WORLD WAR CTHULHU
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Part One: Introduction
**WHAT IS WORLD WAR CTHULHU?**

The 20th century saw conflict on a larger scale than ever before. The level of destruction was devastating and the cost in lives beyond tragic.

With war comes chaos and disruption. Dark days with deep shadows. In this confusion, things that must usually hide themselves away need not be so careful. Plans that moved slowly to avoid attention can be accelerated. For the agents of ancient god-things, war brings opportunities that they will not pass up.

*World War Cthulhu* is a line of settings for the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game. Each setting examines a different 20th century conflict and the ways in which the agents of the Cthulhu Mythos try to take advantage of the situation to further their own ends. *The Darkest Hour* is a core book in our World War Two setting. The line will also include core settings in World War One, The Cold War and World War Three.

**THE DARKEST HOUR**

In *The Darkest Hour*, players will take the role of people exposed to the secret horrors of the Cthulhu Mythos. Recruited into the network of N, a British Intelligence spymaster, wartime investigators come from a wide range of backgrounds in espionage, the military or civilian life. They are tasked with fighting a hidden war on two fronts: against the Fascist forces and the insidious Mythos menace.

From the bombed-out cities of occupied Europe to ancient ruins revealed by shifting North-African sands, investigators must overcome their fears to combat both human and inhuman threats, knowing that to falter against either invites a terrible fate.

This book provides everything players need to create wartime investigators—a full character generation chapter, a primer on intelligence work to get them up to operational speed and a briefing on small unit tactics, just in case.

Keepers have their own section presenting advice on running games in the setting, a guide to key operational theatres for British intelligence, Mythos threats, rules and equipment, as well as a campaign.

*The Darkest Hour* will concentrate on Europe in the earlier part of the war—we will visit wider geographical areas and the late war in future expansions. We will also be publishing scenarios, both in print and electronic formats. We’ll also publish a free scenario or two—take a look at www.cubicle7.co.uk for more information.

The default set-up has the characters caught up in the web of a spymaster, although you can substitute your own invention if you prefer.

The purpose of our spymaster is to provide a reason for the characters to work together, a reason (and the means) to travel to where the Mythos investigation needs to happen, and an added incentive not to give up!

**CTHULHU MYTHOS**

In *The Darkest Hour*, the Mythos threat is one half-glimpsed, lurking in the shadows, the province of the distrusted and insane. Most Mythos encounters will be with its mortal pawns. The unnatural and weird

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1. For the sake of convenience, and mostly accurately, we’ll use that term to summarise a whole range of weird eldritch terrors.
is very much on the outside of society. The sidelined, impoverished and degenerate are its most frequent congregation. The appeal of the Mythos is primal, primitive and unsophisticated – it is the deranged dissolute and the hopeless dispossessed in life’s margins that are susceptible to its call. And the relationship is very much one-way. The humans are the puppets, no matter what they might think.

Creatures of the Mythos are unknowable and incomprehensible. Their goals and desires are beyond our understanding. Their plans move on a timescale of millennia, and they do not care or even notice the hopes or entreaties of the human race.

A modern, sane person recoils from these abominations instinctively, and on a deeply-buried level. The human mind provides its own protection in the form of rationalisation, amnesia and in extreme cases madness.

The vast majority of people would disregard even the most compelling evidence of the existence of Mythos creatures. Even the physical remains of the most unnatural kind can be attributed to a ‘freak of nature’, or a mysterious denizen of the deep.

**NAZIS**

The Holocaust and other atrocities are too awful, important and demanding of respect that we have tried to treat anything that touches on these subjects with sensitivity.

The Nazis were a human evil, and we have taken care not to include any material that could be seen to provide a rationale for their crimes.

Nazi investigations into the occult are treated here as they occurred historically – an attempt to find evidence of Aryan superiority, combined with a love of ritual, elitist cliques and the socially-useful idolisation of a semi-mythical pastoral past. That doesn’t preclude individuals stumbling over some Mythos artefact or activity but, in all but the most psychopathic of people, human instinct to avoid or oppose the threat would kick in, rather than a counter-intuitive attempt to subvert the Mythos for the good of the Reich.

**MOOD**

*The Darkest Hour* is set against a background of utmost desperation. Britain stands isolated against a Europe overcome by the forces of fascism. As agents engaged in espionage, investigators are in incredible danger – paranoia and suspicion should never be far from their minds. As part of N’s network, they have an even wider range of enemies hunting them – cultists, Abwehr, Gestapo and more.

Trust will be in short supply. The consequences of failure are terrifying. Victory is all that matters, and everyone must fight in the best way they can.

Only a few know that victory is needed against more than one enemy.
There is a certain side street in London, near Trafalgar Square, that few people ever walk down. On that road there is a gloomy building, with a closed bookshop on street level and offices on the floors above. Knock on the door beside the bookshop, and you may be admitted into the most secret of sanctums. Ascend the creaking stairs – stepping over the bundles of yellowed newspapers collected from all over the Empire, and the teetering piles of mouldy books – and you find yourself in a little waiting room, with tattered yellow-cushioned chairs and a flickering gas lamp that makes the shadows dance. The sound of typewriters and low voices can be heard through one door, but you wait for the other door to open – the door to N’s office.

On rare occasions, you’ve bumped into other clandestine visitors. Names are never exchanged, of course, so you think of them by whimsical codenames. The Duffer Old Gent, moustaches flaring like a walrus. The Clergyman, pale and nervous, clutching a leather-bound book to his chest. The Smoking Girl; the smell of her acrid French cigarettes filling the room even after she departed. The Sailor, with his tattooed forearms. The Foreign Prince, swarthy, slender and sinister. What business these people have with N you cannot guess.

Then comes the command, “Come forth!”, and you obey. N awaits you. You are struck, as always, by the contrast between the desk and the rest of the room. The desk is clear, empty, save for the same few necessities. Two telephones – one of which, you suspect, is a direct line to some exalted echelon of government. A pen and inkwell. A single folder of documents that contains all you need to know. And a strange paperweight, an idol of clay that squats in the corner of the desk. It seems oddly heavy for its size, on the rare occasions he has to move it. The rest of the desk is pristine. Behind and around the desk, though, is a chaos of papers and books. Files overflow their boxes, and reports lie scattered recklessly, and the bookshelves groan under the weight. Directly behind N’s desk is a locked cabinet containing those books that require special handling. The Necronomicon, requisitioned from the British Library for the duration of the war. Nameless Cults, liberated from the personal collection of an English aristocrat who died mysteriously. De Vermis Mysteriis – stained with some green ichor. Other books come from N’s personal library. The room reflects its occupant. A storehouse of knowledge, eccentrically catalogued, perhaps shot through madness, but utterly focussed and precise when it comes to the matter at hand.

N, then. Younger than you might expect, for a man of such influence. Well dressed, but unaware of it – you suspect that he has a valet who takes care of such mundane matters, and that N would hardly notice if he were dressed in sackcloth and ashes. From his curious mode of speech and slight lingering tan, you guess that he grew up overseas, under the hot sun of India or Egypt or Palestine. Highly-strung, possessed of a frayed, nervous energy. From the pronounced limp and the scars on his lame left hand, you do not need to guess that he suffered some terrible injury in the past, but he is not a military man. He is ascetic. You’ve never seen him drink, or smoke, or to have any vices at all beyond the amphetamine pills he uses to avoid sleep.

“I don’t care to dream”, he said once, and that was the only glimpse he ever gave into whatever drove him to this place.
N occupies a curious niche within the British establishment. From what you have gathered, he operated a private intelligence network of sorts before the war, composed of academics, clergymen, occultists and the like, and was able to provide the government with vital information about the Nazi Abwehr and their operations long before the official intelligence departments were able to do so. Now, N consults with the Special Operations Executive, adding his expertise to their mission of sowing chaos across the path of the Nazi advance. He's a regular visitor to planning meetings at SOE headquarters on Baker Street – and Downing Street too, from time to time.

A well-connected academic, a monkish eccentric who knows too much for his own good, a dilettante in the Great Game – that is how the government sees N.

You've seen another of his masks. You see it again as he passes you the folder. Inside, there are maps, typewritten documents… and a photograph. You turn it face down as soon as you glimpse what it depicts. Your hands shake.

“There’s a lair marked on the map. The RAF intends to bomb the rubber factory here, three miles to the east. I need you to make sure they drop their bombs early. Wipe everything out.”

There’s an ophidian coldness to the man, an inhumanity that terrifies you. The bonds of morality and sanity mean nothing to him. You suspect that you mean nothing to him beyond your immediate value as a tool, a weapon. His intellect – vast, cool, and unsympathetic – regards you like an insect pinned to a slide. There’s no backing out now. You know that he’s used bribery, blackmail, veiled threats to get his way. They found the Duffer Old Gent in an alley in Whitechapel, his throat cut. You’ve heard the Sailor’s in prison now, on suspicion of being a German spy. What else would N do to prosecute his private war?

“It must be done”, he says. You have your orders.

You depart, stumbling down the cramped stairs with the folder of horrors. Later, you memorise it all, then burn it all, and as the flames consume the photo you imagine the incendiaries tumbling from heaven, burning the thing to ash. It must be done, no matter what compromises or sacrifices are needed to accomplish the mission. N’s right, damn him.

As the flames in the grate die down, you try to sleep, but it does not come. You don’t care to dream anymore, either.

“After a few months with Network N, I came to categorise N’s contacts into fools, lunatics and madmen.

Fools were mostly eccentrics who had some odd hobby or obsession, and had come into the Network that way. They might have been amusing and harmless in peacetime, but in wartime they were a liability. I remember one gentleman who concealed us in his cellar, along with what he proudly called the ‘largest known collection of maps of the hollow world’. We hid in that cellar for three days until the morning of the 15th. As we prepared to depart, we heard a car draw up outside. Our host had forgotten we were there, and had invited a fellow cartophile – who also happened to be the local Gestapo chief – over to see his collection.

Lunatics were genuine believers in the occult. Psychics, dowsers, black magicians, theosophists, alchemists. To such people, our military objectives were utterly irrelevant, and I think most of them resented having to deal with such mundane matters as a war.

Finally, madmen appeared more practical and grounded at first glance, but scratch the surface and you saw the insanity. The old priest who had a cache of firearms and explosives in the bell tower, the frail librarian who kept a loaded elephant gun under her desk, the former explorer who knew more about survival and evasion than I did, but who was convinced that there were things watching him in the sky… they were veterans of some older war.

And after a few months with Network N, I realised we were becoming madmen ourselves.”