

INDIGO: After the End of the World

A NEW ORGANISATION FOR CTHULHU



INDIGO: AFTER THE END OF THE WORLD

A suggestion for a new organisation for Call of Cthulhu 7th Edition

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INTRODUCTION

Quantum Leap – Sam: "It all started when a time travel experiment I was conducting went... a little ka-ka. Anyway, here I am, bouncing around in time, putting things right which once went wrong; a sort of time travelling Lone Ranger."

For Call of Cthulhu, there are lots of campaigns, adventures and source books are set across the whole span of time but you can't easily carry a character from one campaign to another.

These horror adventures are some of the best (possibly just 'the best') campaigns and scenarios available for any game but to move from one campaign to another, to play in different time-periods and stories, from the Greek and Roman eras through the early 20th Century and into the near future, you need to make a new character each time.

What if there was a unifying story arc that would let a Referee put continuing characters into *any* campaign?

Referees, have you had players at a loss as to why their character would continue to investigate an ongoing mystery because it wouldn't be 'in character'? What if they had an over-arching reason? What if they started the game knowing that there was more at stake than everyone else realised? And how do you drop new characters into an ongoing story with the surviving original adventurers without causing a break in the willing suspension of disbelief that players strive to maintain?

What if one meta-plot could resolve all those issues and let you use the many dollars worth of scenarios that you have sitting on your shelves in a single, huge campaign?

Welcome to the Future! It's not a nice place to visit and you certainly wouldn't want to live

there. If you are familiar with the Terminator series of movies, Twelve Monkeys or with the Marvel X-men Days of Future Past storylines, the seed idea will quickly become familiar. At some time in the past, a group of adventurers failed to stop the some terrible catastrophe and the world was destroyed. A group of scientists who survived the apocalypse are using time travel to send the minds of adventurers back into the bodies of persons in the past to reverse the events that led to the end of the world. Unfortunately, history is fluid.

Of course, being an ongoing game, as one campaign is resolved and history is re-written, it only reveals other cataclysmic events that also lead to the end of the world, like peeling back the layers of an onion only to reveal deeper layers of rot. The adventurers, the surviving adventurers that is, will need to dive deeper and deeper into time in order to finally save the world.

In order to explain the idea in the simplest fashion, the background is written up as a brief story but don't worry, I haven't tried to obfuscate; the whole tale is only just over one page in length.

In the story, I have also included hints at a background meta-plot involving the Great Race of Yith. Don't feel beholden to using it; I have the time-travel technology provided by one of the Great Race but in your games it could just as easily be a technology invented by the First Scientist or kept as a mystery for now.

CHAPTER ONE: SAVING THE WORLD

First Scientist Denise Davis turned back from the scene on the 6 foot square bunker view screen, where waves lapped around the ruins of an ancient city. The room was dark, lit only by the baleful light from the picture behind her and the glow from a small computer set into her large wooden desk. A group of mismatched personalities sat on folding chairs watching her closely.

"Thank you for volunteering. You all appreciate the risks? If you succeed, the world outside the window will never have existed. You will never have existed. If you fail, madness and death will be your reward."

The group somberly watched the First Scientist as she sat at her desk and shuffled the papers that lay there.

"The time travel technology is new but I believe it to be our last, best hope. No, it is our only hope. Do you have any questions?"

Professor Davis fielded the simpler questions but then one of them made her pause before she answered.

"Because of the way rewriting time works, the mathematics suggests we might have all been around this loop many times. I might have sat here a thousand times, explaining this to a thousand versions of you. None of us can know for sure. We are in a place where science can't guide us any longer; it can only tell us what we don't know. Schrödinger would be so pleased. Only our faith in humanity's will to survive can carry us past this moment in history."

The expressions on the faces of group didn't inspire confidence in the First Scientist but she

watched them in silence until they had talked themselves out.

"I'm sorry that this might seem a strange notion but time is against us. It is time for you to prepare for your journey. I will only wish you luck and hope that the next time we meet, the view will be different."

The First Scientist dismissed the group, leaving her assistants to guide them to the preparation rooms.

LAYERS OF THE ONION

After the group had left her, First Science Davis sat quietly in the dim lit room. The silence in the room was broken a few moments later by the view screen sliding up into the ceiling. In the revealed space, there stood a tall iridescent cone, obviously alive, surmounted by four tentacles. One of them gripped a small data pad and an automated voice rippled out from the device.

"You lied to them."

"And you are lying to your whole race."

"My race, as a whole, does not give credence to my theory."

"That you are descended from humanity."

"Do not be insulting. We are as far removed from you as you are from an amoeba. There are a hundred million years between us. We have recreated ourselves before and when my race faces the destruction of our civilisation in the distant past, we will recreate ourselves again in the far future. But without humanity, we will never evolve into what we are."

"But you came to me."

"I believe Humanity must survive this."

"And so I send one group after another into the past and no-one remembers the changes, except you and me and those agents that are in the past prior to or at the point of change."

"And you only remember because I choose that you should. Only I protect you from the changes in your personal history."

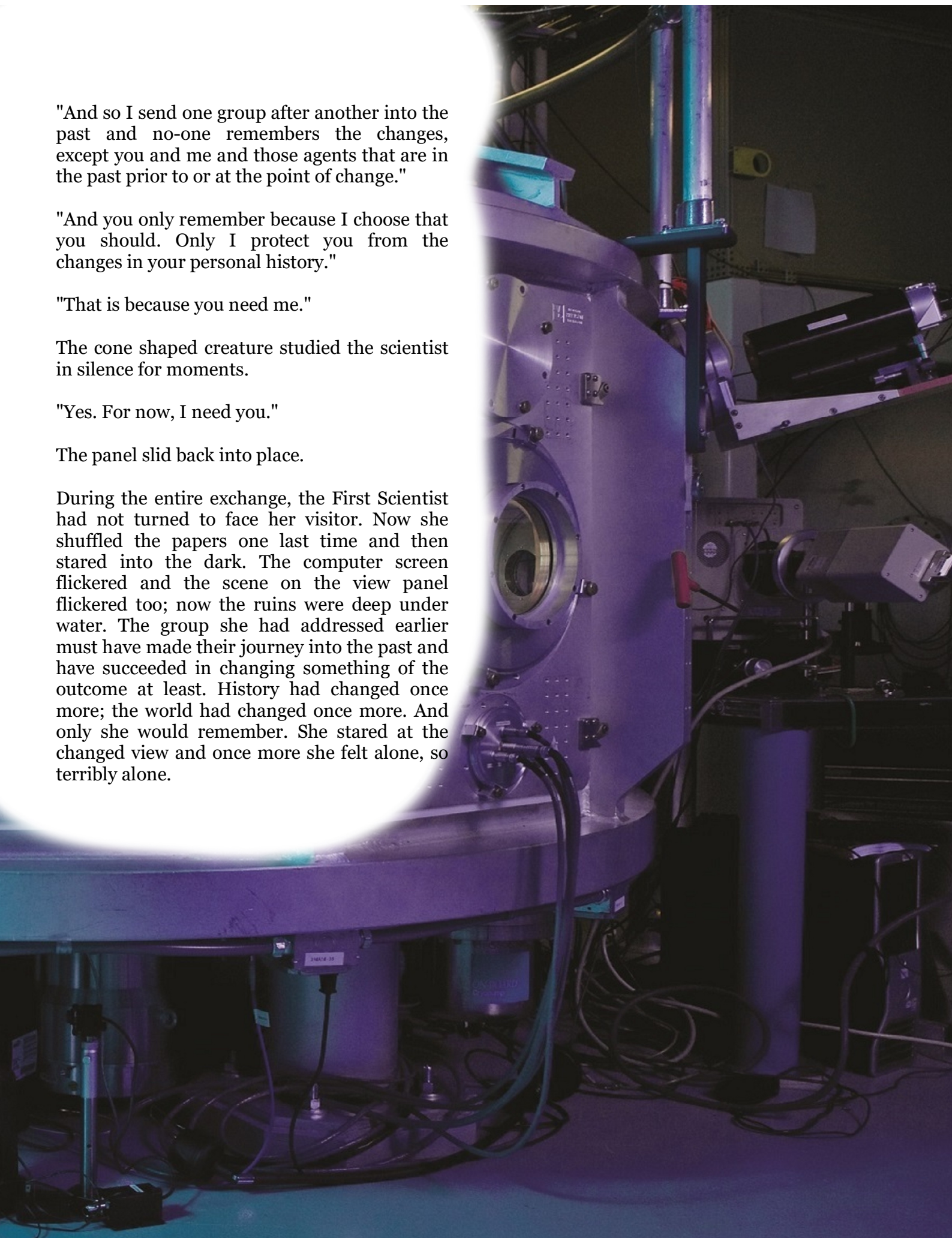
"That is because you need me."

The cone shaped creature studied the scientist in silence for moments.

"Yes. For now, I need you."

The panel slid back into place.

During the entire exchange, the First Scientist had not turned to face her visitor. Now she shuffled the papers one last time and then stared into the dark. The computer screen flickered and the scene on the view panel flickered too; now the ruins were deep under water. The group she had addressed earlier must have made their journey into the past and have succeeded in changing something of the outcome at least. History had changed once more; the world had changed once more. And only she would remember. She stared at the changed view and once more she felt alone, so terribly alone.



CHAPTER TWO: INDIGO

INTERCHRONAL DISRUPTION GOVERNMENT

The characters are agents of the INter-chronal Disruption Government. The official full title for the organisation is The Centre for the Government and Control of Inter-chronal Disruptions but that didn't prove to be pithy enough to catch the imagination of the public. The badges of authority worn by the operatives and scientific elite still read CGCID but everyone else knows them as INDIGO.

THE WORLD OF INDIGO

The entire survivors of the human race are either scavenging a life in the remaining post-apocalyptic wildernesses or surviving deep underground in one of the many remaining bunker complexes. The bunkers aren't sealed from the outside world but trade between the strictly hierarchical bunker communities and 'freedom before anything' groups that roam the outside world is a scarce thing at best. However, what contact there is does allow INDIGO recruit to recruit the best people from both communities for its peculiar missions.

There is no open hostility between the two types of communities but there is also little mutual understanding. Each bunker is linked to every other one by both secure communications links and by the deep underground train networks which were originally built to survive surface nuclear blasts. These connections contribute to the communal sense that everyone belongs to the same worldwide family and that humanity must be united as one global community or individually each bunker will finally be destroyed. If the bunker-dwellers were to have

a motto, it would be "United, we stand. Divided, we fall."

Each tribe or family group that scratches a living from the wilderness has learned through bitter experience that other tribes and groups will kill and steal to survive, killing and stealing even from other tribes. For these groups, family and tribe is everything. In the end, if another tribe is destroyed, that is one less threat to your own family and there is that much more scavenged loot to go around. Above everything else though, and possibly even above survival, the tribes value their freedom from the bunkers. In the bunkers, everyone must follow the rules of the bunker; in the wilderness, a tribe need follow no laws except its own. If the tribal communities were to have one motto, they would never be able to reach a lasting agreement amongst themselves but it would probably be "Survival of the Fittest" or "Give me freedom or give me death."

Both groups agree however, or most of the tribes eking a living in the areas around the bunkers agree, that the world is a terrible place and any change would be a change for the better and so INDIGO often has more volunteers than it needs, allowing it to pick and choose the best from both types of communities.

LIFE IN INDIGO

When a volunteer joins INDIGO, they know that for most of them they will not pass INDIGO's strict testing. For those that do, they know they will be unlikely to survive and those that do survive may never be able to return home again. If INDIGO succeeds, finally succeeds, the world will have changed and every place, every person they knew, even their family, will be changed and will not know them. Indeed, they might not even have been born into whatever changed world they create but all of the volunteers accept that the change will be for the better, even if it is a world in which they themselves no longer have a place.

Once accepted into INDIGO, candidates are screened for mental strength, as agents will only have themselves and their team mates to rely upon and insanity, sense of loss, depression and megalomania are all very real dangers and all will prevent a team succeeding at their assigned goals.

The records maintained in the bunkers from before Point Zero, the theorised start date of the apocalyptic events that destroyed the world, are excellent and allow INDIGO to brief its away teams thoroughly. Back in the past, each team member will have to be able to pass flawlessly any investigations into their assumed backgrounds and cover. Some of the 3C Techniques (read 'magic') can carry an agent past simple checks or suspicions but if a candidate is supposed to be a doctor in their chosen period, they must both be able to carry out such tasks as a genuine doctor might be asked to perform but also not reveal or be seen to be using any skills that would be anachronistic in the time period they are sent to.

There is a lot to study before a candidate is passed as fit for a mission and in the later stages of their training, they are expected to remain in character at all times. Latin, Ancient Greek, Arabic and US English are all heard in the corridors of the INDIGO training facilities and failing to remain in character can be sufficient grounds alone for dismissal from the project.

Once a candidate has chosen a time period to specialise in, or had one chosen for them based on their aptitudes, they are expected to immerse themselves in everything that is known about that period. For an extended period, possibly for the rest of their lives, they will be expected to be able to pass themselves off as their chosen native of that period.

LEAVING INDIGO

Once a candidate has learned thoroughly whatever additional survival skills have been

deemed necessary, be they firearms, kung fu, demolitions, deception skills or 3C Techniques, a final team is chosen from all the remaining volunteers and made ready to make 'The Swap'.

This is always a terrifying moment. If the campaign that you intend to run is of the apocalyptic, end of the world, variety, then completing the campaign successfully will prevent that cataclysm and throw history down a different path. The original end of the world scenario will never have happened and to INDIGO, and to the team that is preparing to go through the device, the next attempt will still be the first time it has ever been attempted. The INDIGO project will still be a new idea and the candidates will be the first team to experience it.

This might be a hard concept to get your head around. The First Scientist knows that Point Zero has changed many times, the cause of the apocalypse has changed many times and many teams have been sent into the past to prevent the destruction of the world but no one else knows! To the team and to the scientists of INDIGO, this is the first time it has been done.

Later in their own timeline, the scientists may have to choose new candidates from the remaining volunteers to send into the past to replace lost or killed team members or to replace a team that failed its mission but as soon as a team succeeds in the past, the timeline will reset itself and it will be a new INDIGO and a new coterie of scientists that are formed around and by the First Scientist and a new group of volunteers that will be chosen to take that first journey into the past to confront a new, and different, apocalyptic scenario.

"It's the future, Jim, but not as we know it".

The Swap itself involves the candidate's mind being projected back in time into the body of the chosen 'target'. Their mind will exchange places with that of the target. The initial intention is that once it has been ascertained that the transfer has been successful, the body

of the candidate, now holding the mind of the target, will be kept restrained, and mildly sedated, for the duration of the mission. The target cannot be kept fully sedated as then, when a candidate returns they would be trapped in an unconscious body and unable to inform the scientists that they have completed their mission.

RETURNING TO INDIGO

If the adventures that you intend to run have a lesser impact on world history than a cataclysm, then the candidates will return from the past as soon as the historical records within INDIGO that initiated their mission cease to exist, because time has changed.

The players can then repeat the Swap with a different target at a different point in time and attempt a different scenario.

The whole idea is to give a conceit to allow the players to play the same characters (if they choose) in many different scenarios in many different time periods.

If the scenarios you run are apocalyptic and the players succeed, they will return to the future in their own bodies but despite what they have experienced, as far as the scientists of INDIGO know, they haven't yet made the Swap. They cannot have done so because the records that would have sent them to the first campaign no longer exist, because that apocalypse was prevented, and they are now being prepared by the scientists to face a wholly different scenario.

Only the First Scientist would believe them and even then their knowledge is redundant to her as it is knowledge of something that now never happened.



CHAPTER THREE: CHARACTER CREATION

CHARACTERISTICS

Rolling characteristics is exactly as normal but bear in mind two things:

One: they will inhabit the body of a person in the past. That means that every time they swap into a new body, they will have to re-roll all the physical characteristics (strength, constitution, size, dexterity and appearance) and apply any necessary changes to the character sheet (e.g. dodge skill, hit points, etc.)

Two: they do not get access to the knowledge and skills of their chosen host, so they will keep their mental characteristics between swaps (intelligence, power and education) and any derived values based on them, such as Sanity.

SKILLS

The candidates for INDIGO all know where and when they will be travelling to so INDIGO will make sure that they can pass for their chosen 'target', at least amongst people that are not intimate relations but also they will receive other training that may not be usual for the person they are pretending to be. For example, they may receive significant training in firearms, which might be out of character for an antiquarian in New York of the 1920s.

This means that the players can create a mix of skills to suit themselves, or at least to suit their perceived needs when acting as agents of INDIGO in the past.

OCCUPATIONS

The players will choose an occupation suitable for their target of choice. The only difference is that the choice will be dictated by what INDIGO knows about the target rather than the skills actually possessed by the target.

Credit Rating, starting funds etc. are all based on the occupation of the target, of course, but contacts and such are all still available to the player when in the past, through studying the notebooks, diaries and journals of the target.

If the same characters swap with a different target in the future, they of course keep their skills as initially learned to impersonate the first target. They don't forget what they have learned and suddenly learn a new set of skills.

In effect, all the physical details change between swaps, all the mental details are carried across between swaps.

3C TECHNIQUES

Lastly there is the matter of magic. Here the referee has a choice and it potentially has the most impact on your game. The world of INDIGO has been destroyed by creatures capable of using, and of being affected by, magic so it is not an unknown quantity.

The referee can either decide that magic is abhorrent to INDIGO and so there is no access to it or that magic, and its inherent dangers, is known to INDIGO and is available to players.

In my own version of INDIGO, the scientists are aware of 'magic' but refer to it as '3C techniques' from the definition of magic as 'Consciously Creating Circumstances'. Magic is not available as a skill for starting characters but players are able to learn magic in the past and continue to use it throughout their careers. Of course, just learning magic can rapidly shorten those careers.