

“To be or not to be...” or Characters in Quandary

BY PEGGY COPE



The problems of character longevity and tenacity of mental cohesion are fraught with many-tentacled difficulties, and I appreciate the concern expressed by Phil Bell in May. If a player becomes more concerned with keeping his or her character alive and sane than with the situation at hand, the quality of the game may suffer. However, some of the points that he raises may be somewhat lacking in realism and a bit high in expectation of what a player can or should bring to a game.

Primarily I question Phil's deploring the fact that players are inclined to keep their characters "alive at all costs," resulting sometimes in a "competition for longevity." It is surely only human and reasonable to preserve one's own life — for a character to wish to remain alive is quite realistic and would be in keeping with almost any role an Investigator might choose to play. I suggest that it is unreasonable to expect that players be willing to sacrifice their characters regularly, throwing themselves on metaphoric hand grenades, so as to preserve a freshness in their responses to situations. Rather, it might be more sensible to propose the possibility of players maintaining a "stable" of characters, with varying, distinctive personalities, to be used in rotation. So that one character might be on sabbatical or vacationing on a South Seas island (any new islands down there?) while another was actively playing. Then the player could introduce or remove players from time to time.

I agree entirely that the game should involve more of the psychology of horror and less of the "Rambo" approach to occult investigation. However, it was much easier for Lovecraft to achieve in hints and evasions what Keepers and players must attempt to physically replicate. This is a problem that must be addressed as much by the Keepers as by the players in the writing, staging, and enactment of a game. Additionally as the characters in live games play the dual role of actor and spectator, I would like to propose the thought that they are far more important to the successful rendering of a CTHULHU LIVES game than they were in Lovecraft's plots. Their personalities, participation and enjoyment are crucial if the game is to work — otherwise, why are we producing these games?

Finally, one must address the question of sanity. This has always been one of the more entertaining and problematical elements of Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* game, and I personally would like to see it used more extensively in live games. Would it be ridiculous to propose general, very vague guidelines as to when it would be appropriate for a character to lose sanity points in a very real and mentally binding sense? The drinking of a friend's blood might produce a different type and degree of insanity than the sighting of a monster or deity, and the Keepers might suggest at the outset of the game that, under certain circumstances which would become obvious during play, a character might feel very much inclined to unhinge to a certain extent, according to player discretion. A touch of paranoia or even flat out catatonia could add a great deal of fun and challenge to many of our games.

This response to Phil's article is precisely that: my gut reaction to an ongoing question which was brought to my attention by Phil and Sean on a ferry crossing Long Island Sound. We cannot, of course, mandate any approach to the game: that must rest with individual players and Keepers if enjoyment of the game is to continue unhampered by red tape. But it is advisable that both players and Keepers give some thought to what will best serve their interests and those of other participants contributing to and reaping the benefits and untold pleasures of participating in CTHULHU LIVES.

