

News from R'tyeh

The Baxter Report

All the Call of Cthulhu news that's fit to print,
and more

By William H. Baxter

The Shetland Isles, Summer 2004

One thing about being an archaeologist, you're rarely paid enough to keep yourself in a civilized manner, and since I'm always one for civility, and brandy and cigars cost money, that means keeping a few fingers in a few pies so to speak. So here I am writing the news pages for this first issue of *Worlds of Cthulhu* magazine. Odd, no? Not as odd as you'd presume. A guilty secret of many archaeologists is their old "role-playing habit" and top of the list of games lies *Call of Cthulhu*. Searching into hidden secrets and ancient mysteries comes with the territory. I really could go on (being paid by the word is such an incentive), but the good editors of this illustrious new magazine would no doubt have a few additional words to say if I did; so on to the news.

No better place to start surely than with the source, Chaosium, a company that has survived close to thirty years in the games industry. After more than a few lean years after the collapse of the collectible card games market it looks like things are picking up for our favorite games manufacturer. Having recently brought out *Call of Cthulhu 6th edition* and *5th edition HPL Dreamlands*, by the time you read this Chaosium should have released *Secrets of Japan*, subtitled as a "Modern-Day Exploration of the Land of the Rising Sun" and providing detailed information for playing in a modern Japanese setting. This book includes new character occupations, spells, monsters, organizations, and rules for playing Japanese investigators. Also included are three adventure scenarios, two short stories, a glossary of cultural terms, details on Shinto and Buddhism and extensive cultural background notes, including the "secret history of Japan." Weighing in at 348 pages this is larger than the core rule book, price \$34.95

Also promised from Chaosium in August and some 22 years after its original release, a new edition of *Shadows of Yog-Sothoth*, one of my old favorites and where I squarely lay the blame for my long time association with the game. SoYS is a modestly-sized campaign of seven scenarios where the investigators penetrate the outer layers of a secret sinister occult organization led by the lords of the Silver Twilight. A world spanning campaign with investigators visiting various parts of the US, Scotland, and surely some of the most terrible mysteries of the South Pacific. This new updated edition includes modified episode scene changes, player-handouts, guide for the Keeper, and new illustrations and diagrams. It is 160 pages with an index, and priced at \$23.95.

It must be election year, and as is traditional Chaosium plan a release to celebrate, so we have the *Cthulhu for President 2004 Kit*

("Why vote for the lesser evil?"). Chaosium have remained cagey about its contents, but I'm pretty sure it will include a presentation folder and a bumper sticker (among many other things), as they're already selling those through their web site.

Further into the future we hear talk of a (tentatively entitled) *Cthulhu Dark Ages Companion*, and *The Stars are Right*, 2nd edition. On the Call of Cthulhu fiction front Chaosium have announced reprints of *Three Impostors* (Arthur Machen), *The Necronomicon* (various), and *Nameless Cults* (Robert E. Howard), with more to come.

This year looks to be the makings of a turnaround year for the venerable games company with their increasing diversification of CoC outlets. The online sales of their new line of *Miskatonic University Library Association* (MULA) monographs have been doing well and now Chaosium has also moved into providing PDFs of old *Call of Cthulhu* titles through DriveThruRPG.com. Whispers abound of other products on the horizon, but perhaps more on those next time. The rumor mill does hint however that a new edition of *Spawn of Azathoth* may be on the cards along with *Malleus Monstrorum*, an English edition of the respected German CoC monster tome.

Speaking of cards, there must be something in the water supply, for we have no less than three Cthulhu-related card games just out or on the way. Perhaps the biggest announcement was that of a new collectable card game from Fantasy Flight Games simply entitled "*Call of Cthulhu*" (why change a great name). In the *Call of Cthulhu CCG* players take on the roles of intrepid investigators trying to solve their cases, or the servants of the Mythos seeking to carry out their vile conspiracies, or any combination of the two. Players can construct decks from the 235+ cards available in the *Call of Cthulhu Arkham Edition base set*. The game is available in "Investigator" and "Mythos" starter decks, and the usual booster packs. The game should be well supported by Fantasy Flight Games, in a manner similar to their *A Game of Thrones* support program, including tournament support through online rankings, prize support, and special tournament events.

Also up is the entertainingly entitled *Cthulhu 500* by Atlas Games. As the name suggests, *Cthulhu 500* is a racing game with a Mythos theme. Each player chooses a car for the race, and as the game goes on can to pick up special drivers/pit crew (such as "The Fungi from Detroit"), as well as car enhancements (such as "Rats in the White-walls"). You can also summon Elder Gods to step on your opponents' cars. (If only that were true in real life, it would solve a lot of road rage). *Cthulhu 500* features a two-deck set (110 cards), simi-

lar in basic size/packaging to Atlas' other products, *Lunch Money* and *Dungeoneer*. Expected price \$19.95.

Last but not least on the card game front is a new and revitalized version of Jeff Barber's and John Tynes' *Creatures & Cultists*. Readers with long memories may recall this as a Pagan Publishing product of old (having been through three prior, but highly limited editions). This time EOS Press have got their hands on it and the new edition has color artwork by Dork Tower's John Kovalic. It features 128 card deck suitable for 3-5 players, and comes boxed with a die and play sheets. (Keep an eye out for a Kovalician depiction of yours truly and my good lady wife on the Spawn of Hastur card). Time to get furiously fuggly (although personally I never fuggle in public). Price \$14.95.

EOS Press have been busy of late, and continue their collaboration with Pagan Publishing, this time with the long and eagerly awaited *Delta Green* source book reprint, the new version also features d20 statistics and a hard cover. Another hefty publication coming in at 340 pages. Slated for release in the Fall. Price \$34.95.

Finally on the EOS Press front, an announcement of a new Cthulhu board game from the fiendish mind of Richard Launius, author of *Arkham Horror. The Trail of the Brotherhood* pits a group of investigators against an evil Cult Leader (naturally!) as s/he tries to unite cults across the globe in order to summon a dark and terrible god. I've had the privilege of playtesting this game, (well, you have to do something after a day's digging) besides the board, it features cards, dice and some quite cunning play. Price \$TBA.

Richard has also been busy, for another game is to be resurrected, the aforementioned *Arkham Horror*. However, this time it lies in the hands of our friends at Fantasy Flight Games rather than Chaosium. Not content with their new *Call of Cthulhu* CCG, Fantasy Flight, in conjunction with Skotos plan a new and updated edition of everyone's favorite monster hunting game. Expect more news on this soon.

Skotos don't get away scot-free either, known for their online adventure games, the company has been working hard on producing *Lovecraft Country: Arkham by Night*, a multi-player online RPG prose game of horror set in the early 1930s, the first part: *In the Tomb of the Desert God* is due for release this Summer. If you've been keeping up to date with your Chaosium supplements you will have already seen adverts for this. It certainly looks promising, and while old HPL himself may not have been overly fond of games, I wonder if he'd begrudgingly approve of such "interactive fiction"?

Continuing with the electronic theme, another game years in the making, first talked about back in 1999; it appears that the stars are almost right for the eagerly anticipated *Dark Corners of the Earth* computer game from Headfirst/Bethesda Softworks. *DcoTE* is first-person horror game that looks to combine intense action and adventure elements, boasting an advanced AI system that reacts to your method of play. Set in 1920s Innsmouth, you come up against all manner of Lovecraftian foes. The graphics look superb and of particular interest is the so-called Dynamic Sanity system which results in hallucinations, panic attacks, vertigo, paranoia and other unsavory mental states. *Dark Corners of the Earth* was voted one of the top 10 games of E3 this year and should be available on IBM PCs compatibles and X-Box by the end of the year. Price: \$49.99.

Moving on to more traditional media, Midnight Syndicate, makers of popular gaming audio CDs (including the official D&D role-playing soundtrack) have announced their next release as being

heavily Mythos inspired. Scheduled for release in early 2005, the new CD will mark a return to their trademark horror stylings. "It's going to be a very dark disc," said Edward Douglas, "with a real focus on the more sinister side of things that go bump in the night. In particular, the Cthulhu Mythos has been a good source of inspiration thus far." The disc's story will apparently revolve around a turn-of-the-century house with a dark history. Gavin Goszka informs me that "This disc will cater to fans of the Call of Cthulhu game more than any disc we've done to date." I look forward to hearing more...

Returning to the world of paper and print, I cannot help but note that Pegasus Press are due to release *Goomi's Unspeakable Vault of Doom*, a compendium of humorous color cartoons from the pen of Francois Launet, featuring the likes of Cthuloo, Nyarly, Ygo, Shubby, and the Shoggies. If Lovecraft has been spinning in his grave from all the merchandising over the years, this will probably help him spin a little faster... I must declare an interest, I'm an editor for this volume (it costs money to keep me in cigars, y'know). So I can say in all honesty, don't buy a copy, buy two. *Goomi's Unspeakable Vault of Doom*, 108 full color pages, price \$15.99.

From self interest to the altruistic, fanzines are produced out of love for their subject, and no less so, those for *Call of Cthulhu*. No definite dates as yet, but keep your eyes peeled for Mike Mason's *The Whisperer #6*, (Severn Valley Press) dealing with the infamous "End Times" when the stars come right and Cthulhu walks the Earth again; Adam Crossingham's *The Black Seal #4*, (Brichester University Press) is a Vietnam war special, so big it's virtually a supplement in its own right ("Hastur La Vista, A Mi-Go!") and Deborah and William Jones' *Book of Dark Wisdom #4* (Elder Signs Press, 1st anniversary issue). *Book of Dark Wisdom* has recently changed format from CoC gaming to Mythos fiction (due to the rise of *Worlds of Cthulhu* no less), however it maintains the high standards set with previous issues and #4 features the works of S. Dorr, C.J. Henderson, Stanley Sargent, Peter Worthy, Ann K. Schwader to name a few. I'm reliably informed that the first two gaming issues are still available from the editors. Last but not least I must mention the rumored return of Carl T. Ford's DAGON. A seminal *Call of Cthulhu* magazine from the 1980s, it looks like the next issue (#28) may be with us before Christmas after some 14 years of slumber, which seems in a way quite appropriate for such a Mythos tome. Cthulhu is truly blessed to be the object of all this devotion!

...and that's about it for squamous news from this the first issue of *Worlds of Cthulhu*. Can't get enough of your Cthulhu news fix? Then for the Internet enabled I humbly recommend checking out sites such as Shoggoth.net, Yog-Sothoth.com, the excellent Cthuu-gle and Chaosium's own web site for up to the minute happenings. Meanwhile I return to my normal duties on this wonderful and remote set of islands. No trees here y'know, and always something strange in the air. A case of "Auf den Inseln" as the Germans might say. Still such thoughts gladly disappear after a few brandies...

Web links

Atlas Games
www.atlas-games.com

Chaosium
www.chaosium.com

EOS Press
www.eos-press.com

Fantasy Flight Games
www.fantasyflightgames.com

Midnight Syndicate
www.midnightsyndicate.com

Pagan Publishing
www.tccorp.com/pagan
 Pegasus Press
www.pegasus.de

Arkham by Night
www.lovecraftcountry.com

Dark Corners of the Earth
www.callofcthulhu.com

The Black Seal
www.theblackseal.org

Book of Dark Wisdom
www.darkwisdom.com

The Whisperer
www.starrywisdom.co.uk

Cthuugle
www.cthuugle.com

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www.shoggoth.net

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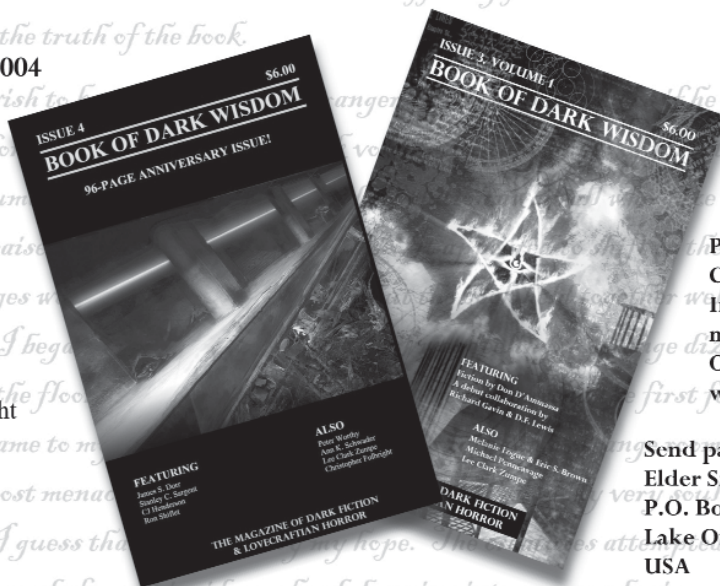
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