



The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft: Dreams of Terror and Death

H.P. Lovecraft, E. Hoffmann Price, Neil Gaiman (Introduction)

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This volume collects, for the first time, the entire Dream Cycle created by H. P. Lovecraft, the master of twentieth-century horror, including some of his most fantastic tales:

THE DOOM THAT CAME TO SARNATH--Hate, genocide, and a deadly curse.

THE NAMELESS CITY--Death lies beneath the shifting sands, in a story linking the Dream Cycle with the legendary Cthulhu Mythos.

THE CATS OF ULTHAR--In Ulthar, no man may kill a cat...and woe unto any who tries.

THE DREAM QUEST OF UNKNOWN KADATH--The epic nightmare adventure with tendrils stretching throughout the entire Dream Cycle.

AND TWENTY MORE TALES OF SURREAL TERROR

The Dream Cycle of H.P. Lovecraft: Dreams of Terror and Death Details

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Frances says

I need to get a couple of things up front, right off the bat.

(1) I have a great and abiding fondness for many of Lovecraft's stories; "Pickman's Model" is a longtime favourite, and "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Colour out of Space" and "The Cats of Ulthar" are part of my very early memories of horror fiction.

(2) Oh dear god the man was racist. The man was *horrendously* racist, and it's not all just the time period he was living in. The first story (as opposed to fragment) in this book is "oh dear god, *the horror*, the evil disgusting inhuman Eskimos wiped out the noble men of prehistory."

Henry says

I found most of the stories very interesting but it was frustrating when they were uncompleted or finished abruptly.

Kinksrock says

Full disclosure: I have not read this entire collection. I previously read "The Dreams in the Witch-House", and I picked it up again to read "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward". This is horror in the tradition -- I'd say -- of Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein": Science-driven, and written in a very 'literary' style that may challenge readers used to modern horror. Not an easy read, but very rewarding.

Marissa says

As a collection of HPL dream stories, this kind of baffles me. Many of the "Dunsanian" and other dream-world stories are here, but why in the name of Azathoth is "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" here?! Randolph Carter is mentioned offhandedly once in the story, but there's really no reason to include it here, especially since it's quite long and takes up space that could have been filled with the rest of HPL's actual dream stories. Once again, since there are corrected texts and annotated editions of HPL's work easily obtained, there's really no reason to get this one.

Luke says

First, I am a long-time Lovecraft fan. For years I've dug his ability - despite his Poe-aping turgid prose - to convey something unique, the ripples of which are still felt in horror. The nameless, strange terrors that

became his stock-in-trade are certainly unique, and forgive a lot of his faults. (Overlong work, repetitive pieces, and a lack of proper description - though this last is understandable as he was largely cribbing from nightmares.)

But.

Ole HPL is racist.

And not just mildly.

He's a pretty terrible human. We know he was a misanthrope, pretty much - well, except for that picture of him smiling in Brooklyn - but he's up there with George Lucas in terms of the whole lazy stereotype thing.

(I guess I should be thankful that he's not pro-rape, as per some of Ian Fleming's more creepy moments.)

I know there's the idea that we shouldn't try to map today's sensibilities onto people writing in another time, and I know there too is an idea that we shouldn't censor creators, but it's a shame that there's so much overt racism in HPL's work - especially in a collection like this, which doesn't so much mine the Cthulhu mythos but rather touches on the more SF/dreamlike of his works (as well as his laudable love of cats) - as it really pulls you out of the work. It's probably most obvious in 'Through the Gates of the Silver Key', but it's there in the other stuff too.

It's difficult for me, as I love the guy's work, but these moments leave you with some 'oh, man' feelings which are hard to reconcile. (Especially if paired with things like his view on jazz, and this terrible poem.)

I can't dismiss him because of the contributions he's made, and the pull that the stories still have. But reading him now as an adult (as opposed to a lonely teenager) bring his problems squarely to my attention.

I still intend to read the rest of the books in the series, though. So consider the racism stuff an ongoing thought that will probably accompany my reading. It's hard not to have it as a companion.

There's a great post on HPL and racism (and the 'man of his time' defense) here, and it worth reading if you're a Lovecraft fan. Acknowledging the dude had problems beyond slavering demon-sultans is a good start, if we're to avoid mindless (piping?) following.

To finish, have some Mountain Goats, singing about the man. (Well, kinda.)

Geert Daelemans says

An excellent collection of stories of the macabre

Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, Bram Stoker's Dracula and Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are commonly seen as the cornerstones of modern horror. In my opinion Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890-1937) must to be added to this list, because horror wouldn't be the same without the influence of this phenomenal writer. One can say that Lovecraft brought the "Dark Monsters" into the genre, take for example the H.R.Giger creature used in the movie Alien, but this simplification neglects his true talent: composing

great atmospheric horror stories.

Although the common threads in this collection are clearly relating to dreams, there is one maybe even more important aspect that returns in all the stories: every main character is obsessively engaged in a personal or even scientific quest that brings him face to face with the most unreal dangers. The eagerness to see the invisible is what links these stories all together. Even if the worst is about to happen to the main character, he just takes that last step because he must know what is crawling behind that wall.

If you love fantasizing about more dimensions and time travel, than this collection is certainly an enticing dip into these mathematical riddles. In addition the stories all weave together, so you get the urge to reread them again after finishing. Don't hesitate to do this because you will get absorbed even more into the surreal mythos of Lovecraft.

Madeleine says

I love how Lovecraft wrote. Really. His word choice, his style, his rampant anglophilia, his imitable style that inspired so many of horror and fantasy's modern-day kings. You can tell the man's got serious talent -- and a truly terrifying imagination, my God -- and it's a right shame that he didn't get the recognition he deserved in his lifetime.

A collection of short stories just wasn't the best introduction to him for me. And it doesn't help that I read this in 30-page chunks spanning more than a month. I mean, the longer stories sucked me in and offered all the development and exploration I wanted from Lovecraft, but the first handful of tales just seemed to end far, far sooner than I wanted them to. But the sheer creepiness and masterful storytelling showcased in this collection definitely makes me want to give Lovecraft's beefier works a try.

Quirkyreader says

This collection had some good stories, bad stories, and weird Lord Dunsayian stories. Then again everyone's perceptions of the stories will be different. And that is a good thing.

Davey-d says

so,

it's Lovecraft and all the surmise on his personal life and beliefs aside, this guy is twisted, dark, macabre (and you really don't get to use this word very often), and writes like no other and I love it. To all that have that streak of Cure listening, black wearing (and who doesn't in PDX), ruminations on a bleak death this is for you. I respectfully, religiously give this tome a read during the first storms of fall around Halloween. Not for the faint of heart.

Leothefox says

Twice I set out to read Randolph Carter's dream quest and twice I was snatched away... I first purchased this book way back in 2003, when I wasn't much of a reader. Fast forward to now and the third time was the charm.

This one took me a while, mostly because I had a lot of stress, had to move and such, but it was well worth it. Lovecraft's dream quest has some of his best stuff. In this collection there's loads of great shorts like "The Nameless City" and "Beyond the Wall of Sleep" some novel-length stuff like "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" and "The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" and some tantalizing fragments like "The Descendant".

This is Lovecraft under the influence of Lord Dunsany, reaching out for cosmic wonder, taking his terrors to poetic heights. It's exciting stuff! Randolph Carter's cycle really takes you out there, into the dream world, the moon, the cosmos, beyond madness and points North. "Through the Gates of the Silver Key", a collaboration with E. Hoffman Price, makes a wonderful climax, so much so that I wish I'd read these in order.

While these tales take us beyond sleep and over the spires of candy-colored cities and through marching mountains, they also take us to the reality of Lovecraft's New England, which he renders lyrically as a paradise on earth. This, to me, is an aspect that takes old HPL and company out of the realm of mere hack-work that the pulps are forever associated with.

I'm really glad I got back into this book! It's always worth it to re-visit an imaginative wellspring like Lovecraft, especially here in the heart of his cosmic vision.

Pamela says

The more I read of Lovecraft, the more I like his work. I started out with a sort of "best hits" compilation book, which I reviewed on here, and if I weren't so blasted tired I would link to it, but basically, at the time, I didn't really get it. There was all this hype about how terrifying Lovecraft is, and Cthulhu kept popping up (not literally, thank goodness) in books I was reading, and I guess I was expecting something a bit more explicitly scary. I also suggested that the man get a thesaurus.

I still must stand by that last statement (really, my dear man, how many times can you use "cyclopean" as an adjective in one story????), and I do feel vaguely unsettled when I read his descriptions of people, since he was pretty much a gung-ho racist. Now that I know that, it's pretty obvious in his writing. However, I finally feel like I'm getting what this is all about. It's subtle and insidious. His people, places, and creations will creep into your mind, where they lie dormant for a time, and then you find yourself thinking about the things he's created, as well as recognizing them as the archetypes they have become for a lot of modern horror.

Lovecraft definitely excels at the shorter stories, as they pack a quiet punch without allowing him to ramble on too much (which he tends to do). I did, however, enjoy the novella *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* included here, as it was genuinely scary and had some pretty compelling characters. I'm not as much of a fan of the Randolph Carter stories for some reason.

The general theme of this collection, as you may have divined from the title, is dreams. It's not the Cthulhu

mythos, although there is a bit of crossover with characters. Evidently Lovecraft dreamed a lot, and if this is any indication of what he dreamed, I feel sorry for him. I don't know if it's the power of suggestion, or what, but I did have more vivid dreams while reading this, although I suppose that reading Lovecraft before bed isn't going to do wonders for my subconscious. I finally see that Lovecraft's stories are frightening because of all that they don't say or show the reader. It's that fear of the unknown and unnameable (or unpronounceable!). I am planning on revisiting the other Lovecraft I've read and not liked as much to see if I have a better opinion of it now.

David Stephens says

As should be obvious from the title, this collection of Lovecraft stories focuses on dreams. In many of these tales, Lovecraft suggests that dreams are where truth actually lies as opposed to reality where it is often thought to be. He believes dreams are things "whose vaguely exciting and disquieting effect suggests possible minute glimpses into a sphere of mental existence no less important than physical life yet separated from that life by an all but impassable barrier." And most of the characters herein try to tear down that barrier.

While there are some more straightforward stories here—"From Beyond," "The Dreams in the Witch-House"—many of them seem like cosmic folk tales, explaining the origins of humanity and how people have established certain systems of belief.

Included among many brief stories are two novellas—"The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" and "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward." The former begins well enough with nightmarish imagery and dark, rich prose, but it doesn't take long before it becomes a complete mess. It involves Randolph Carter traveling through locations both terrible and majestic in his dreams, seeking a city of sunlight, and encountering various creatures along the way. It becomes quite a slog to finish, as many of the creatures and locations seem completely arbitrary and often blur together. Also, it's hard to take creatures called "Gugs" and "Zoogs" seriously. "Charles Dexter Ward" may get a bit repetitive and heavy handed but at least it builds some mystery and feels like an actual story. Perhaps Lovecraft was trying to drive his readers as insane as his characters often end up. That's the only way I can find that he may have succeeded with "The Dream Quest."

My favorite story, though, was "The Strange High House in the Mist." It begins with some of the most gorgeous prose I've seen from Lovecraft. And while the creepiness of its setup dissolves into a more sentimental vibe, it still latches on to readers and makes for a compelling read all the way to the end.

This is definitely not my favorite collection of Lovecraft stories, but there are still enough positive attributes to merit a look in its direction.

arianna says

This book was definitely amazing. Lovecraft was able to weave very frightening and amazing worlds, and the way the editor put them all together was indeed perfect. In some stories the end was rather predictable (because everyone wants to be like Lovecraft) but I still found myself excited to read them. I couldn't give

this book 5 stars though because sometimes the difference in ages of writing was hard to grasp. It just seemed to draw on and on during some stories, and others went so fast i could barely keep up. The dream quest was definitely a fast, slow fast fast slow kind of book, but i'm so glad i read this. Anyone who reads any author or knows anyone inspired by this man, should read the Dream Cycle.

Ben says

Let's be frank -- I love Lovecraft. The "Necronomicon" that you've heard referenced a zillion times is a fictional tome of his invention. He was writing in the 1930's, and his work is dated by its slow pacing, Poe-like vocabulary, and predictability (now that he's fathered the entire horror genre -- nearly every successful writer from Neil Gaiman to Stephen King cites him as an influence -- and its tropes are so recognizable to us). But Lovecraft's style is entirely singular, so much so that the numerous homages to him, and writerly devotees of his, are blindingly obvious to anyone familiar with Lovecraft's stories. Despite this, his threats and monsters were so original they were surreal -- you cannot possibly guess the actual details of them -- and no one since has had the cajones to reuse them except in the most deliberately referential way.

Lovecraft was a skeptical, atheistic researcher of the occult who depicted a universe where cultists worship and summon "deities" that are really just alien beings with no more regard for humanity than we have for a colony of ants (to borrow a phrase from a recent NPR special), and that generally require blood sacrifices and want to consume us all. Magic is possible due to undiscovered laws of the universe, which challenge the sanity and morality of anyone who contemplates them. Anytime you see a horror story that involves that type of idea, or for that matter any Creepy Tome of Forbidden Knowledge that causes all the trouble, you're seeing Lovecraft's influence. Knowledge of the way things really are in the universe is dangerous, any gods you can contact are unthinkably evil and hostile to life, and the more you understand about it all the more you go insane.

Lovecraft was afflicted with nightmares his entire life, and often wrote them into his stories -- wrote his stories around them, in fact. His interpretation of magic and the occult has been so influential that I've even seen him cited by Christian extremists as someone who had genuine contact with, and knowledge of, Satan and his minions -- which is just to say that his world is quite convincing as depicted. If you were raised by enthusiastic Christians you were probably introduced in some way to the idea of the Great Satanic Conspiracy running the world; that is largely inspired by the Illuminati trilogy, but also very heavily influenced, as I now understand it, by the ideas of Lovecraft and his devotees.

So, it's a little slow to read, but it's great fun. Hopefully you too will understand why the man, to this day, has a large and devoted cult following. (Pun intended, and highly apropos.)

P.S. No reason why I picked this volume of his work instead of one of the many others. I will say that this and the other two Del Rey volumes seem well ordered, and well chosen as far as which stories are collected in a volume (important because Lovecraft only wrote short fiction, and was never published in anthology form in his lifetime -- so you tend to get a lot of chaos and redundancy when you try to collect his works). And they certainly do have some beautiful cover art.

Zachary Moore says

Lovecraft's dream cycle is part fantasy and part horror, some of the more Dunsanian stories surprised me quite a bit when I first read them as I was expecting a non-stop diet of monsters from Lovecraft. This collection contains the enormously imaginative "Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath" as well as one of favorite Lovecraft stories, "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" which to my mind was Lovecraft's most successful exploration of the theme of intelligences reaching back through time to claim a living victim. Another favorite is "The Strange House in the Mist" which has some of my favorite imagery from a Lovecraft story along with an intriguing conclusion.

East Bay J says

To my mind, H. P. Lovecraft stands as one of the most singular and interesting writers of the 20th century. Just as interesting as his stories and writing style are his unusual life, voluminous letter writing and his circle of friends (Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, etc.). Most interesting, perhaps, was the pantheon of gods he created and the concept he wrote around that humanity are pawns, specks of dust in an unfeeling universe.

The Dream Cycle Of H. P. Lovecraft collects twenty five of Lovecraft's tales, grouped by their somewhat related subject matter of dreams and dream journeys. I would say this is a loose set of rules at best, given that Lovecraft's stories seem to all be more or less related in various ways. Many of the stories here mention the deities of the Cthulhu Mythos so, ultimately, it seems more accurate to think of this as a collection of Lovecraft tales as opposed to a collection of a certain kind of Lovecraft tale.

There are some real gems in this volume. One of my favorites is *Pickman's Model*, a story containing the classic Lovecraft reveal at the end, meant to shatter the wits and scare the pants off any reader. What I like so much about this story is that it is told in the form of a one sided dialogue. Most Lovecraft stories are told in a narrative, almost journalistic style. This happened then this happened, followed by these things and this other thing. His command of the language is such that these stories are still highly entertaining, but *Pickman's Model* stands out for its unique use of dialogue.

I also especially liked *The Hound* this time around. The story's grave robbing bohemians reminded me of Norwegian black metal kids playacting at evil. Unlike Norway's misguided youth, however, Lovecraft's protagonists aren't playacting and suffer the consequences.

Of the longer tales (and these are some of Lovecraft's longest), *The Dream Quest Of Unknown Kadath* takes center stage in this collection. I like that one, but *The Case Of Charles Dexter Ward* and *Dreams In The Witch House* strike me as better stories and better written.

While this is a fantastic collection, I would recommend Lovecraft neophytes start with another Del Rey collection, *The Best Of H. P. Lovecraft*, which collects most of the famous Cthulhu stories and is the best representation of Lovecraft as a writer, in my opinion.

Dave says

My first real foray into Lovecraft. While some of the stories are disposable, many are quite good and some are excellent (*Pickman's Model*, *The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath*, and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* stand out). I feel, after reading this, that my plans of living a hermetic life and indulging in strange

pursuits are justified.

Edward A. Taylor says

The second most inspiring series of Lovecraftian work after the Cthulhu Mythos itself, the Dream Cycle includes "The Silver Key, Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath, and Through the Gates of the Silver Key" to name a few and connects all the tales of locations mentioned or written in relation to the four regions of the Dreamlands. Highly recommended for those who want to see the "softer" side of HPL where the good guys sometimes win or stay sane long enough to make a difference.

Tom says

If you think Lovecraft is all doom and madness, this compilation of stories is here to teach an important lesson: sometimes he's also writing about how cats can save someone from moon monsters. This collection of short stories is a well-selected look into the stories Lovecraft wrote set in and around the world of dreams. Only brushing the Cthulhu mythos, I found these other works to offer a more rounded view of the author and the universe he created. Included among the shorter stories are two novellas, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and *The Dream Quest for Unknown Kadath*. Both of these works were rather trying at times - Lovecraft's signature attention to somewhat dry and very minute detail can drag sometimes over a hundred pages - but I enjoyed both and they were a refreshing change of pace.

This is a must read for anyone looking for a side of Lovecraft which has been somewhat overlooked in popular culture, and for those who want to know what's up with his love of cats.

Lara says

Maybe I'm jaded, but I just couldn't get into it. I liked *Pickman's Model*, and then I kind of bounced around, trying to find a story I could enjoy or be scared by. I got partway through the *Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath* and just got bored to tears. I kept falling asleep. I just find other people's dreams really uninteresting. And I got distracted by the way he writes: every single noun has to have a hyperbolic adjective attached to it. Drove me nuts.

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