Modern-Day Call of Cthulhu Live Role-Playing - A Players Guide

This is the countdown to the Apocalypse. We stand at the threshold of the End Times, when humans will become as one with the Great Old Ones, killing and hurting and revelling in pain and violence for the sheer joy of it. Soon, the stars will come right and the Great Old Ones will rise and humanity's brief time on the stage will come to an end. But maybe the darkness can be held back for a little longer. Not forever, maybe not for long, but maybe long enough to prepare some kind of defence against the Things in the Outer Dark.

This is the job of The Laundry or, to give it the proper title, the Special Occult Counterintelligence and Countermeasures Executive, a government organisation tasked with protecting Britain from a range of paranormal threats. Originally part of the Special Operations Executive during the Second World War, it gets its nickname from the fact that its original offices were located above a Chinese laundry

Laundry personnel may be computer experts, sorcerers, psychics, cat burglars or some combination of all these and more. When extra firepower is required, they are aided by 21 SAS (Reserve) Rgt and, more recently, the long-suffering men and women of 2nd Battalion, Borsetshire Light Infantry.

The setting and story take their inspiration from H.P.Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, from the Call of Cthulhu role-playing game, the Delta Green game and short stories and from Charles Stross' "Laundry Files" series of novels. The ideas from these works have been adapted for the purposes of the game so players should not take the information in them as canon.

Player Groups

1) **Military:** These are the brave men and women of the Borsetshire Light Infantry. As a unit of the British Army, they should wear the current British camo (MTP). However, resupply can be a bit patchy so some personnel will doubtless still be wearing DPM, or possibly a mixture. They can wear helmets and body armour (if you have them) and carry assault rifles plus a sidearm if desired. Snipers or support weapon specialists will need to buy the appropriate skill (see below).A typical group should include an officer, a couple of NCOs, a demolitions expert and some medics. All military personnel get Pistol, Rifle and First Aid skill for free.

2) **The Laundry:** These are civilian specialists in occult countermeasures, and will dress according to inclination. Scientists would probably tend toward sensible field kit. Hackers see themselves as rebels against authority so would tend to dress casually. Warlocks are somewhat old-fashioned and inclined to the theatrical. However, this is just a suggestion – anything that's not full camo will be fine. Body armour may be worn if you have it. Armament is usually restricted to a pistol. Anything larger will require spending the skill points. The Pistol, First Aid, and one Modern Language skill are free

Characters and Skills

All characters will be members of The Laundry or its attached military unit, 2nd Battalion Borsetshire Light Infantry.

Although not mandatory, you should give your character a name and some back story. These can add to the role-playing aspects of the game. The back-story would include some personal history and how you came to be involved with The Laundry. Keep it simple – don't give yourself several pages of fictional autobiography to memorise!

All characters will have followed one of the available career paths. These are Military, Scientist, Hacker and Warlock. The career path will influence what skills your character has as the points cost of skills varies by career.

The Military path is intended for players intending to play as BLI. Combat-relevant skills are cheap for this path, while occult and scientific skills are more expensive.

Scientists are people who make systematic studies of particular subject areas. This may include the sciences we are familiar with, such as chemistry or forensics, but also things like xenobiology, alien technology, hyperdimensional mathematics or xenolinguistics.

Hackers have computer technology as their principal area of expertise. Since much sorcerous lore can be expressed as computer algorithms, their skills may include things like computational demonology alongside more traditional IT abilities.

Warlocks have an innate grasp of the occult. They are able to carry out rituals, such as summoning or banishments without the aid of modern occult technology. The results may be less predictable, however. They are also more likely to have certain paranormal abilities such as precognition or telepathy.

You have 4 skill points to spend on skills for your character. Some skills have a zero cost, either for a particular path or for all paths.

Skills and Points Cost Table

Skill	Military	Scientist	Hacker	Warlock
Pistol	0	0	0	0
Assault Rifle	0	2	2	3
Sniper	1	3	3	3
Support/Heavy Weapon	2	3	3	3
Demolition	1	3	3	3
Lock Pick	1	2	1	2
Foil Restraints	1	2	1	1
First Aid	0	0	0	0
Medic	1	1	1	2
Medicine	2	1	2	3
Science	2	1	2	2
Weird Science	3	1	2	2
Computer Programming	3	1	1	2
Computer Hacking	3	2	1	3
Computational Demonology	3	3	1	2

Sorcery	4	3	2	1
Necromancy	5	5	5	3
Mythos Lore	2	1	1	1
Precognition	2	3	2	1
Telepathy	3	3	2	2
Detect Lie	2	3	2	2
Divination	3	3	2	1
Ancient Languages	3	2	2	1
Modern Languages	1	1	1	1

Skills

Pistol. All Laundry field personnel have been trained to use a handgun for self-defence.

Assault Rifle. This skill allows the use of assault rifles, submachine guns and machine pistols.

Sniper. This skill is required to use a sniper rifle.

Support/Heavy Weapon. Heavy machine guns, mortars, RPG's and shoulder-launched missiles all fall into this category. Field guns and missile batteries do not.

Demolitions. Enables a character to set a demolition charge, provided they have the materials to hand. The skill also allows the disarming of a simple explosive device.

Lock Pick. A simple lock can be picked in a couple of minutes with a hairpin. More complex locks will require more time and specialised equipment.

Foil Restraints. A character who has been tied up or handcuffed can escape with 5 minutes of obvious role-playing.

First Aid. A first-aider can stabilise a wounded character and slow the rate at which they bleed out. They cannot restore any lost hits.

Medic. A medic can treat combat wounds and restore hit points, but cannot cure persistent effects, such as broken limbs. They can treat the effects of temporary insanity.

Medicine. This skill allows everything the medic can do, plus persistent effects can be removed. Disease and symptoms of poisoning can also be recognised, and the effects of temporary insanity treated.

Science. This is knowledge of conventional sciences, i.e. chemistry, physics, biology, earth sciences, mathematics. Choose a broad field of study, and a couple of specialisations within it.

Weird Science. This is science as we don't know it. It will include xenobiology, xenolinguistics, parapsychology, non-human technology, hyperdimensional mathematics and such like.

Computer Programming. Everyone is assumed to be able to use a computer. This skill represents the ability to write complex programs for a variety of platforms, from a supercomputer to a smartphone.

Computer Hacking. This represents the ability to by-pass computer security protocols, to extract encrypted information, implant a virus, or otherwise take control of a computer system.

Computational Demonology. This is mainly a research skill which is used to discover and develop new spells, particularly those which can be incorporated into portable technology.

Sorcery. The sorcerer is able to carry out summonings and banishments, open and close Gates, and set and neutralise Wards. A hacker manipulates sorcery through his technology, whereas a warlock needs a few ritual objects and the power of his will. Costs marbles to use, number depending on level of spell.

Necromancy. This is power over the dead. A necromancer can speak to the soul of someone recently departed. They can also re-animate the once-living and command them to their bidding. The practice of necromancy is banned under international occult conventions.

Mythos Lore. You have a basic idea of what's really out there. You will be able to recognise some of the entities that you encounter.

Precognition. This psychic ability gives a hazy glimpse of the future. The visions are nearly always ambiguous and can only be invoked 3 times in a 24 hour period. (Requires referee and costs 1 marble to use)

Telepathy. A psychic ability which allows the telepath to read another's thoughts. The telepath needs to be within easy conversational distance from the target. The ability is quite exhausting to use so can only be done 3 times in a 24 hour period. It seldom works on non-humans and can be detected if attempted on another telepath. Costs 1 marble to use.

Detect lie. This combines a skill with reading body language and expression with a little psychic insight. The user can tell if someone is lying in response to a direct question. It won't tell you if they're omitting some of the truth. Costs 1 marble to use

Divination. Objects retain psychic echoes of their history and of those who have possessed them for a long time. The diviner can get a sense of this history by holding the object and concentrating on it. Costs 1 marble to use

Ancient Languages. This is the ability to read and speak ancient languages such as Babylonian, Ancient Egyptian, Olmec and Old Enochian. Sorcerers will know just enough Old Enochian to cast spells, not enough to hold a conversation with an Elder Thing. You may choose 2 ancient languages with this skill.

Modern Languages. All characters can speak English. They may, if they choose, select one additional modern language at no cost. With the Modern Language skill, they may choose another 2 languages.

Medical System, Hits and Armour

We will be using SAMS XP, blue Smartie version. Thanks to Tim Atkinson for designing the system. Smarties and some bandages will be provided by the organiser but players choosing to be medics

should bring some extras of their own, if possible. All players should also consider carrying a bandage in their equipment as a "first field dressing".

Characters with the Medic or Medicine skill can also treat the effects of insanity, which occurs when a player loses all their marbles. Treatment consists of supplying the appropriate colour of Starburst, using the table issued with the Medic chart and supplies.

Unarmoured players will begin the game on 3 hits.

Armour will provide additional hits as per the table below.

Helmet	1 pt
Body armour (as defined by UKLTA rules)	2 pts
Both arms (wrist to elbow minimum)	1 pt
Both legs (ankle to knee minimum)	1 pt

Additional Game Mechanics

1) **Marbles.** All characters begin the game with a certain amount of mental resilience, represented by a number of marbles. This resilience is tested when encountering something especially horrific, or when using occult or psychic skills. The marbles should be placed in a pocket on your right. When casting a spell, using a power or meeting an eldritch horror (a ref call), transfer the appropriate number of marbles from your right pocket to your left. When all your marbles have been lost from the right pocket, you are suffering a temporary mental breakdown. Read the instructions in the SAN envelope and choose the affliction that you're most comfortable to role-play. Do not announce that you've lost all your marbles – let the other players work it out for themselves from your behaviour. Treatment by a Medic or Surgeon will restore your marbles, less one. If you lose all your marbles several times, to the extent that you have none left, you are suffering from an indefinite mental break down and will need to be evacuated to specialist facilities (this is the end of the game for that character, although they will be recovered for future games)

2) **Challenges.** You will all be given a random playing card at the start of the game. At times during the game you may experience a magical effect challenge. First a time freeze will be called, and a property of the playing card will be called (suit, colour, court card, etc). If your card has the property called then you resist the effect. If you fail to resist, you react to the effect as instructed.

Using Skills

Some skills require a little explanation as to how and where they are used. Others are self-explanatory.

1) **Pistol, Assault Rifle, Sniper, Heavy Weapon** are all just what they say. Point, shoot, try not to miss, simple.

2) **Demolition** will require a supplied phys-rep (a thunderflash). Only thunderflashes supplied by the game organiser are permitted. Strike fuse and retire to a safe distance. If a referee is available, you can detonate the charge remotely (i.e. The ref does it for you)

3) **Lock Pick** has a difficulty level from 1 to 4. A *level 1 lock* can be picked in 2 minutes with a hair pin. Each additional difficulty level doubles the picking time so a *level 4 lock* will take 16 minutes with the hairpin. A special set of lockpicks will halve this time so the same lock would only take 8 minutes to open

4) **Foil Restraints** works in the same way as Lock Pick, but with a base time of 5 minutes. If a guard sees you, they can stop you and you will have to start again from the beginning.

5) **First Aid, Medic and Medicine** are as described in SAMS XP, where the medicine skill equates to Trauma Surgeon. The additional ability to treat insanity requires the use of Starburst sweet to represent certain medications. If a character has lost all their marbles, firstly determine which mental disorder they are suffering from. Administer the appropriate colour of Starburst. The patient is now restored to functional mental health and may return their marbles to their right pocket except for one, which is handed over to the medic/surgeon. These lost marbles should be turned in to a referee at the earliest opportunity.

6) **Science, Weird Science, Mythos Lore** are knowledge skills. In some instances you should ask the referee. In other cases you may find an envelope attached to something, labelled with the knowledge area required to read it.

7) **Computer Programming, Computer Hacking** will require a referee. If you want to write a programme, or hack a particular system, the referee will assess the difficulty from level 1 to 4. The task will take 2 minutes for level 1, doubling for each difficulty level

8) **Ancient Languages, Modern Languages** are knowledge skills. Written material in a language other than English will be clearly marked as such. If you have that language, you can read it. Any encounters where a language other than English is being spoken will be clearly indicated.

Occult Skills.

These skills are a bit more involved as we are trying to represent skills with no real-world equivalent

9) **Computational Demonology and Sorcery** are different ways of achieving the same result. Both of these skills allow the player to carry out tasks such as a Summoning, open or close Gates, or set Wards. These have a difficulty level from 1 (easiest) to 5 (very difficult). A Level 1 task takes 2 minutes, with the time doubling for each additional difficulty level. Hence a Level 3 task will take 8 minutes.
In addition, the task will use resources; apps in the case of the CD-ist or marbles for the Sorcerer
The Computational Demonologist works by running his incantations on a piece of technology. Once this would have needed a quite powerful computer but can nowadays run from a smartphone. To open or close a Gate, the device must be connected to a

Dho-Na grid. A grid is not needed for a Summoning or for Wards although the latter will require laying out the Ward perimeter. Wards must form an enclosed shape (circle or rectangle, a pentangle for the traditionalist). A Class 1 Ward, 1 metre in diameter is a Level 1 incantation. A Class 2 ward, up to 2 metres in diameter is a Level 2 incantation, and so on. Class 3 and 3 metres is Level 3. The level is determined by whichever is the higher of class and size. The latest version of the smartphone can store up to 7 levels of Incantation Apps. Once used, the app expires from the device. The skilled CD-ist adapts the apps as needed to accomplish a particular effect. A separate app allows the running of any level 1 incantation at no cost. A level 2 will cost 1 app level, a level 3 costs 2 app levels, and so on. The smartphone also includes an app to measure levels of thaumic (magical) energy – a referee will tell you if you are in an area with a high thaumic field.
The Sorcerer uses the power of his mind and a selection of ritual objects to focus his will on the desired outcome. The only limit on the number and power of spells that a sorcerer can cast is his mental resilience. Any level 1 incantation can be cast at no cost, a level 2 requires 1 marble, a level 3 requires 2 marbles and so on. The sorcerer can also activate a Dho-Na grid at a cost of 1 marble per level above 1. In theory, a skilled sorcerer can create a Gate without a grid but at great personal cost. It costs the (class of gate x 2) marbles, so opening a class 3 Gate would cost the sorcerer 6 marbles.

10) **Necromancy** is power over the dead. The Necromancer can communicate with the recently dead and the more skilled can re-animate and command the bodies of the recently deceased. In fact, they need not even be completely dead. The unconscious and incapacitated can also be raised to apparent full health and commanded. There is a danger here though, as at the end of their normal bleed-out time, they will fall dead unless they have been treated for their wounds in the meantime. A 5 minute conversation with a corpse costs 1 marble. Raising a corpse requires 2 marbles and lasts for 30 minutes or until the corpse is shot down again (an individual corpse can be re-animated a maximum of 3 times, after which it has been too badly damaged to function) Raising an unconscious character takes 1 marble. They will need to be medic'd within 30 minutes or they will die. If they are shot down again, all wounds will be Serious. They can be raised no more than 3 times and they will die at the end of the third resurrection. The Necromancer skill will only work on a creature of the same species as the necromancer.

11) **Precognition, Telepathy, Detect Lie and Divination** are all psychic abilities and each costs 1 marble per use.
Precognition gives a hazy and probably ambiguous glimpse of the future (requires a referee). Using this skill requires 5 minutes of meditation in a calm atmosphere, possibly aided by drugs. It can only be used 3 times in any given 24 hour period.
Telepathy allows the reading of another's thought. The target must be within easy conversational range. Again can only be used 3times in 24 hours. It will normally only work on your own species and can be detected if used on another telepath. Concentrating on a character within easy conversational range will allow you determine if that person is human or another species that you have come into close contact with, by observing a faint aura around them.

Detect Lie combines a skill with a little psychic insight. The user can tell if someone is lying in answer to a direct question. It won't tell you if they are leaving part of the truth out.

Divination will give some sense of the history of an object and its previous owners by holding and concentrating on it. This skill usually requires a referee, unless the object has a divination label on it.