

Out of the Ordinary

"Conventional" Mysteries in

CALL of CTHULHU

The 1920s and 1930s, as well as seeing a revolution in horror fiction spearheaded by Lovecraft and his circle, was also a period of tremendous interest in all aspects of what today would be called the paranormal. Ghost-hunters and table-rappers flourished; 'The Beast' Aleister Crowley was at the height of his notoriety; and sensationalised news reports on archaeological finds such as the tomb of Tutankhamun had re-awakened public interest in the mysteries of the East. A popular vogue for dilettante archaeology — especially in Europe — led to a proliferation of books expounding more or less supernatural explanations for various enigmatic monuments. Popular fiction was full of tales of adventure set in the exotic lands of Africa and Asia, liberally spiced with barbaric rituals, pagan gods and horrific beasts. There was, in the words of the Music-Hall song, a lot of it about.

Most Investigators start out with at least a passing interest in the occult and paranormal, which is how they first become involved with the horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos. Several of Lovecraft's characters were occultists and mystics before their researches led them to the Mythos, and stories such as "The Tomb" and "The Shunned House" stand alone as ghost stories, without the need for any connection to the Mythos proper.

The purpose of this short article is to give the Keeper a brief tour of various popular mysteries, and a few ideas on using material from outside the main body of the Mythos in *Call of Cthulhu* games. You can take two broad approaches to incorporating non-Mythos material into *Call of Cthulhu*: you might fabricate a connection or explanation which ties everything into the Mythos, or you might use occasional adventures which have no Mythos element, just to vary the pace and keep the players on their toes.

Movies and Monsters

As I've already mentioned, the movies of the 1920s and 1930s featured a wide range of horrors, mainly drawing upon 'classic' horror literature but occasionally creating something quite new. The rulebook lists some of the basic non-Mythos horror monsters, such as ghosts, vampires, zombies and werewolves, and these offer as much potential in adventures as they did in movies. Using the movies as a backdrop, too, can create some interesting situations.

Imagine, for instance, that the Investigators go to see the newly-released movie of *The Phantom of the Opera*, starring Lon Chaney. They could find themselves having to deal with a crazed projectionist, intent on destroying the picture house and everyone in it because of a celluloid fire a few years ago that left him horribly disfigured. He blamed the owner of the theatre, and has come back for revenge.

Or how about a real vampire, prompted by curiosity to attend the premiere of Murnau's *Nosferatu* in 1922? He might fancy a drink in the interval — and who's to tell a genuine vampire attack from a grisly publicity stunt?

As well as genuine horror nasties, you can use the legends and folklore surrounding non-Mythos monsters to set up a few interesting hoaxes. Sherlock Holmes encountered such a situation in "The Case of the Sussex Vampire," but discovered that there was a perfectly mundane — if convoluted — explanation for it all.

Ley Lines

Ley lines are a British phenomenon, although similar phenomena have been recorded elsewhere in the world. The history of ley lines begins in 1922, with the publication of *Early British Trackways* by Alfred Watkins, a retired brewery representative. He expanded his theories further in *The Old Straight Track*, published in 1925.

Having spent most of his career travelling throughout Britain, Watkins saw alignments between ancient pagan religious sites such as barrows, stone circles and monoliths — and even early Christian churches, which were often built on the sites of more ancient sanctuaries. He coined the term 'ley-lines' from the fact that the places where these lines intersected frequently had names ending in '-ley', '-ly' or '-leigh'. The lines, he claimed, were ancient pagan processional ways, linking the old places of worship.

Watkins' theories were dismissed by 'respectable' archaeologists as the ramblings of a dreamer — at that time there were a great many dilettantes and amateurs proposing all kinds of explanations and theories regarding Britain's prehistoric monuments, and the academics who were trying to establish archaeology as a science had little time for any of them. But ley-lines rapidly gained popularity, and many occultists and mystics suggested that they might be lines of power,

by Graeme
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Artwork
by
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along which an adept might be able to tap into the mystical forces of the Earth itself.

Thousands of ley-lines have been traced in Britain alone, and supporters of the theory began to discover them elsewhere in the world. In America, for instance, a ley-line is claimed to link Monk's Mound, a prehistoric earthwork on the banks of the Mississippi, with Mystery Hill near North Salem, in the heart of Lovecraft country. In China, there are the lung mei — 'Dragon Paths' — and the lines and other designs carved into the topsoil of the Nazca Plain in Peru have been thought to derive from a similar concept.

Various paranormal phenomena, from miracle cures to UFO sightings, have been claimed to cluster on or around the ley-lines and their points of intersection. In a Mythos setting, such lines of power might be tapped by a skilled person to provide a source of Magic Points, and it could be that the fluctuating power flows and eddies at an intersection might create all kinds of strange effects. The ley lines might owe their origin to some arcane prehuman technology, such as that of the Old Ones or the Great Race of Yith, and the prehistoric sites along them might hide remnants of older constructions. The Lloigor are known to bask in the

power-flows of ancient stone circles, and they might even be able to travel along the lines of force from one site to another.

UFOs

UFOs were not unknown in the interwar years, although they attracted less attention than in their postwar heyday. Before the advent of radar and with aviation barely out of its infancy, the most common UFO manifestation of strange lights in the sky was easily attributable to freak atmospheric effects, meteorite showers, shooting stars, or the strength of the local ale. However, many of the Mythos races were extraterrestrial in origin, and several had the ability to travel through vast interstellar distances.

Lost Worlds

The still-dark continents of Africa, South America and Asia had been peopled with lost civilizations and other fantastic worlds since their discovery, and provided adventure-pulp writers with endless possibilities. Vast areas remained unexplored in the 20s and 30s, and Lovecraft himself succumbed to the lure of the lost world in "At the Mountains of Madness." Lost worlds fall into a number of categories: here is a summary of the most popular types.

The forgotten city is one favorite, and found its most enduring exponent in H. Rider Haggard. *She* was first published in 1887, with sequels in 1905, 1921 and 1932; 'She' was the immortal queen Ayesha, an exile from the Egypt of the Pharaohs who ruled a lost city in the desert, sustained by a life-giving flame. In the 1920s, the concept of a surviving lost city was scarcely more fantastic than the stories of royal burials and ancient curses that were coming out of Egypt and the Middle East.

On a larger scale is the lost plateau or valley. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* was published in 1912, and was first filmed in 1925 — featuring special effects by Willis O'Brien, who went on to create King Kong. A group of explorers discovers a lost plateau in Africa, populated by dinosaurs from a variety of geological periods as well as ape-men and other strange creatures.

As well as lost worlds upon the earth, there was much interest in the possibility of a lost world within the planet. In 1818, one John Cleves Symmes began to publish his theories — based on fairly dubious geology even for those days — of a hollow earth with openings at either pole allowing access to a strange inner world. Jules Verne's explorers in *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864) encountered an inner world which included prehistoric monsters, while Edgar Rice Burroughs' world of Pellucidar from his novel *At the Earth's Core* (1922 with sequels up to 1944) was peopled by a mixture of prehistoric and purely fantastic creatures. Hollow Earth theory received a great boost in 1926 when US naval officer Richard E. Byrd flew over the North Pole, bringing back photographs of apparent open water in the pack-ice close to the pole. These pictures were claimed to provide evidence of a temperature rise near the pole which supporters of the theory claimed was the result of their polar opening.

The ultimate lost world, of course, is Atlantis. First mentioned by Plato (c.429-347 BC), the legend of Atlantis was supposed to have been told by Egyptian priests to the Athenian Solon. Beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the Straits of Gibraltar, separating the Atlantic from the Mediterranean) there was supposed





to lie a landmass larger than Asia Minor and Lybia combined, together with an archipelago of lesser islands. Atlantis had been powerful some 9,000 years before Solon's time, and its armies had overrun the Mediterranean; it was finally overwhelmed by the sea in a great cataclysm. Interestingly, the date of the cataclysm — around 9,500 BC — coincides with the end of the last Ice Age, when the sudden release of melt-water from the retreating glaciers resulted in a considerable rise in global sea level.

Several cultures have legends of a lost land in the west: there are the Greek legends of Hyperborea and the Isles of the Blest; the Irish Tir Nan Og; the Welsh Avalon; the lost Briton city of Is; and the 'green island' (Ile Verte or Ilha Verde) of France and Portugal. Various writers have tried to equate all of these with Atlantis, with varying degrees of success. Another batch of theories concentrate on the Sargasso Sea, which will be mentioned later. Archaeological excavations on Crete and nearby islands lent support to the theory that the legend sprang from the destruction of Minoan civilisation by the eruption of Thera (modern Santorini), a volcano several times larger than Krakatoa — supporters of this theory claim that the original legend places Atlantis outside the Mediterranean purely for dramatic effect.

Mysteries of the Sea

The sea has provided a number of unsolved mysteries. The mysterious disappearances of ships and aircraft in the area known as the Bermuda Triangle, for example, form one of the most popular maritime mysteries today, but like UFOs the Bermuda Triangle only really came into fashion comparatively recently.

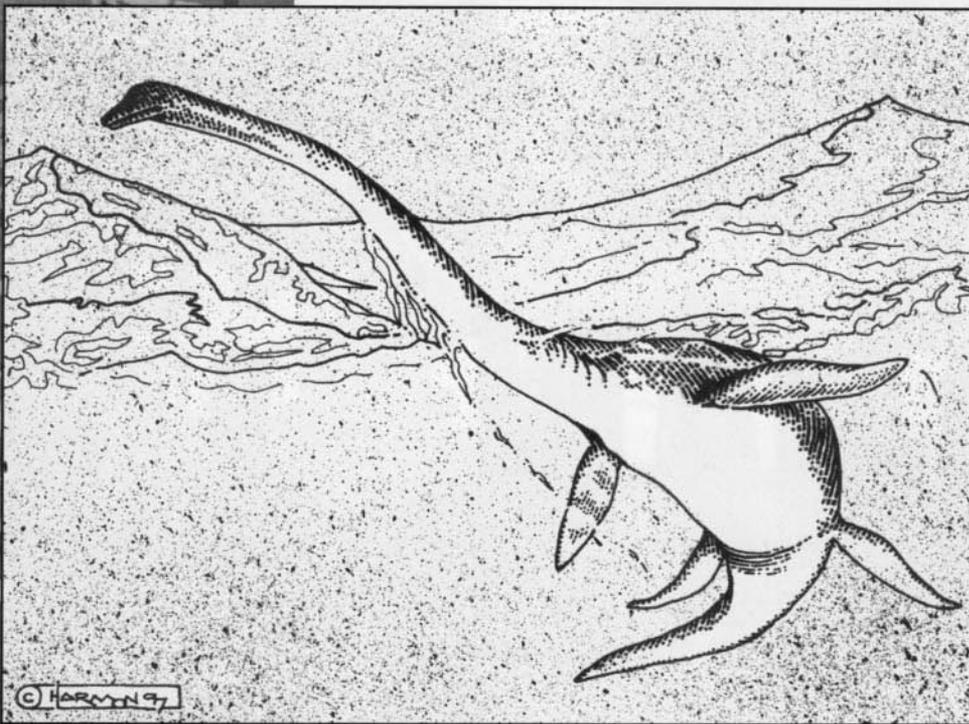
Within the Bermuda Triangle lies the Sargasso Sea, a roughly elliptical area of fairly still water bounded by a rotating ring of ocean currents and strewn with a dense mass of floating seaweed. Columbus is generally

credited with its discovery, although it has been claimed that his journal hints at earlier discoverers, possibly the Carthaginians. There are legends of ships floating helplessly in the Sargasso Sea, and some stories feature a strange civilization set up by the descendants of the original ships' crews. It has been claimed that the weed marks the site of lost Atlantis, and the fact that eels will migrate from the rivers of Europe to the Sargasso Sea each year has also excited much comment. An oceanographic expedition in 1910 proved that eels spawn in the Sargasso sea, and established its boundaries as about 20°S, 35°N, 30°W and 70°W.

One of the most famous mysteries of the sea is that of the *Marie Celeste*, a 282-ton US brig that sailed from New York on November 5th 1868. Aboard were Captain B.S. Briggs, his wife and daughter and a crew of seven. The *Marie Celeste* was sighted by a British vessel off the Azores a month after sailing; she was boarded when she failed to respond to signals. Everything on board was intact, but the ship was completely deserted; the single lifeboat was missing. How and why the ship was abandoned has never been explained. Frank Belknap Long's *The Ocean Leech* features a sea creature which might have been responsible for such a disappearance.

Aquatic Monsters

Huge serpents and similar beasts go back a long way in many traditions, and sea serpents were among various creatures which were quite widely reported in the 19th century. In many ways, they were the equivalent of the UFOs of the later 20th century. The tradition of aquatic monsters inhabiting lakes in Scotland, Ireland and Scandinavia is similarly ancient, but the legend of the Loch Ness monster received a great boost in 1930 with the publication of the co-called 'surgeon's photograph'. Taken by a physician who was holidaying in the area and only exposed as a



fake in the mid 1990s, the picture shows a long neck and a horse-like head; together with later sightings and photographs, this picture established the conventional image of the beast as a kind of plesiosaur. The Loch Ness monster and its relatives might be explained in Mythos terms as Lloigor, or they might be actual plesiosaurs brought into the modern era by the action of Mythos races and their servants.

Time Travel

The idea of time travel began to attract great attention in the science fiction magazines of the 1920s and 1930s, but it was by no means a new idea then. Edgar Allan Poe's story "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1844) deals with time travel in a dream state, and H.G. Wells had published his classic *The Time Machine* in 1895. H. Rider Haggard sent his hero Allan Quartermain into the past in two books, *The Ancient Allan* (1920) and *Allan and the Ice Gods* (1927) — here, the time travel was apparently drug-induced. A great deal of the Cthulhu Mythos, of course, concerns itself with time travel and with races inhabiting the earth in the distant past, so there is little need to elaborate here. Instead, here are descriptions of a few of the better-known dinosaurs, which can be used equally well in time-travel adventures and in prehistoric lost worlds.

Ankylosaurus

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Characteristics | Average | |
| STR 5D6+30 | 47-48 | |
| CON 3D6+40 | 50-51 | |
| SIZ 4D6+36 | 50 | |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 | |
| DEX 2D6 | 7 | |
| Move 6 | | |
| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
| Bite | 30% | 1D6 |
| Tail Lash | 60% | 1D10+5D6 |
| Trample | 75% | 10D6 |

Armor: 15 point head and back armor upon which

impaling weapons do minimum damage. 6 point skin elsewhere.

Notes: Dinosaurs of the Ankylosaurus family are heavily-built herbivorous quadrupeds, ranging in size from 18 ft to 35 ft. They have very heavy bony plates covering the head and back, and extremely flexible tails ending in a bony club. If attacked or threatened they will lash out with this natural flail to the rear and sides; if an opponent is in front, they will bite and/or trample.

Brontosaurus

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Characteristics | Average | |
| STR 3D6xSIZx0.05 | about 100 | |
| CON 3D6xSIZx0.1 | about 180 | |
| SIZ 5D6x10 | about 180 | |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 | |
| DEX 2D6 | 7 | |
| Move 4 | | |
| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
| Bite | 20% | 1D6 |
| Tail Lash | 60% | 1D6+4D6 |
| Trample | 70% | 25D6 |

Armor: 4 point skin.

Notes: Brontosaurus and similar dinosaurs varied considerably in size — statistics above are for a medium-sized example, but SIZ could be anything from double to half the range shown. Some — especially the larger species — may have lived in shallow water which

helped to support their body weight, but others may have been land dwellers, using their long necks to browse on high-level vegetation.

Deinonychus

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Characteristics | Average | |
| STR 4D6 | 14 | |
| CON 4D6+3 | 17 | |
| SIZ 4D6+3 | 17 | |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 | |
| DEX 3D6+3 | 13-14 | |
| Move 12 | | |
| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
| Claw | 65% | 1D8+2D6 |
| Bite | 45% | 2D6 |

Armor: 3 point skin.

Notes: Deinonychus was the largest of a group of swift-running bipedal dinosaurs which apparently filled the same ecological niche as the modern wolf, hunting in packs of 3-18 and attacking prey of almost any size. The group is characterised by a large, upturned, sickle-shaped claw on either foot which was the main weapon, and by a stiff tail which was used as a counterbalance, like that of the modern roadrunner. The statistics given are for a fully-grown Deinonychus, up to 13 feet long; the smallest of the group was about half that size.

Dimetrodon

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Characteristics | Average | |
| STR 2D6+12 | 19 | |
| CON 2D6+20 | 27 | |
| SIZ 3D6+12 | 22-23 | |
| POW 2D6 | 7 | |
| DEX 2D6+3 | 10 | |
| Move 7 | | |
| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
| Bite | 50% | 1D10+1D6 |

Armor: 4 point skin.

Notes: The Dimetrodon was a large sail-backed lizard which lived in the Permian period, before the

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age of the dinosaurs. Average size was 10-15 ft long, and it was an aggressive predator.

Ichthyosaurus

| Characteristics | Average |
|-----------------|---------|
| STR 3D6+20 | 30-31 |
| CON 3D6+20 | 30-31 |
| SIZ 3D6+20 | 30-31 |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 |
| DEX 3D6 | 10-11 |

Move 12 swimming

| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
|--------|--------|---------|
| Bite | 45% | 1D6+2D6 |

Armor: 2 point skin.

Notes: The Ichthyosaurus is a marine reptile with a fish-like appearance and long toothed jaws like a bottlenosed dolphin. The statistics given are for a large individual, about 25 ft long; size varied from 4 ft to 30 ft or more.

Iguanodon

| Characteristics | Average |
|-----------------|---------|
| STR 3D6+24 | 34-35 |
| CON 3D6+30 | 40-41 |
| SIZ 3D6+30 | 40-41 |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 |
| DEX 3D6 | 10-11 |

Move 6

| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
|--------|--------|----------|
| Thumb | 60% | 1D8+2D6 |
| Kick | 40% | 1D10+2D6 |

Armor: 4 point skin.

Notes: Iguanodon was a large browsing dinosaur, 30 ft long and 18-20 ft high. Its main weapon was a rigid, bony 'thumb' which was jerked sharply upward into an opponent's underside, although it could also deliver a powerful kick. Iguanodon was the largest of a family of semi-bipedal browsing dinosaurs, the smallest of which was about half the size given above; its relatives lacked the thumb spike, and relied on flight or kicking if threatened.

Plesiosaurus

| Characteristics | Average |
|-----------------|---------|
| STR 3D6+30 | 40-41 |
| CON 4D6+36 | 50 |
| SIZ 4D6+36 | 50 |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 |
| DEX 4D6 | 14 |

Move 10 swimming

| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| Bite | 65% | 1D6+1D6 |
| Tail Lash | 30% | 1D10+4D6 |

Armor: 2 point skin.

Notes: The Plesiosaurs were a family of aquatic reptiles growing up to 50 ft long. They had long, flexible necks, thick bodies with four diamond-shaped flippers and long, snakelike tails. They were mainly fish-eaters, but could attack with a bite or a tail lash if threatened. It is thought that the monster of Loch Ness may belong to this class.

Pteranodon

| Characteristics | Average |
|-----------------|---------|
| STR 2D6 | 7 |
| CON 2D6+3 | 10 |
| SIZ 3D6 | 10-11 |
| POW 2D6 | 7 |
| DEX 4D6 | 14 |

Move 4/12 flying

| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
|--------|--------|--------|
| Talon | 40% | 1D6 |
| Beak | 45% | 1D8 |

Armor: 1 point skin.

Notes: Pteranodon and its relatives normally inhabited high cliffs and fed on fish near the surface of the water, but nearly all were also scavengers and would attack any prey that seemed helpless. Statistics given are for an average-sized pterosaur, about 4-5 ft long and with a wingspan of 25-30 ft. There are smaller species, and some larger, but the giant Pterodactyl which carried off Raquel Welch in the film *One Million Years BC* is larger than any fossil yet recovered.

Stegosaurus

| Characteristics | Average |
|-----------------|---------|
| STR 3D6+30 | 40-41 |
| CON 3D6+40 | 50-51 |
| SIZ 3D6+36 | 46-47 |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 |
| DEX 2D6 | 7 |

Move 6

| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
|-----------|--------|----------|
| Tail Lash | 65% | 1D10+4D6 |

Armor: 6 point skin.

Notes: The Stegosaurus is the largest of a family of herbivorous dinosaurs characterized by lines of bony spines or plates jutting from the back and flexible spiked tails. The tail was the main defensive weapon, but was not as flexible as that of the Ankylosaurus and could only swing in a narrow arc behind the body. The statistics given are for a fully-grown individual 30 ft long and weighing two tons; the smallest member of the family was only about half that size.

Triceratops

| Characteristics | Average |
|-----------------|---------|
| STR 5D6+40 | 57-58 |
| CON 5D6+40 | 57-58 |
| SIZ 3D6+36 | 46-47 |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 |
| DEX 1D6+3 | 6-7 |

Move 6

| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
|---------|--------|----------|
| Horns | 65% | 1D10+4D6 |
| Trample | 20% | 1D6 |

Armor: 15 point head and neck armor upon which impaling weapons do minimum damage. 6 point skin elsewhere.

Notes: Triceratops was the largest of a family of grazing dinosaurs characterised by an armoured head equipped with a bony neck plate and often with long horns. The statistics given are for a fully-grown Triceratops 30 ft long and weighing over five tons, but smaller relatives were only two-thirds that size. It is thought that Triceratops were aggressive herbivores with a temperament similar to the modern rhinoceros.

Tyrannosaurus Rex

| Characteristics | Average |
|-----------------|---------|
| STR 4D6+36 | 50 |
| CON 4D6+30 | 44 |
| SIZ 4D6+36 | 50 |
| POW 3D6 | 10-11 |
| DEX 2D6 | 7 |

Move 10

| Weapon | Attack | Damage |
|--------|--------|----------|
| Bite | 60% | 1D10+6D6 |
| Kick | 30% | 1D8+3D6 |

Armor: 4 point skin.

Notes: The Tyrannosaurus is the archetypical heavy carnivorous dinosaur. The largest, given above, grew up to 40 ft long and 18 ft high and weighed more than five tons. Related heavy carnivores ranged down to about half this size. 

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