

HIDEOUS CREATURES

SHOGGOTH



BY KENNETH HITE
TRAIL OF CTHULHU



Pelgrane Press



SHOGGOTH

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KEN WRITES ABOUT STUFF

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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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“THE NIGHTMARE, PLASTIC COLUMN OF FETID BLACK IRIDESCENCE OOZED TIGHTLY ONWARD ... IT WAS A TERRIBLE, INDESCRIBABLE THING VASTER THAN ANY SUBWAY TRAIN — A SHAPELESS CONGERIES OF PROTOPLASMIC BUBBLES, FAINTLY SELF-LUMINOUS, AND WITH MYRIADS OF TEMPORARY EYES FORMING AND UN-FORMING AS PUSTULES OF GREENISH LIGHT ALL OVER THE TUNNEL-FILLING FRONT THAT BORE DOWN UPON US ...”

These shapeless black blobs boil with green eyes and iridescent bubbles, making and unmaking any organs or tendrils needed for a given task. A multicellular protoplasmic mass, the shoggoth can exert prodigious strength or ooze through the tiniest cracks. Their matter is neither plant nor animal, at base somewhat like fungi or algae but capable of mimicking or adapting any organic form needed or desired.

They are mostly aquatic, designed to build undersea structures and perform heavy labor for a civilization on the continental shelf. When floating free in the sea, a typical shoggoth is a roughly 15-foot diameter sphere. On land, gravity (and the need to extrude feet or other locomotors) usually compresses them to a roughly ovoid or hemi-ovoid mass.

There’s a lot of juice in Lovecraft’s excellent description: “Formless protoplasm able to mock and reflect all forms and organs and processes — viscous agglutinations of bubbling cells — rubbery fifteen-foot spheroids infinitely plastic and ductile.” Merely presenting shoggoth “forms and organs and processes” as ever-changing provides plenty of variety by itself: a beast that locates you with bat-ears and sonar cries, then closes in by rolling at top speed, then extrudes razor-sharp claws and fang-lined elephantine trunks, is its own reward. But the basic “viscous bubbling cells” can still use some work.

Too often, Keepers fall back on “a big amoeba” or a *D&D*-style black pudding; try modeling the shoggoth with other base matter (and different color schemes instead of black matter and emerald eyes):

- Spongy, powdery, and vomitous like slime molds (yellow with glistening black eyes)
- Matted, wet hair, roped and twisted into strings and shapes (brown with sapphire eyes)
- Bulbous foam, interlocking geometries, razor-sharp edges like coral (white with bright orange eyes)
- Bloated, blistering, liquid-filled, with trailing cilia or tendrils like enormous jellyfish (translucent pink or blue with amethyst eyes)
- Pallid mucus shrouds draped over bluish or purplish lumps (gelatin colored with ruby eyes)
- Boil-covered, rotting, tumor-infested meat (reddish-brown with wet human-colored eyes)

The crinoid Elder Things created shoggoths roughly a billion years ago as slaves and beasts of burden, controlling them with hypnosis and telepathy. Unfortunately, either design errors, the crinoids’ own slow scientific decay, or millions of years of evolution introduced a “semi-stable brain” into the formerly bestial creatures. They were surly servants

- “AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS”

at best, ever becoming more and more intelligent, more and more rebellious, more and more imitative.

Sometime in the late Permian Era (to Lovecraft, about 150 million years ago) they openly rebelled against their creators, launching a million-year war in the seas around Gondwanaland. After unleashing “weapons of molecular and atomic disturbance” against them, the Elder Things eventually defeated the rebellious shoggoths, breaking them like wild horses. The crinoids rebuilt larger, more biddable shoggoths for their civilization’s use, controlling them by vocal commands rather than telepathy to guard against a similar evolution of rebellious will. But even those shoggoths apparently grew to despise their masters, in at least one case destroying them and aping their art until the cold drove them, too, into hibernation.

Abdul Alhazred attempted desperately to claim that there were none of these fetid, oozing, protoplasmic monstrosities on Earth itself, save in crazed dreams or alkaloid visions. He was wrong. But with this fairly wide variety to choose from, which shoggoth breeds did survive down to the present day?

- The final, rebuilt, “loyal” shoggoth caste devoted to restoring the Elder Things once the Earth’s atmosphere and other factors change back to Ordovician-Silurian conditions. The shoggoth the Dyer party encountered was a lone rogue.

Shoggoth

- Rebel, animalistic “mustang” shoggoths with no agenda except expansion and reproduction.
- Rebel, intelligent shoggoths with their own agenda, dark gods, and desire to rule the world from their own mighty cities.
- Shoggoths tamed or built by Deep Ones to be slaves of Cthulhu. Some of these shoggoths have been hijacked by (or inserted into) human cults such as the Cult of the Skull in Maine.
- Different clades of shoggoths have different pre-programmed or quasi-evolved ideologies; their deep-sea or volcanic-vent wars are all that keep Earthly life independent.

Shoggoths are often found as servants of Deep Ones and even in some human cult compounds. They communicate in whatever manner their master race wishes, forming special organs for the purpose: the shoggoth cry “Tekeli-li!” replicates the crinoids’ piping speech.

Shoggoth

In combat, a “standard” shoggoth can attack two beings at Close range per round and all beings within Point-Blank range simultaneously, although its targets’ Hit Thresholds increase by 1 for every three separate targets it attacks. After successfully attacking a target at Close range, that target counts as Point-Blank – the shoggoth has oozed some part of itself even closer. A shoggoth may stretch or shape its bulk to bring itself into Point-Blank range of as many targets as possible;

an Athletics roll can determine whether that happens in one round or in three.

Abilities: Athletics 10+, Health 32+, Scuffling 23+

Magic: A shoggoth that had somehow absorbed (or perfectly imitated) the magic of its masters might have a few points in Magic and one or two rote spells.

Hit Threshold: 3 (large)

Alertness Modifier: +2; shoggoths suffer no penalty for darkness, fog, etc.

Stealth Modifier: -1

Weapon: -+5 (pseudopod, often ridged), +2 (snare, see below)

Armor: fire and electricity do only half damage; all physical weapons do only 1 point of damage; regenerates 2 Health each round until dead. Shoggoths suffer no penalties for Health loss and never become Hurt.



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Stability Loss: +3

Snare and Crush: With a successful Scuffling attack, a shoggoth may loop an increasingly muscular tendril around a character (+2 damage modifier). Each round thereafter, the shoggoth hits automatically and does +2 more damage each time. (It might also make a second attack and bite down with a suddenly-grown mouth for +5.) Characters snared by the shoggoth also automatically hit the shoggoth.

Proto-Shoggoth

"HE HAS ON RARE OCCASIONS WHISPERED DISJOINTED AND IRRESPONSIBLE THINGS ABOUT 'THE BLACK PIT,' 'THE CARVEN RIM,' 'THE PROTO-SHOGGOTHS' ..."

- "AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS"

A horrific blend of shoggoth and human tissue originally created by Atlantean or Hyperborean magi, the proto-shoggoth has a human-like intelligence. Reduce shoggoth Health and Scuffling by half, increase Magic to 4+; change Hit Threshold to 4 and Stealth Modifier to +0. In human form, proto-shoggoths do only +2 damage from a blow, but they can shape-shift their limb into a ridged pseudopod or other striker, add mouths, and otherwise make themselves more deadly. (Seeing a proto-shoggoth shapeshift triggers the Stability test, at +1 Stability loss.) They can only attack two Point-Blank foes or one Close foe per round.

Possible Shoggoth Abilities

Mix and match these abilities for the shoggoth in your campaign. The Elder Things built shoggoths as multi-purpose slaves, after all; if any Lovecraftian monster should have surprising features and changeable powers, it's this one.

By and large, a "standard" shoggoth spends 2 Health to "power" any particularly

unusual ability – unless your shoggoths are even more powerful.

Even without these abilities, the shoggoth can pretty much batter, corrode, filter, or ooze its way through any obstacle except possibly the Cyclopean architecture of the Elder Things and the Great Race.

Absorption Attack: Touching any part of a shoggoth (even a single tendril) with bare flesh triggers a catastrophic process of absorbing the target's matter and replacing it with shoggoth matter. In game terms, the shoggoth automatically hits for +1 damage, increasing each round to a maximum of +5; when the target's Health reaches 0 (or -12, for Investigators) he has been replaced entirely by a shoggoth-matter "clone." Ridding one's body of shoggoth-matter involves powerful electric shocks.

Acid Slime: The shoggoth can turn its slime powerfully acidic (or alkaline) by spending 2 Health. All shoggoth damage, including crushes, increases by 1; characters struck by shoggoth slime take +1 caustic damage each round for the next three rounds.

Amphibious: Shoggoths are completely amphibious, suffering no penalties whatsoever when moving or attacking under water.

Budding: A shoggoth can reproduce by separating a bud from itself. As that bud inflicts Health damage on organic foes, it absorbs their lost Health and adds it to its own Health score up to a maximum of 32.

Cling to Walls: The shoggoth can cling to walls, ceilings, etc. by spreading itself thin and extruding tiny suckers or cilia. This might also let it hide in a dark chamber or crypt where it could be mistaken for dampness or bare rock. (Sense Trouble Difficulty 6+ to spot.)

Dread (Elder Sign): A shoggoth cannot directly attack anyone brandishing an

Elder Sign. With a successful Difficulty 8 Health test, it can try to indirectly attack such a target: undermine the floor or ceiling, pull loose a steam pipe, twist a comrade into position and force them to fire a weapon, etc.

Engulf: If the shoggoth uses all its attacks on one Point-Blank target, it can completely engulf that target on a successful Scuffling test (at -2 to Hit Threshold since the shoggoth is attacking from all sides at once). The engulfed foe must make a Difficulty 4 Athletics test to move anything more than a trigger finger; escaping requires a win in a contest of Athletics against the shoggoth. Each lost Athletics contest does +2 damage to the engulfed foe; each round, the shoggoth's internal teeth, pseudopods, crushing gullet, etc. does +3 damage automatically.

Entangle: Shoggoth filaments can whip together into a net or trap up to several hundred yards away. Entangled victims lower their Hit Threshold by 2, and might suffer an absorption attack. After 3 rounds, the entangling web can become a Snare and Crush attack as above.

Extensible Eye: A shoggoth can extend its eye (or any other sensory organ) on a thin stalk up to several hundred yards long. This enables it to see around corners, into other rooms or levels of a crypt complex, above the ground, or anywhere else it might wish.

Flight: A shoggoth can grow immense wings, or inflate itself with hydrogen and float like a hideous dirigible, or both.

Instant Healing: Shoggoths take no Health damage from any physical attack whatsoever; the wound immediately oozes closed. They still regenerate 2 Health each round against other attacks such as fire, electricity, bitter cold, etc.

Larger: The shoggoth Danforth and Dyer encountered was at least the size of a subway car (60 ft. x 10 ft. x 10 ft.), about twice the "standard" shoggoth size

Shoggoth

(15 ft. in diameter). For each “extra” shoggoth mass, add 3 Athletics, 15 Health, and 5 Scuffling. For each two extra masses, increase standard pseudopod damage by +1.

Mimicry: The shoggoth can imitate any human voice (or indeed any sound) it hears. If this power costs points at all, it should cost 2 Health points per scene, not per use or per target. Listeners who suspect that they are hearing monsters instead of friends must make a Difficulty 4 Stability test to convince themselves.

Replicate Foe: A shoggoth that consumes any part of an organism – including skin cells! – can spend 2 Health to replicate that organism down to a cellular level if need be. The shoggoth gains all the target’s physical abilities but no mental abilities from this act. Unless ...

Replicate Mind: After consuming a human brain, the shoggoth has all the knowledge that brain possessed. For an even more horrible version of this ability, a shoggoth that makes telepathic contact with a human can spend 2 Health to “mold” its own brain into that human’s knowledge, memories, etc.

Resurrection: Unless entirely killed (taken to -12 Health or lower) by flame or other high-energy release (lightning, radiation), a shoggoth regenerates all lost Health at the end of a scene.

Stench: All unprotected breathers around a shoggoth must make a Difficulty 5 Health test or be Hurt until they return to clean air.

Strikers: The shoggoth can grow mouths full of fangs, whiplike stingers, immense talons, or any other sort of striker it likes. Damage can stay at +5 or increase by +1 for each 1 Health point the shoggoth spends before the roll to “harden” or “supercharge” the attack.

Telepathy: The Elder Things originally

used telepathic commands to control shoggoths; they still act as superb telepathic receivers and re-transmitters, adding +3 or more to any telepathic attempt to contact them or transmit thoughts through them. They may be more attracted to human telepaths, or more likely to attack them. If the shoggoth has a Magic pool, use that to power its own telepathic sendings (Stability test at -2 against the shoggoth’s Magic pool to resist).

Vulnerable to Cold: Shoggoths’ liquid bodies freeze at temperatures much below -20°F, which is why they remain trapped in the relatively warm spot beneath the Elder Things’ city. Temperatures of absolute zero may (or may not) actually kill them.

VARIATIONS

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. Remember that Dyer gains his entire knowledge of shoggoths from the *Necronomicon* (which, palpably inaccurately, swears the beings no longer exist) and from brief glimpses by flashlight of alien bas-reliefs that no human can read or decipher. Certainty about the infinitely plastic shoggoth is thus even more elusive than for other Mythos creatures.

- Shoggoths incorporate a billion years of terrestrial evolution; every life form that has ever existed lies somewhere in the potential shoggoth pattern.
- The war between the shoggoths and Elder Things splintered Gondwanaland and caused the Permian-Jurassic mass extinction.
- Shoggoths evolved the ability to live on land during the Cretaceous-

Tertiary mass extinction.

- Shoggoths are colony creatures, like coral reefs or jellyfish blooms. An individual shoggoth polyp or cell contains proto-matter and a very simple genetic computer; when linked in parallel with thousands of other polyps, the shoggoth can resolve any genetic program nearly instantaneously.
- A shoggoth still lurks at the bottom of Innsmouth harbor, damaged but not destroyed by the U.S. Navy’s torpedoes. It may or may not have been freed from Deep One overlordship by the FBI-Navy raid in 1928.
- The Pit of the Shoggoths lies at the bottom of the Six Thousand Steps in the fane of the Cult of the Skull near Chesuncook, Maine.
- Mi-Go have attempted to cross-breed their matter with shoggoth matter, creating a number of vicious hybrid beings, among them the reflexively cruel and violent *ghol* (Hindi backformation from the Thibetan *ghol*, meaning “soft” or “pliable”) in Bhutan.
- Shoggoths reproduce by fission, but only in the sea. They cannot reproduce on land or in space.
- Shoggoths prefer to bite the heads off intelligent foes, to make sure that brain activity ceases.
- Shoggoth Lords are an intelligent, land-dwelling subspecies of shoggoth, evolved or created by some horrible mischance. They mass approximately 350 lbs. and usually take the form of obese, hairless humans.
- Shoggoth Lords pursue their own sorcerous agendas; their rivalries play out over centuries and end with one Lord completely ingesting his foe.

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- The Xothians keep almost all surviving shoggoths penned in the oceanic trenches to prevent the creatures' resuming their masters' war against R'lyeh.
- The shoggoth colony in the Dreamlands is a foul lake beneath the Peaks of Throk. There, night-gaunts spy on the puffed shoggoths for Nodens, ensuring their doubtful sleep continues.
- Shoggoths exist in more dimensions than the normal four, extruding themselves into other planes of existence, including dimensions with different time rates, physical constants, and so forth. This explains shoggoth immortality, invulnerability, and other characteristics.
- There is only one shoggoth, whose constant expansion has entirely filled its home dimension. Shoggoths on Earth and other worlds are simply nodes of this shoggoth extruded into conventional space-time at seemingly discrete locations.
- This universal shoggoth is tentacled and protean Cthulhu, bloated and rubbery, battering and pressing endlessly against the dimensional barriers keeping physical law intact.
- The shoggoths who entered N'Kai took on the shape of Tsathoggua's thoughts; they are also known as the Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua.
- The Elder Things created the shoggoths using ritual matrixes of Shub-Niggurath; the shoggoths are the greatest of her Dark Young.
- A sub-species of shoggoth takes the form of an enormous tree such as a baobab, mangrove, or sequoia, communicating with its mile-deep roots with the Tunnelers Below and other races. This, by the way, is the origin of the myth of the Upas tree.

- Alhazred took the word "shoggoth" from the Sabaean word *shaggath*, meaning "fornication," possibly cognate with the Hebrew *shegagah*, meaning "sin" or "mistake."

MYTHIC ECHOES

"THESE VISCOUS MASSES WERE WITHOUT DOUBT WHAT ABDUL ALHAZRED WHISPERED ABOUT AS THE 'SHOGGOTHs' IN HIS FRIGHTFUL NECRONOMICON, THOUGH EVEN THAT MAD ARAB HAD NOT HINTED THAT ANY EXISTED ON EARTH EXCEPT IN THE DREAMS OF THOSE WHO HAD CHEWED A CERTAIN ALKALOIDAL HERB."

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As with the variations and possible powers above, the shoggoth might more closely match its various mythic depictions than Lovecraft's fiction. Its most common mythic incarnation occurs as a dragon, serpent, or other primordial chaos monster defeated by a divine hero. These myths combine the protean, ancient nature of the shoggoths with confused traces of their rebellion against the Elder Things.

Abzu (Mesopotamia)

Normally used as the term for deep-water aquifers or swamps, Abzu or Apsu is personified as a god only in the *Enuma Elish*, where he is the mate of Tiamat. A chaotic, formless, primordial god, Abzu desires the death of the other gods but is sent into a magical coma and killed by Ea.

Hydra (Ancient Greece)

This monster has nine heads in the most familiar myth, although some earlier versions have fifty or a hundred heads sprouting from its body. When one head is cut off, two spring from the stump; the monster is unkillable and its blood is a deadly, acidic poison. It dwelt in the swamp of Lerna, an entrance to the Underworld; Heracles cauterized its pseudopod-necks with fire and buried the immortal head

under a huge rock.

Other possible echoes of the shoggoth are the protean Chimera defeated by molten metal, or the myth of the monstrous Hekatonkheires, the primordial "hundred-handed ones" born of Ouranos who rebelled against the Titans along with Zeus.

Kaliya (India)

Described as an immense naga (a serpentine water-spirit) with 110 hooded cobra heads, Kaliya turned the river Yamuna into a bubbling, poisonous mass. The god Krishna defeated Kaliya by rhythmically dancing upon it, then exiled it to Ramanaka Dwipa in the south Pacific. There may also be echoes of the shoggoth in the legends of the rakshasa, shape-changing servitors of the gods and demons.

Tulpa (Thibet)

This hypnotically controlled, shapeshifting servant being is created by the concentrated thought energy of an adept. According to Alexandra David-Neel, however, "once the tulpa is endowed with enough vitality to be capable of playing the part of a real being, it tends to free itself from its maker's control." Like the egregores of Golden Dawn mysticism, tulpas may take on human or superhuman form, or be shapeless blobs of matter-energy.

Yamata no Orochi (Japan)

Its name means "Eight-branched Orochi," and it is usually described as an enormous eight-headed and eight-tailed serpent crawling with moss and ferns. (The word *orochi* or *worōti* is of unknown derivation.) It devoured human sacrifices in Izumo province until the storm god Susano penned it into an octogram, sent it to sleep with liquor, and then chopped it into pieces. In one of its tails, he discovered a sword of unknown metal.

INVESTIGATIONS

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

Shoggoth

Clues

Perforce, the clues in this section mostly point to a “conventional” shoggoth, primarily as painted in Lovecraft’s novel *At the Mountains of Madness*. Feel free to adjust them at will.

Accounting: This manifest is interesting: the water barrels Kapitän Ritscher is taking with him to the Antarctic are very expensive, made by Rheinmetall of beryl-steel alloy. And they have a triple-seal, which seems excessive.

Anthropology: Pigafetta claims that the first travelers in Patagonia met giants who, when trapped on the ships, burst their bonds, “foamed like bulls,” and cried out “Cheleule.” Could some fragmentary inhuman DNA have been present in that tribe – which was exterminated two centuries later by other Patagonians? (History)

Archaeology: The Esagila ziggurat in Babylon was originally transliterated “Bit-Shaggath,” due to a misreading of the cuneiform. Interestingly, it too is a Cyclopean structure above a subterranean lake, called the Abzu after the source of primal chaos in the *Enuma Elish*.

Architecture: “The Cyclopean massiveness and gigantism of everything about us became curiously oppressive; and there was something vaguely but deeply unhuman in all the contours, dimensions, proportions, decorations, and constructional nuances of the blasphemously archaic stonework. ... We cannot yet explain the engineering principles used in the anomalous balancing and adjustment of the vast rock masses, though the function of the arch was clearly much relied on.”

Art History: “It was like, yet disturbingly unlike, what we had come to recognize as the Old Ones’ art; and I was persistently reminded of such hybrid things as the ungainly Palmyrene sculptures fashioned in the Roman manner.” (Archaeology)

Assess Honesty: That fat man is simply matching your own posture and facial expressions instantaneously. That’s why he seems trustworthy; now that you notice what he’s doing, you find him unutterably creepy.

Astronomy: The striations in this cave wall resemble those found in meteorites in East Africa – but surely this cave hasn’t been exposed to the stresses of interstellar space. (Geology)

Biology: The slime is pure protoplasm, much like the matter of an amoeba. There is no cell structure visible. Its chromatin is fragmentary and evenly mixed throughout, rather than being differentiated into nuclear bodies or organelles.

Bureaucracy: That’s odd – the Navy placed the original logs and records of Admiral Byrd’s 1934 solo sojourn at “Advance Base” in Antarctica under a classification normally used for weapons research.

Chemistry: That bright purple streak in the smashed laboratory must be where the thing’s slime reacted with one of the chemicals. If we can discover which chemical that was, we might have a way to detect its matter regardless of its form.

Cop Talk: We’re not letting it get out, because it totally wrecks the case, but I can tell you that we’ve got witnesses that saw each of the dead men walking around as much as a week after their killing. Weirder still, the descriptions match perfectly, except they all had green eyes now.

Credit Rating (4-5): As a fellow professional, I can assure you that nobody needs to know how precisely Dr. Bishop carries out his miraculous surgeries. Not the superstitious locals, nor the wealthy clients he helps. If you’d like, I’m sure the good doctor would be happy to recommend you for a lucrative position ... far away from here. (Medicine)

Cryptography: This code is based on a pattern of fives! Once you know the pattern and do the math, parts of it are weirdly simple to decipher, while other parts just reduce to sheer gibberish.

Evidence Collection: The bricks on the south wall are just piled up against each other, as though the mortar was dissolved in place by something that flowed through the wall into the room. (Architecture)

Forensics: Greenish-black putrescent slime covered the body, which was heavily contused. The spine had been partially detached, and the head hung by ragged fragments of skin and tendon. There were ten or a dozen different types of bite and claw marks on the body.

Geology: There is an enormous empty space in the fossil record – especially of sea life -- at end of the Permian Era, as though something had simply erased virtually all life on Earth and started over.

History: In the 7th century, Japan nearly came apart over a cult worshipping a strange green-and-black worm that somehow promised an eternal world, the *Tokoyo-no-Mushi*. After the worm was destroyed, an unknown plague killed half the country.

Languages: The word *tekilili* appears only in Maori, the language of the indigenous peoples of New Zealand. It means “to shiver or shake,” implying some terrifying thing seen only in the farthest southern seas.

Law: The will is quite clear. Sir Francis inherits the property on the sole condition that he keep the well in the lowest cellar sealed, and that he recruit a brother from St. Augustine’s to “refresh the inscriptions” around it. Otherwise, the house is to be dynamited, and all the Penworthy properties and assets in the island of Great Britain are to be sold off.

Hideous Creatures



Library Use: The *al-Fitna fi-al-Tibb* of Daud al-Antaki (fl. 1599), the doctor and occult scholar of Cairo, was suppressed by the Mamelukes for its specific descriptions of a certain alkaloid herb growing in the Iraqi marshes, and of the visions “of all-formed creatures of immortal chaos” gained by ingesting it. Supposedly al-Antaki blinded himself after writing the book.

Medicine: There is literally no way he could be using his arm again that soon after being shot. The bones were splintered, nerves destroyed – and yet he’s waving as though they re-grew and healed within days.

Occult: The description in that diary sounds like the egregore, a formless entity built up by magical power or mental concentration. Eliphas Levi claimed the egregores predated the Flood; “terrible beings that crush us without pity.”

Oral History: The legend of the “Halloween Cave” in Maine shows up all across New England, but in northern Maine it’s called “Shotgun Cave” or “Soggy Cave” or “Shaggy Cave” or weirdly “Goth Cave.” This pattern of variation implies that the original of the story is somewhere in Piscataquis County. (Anthropology)

Outdoorsman: “Above the glacial sheet the floors were generally thick with detritus, litter, and debris, but farther down this condition decreased. In some of the lower chambers and corridors there was little more than gritty dust or ancient incrustations, while occasional areas had an uncanny air of newly swept immaculateness.” (Evidence Collection)

Pharmacy: The syringe was full of endotoxin, a bacterial-shell substance that triggers severe inflammation and fever. Why she was carrying it to a meeting of the National Geographic Society remains something of a mystery, but she obviously intended to inject it into someone there.

Physics: “The Old Ones had used curious weapons of molecular and atomic disturbances against the rebel entities, and in the end had achieved a complete victory.”

Photography: Developing the pictures reveals a glow below the threshold of human perceptibility ... not just on the frozen ball but all over the chamber’s floor and walls ... and on Jenkins’ boots and gloves ... and water bottle.

Sense Trouble: From down the tunnel comes a sort of anechoic roaring or rumbling. It almost sounds like a crowd of people or birds.

Sense Trouble: “The nameless scent was now curiously mixed with another and scarcely less offensive odor — of what nature we could not guess, though we thought of decaying organisms and perhaps unknown subterranean fungi.”

Streetwise: You want to make someone disappear? I mean, really disappear? Talk to Wade Sargent. I don’t know what happens to the body after he loads it on that old bus, and I don’t want to know. All I know is no trace of it ever shows up again.

Theology: The chaoskampf, the struggle of the culture-hero against the oceanic

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chaos-monster, is a nearly ubiquitous motif in world myth: Marduk vs. Tiamat, Thor vs. Jörmungandr, Indra vs. Vritra, Ra vs. Apep, Zeus vs. Typhon, even Yahweh vs. Leviathan. This implies some primordial witnessed experience passed down possibly through racial memory in our gene plasm. (Anthropology)

SCENARIO SEEDS

Although a shoggoth can turn up as the major threat in any adventure involving Deep Ones or even ambitious human cults, making the shoggoth the centerpiece of an adventure is a little harder. Traditionally, such scenarios follow one of two patterns: the awakened or “weaponized” shoggoth at the heart of the mystery, or the shapeshifted shoggoth or proto-shoggoth moving among us invisibly. In short, such adventures model either *The Thing* or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. Here’s one of each.

Green Land, Black Heart

Either through contacts in Project Covenant, or academic sources in Germany, the Investigators hear of an August 1937 Kriegsmarine expedition to Greenland to be headed by Untersturmführer-SS Paul Burkert. He is rumored to be searching for the “black blood of Ymir” that supposedly destroyed the Viking colony on the west coast of Greenland in 1340, inland from the current capital town of Godthab. Unbeknownst to both Burkert and the Investigators, the “black blood” has already been found, by the Esquimau angakok Tselihye, the reincarnation of the angakok who drove the Vikings out 600 years before with a shoggoth he mastered using Hyperborean magics. Tselihye has melted the “black blood” out of the ice over the last 15 years (the Arctic has warmed unusually since 1923) and has formed it into a tupilak, a constructed creature animated by revenge. Tselihye plans to destroy Godthab and then begin melting out a much bigger Hyperborean city – can the

Investigators beat Burkert to Tselihye’s icy lair and keep the shoggoth away from him and the Nazis long enough to destroy it?

One of Us, One of Us

Somewhere in the Great American West, the Eliot Marvel Show keeps them coming in, with freaks you just can’t see anywhere else. Not just a dog-faced boy and a bearded lady, but a stretch-neck from Borneo, a living Feejee Mermaid, an All-Legged Wonder, and so much more! And every once in a while, a visitor doesn’t come back out of the tent – missed only after the Eliot Marvel Show has pulled up stakes and left for the next town.

Investigation discovers that some of the missing folk are working as carnies for the Marvel Show’s surrounding attractions, or for the Show itself. The description of the ringmaster, Dr. Eliot, changes every so often: perhaps he’s a shapeshifting wizard experimenting with human parts? In fact, he’s an enslaved human, telepathically manipulated and replaced from the crowd when his brain burns out; the carnies are controlled more simply, with shoggoth-matter ‘transmitters’ implanted in their brains’ pain centers. All the freaks in the carnival simultaneously are the shoggoth, connected by telepathy (or by invisibly thin nerve tendrils) into one mighty monstrosity. It seeks a specific set of human chromosomes to unlock the Elder Thing “security code” (restricting its size and independence of action) implanted in its own genetics.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Although Lovecraft first mentions shoggoths in a sonnet (“Night-Gaunts” in *The Fungi from Yuggoth*) the shoggoth takes center stage only in *At the Mountains of Madness*. In “The Shadow Over Innsmouth” and “The Thing on the Doorstep” shoggoths are off-screen horrors.

Most later shoggoths come from retellings or re-skins of Lovecraft’s novel of Antarctic horror. Colin Wilson’s idiosyncratic spin “Tomb of the Old Ones” presents the shoggoths in relief against truly horrible Elder Things, while Tim Curran expands the shoggoths to a whole novel (*Hive 2: The Spawning*) in his own remake, the *Hive* novel series. Certainly no Lovecraftian can read “Who Goes There?” by John W. Campbell or watch John Carpenter’s inspired 1982 film adaptation of that story, *The Thing*, without comparing their extraterrestrial shapeshifting monster found in the Antarctic to Lovecraft’s original. In “Once More From the Top,” Adam Scott Glancy takes the less-traveled tack of re-examining the Raid on Innsmouth and the shoggoth breeding there.

Robert Bloch’s “Notebook Found in a Deserted House” presents a shoggoth more closely resembling Chaosium’s Dark Young of Shub-Niggurath, while Walter C. DeBill’s “Perilous Legacy” ties shoggoths to the Mi-Go. In “A Colder War” Charles Stross treats shoggoths as the ultimate weapon, a concept explored in more detail by David Conyers in “The Weaponized Puzzle” and “Weapon Grade.” Greg Stolze’s novel *Mask of the Other* likewise presents a possibly militarized – and definitely dangerous – shoggoth, along with really creepy Deep Ones.

“Shoggoths in Bloom” by Elizabeth Bear provides a sympathetic view of the enslaved sub-creations, while “Fat Face” by Michael Shea sends them out to walk among us in our form; both stories are in *The Book of Cthulhu*. In “Two Fingers” by David Hambling, the shoggoth is (very) slightly domesticated; the reverse is true in Cody Goodfellow’s medical technothrillers *Radiant Dawn* and *Ravenous Dusk*. These two novels present the next stage in shoggoth evolution, along with enough conspiracies, cancer, and gunplay to fill a whole campaign.