ADVENTURE
By: Monte Cook

CALL OF CTHULHU: INFEST

INTRODUCTION

Infest is a *d20 Call of Cthulhu* adventure set in the present day. Designed for beginning characters, it is ideal for use as an introductory scenario to begin a campaign. You need to have the *d20 Call of Cthulhu* rulebook to play this adventure.

In *d20 Call of Cthulhu*, a horror game, characters usually play normal people that investigate strange, terrifying and ultimately mind-shattering events and entities. Getting characters started on these investigations can sometimes be difficult. How does a group of disparate, relatively normal people band together to explore the otherworldly? This scenario was designed to help facilitate that. In so doing, it is a non-traditional *d20 Call of Cthulhu* adventure, in that things do not start slowly, with the characters getting opportunities to research and investigate the mystery at hand. The adventure's action begins immediately, and the player characters are thrust into a terrifying situation with their only real goal being survival.

BACKGROUND

The insects from Shaggai, also known as the shan, are a fugitive alien presence here on Earth, having fled their home world after it was destroyed by some unknowable thing in the boundless void of space. Tiny, flying, crawling things, they feed on the emotions of other creatures and devote their horrible alien existence to a dread being known as Azathoth. They possess the ability to fly right into a person's mind and take control. A number of them have done just that, and use their human hosts to help occasionally gather food and sacrifices for the blind, unknowing god Azathoth in a large office building in the middle of a city (whatever city you want to set it in). The creatures have taken over the minds of some contractors who have blocked off the bottom level of the building's parking garage to construct a bizarre mental machine that will eventually allow them to exert even greater influence over humans. They are currently hoping to capture a few humans to elicit strong emotions from (upon which to feed) and then test their machine on them.

OVERVIEW

The point here is to create a bond among the PCs, forged in supernatural horror, which will last into future adventures. They are no longer a group of unrelated individuals when this is over, but a tight-knit group of people who have shared a terrible experience.

The PCs are trapped in an elevator in a large building at night. As they attempt to extricate themselves from the situation, strange things begin to occur. Finally, they must confront the insidious, alien creatures behind the events and—if they escape—are joined in a temporary telepathic bond that is both terrible and revelatory.

THE BUILDING

The Heard Building is a 38 floor building filled with different offices and businesses. Beneath the Heard Building lies a five floor parking garage that serves not only the building but surrounding businesses as well. It has its own elevator, so people must ride the elevator up to the lobby of the Heard Building from the parking garage and then get on a different elevator to get to any of the building's office levels. Currently, the bottom floor of the parking garage has been closed off for repairs—although this is actually not what it seems. The shan-controlled contractors use this bottom floor as a staging area to build an alien machine. When the machine is first activated, it drains power from the building's systems, stopping the elevator unexpectedly.

GETTING STARTED

Have each player create his or her *d20 Call of Cthulhu* character ahead of time. In the best possible situation, the players would create their characters independently so that they know nothing about each other.

This adventure can be set in any major city the Gamemaster wishes, and with only a small amount of adaptation, the time period can be changed as well. (For an earlier time period, such as the 1920s, the parking structure needs to be changed to the lower levels of a large building—and the number of cities with tall enough buildings is more limited.)

The players should come up with their own reasons why their characters have visited this particular building on this particular day and why they have stayed there until after dark—about 9:00 PM. Each of them has parked their respective cars on level 4 of the parking garage—the lowest open level. They ride the elevator down to get to their cars.

At this point, don't let the players talk to each other yet. People in real life don't usually talk to strangers in elevators—particularly at night. Start the game session by telling the players this:

You ride the parking garage elevator down to where you parked. A few people get off on Parking Level 1, and a woman gets off on parking level three. You ride down to level 4. Suddenly, there is a jolt, and the elevator shakes. Then all goes black.

At this moment, allow the PCs' panic to ensue.

The PCs can speak to each other, but have no reference for the other characters, whom they cannot see and do not know. Allow each to give the others a short phrase of description—only the amount of information that a person casually notices about someone else in an elevator: "the young, blond guy," "the tall woman with all the shopping bags," or "the overweight guy in the nice suit."

Don't allow them to engage in any really comfortable or personal dialog. If things get to that point, interrupt the players and tell them that they feel another shudder from the elevator.

ELEVATOR DETAILS

The elevator is six feet wide, five feet deep, and about nine feet tall. Above the doors are six lights labeled L (Lobby) and 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for each floor. To the right of the doors are buttons for each floor, a "door open" and a "door close" button, and an emergency stop button. These all light up.

Behind a panel labeled "for emergency use only," beneath the elevator buttons, PCs can find a telephone receiver and a single button. Normally, pushing the button sends an alarm signal to emergency services and the receiver allows someone in the elevator to speak with someone at emergency services (assuming someone hears the alarm and picks up on the other end). The phone is also rigged with a light and a buzzer of its own so that emergency services can call into the elevator.

In the rear of the elevator, in the ceiling, there is a two and a half foot square emergency hatch. This hatch is locked from the outside, meant to be usable by emergency rescue personnel only.

POTENTIAL PC ACTIONS

There are six likely actions that the PCs might take at this point.

1. Use the emergency elevator telephone to call for help. If a PC attempts this while there is no power, they hear nothing on the other end. If attempted when there is power, the only sound they hear in the receiver is a strange intermittent clicking and buzzing sound. If a PC attempts to use the phone after the first phone call comes (see below) he also hears a faraway voice (besides the clicking and buzzing) that whispers coarsely "what are you doing?" No matter what the PC does then, he hears no further voices on the phone.

2. Use a cell phone to call for help. All cell phones display "no service" or "no carrier." This is partially because the characters are so deep below ground, and partially because of the interference of the shan machine.

3. Pry open the doors. This is very difficult at first, when there is no power. This requires a Strength check with a DC of 30. When emergency power is restored, the door mechanism can aid the manual opening of the doors, lowering the DC to 25. As many as three people can help (see rules for cooperation in Chapter 2 of the d20 Call of Cthulhu rulebook) to open the door. A lever of some sort (like a crowbar, although it's unlikely a PC has an actual crowbar) would give a +2 circumstance bonus to the check.

When the elevator first stops, it is between levels 3 and 4 of the parking garage. When it drops (see below), it goes down to level 5. If the elevator doors open before the drop, the doors to level 3 and 4 are exposed. If the doors are forced after the elevator drops, the doors to level 5 are exposed. Characters can attempt to open any of these, with the same difficulty as the previous doors.

If characters are successful in opening all the doors, see "Exploring the Parking Garage" on the next page.

4. Use the emergency hatch in the ceiling. This isn't as easy as movies would have you think. As mentioned above, the hatch is locked from the outside. A character must make a Strength check (DC 30) to force open the hatch. Only one other PC could potentially help in this task, and that assumes both PCs are somehow able to reach the door on the nine-foot ceiling.

If a PC succeeds somehow, he now has access to the shaft. The shaft, even after emergency power kicks in within the elevator, is very dark. A Search check (DC 18) allows a character to find the ladder that runs up the side of the shaft. However, not only does the searching character get covered in grime and grease from feeling around the mechanisms and cables, he tears a bit of his clothing. If the searching character fails a Balance check (DC 12), he also cuts himself on a rough edge of the cable mechanism and suffers 1 point of damage.

Characters can attempt to open the doors out into level 3 from atop the elevator, as described in 4, but suffer a -4 circumstance penalty due to darkness.

Climbing the ladder in the dark requires a DC 5 climb check (normally, no check is required to climb a ladder). If the character tries to open any of the doors to the levels above, the DCs for the Strength checks required are the same as described in 4, however he suffers a further -8 circumstance penalty (due to darkness and being on the ladder). And, if he fails the check, he must make a Climb check (DC 12) or fall. Falling characters suffer 1d6 damage per level—so if the character is attempting to open the doors to level 2, he suffers 1d6 damage, and if on level 1 he suffers 2d6 damage.

5. Shout for help. This accomplishes nothing.

6. Wait for help to arrive. Events occur whether the PCs wait for them or not.
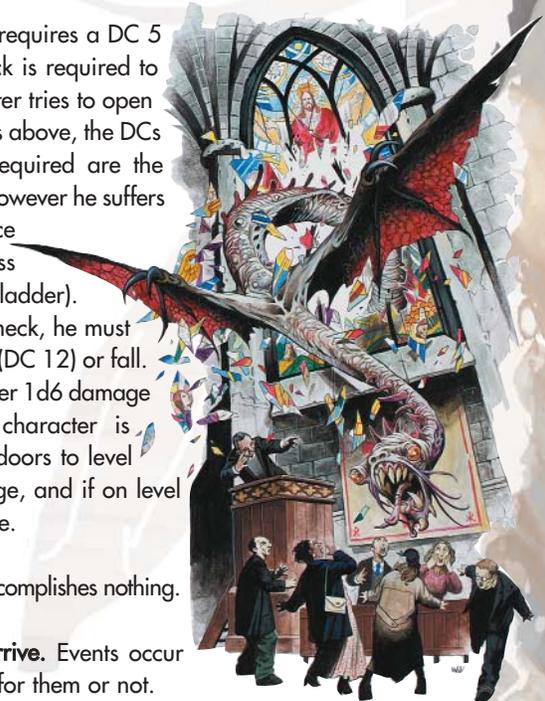
EVENTS

About a minute after the elevator stops, the emergency batteries kick in (this is a little slow, showing that something is definitely amiss to anyone making a Knowledge (Engineering) or (Electronics) check with a DC of 15). This gives the interior of the elevator a very dim, pale blue illumination.

About two minutes later, there is a loud metallic banging sound from outside the elevator for about 10 seconds. The shan-controlled humans are determining exactly where the elevator is now that it is stopped.

A minute later, the elevator emergency phone buzzes. If a character picks it up, she hears a strange, intermittent buzzing/droning sound and a faraway, coarsely whispered voice say "hungry…" and then just more buzzing and some clicks.

About five minutes later, if the PCs have forced open the doors, they close. Anyone in the doorway must make a Reflex saving throw (DC 18). Failure means that the character is caught in the doors. The characters feel a powerful lurch and a drop. All of them must attempt Reflex saving throws (DC 13). Failure means that a character bumps her head or otherwise tumbles because of the drop, suffering 1d3 points of damage. Anyone caught in the doors suffers 6d6 damage (no saving throw)—and thus are almost certainly very messily killed. Anyone seeing the poor character trapped in the doors as the elevator slides quickly down the shaft must make a Sanity check (1/1d3). The elevator now rests at the bottom level of the parking garage.

After thirty seconds more, the emergency phone buzzes again. On the other end, amid the intermittent droning noises, a voice says "welcome…"

Two minutes later, the PCs can make listen checks (DC 10). Those that succeed hear something moving around on top of the elevator.

About ten seconds later, the PCs that made their listen checks hear something rattling the emergency hatch. Then, after a moment, they hear nothing. A shan-controlled human attempts to get in, but is thwarted by the lock. He climbs back up the ladder in the shaft.

Three minutes later, the elevator doors open. The insects from Shaggai hope to draw out the characters to invoke still more fear to feed upon and then to capture them and scan them with their machine.

EXPLORING THE PARKING GARAGE— LEVELS 1 TO 4

If the PCs make it into any of the levels of the parking garage other than level 5, they are faced with wandering around the garage in the utter darkness. The GM should take this very slowly. The PCs, as they move around, bump into cars and walls. If they are not on level 1, the PCs can take a few minutes (assuming they keep their heads about them), however, make a successful DC 15 Search check, and find the door to the stairwell and get up to the first level.

Once on the first level, the PCs can see a little bit from the high-placed grating-covered windows and they can hear distant sounds of traffic. This is when they are attacked by 2 shan-controlled workers that run up from behind wielding heavy tools as weapons.

> You hear footsteps from behind you. In the very dim light, you can see two men dressed in dirty, torn coveralls approaching quickly. One carries a wrench and the other a crowbar. Both drool and gibber incoherently and one suddenly shouts "motherhive painstun feedmind!" He raises his crowbar and opens his mouth wide, from which comes an intermittent droning and clicking sound.

The workers attack with intent to subdue with their crude but dangerous weapons. If they defeat the PCs, the poor characters are dragged down to level 5. If the PCs knock the workers unconscious, they can attempt to run away, but just as they escape, the shan machine is fully activated and the scan begins.

If the PCs kill one of the workers, the shan within him crawls incorporeally out of his head and attacks, hoping to meld with a PC's mind, rising up from the worker's face like an insectoid ghost. Seeing this forces a Sanity check (0/1d6).

EXPLORING THE PARKING GARAGE—LEVEL 5

If the PCs enter level 5, either after the elevator drops and the doors open, or after they are brought there, captured on one of the above levels, they can feel some sort of strange energy that makes their hair stand on end on this level. There is a dim light here, and a door to the elevator maintenance room as well as a door to the stairwell that is locked with a chain and padlock (the lock can be opened with a DC 25 check, otherwise, the door can be forced open with a DC 30 Strength check). A shan-controlled worker is in the elevator maintenance room and attacks anyone that comes in. Besides the elevator-related machinery, this room contains the massive electrical box that controls all the lights and other circuits in the parking garage (all are currently powered down), the emergency generator (currently active), and a phone.

If the PCs knock the worker unconscious, they can either try to re-activate the elevator with a Knowledge (Engineering) or Knowledge (Electricity) DC 18 check. Or they can call for help on the phone. Either way, the shan activate their machine before the PCs get fully away. The scan begins.

If the PCs kill the worker, the shan within him crawls incorporeally out of his head and attacks, hoping to meld with a PC's mind. Seeing this forces a Sanity check (0/1d6).

There are also two shan-controlled workers waiting in the shadows of the parking garage, not far from the machine itself. They attack as described in the section above.

The dim light comes from the alien machine, a 6-foot tall pyramid of gray metal with metal tentacle-like controls and strange electrical flares all around it. If PCs were captured, this is where they are brought. When the PCs arrive here, either way, the scan begins.

THE SCAN

At some point, toward the end of the adventure, the workers activate the shan mind device. They hope to, eventually, perfect the machine to sense and direct minds. For now, all it does is produce a powerful mental scan of any nearby non-controlled humans (most likely, just the PCs). During the scan, the machine stores the mental patterns of the PCs. More immediately, however, the scan joins the minds of all it affects for one round. During that time, they trade thoughts and even a few memories. At this point, it is up to the players to tell each other the memories from their characters that the others experience. The exchange of memories, emotions and thoughts should join the PCs together in a bond that few people—let alone perfect strangers—ever experience.

Those affected should then make a Will saving throw (DC 14). Those that fail are stunned for 1d2 rounds. Those that succeed can act normally. The shan-controlled workers are automatically stunned for three rounds. This is an opportune time for the PCs to attempt to escape up to garage level one and out.

THE ALIEN FOES

These are the statistics for the insects from Shaggai and those that they possess.

Shan-controlled worker, Male, 1st level: HD 1d6+2; hp 6; Init +1; Spd 30 ft.; AC 11; Atk +1 melee or +2 ranged; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +0; Str 11, Dex 12, Con 15, Int 13, Wis 12, Cha 8.

Skills and Feats: Bluff +3, Gather Information +4, Hide +5, Knowledge (Engineering) +10, Listen +7, Move Silently +4, Search +3, Spot +7; Alertness, Skill Focus (Knowledge (Engineering)).

Possessions: Crowbar or heavy wrench (1d6 damage)

Insect From Shaggai: Diminutive Aberration; HD 1d8; hp 4; Init +6 (Dex); Speed 5 ft., fly 30 ft. (perfect); Armor Class 23 (+4 size, +6 Dex +3, Deflection); Atk: +10 ranged (1d2+ pain, 1 nervewhip); Face/Reach 1/2 ft. by 1/2 ft./0 ft.; SA Meld, Pain: nervewhip stuns victims for 1d4 rounds ; SQ Incorporeal, darkvision 60 ft.; SV Fort +0, Ref +8, Will +6; Str --, Dex 22, Con 11, Int 17, Wis 18, Cha 17.

Skills and Feats: Cthulhu Mythos +7, Hide +18, Knowledge (occult) +7, Listen +8, Open Lock +10, Search +5, Spot +8; Dodge, Expertise, Lightning Reflexes

Meld: If a victim is stunned by the nervewhip for 4 full rounds, the shan flies incorporeally into the victim's mind and begins to insert sanity-destroying images and memories each night (victim loses 1d4 Sanity per night)

Incorporeal: An incorporeal creature can be harmed only by other incorporeal creatures, +1 or better magic weapons, spells, spell-like abilities, or supernatural abilities. It is immune to all nonmagical attack forms. When hit by spells or magic weapons, it has a 50% chance to ignore any damage from a corporeal source. Force effect spells affect it normally.

An incorporeal creature can pass through solid objects at will. Its attack passes through (ignores) natural armor, armor, and shields, although deflection bonuses (and force effects) work normally against it. An incorporeal creature moves silently and cannot be heard with Listen checks if it doesn't wish to be heard.

THE FUTURE…

If the PCs escape, they are safe for the moment. If they attempt to bring back authorities, any dead or unconscious workers remain (with no shan) and the machine is gone.

The PCs have experienced something horrific together—and, with the mentally-joining scan, something unique and strange. This can easily be used as an excuse for the characters sticking together and investigating more into strange events—possibly more into the activities of the insects from Shaggai.

However, the shan now have the mental patterns of the PCs stored in their machine. They use this information later to track them by their mental patterns in an attempt to meld with them and study them further.

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Monte Cook is the co-designer of the d20 system, 3rd Edition D&D, and the lead designer of d20 Call of Cthulhu. He publishes d20 material under his own imprint, Malhavoc Press. Look for Malhavoc products at your local game store, and for more information go to www.montecook.com.