

TRAIL OF CTHULHU

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Introduction

“THESE CYCLES OF EXPERIENCE, OF COURSE, ALL STEM FROM THAT WORM-RIDDLED BOOK. I REMEMBER WHEN I FOUND IT - IN A DIMLY LIGHTED PLACE NEAR THE BLACK, OILY RIVER WHERE THE MISTS ALWAYS SWIRL. THAT PLACE WAS VERY OLD, AND THE CEILING-HIGH SHELVES FULL OF ROTTING VOLUMES REACHED BACK ENDLESSLY THROUGH WINDOWLESS INNER ROOMS AND ALCOVES. THERE WERE, BESIDES, GREAT FORMLESS HEAPS OF BOOKS ON THE FLOOR AND IN CRUDE BINS; AND IT WAS IN ONE OF THESE HEAPS THAT I FOUND THE THING.”

- THE BOOK

The dubious tome you hold in your hands offers you a different kind of Mythos experience. It's not about remote inbred towns, or swamp altars, or lost prehuman ruins, but about a city of cinemas, electric lights, global power and the height of fashion. It's about the horrors - the cancers - that lurk in London, in the very beating heart of human civilization. Of course, London has its decaying, inbred populations - both East End drabs and West End aristocrats. A Templar altar

might well crouch, mostly forgotten, in the dreary Hackney Marshes, but altars to false gods tower over the metaphorical swamps of Fleet Street and Whitehall. And as for lost, prehuman ruins ... who's to say what lies under London, if you dig deep enough?

Your characters aren't stalwart G-men or tweedy scholars this time around, serving their country or sealing off forbidden frontiers. They're working

the main chance, and selling maps (and maybe guidebooks) to those forbidden frontiers. They are book-hounds, looking for profit in mouldy vellum and leather bindings, balancing their own books by finding first editions for Satanists and would-be sorcerers. They may not quite know what they traffic in, or they may know rather better than their clientele. Peddlers of blasphemy and madness aren't nice people, and the only consolation is that their customers are worse yet.



Book-Hounds

“BUT NOW, AT LAST, HE HAD NOT ONLY FOUND AN ACCESSIBLE COPY BUT HAD MADE IT HIS OWN AT A LUDICROUSLY LOW FIGURE.... THE ONE GLIMPSE HE HAD HAD OF THE TITLE WAS ENOUGH TO SEND HIM INTO TRANSPORTS, AND SOME OF THE DIAGRAMS SET IN THE VAGUE LATIN TEXT EXCITED THE TENSEST AND MOST DISQUIETING RECOLLECTIONS IN HIS BRAIN.”

– THE DESCENDANT

In a *Book-Hounds of London* campaign, the Investigators do not investigate horror and strangeness professionally. Rather, they investigate books about horror and strangeness and become, seemingly inevitably, drawn into the horror themselves. If they could just sell a pristine copy of the 1845 Bridewell edition of *Nameless Cults*, pocket their 40% (or 400%) and move on, they would. But it's never that simple. Not for them. Not for book-hounds. Not in London. Not now.

The global Depression has driven an unprecedented number of collectors – both individual and institutional – to sell off their holdings for whatever they can get. The global crisis has also driven an unprecedented number of over-educated, morally bankrupt aristocrats and resentful would-be Great Beasts to experiment with black magic ... including the Cthulhu Mythos. Between the two groups, sellers and buyers, a specialty market has sprung up in blasphemous tomes, no questions asked.

You cater to that market, finding

books at estate sales or abandoned churches across the Home Counties, tracking down rumors and doing your competitors dirt. You've had to learn the difference between the 1452 and the 1472 editions of Wormius, and why neither should be opened at Ludgate, or anywhere during a full moon. Sometimes you touch up an imperfect von Junzt, and sometimes you might liberate a Prinn first edition from an insufficiently caring owner.

It's a hard old world out there, and mayhap the hardest thing about it is that you have to save it from your own customers now and again.

CREATING A BOOK-HOUND

While every campaign will be different, the atmosphere of the default *Book-Hounds of London* campaign is a sort of seedy scrabbling on the verge of disaster. Investigators (called **Book-Hounds** in this campaign) shouldn't feel broadly

competent: indeed, the world should seem on the verge of over-mastering them even before the Mi-Go crash the book-swap.

Keepers might want to reduce build points for **General** skills from 65 to 55.

For properly dodgy desperation, all Book-Hound **Credit Ratings** should be capped at 4, and all Book-Hounds should begin with no free rating points in **Credit Rating**. Players may still build aristocratic characters, but they will be from families long gone to seed, or horrible black sheep no longer invited to decent parties.

OCCUPATIONS

The Book-Hounds are people active in London's underground trade in occult books (and possibly in other dubious literatures such as pornography). They will likely come from one of the following Occupations: **Antiquarian**, **Criminal**, **Dilettante**, **Hobo** (called “Tramp” in this campaign frame; see p. XX), or **Private Investigator**. That said, **Artists**, **Authors**, **Clergymen**, and **Professors** might easily find themselves involved.

New Occupations

Players may also select from among the following new Occupations, some of which are functionally customised versions of the corebook set: Bookseller is a specialised Antiquarian, Forger is a specialised Criminal, and so forth.

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Book-Hounds



Some **Credit Rating** bands exceed the suggested campaign cap of **Credit Rating** 4. This makes these Occupations more playable in other, non-Book-Hounds campaigns if the Keeper wishes.

Book Scout

You resent terms like “bottom-feeder.” Without you, books wouldn’t get from the tables and shelves of the unappreciative to the kind of shops where they belong. You find books at lesser bookshops or estate sales or wherever it might be, obtain them – by subterfuge, by feigned disinterest, by “five-finger discount” if the Devil drives – and re-sell them to a better bookshop for more money. If you’re pressed, maybe you just cut away the coloured plates or the maps for quick sale. But you’d rather get the books cheap, and sell them dear, and go out again before some bottom-feeder beats you to the next unconsidered trifle.

Occupational Abilities: Bargain, Bibliography, Evidence Collection, Filch, Sense Trouble, Streetwise, The Knowledge.

Credit Rating: 0-3

Special: You are always the first Book-Hound to notice an inconspicuous clue (*Trail of Cthulhu*, p. 55) in a bookshop, library, or similar environment.

If there are two book scouts in a player group, the Keeper decides who gets the inconspicuous clue as normal.

You can also pick up juicy gossip on bibliophiles, auctions, and street markets by dickering with booksellers and fellow book-scouts (**Bargain**) or with touts in the underground book trade (**Streetwise**).

Bookseller

You live surrounded by books, and you draw your living from them. Perhaps you see them as living things in their turn; with destinies entwined with a given customer, or capable of speaking to a sensitive reader and changing his life. Or perhaps you see them as horrible relatives you can’t get away from: draining your energies and resources with only grudging acknowledgement of your needs. Or it might be that you fell into the job because it was light work indoors.

Occupational Abilities:

Accounting, Art History, Bargain, Bibliography, Document Analysis, Languages, Library Use, Textual Analysis.

Credit Rating: 2-5

Special: You own or manage the party’s bookshop. You may decide shop policy: which books to steal, which to sell, which to destroy; whether to move the shop, attend an auction, etc. In short, you are the “party leader,” if you wish to be, at least where the shop is concerned.

Book-Hounds’ Contacts and Connections

As noted on p. 31 of the *Trail of Cthulhu* corebook, using **Bureaucracy**, **Cop Talk**, **Credit Rating**, **Streetwise**, and many other abilities involves making a contact. Some of the special abilities of Book Scouts, Catalogue Agents, Forgers, and Occultists – all of which have special sources of information or potential access to them – likewise depend on personal contacts. (As do many other Occupations, either implicitly or explicitly.) These contacts should go on your campaign’s dramatis personae list (see p. XX), so that they may be rousted during player-driven adventures and hooked by the Keeper for her own fell purposes.

Unofficial, non-academic investigators – such as the Book-Hounds – depend more heavily on contacts and connections than in some campaigns. At character creation, the Keeper might request each player begin with one contact tied to an Occupation ability: a book scout might know a fence (**Streetwise**), a bookseller might know a librarian at the Museum (**Library Use**), an occultist might know a grave-robbler (**Archaeology**), etc. This can help create player-driven adventures (see pp. XX-XX) right from the beginning of the campaign.

In addition to the data requested in the corebook (name, residence – a road or neighbourhood is fine – and connexion to the Book-Hound), the player should supply the Keeper with any contact’s bibliographic interests. This helps bulk out auctions, fertilise future adventures, and keeps everyone thinking about books.

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Occupations

(You can always fob this responsibility off, just like real leaders do.) If there are two booksellers in the Book-Hound group, whichever of you has the higher **Credit Rating** is the owner or manager.

Also, as Antiquarian (*Trail of Cthulhu*, p. 10), although the **Bookshop Stock** pools (p. XX) will overlap with this special ability to some extent. See that section for further details.

Catalogue Agent

You might represent a secret buyer at auction, be the go-between for two dealers who don't trust each other, or simply be retained by a collector to find (and obtain) a much-sought item. A less disreputable book scout, a bibliophile's private eye, you take your commission from buyer, from seller, or from both: in a phrase, you are "a mercenary of books."

Occupational Abilities: Assess Honesty, Bargain, Bibliography, Conceal, Disguise, Flattery, Library Use, and any one Investigative ability as a personal specialty.

Credit Rating: 1-4

Special: If you have (or can believably claim to have) a copy of a book they seek, you can interact with bibliophile NPCs of any Credit Rating as if you shared their Credit Rating: get them to recommend contacts, do small favours, allow you into their club as a guest, or otherwise smooth your path. (The Keeper will likely wish to restrict this ability to non-financial transactions.) You do not have any extra Credit Rating pool points to spend, however.

Either the player or the Keeper can suggest the book in question, depending on whether the NPC's taste in books has been previously

established, which of you has a good idea, etc. The Keeper can always veto a suggested book.

Forger

You do the world a service: you increase the supply of something precious and desired. Thanks to you, there is one more priceless Audubon portfolio or Poe octavo, one more Dumas autograph or Rosicrucian letter in the world. Thought of correctly, you're more artist than criminal, more publisher than cheat.

Occupational Abilities: Art: Calligraphy, Art: Engraving, Art: Printing, Chemistry, Craft: Bookbinding, Craft: Papermaking, Document Analysis, Forgery, Streetwise.

Credit Rating: 1-4

Special: For every rating point you have in Forgery, you may declare that you're "the last word" in one specific type of forged book or document: American passports, Blake illuminations, black-letter German religious texts, or Satanist grimoires. By narrative fiat, your work in that field cannot be detected as a forgery under any circumstances short of your confession. It is perfect.

Like Driving, Languages, and other similar abilities, you may want to keep "slots" open so that during an adventure you can exclaim: "*Byron's handwriting? Nobody does a better Lord B. than meself, and you can ask anyone. I know where we can get a quire of Regency foolscap to hatch it on, too. I'm the last word on the topic.*"

The Keeper need not allow "Mythos tomes" (or "Bank of England notes") as a suitable type for this ability, but "von Junzt's handwriting" might be permissible, or "8th-century Arabic codices." As with any special ability,

she is within her rights to reject derailing suggestions.

You can also use Streetwise to find out the "true bill" on underworld rumours, especially about book and document thefts.

Occultist

You always knew there was something else, something more to the world than the crude lies and vague approximations of history, religion, and materialism. There is an inner truth, and you are inside its threshold. You might be a Rosicrucian, an esoteric Freemason, a student of ancient wisdom or of new revelation. Perhaps your more recent investigations have overturned your previous approximations ... but you were certainly right about the failure and short-sightedness of conventional wisdom!

Occupational Abilities: Anthropology, Archaeology, Cryptography, History, Languages, Occult, Theology.

Credit Rating: 1-5

Special: You know the occult social scene in London, in Britain, and (most probably) anywhere else you happen to visit in the course of the campaign. Arcane scholars, eccentric anthropologists with wild theories, Satanists, ritual magicians, Theosophists, and other sorts accept you as "one of them" and will exchange gossip, tips, and other useful social connections or knowledge.

With fellow occultists, or when dealing with the occult social scene, you can use and spend Occult as if it were any Interpersonal skill. The Keeper will probably ask you to justify (by roleplaying or pre-planning, if no other way) borderline cases such

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as Interrogation. (That said, claiming to represent the displeased Secret Masters has a distinguished pedigree in occult interpersonal relations.)

This ability does not necessarily work on Mythos cultists, zero Sanity magi, and other devotees of the Great Old Ones and their ilk – but the cold shoulder or misleading pointer you get from them may prove informative in its own right!

An Occultist might “in actuality” be an antiquarian, author, dilettante, doctor, professor, or any other sort of occupation. Nevertheless, Occultist characters use the Occultist special ability rather than the Occupation ability related to whatever it actually says on their visiting card or Inland Revenue form.

Occupational Changes

American and British Investigators both confront the global horrors of the Mythos. However, some of Britain’s specifics are slightly different from those in the Trail of Cthulhu corebook:

Clergy: Anglican clergy may take Bureaucracy instead of one existing occupational ability. They may use Bureaucracy as well as Reassurance or Theology to use their special ability and gain access to Anglican Church records.

Dilettante: Must spend 1 build point on Languages to cover Latin learned at a good public school. May spend 1 more build point on Languages to cover (classical) Greek.

Hobo: Called a **Tramp** in Britain. Tramps may take The Knowledge as an occupational ability; unlike American hobos, they have no special ability to make contacts or find out the lay of the land. They may, however, use Streetwise to identify doors and gates “usually left unlocked” (narratively similar to Locksmith), and use their Streetwise pool as though it were Stealth when piggybacking with other Investigators on a Stealth test in an urban area.

Police Detective: Firearms is not an occupational ability for police in Britain. They may either take The Knowledge or Weapons, reflecting the ubiquitous truncheon (-1 damage), as an occupational ability instead.

Professor: Must use two Languages slots for Latin and Greek.