



Professor Webb had been engaged, forty-eight years before, in a tour of Greenland and Iceland in search of some Runic inscriptions which he failed to unearth; and whilst high up on the West Greenland coast had encountered a singular tribe or cult of degenerate Esquimaux whose religion, a curious form of devil-worship, chilled him with its deliberate bloodthirstiness and repulsiveness. It was a faith of which other Esquimaux knew little, and which they mentioned only with shudders, saying that it had come down from horribly ancient aeons before ever the world was made. Besides nameless rites and human sacrifices there were certain queer hereditary rituals addressed to a supreme elder devil or *tornasuk*; and of this Professor Webb had taken a careful phonetic copy from an aged *angedkok* or wizard-priest, expressing the sounds in Roman letters as best he knew how. But just now of prime significance was the fetish which this cult had cherished, and around which they danced when the aurora leaped high over the ice cliffs. It was, the professor stated, a very crude bas-relief of stone, comprising a hideous picture and some cryptic writing. And so far as he could tell, it was a rough parallel in all essential features of the bestial thing now lying before the meeting.

—H.P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”

History

A tupilak is a fetish made by the Inuit shamans of Greenland for a variety of purposes, most frequently to enact supernatural vengeance upon an enemy. Meaning “ancestral spirit,” a tupilak is created during a private ritual that may take several days, and is hand-crafted from a variety of organic substances—human bones, walrus tusks, caribou antlers, the tooth of a sperm whale or narwhal, possibly even wood. As part of this ritual, the shaman—or *angedkok*—dons his anorak backwards, with his face covered by the hood. It is customary to use his own body fluids for the tupilak, such as blood and semen, and sexual relations with the bones and other materials are believed to bind them closer to his will. Other body parts are slowly grafted onto the tupilak, usually hair, sinew, and nails, sometimes taken from the bodies of dead children. Once the tupilak is ready, the shaman invests it with a spirit by chanting the proper magical formulae. It is then released into the sea to begin its quest for vengeance.

Dangers

The creation of a tupilak is intensely private and often dangerous. If the subject of the shaman's fury becomes aware of the tupilak, he may turn it upon the angakok who created it. In some traditions, the only way to negate its usurped power is through an act of public confession—the angakok must admit that he created a tupilak. This in itself has negative consequences, as it diffuses the returning spirit into the body of the community.

Forms

The magical form of the tupilak, and the powers it might have over its target, vary from culture to culture. It may be a ghost, the spirit of an animal, a doppelgänger of the angakok himself, or an invisible monster formed from the body parts of different animals. Of course, the “degenerate Esquimaux” who produced the Cthulhu tupilak have their own blasphemous beliefs, but sadly Professor Webb is still translating that particular bas-relief.



Gaming Systems

Finding a Tupilak

If the Cthulhu tupilak is found, it exerts an immediate attraction upon its discoverer. The first investigator to catch sight of the tupilak must make a Sanity roll. If she is successful, she may tear herself away from the sight. Failing the roll does not bring a loss of points, but the unfortunate character is suddenly gripped by the need to possess the tupilak. Resisting the urge to take the tupilak forces another Sanity roll. If the investigator is successful, she loses 1 Sanity point and may resist. If she fails, she does not lose any Sanity, but must take possession of the tupilak.

Touching the ivory tusk costs 1/1D3 Sanity points, and triggers a dreamy flash of sensations and images in the investigator's mind. The artifact seems to *want* a new owner! In fact, it appears *warm* to the touch, almost *alive*, like it's made from some amalgam of morse, bone, flesh, teeth, and even more unspeakable things, all fused together into one, yes, *and isn't the aurora so beautiful tonight...*

Keeping the Tupilak

If the investigator decides to keep the tupilak, it has three unusual effects.

Power 1: Esoteric Apophenia

First, the tupilak gradually produces a sense of *connectivity* in the investigator's imagination. As the character proceeds through the campaign or various gaming sessions, he begins to perceive linkages that may or may not be there. The howling wind is muttering in a dead language, the aurora is painting intelligible signs in the sky, and even the squawking of albino penguins begins to make sense.

Gameplay Note: This power is entirely at the discretion and whim of the Keeper! The Keeper may grant the affected character some genuine insights into esoteric lore, or she can cheerfully lead him down the path of delusion, feeding him spurious or unreliable information at her whim. The Keeper may even allow the investigator to trade Sanity points for scraps of potentially nonsensical information: "So, Clark, as you lie in the tent listening to the howling of your sled-dogs, you begin to hear a dialogue of sorts, like they are...communicating? With the wind? You feel that by allowing yourself to slip into a less lucid frame of mind—you know, a bottle of Canadian rye and a Sanity point?—you could even *understand what they are saying...*"

Power 2: Sympathetic Embrace

As the tupilak grows more *fond* of its possessor, it begins to structure reality in a way that binds it even closer. Once per gaming session, the owner of the tupilak may trade 1 Sanity point to push a failed roll with no additional consequences. (Sanity rolls are exempt from this.)

Gameplay Note: MacReady blows an important **Pilot (Aircraft)** roll in the middle of an iceblink. Did that really happen? No, of course not! He strokes the tupilak warmly and rolls again. Sure, he just lost 1 points of Sanity, but that was because of that terrible "vision" he just had of crashing into the nunatak, right?

Power 3: Wrecker of Vengeance

Once the possessor of the tupilak has lost 5 Sanity points using its powers, he begins to feel bonded to it. Yes, in fact, the only thing it's missing is a part of himself! From now on, every tupilak-related Sanity loss comes with a corresponding loss of self—literally. Maybe some hair and nail clippings, a chunk of flesh, a broken tooth; all bound to the tusk with blood, saliva, menses, or semen. The next time the owner loses 10% of his Sanity for any reason, he begins to hallucinate that the tupilak is alive, that its spirit is helping to avenge him. From this point on, he cannot be without it. During any combat scenario, he may spend 1 Sanity point to earn a +1D10 bonus die for any single attack. In his mind, he sees the spirit of the tupilak coming to his aid, steeling the dagger in his hand or guiding his bullets to their mark. This spirit may take on many forms, but is usually cobbled together from human body parts and animal remains, like a crazy taxidermist's puppet with a human head. Invisible to anyone but the possessor of the tupilak, the monster's head is invariably that of its owner.

Losing the Tupilak

Once the owner of the tupilak has lost 10 Sanity points to it, he is bound to the tusk, and will not part with it willingly. Any attempt to remove the tupilak by force is met with violence, and losing it inflicts an immediate 1D6 Sanity loss. However, if the possessor loses all of his Sanity—through the tupilak or not—the time has come to release its spirit into the world. After some form of disgusting ritual best left unprinted, he lowers the tupilak into the sea, freeing it to wreak vengeance on the madman's enemies. Or, perhaps it's just washed out to sea until the next poor devil finds it?

A Tupilak of Your Own

The above guidelines are for finding and possessing a Cthulhu tupilak. Less stable Keepers and investigators are welcome to explore the *creation* of a personal tupilak, one designed to fulfill its actual shamanic purpose. Of course, such investigators should probably be Inuit shamans, or at least have high ratings in Anthropology and Occult. Otherwise, they must be crazy enough to enact a powerful and dangerous shamanistic ritual with no appropriate cultural background and little magical training. And certainly *that* would never happen in a *Call of Cthulhu* game!

Sources and Notes

The Cthulhu tupilak was inspired by H.P. Lovecraft and the [HPL Historical Society](#). The actual [Cthulhu tupilak prop](#) shown above may be purchased from the HPLHS site. I introduced this item into my [Beyond the Mountains of Madness](#) campaign, but it can certainly be used in a wide variety of delightful scenarios. If you are running *Beyond the Mountains of Madness*, I invite you to visit my [expansion of the S.S. Wallaroo](#) from Chapter 6. My alternate version includes finding the Cthulhu tupilak, and outlines a few campaign-specific powers it may exert over investigators.

An interesting use of a non-Mythos tupilak was explored in the second season of *Fortitude*, a delightfully weird show that comes across like a British *X-Files* set in a Norwegian *Twin Peaks* located near the Mountains of Madness. The plot makes little sense, but I recommend it anyway, and the death count is pleasantly high.

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Online Version: <http://www.shipwrecklibrary.com/call-of-cthulhu/tupilak>