

# **Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos Study Guide**

**Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos by H. P. Lovecraft**

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# The Call of Cthulhu and The Haunter of the Dark by H. P. Lovecraft

## The Call of Cthulhu and The Haunter of the Dark by H. P. Lovecraft Summary

The story purports to be written by Francis Wayland Thurston and to have been found after his death. In the story, Thurston relates two broad series of events, beginning with the strange 1926 death of his grand-uncle, George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages at Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island. Angell was a widely-respected expert on ancient inscriptions and was generally held to be a rigid academician. Thurston becomes Angell's heir and executor and disposes of the bulk of his professional belongings by placing them in an appropriate library. One box of belongings contains a bas-relief sculpture depicting strange hieroglyphics and a crouching and clawed figure of vaguely humanoid outline bearing an apparently pulpy head with features somewhat akin to an octopus. Along with the sculpture, Thurston finds a mass of documents in a file labeled "Cthulhu Cult." The documents explain the sculpture to be the 1925 work of Henry Anthony Wilcox, a local artist of some renown, and generally investigate a global series of nightmares, panics, manias, and bizarre crimes occurring from February 28th to April 2nd, 1925. Much of the paperwork consists of correspondence with various artists and poets afflicted with nightmares during the time period noted; many of the nightmares share common elements including a threatening and huge amorphous and malevolent being. Thurston finds the obsession with the sculpture and the noted time period bizarre and certainly unusual for the normally staid professor.

Additional reading of the various papers reveals Angell had attended the 1908 annual meeting of the American Archaeological Society. There, a policeman from New Orleans named John Raymond Legrasse had appeared bearing a grotesque statuette. Legrasse explained that the statuette had been an object of reverence of a particularly disgusting criminal cult, and hoped some of the scholars could inform him of the statuette's possible origin. One of the attendees, William Channing Webb, professor of Anthropology in Princeton University, indicated the statuette was vaguely familiar to works he had seen c. 1860 during field work in Greenland; those works had been venerated by a much-feared tribe of Eskimos, widely said to practice witchcraft. None of the other attendees had ever seen anything like the statuette. Legrasse then explained that one cultist, Castro, spoke freely for quite some time about evil Great Old Ones, pre-historic god-like beings of vast power and malevolence. One, Cthulhu, being represented by the statuette. The Great Old Ones, Castro explained, were sleeping in their lost city R'lyeh, awaiting a glorious resurrection at a time when "the stars and the earth might once more be ready for Them" (p. 13). Castro further explained that Cthulhu and the other Great Old Ones communicate to humanity through dreams. Thurston



sees a photograph of the statuette and realizes it bears a striking resemblance to Wilcox's sculpture—in part explaining Angell's fascination with the subject.

Later, Thurston reads a newspaper story about piracy and strange adventure in the South Pacific, wherein a much-weathered ship with one survivor was recovered. The survivor, Second Mate Gustaf Johansen, had been clutching an evil-looking statuette and told a bizarre tale. Johansen's ship had been attacked by *Alert*, but had overpowered that ship's degenerate, mixed-race, and lunatic crew. Their own ship sinking, Johansen and his ship's survivors had boarded *Alert* where he located the grotesque statuette. Thurston departs on a lengthy trans-global voyage in pursuit of Johansen and eventually locates Johansen's widow. She states Johansen's death to be unnatural, knows nothing more of the tale, but does surrender to the insistent Thurston an English manuscript, written by Johansen. The manuscript relates that the survivors found a strange and uncharted island and went ashore—while ashore, nearly all of the men were killed by a gigantic being said to resemble in salient particulars the statuette. A few, including Johansen, had escaped to *Alert* only to be pursued into the water by the gigantic thing bearing an octopus-like head. Johansen drove *Alert* directly into the thing, dispersing it into vapors and slime, and then fled as the being appeared to re-incorporate itself. Later, the survivors other than Johansen died. Thurston returns home and pieces together the theory that sunken *R'lyeh* must have been partially raised by a great storm c. February 28th and then again sunk by the great storm c. April 2; during its time of ascendancy poets, artists, and criminals had been driven nearly insane by recurring nightmares and visionary dreams.

*The Haunter of the Dark*, begins with a recapitulation of events described in Bloch's *The Shambler from the Stars*. Following his horrific experience, Blake returns to Providence and settles in the Federal Hill region, taking an apartment that overlooks a vista containing a distant massive and foreboding church spire. Drawn to the spire, Blake begins to dream about it and then begins to search for it, finally locating the church in a poor Italian neighborhood. It has been deserted for decades and is never visited because of strong local superstition. Blake enters the church through a broken window and explores. He finds it in remarkably good condition and locates numerous ancient and forbidden texts. Climbing into the tower, Blake finds the skeletal corpse of a newspaperman from some decades earlier. Blake reads through the newspaperman's notebook and discovers a list of historic events focused on the church and its assembly, apparent worshipers of a vile extraterrestrial being that is sensitive to light. Blake then finds an odd hinged box and opens it to find a luminescent stone called the Shining Trapezohedron. Blake is mesmerized by the stone and stares into its depths before snapping shut the lid of the box and retreating to his abode. There, he becomes convinced that he has summoned the vile extraterrestrial being and that he shares a type of mental connection with the ancient evil.

Some reporters investigate the church but find nothing exceptional and some policemen are sent to investigate the church but they also find nothing. Throughout the period of May through August of the year Blake keeps a diary of related events and thoughts, and falls into a deep depression, convinced that the evil thing will shortly kill him. He is particularly frightened when power outages occur, plunging the city into darkness.



Finally on an early August day a severe thunderstorm knocks out power to much of the city and the next day Blake is found dead, his face twisted into a mask of abject terror and his hands clutching a remarkable journal full of what authorities describe as the ramblings of a madman. The official cause of death is listed as electrocution from lightning.

## **The Call of Cthulhu and The Haunter of the Dark by H. P. Lovecraft Analysis**

The story establishes the mood and type of the entire collection inasmuch as it defines the concept of a "Cthulhu Mythos" story. The dominant themes of the story include the fragile nature of the human psyche; the human mind's inability to perceive the pure realism of a hostile and malevolent universe; and mostly the unsuspected but nevertheless real existence of god-like malevolent beings. The stories also reveal communication between humanity and these beings through the unconscious mind—mostly through dreams. Lovecraft's horrors are not supernatural per se, nor are they borrowed from Christianity's Satanism. Instead they are of cosmic origin and transcend space and time as understood by humanity's rather limited intelligence. The story's construction also features elements that are nearly characteristic of the genre, namely giving characters' full names, specifying exact places and locations, noting exact organizations, and giving precise dates nearly contemporaneous with the publication date. Thus, Francis Wayland Thurston is the executor of the estate of George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic Languages at Brown University, in Providence, Rhode Island, while the story's macabre nightmares are said to transpire between February 28th to April 2nd, 1925. Sunken R'lyeh, surmised to be irretrievably lost, is fairly precisely located at South Latitude 47° 9', West Longitude 126° 43' (basically, the middle of the South Pacific). These thematic and narrative techniques are used in nearly all of the stories in the collection, and they are intended to yield an authentic tone to the fictional works, such that they read more like an autobiographical statement of events than as fictional short stories.

The story does not suggest any redeeming powers or any helpful god-like powers to offset the malevolence of the Old Ones. Instead, the universe is entirely hostile and humanity exists nearly by accident and nearly entirely ignorant of the cosmic dangers lurking at the threshold. Thurston, as is common with most Cthulhu Mythos protagonists, does not actually do anything in the story beyond being an observant investigator and reporter who stumbles onto dark and mind-numbing secrets of evil cults and vile practices. He gathers information provided by other men who have actually performed acts—Wilcox, Legrasse, and Johansen. Like Angell, Thurston dies young and nearly unhinged by the disturbing things he has learned through vicarious experience. Like most Lovecraft stories, the short story features a large cast of degenerate and racially-impure worshipers of evil who are nearly subhuman in intellect. This reflects Lovecraft's well-known and unfortunate racism, and is a recurring theme in works of the Cthulhu Mythos. Note also that the construction relies far more on suggestive but indeterminate statements than on brazen depiction of horrific acts; for



example, the mutilated sacrificial bodies are said only to be "oddly marred" (p. 12) and the reader is invited to wonder about the gruesome details. How would an oddly marred body appear after it had been used as a human sacrifice in shocking voodoo orgy of half-caste pariahs? The encounter between Cthulhu and Johansen, et. al., is the only actual face-to-face encounter with an Old One documented in the entire corpus of Lovecraft's work. The story was originally published in *Weird Tales*, February 1928, and like most of Lovecraft's fiction has since been republished in a bewildering variety of editions, revisions, and compilations.

The *Haunter of the Dark* features a straightforward construction and in essence is a monster story—Blake feels drawn to the church, drawn to the spire, and drawn to gaze into a yellowish stone through which his mind is linked to an extraterrestrial evil. Snapping shut the box plunges the stone into darkness and summons the malevolent being. Blake then flees the area and goes slowly crazy while the summoned thing gains power. Finally a power outage plunges the city into darkness and the thing—unable to exist in any light—moves through the sky and murders Blake. The basic story is supplemented with Lovecraft's typical masterful setting of mood and place; note in particular the long history of the evil creature spanning back through about one hundred years of interaction with various peoples. Of course, the church is set in a racially mixed neighborhood but here the predominately European people are sensible enough to leave the malevolent church alone and even to guard against the creature during storms. It is humorous that Blake's corpse is discovered by members of the fraternity Psi Delta (e.g., 'mind change'). Note that the protagonist (and victim) of the story, Robert Blake, is generally held to be a fictionalized representation of Lovecraft's friend Robert Bloch—even Blake's street address is Bloch's actual address. Presumably, Lovecraft was 'returning the favor' of murdering his friend in fiction following Bloch's fictional death of Lovecraft in *The Shambler from the Stars* (discussed later in this summary). It is instructive to compare the two stories—similar in basic plotting—and from this derive a theory as to why Lovecraft is today remembered as the founder of the modern weird tale. The story was originally published in *Weird Tales* in December 1936.



# The Return of the Sorcerer and Ubbo-Sathla by Clark Ashton Smith

## The Return of the Sorcerer and Ubbo-Sathla by Clark Ashton Smith Summary

In *The Return of the Sorcerer*, the putative narrator Ogden is out of work and destitute and takes a job as a scribe to the eccentric John Carnby. Ogden is singularly suited to Carnby's needs because of fluency in ancient Arabic and other esoteric skills. Ogden plans to tenant with Carnby and moves into Carnby's rambling mansion. Within just a few hours Ogden realizes that Carnby is frightened of something. The first evening of his employment, Carnby has Ogden translate various passages from the *Necronomicon*, written in Arabic. Carnby explains that his Latin translation omits several passages. The passages that Ogden translates deal with the Satanic ability of a sorcerer to animate his body after death. While working, various clomping sounds emanate from the house and Carnby nervously dismisses them as rats. That night Ogden overhears Carnby reciting an incantation to keep away the evil dead; the incantation had been translated hours before by Ogden. The next day work continues and Carnby seems relaxed until toward evening the various clomping sounds resume. Carnby confesses he has recently murdered and dismembered his brother, Helman Carnby, in a jealous rage of Helman's superior sorcery. The clomping sounds are indeed not rats, but the reanimated parts of Helman's body seeking vengeance from beyond the grave. Ogden hurries to his room in horror, packs rapidly, and plans to leave. Prior to egress he passes the workroom where he sees the shadow of the headless corpse of Helman, assembled from various rotting component parts, standing over the dismembered body of Carnby. Frozen in horror, he watches as Helman's body collapses into pieces and mingles with the pieces of Carnby's body.

In *Ubbo-Sathla*, the narrator is unnamed and effaced, and the protagonist, Paul Tregardis, is unexceptional but educated in various obscure things. Tregardis shops at a store selling antiquities and purchases an orange-sized opalescent crystal that he finds fascinating. The proprietor explains it to be a type of visionary device recovered from the Miocene era and attributes it to a pre-historic civilization known as Thule. Tregardis realizes that he has read of the crystal in his archaic French version of *The Book of Eibon*, an accursed text. The crystal belonged to the wizard Zon Mezzamalech who used it to look into the past, before his untimely and mysterious disappearance. Tregardis returns home and gazes into the crystal. He feels himself transcending time in reverse and eventually partially becomes Zon Mezzamalech. With effort, Tregardis regains his distinct existence and looks away from the crystal. Over the next three days Tregardis repeats his experiment, each time feeling that the distant past fuses with the present. On the final experiment, Tregardis is unable to stop looking and his existence vanishes into that of Zon Mezzamalech on his last day of life. The fused beings continue to gaze into the crystal as they recede in time past the beginning of human evolution,





past the beginning of simian evolution, and to a vastly distant time when an amorphous, disgusting slime known as Ubbo-Sathla spumes off amoebic offspring that form the basis of all terrestrial life.

## **The Return of the Sorcerer and Ubbo-Sathla by Clark Ashton Smith Analysis**

Smith's stories are far more mundane than Lovecraft's stories. In them, the protagonists are fairly uninvolved and are more passive observers of a singular event than the determined investigators of Lovecraft's stories. Smith suggests a variant on simple Satanism as an ultimate source of evil and his first-presented story is little more than a revenge-of-the-zombies work. Characterization is simple and the story unfolds over the course of three days. Carnby presents himself as an academic interested in the sociology of black magic but in fact is easily seen to be a dedicated practitioner. His early mention of his brother, recently "gone away on a long trip" (p. 27), combined with the title, provides heavy-handed foreshadowing that Carnby's recent loneliness is more sinister than it might appear. The Return of the Sorcerer was originally published in *Strange Tales*, September 1931.

In *Ubbo-Sathla*, the protagonist becomes involved by buying a strange crystal at an antique shop and then gazing into it. Aside from being noted as educated in strange things of the past, Tregardis is not developed, nor is Zon Mezzamalech the sorcerer of antiquity. The evil forces in the story are said to be Satanic and *Ubbo-Sathla* is presented as horrific generally only in appearance rather than motive—thus, it's loathsome but not particularly malevolent, and it predates Satanism by billions of years making any link to evil tenuous. It is described as oblivious but pre-mundane; though fantastic, it is not really akin to Lovecraft's malevolent Old Ones. Aside from the physical connection of the crystal, there is no logical thread linking *Ubbo-Sathla*, Zon Mezzamalech, and Tregardis, and once their three beings are reverse-telescoped to the origin of terrestrial life the crystal itself is said to vanish. In this respect, Tregardis is nothing but a hapless victim of circumstances. *Ubbo-Sathla* was originally published in *Weird Tales*, July 1933.





# The Black Stone by Robert E. Howard

## The Black Stone by Robert E. Howard Summary

The putative narrator and protagonist reads *Nameless Cults* by Von Junzt, published in 1839. Von Junzt's work hints that all times and spaces are linked by doors and keys. Von Junzt discusses the Black Stone, an obelisk, as an example of such a key. His curiosity piqued, the protagonist locates the Black Stone adjacent to the village of Stregoicavar, in Hungary. On the way to visit the obelisk, the protagonist learns that during 1526 the Turkish scribe Selim Bahadur had delivered a scroll concerning Stregoicavar to Count Boris Vladinoff; the Count found the scroll's contents displeasing and was shortly thereafter killed and buried under collapsing masonry. Arriving in distant Stregoicavar, the protagonist speaks with the inn-keeper. The distant Black Stone is said to be evil; the original inhabitants of the village were all slaughtered in 1526; the current villagers moved in from surrounding areas. The protagonist ventures out the next day and locates the Black Stone deep in the mountainous woods.

The protagonist travels to the obelisk the next night and at midnight falls into a deep sleep. He awakens to see ghostly figures cavorting around the obelisk; they appear as degenerate humans and are nude. A nude woman dances while a masked priest flagellates her into bloody unconsciousness. The priest then sacrifices an infant, which summons a flabby toad-like being that perches on the stone. The priest lifts a nude, bound girl upward as an offering and the protagonist passes out. Upon regaining consciousness in the morning the protagonist returns to town and broods over the horrible experience, then travels to the site of Vladinoff's death where he exhumes the centuries-old corpse and recovers Bahadur's ancient scroll, wrapped around a statuette of a toad-like thing. The scroll describes the ritual the protagonist has seen in ghostly vision, and relates how Bahadur and his men had slaughtered all of the villagers and then cornered the toad-like thing in a cavern and, with great loss of life, slain it. The protagonist flings the statuette and the scroll into a river and staggers away, agog at the implication that such monstrous evils exist and are separated from mundane reality only by insubstantial doors and keys.

## The Black Stone by Robert E. Howard Analysis

The story is a relatively straightforward horror story involving foul rituals of times long passed and demonic beings demanding human sacrifice. The ritual is described in considerable detail and thereby loses some of its horrific aspect. It involves infanticide and ritual human slaughter—presumably the young girl being offered as living food. The story is unlike typical Cthulhu Mythos stories inasmuch as the horrible toad-like being is killed by twenty or so determined men with swords. Usually, the ancient evils are indestructible and indescribably powerful or, at the very least, are able to reconstitute themselves after apparent death.



Elements shared in common with other tales in the collection include: the protagonist's momentary collapse of reason, being overpowered by the sheer horror of the scene being witnessed; the dream-like sequence where a vision from a hugely distant past is received; the basis of the foul cult activities being borne by degenerate, mixed-race peoples; foul forms of orgiastic devil worship; and a tangible link to the past in the form of an object or an obscure document—in this case, both. Note how the ancient cult and the toad-like deity were wiped out by Bahadur as reported in his scroll. Bahadur includes in his report the golden figurine of the toad-like thing, and delivers it to Vladinoff. Vladinoff's death and entombment conveniently follows. This allows the protagonist to recover the full story of events, completing the plot development. The fact that Vladinoff remained entombed for many hundreds of years and is then disinterred by a few hours of manual labor strains credulity, though the protagonist's observation of the "missing" pendant, during his vision, is a nice artistic touch. The fact that the manuscript is still legible and durable is also not particularly believable. The story was originally published in *Weird Tales*, November 1931.



# The Hounds of Tindalos and The Space-Eaters

## The Hounds of Tindalos and The Space-Eaters Summary

In *The Hounds of Tindalos*, the narrator and protagonist, Frank, calls upon his acquaintance Halpin Chalmers. He finds Chalmers engrossed in the contemplation of a new drug, said to allow the user to view the past and future. The two characters engage in a rather adversarial discussion about the nature of science and insight. Chalmers then delivers a rather incoherent discourse on the nature of time being composed of curves and angles. Chalmers then insists on taking the drug immediately and enlists Frank's aid to write down anything notable during the drug trance. Chalmers quickly appears to have a vast visionary experience and moves rapidly through various time periods, speaking aloud as his vision continues. Chalmers then becomes frightened and agitated and insinuates that he "went too far" (p. 67) and attracted the attention of vague hound-like ancient evils that caught his particular scent. The so-called Hounds of Tindalos can lope through time and scent track their prey through the millennia. Frank departs but is summoned the next day. Chalmers explains that he is being tracked by the Hounds of Tindalos and his only chance of survival is to remove all of the angles from a room; the Hounds of Tindalos travel through angles but cannot travel through curves. With Frank's help, Chalmers plasters over all the angles in a room and then seals himself in, waiting for the Hounds of Tindalos to give up the scent. Frank goes home and later learns through newspaper articles that an earthquake occurred, sending various cracks through Chalmers' room. The cracks—angled cracks—allowed the Hounds of Tindalos to find and kill Chalmers.

In *The Space-Eaters*, the narrator and protagonist, Frank, visits with his acquaintance Howard. Howard is a writer of weird tales and agonizes over his inability to create precisely various types of horror in writing. Howard is rather conceited and abusive, but claims there are various types of horrors that cannot be conceived of by the rational human mind. They are shortly joined by Henry Wells, who tells a chilling tale of being assaulted in a nearby woods by a wispy smoke-like apparent ghost which seized him by some non-physical means and inflicted intense pain. Wells also exhibits a hole in his head, much like a gunshot without trauma, which extends into his brain. After much discussion and advice, Wells departs. Howard is angry that Wells has captured the essence of some new concept of horror through what he assumes is psychosis.

Hours later, a shrieking wail is heard from the nearby woods. Frank and Howard go to investigate, and find Wells collapsed with new pain. They assist him and all three men then flee a shapeless, ghostly evil that lurks about the woods. The return to a nearby farmhouse and summon a surgeon. The surgeon sedates Howard, who is nearly hysterical, and then operates on Wells' brain. He declares he can do nothing for Wells,



advises Frank and Howard to flee, and then departs. Howard comes to and he, and Frank, fear the ghostly malevolent being will shortly kill them. They abandon Wells and put out to sea in an open boat, pursued by a wailing fog-like being. Frank makes the sign of the cross, followed by Howard, and the malevolent force disappears. Over the next week Howard strives to recreate the fateful night in fiction; Frank fears that doing so will unhinge Howard's mind. In the end, Howard's fate is far worse, however, because his ceaseless dwelling upon the ghostly horror summons is again and as Frank watches, it drills into Howard's mind and destroys him. Frank flees.

## The Hounds of Tindalos and The Space-Eaters Analysis

The Hounds of Tindalos is a remarkably simple but powerful story based around the recurrent mythos idea that the human mind cannot comprehend the rational universe as it really exists. The plot device used to open up terrifying new vistas is an obscure drug that allows the user to enter a type of "fourth dimension", where the past, the present, and the future are all visible simultaneously. The metaphysics of the story suggests that ancient evils can travel through "angles" in space and time, while ancient goods travel through "curves" in space and time. This metaphysics is not fully developed but is sufficient for the story. It is ironic that Chalmers is so anxious to start a timeless experience. Note also that his universal and timeless experience heavily favors the past of Western culture. By going too far and seeing too much, Chalmers attracts the ire of ancient evils that track him through time. Chalmers believes that if he can avoid death for a few days the ancient evils will lose interest and he can survive—to this end he obliterates angles from his room. An unfortunate earthquake reintroduces angles. Note the typical mythos construction of presenting putative newspaper clippings and excerpts from official reports to conclude the narrative structure. The Hounds of Tindalos was originally published in *Weird Tales*, March 1929.

The Space-Eaters proves interesting in construction. Frank and Howard—presumably fictionalized representations of Frank Long and Howard Lovecraft—meet and Howard expounds a fictional idea about a new type of horror able to travel through space, without dimension or color, but able to be perceived and inflict horrible pain. That very type of horror then arrives and begins to prey upon locals. The actual injury suffered by Wells should be fatal but is not—Frank peers down the neatly-bored hole to Wells' brain and then, unbelievably, allows his friend to wander off into the night a second time. Later, a surgeon rather fortunately appears and opens Wells' head up for a look-see, and then decides nothing can be done. This aspect of the story is fairly silly and does not parallel well the flight in horror of Frank and Howard. Note that Frank's dispersal of the horror by using the sign of the cross is not intended as a Christian act, as earlier Howard had been expounding the pre-historic foundations of symbols, now used in such practices as religion. Frank is thus using a vastly ancient warding symbol when he crosses himself. The Space-Eaters was originally published in *Weird Tales*, July 1928.



# The Dweller in Darkness and Beyond the Threshold by August Derleth

## The Dweller in Darkness and Beyond the Threshold by August Derleth Summary

Professor Upton Gardner becomes fascinated with various local legends about a force known as the Wendigo, said to frequent an area around Rick's Lake in a forested, remote area of Wisconsin. One of Gardner's friends owns an unused lodge in the area and Gardner travels there and stays at the lodge for several weeks before simply disappearing. Subsequent to Gardner's disappearance, his secretary, Laird Dorgan, decides to intervene because police searches have been fruitless. Dorgan enlists the assistance of Jack, the narrator and principle protagonist in the story. Jack is an assistant librarian at Miskatonic University. Dorgan explains that prior to his disappearance, Gardner had written several bizarre letters requesting for photocopies of certain ancient books and complaining of an evil presence. Dorgan and Jack travel to the area and are joined by the local sheriff and an alcoholic local known as Old Peter. The group searches the area with no results, except that they stumble across an ancient, moldering monolith with strange carvings—Old Peter seems frightened of it.

Laird and Dorgan then begin a two-week stay at the Rick's Lake lodge; they bring along a recording device with much blank media to observe the various hours in which they might be away from the lodge. Once they arrive they review Gardner's books, notes, and so forth. They appear to be lists, codifications, and links to various elements of several supernatural beings known as Old Ones. The papers also contain a letter to a local man, Professor Partier, who was released from his university posting for dabbling in various forbidden areas of wild speculation. During the first night, Dorgan and Jack hear sounds of rushing wind but the air is still, and they also hear sounds of shrieking ululations that cause them to fear. The next day they decide to visit Partier and then turn on the recording device before leaving. Partier expounds on a class of good powers known as the Elder Gods who stand in opposition to the malevolent Great Old Ones. He also attempts to link the Great Old Ones to various elemental forces, and states that the stories of H.P. Lovecraft are not fictional. Dorgan and Jack return to the lodge, picking up Old Peter on the way. They liquor him up and then take him back to the ancient monolith where he frightfully admits having once seen an apparition emerging from the monolith. Old Peter departs and Dorgan and Jack return to the lodge and listen to the tape. They hear a repetition of the wind, much chanting and ululations, and then a strange message apparently shouted by Gardner and addressed to Dorgan. Gardner states he is imprisoned by an Old One named Nyarlathotep, having been careless in approaching his research. Gardner tells Dorgan how to summon an Elder God named Cthugha who will counter Nyarlathotep, and urges Dorgan to summon Cthugha and flee immediately. Dorgan and Jack carefully transcribe the summoning incantation. Then, despite the cryptic warning, Dorgan and Jack decide to observe the monolith during the



nighttime hours. At the monolith they hear weird noises, see a bright light, and then witness a vast, amorphous, semi-tangible being appear. They flee to the lodge, pursued by the being, but gain the safety of the house.

Moments later they are joined by Gardner who tells them the whole thing is a hoax, explained by various natural causes including hallucinogenic gasses emerging from mineral deposits around the ancient monolith. Gardner examines the recording from the previous night and accidentally drops it, destroying it. Dorgan readily agrees with everything Gardner says, but Jack is openly skeptical. Finally, all three men go to sleep. A few hours later Dorgan and Jack awake in fear, aware that some supernatural force is coming to harm them. They read the incantation to summon Cthugha from their transcription and then see various points of light and flame appear and scour the woods, apparently driving out Nyarlathotep. The men then flee the area, and as they depart they notice that footprints lead away from the lodge—they start out as Gardner's but then change into a hideous, shapeless footprint.

In *Beyond the Threshold*, the narrator and protagonist Tony is summoned by his cousin Frolin to the ancient and bizarre house of their grandfather, Josiah Alwyn. As he travels to the distant backwoods surrounding his grandfather's house, Tony muses about a strange and disquieting painting that dominates one of the walls in the strangely windowless structure. Upon arrival, Frolin confides in Tony that Josiah has been acting strangely for several months and increasingly so as of late. Tony is received cordially by Josiah who appears in good health, but over the next few days Tony discovers that Josiah is anxiously engaged in exploring forbidden knowledge compiled many years ago by Leander Alwyn, a deceased but common ancestor and the builder of the ancient home. After a few days of increasingly bizarre sounds and sights in the remote area, the longtime family assistant excuses himself on the ground of health and flees the area. Josiah then confides to Tony that he is attempting to find—and intends to cross—a supernatural threshold, hidden within the house and much discussed in Leander's writings. A few days later Josiah succeeds in conjuring Ithaqua, a malevolent wind spirit who enters the house through a cavern system concealed by the painting and carries Josiah aloft and away. After an official investigation, Josiah's few belongings begin showing up in divers places and his body—frozen—is found some days later on a tropical island, his pockets full of weird mementos of a strange and evil voyage.

## **The Dweller in Darkness and Beyond the Threshold by August Derleth Analysis**

Derleth's adjective-rich stories feature a fairly complex construction, often with a larger-than-typical cast of characters. *The Dweller in Darkness*, in particular, is a fairly complicated narrative with flashbacks and numerous minor characters. Most of the minor characters—Old Peter and Pariter, for example—are little more than sources of information. The primary characters also use a recording device which allows them to overhear a 'conversation' for which they are not present, easily the most-interesting plot device utilized in the story. The recording device uses a fragile cylinder as media, and this allows the cylinder to be destroyed later in the narrative. Derleth's Cthulhu mythos





varies markedly from Lovecraft's vision in several respects. Derleth was interested in codifying the various supernatural beings such as Cthulhu and Nyarlathotep in a type of hierarchy, and in linking each power to a particular element. Lovecraft left them all as ill-defined and irrational, not subject to codification and certainly not associated with any particular terrestrial element. Derleth also sets up the Elder Gods as a sort of opposition to the Great Old Ones, such that the malevolent Nyarlathotep shares great antipathy with the benevolent Cthugha. For Lovecraft, such a dichotomy would have been spurious; the Old Ones were immensely powerful, entirely malevolent, and unopposed by anything meaningful. Given that Dorgan and Jack dispel Nyarlathotep by conjuring the friendly Cthugha, it is obvious that Lovecraft's cosmic view was far more starkly depressing—and horrific—than Derleth's view.

Gardner's behavioral change is explained easily—his first recorded warning was actually Gardner, while his later visit to the lodge consisted of Nyarlathotep—or an agent—acting in the physical guise of Gardner; the second visit intending to eradicate the information conveyed in the first visit. Again, Derleth's vision of the Old Ones is fairly rational and intelligible: Nyarlathotep fears Cthugha, fears that Dorgan and Jack may summon Cthugha, and thus destroys a recording and steals information. Such banal and rational motivation for a cosmic, ageless, infinite evil would never occur in Lovecraft's work. Note also that both stories by Derleth cite Lovecraft and his fiction (humorously, specifically *The Outside and Others*, the posthumous volume first published by Arkham House, a publishing company co-founded by Derleth) as a type of non-fiction authority on the horrific events; certainly an interesting and atypical meta-fictional element. Derleth coined the phrase "Cthulhu mythos" to describe the particular type of fiction presented in e.g. the present work. *The Dweller in Darkness* was originally published in *Weird Tales*, November 1944.

In *Beyond the Threshold*, the malevolent force is Ithaqua, a wind spirit that catches victims up into the air and then transports them about the globe to random places before dropping them from some great height. The threshold of the title is heavily foreshadowed in Tony's contemplation about the great painting in the house—so heavily foreshadowed that the subsequent story becomes tiresome in the presentation of Josiah's speculation about what or where the threshold might be. In the end the result is not even supernatural—the painting merely covers a hole in the wall that leads into a cavern system through which Ithaqua—apparently incapable of supernatural ingress—travels to take Josiah away. The narrative development is straightforward, though Frolin and Tony make a quintessential pair of indecisive and unimaginative Cthulhu mythos investigators. *Beyond the Threshold* was originally published in *Weird Tales*, September 1941.





# **The Shambler from the Stars, The Shadow from the Steeple, and Notebook Found in a Deserted House by Robert Bloch**

## **The Shambler from the Stars, The Shadow from the Steeple, and Notebook Found in a Deserted House by Robert Bloch Summary**

In *The Shambler from the Stars* the unnamed narrator is a writer of weird tales who ekes out a bare existence in order to pursue a life devoted to a study of the weird. The narrator eventually locates a Latin copy of Ludvig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis*, a suppressed and hated book of vile secrets penned by an infamous necromancer. Unable to read Latin, the narrator travels to his friend's house and his friend begins to translate various passages. One appears to be some type of summoning spell and upon its completion a horrible and invisible force invades the room, kills the narrator's friend, and drinks all of his blood—in the process becoming infused with blood and partially visible as an amorphous horror with many tentacles. Satiated, it departs. Horrified, the narrator sets fire to the abode and returns home, sure that the horror will eventually come calling again for another meal of blood.

In *The Shadow from the Steeple* the black thing conjured during Lovecraft's *The Haunter of the Dark* (see earlier in this review) is reconsidered. The story begins with a fairly lengthy recapitulation of Lovecraft's earlier story before introducing the protagonist, Fiske, a friend of the late Blake. Fiske strongly believes that the official statement concerning Blake's death—electrocution by lightning—to be erroneous and suspects a sinister conspiracy. To this end he doggedly investigates Blake's demise over a period of several years. He finally manages to locate Dr. Ambrose Dexter, a physician and physicist who entered the ancient church, recovered the Shining Trapezohedron, and flung it into the depths of the local bay only days after Blake's death. Fiske calls on Dexter at his home and finds it illuminated and notes the library is stocked with various evil and banned books that were taken from the church's library many years ago. During a strained conversation Fiske postulates—apparently correctly—that Dexter had gazed into the gem but not closed the box to prevent a summoning. However, the Shining Trapezohedron found ample darkness in the deepest reaches of Narragansett Bay allowing the black thing to be summoned. Fiske names the thing as Nyarlathotep and further postulates that after many years of coexistence it has finally merged with—indeed become—Dexter, and has thereby become immune to light. Dexter's lengthy career in the development of the hydrogen bomb is damning evidence that Dexter wants to destroy mankind. A strangely nonplussed Dexter sees Fiske to the door and



then walks into a darkened garden to consort with animals, and is found to slightly glow in the dark with an evil luminescence.

In *Notebook Found in a Deserted House* the narrative purports to be a transcription from the said found notebook. The transcription tells the story of Willie, the putative writer and protagonist. Willie is a young orphan who is sent to live with his Uncle Fred and Aunt Lucy on a remote country farm. The area is reportedly haunted by something foul and an evil cult of worshipers, but in the first months Willie finds little evidence of this. Later, he accidentally sees a haunting thing that looks something like an amorphous tree shambling along intoning foul incantations—he surmises it must be worshiped by a type of druidic cult, and thereafter keeps out of the woods. The family then readies for a visit by Cousin Frank Osborne yet when Fred drives to town to pick him up the horse and buggy return empty—Fred is never seen again. The homestead is too remote to travel for assistance and Lucy and Willie spend an anxious day hoping Fred will appear. That night Willie has nightmares and in the morning Lucy has vanished, along with the horse and cattle. Then Osborne arrives but quickly enough Willie determines it is not really Osborne. Willie then pins his last hope on Cap Pritchett, the mailman who calls once a week. When Pritchett arrives Willie begs for a ride into town. Osborne attempts to intervene but Pritchett drives away with Willie. They make a run for town but are intercepted by cultists and Willie ends up returning to the homestead, much distraught and alone; Pritchett is captured in the fray. Osborne is gone so Willie boards up the house to make a final stand, writing his sad tale into the aforementioned notebook and concluding by noting that cultists and things have surrounded the house and are beginning to break in the door.

## **The Shambler from the Stars, The Shadow from the Steeple, and Notebook Found in a Deserted House by Robert Bloch Analysis**

The narrator in *The Shambler from the Stars* generally is held to be a fictionalized version of the author, Bloch, and was 'retroactively' and meta-fictionally named Robert Blake by H.P. Lovecraft, in *The Haunter of the Dark*. The friend viciously killed by the monster generally is held to be a fictionalized version of Lovecraft—and was so stated to be by the author who held a personal friendship with Lovecraft. Robert Blake, in Lovecraft's *The Haunter of the Dark*, generally is held to be Bloch, while Bloch's *The Shadow from the Steeple* extends Lovecraft's *The Haunter in the Dark*. This authorial interplay explains the particular sequencing of stories contained within the volume. *The Shambler from the Stars* is a fairly simple narrative, with an over-long (presumably fictionalized auto-biographical) introduction. The protagonist finds a rare book, known for its malevolence, seeks help in translating the book, only to have the friend who performs the translation accidentally conjure a horrific being that kills him and drinks his blood before flying off into space. The narrator burns the place down and returns home. Indeed, the story is far more enjoyable because of the back-story between the two authors and the subsequent fictional interplay presented in the collection. The story was originally published in *Weird Tales*, September 1935.



The Shadow from the Steeple concludes the three-story narrative arc discussed above. Dexter apparently truly intended to place the evil of the Shining Trapezohedron beyond human use, only inadvertently plunging it into darkness and summoning Nyarlathotep, here named as the shadow itself. The publication date of the story indicates the heightened focus on hydrogen bomb research as appropriate. The Dexter-Nyarlathotep conflation glows in the dark with strange iridescence, appears over-tan in bright light, and hides its fluorescence by remaining constantly in brilliant light: it is also responsible for the development of hydrogen bomb weapons. Note that Fiske's investigation essentially leads nowhere—he discovers the truth and then goes home. Atypical for the genre, he is not noticeably unhinged by his discoveries.

Notebook Found in a Deserted House features a unique construction and tone. Told from the first-person perspective of a twelve-year-old boy, it has a slightly affected yet successful execution. Note the lack of complicated construction and the dearth of adjectives and 'big' words that mark the narrative. Willie, the narrator, is active within his abilities but lacks the better judgment one would expect of a grown-up. Instead, he relies heavily on the decisions made by Lucy, defers to a remarkable degree to Osborne, and ultimately relies on Pritchett for rescue. Unfortunately for Willie, none of these people help. His description of the thing in the woods is exceptionally precise and quite compelling.



# **The Salem Horror by Henry Kuttner; The Terror from the Depths by Fritz Leiber; Rising with Surtsey by Brian Lumley**

## **The Salem Horror by Henry Kuttner; The Terror from the Depths by Fritz Leiber; Rising with Surtsey by Brian Lumley Summary**

In *The Salem Horror*, Carson, a novelist of popular fiction and the protagonist, seeks a quiet tenement in which he can finish his current novel. He ends up in Salem and rents the house once inhabited by Abigail Prinn, who had been hanged for witchcraft on Gallows Hill in 1692 and thereafter interred with a stake through her heart. Carson finds the house acceptable even though nearly everyone else shuns it. One day he is bothered by a rat and follows the strangely-acting creature into the basement where he locates a secret door. Opening the portal, he discovers a tunnel cut through the rock that ends in a large room with intricate mosaic patterns, runes, and a metallic-disc lid over a hole in the ground. Noting the chamber is absolutely silent, Carson moves into it and continues to write. He mentions his find to the landlord who publicizes the strange room and soon Carson is interrupted by a flow of occultists and sightseers. One, Michael Leigh, strongly suggests Carson vacate the home—but Carson rebuffs the suggestion. Leigh hints the hidden room is a sort of thought-wave concentration point but Carson ignores him. Carson then has strange dreams that culminate in a frightful night. He goes wandering the next morning and discovers that in a nearby graveyard a body had been disinterred the previous night. A neighbor accosts Carson and accuses him of harboring some type of thing. Carson then descends to the secret room and discovers the desiccated undead corpse of Prinn, and watches her utter an incantation over the metallic disc. It rises as a summoned amorphous and black being begins to emerge. Just then Leigh rushes into the room with various paraphernalia, and dispels the evil being which retreats back into the hole in the ground, dragging the corpse of Prinn below.

In *The Terror from the Depths*, Georg Reuter Fischer, the narrator, briefly describes his genealogy; his father was sensitive to psychic impressions, a skilled mason, a successful dowser, and eccentric. The family moved to the Los Angeles area when the narrator was young. The narrator has a crippled foot and spends about twelve hours every night in deep sleep from which it is impossible to rouse him—yet he has no dreams, remembering only a few intense nightmares about flying worms. During one hiking excursion, the narrator's father falls into a deep sinkhole that opens under his feet and dies; he is entombed in situ. The narrator attends Miskatonic University for a few weeks but suffers a nervous collapse after prolonged bouts of sleepwalking. He returns to Los Angeles and attends UCLA, taking courses in poetry and earning a BA in literature. During a hiking excursion, the narrator's mother dies of a poisonous snakebite



only a few feet from the place where his father had died years earlier. The narrator becomes increasingly eccentric and convinced that the Los Angeles area is riddled with tunnels of varying depths, created by malevolent flying worms with whom he believes he shares an evil psychic link. He self-publishes a volume of poetry that brings an enthusiastic response from Albert Wilmarth, a professor at Miskatonic. The narrator and Wilmarth exchange lengthy letters dealing with Lovecraft, the occult, and other topics. Wilmarth then visits with a machine able to detect cavities in the earth—the two men discover that indeed the Los Angeles area is riddled with tunnels. Coincidentally, the narrator then receives a letter and materials from his deceased father—held by a family friend until a certain time. In the letter the father states that he was able to swim through the earth and see minerals, thus his successes with dowsing; he encourages his son to fully exploit his natural, albeit bizarre, abilities.

Later, a telegram arrives informing Wilmarth of Lovecraft's death. The two men then take a reading in the family house's basement and find that the structure rests upon a huge cavity in the earth. Wilmarth wants to flee but the narrator insists they remain behind; the two men then take drugs that purportedly assist them in exploring the occult dream world. The narrator does not remember dreaming, but Wilmarth awakes in a panic and flees the area. The narrator writes his account, gathers and stores various materials, and then flees as the house begins to collapse into a giant sinkhole. The narrator's corpse is discovered in a partially dissolved state on the edge of the collapsed structure.

In *Rising with Surtsey*, Phillip Haughtree, the narrator, co-authors romance novels with his brother Julian. Julian has a lifelong tendency to be morose and brooding, and spends time studying the occult. Then Julian suffers a mental collapse and is deemed insane—coincidentally a large geologic disturbance occurs in the North Atlantic during the same period. Julian spends months in an asylum where he is catatonic and mumbles strange sounds. Then, Julian makes an apparently miraculous recovery, except that he always wears large, dark sunglasses—coincidentally a second large geologic disturbance occurs in the North Atlantic during the same period. The two brothers return to their common home and begin writing again, but Julian is secretive, paranoid, and weird in behavior. Julian becomes increasingly erratic and spends much time in the cellar; Phillip finally discovers Julian is conjuring the body of Pesh-Tlen, an ancient amorphous being. Julian's true intelligence is captured in the amorphous being, while the amorphous being's true intelligence is captured in Julian's physical body. The summoning will once again transfer the two psyches and also free the amorphous being on the surface. The summoning coincidentally coincides with the appearance of the Island of Surtsey during a massive geologic disturbance in the North Atlantic. Phillip intervenes during the summoning to kill his brother's physical body, preventing the transfer. He notes the body's eyes are distended and horrible. Phillip later commits suicide after he is deemed insane and committed.



## **The Salem Horror by Henry Kuttner; The Terror from the Depths by Fritz Leiber; Rising with Surtsey by Brian Lumley Analysis**

The Salem Horror conflates the history of Salem witchcraft with the Cthulhu Mythos; in the narrative a 'standard, old-fashioned witch' summons a being of amorphous shape, indeterminate size, and malevolent intent. Leigh has fortunately done his research and counters the witch's summoning spell with symbols, potions, and incantations, presumably preventing a monstrous attack on humanity. Elements of modern vampire tales are also present, as Leigh indicates Prinn's undead body was fixed in the grave only by the stake through the heart. The narrative strongly supports Leigh's supposition that Carson's nightmarish night was spent exhuming Prinn's body and pulling the fixing stake from her corpse. Carson was being controlled, of course, by Prinn's disembodied ghost gaining influence by his prolonged stay in the witch's chamber. The story was originally published in *Weird Tales*, May 1937.

The Terror from the Depths is a slow-paced story involving a small cast of characters. The narrator shares an apparently hereditary visionary personality with his father and grandfather, though the narrator's visions are malevolent. Early in his youth, the narrator begins an apparent form of intellect transference with flying, worm-like creatures that live deep underground and under the Pacific seabed. The worms are malevolent and gradually tunnel under Los Angeles, causing occasional collapses and sinkholes. Note that Professor Wilmarth is a fictionalized representation of H. P. Lovecraft himself, and it is thus ironic that Wilmarth receives a telegram informing him of Lovecraft's death. Much of the narrative is concerned with the logical introduction of things such as the dream drug and the cavity-detecting machine. Also note the reference to the death of Robert Blank (p. 256); a tie-in to the *The Haunter of the Dark*. This story marks a profound shift in the collection away from the Lovecraft 'Circle' of writers to a broader authorial pool; this is easily seen by the dates on which the remaining stories were published. The story was originally published in *The Disciples of Cthulhu*, 1976.

Rising with Surtsey conflates an amazing and historic geologic occurrence (e.g., the advent of Surtsey) with a seabed shifting that purportedly releases long-confined ancient evils. The narrator's brother apparently self-selects as a host through his dabbling in black occult practices and is then subjected to mind transference; his mind being sent to an amorphous nasty thing living below the ocean. The evil thing's mind takes over the brother's body during a period of insanity and then 'regains sanity' and resumes an apparently normal life. For unspecified reasons, the eyes of the two beings are destroyed or deranged during the process, though such brings a nice touch of horror to the narrative. The narrator intervenes to kill his brother's body, thus dooming his brother to a life as an amorphous nasty living below the ocean but preventing the malevolent force from gaining freedom. The black slime that washes ashore later is obviously intended to infer that the brother's assumed physical form has died. Note the reference (p. 287) to Robert E. Howard's *The Black Stone*. The story was originally published in *Dark Things*, 1971.





# **Cold Print by Ramsey Campbell; The Return of the Lloigor by Colin Wilson; My Boat by Joanna Russ**

## **Cold Print by Ramsey Campbell; The Return of the Lloigor by Colin Wilson; My Boat by Joanna Russ Summary**

Cold Print relates the story of Strutt, an exceptionally unlikable gymnasium teacher suffering from obsessive-compulsive disorders. Strutt is isolated, racist, sexist, sadistic, and relishes reading and collecting various forbidden or outré books. He treats books with a fetishistic fascination. One day he meets a hobo in a bookstore who tells him of a bizarre bookshop selling many curious books. Strutt follows the hobo to the bookstore and gets a book which the hobo encourages him to steal as the shopkeeper is missing. Strutt leaves cash and departs, aware but uncaring that the hobo is seized and detained by someone lurking in the shop. Strutt returns to the strange bookshop later and sees the shadow of an apparently headless man before the man emerges from an office. The man purports to be the shop proprietor and proceeds to interview Strutt, placing a malevolent tome in his hands and urging him to read several passages. Strutt thus reads from the Revelations of Glaaki and is thus ensorcelled. The man-like thing gradually reveals its true form and asks Strutt to serve as his high priest. Though Strutt cannot escape he declines the evil offer and is in turn partially consumed by the thing.

The protagonist of The Return of the Lloigor is Paul Dunbar Lang, an author. Lang learns of an ancient manuscript called the Voynich manuscript that is discredited as being an original document. Lang feels compelled to investigate, however, and obtains color photographs using various development techniques. He uses the color photographs to reconstruct the original document and after many months succeeds in translating it from medieval Arabic writing and mixed Latin and Greek into English. He discovers during this period that it is a fragment of the Necronomicon and learns that Lovecraft wrote about that book. Lang then visits Colonel Lionel Urquart, a local antiquarian, and the two men start up joint investigations. They follow up on various weird local happenings, including a large explosion, and come to be convinced that the area is a hotspot of activity by non-terrestrial beings called Lloigor. They spend much time gathering evidence and presenting their findings to various groups—all are nonplussed. The story concludes when the two men board a small aircraft on a journey to attempt to convince government officials of their findings—the aircraft vanishes and is never seen again. Their account is published posthumously by Julian F. Lang who vituperates Urquart and attempts to restore Lang's name.

In My Boat, the narrator and protagonist is Jim. He reminisces about events when he was about eighteen years of age and attending high school. At school with his friend Al,





he meets and eventually befriends an African American girl named Cissie. Cissie's mother is very protective and conventional and Cissie secretly defies her by participating in drama classes. Al and Cissie become close friends and are often alone together. One weekend they invite Jim to accompany them on a trip to a lake where they have an old rowboat. Jim is invited mostly because he has an automobile. He follows them to the boat and initially finds it a decrepit rowboat but every time he looks again the boat has increased in size and opulence until it is eventually a huge and fascinating yacht. Jim declines to board and the boat sails away, vanishing forever. Twenty years later Jim bumps into Al, who has not aged. Al explains he has returned to recover a book he calls the Necronomicon. Jim accompanies Al into his old home where Al recovers a book by Lovecraft and then leaves. Some moments later, Jim realizes that the home is in fact a modern freeway right of way, and contacts his literary agent to discuss these mysterious events.

## **Cold Print by Ramsey Campbell; The Return of the Lloigor by Colin Wilson; My Boat by Joanna Russ Analysis**

Cold Print is unusual in presenting an exceptionally repulsive protagonist. His uncaring attitude pervades the narrative and makes reading somewhat unpleasant—an excellent accomplishment of construction. If Strutt were somewhat observant, he could easily have deduced that returning to the bookshop was a poor decision. The headless thing apparently uses some type of realistic prosthetic head (an action taken in other Cthulhu Mythos stories not presented in the current collection) to pass as human; its body appears to be able to contract or expand to a remarkable degree. The thing's various ramblings are semi-coherent and are a definite highlight of the story; its offer to show Strutt the partial remains of its previous victims is enjoyable. The story was originally published in *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*, 1969.

The Return of the Lloigor is a lengthy narrative with fairly slow pacing. The details are put forward in a plodding and rather tedious fashion, while the evidence gathered is tenuous at best. The two investigators have learned that several small aircraft have vanished over the past few years and attribute this to Lloigor activity, yet they do not hesitate to board a small aircraft themselves—an apparent gap in narrative credibility. The conclusion is interesting in that the attempt is made to 'blame' Urquart for Lang's participation. The story was originally published in *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*, 1969, and it is the longest story in the current collection.

My Boat is more akin to a children's fantasy story than a Cthulhu Mythos tale—there is no overt horror involved beyond the disappearance of two eighteen-year-old kids who are presumed dead by drowning. Sad, but hardly horrible. The tie-in to the Cthulhu Mythos is tenuous at best. The story is notable for being the only one in the collection written by a female author and for its construction, being apparently a conversation—albeit one-sided—between an author and an agent. The story was originally published in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, January 1976.



# **Sticks by Karl Edward Wagner; The Freshman by Philip José Farmer; Jerusalem's Lot by Stephen King; Discovery of the Ghooric Zone by Richard A. Lupoff**

## **Sticks by Karl Edward Wagner; The Freshman by Philip José Farmer; Jerusalem's Lot by Stephen King; Discovery of the Ghooric Zone by Richard A. Lupoff Summary**

In *Sticks*, Leaverett, the protagonist, is an artist who goes hiking just a few days before being drafted during World War II. He explores old growth forest and discovers numerous strange signs made of twisted sticks. Fascinated, he sketches them in detail. He follows them to an abandoned and overgrown house and explores it, finding a deep and over-sized cellar that contains a central massive table altar. He approaches the altar and an undead lich is upon it, and grabs him. He smashes the lich's head and flees. He returns from the war morose and changed. Leaverett's post-war art is brooding and so repugnant that even *Weird Tales* begins to reject it. He attempts to relocate the abandoned house but discovers the entire area has been swept by massive river floods. He is then contacted to illustrate a three-volume edition of the collected works of H. Kenneth Allard's horror fiction. He creates the illustrations and includes reproductions of the signs made from twisted sticks. He is later approached by a man posing as Dana Allard; Dana claims to be a descendant of H. Kenneth Allard and displays a huge collection of previously unknown stories. Dana commissions Leaverett to illustrate a forthcoming volume of the previously unpublished work. Leaverett completes over seventy plates, including all of the signs made of twisted sticks, taken from his old sketches. Afterwards, he becomes aware that the signs are ancient symbols used for foul purposes and approaches Dana in an attempt to withdraw the art. He thereupon discovers that Dana is in fact H. Kenneth Allard, now a wizened undead corpse disguised with liberal makeup. Allard confesses that the stick symbols are magical symbols and that the only surviving representations—since the flooding—had been Leaverett's reproductions.

The *Freshman* is a story about Desmond, a student at Miskatonic University. Rather old at 60, Desmond still hasn't managed to cut the apron strings and his overbearing mother pesters him constantly. During pledge activities Desmond learns a vile incantation involving pledging unspecified things to a malevolent force. Desmond casts the spell to kill his mother and later learns she had died a few hours before of natural



causes—yet the spell had functioned, killing several policemen and emergency medical respondents at his mother's house.

Jerusalem's Lot is a small town with a complex history that is gradually developed throughout the narrative. It was founded 1710 by James Boon, a monomaniacal preacher who founded a family dynasty of demon worship and incestuous polygamy. Sometime after the town's founding, some Boon family descendants left the area while most remained to worship vile beings and reproduce with their own offspring. Eventually, two brothers, Robert and Philip Boone, descended from the departed family members return to the area. Philip quickly falls under the sway of the demon-worshipping branch of the family and becomes violent, angry, and eccentric. Robert remains normal and appeals to Philip to avoid evil. Philip wheedles Robert into purchasing a forbidden text, *De Vermis Mysteriis*, on the promise that they will both depart the town upon its acquisition. Robert locates and purchases the book and Philip ignores his promise.

Shortly thereafter the entire town of Jerusalem's Lot is unpopulated by unknown means. In 1850 Charles Boone inherits property and the home of Robert and Philip Boone. Charles travels to the area and takes possession of the home, accompanied by his good friend Calvin McCann. Charles and Calvin travel through the area, eventually locate and explore Jerusalem's Lot, and find an abandoned church devoted to demonic worship. The forbidden book is still on the pulpit. Charles then falls under a family curse of evil and the local populace shuns him as he descends into sickness and madness. Charles determines he must burn the wicked book to destroy the curse. Accompanied by Calvin he manages to burn the book but in the process a huge worm-like demon kills Calvin. Charles returns to his home, realizes the blood curse is irreversible, and—believing himself to be the last of the family line—commits suicide. Then, in 1971, James Robert Boone appears. He is descended from a bastard branch of the family and has inherited the area. Taking possession of the old family home, he discovers Calvin's diary and a stack of unsent letters written by Charles that detail the horrors they encountered. James Robert Boone makes the material public, claiming they demonstrate his ancestor's insanity, and states his intention to live in the region. He then begins to note peculiar sounds and events as the story concludes.

Discovery of the Ghooric Zone tales the story of Gomati, Njord, and Shoten, three cyborgs traveling aboard the spaceship Khons. They while away the time burden of deep space travel by having group sex. They pass far beyond the orbit of Pluto and discover a massive, fast-rotating planet with many moons that they decide must be Yuggoth. Descending to the surface of one of the moons they find the remains of an ancient civilization. They find a stairway leading down and follow it to discover an underground lake surrounded by beings they decide must be Shoggoths. The stairway collapses, stranding them. Their rather mundane adventure is interleaved with lengthy sections describing an alternate earth history.



## **Sticks by Karl Edward Wagner; The Freshman by Philip José Farmer; Jerusalem's Lot by Stephen King; Discovery of the Ghooric Zone by Richard A. Lupoff Analysis**

Sticks is easily one of the best stories in the second portion of the current collection, successfully capturing the pervading malevolence of the Cthulhu Mythos and embroiling the protagonist—quite unwittingly—directly in the middle of vile practices. The narrative pacing is excellent and the plot is tightly controlled and well-executed. The texture and tone are both plausible and horrible. H. Kenneth Allard is a rather thinly-veiled fictionalized representation of H.P. Lovecraft, which adds to the enjoyment. The story was originally published in *Whispers*, March 1974. The Freshman is a rather banal story which relies almost entirely on texture and setting to create an ambiance of horror. Desmond spends much time establishing his genealogy which is unremarkable except for apparently inherited longevity. The story's deficiencies are highlighted by its bracketing between *Sticks* and *Jerusalem's Lot*—two of the strongest pieces in the collection. Note the early reference to *The Collected Works of Robert Blake* and various other references to well-known Cthulhu Mythos tales and objects. The story was originally published in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, May 1979.

*Jerusalem's Lot* is one of the best stories in the current collection, and is masterfully constructed with excellent pacing. The story is told as a series of letters interleaved with diary entries and a receipt for a large amount of rat poison. The story hearkens back in several ways to Lovecraft's fiction—not the least being numerous references to rats in the walls. The story covers just over 260 years of family history, tracing a bloodline curse through at least four generations of the Boon/Boone family. The first generation presented includes James Boon, an obviously egotistical and evil man who fathers children by his own daughters and establishes a dynasty of institutionalized incest. The resulting town is so inbred that nose-less children and other gross deformities are commonplace. The town also worships demons and after the advent of Philip Boone begins to focus its worship on a worm-like demon. Apparently at about the time the worm-like thing is successfully conjured, the town's population vanishes. The town then remains untouched by human hand for about one hundred years, whereupon Charles Boone unwittingly becomes involved. His bloodline descent, in proximity with the wicked being, conflates into a type of driven or compelled behavior common among Cthulhu Mythos tales. Charles actually sees the worm-thing as he burns the book; it has previously crawled through the church leaving a black slime. The story's ending is exceptional inasmuch as the reader knows more than the narrator without the construction being in any way strained. The story was originally published in *Night Shift*, 1978.

*Discovery of the Ghooric Zone* is a fairly banal tale of space exploration by three cyborgs. Much of the gee-whiz quality of the story is derived from the lengthy discussion of cybernetic technologies in common use, with a focus on mechanical genitalia. There is no solid reason to presume the newly-discovered planet is Yuggoth or the newly-



discovered beings are Shoggoths; in fact, the story has no horror element. The interleaved history segments are sometimes humorous, sometimes difficult to understand, but nearly entirely unconnected with the other portions of the narrative. The explicit mention of Lovecraft's death is a high point. The story is commented upon by James Turner, in the book's introduction, as capturing the shock essence of Lovecraft's work.



# Characters

## Cthulhu appears in multiple stories

Cthulhu is a fictional creature of enormous size and malevolent intent. The creature was created by H.P. Lovecraft and has since been featured in the writings of numerous authors. Cthulhu, one of the Old Ones, is generally described as having an octopoid head atop a grotesque and scaled humanoid body with rudimentary wings. Its hands are described either as claws or possessed of long talons. Cthulhu is most-fully described in *The Call of Cthulhu*; the name is spelled in alternate ways in some of the other stories in the collection. Cthulhu is significant for lending its name to the entire sub-genre as well as for becoming a sort of pop culture icon.

## Nyarlatotep appears in multiple stories

Nyarlatotep is a fictional creature with malevolent intent; it is frequently referred to as the Crawling Chaos and its identity is occasionally conflated with that of other Old Ones. Nyarlatotep is variously described as nearly human in appearance or an amorphous shifting cloud of inky blackness. Nyarlatotep is generally considered to be more active than the other Old Ones, and its motivation is generally more intelligible and anthropomorphic than the other Old Ones. Nyarlatotep is featured in Derleth's *The Dweller in Darkness*, among others. Often portrayed as a messenger or representative of the collective will of the Old Ones, Nyarlatotep makes more personal appearances than most of the other beings in the Cthulhu Mythos.

## Hastur, Azathoth, and Shub-Niggurath appears in multiple stories

Hastur is a fictional creature with malevolent intent; originally mentioned by Lovecraft only in passing, it gained prominence with other writers of Cthulhu Mythos tales. It is usually described as vastly large and unintelligible in motivation, though clearly evil and vile. Azathoth is a fictional creature with malevolent intent; originally created by Lovecraft, it gained prominence with other writers of Cthulhu Mythos tales including Derleth and Campbell. It is usually described as vastly gigantic, usually as large as a planetary body, and is usually said to have numerous servants orbiting about. Shub-Niggurath is a fictional creature with malevolent intent; originally created, but not described, by Lovecraft, it gained prominence with other writers of Cthulhu Mythos tales including Derleth, Bloch, and Campbell. Shub-Niggurath is unusual inasmuch as it is usually considered to be female; it is often also called the black goat of the woods with a thousand young, indicating flagrant fecundity. Bloch's *Notebook Found in a Deserted House* gives a quite exact description of Shub-Niggurath.



## **Arthur Machen appears in multiple stories**

Arthur Machen (1863 - 1947) was a Welsh author of supernatural and horror fiction. Machen studied history during early schoolwork and published poems and short stories at a quite early age. Machen's work through the 1890s featured Gothic and fantastic themes leading gradually into tales of decadent horror. Machen's literary output declined in the 1900s, though his early work saw a revival during c. 1922 as American writers, including the Lovecraft circle, began to rediscover his work. Authors in the current collection who are generally held to have been heavily influenced by Machen include Smith, Howard, and Campbell; Lovecraft considered Machen a master of horror and was heavily influenced by his writing. For example, Machen's *The Novel of the Black Seal* uses a narrative construction technique mirrored in *The Call of Cthulhu*. Machen is mentioned in several of the stories in the collection.

## **Edgar Allan Poe appears in multiple stories**

Edgar Allan Poe (1809 - 1849) was an American poet, writer, and critic. He is usually considered to be part of the American Romantic Movement, and is best remembered for his tales of the macabre. Most of Poe's work focused on mysterious or strange events and his literary influence is considered to be enormous. Poe was a favored source of inspiration for Lovecraft and nearly all of the other members of the Lovecraft circle, and Poe is mentioned in several of the stories in the collection.

## **H.P. Lovecraft appears in multiple stories**

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890 - 1937) was an American writer of horror and fantasy tales then known as weird fiction. Lovecraft's central fictional preoccupation was the concept of a cosmic, irrational horror, such that the universe is fundamentally amoral, malevolent, and alien—and is beyond the ability of the rational, human mind to comprehend. Many of his stories feature this element of cosmic horror and share additional construction elements; these tales comprise what is often referred to as the Cthulhu Mythos. Lovecraft's work was not particularly widely read during his lifetime but was popularized, posthumously, largely through the efforts of August Derleth. By the mid 20th century, however, his reputation had grown such that it was on a par with Poe. Lovecraft is generally considered to have held racist views and to champion an Anglo-centric world-view; such elements are in any case often evident in his fiction.

## **August Derleth appears in multiple stories**

August Derleth (1909 - 1971) was an American writer of horror and fantasy tales, as well as the founder of Arkham House, a company that published the writings of Lovecraft. Derleth was a friend and correspondent of Lovecraft and coined the phrase "Cthulhu Mythos" to describe the shared stories of Lovecraft, Derleth, and others. After Lovecraft's death, Derleth founded Arkham House in 1939 and published the collected





works of Lovecraft. Later, Arkham House published Derleth's works and works of other authors. Derleth also utilized numerous Lovecraft outlines or partially completed stories in posthumous collaborations, leading to some criticism. Derleth's use of the Cthulhu Mythos varied considerably from that of Lovecraft. While Lovecraft proposed an amoral and unintelligible universe, Derleth favored a more codified and traditional approach. Thus, Derleth's writing positions the Old Ones as evil beings in opposition to good beings of roughly equivalent ability; this cosmic vision aligned more closely with Derleth's Christian beliefs. Derleth also codified the Old Ones and attempted to align them with various elemental forces such as earth, water, air, and fire. A fictionalized Derleth appears in some Lovecraft stories under the pseudonym 'le Comte d'Erlette'.

## **Robert Bloch appears in multiple stories**

Robert Bloch (1917 - 1994) was an American writer of various genres including horror. Bloch is remembered primarily for his novels, but also produced numerous short stories. He was a friend of Lovecraft and other members of the Lovecraft circle, and Bloch's early works are clearly heavily influenced by that association. Bloch made considerable contributions to the Cthulhu Mythos, first introducing the often-cited texts *De Vermis Mysteriis* and *Cultes des Goules*. A fictionalized Bloch appears in some Lovecraft and Cthulhu Mythos stories under the pseudonym 'Robert Blake.' Bloch's presentation of Lovecraft as the victim in *The Shambler from the Stars* was seen by both men as a humorous courtesy, or homage. Lovecraft returned the favor in *The Haunter of the Dark*. Bloch's most famous work, *Psycho*, relies on realistic horror rather than supernatural horror, but shares many construction elements with his earlier works.

## **Clark Ashton Smith appears in multiple stories**

Clark Ashton Smith (1893 - 1961) was an artist and author of fantasy and horror fiction. Smith was a friend of Lovecraft and other members of the Lovecraft circle, and Smith's early works in horror fiction are markedly influenced by that association. Smith's contributions to the Cthulhu Mythos include *Tsathoggua* and the wizard *Eibon*, whose book appears in the current collection. Lovecraft held Smith's work in high regard, particularly his sculpture and art. Smith is referred to in the current collection by name, and appears fictionalized in some Lovecraft stories as 'Klarkash-Ton.' Many of Smith's stories were originally published by Arkham House, though after Lovecraft's death Smith largely abandoned writing weird fiction for sculpture.

## **Frank Belknap Long appears in multiple stories**

Frank Belknap Long (1901 - 1994) was an American writer of horror and fantasy fiction, poetry, and non-fiction. Despite a prolific and prolonged output, he probably is best remembered for his early contributions to the Cthulhu Mythos. Long published a biography of Lovecraft and an autobiographical memoir. Long was a friend and correspondent of Lovecraft, known to have exchanged over 1,000 letters, some running

to eighty pages in length. Some of this correspondence was published by Arkham House. Long was also a member of the Lovecraft circle, and is widely considered to have written the first Cthulhu Mythos story not authored by Lovecraft—The Hounds of Tindalos. Long's contributions to the Cthulhu Mythos are foundational.



## Objects/Places

### **The Necronomicon appears in multiple stories**

The Necronomicon is a fictional ancient book, originally written under the title of *Al Azif*, in Arabic, c. 738 by Abdul Alhazred, a demonologist. It is banned, hated, and suppressed in all cultures, but various translations occasionally surface. Originals in Arabic are nearly non-existent. The work was re-titled and translated into Greek c. 950 by Theodorus Philetas, and an imperfect Latin re-translation from the Greek c. 1228 by Olaus Wormius is the version usually encountered in the various Cthulhu Mythos tales. An English-language translation is sometimes cited. The book conveys information about the Old Ones and is said to contain summoning rituals and various other spells. For example, a spell allowing a deceased sorcerer to regain control over their physical remains for purposes of revenge.

As typically described, the book is a giant tome, usually bound in leather, with rusting metal hasps and hinges. It is often disguised under another title. In some tales, the book's function remains, but another title is also offered—for example, in Smith's *Ubbo-Sathla* an evil tome of spells known as the *Book of Eibon* is commented upon by the protagonist. Aside from the *Necronomicon*, the most-encountered vile tome in Cthulhu Mythos tales is *De Vermis Mysteriis*, or *Mysteries of the Worm*.

### **Miskatonic University appears in multiple stories**

Miskatonic University is a fictional university specializing in the occult, located in the fictional town of Arkham. In some stories it is a legitimate university with a questionable reputation, and in other stories it is more akin to secret magician's university. Many characters from the current collection have ties to Miskatonic University; e.g., Jack, the protagonist of Derleth's *The Dweller in Darkness*, is an assistant librarian at Miskatonic University while Desmond is a new freshmen student at the university in Farmer's *The Freshman*.

### **Yuggoth appears in multiple stories**

Yuggoth is presumably the stellar home of various Old Ones, and is attributed as the origin of the Shining Trapezohedron in Lovecraft's *The Haunter of the Dark*. Its location is variously given, often as simply outer space or in orbit around some distant star. The planet is putatively discovered beyond the orbit of Pluto in Lupoff's *Discovery of the Ghooric Zone*—though its identification there is questionable.



## **Innsmouth, Massachusetts appears in multiple stories**

Innsmouth is a fictional town created by Lovecraft, first appearing in the short story *Celephais*, where it is located in England, and more famously described in the story *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, where it is located in Massachusetts. The town was founded in 1643 and was c. 1846 plagued by Deep Ones. The town is referenced by several stories in the collection.

## **Arkham, Massachusetts appears in multiple stories**

Arkham is a fictional town created by Lovecraft, first appearing in the short story *The Picture in the House*, though later featured in many of his stories and also featured in or referenced by several stories in the collection. The town is located in Massachusetts, and it is the home of Miskatonic University. Thus, Professor Albert Wilmarth—from Lieber's *The Terror from the Depths*—is a resident of Arkham.

## **Providence, Rhode Island appears in multiple stories**

Providence is the capital and largest city of Rhode Island, and was the birthplace, place of death, and usual home of Lovecraft—as well as the home of Edgar Allan Poe. The city features in later Cthulhu Mythos stories as they cite fictionalized versions of Lovecraft and of necessity discuss his prolonged association with Providence. Lovecraft's period in Providence was his most-prolific period as a writer.

## **Underground appears in multiple stories**

Most evil things in the Cthulhu Mythos hide underground. Thus, cellars, basements, and ancient foundations are all featured sites in the stories in the collection. Kuttner's *The Salem Horror* begins with the discovery of an underground witch's room, itself connected to underground labyrinths. Lieber's *The Terror from the Depths* features flying, boring worms trying to escape from an underground prison. Wagner's *Sticks* features a descent into a haunted and horrible foundation used for foul rites. King's *Jerusalem's Lot* features undead beasties trapped in a boarded-over cellar. Indeed, for characters in a Cthulhu Mythos story, underground is always a very bad place to be.

## **Undersea appears in multiple stories**

Most minor evil things in the Cthulhu Mythos may hide underground, but the really nasty things are entrapped under the sea. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* suggests that Cthulhu's powers are somehow blocked by the depths of sea water over his city, while Lumley's *Rising with Surtsey* suggests that whenever previously underwater lands arise above the surface wicked things are set free to roam. For characters in a Cthulhu Mythos story, the only place worse than underground is undersea.



## **R'lyeh appears in multiple stories**

R'lyeh is a fictional city created by Lovecraft and first appearing in the story *The Call of Cthulhu*. It appears in other Lovecraft stories and is featured in or referenced by various other Cthulhu Mythos authors, often by variant spelling. The city is said to be submerged below the water and is located in the South Pacific Ocean (Lovecraft offers a specific location for it; Derleth offered another specific location for it). R'lyeh features bizarre architecture that is said to be non-Euclidean in geometry. Lovecraft seems to suggest that R'lyeh is Cthulhu's tomb, inasmuch as his powers seem to be curtailed by being undersea most of the time.

## **Shoggoth appears in Discovery of the Ghooric Zone**

A shoggoth (alternately, shaggoth) is a fictional monster appearing in numerous Cthulhu Mythos stories. The monsters first appeared in Lovecraft's work *At the Mountains of Madness*, and they are described as vast conglomerations of tarry, bubbly protoplasm flickering with malevolent luminescence. Shoggoths are huge, capable of swarming over a man using their amoeboid movement. Shoggoths are featured in the concluding scene of Lupoff's *Discovery of the Ghooric Zone* where they are said, curiously, to have "rolled and gamboled shockingly" (p. 461). Gamboling shoggoths? Shocking, indeed!



# Themes

## The horror, the horror!

The dominant theme of any Cthulhu Mythos tale is obviously horror. Indeed, the genre is defined by the horrible aspects of the story. The horror presented is distinct from violence, gore, or explicit acts of torture or barbarity. Indeed, the typical story features little if any violence and scenes of gore are more-often inferred than described. One notable exception is Howard's *The Black Stone* where acts of human torture and sacrifice are described in detail. For the most part however, characters are not enslaved, tortured, or mutilated—instead, they suffer mental collapse because of their inability to rationally process the horrific facts they have recently learned. Most of the horrific aspects of the story involve some god-like malevolent being from a non-terrestrial place. The beings typically are at reality's threshold, waiting to break through into the world of humanity and in need only of minor assistance. The beings are often worshiped in foul rites that commonly are generational and follow specific 'doomed' bloodlines. For example, this aspect of generation-after-generation of a particular bloodline being cursed with horror is fully developed in King's *Jerusalem's Lot*. Indeed, without the pervasive theme of the inexplicable horror, the Cthulhu Mythos would not exist.

## Humanity is unaware

In nearly all of the stories in the collection malevolent and powerful beings lurk in cellars, underground caverns, submerged cities, or extra-dimensional pockets. These beings are at best powerful monsters and at worst god-like in ability and intelligence; for example Cthulhu kills five men with one swoop of his pincer in Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* while a race of beings exerts constant and considerable negative pressure on humanity in Wilson's *The Return of the Lloigor*. In all of the stories, these monstrous entities have existed for vast periods of time—typically, they are said to have originated before life on earth or even before the birth of the physical universe. In many cases, the beings' motivation is inscrutable—they desire to break through into the physical world but their rational for doing so is uncertain. However, it is certain that humanity will suffer catastrophically if the beings manage to gain a toe-hold in the material world. A parallel theme develops along with the existence of these beings in nearly every story—that humanity in general is entirely unaware of the beings' existence. Thus, in Lieber's *The Terror from the Depths* metropolitan Los Angeles goes about its daily round while only a few meters underground masses of evil flying worms tunnel through the ground. Occasionally the uneducated and generally backwards locals are aware of the beings, but they hold such information to be secret and do not share it with outsiders. Thus, the Italian immigrants in Lovecraft's *The Haunter of the Dark* know of the lurking terror, and take simple steps to confine it within the haunted chapel—even while the urban center sprawling around is entirely oblivious to the threat.



## The amoral universe is malevolent

The Cthulhu Mythos developed by Lovecraft is distinct from most horror or monster stories because Lovecraft proposed an entirely amoral universe where evil is decidedly not offset by good. That is, for every evil god-like being such as Azathoth there is no beneficent god-like being standing in opposition. This varies from time to time within various Cthulhu Mythos stories, however—Derleth's stories generally suggest that for every evil god-like being there is a good god-like counterpart. Thus, Derleth's cosmic vision is fairly Judeo-Christian in conception and is basically a good vs. evil milieu with a clear and balanced dichotomy. This varies markedly from most Cthulhu Mythos tales where evil only finds more evil or, at best, complete indifference. The evil and amoral forces in most Cthulhu Mythos tales are motivated by things beyond the comprehension of the rational mind; their evil is not humanity's evil. Though they do kill and destroy they do not usually do so as a primary goal but merely as incidental effects of their purposeful acts, which often appear random as they cannot be comprehended by humanity. These evil powers transcend normal space, rational thought, and have endured for time spans so vast that they predate human evolution. Thus, the universe is amoral, malevolent, and largely unintelligible.





# Style

## Point of View

The stories in the setting feature several points of view, as typical for a collection of this sort. There are several common elements, however. Usually, stories of the Cthulhu Mythos are told from the first-person point of view where the narrator is also typically purported to be the author of the story. Stories are almost always told in the past tense; e.g., 'I went and I did.' This allows for the complex chronological construction featured in several stories and allows the horrific details to be presented as seen through the narrator's perspective. In this way, rather than detailing explicit horrific acts the narrator frequently appeals to their own inability to convey the horror of the experience. This 'overwhelmed by irrational horror' theme recurs in most of the stories in the collection; indeed, Lovecraft's introductory tale *The Call of Cthulhu* begins with "The most merciful thing in the world...is the inability of the human mind" (p. 1) and many other stories see their protagonist reduced to a frightened immobility during the critical moment. The point of view selected for the stories in the collection allows this standard presentation to recur without appearing overtly ridiculous, and additionally allows for the typically idiosyncratic reverse chronologies favored by those who investigate the workings of the Great Old Ones.

## Setting

The stories in the collection take place in a variety of settings, though many of the stories share common elements. The typical story in the collection is set in a small urban area surrounded for many, many miles by rural country that is lightly settled. Often, there is a nearby unexplored or largely unknown wilderness areas. A primary feature of any central dwelling featured in a story is usually a large and shadowy basement area. Most structures are ancient, in somewhat poor repair, and sprawling. They are frequently infested with rats, often have hidden compartments or corridors, and generally have a long and colorful history. They are commonly of unusual construction, such as a house without windows or a room with detailed mosaics on the floors and walls. The regions surrounding the central settings are frequently populated by peoples of indeterminate race, frequently said to be degenerate and inbred; among them vile practices such as institutionalized incest, human sacrifice, and demon worship are commonplace. They are often described as reptilian or amphibian in appearance and in at least some stories these degenerate people are the result of inter-species breeding. Almost all Cthulhu Mythos tales rely heavily upon setting, deriving from the setting a sense of general brooding and foreboding. Because of this, the settings are often more-developed even than the principal characters.



## Language and Meaning

Most of the stories in the collection are presented in standard English; most use American spelling and punctuation but some use British spelling. Lovecraft was fond of utilizing obsolescent spellings of words as well as using obsolescent words themselves, and this predilection has been championed by many other writers in the sub-genre. Nearly all of the stories in the collection derive the preponderance of meaning from plot and construction. As with most short stories, characterization is generally light or altogether lacking and character development is usually severely limited. Instead, characters are of an obvious type and drawn from a very stereotypical caste. The narratives often rely heavily upon the presentation of a series of events that span from a few days to a dozen or so generations; almost always the stories are told with an inverted chronology such that some horrific end event is initially described, and then the story explains how the event developed. Many of the stories present words or sounds from an extra-terrestrial language. Most of them comment upon the inability of human vocal chords to produce the exact nuances of the supernatural language; it is often described as loud but toneless buzzing. Usually, these linguistic elements are not translated and thus are best interpreted as a sort of textural background. Latin phrases are occasionally used as e.g. titles of old books to lend an air of authenticity to ancient manuscripts.

## Structure

The 461-page book collects twenty-two previously-published short stories by sixteen authors, including: *The Call of Cthulhu* and *The Haunter of the Dark* by H. P. Lovecraft; *The Return of the Sorcerer* and *Ubbo-Sathla* by Clark Ashton Smith; *The Black Stone* by Robert E. Howard; *The Hounds of Tindalos* and *The Space-Eaters* by Frank Belknap Long; *The Dweller in Darkness* and *Beyond the Threshold* by August Derleth; *The Shambler from the Stars*, *The Shadow from the Steeple*, and *Notebook Found in a Deserted House* by Robert Bloch; *The Salem Horror* by Henry Kuttner; *The Terror from the Depths* by Fritz Leiber; *Rising with Surtsey* by Brian Lumley; *Cold Print* by Ramsey Campbell; *The Return of the Lloigor* by Colin Wilson; *My Boat* by Joanna Russ; *Sticks* by Karl Edward Wagner; *The Freshman* by Philip José Farmer; *Jerusalem's Lot* by Stephen King; and *Discovery of the Ghooric Zone* by Richard A. Lupoff. The book also presents an introduction entitled *Iä! Iä! Cthulhu Fhtagn!* by James Turner. Each story includes a footnote noting the date and place of original publication. Many of the stories feature atypical short story construction, and an often-encountered construction technique is the presentation of interleaved narrative and documents purporting to be from newspapers, personal letters, or other materials.

The collection of short stories presents a variety of material popularly attributed to a style of horror writing falling under the rubric of the 'Cthulhu Mythos' (the term was originated by August Derleth). During the 1920s, noted writer H.P. Lovecraft introduced a style of horror writing and a cast of objects and beings which captured the imagination of a small circle of writers who began to collaborate in the construction of a new style



and sub-genre of horror writing. Although Lovecraft did not enjoy widespread fame during his lifetime, his influence on horror writing has been substantial over the past eighty years as illustrated in the authors collected in the present volume.

The stories in the current volume follow a general pattern of narrative development. In most of them, a malevolent and vastly powerful—often god-like—being of supernatural origins is freed from some constraint or threshold through the generally unintentional and often accidental intervention of the protagonist. The horror thus loosed on the world is usually limited in scope to a specific region or locale, and after inflicting some horrific fate upon a relatively small group of people voluntarily retreats back to some extraterrestrial space or dimension or is dispelled through a supernatural incantation or process. The protagonist usually survives but is driven to the very brink of sanity by the realization that humanity is inferior in all respects to numerous malevolent powers that rule the universe in an amoral milieu. Usually, the events described are witness by comparatively few people or are explained by some apparently rational series of improbable events.

Cthulhu Mythos stories usually are told in the first-person point of view, past tense, and usually feature a protagonist of above-average intelligence but little inclination to direct action and often superbly flawed judgment. The protagonists are often fiction writers, musicians, or artists, and are normally self-described as sensitive and non-aggressive. The past-tense construction allows for a fair amount of retrospective commentary that usually includes a longing to return to a previous time when knowledge of vast malevolent evils was not possessed. Several objects recur with regularity, including ancient tomes with known histories—for example, the *Necronomicon* written by Abdul Alhazrad. Several beings recur with regularity also, including the giant octopoid-headed Cthulhu from whence the sub-genre derives its name (most exceptional beings are only vaguely described). Notably lacking in the genre are explicit descriptions of horrific acts of violence—most of the barbarity involved is inferred or only lightly described. Mood and tone often are emphasized over characterization, and plotting is generally fairly simple. The sub-genre is often caricatured for its heavy reliance on adjectives and a fondness for archaic linguistic construction and obsolescent spelling variants. Stories often feature various words in italicized font faces, apparently to emphasize particularly horrible passages.



## Quotes

In the elder time chosen men had talked with the entombed Old ones in dreams, but then something had happened. The great stone city R'lyeh, with its monoliths and sepulchers, had sunk beneath the waves; and the deep waters, full of the one primal mystery through which not even thought can pass, had cut off the spectral intercourse. But memory never died, and high-priests said that the city would rise again when the stars were right. Then came out of the earth the black spirits of earth, mouldy and shadowy, and full of dim rumours picked up in caverns beneath forgotten sea-bottoms. But of them old Castro dared not speak much. He cut himself off hurriedly, and no amount of persuasion or subtlety could elicit more in this direction. The size of the Old Ones, too, he curiously declined to mention. Of the cult, he said that he thought the centre lay amidst the pathless deserts of Arabia, where Irem, the City of Pillars, dreams hidden and untouched. It was not allied to the European witch-cult, and was virtually unknown beyond its members. No book had ever really hinted of it, though the deathless Chinamen said that there were double meanings in the Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred which the initiated might read as they chose, especially the much-discussed couplet:

"That is not dead which can eternal lie

And with strange aeons even death may die." (The Call of Cthulhu, p. 14)

"Suppose there were a greater horror? Suppose evil things from some other universe should decide to invade this one? Suppose we couldn't see them? Suppose we couldn't feel them? Suppose they were of a color unknown on Earth, or rather, of an appearance that was without color?

"Suppose they had a shape unknown on Earth? Suppose they were four-dimensional, five-dimensional, six-dimensional? Suppose they were a hundred-dimensional?

Suppose they had no dimension at all and yet existed? What could we do?

"They would not exist for us? They would exist for us if they gave us pain. Suppose it was not the pain of heat or cold or any of the pains we know, but a new pain? Suppose they touched something besides our nerves—reached our brains in a new and terrible way? Suppose they made themselves felt in a new and strange and unspeakable way? What could we do? Our hands would be tied. You cannot oppose what you cannot see or feel. You cannot oppose the thousand-dimensional. Suppose they should eat their way to us through space!" (The Space-Eaters, p. 77)

Thus it was with some trepidation that I prepared for my vigil. After Laird had gone to his room, which was at the head of the stairs, with a door opening upon a railed-in balcony looking down into the lodge room where I sat with the book by Lovecraft, reading here and there in its pages, I settled down to a kind of apprehensive waiting. It was not that I was afraid of what might take place, but rather that I was afraid that what took place might be beyond my understanding. However, as the minutes ticked past, I became engrossed in *The Outsider* and *Others*, with its hellish suggestions of eon-old evil, of entities co-existent with all time and conterminous with all space, and began to



understand, however vaguely, a relation between the writings of this fantasist and the curious notes Professor Gardner had made. The most disturbing factor in this cognizance was the knowledge that Professor Gardner had made his notes independent of the book I now read, since it had arrived after his disappearance. Moreover, though there were certain keys to what Gardner had written in the first material he had received from Miskatonic University, there was growing now a mass of evidence to indicate that the professor had had access to some other source of information. (The Dweller in Darkness, p. 111)

My friend was shrieking now; his screams blended with that gleeful, atrocious laughter from the empty air. His sagging body, dangling in space, bent backward once again as blood spurted from the torn neck, spraying like a ruby fountain. That blood never reached the floor. It stopped in midair as the laughter ceased, and a loathsome sucking noise took its place. With a new and accelerated horror, I realized that the blood was being drained to feed the invisible entity from beyond! What creature of space had been so suddenly and unwittingly invoked? What was that vampiric monstrosity I could not see? Even now a hideous metamorphosis was taking place. The body of my companion became shrunken, wizened, lifeless. At length it dropped to the floor and lay nauseatingly still. But in midair another and a ghastlier change occurred. (The Shambler from the Stars, pp. 159-160)

It looked like a mummy. For an intolerable, age-long second the thought pounded frightfully at Carson's brain: It looked like a mummy! It was a skeleton-thin, parchment-brown corpse, and it looked like a skeleton with the hide of some great lizard stretched over its bones. It stirred, it crept forward, and its long nails scratched audibly against the stone. It crawled out into the Witch Room, its passionless face pitilessly revealed in the white light, and its eyes were gleaming with charnel life. He could see the serrated ridge of its brown, shrunken back... Carson sat motionless. Abysmal horror had robbed him of the power to move. He seemed to be caught in the fetters of dream-paralysis, in which the brain, an aloof spectator, is unable or unwilling to transmit the nerve-impulses to the muscles. He told himself frantically that he was dreaming, that he would presently awaken. (The Salem Horror, p. 230)

And they were brought here by that excessive love of sunlight which characterizes most faddists of any sort and that urge to find an unsettled, unorganized land in which utopias might take root and burgeon, untroubled by urbane ridicule and tradition-bred opposition—the same urge that led the Mormons to desert-guarded Salt Lake City, their paradise of Deseret. This seems an adequate explanation, even without bringing in the fact that Los Angeles, a city of retired farmers and small merchants, a city made hectic by the presence of the uncouth motion-picture industry, would naturally attract charlatans of all varieties. Yes, that explanation is still sufficient to me, and I am rather pleased, for even now I should hate to think that those hideously alluring voices a-mutter with secrets from



beyond the rim of the cosmos necessarily have some dim, continent-wide range. (The Terror from the Depths, p. 237)

"But whether any of those creatures exist today—there, there's the rub! The overwhelming question we can't answer, though always on the edge of doing so. The thing is," he went on with gathering urgency, "that if they do exist, they are so unimaginably powerful and resourceful, they might be"—and he looked around sharply—"anywhere at the moment!

"Take Cthulhu," he began.

I couldn't help starting as I heard that word pronounced for the first time in my life; the harsh, dark, abysmal monosyllabic growl it came to was so very like the sound that had originally come to me from my imagination, or my subconscious, or my otherwise unremembered dreams, or... (The Terror from the Depths, p. 262)

"I am the chosen one....Through His eyes and my body will they again acquaint themselves entirely with the surface; that in time, when the stars are right, they may perform the Great Rising....Ah! The Great Rising! The damnation of Hastur! The dream of Cthulhu for countless ages...When all the deep dwellers, the dark denizens, the sleepers in silted cities, will again confound the world with their powers....

"For that is not dead which can lie forever, and when mysterious times have passed, it shall be again as it once was....Soon, when the Transfer is done, He shall walk the Earth in my guise, and I the great deeps in His! So that where they ruled before they may one day rule again—aye—even the brethren of Yibb-Tstll and the sons of dreaming Cthulhu and their servants—for the Glory of R'lhey...." (Rising with Surtsey, p. 279)

It was an absurd explanation; it would have taken a ton of nitroglycerine to do so much damage. In any case, a nitroglycerine explosion leaves behind characteristic signs; there were no such signs in the devastated field. A nitroglycerine explosion can be heard; no one heard it.

And yet the explanation was never seriously questioned, although there was later an official investigation into the disaster. Presumably because human beings are afraid of mysteries for which there is absolutely no explanation, the mind needs some solution, no matter how absurd, to reassure it. (The Return of the Lloigor, p. 350)

The Eyrie/Salem, Mass./Aug. 2

To the Macabre Hermit of the Midlands:

Colin, I'm putting together a deluxe 3-volume collection of H. Kenneth Allard's horror stories. I well recall that Kent's stories were personal favorites of yours. How about shambling forth from retirement and illustrating these for me? Will need 2-color jackets and a dozen line interiors each. Would hope that you can startle fandom with some especially ghastly drawings for these—something different from the hackneyed skulls and bats and werewolves carting off half-dressed ladies.

Interested? I'll send you the materials and details, and you can have a free hand. Let us hear—Scotty.





Leverett was delighted. He felt some nostalgia for the pulp days, and he had always admired Allard's genius in transforming visions of cosmic horror into convincing prose. He wrote Brandon an enthusiastic reply. (Sticks, p. 380)

"Never to be mended," she whispered. "You know nothing of the original quarrel?"

"Robert Boone was discovered rifling his brother's desk."

"Philip Boone was mad," she said. "A man who trafficked with the unholy. The thing which Robert Boone attempted to remove was a profane Bible writ in the old Tongues—Latin, Druidic, others. A hell-book."

"De Vermis Mysteriis."

She recoiled as if struck. "You know of it?"

"I have seen it...touched it." It seemed again she might swoon. A hand went to her mouth as if to stifle an outcry. "Yes; in Jerusalem's Lot. On the pulpit of a corrupt and desecrated church."

"Still there; still there, then." She rocked in her chair. "I had hoped God in His wisdom had cast it into the pit of hell."

"What relation had Philip Boone to Jerusalem's Lot?"

"Blood relation," she said darkly. "The Mark of the Beast was on him, although he walked in the clothes of the Lamb. And on the night of October 31, 1789, Philip Boone disappeared...and the entire population of that damned village with him." (Jerusalem's Lot, pp. 422-423)

"The Ghooric zone," Sri Gomati whispered to herself, "the Ghooric zone."

They advanced down the stairs, leaving behind the baleful pulsations of Yuggoth, lowering themselves meter by meter into the bronze-green lighted depths of Thog. The track-laying cybermech of Shoten Binayakya took the strangely proportioned stairway with a sort of clumsy grace. Njord Freyr, his wheeled undercarriage superbly mobile on the level surface of Thog, now clutched desperately to the fluted carapace of Shoten. (Discovery of the Ghooric Zone, p. 460).



## Topics for Discussion

Consider the stories presented in the collection. While some obviously 'belong', such as Lovecraft's *Call of Cthulhu*, some perhaps do not belong quite so much. Which stories in the collection seem to have only a tenuous connection to the others?

Stories in the collection published prior to c. 1950 are generally authored by members of the 'Lovecraft circle'—that is, actual friends and close acquaintances of Lovecraft. Stories published after 1969 are by a variety of authors exposed to Lovecraft's ideas only through his fiction. How do the first 13 stories in the collection vary as a group from the remaining nine stories?

What construction elements and fictional objects are shared in common amongst all of the stories in the collection?

Which story was your favorite, and why? Which story was your least favorite, and why? In your opinion, does the collection do a good job of presenting the breadth of material commonly encountered in the sub-genre of the Cthulhu Mythos?

Several stories present fictionalized representations of Lovecraft himself; many of the stories present Lovecraft's fictional work as if they were works on non-fiction. How does the presence of an actual person impact the flow of the stories? Are they more or less credible for including the founder of the mythos?

Robert Bloch and Lovecraft wrote a series of stories that reference previous stories, forming a sort of continuum of narrative. While this is fairly common for a single writer it is less common when found amongst stories written by two authors. Does the interplay between these stories make them more or less enjoyable? Why?

Most of the stories in the collection have a length of something like twenty pages, while some—Leiber's *The Terror from the Depths* and Wilson's *The Return of the Lloigor*—are over twice that long. Discuss the pacing of the narrative construction of these longer stories: are their plots so complex that they require greater length? On the other hand, Smith's *Ubbo-Sathla* and Bloch's *The Shambler from the Stars* are not quite half that length. Are these stories too simple to be enjoyable?