

# Keeper's Revenge Kit

by Jonathan Turner

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been frustrated by your players' arrogance? Have they ever taken your most well-crafted and terrifying scenario and spat it back at you? Well, you can take it easy from now on. It's payback time.

*Call of Cthulhu* is a game which is all about atmosphere. Like the literature on which it's based, crawling chaos and unimaginable horrors close in on the characters as they carry on their titanic struggle for goodness and sanity.

At least, that's the noble ideal. But what happens when your players get so jaded they don't care? Does this sound familiar?

 **KEEPER:** "Okay, the thing lunges at you again, dripping ichor. It claws you across the chest and throws you backwards into the wall."

Rolls dice. "Lose four more hit points."

 **PC:** "No problem, I still have three left. I blast it with my sawn-off."

 **KEEPER:** "Gahhh!"

Irritating, huh? It's long been my contention that players know far too much about their characters' well-being. For example, can you say how many SAN points you think you have left? Oh yeah? Well how do you know something out there isn't just waiting to push you over the edge?

Every roleplaying game needs rules, sure, or we're no further on than when we were kids playing make believe. But I think a few *Paranoia*<sup>TM</sup> style gamemaster tips are in order. Fear and Ignorance are the essential ingredients of a Keeper's Revenge.

You might ask, why bother? The simple answer is, anything which makes your players think like their characters is a good thing. Fear is the key.

## STEP ONE: Don't tell them how many hit points they have.

Let's get back to our friend with the sawn-off. Now instead of telling him how many hit points he's lost, let's just tell him what his symptoms are. Check this out:

 **KEEPER:** "The thing lunges at you and hits you in the chest. You stumble backwards and" (rolls dice) "slump to the ground. The pain in your chest is incredible, like a vice was wrapped around your torso. When you look down through your torn shirt, you can see one part of your chest moving in when it should be going out and vice versa. You're almost panting in pain."

 **PC:** "Good God! Somebody get me to a hospital!"

See the difference? The PC in the first example doesn't really care because he knows he can hang on long enough to put the monster down. The second guy, he doesn't know what the hell's going on, so he panics. For your information, he has a terribly painful condition called flail chest.

This is a jump away from the rules, of course, which state that PCs can keep going until they're down to their last few hit points. It may not be to everyone's taste, but hey: it's just a suggestion.

Of course, if you're going to go down this path, a little knowledge about medicine is a good thing. Or just get your hands on a good first aid manual. The ideas there are pretty frightening. For your players, anyway. Heh, heh, heh.

## STEP TWO: And the same goes for SAN and Magic Points.

The best way to introduce a phobia to a player is not to say: "Okay, Jim, you've got a phobia of snakes." That noise you just heard was the atmosphere closing the door as it left the room.

Instead, introduce madness the way it creeps into real life: phantom voices, sudden anxiety attacks, strange feelings of dread and doom. Do it right, and your

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player won't know whether he's actually going mad, or whether he's having a genuine supernatural experience.

Never ask for SAN rolls. (See step three for how to get around it). Never tell a player he's just failed one. Let's just say someone's had a bad shock — running into a monster for example. They fail their SAN roll and lose a couple of points. Their character would maybe start hyperventilating. Heart palpitations, anyone? Nausea? The symptoms would also theoretically be similar for losing magic points, but would include tiredness, lethargy and that sort of thing.

Of course, your smart-aleck player who has read the rule book from cover to cover will be asking himself what the hell is going on. Work it right and he may think he's under some kind of magical attack. And maybe he is! That's the beauty of the whole thing!

### **STEP THREE: Ask for lots of apparently meaningless dice rolls.**

Keep a list of key skills for all of your players pinned to the back of your shield. You do have a shield of some kind, of course. (Homemade ones are better because then your players don't know what the hell you have behind there).

My list includes SAN, Luck, Spot Hidden, Listen, Idea, Know, and maybe a few others like Sneak and Hide depending on my mood.

Of course, my misguided sense of fair play means I always let a player make the rolls for his character, though sometimes I get him to flick the dice behind my shield so that he can't see what the result was.

Every so often, casually ask a player to make a dice roll. Look behind your shield and hum to yourself.

Of course, maybe your player has just successfully made a Spot Hidden check, and you pass on the relevant info and let him tick his skill. Or maybe he's just failed. Or maybe you were just doing it to wind him up. He'll never know. Heh, heh, heh.

### **STEP FOUR: Change the monsters.**

Good players can game as if they never read the rule book, but hey, we all know they have. You can see it in their eyes.

They find a webbed footprint in the riverbed and they're breaking out the shotguns. Oh, good. It's only some Deep Ones, they're thinking.

But what about a Deep One who can fly? Or a Byhakee which can take on human form? There's no reason

not to twist things for your own perverted motives. If your players are good, they would rather enjoy the mystery of being kept in the dark and getting the pants scared off them.

### **STEP FIVE: Make them work for their skills OR Make your props interactive.**

Have you ever done any "Library Use" research? Ever spent hours translating a book? Me neither. But I bet it's pretty tough.

So your players expect to get away with just a flick of the dice, eh? Not in my game, pal.

Recently my group of misfits was in Egypt when they came across some mysterious hieroglyphics. The resident Egyptologist offered to translate them with the help of an assistant.

An interesting fact which I came across in my research is that hieroglyphics are all consonants, with no vowels. So I prepared a sheet with the translation on it, but took out all the vowels and replaced them with blank spaces. (Computers are wonderful things).

The great thing about this prop was when the two translators got sucked in, scribbling away like they were on some kind of game show. The other players carried on while the scholars muttered and bickered among themselves. And in that moment, they were their characters.

And that, to me, is what it's all about. Getting into character can be difficult when you're sitting in a cosy room drinking coffee and eating munchies. It's been my happy experience that anything you as Keeper can do to put your players on the spot will be even more enjoyable for them than for you.

Of course, I draw the line at going into total *Paranoia*<sup>TM</sup> mode. My players are currently going up against Yig, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to head down to the pet shop and buy a python.

Though, now that I mention it ...

