

HIDEOUS CREATURES

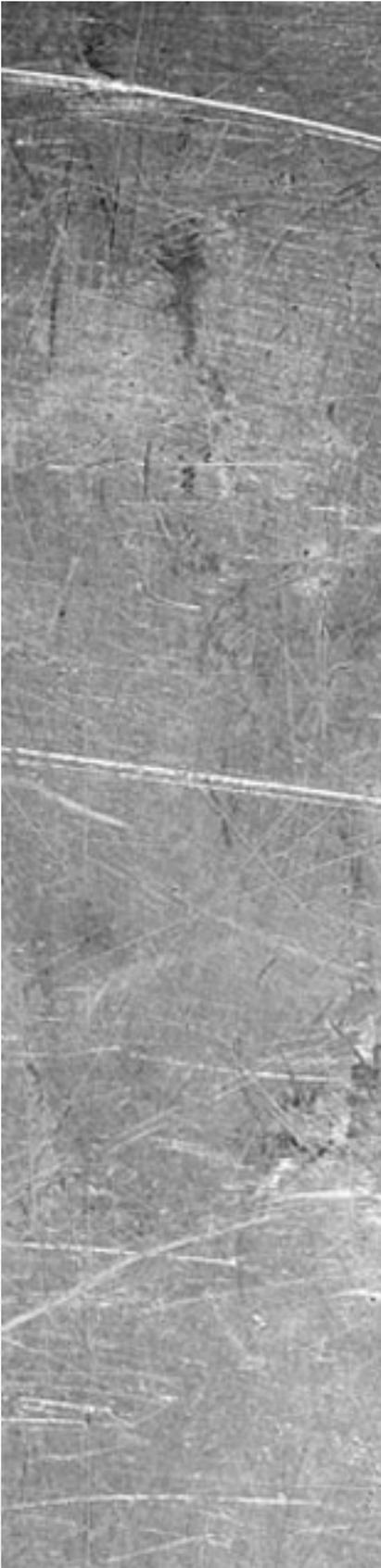
DARK YOUNG

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TRAIL OF CTHULHU



Pelgrane Press



DARK YOUNG OF SHUB-NIGGURATH

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KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

Hideous Creatures: DarkYoung of Shub-Niggurath is part of the Ken Writes about Stuff subscription series, featuring new and original Hite goodness every month for twelve months. A subscription costs \$24.95 and as well as giving you a generous 30% discount on the individual article price of \$2.95, we'll be offering an exclusive extra later in the year to all subscribers.

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Hideous Creatures: Introduction

Lovecraft created his various “shadowy congeners” because the stories of vampires, werewolves, and even ghosts had become too familiar and too formulaic to evoke true horror. Almost a century after he wrote, his own monstrous races have likewise begun to seem like comfortable story furniture rather than unnerving signals that the world is horrible and wrong.

Our goal with this series is to present a comprehensive look at Lovecraft’s hideous creatures, from as many angles as we can. Our goal is contradiction, surprise, and most especially the uncanny: the recognition of something familiar as something weird. As in the “Gods and Titans” section of the *Trail of Cthulhu* core book, this series deliberately contradicts itself, blurring boundaries and erasing certainties in the name of the uncanny. In your campaign, these variant truths might be misunderstandings, legends, heresies, or deliberate lies spread by the creatures to lull their foes into a false sense of familiarity.

Change anything and everything in these pages, most especially the ability scores. If you need a terrifying assassin, a brief but survivable fright, or a sanity-shattering horror, just add or subtract points at will.

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Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath

“SOMETHING BLACK IN THE ROAD, SOMETHING THAT WASN'T A TREE. SOMETHING BIG AND BLACK AND ROPY, JUST SQUATTING THERE, WAITING, WITH ROPY ARMS SQUIRMING AND REACHING. . . IT CAME CRAWLING UP THE HILLSIDE. . . AND IT WAS THE BLACK THING OF MY DREAMS - THAT BLACK, ROPY, SLIME JELLY TREE-THING OUT OF THE WOODS. IT CRAWLED UP AND IT FLOWED UP ON ITS HOOFS AND MOUTHS AND SNAKY ARMS.”

- ROBERT BLOCH, “NOTEBOOK FOUND IN A DESERTED HOUSE”

Dark young are enormous writhing masses, formed out of ropy black tentacles. Here and there over their surface, ragged, puckered mouths drool green sap. Beneath them, tentacles end in black hooves. Dark young roughly resemble trees in silhouette -- the trunks being the short legs, and the tops of the trees represented by the ropy, branching bodies – but smell like open graves.

They are traditionally depicted as treelike, standing between 12 and 20 feet tall, covered in black wool or dark leaves, the tentacle-ends extended like clouds of branches. But this DarkYoung description comes from traditions familiar with the temperate forests of Europe and North America. Shub-Niggurath perverts and inflames all organic life on Earth, so her Young might take their keynotes from other ecological niches:

- Taiga or northern pine forest (tall, spindly, multiple long mantis-like limbs, bristles)
- Desert (cactus-bodied, bloated with algal water, spines, eyes like bright flowers, twisted Joshua-tree tentacles)
- Jungle (emerald green fronds, orchid-like bulbs and glands, endless liana vines or moss, ridged palm-like tentacle husk)
- Savannah (thick woody body, grassy fur, thorny tentacles)
- Mediterranean (gnarled body,

interlaced tentacle branches, sickly-savory smell, tufts of reed hair)

- Map the Dark Young onto specific iconic trees: sequoias, banyans, silk-cotton trees, baobabs, eucalyptus, etc.

This presumes that the Keeper wants to stick with the animate plant-Druid feel evoked by Robert Bloch in his story. In Ramsey Campbell’s “Moon-Lens,” Shub-Niggurath (or her immense Young or avatar) is described as a thick white pillar held up by three many-jointed, bony leg-spines. Its head is coiled, grayish-translucent intestine spangled with yellow bestial eyes and mounting an immense toothed beak. In short, any sort of horrific animal or vegetable blend works for Shub-Niggurath’s Young.

Dark Young act as proxies for Shub-Niggurath in accepting sacrifices, accepting worship from cultists, devouring non-cultists, and in spreading their mother’s faith across the world. They appear where she is (or was) worshipped. In the few Dark Young centered stories, they seldom have their own agenda besides manifesting to mate with or devour some luckless bystander.

Dark Young

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 16, Scuffling 26

Magic: 8+. Dark Young are pregnant (sometimes literally) with magical force. They know Call Shub-Niggurath, Summon DarkYoung, and one other spell.

Hit Threshold: 3 (large)

Alertness Modifier: +1

Stealth Modifier: +2 in forests or jungles

Weapon: +5 (trampling hooves); +2 (tentacle); -2 (horrible sucking mouth); after a successful tentacle attack, in lieu of doing damage, the dark young may pull her victim inexorably toward a mouth for an automatic blood drain each round thereafter.

Armor: The thick, woody, sap-filled flesh of the DarkYoung means that most firearms do only 1 point of damage (2 if the attacker rolled a 6); shotguns do one-third damage; axes and other chopping weapons do normal damage. Dark Young are immune to fire, blast, acid, electricity, and poison, although the Keeper may decide that some alchemical herbicide (made of something truly awful) could work.

Stability Loss: +2

Multiple Attacks: In its masses of tentacles, a typical Dark Young has four thicker sinuous tentacles with which it attacks. Each of these thicker tentacles can strike out to injure or to grab and capture once per round, conceivably at four different targets. Instead of making a tentacle attack, the Dark Young may trample one victim with its massive hooves, typically hooting and bellowing the while.

Gof’nn Hupadgh

The Goddess (and those of her Young who wield the correct magics) can transform her favored humans into woody-fleshed, horned, satyr-like servants of Shub-Niggurath. Traditionally this involves consuming the favored one whole and later “rebirthing” him as a knurled, hideous gof’nn hupadgh.

For slower transformations, simply drain 1 rating point of Sanity per week (or month) and add it to Athletics, Armor, etc.

Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath

until Sanity reaches 0.

Abilities: Athletics 8, Health 7, Scuffling 10

Hit Threshold: 4

Alertness Modifier: Divide original Sense Trouble rating by 4, dropping fractions.

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: -1 (claw, head-butt, gore); -2 (bite)

Armor: -2 (woody flesh)

Stability Loss: +0, +1 if the gof'nn hupadgh was previously known to the witness.

Regeneration: Refreshes 1 Health per round until dead.

Milk-Spawn

In its raw form, the Milk of Shub-Niggurath (see box, p. 6) can be shaped into a living, bluish-white blob. Indeed, unless tampered with or consumed, it grows into such a blob-spawn on its own.

Abilities: Athletics 4, Health 2, Scuffling 4

Hit Threshold: 4 (small)

Stealth Modifier: +2

Weapon: -1 (smother); only on sleeping humans (Hit Threshold -2), automatic success after first hit; Sense Trouble Difficulty 6 to awaken each round

Special Abilities: It has the Corrupt Fertility, Drain, and Plant Control (only for plants it coats or invades) abilities from the list on pp. 5-6.

Animal Possession: Against alert humans, the Milk-Spawn possesses a bird or animal (flowing into its mouth, anus, or nose) and attacks the victim physically using the host's abilities (Scuffling 4 minimum).

Possible Dark Young Abilities

There's certainly no canonical reason to assume that all of Shub-Niggurath's thousand kids are identical: rather the opposite. Like the shoggoths that Bloch named them, Dark Young embrace the protean, multifarious nature of Lovecraft's terrors—they evoke and underlie not just all malevolent plant life, but horrid animalism as well. In short, add anything creepy from Earth's organic grotesques.

Call Storms: In Bloch's story, either the creature or the Druids in its cult could call

up storms to flood country roads, block escapes, confuse travelers, and so forth. Assign a value to the storm (the Difficulty number for a Piloting test to escape it, or for a Sense Trouble to see anything in it); the Dark Young must spend 1 Magic point per hour (or 1 Health point every 10 minutes) until the total spent equals the storm value.

Corrupt Fertility: Contact with the Dark Young can trigger any number of biological reactions especially including pregnancy, elephantiasis, or the seeding of horrible spores under the skin or inside the body cavity. To resist such horrors, Investigators struck or caressed by a Dark Young make a Health test against Difficulty 4 (6 if the contact is with an orifice or open wound). Extra-awful Dark Young can spend Magic (1 for 1) or Health (2 for 1) to raise that Difficulty.

Drain: Blood sacrificed to the Dark Young (spilled on its altar), or sucked through its mouth after a bite attack, refreshes its Health points. (Blood spilled on its altar can instead refresh its Magic points, if applicable.) Even more deadly Dark Young can drink extra Health into their pool, over their rating.

Entangle: A Dark Young with many tiny vine-like tendrils, or one that can command nearby bracken or lianas, can entangle foes within 10 yards (Close range). Entangled victims lower their Hit Threshold by 2, and can *either* try to pull free (Athletics test against Difficulty 4; Dark Young can spend Athletics to increase that Difficulty) *or* attack the Dark Young.

Hypnosis: Whether by the soothing waving of leaves and branches, the bewitching perfume of orchids or lotuses, or by direct application of the Black Goat's eldritch powers, some Dark Young have the equivalent of the Hypnosis ability (*Trail of Cthulhu*, p. 43) usually at 8+. Dark Young Hypnosis can work on the unwilling (contest of Hypnosis against the Investigator's Stability), and includes simple commands ("open the door"). It is most commonly used to lull the target

into quiescence, allowing the Dark Young to painlessly and beautifully drain or mate with him.

Induce Hallucination: The Dark Young might emit hallucinogenic vapor, breathe psychoactive spores, or simply use fell mesmerism on those it would deceive. The monster spends 2 or more Magic (or Health) and adds its spend to the roll of a die. The total is the Investigator's resistance Difficulty. It's up to the Keeper whether the hallucination is a believable illusion (Sense Trouble test to disbelieve) or simply an immobilizing fugue state (Stability test to throw off). Like entangled foes, hallucinating foes lower their Hit Threshold by 2.

Panic Fear: Or it might just shoot the Investigator full of ergot, howl like a banshee, or otherwise invoke its devil-goat nature to unleash Panic fear. Use the same method as Induce Hallucination, above, to create the Difficulty to resist with Stability.

Plant Control: It might be a tiny bit too *Swamp Thing* for some Keepers, but a Dark Young can potentially make plants in its forest (which presumably have been drinking Dark Young sap up with their groundwater) obey its will. This costs 1 Magic point for an indirect attack (trees fall across the road, moss grows on the wrong side of an oak to divert Outdoorsman abilities), and 2 for a direct attack (trees fall on a foe, branches smite, vines trip and entangle).

Poison: Dark Young sap, bites, slime, etc. can be highly toxic. Any Dark Young attack that breaks the skin (or a covert application of Dark Young gel to an Investigator's food or clothing) triggers a Health test against Difficulty 8 (or worse). In combat, onset is near-immediate (1-3 rounds); in other circumstances, the poison takes effect between 15 minutes and an hour after administration. If the victim successfully resists, he takes +1 damage and becomes Hurt for the rest of the day (-1 damage only if treated immediately with Pharmacy or First Aid). If he fails, he takes the Dark Young's Athletics *rating* as Health damage

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and becomes Hurt, losing 1 Health and 1 Athletics point every 30 minutes until dead or treated in a hospital.

Regeneration: The Dark Young regrows a bit of its infraterrene flesh; it refreshes 1 Health per round until dead.

Regrowth: Unless entirely killed (taken to -12 Health or lower) and every fragment removed from the soil and packed in salt or inside an inorganic container, the Dark Young regrows from a sapling, returning after 10-60 years. For Dark Young less connected to the Earth, once taken to -12 Health, they lose their connection to Shub-Niggurath's vile fecundity: their remains become vulnerable to fire or acid and can be destroyed.

See Through Plants: The Dark Young can perceive anything a plant in its forest is affected by: heat, touches, smells, chemicals, sounds, etc. This raises its Alertness modifier to +3 -- or higher!

Spit Thorns: The Dark Young can spit poison thorns (-2 damage, and Poison as above) out to Near range. More horrible Dark Young can spit out clouds of poison thorns (either attack two foes simultaneously, or lower one foe's Hit Threshold by 1).

Stench: "As a foulness shall ye know them." All unprotected breathers around a Dark Young must make a Difficulty 5 Health test or be Hurt until they return to clean air.

Vanish: The forest of a Dark Young begins to take on its own infradimensional qualities. The Dark Young can pass through thick undergrowth without disturbing it, or melt into and emerge from a thick tree trunk or a completely shadowed copse. In extremis, it can dematerialize itself after entering thick vegetation in its forest. This raises its Stealth modifier in the forest to +4.

Vulnerable: Weaker Dark Young strains might actually take normal damage from fire or herbicide. Mythically vulnerable Dark Young take physical damage only from iron.

Whipping Branches: The Dark Young can hit any foe in Close range with the end of a tentacle or tendril. This whip attack does +0 damage and unlike a normal tentacle attack, cannot be used to set up a blood drain.

VARIATIONS

"TÄ! SHUB-NIGGURATH! THE BLACK GOAT OF THE WOODS WITH A THOUSAND YOUNG!"

- "THE WHISPERER IN DARKNESS"

As with the "Gods and Titans" section in the corebook, this compendium is intentionally self-contradictory. Its facts and theories come from Lovecraft, from later writers, and from the universe of possibilities opened up between them.

- Female Dark Young are more treelike; male Dark Young take after

Shub-Niggurath's male avatar, the Black Goat of the Woods. Some of them take the form of fauns, satyrs, or large black goat-headed men.

- The Dark Young dwell in their swarms in the fungus-litten cavern city of Harag-Kolath, suckling at the teats of Shub-Niggurath until such time as she emerges to remake all Earthly life in her image.
- The Dark Young and their Mother roil the swamps of the planet Jadith, which orbits Capella, the Goat-Star. They can only be summoned when Capella is in the sky: which is all night long, all year, north of 45 degrees N.
- The goblinoid *gof'nn hupadgh Shub-Niggurath* are indeed her Dark Young. The occasional gigantic tree-creature at her ceremonies is a shoggoth, rewritten into joyful slavery to Her will.

Milk of Shub-Niggurath

Even Dark Young must suckle on something. That "something" is the whitish secretion called (possibly euphemistically) the "Milk of Shub-Niggurath." It's up to the Keeper if Shub-Niggurath herself must be summoned to obtain Milk, or if her older Young can be tapped for the fluid.

The Milk's effects are likely to be unpredictable, even within the same batch. They might include random Health, Athletics, or other pool losses, or any of the following.

Addiction: The drinker is addicted to the Milk. He must make a Stability test (Difficulty 6) to endanger his possible access to Milk (harming the source or Shub-Niggurath's interests in any way) or to resist actions that might obtain Milk (walking in the woods alone, leaving the gates unlocked, etc.). If presented with Milk, the test is Difficulty 8 to resist temptation or reject it.

Corrupt Fertility: As p. 5, above.

Dreams: The drinker dreams of waving forests, goats, and orgies – and eventually, of Shub-Niggurath herself, with the attendant Stability and Sanity penalties. Those dreams may include or incorporate other contact with lasting effects in the waking world: see *Corrupt Fertility*, above.

Growth Hormone: The Milk can make any life form grow, more lushly and invitingly or more monstrously and pervertedly. It can vastly increase crop or dairy yields, cause fish or bees to spawn in the millions, or turn humans into gigantic freaks.

Immortality: This is what many cultists believe drinking the Milk of the Goddess produces. They may or may not be correct, and the immortality may not be in the form they would have chosen for themselves. (See *Gof'nn Hupadgh*, pp. 4-5)

Key to Nature: Using the Milk allows the most outré experiments in vivisection, grafting, and germ plasm alteration to succeed.

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- After a few millennia, the gof"nn hupadgh further metamorphose into the more familiar tree-monster Dark Young form.
- The Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath are her worshippers, the Mi-Go and the other "million favored ones." The term is symbolic, and the enormous goat-tree creatures are alien beings from Jadith left behind after the sinking of Mu cut them off on Earth. Some of them have turned to the worship of Yig, Mormo, Gol-Goroth, or (much worse) Ghatanothoa.
- Dark Young can only be summoned at the dark of the moon.
- Dark Young can only be summoned at the full moon.
- Somewhere in Goatswood (in England's Severn country) there exists a Moon-Lens that can artificially re-create any phase of the moon for ritual purposes. It was built by the Romans to inhuman designs.
- The Romans compiled all they knew of the Dark Young (including how to summon them, and any weakness they had discovered) into one scroll of the *Liber Ivonis*, the Latin version of the *Book of Eibon*.
- The Romans called the Dark Young the *juvenes nigrityae*, the "young creatures of blackness." After the Muslim conquest of Sicily, the resulting hybrid magical culture dubbed the Dark Young *ash-shabab al-nigrith* (*ash-shabab* means "the young ones"). The 1228 Latin *Necronomicon* corrupted the term further, to Shub-Niggurath, and applied it to the goddess instead of her Young.
- Babylonian magi, seeking older gods to worship during a time of war and collapse (ca. 10th century BC) named the Ancient Mother they summoned Shuba-Nigûr-Urash, using words meaning "Shining Terrible Secret One

of Earth" in Sumerian, a language that had been dead for a millennium. (This was a corruption of her original name, Másh-Ngi, meaning both "black goat" and "dream or omen.")

MYTHIC ECHOES

"MUCH OF THE POWER OF WESTERN HORROR-LORE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY DUE TO THE HIDDEN BUT OFTEN SUSPECTED PRESENCE OF A HIDEOUS CULT OF NOCTURNAL WORSHIPPERS WHOSE STRANGE CUSTOMS ... WERE ROOTED IN THE MOST REVOLTING FERTILITY-RITES OF IMMEMORIAL ANTIQUITY."

- "SUPERNATURAL HORROR IN LITERATURE"

As with the variations and possible powers above, Dark Young might more closely match their various mythic depictions than standard Mythos fiction or gaming concepts.

Bosa Kalu (Siau)

On the island of Siau, north of Celebes in the East Indies, these black giants take the shape of trees or of beings with long arms and legs. They stand in the pathway at night to confuse travellers; to touch the limb of the bosa kalu is to die. They drink the souls of those who die in the forest, and sometimes appear in dreams.

Leshy (Russia)

Like most European fairies now thought of more as a trickster, the original leshy was a dangerous forest spirit that whipped or terrified (often fatally) travellers who did not sacrifice a cow or other large animal to him. Each forest had one leshy (or one "family" of leshiye), which might take the form of a tree, a blue-skinned (or green-skinned) man sprouting ropy vines or branches, a shadow or whirlwind, or a bear. Some leshiye appear goat-like, and rape women left alone in the woods. Leshiye have unusual feet in any form.

Mushmahhu (Babylonia)

Tiamat, Mother of Chaos, spawned this horrific creature (or creatures) with seven

snaky heads and seven long tails growing from its four-footed trunk. Crowned in blackened fire and full of deadly poison, it dwelt in the forested Zagros Mountains. The name later formalized by Marduk's priests as "mighty serpent" may be an intentional corruption of *máshmahku*, "mighty dark goat."

Shekkasoh (Burma)

This tree spirit lives in the trunks of large trees (the akakasoh lives in the treetops; the boomasoh lives in the roots) and causes fevers and malaria when angered. It can be propitiated by sacrifices, and its curse can be lifted by exorcism and purging. When the leaves of a tree move while other trees are still, it is a sign that the tree is a shekkasoh.

Stcemqstcint (Idaho)

The Cour d'Alene tribe call these foul-smelling giants the "Tree Men." The stcemqstcint wear skins with the hair or wool left on, and tower over the tallest tipis. Their skin and hair is black. They can transform into trees, but cannot change back from tree form while a human is watching. Being perceived for a long enough period freezes them in tree form forever.

Umdhlebe (Zululand)

This tree grows in rocky declivities, although the surrounding area becomes quite fertile and lush. It has a thick integument of dead bark, spear-shaped glossy leaves, sticky caustic sap, and reddish-black fruit on long branches. It is supremely poisonous, causing fever, abdominal swelling, delirium, and death to all who approach it ... or whom it approaches. The umdhlebe can move from place to place, and moves its branches to attack those who try to cut its wood or fruit.

INVESTIGATIONS

Keepers should treat this section, and use these elements, even more idiosyncratically.

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Clues

Perforce, the clues in this section mostly point to “conventional” Dark Young as presented in the corebook. Feel free to adjust them at will. Quotes are from Bloch’s “Notebook Found in a Deserted House,” the ur-text of the Dark Young.

Accounting: Based on the tax assessments of the neighboring parcels, the stretch of forest around Yews’ Hill would bring a small fortune in timber leases. But for some reason, the Mendescut family has never opened up the land in that way – and they certainly could use the money. (Bureaucracy)

Anthropology: The ancient Germans, among other tribes, used to ritually slash human sacrifices and then chain them to certain trees that were never allowed to be cut down. Alder trees, especially, were seen as sacred female entities.

Archaeology: According to the research of Johann Jakob Bachofen and Jane Ellen Harrison, underlying and pre-dating all known religion and myth, a cult of the Great Goddess, or Magna Mater, extended across Eurasia from the Old Stone Age until the Iron Age. These idols look similar to those “Prehistoric Venus” images, but seem to have been made in recent times, not the Paleolithic. (Anthropology)

Architecture: I have no idea what black wood these ceiling beams are made of. It’s stronger than anything I’ve ever seen, harder than teak, and apparently grows to quite a height given that the center beam is all one 20-foot piece. (Biology, Craft (Woodworking or Carpentry))

Art History: Paolo Uccello was obsessed with geometry and perspective. Uccello’s final two paintings, made in 1470 when he was very ill, show *The Night Hunt* (in the Ashmolean at Oxford) vanishing into a dark wood and an extremely



peculiar *St. George and the Dragon* (in the Lanckoronski Collection in Vienna). The dragon’s tail and wings resemble long tentacles rising from the body, which has two thick, hoof-like feet. A vortex forms behind St. George, over another black, bulbous forest.

Assess Honesty: “Then he said something about me being scared in the woods and how could he know that? I never told him *that* part at all.”

Astronomy: All these railroad ticket stubs in her handbag – the dates are regular – she’s been traveling out to Brichester every new moon for the last year, it seems like.

Biology: If you look at the cells of these plants under the microscope, you can see them still growing and dividing, even after being cut. They have definitely been affected somehow – perhaps by some kind of radiation, or by a virus or chemical that works on a sub-cellular level?

Bureaucracy: It’s clear from a few conversations and a little idle observation that Mrs. Grunwald is the roadblock in getting the information you need from the U.S. Forest Service. She seems to have positioned herself perfectly to control all forest use information and permissions for the whole tri-state area.

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Chemistry: This tobacco has been laced with something – fertilizer, perhaps, or maybe some other plant with a higher nitrate content.

Cop Talk: You surely don't want to be on duty when the Tibbett twins bring that "Black Lightning" hooch up from the holler, no sir you don't. Rapes and stabbings is the least of it. We mostly just lock ourselves in the jail and come clear things up after moon set.

Credit Rating (0): You really up against it, huh? Well, if you want to go out with a full belly, the 'bos at Graves Crossing can always use a king. Just tell 'em you want to be king, they'll feed you and keep you out of the rain for the whole month. Then, o'course, you got to meet the Queen down by the cut.

Cryptography: These trees in the tapestries, the different woods used in the Great Hall and the furniture, the flowers painted on the ceiling; this whole *house* is encoded using the medieval Irish "tree alphabet"! Each tree corresponds to a different letter of the ogham alphabet, although I'll wager the actual clear text is in Latin. This room, for example: yew, honeysuckle, heather, aspen, ash, aspen, willow. JUVENES: "The Young Ones." (plus Biology, Craft (Woodworking or Carpentry), or Outdoorsman to identify trees/wood/flowers)

Evidence Collection: "Maybe the stains are gone and the rain washed the footprints away. Maybe they got rid of the traces of the fire. But the alter stone must be there. ... There should be some big round spots on that stone. Round spots about two feet wide."

Forensics: The knife wounds didn't kill him – they were superficial cuts at best – although the blood loss was serious even before whatever happened. The face and mouth cavities are full of blackish-green pus. Ulcerated open sores are on the anterior of the body, though that clear grease has dried by now. The expression

on what's left of the face is ... well, if you didn't know better, you'd say it was religious ecstasy.

Geology: This so-called "gravel" left behind at the scene is actually bits of petrified wood.

History: Mona was the old Roman name for Anglesey Island, the last redoubt of the Druids in Britain. Perhaps Sir Eric named his seat Mona House because he imagines himself their successor.

Languages: I recall Professor Kirkomark's insane theory that the "gig" in Sheela-na-gig – you know, those fertility icons all over the east of Ireland – comes from the Sumerian *gíg*, meaning "black." Publishing that paper cost him his post at the University of Dublin. So why would the Garda want to confiscate his clearly fringe researches? (Occult)

Law: Look, if we can just prove this horrible thing is on Calvert's land, we can have him charged under Michigan law (Act 91, P.A. 1905) with keeping infectious plants on his property. Maybe he bought the local cops, but did he buy the State Agricultural Control Board? At worst, it makes a great diversion.

Library Use: A great deal of information about the cult of Attis and Cybele in Gaul and Britain, and a very free (even lurid) translation of Catullus' poem on the topic, appears in *The Origin of Tree Worship* (1793) by James Franklyn. Its themes of incest and bestiality caused it to be suppressed, and Franklyn to be expelled from the Ancient Order of Druids.

Medicine: Smell his breath – like fruit trees. His bloody vomit is granular ... He's not drunk, he's in ketoacidosis shock. Something he ate or inhaled in that swamp must have triggered the Clostridium micro-flora in his gut into vastly over-producing acetone. He'll be dead in a day if we can't figure out what did this to him.

Occult: The enchanter Gwydion famously brings the trees of Wales to life in a battle against (or perhaps *over*) the Underworld. The poem describing his feat, the *Cad Goddeu*, is elliptical and allusive in the extreme, with sections referring to the plant-woman Blodeuwedd. The phrase painted on the wall in the girl's blood is the last stanza of that poem: "I would conjure plants/ for I am wanton/with the prophecy of Alchemists." (Languages (Welsh))

Oral History: None of the womenfolk in the district will talk about the disappearances at all. Our only informants are very old men, all childless widowers, the reverse of the usual patterns of folklore transmission.

Outdoorsman: Those prints are like enormously splayed goats' hooves, as though a goat weighing several tons stood here. But there's no room among these trees for something like that to have passed – look, all this lush, new foliage is completely undisturbed. Strange for it to have grown up this thickly without any rain, though.

Pharmacy: I can't tell you whether these drugs do anything about dysentery, but I can promise you they will definitely induce hallucinations, nightmare visions – even paranoid delusions. They're definitely vegetable in origin, something like belladonna, perhaps?

Photography: Look at the picture here: that tree's branches are blurred, like it was in a strong wind. But none of the other trees are moving at all; their branches and leaves stand out in total clarity.

Physics: If I'm right, a combination acid bath, sandblast, very high heat – 1400 degrees or more – and an argon atmosphere might actually petrify the thing. That means we'll have to lure it into the lab, here ... or summon it, of course. (2 point spend)

Hideous Creatures

Sense Trouble: Although the wind doesn't shift, it picks up – and it must have uncovered something dead for a week. And there seem to be more trees there than there were just a minute ago.

Streetwise: We just get the white stuff in from downstate, about once a month. Then we cut it into whatever we've got: coke, heroin, even reefer. Really brings the junkies back for seconds and thirds, I can tell you that. Hell, no, I haven't smoked it myself. Not after what happened to Louie -- paralyzed and drooling green spit.

Theology: Recent (1927) excavations in Ugarit in Syria indicate that the “asherah,” or pagan groves and wooden idols or poles condemned in the Old Testament (1 Kings 15:13; “a loathsome idol in Asherah”), are actually figures of a goddess named Asherah or Athira (“the Treader”), the consort of Baal. Whatever the truth, it makes those carved things we found in the woods seem less like abandoned telegraph poles. (Archaeology)

SCENARIO SEEDS

In most scenarios featuring a Dark Young, the beast is either a simple representation of Shub-Niggurath's mindless urges or the heavy artillery of a local cult. These two cuttings attempt to get away from those stereotypes and vary the Dark Young diet.

Carnivorous Plantings

According to a UPI story, RAF Captain Victor de la Motte Hurst, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, plans an expedition to Madagascar in August 1932 in search of the “man-eating tree” *Crinoida dajeeana*. Captain de la Motte Hurst is quoted: “I have been told about the ‘sacrifice tree’ by many chiefs of the island and I have no doubt of its existence. It eats human beings, but since the natives worship it they are reluctant to reveal its location.” He further indicates his intention of taking a film crew along to record the tree's carnivorous habits, besides the normal complement of botanists, adventurers,

and the like. The paper goes on to note the previous expedition in search of the man-eating tree of Madagascar: a two-year search (1912-1914) by the former governor of Michigan, Chase Salmon Osborn. It proves surprisingly easy for the Investigators to wangle a position on this year's Sacrifice Tree Expedition, which should make them a trifle suspicious.

Even more suspicious: Library Use uncovers a still earlier spate of Man-Eating Tree stories between 1874 and 1882, all traceable to a hoax in the *New York World*. Worse yet, de la Motte Hurst (or his shadowy theosophical accomplices) have seen – and tried to conceal their knowledge of -- the 1888 article (in *Current Literature*) debunking the original hoax.

Either a decades-old conspiracy, or the strange workings of some ancient entity, has seeded the dream of a man-eating tree in the global unconscious. Already weakened by the rise of R'lyeh seven years earlier, human sanity teeters on the verge of madness and ruin.

The Expedition's supplies (or perhaps one of the theosophists' stomachs) contain a Dark Young “egg” to be hatched in Madagascar. Fed on human sacrifice, the Dark Young's rising will be witnessed by minds primed with the Mythos (both de la Motte Hurst's theosophists and the Investigators) and finally filmed – a cinematic hymn to Shub-Niggurath that will reverberate through the Lemurian ley networks centered on the island and awaken the Black Goat once and for all.

This plot, of course, can also serve as an *Esoterrorists* scenario seed. Run the adventure in the modern world of *Ancient Aliens* and *Monster Hunters*, or flash back to the days when Ordo Veritatis agents carried bullwhips and wore fedoras.

Into the Woods

A disappeared traveler brings the Investigators to the small town of Corbimere, which might be in the Eastern U.S., Britain, France, Belgium, or the Rhineland. When they arrive, they first see nothing more than an insular town with little interest in the outside world: fashions and technology are backward even

for small town life, though without being too obviously anachronistic. Perhaps this is because of the thick forest almost entirely surrounding Corbimere; only one road leads in and out.

The longer they stay, the more oddities they notice: the large number of orphans or near-orphans, the venerable copies of Grimm or Perrault in the church alongside the hymnals and Bibles, the strange way nobody in town seems to remember the Investigators' friend, or even their own family's past. Further sneaking around produces glimpses of a young woman sleeping inside a house surrounded by thorn bushes, another woman with very long hair seemingly imprisoned in the church steeple, sisters in red and white dresses, the discarded iron shoes in a rank yard under a juniper-tree, the young girl in a red hood.

Centuries ago, a Dark Young somehow imprinted on the dark, bloody tales of the area. Perhaps its priestess was also a grandmother, or it devoured a whole flock of children and found their archetypal fears delicious, or perhaps these “fairy tales” actually contain some magical ritual pattern that ensnared the monster.

However the horror began, the Dark Young has been replaying the tales using the villagers as toys. It devours mothers to create step-mothers, engenders three-child births to get Jacks, and every so often lures children into the woods to be eaten. It might make a beanstalk grow one day, next year turn a man into a beast and then curse the town until he finds love, or inspire another man to kill a series of wives and hang them in his bedroom. It erases the villagers' memories when it's time to start over or “recast” a tale; it lures in strangers for variety in bloodline and invention. It's up to the Keeper to keep the tales properly grim, and up to the Investigators to finally kill the dark and wicked witch of the woods.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lovecraft alludes to the “Thousand Young” of Shub-Niggurath first in “The Whisperer in Darkness,” and later in “The Thing on the Doorstep” and “The

Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath



“Dreams in the Witch-House,” as well as in the revision tales “The Horror in the Museum,” “The Diary of Alonzo Typer,” and “The Man of Stone.” However, they remain fundamentally undefined in his fiction, save as a ritual exclamation.

Once Robert Bloch wrote “Notebook Found in a Deserted House,” the monstrous, as opposed to the numinous, aspects of Shub-Niggurath’s spawn appeared in the Mythos. Bloch introduced vegetable horror, Druid survivals, and lots of hooves and branches in his tale. However, it took thirty more years until Sandy Petersen first identified Bloch’s creature (which Bloch’s narrator calls a “shoggoth”) as one of Lovecraft’s “Dark Young” in the *Call of Cthulhu* corebook.

Even counting Bloch’s story retroactively, there are relatively few Dark Young-centric tales to investigate. “Mr. Skin” by Victor Milan, in *Cthulhu’s Heirs*,

and “Regrowth” by David Conyers, in *Arkham Tales*, are two solid examples. The being in “Red Goat Black Goat” by Nadia Bulkin (in *Lovecraft’s Monsters*) might be an immense Dark Young or a localized avatar of the Goddess; the same might be said for the, er, unicorn, in “Equoid” by Charles Stross. Both are excellent Shub-Niggurath stories, however.

A number of tales focused on the deity herself appear in *The Shub-Niggurath Cycle* anthology, the standout tale being “Harold’s Blues” by Glen Singer. “The Moon-Lens” by Ramsey Campbell is also good, riffing on “Shadow Over Innsmouth” in the key of Shub. Aside from (arguably) that story, none of the other tales in the volume (even “A Thousand Young” by Robert M. Price) deal specifically with the Dark Young. The earlier pieces in that collection are good, atmospheric goat-demon tales ancestral to Lovecraft’s imagery.

Further pre-Lovecraftian avatars or spawn of the Black Goat can be found (with a little creative adjustment) in “The Grove of Ashtaroth” by John Buchan, among the devil-trees in Chapter IV of *Boats of the Glen Carrig* by William Hope Hodgson, and especially in “The Willows” by Algernon Blackwood. Lovecraft believed that story to be the finest cosmic horror tale ever written, and it endlessly repays re-reading.

Finally, Keepers interested in amplifying the Shub-Niggurath element in their games might want to look at *The Language of the Goddess* by the archaeologist Marija Gimbutas. She (like Lovecraft!) postulates a pre-Indo-European matriarchal goddess cult extending across Eurasia, and presents lots of weird, evocative symbols, idols, and themes gravid with unconscious horror-game potential.

Deep Ones
