



SCIONS OF THE DARK GODDESS

RUBÉN G. COLLANTES
ENRIQUE CAMINO



CALL of
CTHULHU





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AUTHORS

Rubén G. Collantes and Enrique Camino

EDITOR

Francisco Javier Valverde García

ILLUSTRATION

Andrés Sáez Martínez «Marlock»
Shutterstock

LAYOUT

Laura Faílde

CORRECTION

Marta de la Serna

PLAYTESTING

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Juegos de mesa y rol, S.L.

Calle Pere IV, 51, 4º 4º, 08018 Barcelona

<https://shadowlandsgames.com/> info@shadowlandsgames.com

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CAMPAIGN GUIDE
SCIONS OF THE
DARK GODDESS

THE CTHULHU MYTHOS TODAY

Sandy Petersen said that the time for playing with the Mythos was the present, and that H.P. Lovecraft and his circle set his stories in the twenties because it was their present, and not because there was something special about that particular decade. And we wholeheartedly agree. After all, it is far easier to instil terror using a familiar environment. The act of “dealing with normality” makes things unexpected and surprising.

Scions of the Dark Goddess is a story from the Cthulhu Mythos set in the present day. To bring the Mythos into our world and ensure it inflicts terror -or at least fear and uneasiness- it had to be re-equipped, thereby enabling it to fulfil its purpose- to terrify us!- in the times we live in. “We’ve already read a hundred different versions of this Lovecraft story and we’ve seen the film. The twist in this plot no longer surprises us. This kind of beast doesn’t scare us anymore. Nobody will believe it”... To avoid this, the Mythos had to be transformed, reinterpreted based on today’s fears. The ocean depths remain largely unknown to us and can potentially still fill us with dread, and cemeteries continue to conjure up that rare blend of allure and repulsion. But there are many other traditional sources of horror that have gradually become somewhat hackneyed. Today, the fears of the “average person” are very different. This is what we have sought to expose.

Our Mythos, without losing its essence, otherworldliness and immeasurable nature, has been reinvented and is fuelled by the very concept of life, by our relationship as human beings with nature - could our own extinction be the cost of overcoming nature? - and by transhumanism - can we transcend our nature and become “enhanced humans”? Would that mean giving up our individuality? These questions are at the heart of the *Scions of the Dark Goddess* Mythos. And this is why it embodies our deepest fears.

SHUB-NIGGURATH AS AN ELEMENTAL FORCE AND ESSENTIAL FOR LIFE

Shub-Niggurath is an Outer God, a Great Old One from beyond time and space. She is also an incarnation of fertility. The unpredictability that Shub-Niggurath breathes into all living beings is what gives them their individuality. It is not something this deity decides voluntarily, but rather it emanates from her naturally as a result of her mere existence.

We have heard many times about the inherent evilness of the Great Old Ones. But, the rule seems sometimes to lack coherence when we look at the intentions of these gods. Lovecraft himself in *Out of the Aeons*, says through the character of T’yog, a high priest of Shub-Niggurath, that in the event of a war, Shub-Niggurath, Nug, Yeb, and Yig, the snake god, are ready to take the side of humanity. This could be understood as confirmation that, when all is said and done, there is no atavistic struggle between good and evil, but rather a need for balance.

Shub-Niggurath is a living being. She was one day born, and will one day die. Meanwhile, she goes through the stages of an aeviternal cycle. Every 744 years, Shub-Niggurath dies. She fades away. When that happens, nature also begins to wither. There are species that appear or die out. Animal and plant communities that change their habits. It is also said that babies born during these periods lack feelings, they have no soul, they behave like monsters. Entropy holds little sway over living beings during these periods. And immediately, Shub-Niggurath is reborn again. She is reincarnated as herself. When this happens, the spring is perfect, no baby is born deformed and (almost) no one falls sick.

Those who have studied this phenomenon, and there have been others before us, know that there are three phases in each cycle of the Goddess: *peperit* (birth), *puer* (youth) and *propinquus* (closure). The “3Ps”.





THE CAMPAIGN: SCIONS OF THE DARK GODDESS

From the beginning of time, Shub-Niggurath has represented the variability of life. As an incarnation of fertility, her presence implies the emergence of unpredictability. That is why all living beings are different, and why there are mutations. That is why there is change and evolution. And that is why there are mistakes, decadence and corruption. Chaos and madness.

Like all forces of nature, Shub-Niggurath undergoes different cycles in her existence. Just as we are born, grow up, reproduce and die, so too is this being affected by the passage of time, albeit not necessarily as we understand it. And now it is time for her to die.

During the campaign, the *investigators* find out about the existence of Shub-Niggurath, what she symbolizes and what her existence entails. Depending on how the scenarios unfold, clues will be found that reveal this deity's imminent death and the consequences her disappearance may have on humankind as we know it. They will also discover how humans are contributing to that process of destruction - their development of new forms of artificial fertility makes natural processes less necessary.

The whole backstory for the campaign develops as the scenarios unfold, which could each be played independently or altogether as a compact campaign divided into six acts. At the end of the campaign,

the players will be faced with an ethical, moral and “anti-natural” dichotomy, and they will have to choose between the perilous acceptance of evil as part of the existence of all individuals or place their hopes in a new species of human.

ARIADNA

Ariadna Valverde was born with a number of physical mutations. She was made to feel like a “monster” and was unable to ever have children, something that became a source of great torment and the reason she turned to natural medicine in search of a remedy. What nature had corrupted, nature could resolve. She developed connections with a number of environmental groups and underwent different pseudo-therapies. After years of trying, Ariadna was forced to accept two brutal realities: nothing in nature could help her and no one could change how nature worked.

That was when Ariadna said enough is enough. She turned her back on pseudosciences and unproven theories and threw herself into contemporary science. *In vitro* fertilization, gene editing... everywhere she looked and within reach of her deformed nailless fingers, science was outdoing nature: she could create life, a life that was not exposed to the disorder of chance, a life that was more than human. Ariadna set out to become an expert in genetics. But she soon found that science could no longer give her the



answers she was looking for, and that was when she came upon The Children of Amalthea.

The Children of Amalthea is the name of a cult that worships nature as the giver and guardian of everything that lives. Its members also worship Shub-Niggurath, as the incarnation of fertility, although they are unable to conceive of the goddess as a specific being. “The Children” know that we are approaching the end of a cycle, and that this situation, if properly managed, could give rise to a conceptual leap in what we call life. They are, therefore, willing to do whatever is necessary to ensure this happens.

Thanks to their very different aspirations, Ariadna’s relationship with the different Children of Almathea groups she made contact with was anything but simple. Today, Ariadna is an outsider within the group, a traitor for some. In any case, the sect has given her valuable knowledge about the Mythos, particularly that Shub-Niggurath is a necessary yet perverse component of humanity. She knows that the end of a cycle is approaching and is going to try to arrange things so that Shub-Niggurath, instead of reincarnating in herself, does so in a being of Ariadna’s creation. This being will be a mix of organic matter and artificial intelligence, spelling the end for unpredictability in all its forms. Ariadna is not yet powerful enough to create this new “life”, and, on occasion, she will need to use the characters to her advantage, passing herself off as their ally.

CAMPAIGN THEMES

As we said at the outset, the *Scions of the Dark Goddess* offers an updated Mythos that represents today’s fears without losing its essence. Some of the themes provided below can be used to drive the action, others are offshoots of these themes and can give rise to events that give “colour” to the central stories.

FERTILITY AND REPRODUCTION

Reproduction is how we living beings perpetuate our species. It is therefore innate to our existence and something which, as a group, we must ensure continues. Nature sometimes makes mistakes, and there are individuals, in all species, that are incapable of reproducing. Medical and scientific progress enables us to correct many of these situations. However, in keeping with that most human of maxims, “we did it because we could”, the very same science that was born out of a desire to help has crossed ethical boundaries. It can now serve purposes that were entirely unimaginable in the past. Which leads us to...

INDIVIDUALITY AND IDENTITY

The most cherished possession of every human being is their individuality. We cannot bear the thought of losing a hand or being confined to a wheelchair, but nothing terrifies us more than ceasing to be ourselves or losing our own self-recognition.



But are we truly singular? The scientific possibility of cloning set the stage for the debate, but this theme has long been addressed by writers of fiction. In our time, identity theft is already becoming a reality. How can we protect ourselves against this? How can we convince someone that we are who we say we are? Of course, the fact that there could be various copies of the same person leads us to think about...

TRANSHUMANISM AND THE NEXT STEP IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE HUMAN SPECIES

Can we beat death? If possible, could reproduction cease to be necessary? How could we overcome death? Could we download our memory and our personality onto a machine? And would what we create be us or a copy of us? Where does that leave the concept of individuality if we could recover “backup copies” of people?

And what about improving our species? Would it be right to partially transform ourselves into machines to be better or “last” longer? In reality, we have been doing this for centuries: false teeth, prosthetic arms and legs, and, more recently, pacemakers and cochlear implants... If we have already modified so many parts of our bodies, why not move onto our brains? What’s to stop us from enhancing our capacities? And this point brings us to consider...

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In 1996, Garry Kasparov beat a computer in a chess tournament that was specifically programmed to defeat him. A year later, it was the computer that was victorious. Ever since, no human has been able to win against a machine. Almost three decades later, in 2018, a computer programme was created that learnt to play chess based on the basic rules of the game. The programme was not shown any matches, nor was it taught any game strategies. After spending just four hours playing against itself, it became the greatest chess player in history, “effortlessly” beating one of the world’s best chess programmes, losing not one single match.

In short, in terms of the capacity to process large volumes of information, machines left us behind years ago. From the humble calculator lying on our desk to programmes that can work out the price of a plane ticket or algorithms that decide what to show us next while we shop online. And now we are teaching computers to go further. To recognize patterns, to make decisions, to consider ethical issues... in short, to think.

Of course, like with the other themes we have mentioned, this is nothing new in our collective deliberation. To the question: “what would happen if we gave machines the chance to rule over us?”, different authors have given us different responses. But perhaps we are not asking the right question. Going back to that old human maxim, are we destined to one day be ruled by machines, if things are so often done simply because they can be?

CHANGES IN NATURE

climate change, rising sea levels, the disappearance of bees... there only seems to be one possible outcome to all this and it is not very encouraging.

This is the backdrop to *Scions of the Dark Goddess*. Each participant has their role and this has not always been chosen voluntarily. Ariadna wants to undermine the established order for “the right reasons”, as she would claim. But how can we apply human ethics when we do not even know if we can call what remains humanity? Your players will have to provide the answer. Good luck with what they choose.

As Keeper, you can add colour by introducing small, apparently unconnected and irrelevant events in the background, for example, in reference to:

- Quantity: “a thousand corrupt young”, packed waiting rooms, overflowing parks, anthills teeming with hundreds of ants, etc.
- Growth: nurseries, fish farms, schools, etc.
- Growth in unusual places: “nature finds a way”, patches of grass spreading inside buildings, etc.
- Unbridled growth: branches and roots invading paths in a park, people and animals with hypertrophies, etc.



- Maternity: a news story in the background telling of the overflowing neonatal unit of the hospital, “pregnant women everywhere”, etc.
- Nature.
- Genetically modified organisms.

METAGAME

Roleplaying campaigns are experiences that change the lives of the characters. With the Mythos, entirely ordinary characters come face to face with arcane lore, their decisions eventually saving - or condemning - the whole of humanity.

But, what happens when one of the *investigators* dies in a scenario? That’s easy, the player creates another character and finds an excuse to join the original group. In other words, the experience that counts is that of the players themselves. In a process as long as a campaign, and in a setting as particular as the Cthulhu Mythos, metagaming will form an inevitable part of the proceedings. We define metagaming as the use of knowledge that belongs to the players - but is unknown to the *investigator* - so that the character can act in a way that may not obey logic and which is, in general, beneficial to the character and the player. Would a “normal” person face up to this creature or would they run away? They would certainly face up to them if they knew they only had X Hit Points. Would it occur to someone to press that janitor for more information simply because he was so forthcoming with his name? Generally speaking, if a non-investigator is asked for their name and the Keeper is quick to provide it, this character most probably has a name assigned to them and is therefore important for the game.

In all reality, metagaming cannot be entirely avoided, so we should use it to our advantage. *Scions of the Dark Goddess* spans across six chapters. We could say that the first two chapters are independent events. The participating *investigators* are different to those in the following chapters. The idea is to get the cogs turning in your players’ brains. You want it to be them and not their characters who pick

up on patterns, realize what names are repeated and envisage how the story might evolve.

One of the moments of investigation games that we most enjoy as Keepers is when the action stops and the players share their theories to try to explain the events that have taken place. These are moments of particular importance to us. We want the players to be present in various places at various times - through different character groups - so that they get an overall view of what is happening. In our campaign we are not going to start with a single thread that will lead us to an enormous ball of yarn. We will gradually provide our players with an overall vision but hold back some of the information. We want this perspective to be an incentive for your players to rack their brains and use everything they have learnt through their different characters. From the third scenario onwards, with a break in the fourth, it is the group of *investigators* that will eventually unravel the ball of yarn - if they are able to find it in the first place that is - playing the third, fifth and sixth scenarios.

SUMMARY

CHAPTER I

Synopsis: The Children of Amalthea sect want to inseminate a woman with the seed of Shub-Niggurath. The organization’s founder, the biologist Alexander Neville, has modified the seed’s extraterrestrial DNA to make it compatible with the human species and has conducted several experiments with it. After perfecting the seed, he created the Amalthea Fertility Clinic to test it out on patients. He has found what might be the “perfect mother” and has begun the *in vitro* fertilization process on her. The *investigators* must find out what has happened to that patient.

Events: approach to the general ideas about fertilization and its relation with Shub-Niggurath. Presentation of The Children of Amalthea organization. Introduction of the character of Ariadna Valverde.



Theme: artificial extraterrestrial fertilization.

Investigators: characters that will only play this chapter.

CHAPTER II

Synopsis: a group from The Children of Amalthea, led by Jonas Evergreen, uses the environmental organization Mother Gaia as a cover. Through a ritual that reveals Shub-Niggurath herself, Evergreen tries to create an enhanced human specimen using human hosts: three women hoping to become mothers who believe they are being put through a fertility rite. After the ritual, Ariadna steals the arcane lore of The Children of Amalthea using the *investigators* as a lure.

Events: the character of Ariadna Valverde is presented as the antagonist of The Children of Amalthea, although her real intentions are kept hidden.

Theme: the true balance of life.

Investigators: characters that will only play this chapter.

CHAPTER III

Synopsis: Ariadna Valverde has begun to build an artificial host to give birth to the offspring of Shub-Niggurath. Essential for spawning a child

of the Goddess are the pineal glands of the leaders of The Children of Almatheia, which have been genetically modified to be able to channel a power of great magnitude. Valverde uses the failed results of the fertilization experiments carried out by The Children of Almatheia, the so-called “Scions of the Dark Goddess”, to assassinate some of the organization’s leaders and thereby obtain their glands.

Events: Ariadna Valverde sets in motion her plan to obtain the power of Shub-Niggurath. Hints are made at the existence of an artificial intelligence that will be the heir of the Great Old One. The *investigators* find out what happened in the previous chapters.

Theme: Scions of the Dark Goddess.

Investigators: they will play this chapter and chapters 5 and 6.

CHAPTER IV

Synopsis: in 13th-century Syria a group of knights from the Order of Saint John are given a mission to infiltrate a crusader castle and recover an old codex hidden in a secret library. During their journey the knights came into contact with certain Zoroastrian traditions that would lead them to a Tower of Silence. Beneath the tower, a society



of cannibalistic outcasts are planning to replace Shub-Niggurath with their god in the natural order of things.

Events: the lifecycle of Shub-Niggurath is discovered. The outcasts get ahead of Ariadna Valverde in their attempt to replace the goddess, and that is what the players will be given to understand.

Theme: the lifecycle of The Black Goat of the Woods.

Investigators: characters that will only play this chapter.

CHAPTER V

Synopsis: back in the present day, the *investigators* learn of the experiences of the knights of the Order of Saint John in the 13th century. With this information and the knowledge gathered from the previous chapters, the *investigators* uncover Ariadna Valverde's plans. As the story unfolds they discover the artificial intelligence created by Valverde.

Events: we find out that Ariadna Valverde is attempting to take control of Shub-Niggurath's power and that the artificial intelligence she has created will be heir to the goddess.

Theme: Ariadna's plan.

Investigators: characters that will play chapters 3, 5 and 6.

CHAPTER VI

Synopsis: after discovering the artificial intelligence that will inherit the power of the Great Old One, the *investigators*, through a virtual reality induced by the "machine", experience the future of humanity free from the influence of Shub-Niggurath. They return to reality before the cycle of the goddess is completed, with time to put an end to Ariadna Valverde's plans. Or not.

Events: the players are shown the possible result should Ariadna Valverde's plan be brought to fruition. As the chapter draws to a close, the *investigators* must decide whose side they are on before the cycle is completed.

Theme: the end of the cycle and the beginning of the end.

Investigators: characters that will play chapters 3, 5 and 6.