

Call of **CATTHULHU**

Joel Sparks



CALL OF CATTHULHU ๑2๐13 by Joel Sparks

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Editors: Shelley Harlan, Jeff Sparks

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"Through all this horror my cat stalked unperturbed. Once I saw him monstrously perched atop a mountain of bones, and wondered at the secrets that might lie behind his yellow eyes."

-- H.P. Lovecraft

"Of all God's creatures, there is only one that cannot be made slave of the leash. That one is the cat. If man could be crossed with the cat it would improve the man, but it would deteriorate the cat."

-- Mark Twain

"The most convenient thing for cats, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents."

-- Duel-Threat Gus, the Oracle Tom

"Some say the greatest Tiger Dreamer of all was Duel-Threat Gus, known as the Oracle Tom. In his difficult lifetime he intuited tremendous amounts of new information about the gods and their horrible plans. On the other paw, some of what he said was clearly nonsense. If only we knew how much."

-- Rev. Flatchop, Tiger Dreamer

"Mia! Mia! Catthulhu ffft-backin!"

-- Cry of a deranged cultist

CAT CHARACTERS

In **CALL OF CATTHULHU**, the players take the roles of a variety of ordinary-seeming cats fighting the cosmic powers of chaos. From all sides, the gods of other animals and worse try to break into the human world and take over, driving humanity into slavery and madness and interrupting the all-important schedule of feeding, petting, and changing the litter box. One or more participants play the part of the heroic cats, and one person acts as the Cat Herder, arranging secret challenges and rewards and guiding the others through the process of making an adventure.

The Five Roles

From the toughest alley fighter to the most pampered sofa-puff, each cat occupies one of five key roles in the feline world. A cat's role is like a character class or archetype in other games, defining what she can do best. Unlike most games, if a challenging action is right up that role's alley, the cat almost always succeeds. There are no scores or skill lists. Only extraordinary dangers require adjudication with dice, as explained later under Challenges.

CATCROBAT

All cats can climb, jump, balance, and move with great stealth. The Catcrobat's natural gifts and style take this to another level. Feats of dexterity considered downright supernatural by most creatures are daily accomplishments for this cat. Whenever athletic Challenges come up, the Catcrobat handles them quickest and best.

PUSSYFOOT

Cute, playful, and sweet with just a touch of spoiled temperament, the Pussyfoot has spent a lifetime charming the two-foots out of treats, toys, and special treatment. Even cats, even sometimes other animals, can fall prey to the sheer adorableness of the Pussyfoot and give her whatever she wants. Most Pussyfoots live with pampering humans to serve them; a few are street cats with many friends but no fixed home.



SCRAPPER

Big, tough, and mean, a Scrapper has had a life of vicious fights, with the scars to prove it. A snarl from a Scrapper can stop even a dog in its tracks. When it comes down to a tussle, or a Challenge of brute strength or intimidation, this is the cat to count on.

TIGER DREAMER

All cats know that they are tigers in disguise. If humans and dogs choose to be fooled by size, all the easier to get away with things. A Tiger Dreamer has a special connection with cats' mighty ancestry. She sleeps a lot, even more than other cats, and in her dreams, finds answers. When awake, her lifetime of accumulated wisdom about the True Tiger Way can help the cats around her to success.

TWFOOTOLOGIST (POKER)

Many cats live with humans. Some brainy cats have made a close and extensive study of the two-foots and their ways. Twofootologists don't like the nickname "Poker," but that's what most call them. A Poker often knows, or can figure out, how human devices work, from doorknobs to toilets to simple machines.



Background

All cats are born in the dark and very few know who fathered them. After that, each cat's life proceeds uniquely. Defining a cat hero's background gives the player and the Cat Herder more hooks on which to hang important happenings in the game, as discussed under Challenges. Details vary by setting, but certain general information is relevant to any cat's life.

LIFESTYLE

Feral cats have no place in a human home and no regular human contact. They live on the street, or in abandoned cellars, or even in the wilderness.

House cats have adopted at least one human and dwell in ordinary homes. Some never go outside at all, but that isn't natural and makes for a very limited adventuring career. Unlike other cats, most house cats have been spayed or neutered.

Show cats live in luxury, whether they actually compete in cat shows or just have the looks for it. Almost always Purebreds, show cats are sheltered from the hard knocks most cats go through. For example, one might know a great deal about caviar and nothing about mice. A show cat doesn't have to be a Pussyfoot.

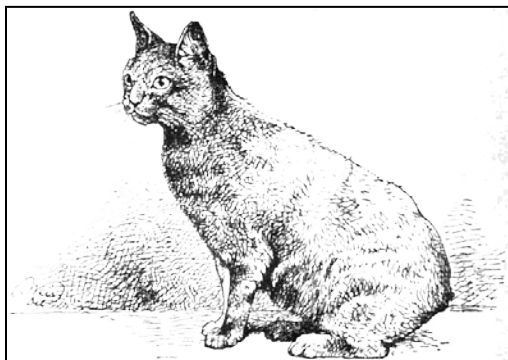
HUNTING

The player should also decide how much experience the cat has in stalking, catching, killing, and eating small animals. Does she hunt to survive, or only for fun between meals of cat food? Is she a professional mouser or barn cat? Does she eat her prey, or only toy with it? Has she never hunted anything but string?

Physical Description

Players are encouraged to describe their cats any way they want. Certain traits, however, can have an effect on play. In fact, any time the Cat Herder wants to hang a plot point or happenstance on a cat's description, she can do so. Each description must include at least Breed, Hair, and Coloration.

PUREBRED OR MIXED BREED?



A *Purebred* cat stands out in a crowd and is often treated better by humans, even those who don't actually know the cat's breed or possible value. For example, if half a dozen cats are caught in the rain, a human's eye might be caught first by the Purebred, and she might get picked up and taken to shelter while the rest are left in the downpour. On the other hand, the Purebred has a more delicate

constitution than her hybrid Mixed Breed cousins, and might suffer more from exposure, injury, dust in the nose, or other unpleasant conditions.

Purebreds do especially well with the Pussyfoot role, and exotic types can play mysterious Tiger Dreamers. The player should write down what breed the cat is, using as much of the fanciful language of cat fancy as desired, from Norwegian Forest Cat to Chocolate Point Siamese.

A cat of *Mixed Breed* will never win a ribbon at a cat show. She comes from an indiscriminate variety of ancestors and looks like any other cat that might be found in a pet shop or a litter under a bridge. The Mixed Breed can blend into a crowd of cats easily. Non-cats who don't know her well won't be able to tell her from other, similar-looking cats even after meeting her once or twice. Mixed Breeds are strong and nimble and make excellent Scrappers and Catcrobaters. They resist threats to their health much better than Purebreds can.



SHORTHAIR, LONGHAIR, OR HAIRLESS?

For a Purebred, this characteristic should match the selected breed. For Mixed Breeds, anything goes.

Shorthairs don't shed much, leaving less evidence behind, and find it easy to clean up with a quick tongue bath. A Shorthair makes a good Scrapper, more protected than a Hairless but less susceptible than a Longhair to the grip of hands, claws, or teeth.

A *Longhair* can suffer from matted-in dirt and often leaves telltale hairs at the scene of shenanigans. On the other hand, Longhairs are well adapted to cold conditions. Many humans favor Longhair cats for Pussyfoot pets due to their luxurious beauty.

Hairless cats are rare, and almost always some kind of Purebred. They find it easy to slip out of the grasp of humans and other animals, but stand out in a crowd and suffer more than others from cold and wet. For some reason, perhaps because they most need a house to live in, the Hairless often become Twofootologists.



FUR COLOR?

Attractive, varied color patterns, like tabby, calico, or tortoiseshell, appeal to humans and other cats. Black cats hide more easily in the darkness, which makes for good Catcrobat, but are the last to be adopted. Some humans consider them bad luck or even kill them. White cats, of course, shed white fur, which disappears against light-colored furniture; for this reason, Pussyfoots are often white.

EYE COLOR?

Cat eyes can be yellow, green, gold, brown, blue, or any other color that a player chooses. The only time this makes a difference in play is for identifying one cat from another. The underlying color can be noticed even from seeing the eyes reflecting in the dark. A cat with eyes of two different colors may be a Tiger Dreamer, touched by unusual visions.

"FELIS DOMESTICUS: the cats that domesticated humans." -- Duel-Threat Gus

THE POWERS THAT BE

Every game needs bad guys. In *CALL OF CATTHULHU*, heroic cats oppose the efforts of various mystical forces to undermine human civilization and the feline rule. Viewing this island reality from unthinkable dimensions beyond, each of the powers listed below commands followers in the ordinary world: animals and people who use both mundane and magical means to oppose the status quo. Rarely, through certain difficult and unpleasant rituals, cultists can summon unnatural servants of the gods, generally giant-sized, zombie-minded versions of the appropriate animal form.

The Animal Gods

As a few gifted humans suspect, the main Powers from beyond are not, themselves, human in form. What they don't realize is that those most focused on this world are the spirits of Earth animals, older by far than *homo sapiens*. Certain animals have particularly powerful spirits bent on deposing catkind, destroying or subjugated humans, and shaking up the order of reality.

CATS

Cats rule the human world now, and fight to keep it that way. They venerate *Ptar-Axtlan*, the Leopard That Stalks in the Night, the Tiger Father, the Cat Who Walks by Himself. Cats appoint themselves the special protectors of humanity. After all, no other species makes such excellent servants. For millennia, cats have been guiding humans, with their chattering voices and busy hands, into making a highly comfortable civilization for cats to occupy.

DOGS

Dogs are allies to humanity, and don't threaten people's way of life, but they savagely desire to replace cats as the most favored of pets. They worship *Mutt'thra* the Monster Dog, whose two aspects are total loyalty and the fierceness to tear rivals to bits. Worshipers of Mutt'thra include wolves, coyotes, and other doglike species who may not want to be pets but view cats as merely verminous prey.



FISH

Weirdly, many creatures of the sea are involved in the struggle to change reality, with motivations that mammalian spirits cannot fully fathom. It is known that they hate cats and humans for their fish-catching ways, and for some reason they particularly desire to banish dogs from the world. Their shark-like Fish God is therefore referred to as *Doggone*. On rare occasion, a clever cat is able to get the Cult of Doggone to work together with Ptar-Axtlan against some scheme of Mutt'thra.

TOADS

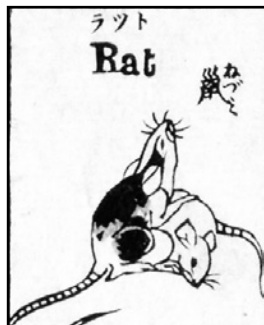
Another non-mammal contender, toads apparently want the entire world flooded with water and all its mountains worn down into mud. Toads and their amphibian allies are wily and have a long-term scheme running whereby they psychically influence humans to activities that tend to melt the ice caps. So far, no cat has found an effective counter to this slow but dangerous plan, but efforts continue. The toad spirit is named *Phatphroggwa*.

THE WILD

Numerous wild mammals venerate a single spirit known as *Snarlathotep* of Many Shapes. Snarlathotep appears to each animal as a perfect example of that species. Major Snarlathotep followers include bears, elk, elephants, and other large mammals who desire a world wild and unmarked by humanity's so-called civilization. They are indifferent to cats and dogs except as allies to the world-wrecking humans.

OTHER ANIMAL GODS

Many such spirit forces exist, including the Rat God, the Bird God, the Lizard King, and the horrible Insect God. Usually the interests of these other animal cults don't affect the *status quo*, but one never knows what a curious kitty might uncover.



Bad Kitties

During the 10,000-year ascendancy of cats, and even before, certain feline and related spirits have gone awry and turned against the way things are. These former friends may pose the biggest threat of all. **WARNING:** These forces are not nice. Younger players, or Cat Herders who don't wish to taint their play sessions with the knowledge of Chaos, may want to skip this part.

THE MEW-GO

This alien cat species comes from another planet known as Yuckuth, by all accounts a horrifying place of freezing cold, constant rain, and no houses. They rarely visit Earth, but when they do, they seek to harvest the brains of humans and earth-cats for use in dreadful experiments. The Mew-Go themselves appear as large cats with rubbery, fungal strips for fur, and it is reported that they are so light that they can float through the air.

HASTPURR OF CATCOSA

This ancient cat spirit was once a great leader, a strong yellow tom who helped cats conquer the world. However, he split with the other cat leaders on the issue of humanity. Hastpurr worshipped Great Catthulhu (page 10) and believed that the humans should be wiped out and civilization built by and for cats alone. The schism led to the great Thumb War, a struggle among the cats that nearly cost them everything. Finally, Hastpurr was killed and his followers dispersed. Unfortunately, some cats today, especially those abused by humans, still worship him, and outside the world his spirit gathers power. His worshippers are known as the Cult of the Yellow Eye, and they conspire to trick humanity into destroying itself with spectacular disasters. Sometimes they try to insinuate visions of an afterlife called Catcosa into human minds, subtly implying that things will be better for people once they are all dead.

SHED-NAPPURATH, MOTHER OF A THOUSAND KITS

A hideous spirit of uncontrolled overpopulation and inbreeding gone haywire, Shed-Nappurath is a perverted vision of a mother cat. She appears as a huge, bloated female with dozens of seeping nipples, frequently giving birth to dreadful monsters, catlike and otherwise. Sometimes she coughs up the living hairballs called Shaggoths. Mercifully, like Catthulhu, Shed-Nappurath sleeps for many years in a row. She also occupies a facet of spacetime that seldom intersects with the human world. Many wise cats devote themselves to making sure that no gate from her realm is ever allowed to open. It is believed that Shed-Nappurath is the mate of Great Catthulhu and thus mother of Ptar-Axtlan. If this is true, life was the only thing Ptar-Axtlan's parents ever gave him.

Shaggoths: These mindless monsters are giant hairballs, clotted with nasty fluids. Whether summoned by foolish cultists, or slipped in through temporary cracks in reality, they roll over everything, dissolving whatever they touch into slimy goo. No cat can oppose such a thing physically, so great effort is required to destroy them.

THE CATNIP OUT OF SPACE

This rare cosmic horror falls to Earth as a meteorite, a frozen lump that crashes down and quickly thaws into dimly-glowing gas. Wherever it lands, it spreads a corrupting influence through the soil and water. Cats in the affected area slowly lose control, acting wilder and wilder, and finding it harder to stay away. In time, any cats who haven't escaped go completely mad and march to the center of the blight, where the Catnip absorbs their minds, abandons their bodies, and blasts off into space in a glowing cloud, ready to infect another world.



GREAT CATTHULHU

The primal progenitor of all the gods and animals, cosmic father of Ptar-Axtlan himself, Catthulhu appears as a vast and unsympathetic feline, whose whiskers alone are said to grip more mightily than any hand or jaw. A mere thought of Catthulhu's can twist creatures' minds and wills, forcing them to obey, easily breaking their sanity. He and his deranged worshippers of all species never agreed to let cats, or anyone else, bring humanity out of barbarism and establish a comfy civilization with fishing rods, air conditioning, can openers, fur-brushes, and other conveniences. To him, such things are trash to be swept aside, along with any that dare oppose him and indeed entire species. Fortunately, Catthulhu is so old that he sleeps for ages at a time. Should he awaken, he would pose a most dire threat to the orderly world. Certain dangerously misinformed cults of cats, and even humans, still work to fulfill ancient prophecies and rouse the sleeper.

THE BIG CATS

Lions, tigers, panthers, and other large, wild felids are something of a mystery. By rights, they should follow Ptar-Axtlan, who fathered their species and appears as a huge black jaguar. However, these are the descendants of ancestral cats who chose not to join the effort to establish human civilization. Some of them surely venerate Catthulhu or Hastpurr and their old and cruel ideals.

CHALLENGES

Most of the fun in CALL OF CATTHULHU comes from challenges to wit, cleverness, and bravery. The Cat Herder describes a situation and the players think of a way to handle it. Rolling well on dice doesn't much matter. When a cat character encounters a potentially difficult task, the Cat Herder defines it in a very simple way by answering four questions.

1. Is this the right cat for the job?
2. Is this task dangerous or urgent?
3. Is the Challenge Difficult (or even Dire)?
4. Is any creature actively opposing success?

1. Is this the right cat for the job?

It's up to the player to make the case that her cat could easily accomplish the challenge at hand. She can cite anything in the cat's description, breed, or role that might give her an edge, or anything that's happened during play that might help, including some nearby object or useful circumstance. If she can come up with something acceptable to the Cat Herder, who should be generous here, then the challenge is considered well within her cat's capabilities: It is **Appropriate**. On the other hand, if the challenge is alien to the cat's nature, such as a **Pussyfoot** trying to balance on a rope or a **Scrapper** trying to work a can opener, the challenge is **Inappropriate**.

2. Is this task dangerous or urgent?

What are the consequences of not meeting this challenge? If they are not dangerous and there is no immediate time pressure, then there is no challenge at all. It's a **Mundane Task** and the Cat Herder can simply allow the cat to succeed. If the task is **Appropriate** to the cat, she succeeds on her first try and pulls it off with style. If the task is **Inappropriate**, it takes careful progress or several attempts, and the Cat Herder allows other players and creatures to take multiple actions while the first cat struggles a bit and finally gets it.

Anything that cats regularly do is a **Mundane Task**: Jumping five or six feet, safely falling a bit more than that, balancing on a tree limb or sofa back, spotting a little creature moving in the grass, hearing a faint noise beyond human ears, and hundreds more. There's never a need to roll dice for such things!

However, if the risks are dangerous, or an **Inappropriate** task must be accomplished on the first try, it becomes a **Challenge**. Even at a real **Challenge**, an appropriate cat to the task still automatically succeeds! A cat who finds the **Challenge Inappropriate**, however, has to roll for success. See the **Challenge Chart** on page 13.



SCRAPPING RESULTS -- See pages 14-15

The combatant with the most successes inflicts one result on the victim.

COWED: The target is stunned, possibly with some fresh scratches, and stops what it was doing. It becomes reluctant to attack the successful foe. The tougher the target, the quicker it recovers its nerve, at the Cat Herder's discretion.

DODGED: The victor feints one way and dives the other, getting beyond the opponent's reach. Unlike other results, this is just as easy against a big, tough foe as against any other; see page 16.

GRIPPED: The victor gets a grip on the foe, usually with teeth. Another successful Grip immobilizes the foe if it is of similar size to the attacker or smaller; otherwise, the gripper may get shaken off or carried along. A Gripped creature who Dodges breaks the Grip; an immobilized creature cannot fight.

INJURED: The target suffers a bloody cut, scrape, or bite. If the attacker is big or tough enough to effectively injure the victim, she has to treat all physical challenges as Inappropriate for the rest of the adventure, and leaves a blood trail until she gets a chance to lick her wounds. A second Injury requires the victim to make a choice. The victim either loses a Life or is Disabled: out of the fight completely, able only to lie around in pain for the rest of the adventure. The Cat Herder makes this choice for non-player cats. Other creatures don't have Lives to use and are therefore always Disabled upon a second Injury. A deadly attack on a Disabled creature kills it automatically.

Why Spend a Life?

Why would a player choose to sacrifice one of her cat's irreplaceable Lives instead of taking an Injury? Well, being Injured has serious consequences that can make the rest of the adventure harder. A cat who spends a Life somehow twists her way completely out of a potentially bad situation and comes away totally unscathed. Sometimes it makes sense to hang onto the Life and limp for a while; sometimes it's important for the cat to jump clear of the consequences and carry on at full health. Only the player can decide.

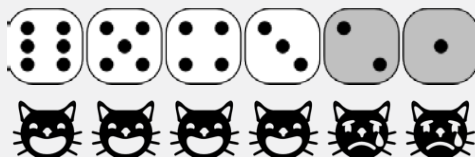


CHALLENGE CHART -- See Typical Challenges, page 17

<i>How hard is the task?</i>	<i>Right cat for the job?</i>	
	Appropriate	Inappropriate
Mundane Task	Instant, stylish success!	Slow, cautious success.
Challenge	Success.	Roll to try it.
Difficult Challenge	Roll to try it.	Roll two dice to try it; double success required; double failure costs a Life or Injury.
Dire Challenge	Roll two dice to try it; double success required; one failure costs Injury or Life; double failure costs both.	Don't try it!

Rolling for Success

To meet a challenge that is not automatically successful, the player rolls a single, ordinary six-sided die. A roll of 6, 5, 4, or 3 indicates success; a 2 or a 1 indicates failure, and the cat takes the in-game consequences.



Risking Injuries and Losing Lives

To improve the odds, the player can risk one of her nine Lives on any roll. This lets her roll two dice. For a Challenge where only one roll is required, success on **EITHER** die is enough to complete the task successfully. But if **BOTH** dice come up 1 or 2, the cat fails and loses the Life or suffers an Injury, as the player chooses.

Every cat, of course, begins with nine Lives, and they are all but impossible to regain. No other ordinary creature has extra Lives, so if they take a risk and roll two failures, they are Injured.

BLAZE OF GLORY

When a cat loses her last Life, she is permitted to go out in style, succeeding at a final Challenge regardless of what the dice say.

3. *Is the Challenge difficult?*

Some things are particularly hard to achieve, at the Cat Herder's discretion. For such Difficult Challenges, even a cat of Appropriate skill has to try a success roll. If she fails, she has to take the in-game consequences.

A cat facing an *Inappropriate* Difficult Challenge needs to achieve TWO successes on a single roll. The only way to do that is to Risk a Life, and in this case BOTH dice must come up 3 through 6 for the cat to succeed. If she rolls one success and one failure, the cat fails, and suffers the in-game consequences, but does not lose a Life. A result of two failures sacrifices the Life or causes Injury as well as failing the challenge.

When a cat fails a Difficult attempt that would not usually have dangerous consequences, she engenders an embarrassing and unlikely accident with painful result. For example, clambering up a rough basement wall in a great hurry, a cat rolls two failures. Normally any cat can fall from a few feet like this without danger, but this time, she not only falls but knocks over some cans of paint that tumble down and whack her in the head. Ouch. To miraculously walk away without Injury, the cat has to spend one of her lives.

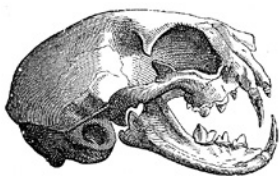
GOING FOR BROKE: At her discretion, but probably no more than once per game session per player, the Cat Herder might allow a cat to risk more than one Life on a single Difficult roll. Each Life at risk adds an extra die. It takes a total of two successes to meet the challenge. Every failure beyond one costs the cat a Life or an Injury; three Injuries kills the cat.

DIRE CHALLENGES

Rarely, a task is so hard to pull off, and the consequences of failure so bad, that the Challenge goes beyond merely Difficult. The Cat Herder should not plan an adventure around Dire Challenges -- they aren't meant to add excitement, only to give players the option to try something that they probably shouldn't.

For a Dire Challenge, only a cat with Appropriate background has any chance of success. She must risk a Life, roll two dice, and get both successes. If either die comes up 1 or 2, she fails the task and loses a Life or suffers Injury. If both rolls fail, she is Injured AND loses the Life.

The only way a cat can handle an Inappropriate Dire Challenge is to die in the attempt, automatically losing all her remaining Lives and invoking her final Blaze of Glory.



4. Is any creature actively opposing success?

Another creature, whether cat, dog, human, or other, may be trying to stop the cat from meeting this Challenge, if the Challenge is Appropriate to that creature. For example, a Pussyfoot could not oppose another cat's attempt to leap a wall, as she lacks expertise in such things. She could easily interrupt a persuasive speech.

An opposing creature rolls one die; a cat can Risk a Life on this roll also. Each success scored by the opposing creature cancels out one success of the attempting cat. If the cat would normally accomplish this task automatically, the player is assumed to have rolled one success. If the cat succeeds despite the opposition, the opposing creature is off balance, vulnerable to the cat's next move and unable to oppose it.

No opposition can prevent a Blaze of Glory.

SCRAPPING

Cats may tussle among themselves to prove a point. Smart heroes, though, avoid tangling with big, nasty critters. When necessary, fighting is treated much like other opposed challenges, with a few additional questions.

1. Is this a surprise attack?

The Cat Herder, at her discretion, may decide that an attack comes as a complete surprise to the victim. In this case, a Scrapper automatically lands the blow, or another type of attacker tries an ordinary success roll. Sometimes a Pussyfoot, not usually a fighter, can get in a surprise attack through sheer unexpectedness.

An ordinary move is never enough to catch a Catrobat off guard, so they don't suffer normal surprise attacks. Truly shocking situations, however, can affect any cat, such as a giant claw bursting through the wall.

If the attack is not a surprise, the attacker and the defender both roll a number of dice (usually one). The one with more successes gets to inflict a result on the other. A tie is a tie, with much spitting and noise, a little flying fur, and no other result.

2. What does the attacker hope to accomplish?

CALL OF CATTHULHU does not track "hit points." A successful attacker chooses one result to inflict on the target. It is completely within the Cat Herder's discretion to rule that a sufficiently large or tough target cannot be affected by certain results from a smaller or weaker attacker. However, a Dodge should always work against a larger foe, and any creature capable of being surprised can be Cowed for at least an instant. See SCRAPPING RESULTS on page 12.

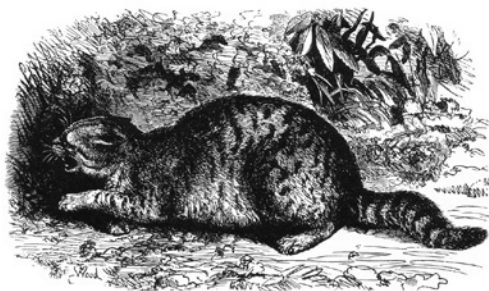
3. Is one opponent much tougher or larger?

Between ordinary cats, most fights are about equal. In other cases, one creature may greatly outweigh another, or be much tougher, or bear bigger teeth, claws, or weapons. A fighter thus outmatched can't accomplish much with ordinary attacks; a wise cat runs away.

If it seems necessary to hold off a stronger foe, a cat can attempt it as a Difficult Challenge opposed by the foe's roll. Two successes are needed to succeed, and a double failure costs a cat a Life or Injury, at the player's option.

Most tough opponents roll a single die in opposition, but very tough creatures may have more. For example, a huge pit bull in a murderous rage might oppose a cat with three dice. The cat would have to roll two dice (risking a Life) to fight it, and for every success the dog made, one would be taken away from the cat's result. If the cat is left with two successes, she manages to deal with the dog and inflict a result. With only one success, the dog lands a bite, and the cat is now Injured. If the cat ends up with no successes, she loses a Life and is most likely thrown aside like a rag doll as the dog charges ahead to its next victim.

In addition to being too large to effectively Injure, some horrors are completely out of the league of catfights. A Shaggoth, for example, rolls at least 10 dice and can't be Injured or even Cowed. On the other hand, some seemingly intimidating foes are not so quick as cats. A human, for example, can be Dodged, briefly Cowed, or even Gripped if the cat wants to hang on and occupy the person's attention with ongoing scratches and bites.



Mixing It Up: Multiple Foes

If attacked by more than one creature, a target rolls all its dice as many times as needed to oppose every one of them. However, it can only inflict a result on one foe for each round of rolling; other successes are purely defensive. The Cat Herder may rule differently for otherworldly creatures with too many eyes and tentacles.

TYPICAL CHALLENGES

These examples may help the Cat Herder to decide what task is appropriate for what role, and how difficult each Challenge might be.

A CATCROBAT...

- * can easily climb a rough wall, leap a fence, slip out of sight of a human, slip through a closing door, walk a rope
- * with difficulty, can climb a slick wall, leap from roof to roof, run across a wire, slip out of sight of an animal

A PUSSYFOOT...

- * can easily appeal for help, beg for food, distract a human, recognize exotic food
- * with difficulty, can appeal for help to a dog, distract a cat, interpret what's on TV, understand riding in human vehicles

A SCRAPPER...

- * can easily bite through a string, catch a mouse or baby bird, scare off some kittens, land a surprise blow
- * with difficulty, can catch a large city rat, face down a dog, tear open a bag or box

A TIGER DREAMER...

- * can easily comfort a human, interrupt a magic ritual, notice unnatural behavior, recognize that a pattern is mystical
- * with difficulty, can calm a dog, communicate with an alien being, identify what a mystical pattern means



A TWOFOOTOLOGIST...

- * can easily distinguish car keys from house keys, flip a switch, flush a toilet, pull open a kitchen cabinet, pull out an electrical plug
- * with difficulty, can memorize what buttons a person pushed, open a door chain from inside, position a rolling chair, distinguish text from random markings

THE WORLD

Being Cats

Apart from their level of mental activity, the cats in this game are cats. They cannot talk, or read, or write, or drive cars, or post on the Internet. They don't wear clothes, except as an occasional indulgence of a sentimental human, and they don't have thumbs to use tools, nor a primate's tool-using mindset. To oppose the maneuverings of evil cabals, players have to be inventive, use trickery, and find ways to make others do the dirty work. A cat's life is improv.

Cats can talk among themselves and to other animals. Cat elders have gathered information about gods and horrors, but the felines themselves cannot sense the existence of, say, *Spazzatboth*, mindless ball of fury at the center of the universe, any more than humans can. The heroes learn about the manipulations of sinister cults or various impending dooms by the evidence of their delicate, but natural, cat senses.

The exception is the Tiger Dreamer. In addition to knowing the lore of the gods and animals, a Dreamer is sensitive to cosmic vibrations -- but only when sleeping. The Cat Herder uses dreams to give players vague intimations, cryptic hints, and a useful sense of urgency. While running around alleys and under furniture, however, there's no time for a luxurious snooze, so no extra-sensory information can be had.

DEATH

No one is completely sure what happens when a cat passes on. Some say that her being is snuffed out completely. Some say she is reborn as a kitten at the same moment. Certain Tiger Dreamers describe visions of cat spirits hunting forever with great Ptár-Axtlan in a pleasant grassland rich with prey, and this is the notion that, while they may not actually believe it, many cats find the most comforting.

Influencing Humans

Humans have very large and agile minds, capable of solving intricate problems and grasping great ideas. However, these minds are unwieldy and not well defended. Humans live in ways out of touch with their own ancestral Ape God, Kong, and an animal with a stronger spiritual connection can influence a human's thoughts.

There is no separate game mechanism for insinuating thoughts. It is a Challenge like any other. Tiger Dreamers can visit humans in their dreams, making this a highly Appropriate task for them, although even in dreams cats can't talk. Other sorts of cats have to spend at least an hour in physical contact with a human to make the attempt.

The player describes the idea that she wants to impart. If she succeeds, the Cat Herder decides secretly how effective it is. The more simple and subtle the notion, the more likely that it nudges a human just a little bit closer to acting the way the cat wants. This process takes time and never amounts to mind control. Highly detailed, emotional, or frantic urgings get ignored, and make the person irritable to boot. A rare, very spiritually attuned human mind might present a Difficult Challenge to affect; a mystically schooled human might even suspect what the cat is trying to do.

Other creatures have similar means of slowly pressuring the undefended minds of humans. For example, it is believed that the followers of the Rat God have been guiding human science for decades from within laboratories. Cats regard the resulting progress with suspicion: Civilization is nice, but surely the rats are up to no good and should be eaten whenever possible.



Other Dimensions

As everyone knows except the humans, the multiverse contains countless rotating and overlapping dimensions of space and time. In some of those crooked corners dwell gods and spirits exiled from the physical world known to Earth dwellers. When the dimensions intersect, it happens at certain patterns of sympathetic correspondence expressed in chaotic, fractal geometries. In effect, if a sufficiently complex, potentially infinite pattern is the same in both worlds... it becomes, for a flicker of time, the same place in both worlds. The main activity of animal cults on Earth is trying to arrange perfect conditions for the manifestation of Presences from the home dimensions of their own ancestral gods. No known gate will admit a god itself, but their monstrous servants are legion and much easier to slip through....

Such dangerous contact between realities can arise from any sort of physical pattern: intersecting beams of starlight among the shifting constellations, vevé beacons inscribed by Voudoun priests, crop circles made by cattle cultists of the Bull God, hedge mazes designed by tortured visionaries, steel frameworks secretly hidden in the floor plans of huge modern buildings, the unpublished documents of Isaac Newton, demonic street plans laid out by Illuminati, the sigils of the Mad Arab, ancient petroglyphs, sacred tattoos, the drawings of schizophrenics, natural cavern systems, tectonic faultlines, railways, telegraph wires, circuit boards, and many more.

In the 21st century, a new network has emerged: the ever-shifting pattern of connections and signals known as the Internet. The resulting geometries may not be visible, but that doesn't mean that they can't leak into other worlds.

Settings and Adventures

The ancient struggle can happen anywhere. This section contains lots of adventure spoilers, so players should check with the Cat Herder before reading it.

STEARNS PLAZA

In the big city, a high rise is a world unto itself. Street cats dine on garbage in the building's shadow, living in the alleyways and seeking shelter in the sewers when they can fight off the endless jumbo-sized rats. Tenant cats dwell in modest apartments with loving people, occasionally slipping down the fire escape, with or without the humans knowing, when they just have to get out for a while. On the top floor, a few cats of exclusive breeding lounge about the penthouses, keeping their wealthy humans company in exchange for a lifetime of luxury.

What brings cats of these disparate backgrounds together? Trouble. One-Eye, a battered alley tom of many years, Knows Things. The doorman keeps a vicious dog. Many other types of pets live in other apartments, and it might be that the building itself contains dimensionally active architectural patterns. From the Plaza, cats can range the streets and buildings of town, or deal with situations arising in and around the building itself. For example:

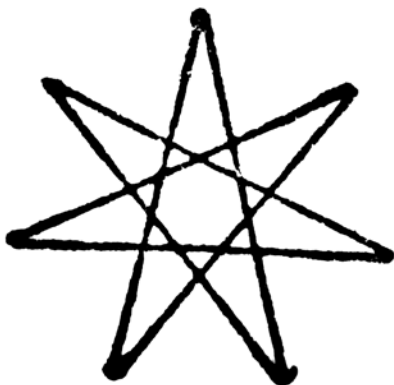
- * **LOL of Catthulhu:** Humans have always seemed oddly compelled to record the images and antics of cats. This used to be a genre of painting and drawing and, of course, a perfectly understandable tribute to feline perfection. Cartoons and comics reliably featured cats as well. In recent years, however, photographs and video have increased explosively, and now, almost every apartment in Stearns Plaza is connected to the Internet twenty-four hours a day. And as cats have their ghostly visual echoes distributed and duplicated more and more, some of the real, living originals are just... fading out. Has the Internet developed holes that let spirits from Beyond leak through, or vice-versa? Does the danger of disappearance correlate somehow with how many people "like" or "upvote" a cat pic or video? And what happens when the last few holdouts succumb to inexpensive Internet and the entire Plaza building is entirely ensnared in a web of high-speed wiring and wireless radiation? Surely, the notion of a Machine God is nonsense... right?
- * **Professor Morpho:** On the top floor but one, old Professor Morpho occupies a decaying, rent-controlled suite, stuffed floor to ceiling with the glass cases of his enormous collection of butterflies. He putters around all day rearranging specimens, peering through a magnifying glass, and taking copious notes. In the Spring he's always out in the courtyard or the corner park with a mesh net, swinging at anything that flutters. At night, odd noises come from his apartment, and strange patterns, colorful and symmetric, appear to Tiger Dreamers when they close their eyes. Worse, a few cats report seeing butterflies going in and out of the Professor's high windows -- butterflies that smell of the killing jar, and those windows have been painted shut for years.

OLD TOMCAT TOWER

Fifty miles from London, a beloved population of cats dwell at Whiskatonic University in the grand old church on campus. The bell tower, originally named for a departed soul called Thomas something, has long enjoyed the nickname "Tomcat Tower" for the generations of cats who have dwelt there ever since the great bell was removed and the church deconsecrated for academic use.

All is not calm and bright, though. The tower was designed by the 17th-century supernaturalist and architect calling himself Christopher Wren, whose chosen pseudonym reveals that he was under the sway of the Bird God. What he constructed, under the guise of adding to the ancient church, is an enormous conductor of cosmic energy, erected at the intersection of two ley lines and incorporating some decidedly strange geometry. Whoever controls the tower can conduct rituals in the oddly-shaped belfry, with strong and unpredictable effect. The cats have an ancient duty, unknown to the University's humans, to occupy Tomcat Tower and prevent any other animals from using it. The birds in particular consider it their property and work always against the cats, striving to reclaim the tower for unpleasant purposes. The heroes come from the ancient and sprawling cat family. Some adventures:

- * An apparently well-meaning academic decides that the cats should be gently relocated for reasons of "modern hygiene."
- * Are some within the family of tower cats itself plotting to use the building to propitiate Great Catthulhu?
- * The Department of Zoölogy is breeding hawks and flying them in the woods.
- * If the birds ever got in, just what would they do? The motivations of the Bird God are obscure, but certainly birds hate cats and their predacious ways.
- * The cats learn that the University Library, across campus, has acquired an original copy of the *Nyancatnomicon* and plans to use it in an ancient studies course. Anyone who hears the verses read aloud will be driven mad and possibly fall under the mind control of an unknown Power. The book must be destroyed!
- * The heroes find termites: They might be just chewing boards, or they might be an advancing force of the Insect God, who is known to demand human sacrifices. If the cats lead the people to discover the termites, the tower will be fumigated -- but while that goes on, the cats can't be at their posts, and someone might try to sneak in.
- * In a time of crisis, the cat elders are divided: Should the guardian family try to use the tower to call upon Ptar-Axtlan, or should cats not dabble in the affairs of gods?



THE VILLAGE

In an arid and impoverished part of the Third World, the cats run the dusty streets of a small native village. The children love the half-wild felines, and the adults tolerate them for their predations on rats, mice, and insects. But near the village is a strange stone monolith. The troubled national government considers it a "natural wonder" and sends occasional busloads of tourists. The local elders say that it is not natural at all, but the product of inhuman handiwork from millennia gone, and haunted by spirits older than time. Certainly, peculiar things happen there at night.

- * When a village child disappears near the monolith, only the cat heroes are savvy and stealthy enough to find out what happened.
- * A team of Western scientists arrives and sets up camp at the site, poking around and disturbing things best left alone. They have a dog.
- * A forbidden native cult reappears and starts conducting repulsive rituals at the stone with no wholesome goal.
- * Under the monolith, a labyrinthine ruin lies hidden, sealing in who knows what horrors from the past. Places like that are rumored to belong to the Spider God.
- * A nomadic people who roam the land have the habit of roasting feral cats over special fires and feasting on the flesh. What god are they trying to appease?
- * Out in the wild, the big cats stalk: tigers, panthers, or even lions. Are these undomestic relatives in touch with Ptar-Axtlan, the Cat Father, or do they venerate Great Catthulhu and want all the humans dead?

THE POUND

Players take the role of kittens waiting to be adopted from a large suburban animal shelter. They're all plenty cute, and it shouldn't take more than a few days... but something seems to be driving the human visitors away. In other rooms and cages, populations of dogs, rats, snakes, birds, and even fish bide their own time. At least one of these groups is up to no good. Is it the dogs, supplicating Mutt'thra to keep the cats captive? Are the rats conducting some horrible experiment? Is the shelter itself constructed on the site of an ancient sacrificial temple of Hastpurr, magically repelling human presence? Certainly the staff changes quickly, except for the old woman in charge, who seems very odd. A few older cats tell of having been there for their entire lives. Fortunately it's a non-euthanizing shelter, but if adoptions don't pick up, that may have to change.

The Pound setting can also be run in a light-hearted way for young players, as they try to invent playful tricks and cute poses, get attention from visitors, and eventually all get adopted by a number of siblings equal to the number of players.

KITTSMOUTH

Not a single dog lives in this coastal New England town, and the locals have long since stopped trying. Bringing a puppy here would sentence the poor animal to a mysterious death or disappearance. The cats live by the docks and feast well on gifts from the many fishing boats, and during the long winters the humans take them in to live in the shops and taverns.

It should be a feline paradise, but dark schemes are afoot. The Cult of Doggone rules the local waters, and in order to make a living, the fishermen of Kittsmouth have made unwholesome deals with the Fish God. Among other things, the subaquatic creatures do not tolerate canines and take them as sacrifices when they appear. And surely the Cult is always looking for a loophole in their agreements with the surface dwellers, one that would allow them to convert the people into mindless slaves. Certain humans, who seem to have bulging fish-like eyes and quivering jowls, don't exactly oppose this plan. The cat heroes must foil the plots of Doggone to subjugate the entire town, while not ruining the fisheries upon which the humans depend.

BIG KITTIES IN LITTLE CHINA

The cats live in the back of a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco's Chinatown. Under the city, Chinese demons and ghosts and monsters, brought from the Old Country by dark magic, haunt tunnels and temples. Gangs of animals meet in wildly acrobatic street fights to claim blocks of territory for their own cults.

- * A cabal of Mutt'thra dogs are secretly using their ways of influencing humans -- submission, service, and apparent worship -- to cause recently-arrived chefs to reconsider the lost tradition of eating cats. After all, meat is expensive.
- * The cats hear of a visionary Tiger Dreamer of great age and wisdom. She can help them with their latest problem, if anyone can, but she lives across town in Haight-Ashbury, where sharing years of incense and other substances with her humans has given her remarkable, possibly reliable visions. The cats have about four miles of hilly, crowded city blocks to navigate, twice.
- * In ancient China, Catthulhu had another name, but he is eternally the same. An apparently deathless human sorcerer of Chinatown seeks to open a gate and supplicate Catthulhu for an army of demon cats to attack his rivals, a community of peaceful Buddhist monks who keep many friendly cats. The sorcerer's familiar is alert to possible efforts by Ptar-Axtlan loyalists to disrupt the ritual. Can the cats penetrate the underground lair and stop the evil plan?
- * A plague of hauntings has hurt tourism in Chinatown, and the cats' home restaurant may have to shut down. Human authorities dismiss the ghost sightings as hoaxes and superstition. Old Chinese know that they are real. Others just aren't sure. The hero cats must find out what disturbance in the underworld has caused the dead humans and other animals to appear on the street, and make it right.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When researching for **CALL OF CATTHULHU**, I came upon a game simply called **CAT**, written several years ago by the brilliant John Wick. John and I have worked together and his game is great. Both games have players take on the role of cats protecting humans from unseen dangers, but there are also some key differences. **CAT** is much lighter in tone and much smaller in scope, and good for kids. It uses story-telling mechanics and emphasizes role-play. Pet cats try to protect their owners from invisible parasites based on deadly sins like avarice, sloth, envy, and so on, and they cast magic spells with their tails. John and I both love H.P. Lovecraft, who included cats in some of his stories, and in an appendix to **CAT** John even suggests using Lovecraft as play material. If you like the sound of **CAT**, I encourage you to pick up a copy and swat those Boggins. To fight the epic struggle against evil cultists of Things Humans Were Not Meant to Know, **CALL OF CATTHULHU**, I humbly suggest, is the sourcebook you need. If you like elements of both, use them together!

No Mythos game can exist without acknowledging **CALL OF CTHULHU**, the RPG that first made it fun to go mad and die. **COC** players must gleefully go up against unstoppable horrors, expecting a character to slowly lose his grip on reality, and end up in a madhouse, eaten by an alien god, committing suicide, or going on a rampage. It's great fun. **CALL OF CATTHULHU** is not quite on that level of grim. Here, the opponents are other animals (usually), and the cats are heroes. There's no reason that a group couldn't use **CALL OF CATTHULHU** to run games where the Powers of Chaos come out ahead, but as written, the cats are expected to win, at least most of the time. After all, they are much more flexible and resourceful than mere humans.

Thanks are due, as usual, to Mark Diaz Truman and Marissa Kelly of Magpie Games. No one else understands the modern independent game design industry, or cottage industry, quite so well. Thanks also to artist Caroline Jamhour for her fantastic Octopussy on the cover.

FASTER MONKEY GAMES is me and two great partners: my brother Jeff "Bighara" Sparks and The Remarkable Shelley Harlan. Since 2010, we have put out a wide variety of adventures and sourcebooks for more traditional role playing games, especially in the classic D&D revival known as the Old School Renaissance. You can see the books, order print copies, or download inexpensive PDFs at fastermonkeygames.com.

Thanks for playing!

Joel Sparks
mrjoel@fastermonkeygames.com
July 2013

"No! No! Like, I'm always threatening to challenge you to a duel. I only have one throat, birdbrain."

-- Duel-Threat Gus



KICKSTARTER

Like CALL OF CATTHULHU? Don't miss the campaign to create a Deluxe Edition! More gods, more cats, more cultists, more about the world, and more adventure! Lots of great rewards like Cat Dice, cat portraits, and your own pet immortalized in print.

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Okay, kittens, listen up. It's time you know the score.

As usual, the humans have it all backwards. They think their reality is the be-all and end-all. They even believe that they are in charge. They can't see the great storm of the multiverse surrounding their tiny, fragile bubble of a world.

But it's a *nice* world. Cozy, with milk in it. And we like the people. They're just so adorable, the way they pet us and open cans and try to understand. They have no idea what horrible threats exist outside this little pocket. They have no idea what's really going on.

And we aim to keep it that way.

WELCOME to the real world -- that is, the world in which human civilization was secretly made for the comfort of cats, in which incredibly ancient and powerful spirits vie for control of reality, in which only brave and clever felines have the wit and wherewithal to oppose grim and mystic cabals, and in which two-footed people live in blissful ignorance of all of these facts. Misguided cults of humans and other animals propitiate dark Powers like Mutt'thra the Monster Dog, Hastpurr of Catcosa, and Great Catthulhu himself. They seek to end civilization, driving humanity into slavery and madness and interrupting the all-important schedule of feeding, petting, and changing the litter box.

In **CALL OF CATTHULHU**, the players take the roles of a variety of ordinary-seeming cats fighting conspiracies of cosmic chaos. One or more participants play the part of heroic cats, and one person acts as the Cat Herder, arranging secret challenges and rewards and guiding the others through the process of making an adventure. Rules are light and emphasize player cleverness and quick wits. There's plenty of darkness and chaos, but the feline heroes are up to the challenge... usually.



Welcome to Call of Catthulhu. Good hunting.