

Mind Over Matter

Psychic Powers in Call of Cthulhu

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Introduction

The 1920s was a period of great interest not only in the occult but in all areas of what today would be called the paranormal. Spiritualism and psychic ability were two major areas of interest, and since many of Lovecraft's characters moved in occult and mystic circles, the Call of Cthulhu keeper might find the following rules useful in dealing with psychic talents and phenomena.

The Psychic Talents

The major talents covered in this article are Telepathy, Mediumship, Clairvoyance, Telekinesis, Spirit Travel and Faith Healing. Each talent confers a number of abilities, which are described below.

Determining Psychic Talent

Any character with a POW score of 17 or more may have some psychic ability. When such a character is generated, make a POW x 1 roll; if the roll succeeds, the character is gifted with psychic ability.

Once a character has been found to be psychic, make a POW x 3 roll for each of the six talents listed above. Each successful roll indicates a talent which the character possesses - note each one on the character sheet. Next, roll a D4 for each talent the character possesses, and multiply the result by the character's POW score - this is the character's base score in the talent, and is used in the same way as a skill score.

If a character is found to have psychic ability but all the talent rolls are failed, you can take one of two courses, according to the Keeper's preference. The character might be considered to have a latent psychic talent, or he/she might have a single weak talent, chosen by the Keeper or determined randomly by a D6 roll. If a character has a single weak talent, his/her basic score is equal to D4 x half POW.

A character with latent psychic ability can develop it in a number of ways: by spending a week with a psychically gifted character, for instance, or by receiving a severe nervous shock such as the loss of 3 or more SAN points at a single time. When these circumstances arise, the character is permitted to check each of the six talents with a POW x 2 roll - the player may choose the order of the checks, but only one talent may be obtained. If no talents are obtained, the process may be repeated the next time the circumstances are favorable. Note that a character with latent psychic ability may only ever develop a single talent - this is treated as a weak talent, with the basic score being D4 x half current POW.

For example: Philip Moorgrave, a newly-created character, has a POW score of 17. A POW x 1 roll of 04 indicates that he is psychic. His POW x 3 roll is 51, and he checks each of the talents in turn to see where his psychic abilities lie. The first roll is 83, indicating that he is not a telepath; his second roll is 53, so he is not a medium. The third roll is 21, making him clairvoyant, and a D4 roll of 3 gives him $3 \times 17 = 51$ points in that skill. The fourth roll is 78, denying him telekinesis, and a fifth roll of 63 indicates that he has no talent for spirit travel. The sixth and final roll is 11, indicating that he is a faith healer; a D4 roll of 1 gives him just 17 points in that skill.

Edwin Petheridge, on the other hand, has a POW of 18, and a POW x 1 roll of 11 indicates that he is psychically gifted. However, disastrous rolls of 62, 56, 94, 64, 73 and 80 deny him any ability. The Keeper decides that Edwin has a latent psychic ability which has yet to be determined. Meeting Philip Moorgrave later in the campaign, Edwin studies with him for a week in an attempt to develop the psychic talent he feels sure he possesses. A POW x 2 roll of 76 indicates that the attempt is a failure. Later, Edwin receives a severe nervous shock as a result of an unexpected meeting with a Shoggoth - to be precise, he loses 4 SAN points. Is Edwin's psychic talent awakened at last? Edwin's player wants him to be clairvoyant - possibly to avoid future unexpected meetings - but a POW x 2 roll of 53 denies him that talent. Next in order of preference is telepathy, and the POW x 2 roll is 22 - Edwin is telepathic. A D4 roll produces a result of 3, and 3×9 (half Edwin's POW) = 27. Edwin has 27 points in his Telepathy skill.

Using Psychic Abilities

The use of any psychic ability requires absolute and uninterrupted concentration. The psychic may not move nor engage in any kind of activity while attempting to use a psychic ability. If a psychic is attacked or subjected to any other kind of physical contact while using a psychic ability, he/she must make a POW x 5 roll, with a 10% penalty for every point of damage caused by a successful attack. If this roll is failed, concentration is broken and the use of the psychic ability is abruptly curtailed.

Some psychic abilities carry certain risks. If a critical failure (96-00) is rolled while using telepathy, clairvoyance or mediumship, the psychic may unwittingly have made contact with some malign entity, possibly a minor Mythos being; at the Keeper's discretion, a really spectacular failure (00) might even involve accidental contact with Nyarlathotep himself. Critical failure with telekinesis may result in loss of control, possibly resulting in injury to the psychic or an uncontrolled burst of poltergeist-like activity; any failure at all while levitating could be uncomfortable to say the least. The risks of spirit travel are explained in the relevant section below. A critical failure in faith healing might result in the patient's condition worsening, or even being transferred to the would-be healer. These are only suggestions, and the Keeper should try to be imaginative when dealing with critical failures.

The Psychic Talents

Telepathy

The talent of telepathy permits the user to engage in mind-to-mind communication. This communication may be used in various ways; the individual abilities permitted by telepathy are as follows:

Detect Sentient Being: on a successful telepathy roll, the psychic may detect the presence of any minds of INT 3+ within a radius of POW x 10 feet. The presence, number and rough direction of intelligent minds will be known, but no other information will be gained. At the Keeper's option, this ability might be used to detect incorporeal beings such as ghosts.

Read Thoughts: this ability permits the user to sense the surface thoughts of one creature within the psychic's field of vision. Thought-reading costs 1 Magic Point per round. One character who is well known to the psychic may be sensed over a wider range by a further expenditure of Magic Points, as follows:

MP cost/Round Distance in miles not to exceed

1	1
2	10
3	100
4	1,000
5	10,000

... etc.

The subject of such observation may detect the intruding mind on a successful POW x 5 roll, modified downwards by half the observer's telepathy score. Once the thought-reading is detected, the subject may resist it by matching Magic Points with the psychic; this may be attempted once per round.

A successful telepathy roll is necessary to use this ability, and once this level of rapport is reached the telepath may attempt to send a communication (see below) on the following round. If both parties are telepaths, Magic Point costs

are halved, and the receiver may opt to share the costs; additionally, telepathy rolls are made at a bonus equal to one-tenth of the receiver's telepathy score.

Communication: in order to send a communication, the psychic must first have successfully established the basic rapport necessary to read thoughts (see above). On a second successful telepathy roll and the expenditure of a further Magic Point per round, the psychic may engage in two-way communication with the subject. The subject may continue to resist, as for thought reading. Once this level of rapport is reached the telepath may attempt domination (see below) on the following round. If both parties are telepaths, Magic Point costs are halved, and the receiver may opt to share the costs; additionally, telepathy rolls are made at a bonus equal to one-tenth of the receiver's telepathy score.

Domination: once the level of rapport necessary for communication (see above) has been reached, the psychic may attempt a third telepathy roll in order to force the subject into a POW vs POW conflict; this is in addition to any Magic Point conflict being conducted as the subject tries to free himself from the telepathic intrusion. If the psychic wins the POW vs POW conflict, the subject may be forced to perform one simple act which is neither reckless nor homicidal, and which takes no longer than two rounds. Once the act has been performed, the subject will have no memory of the telepathic contact, or of performing the act. In addition to the costs of thought reading and communication, this ability costs 1 Magic Point per 5 points of the subject's POW.

Attack: telepathy may also be used aggressively. The procedure is exactly as for domination above, but instead of forcing the subject to perform an action, the telepath may inflict psychic damage. For every Magic Point expended by the telepath after the successful domination procedure, the subject will take one hit point of damage. This is identical to physical damage in all respects, except that lost hit points are regained at the same rate as expended Magic Points because of the psychic origins of the damage.

Mask: a telepath may mask his/her mind on a successful telepathy roll; a masked mind may only be detected or contacted by another psychic if he or she can successfully match POW with the masked mind; this includes detection by the use of clairvoyance.

Mediumship

The talent of mediumship allows the user to hold spiritualist séances and communicate with the spirits of the dead. There is only one ability connected with the talent - séance, given below - but most professional mediums will have certain non-psychic skills in addition (see *The Medium - a New Character Profession*, at the end of this article). If this talent is used to gather information, the Keeper should be very careful over the quantity and quality of information gained - a dead informant can be just as vague, misleading or uncommunicative as a live one.

Séance: this ability enables the user to conduct a spiritualist séance, given the co-operation of all other participants. At the first séance a character conducts, he or she must make a mediumship roll twice - success on both rolls indicates that the character has gained a spirit guide, a friendly spirit who will thereafter act as an intermediary between the medium and the spirit world. No further activity is possible without the spirit guide, and once a spirit guide has been obtained, that spirit will work with the medium permanently - thereafter only one successful mediumship roll will be required for each séance in order to make contact with the spirit guide. Once contacted for a séance, the spirit guide will assist the medium in making contact with the desired spirit or spirits - a further mediumship roll is necessary for each such contact. The Keeper may modify this roll at will, according to how well the enquirers know the spirit they are seeking, whether or not the spirit is willing to be contacted, whether the spirit is known to haunt the area where the séance is taking place, and - of course - whether such contact is desirable for the progress of the adventure.

Once a spirit has been contacted, it is treated just like any other NPC informant, and the players should be encouraged to roleplay any questioning sessions. Telepathic characters might try to dominate the spirit psychically if they wish, but otherwise persuasion is the only tool the questioners have. Note that the medium may perform no action other than maintaining the contact while a séance is in progress.

Clairvoyance

Sometimes referred to as 'second sight', this talent has to do with the remote viewing of distant places and the detection of psychic phenomena closer at hand. The abilities associated with this talent are as follows:

Clairvoyance: this ability permits the remote viewing of distant places. A successful clairvoyance roll is necessary each round, and each round a number of Magic Points must be expended, according to distance - use the table given for Telepathy above. At the Keeper's option, it may be possible to view the spirit plane (see Spirit Travel below), or to view through time rather than space - in the latter case, substitute years for miles on the table, and note that it is only possible to view backwards through time. At the Keeper's option a scrying device such as a crystal ball may reduce the Magic Point cost.

Clairaudience: this ability works in exactly the same way as clairvoyance above, except that it permits remote listening instead of viewing.

Combined Clairvoyance and Clairaudience: this ability permits the user to watch and listen simultaneously, like the proverbial fly on the wall. For the simultaneous use of both talents, a 20% penalty is imposed on the clairvoyance roll and Magic Point cost is 3 per round.

Psychometry: this ability works in a similar way to Combined Clairvoyance and Clairaudience above, but uses and object as a 'focus'. The clairvoyant may monitor any events which have taken place in the object's immediate vicinity - seeing through its eyes and hearing through its ears, as it were. Although this viewing is through time rather than space, the use of the focus object negates any penalties to the clairvoyance roll, and each expenditure of Magic Points permits D4 rounds of uninterrupted monitoring.

Detect Psychic: the clairvoyant may detect an intruding mind at any time, on a successful clairvoyance roll. The Keeper should make these rolls secretly, in order to avoid arousing suspicions unnecessarily. This ability allows the clairvoyant to detect other clairvoyants scanning the area he is in, or telepaths trying to read his thoughts, or even the presence of incorporeal beings such as ghosts and spirit travelers. The range of this ability is 10 x POW feet; it has no Magic Point cost.

Block: on a successful clairvoyance roll, a clairvoyant may create an area of psychic interference with a radius of 10 x POW feet, centered on the medium. The field costs 3 Magic Points for the first D6 rounds, and 1 Magic Point per round thereafter. No psychic scanning or communication ability will function within the area covered by the block, including telepathy, clairvoyance and spirit travel. The Keeper must decide whether any ghosts in the area will be repelled by the field.

Telekinesis

The talent of telekinesis permits the conversion of psychic energy into physical force, and the exertion of this force upon physical matter. The abilities granted by telekinesis are as follows:

Move Object: a minor form of telekinesis, this ability can move any loose object (i.e. any object which is not nailed down or similarly secured) at a speed not exceeding 3 mph, in any direction including the vertical. The ability requires a successful telekinesis roll and costs 1 Magic Point per 10 pounds of the object's weight - the roll and expenditure are repeated for each round of movement.

Hurl Object: using this ability, any object weighing up to 10 pounds may be hurled on a successful telekinesis roll, at a cost of 1 Magic Point per pound of weight. The object has a 45% chance of hitting the target, and will inflict 1 point of damage per pound weight. If a sharp or pointed object such as a knife is hurled, attacks and damage are as for the appropriate weapon.

Telekinetic Blow: this ability uses pure telekinetic energy to deliver a physical blow. On a successful telekinesis roll the blow hits the target automatically, and cannot be dodged or parried except by a successful telekinetic block (see below); however, the target must be within the psychic's line of sight. Base cost is 3 Magic Points, and base damage is as for a Fist attack; additional Magic Points may be invested in the attack, each additional Magic Point

causing an additional point of damage. At the Keeper's option, any character hit by a telekinetic blow may be required to make a DEX x 5 roll to avoid being knocked down. This ability may be used to break, bend or shatter objects, each object making a resistance roll matching its breakage points against the Magic Points invested in the attack.

Levitation: this is a special application of telekinesis, and instead of a telekinesis roll it requires the user to match his or her POW against his or her SIZ. The Keeper may decide to impose further modifiers reflecting how heavily encumbered the character is when attempting levitation. A successful roll allows the character to rise up to 10 feet into the air, plus 1 foot for every point by which POW exceeds SIZ. The roll must be repeated each round, and each round of levitation requires the expenditure of Magic Points equal to one-third the character's SIZ. If the roll is failed, or the character runs out of Magic Points, he or she immediately falls to the ground, sustaining damage as from a normal fall.

Block: this ability is used to block any one telekinetic action within POW x 10 feet of the user. The user must match POW with the psychic concerned, and if the block is successful the blocking character must expend a number of Magic Points equal to that invested in the action being blocked. If a character does not have sufficient Magic Points to block an action, it proceeds unhindered; the character attempting the block must make a successful POW x 5 roll or lose half his remaining Magic Points in the unsuccessful attempt.

Spirit Travel

This talent permits the user to travel by Astral Projection to the Spirit Plane on a successful spirit travel roll. The character's spirit leaves his body in a trancelike state, but remains attached to it by a 'silver cord' of ectoplasm. If the silver cord is severed, the spirit traveler dies instantly; for every 3 POW of the spirit traveler, the silver cord has 1 point of armor and 2 hit points. If a spirit traveler's vacant body is disturbed in any way, the spirit is abruptly recalled, and the spirit traveler must make an immediate CON x 5 roll or die from shock; even if the roll is successful, the character is still stunned and helpless for (20-CON) rounds.

While on the Spirit Plane, the character appears physically the same (but naked), and may see into the material plane as well as the spirit plane. The character must expend 1 Magic Point for every 5 rounds of spirit travel, but it is not necessary to repeat the spirit travel roll once travel has begun. Movement rates are the same on the spirit plane as on the material plane, but physical obstructions, such as walls, present no obstacle.

Ghosts and other non-corporeal entities exist mainly on the spirit plane, and a spirit traveler may enter into quasi-physical combat with them. This is exactly the same as physical combat on the material plane, except that POW is substituted for STR and Magic Points for hit points. The spirit traveler must return to his body and re-enter the material plane before his Magic Points total reaches zero - if Magic Points are exhausted before this can happen, the spirit is abruptly recalled to the body just as if the body had been disturbed. If Magic Points fall to zero as a result of quasi-physical combat, the multiplier for the CON roll is equal to (5 - half negative Magic Points) - for example, a character with 2 Magic Points remaining takes a blow on quasi-physical combat which does 4 points of damage. This would reduce his Magic Points to -2, so his spirit is recalled to his body, and he must make a CON x 4 roll to avoid shock.

Quasi-physical combat is mainly unarmed, although a weapon specifically enchanted against ghosts, for example, will exist partly on the spirit plane, and can be used there. If you like theatrical effects, then the material portion of the weapon might move along with its spirit counterpart. Alternatively, the two might be separable - in this case, the spirit portion of the weapon will deteriorate after too long away from its physical 'body', losing one breakage point per 5 rounds. When breakage points are reduced to zero, the weapon ceases to exist on the spirit plane, and the physical form will also shatter.

At the Keeper's option, spirit travel might be one means of entering the Dreamlands.

Faith Healing

This talent permits the diagnosis and treatment of poisons, diseases and some injuries by psychic means; certain diseases may respond better to psychic healing than conventional medicine. The abilities conferred by this talent are as follows:

Diagnosis: this ability permits the user, on a successful faith healing roll, to diagnose any disease, poison or other ailment afflicting one patient, as if by the use of Diagnose Disease skill. The Keeper may decide to impose a penalty for attempts to diagnose ailments arising from magical or psychic attacks.

Healing: after a successful diagnosis, the healer may match his or her POW against the potency number of any one poison or disease with which the patient is afflicted. This assumes that diseases are given a potency rating like poisons, with, say, the common cold rated 1 and bubonic plague or yellow fever rated 19-20. In the cases of magical afflictions, the healer must match his or her POW against that of the character or being who inflicted the ailment. If the roll is successful, the healer may expend Magic Points equal to one-third of the potency rating (or POW) of the affliction, and thereby destroy all traces of it, leaving the patient to recover lost hit points and attribute points in the normal way.

At the Keeper's option, this ability may also be used to heal wounds and injuries, with the healer matching his/her POW against the number of hit points lost and restoring D3 hit points for every Magic Point expended.

THE MEDIUM - A NEW CHARACTER PROFESSION

Spiritualism was thriving in the 1920s, never having really lost the popularity it had gained in the 19th century; many mediums and spiritualists made a handsome living from holding séances to contact their clients' dead loved ones. Some may have been genuine psychics, but many were charlatans, living on the credulity of their clients.

A genuine medium must be psychic, and must have the talent of Mediumship described above. Other skills will include many also used by the charlatan.

A charlatan will have no psychic ability, and may well be highly skeptical about the supernatural. However, the charlatan's act will include a great deal of occult knowledge, either genuine or pretended. A high APP score will be a definite advantage, and common skills will include the following:

- Occult
- Psychology
- Oratory
- Prediction (see below)
- Ventriloquism (see below)

Income

Many mediums had other, more mundane professions and did not depend on their talents as a sole source of income. Those who do, both genuine and charlatan, have a basic income of D4+2 x \$1,000.

New Skills

Prediction (Knowledge skill, basic 00%): the successful use of this skill allows the character to make one prediction by means of astrology, palmistry, tarot or other cards, tea leaves, or some other means. Each method requires a separate skill. The Keeper should make all rolls for this skill secretly, leaking information to the players as he sees fit; the degree of success or failure is a good guide as to the amount and accuracy of any information gained.

Ventriloquism (Communication skill, basic 00%): successful use of this skill permits the user to throw his or her voice, making it appear to come from somewhere other than the ventriloquist. A failed skill roll indicates that the deception has been penetrated - the ventriloquist's lips have been seen to move, for instance, or some other misfortune has occurred which has led to the deception being exposed.