group's activities. To his surprise there were no problems, and he did not even need to use a password to contact the computer. However, as soon as he began to read the books stored by the cult he realised that something was badly wrong (and lost 5 points of SAN). What Kildare did not realise was that the cult had fitted a tracing device to the computer, which gave them his home telephone number and (with a little research) his address. Kildare has spent the last three evenings reading the books stored on the computer, gaining 14 points of *Cthulhu Mythos* knowledge (and incidentally losing more SAN). He does not yet realise that the books represent anything more than a compilation of legends. Meanwhile, the cult have sacrificed two tramps to Nyarlathotep, who has responded by sending one of his Hunting Horrors to Kildare's House. It arrived a few minutes before the team, crashing through the roof and attic floor at the back of the house, and has now cornered Kildare under his steel desk. As the team reach the house it is preparing to

throw the desk aside and kill him. If the team enter immediately and rush to his aid it will be diverted, otherwise he will die, and the creature will leave the way it came. If Kildare survives he will be insane, since his reading and the sight of the creature have drained too many points of SAN. Searching Kildare's house will reveal the wreckage of his computer (formerly in the attic, now on the second floor) and several hundred pages of printed data from the cult's files. Kildare's printer used a modernistic typeface, and although the pages include almost all the *Necronomicon* they will give *Cthulhu Mythos* knowledge (and a corresponding loss of SAN) without any chance of spells. *Spot Hidden Object* will reveal a notepad under the papers, recording the cult's telephone number and address. The contracts have been destroyed. The cult's headquarters is in a house near Regents Park, and holds 5d4 cultists of whom 1-3 carry firearms and 1-4 have spell knowledge. The ground floor is an apparently innocent suite of offices with a receptionist who is a cultist. On the upper floors are the computer room, and a library holding several hundred innocuous books hiding a complete English *Necronomicon* and the books *Nameless Cults* and *True Magick*. The basement is a soundproofed temple of Nyarlathotep and contains gold ornaments worth five hundred pounds. At any time 3d4 more cultists will be away from the temple, and may revenge any action the team takes. □

TRAIL OF THE LOATHSOME SLIME

Miniscenario for 3-5 player characters

Players Information

The British Animal Preservation Society (BAPS) have received reports suggesting that the noise and explosions of a recent war have seriously upset the ecology of the Lesser Barbed Penguin, an endangered species found only on a few Antarctic islands. Accordingly, they have financed an expedition to see if anything can be done to aid the species, hiring various experts and explorers including the team. When the ship sails from Dover all is well, but by the time it reaches the Antarctic two crewmen have died in mysterious accidents and another seems to be permanently insane...

Referees Information

No matter how hard the team try to find a common cause they will learn nothing, since the accidents were caused by carelessness and the intense cold, while the insanity was caused by the crewman, an alcoholic, accidentally drinking methylated spirits



instead of whisky.

There are a total of 14 explorers and scientists including the team on board the ship, which is supplied with a variety of equipment including a hot air balloon for silent aerial observation of the birds, a two-seater helicopter, two four-wheel drive trucks, and several rubber boats and tents. There are no weapons on board apart from those the team possess, a .45 revolver and a 9mm machine pistol in the captain's safe, and a shotgun owned by one of the truck drivers. It is possible to improvise some additional weapons from the equipment on board (helicopter fuel, signal flares, etc) but players should be allowed to deduce this



Cthulhu Now!

Campaign outline for 5-8 experienced characters

There they intend to lower it into a volcanic fissure and trigger an eruption that should bring R'lyeh back to the surface and release Cthulhu to rule the world...

Players Information

Sir Maxwell Lyon, a well-known ecologist and TV Pundit, is also the founder of *Peace Force*, an environmental group which is frequently in opposition to government and EEC policy, and has had several brushes with the law. In recent weeks four senior members of the society have been slain in brutal, almost ritualistic killings, and he has decided to recruit some investigators to find out the reason for the deaths. He hints that the society is about to launch some ambitious but illegal project, but refuses to give any details, and suggests that the murders may have been committed by a government 'Dirty Tricks' department. He is prepared to provide any reasonable quantity of funds, but wants quick results.

Referees Information

Peace Force are about to launch their most ambitious project, an attempt to stop a NATO nuclear test in the Pacific. They plan to fly an old cargo plane into the area and drop eighteen dedicated volunteers onto the test island by parachute. The volunteers will then disperse down to a cave 500 metres below sea level and, equipped with radio transmitters and concentrated iron rations, will hide and transmit

propaganda until the test is cancelled. What *Peace Force* do not know is that a group of Cthulhu worshippers plan to steal the bomb and deliver it to another island, a hundred and fifty miles to the East. There they intend to lower it into a volcanic fissure and trigger an eruption, which will initiate a wave of mountain building that should bring R'lyeh back to the surface and release Cthulhu to rule the world.

One of the Cultists covered his darker activities by membership in the *Peace Force* organisation, and chanced to learn of their plans for the weapon test. When he reported to the cult they decided to disrupt the plan, and thus avert any possibility that the ecologists would get in their way, by killing some of the organisation's leaders. They feel sure that a continued campaign of terrorism will be enough to stop the protest.

For this reason, both Lyon's home and the offices of *Peace Force* are under observation and bugged by cultists. The offices are also being watched by the police, who suspect that *Peace Force* are involved in some sort of illegal activity but know no details. Once it becomes apparent that the team have been hired by Lyon the cultists will attempt to murder them, as well

as members of *Peace Force*, with the majority of the assaults being made by lone assassins armed with daggers and carrying poison capsules so that they cannot be interrogated if caught. They naturally carry no identification. The cultists will typically try to catch their victim in their most vulnerable moments (in bed, alone in lifts, while taking a bath, etc) and do their utmost to disfigure the corpses before fleeing. If this proves impractical they may attempt to cast spells such as *shriving* against their victims, and thus give a clue that cult activity is involved.

Sooner or later they will attempt to kill Lyon and probably succeed, but a private trust fund established before his death will continue to pay the investigators. Lyon's lawyer knows nothing of his plans.

By the time the investigators have learned what *Peace Force* plan (preferably by saving the life of a member who tells them in gratitude) the majority of the cultists will already be on the test island, holed up in a cave near the test site. They are equipped with military equipment including a helicopter, rocket launchers, nerve gas, and machine guns, and will be aided by 8d20 Deep Ones who will attack the NATO forces guarding the bomb after it is armed but before it is lowered into the test cavern.

The investigators will have great difficulty in convincing NATO that something is going to happen – the only likely result is that they and all known members of *Peace Force* will be arrested until the test is over. The only practical way to reach the island in the time available is for the investigators to join the *Peace Force* parachute mission and try to do something on the spot.

The bomb itself is a 1-megaton missile warhead. If it explodes in the original test cave the entire island will suffer a severe but survivable earthquake inflicting 3d10 damage on all present. Surface explosions will cause the damage listed on the nuclear weapons table in Part 1 [WD42]. If the bomb is detonated underwater it will produce a vast tidal wave and certainly sink any surface vessel within 25 miles, as well as its normal blast effects.

If the cultists succeed in stealing the bomb they will fly it to their island base, attach their own remote controls, and lower it into the volcano. If it actually detonates in this position they will all be killed, but their plan will succeed and the sunken city of R'lyeh will rise to the surface three weeks later, accompanied by volcanic explosions throughout the Pacific which will make Krakatoa look fairly puny. Subsequent events are left to the discretion of the referee. □