



The Dreams in the Witch House

H.P. Lovecraft

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This Halcyon Classics ebook is H.P. Lovecraft's classic occult tale of horror THE DREAMS IN THE WITCH-HOUSE.

The story follows Walter Gilman, who takes a room in the Witch House, an accursed house in Akham, Lovecraft's fictional New England town. The house once harbored Keziah Mason, an witch who disappeared mysteriously from a Salem jail in 1692. Gilman discovers that over the centuries most of its occupants have died prematurely. In his dreams while at the house, Gilman travels to the city of Elder Things and communes with the evil witch and her henchmen.

The Dreams in the Witch House Details

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From Reader Review The Dreams in the Witch House for online ebook

Lyn says

Jerry, George, Elaine and Kramer sit at their favorite table at the café and discuss HP Lovecraft's 1933 short story "The Dreams in the Witch House".

George: See, that's why we started rent control, even back then a good studio apartment was valuable – haunted, possessed by a two hundred year old witch and her malevolent rat-like familiar, maybe a portal to a demon – but still rentable.

Kramer: And ya gotta say, the super was trying, I mean he put down rat poison – there's plenty of sub-leases today – forget it!

Elaine: So ... why did we all read this stupid 80-year-old story again? I mean this student lives in a garret apartment – I can understand the discounted rent, I got that - and he has some weird dreams and there's a weird rat thing, but why? Why does Lovecraft write this creepy, depressing stuff and why do we read it?

Jerry: Isn't it obvious? You get a discounted rent because the place is haunted? You write about it, you tell everyone about the witch and the demon, I'm seriously considering a play at the haunted bit myself, maybe I'm having weird dreams and sleep walking, maybe the landlord needs to come off a few hundred a month.

George: I see what you're saying, and I like it! I like what you're saying.

Kramer: You know Newman said it was a lot like another older story, The House on the Borderland by William Hope Hodgson.

Jerry: Newman.

Elaine: Well, I thought the old Salem witch ghost or whatever she was creepy and so was her little pet thing and yada yada yada, Lovecraft being Lovecraft again.

Kramer: But what a great film it would make, Boy, I'd like to get it on video. Watch it in slow motion and freeze frame it!

Jerry: Ah, you're crazy!

Kramer: Am I? Or am I so sane that you just blew your mind?

Jerry: It's impossible!

Kramer: Is it?! Or is it so possible your head is spinning like a top?

Jerry: It can't be!

Kramer: Can't it?! Or is your entire world just crashing down all around you?

Jerry: Alright, that's enough!

Athen says

We had to read this for class, along with At The Mountains of Madness (also by Lovecraft), and I have to say that I enjoyed this one much more than ATMM.

Kyriaki says

*?νειρα στο σπ?τι της Μ?γισσας: **5/5** ,το εκτεν?στερο δι?γημα της συλλογ?ς και αυτ? που μου ?ρεσε πιο πολ?

*Ο αλχημιστ?ς: **3/5** ,καλ? αλλ? λ?γο αδι?φορο

*Η μουσικ? του ?ριχ Τσαν: **3/5** ,επ?σης καλ? αλλ? λ?γο αδι?φορο

*Η γιορτ?: **3,5/5** ,αρκετ? καλ?

*Ο φ?βος που εν?δρευε: **4,5/5** ,πολ? καλ?

*Το μοντ?λο του Π?κμαν: **3/5** , καλ? αλλ? λ?γο βαρ?θηκα

*Ο νας: **4/5** ,κι αυτ? πολ? ωρα?ο

*Το δ?ντρο **3,5/5** ,το μικρ?τερο απ? ?λα τα διηγ?ματα, αρκετ? συμπαθητικ?

Τα συγκεκριμ?να διηγ?ματα ε?ναι η πρ?τη μου επαφ? με το ?ργο του Lovecraft και μπορ? να πω πως ?μεινα αρκετ? ικανοποιημ?νη. Φαν των διηγημ?των δεν ε?μαι αλλ? αυτ? μου ?ρεσαν αρκετ?.

Κ?ποιες ιστορ?ες ?ταν πιο ωρα?ες απ? κ?ποιες ?λλες, αλλ? ?λες ?ταν σ?γουρα πολ? ατμοσφαιρικ?ς! Δεν ενδε?κνυνται για μεταμεσον?χτιο δι?βασμα!

Peter Ezzat Aziz says

According to Dr. Ahmed Khaled Tawfik's article, Lovecraft actually contacted those aliens. Turns out, according to Dr. Tawfik, aliens are devils expelled from Earth.

Kirsten says

Read this as part of The Complete Works of H.P. Lovecraft.

A delightfully creepy story - though one wonders why the students insisted on living in such a place. I think I would've rather slept outside than slept in this house. A very solid entry in Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos.

Kim says

"The Dreams in the Witch House" is a short story by H. P. Lovecraft, written in February 1932 and first published in the July 1933 issue of *Weird Tales*. Well it certainly was that, a weird tale that is. Also, I am absolutely sure that none of this could ever have happened to me, even if there wasn't an old woman's ghost and a white, hairy, sharp-toothed thing called by the townspeople "Brown Jenkin"—running around the house. It is rather surprising I ever got through the first few paragraphs, things like this kept being said by our narrator:

"Possibly Gilman ought not to have studied so hard. Non-Euclidean calculus and quantum physics are enough to stretch any brain;"

"some circumstance had more or less suddenly given a mediocre old woman of the seventeenth century an insight into mathematical depths perhaps beyond the utmost modern delvings of Planck, Heisenberg, Einstein, and de Sitter."

"Toward the end of March he began to pick up in his mathematics, though other studies bothered him increasingly. He was getting an intuitive knack for solving Riemannian equations, and astonished Professor Upham by his comprehension of fourth-dimensional and other problems."

"theoretical points of approach or even contact between our part of the cosmos and various other regions as distant as the farthest stars or the trans-galactic gulfs themselves—or even as fabulously remote as the tentatively conceivable cosmic units beyond the whole Einsteinian space-time continuum."

"All the objects—organic and inorganic alike—were totally beyond description or even comprehension. Gilman sometimes compared the inorganic masses to prisms, labyrinths, clusters of cubes and planes,"

All those mentions of mathematics types of things, not to mention other things that may or may not be math I have no idea, things like that can make me run from a room, or a book.

Then there is the above line of how the objects are totally beyond description and then he goes on to describe them, that just bugged me. Oh, and that reference to de Sitter, and no, I didn't know who he was there was a notation, the story was probably inspired by the lecture "The Size of the Universe" given by Willem de Sitter. Lovecraft attended the lecture for some reason three months prior to writing the story. De Sitter is even named in the story, Lovecraft calls him a mathematical genius. That almost made me want to go look up the lecture or the person which scared me more than the story, no I didn't look it up I wouldn't understand a word of it.

But the thing that makes me sure that none of this would have ever happened to me, after the first paragraph that is, were the rats. Our main character, Walter Gilman, moves to a new town and is excited to learn that there is a room for rent in the old "Witch House" as it is called. Not only is there a room for rent but it is the actual room of the witch, Keziah Mason. It was the eastern attic room where Keziah was said to have practiced her spells and done all sorts of horrible things. It isn't Keziah that would have got me out of that room and that house rather quickly, in the first paragraph it says:

"At night the subtle stirring of the black city outside, the sinister scurrying of rats in the wormy partitions, and the creaking of hidden timbers in the centuried house, were enough to give him a sense of strident pandemonium."

"Aside from an obvious rat-hole and the signs of other stopped-up ones, there was no access—"

" So far as concrete noises went, the rats in the ancient partitions were the worst."

Scurrying rats, rat holes and wormy partitions? I am out the door that minute, Keziah's ghost can come with me if it wants to, rather a ghost than a rat. Go ahead and read the story it is short so it won't take you long whether you like it or not. As for me between the math and the rats, plus it being so short I will never remember it, it was just an ok for me.

Sheri says

These old sci-fi/horror stories are fun. They are filled with Victorian era supposition (or post-Victorian in this case) in which scientific explanation is given for the supernatural. These stories come out of a time when science started to be able to explain things like time and space and so credence was given to some historical superstitions. My favorite such example was: "Elwood agreed that Gilman had good scientific grounds for thinking she might have stumbled on strange and significant information....it was by no means impossible that Keziah had actually mastered the art of passing through dimensional gates."

Overall it is short and interesting.

David Sven says

I listened to this on the SFF Audio Podcast <http://www.sffaudio.com/?p=48997>. The actual book reading was 1hr 42min followed by discussion of the book.

I remember seeing the *Masters of Horror* TV show adaptation which came off pretty creepy. The book itself not so much. I mean the witch coming for the protagonist through his dreams with the little rat creature Brown Jenkins, with the human face and 4 hands, were pretty creepy, and there is a lot of weird and grotesque elements in the book, but a lot of the psychological tension in the story is undermined by the fact that we get to see what the horror is ie the irrational fear of the unknown, unseen terror doesn't come into play to a significant degree, if at all.

There are arguably two distinct elements of the book which were discussed on the podcast - one is the sci fi element where the idea that if we knew the right numbers or the right math we could transport ourselves to anywhere in the universe or even into a parallel universe or dimension. References to Einstein's work are referred to. Bear in mind this was published in 1933 when all these weird and wonderful extrapolations of the emerging quantum physics were being explored.

Then we have the horror element with other worldly beings and their minions in another dimension.

Ultimately, neither part of the story appealed to me that much - but the parts where the witch and Brown Jenkins come for Walter Gilman in the night add enough creepiness to pull this up to...

3 stars

Lucia says

****Leído para el Club de Lectura****

Para la segunda entrega del Club de Lectura le tocó a Gloria elegir el libro, y se decidió por una selección de cuentos de Lovecraft.

Por comentarios que me habían hecho acerca de este cuento esperaba otra cosa, y cuando finalmente lo leí me sorprendió positivamente. De nuevo mi fé en Lovecraft se renovó xD

Me gustó que a diferencia de otros cuentos del autor el protagonista se mantuviera escéptico durante la mayor parte de la historia, no admitiendo hasta ultimo momento la posibilidad de que lo que soñaba fueran más que sueños inducidos por la fiebre y la sugestión de sus estudios. También me pareció interesante la relación que plantea inicialmente entre las matemáticas (o más bien la física) y el ocultismo, es una lástima que haya sido casi una excusa en la historia y no lo haya desarrollado más.

Leonard Gaya says

Unsurprisingly for a Lovecraftian character, Walter Gilman, the protagonist of this story, is a young specialist in mathematics and folklore. Moreover, this tale mixes considerations on the multi-dimensional nature of the cosmos with witchcraft — the rituals of Walpurgis Night — and the recurring Cyclopean cities of the Cthulhu mythos.

More characteristically, in stark contrast with *At the Mountains of Madness*, which takes place in the cold heart of the Antarctic, *The Dreams in the Witch House*, brings a new, inner flavour, intimate even, to Lovecraft's weird imaginings. This time, the apparitions out of distant stars and countless aeons are revealed inside a series of nightmares. In the end, the monster bursts out, hatching from the shell of a human body: a ghastly image that Ridley Scott translated into film, at the starting point of his *Alien* series.

At times, this tale made me think of De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*. Be it as it may, it certainly has ramifications into more recent literature (the daemons of Pullman's *His Dark Materials*) and film (David Lynch's repeated witch dreams in, say, his masterpiece, *Mulholland Drive*).

Duffy Pratt says

This seemed pretty standard for the Lovecraft I have read. He tends to write through so many veils, and keeps so distant from his material, that it is hard to empathize with any of the characters, even as horrible things are happening. I guess that may just be a part of writing about unspeakable horror. If he actually spoke it, it would cease to be unspeakable. And this story comes pretty close.

The idea that witchcraft may just be advanced math is pretty scary. Its one that also comes up, to different effect but with the same basic mechanism, in Stephenson's *Anathem*. And its interesting to think that Lovecraft was already onto, in some sense, the modern idea of the multiverse - long before Kripke ever conceived of any "possible world."

Bill Kerwin says

Objectively considered, this should have been a Lovecraft masterpiece. Unfortunately (as is often true of predictive analysis), the story itself didn't turn out that way.

Here are the facts so you can decide for yourself. H.P. wrote "Dreams" in 1932, a few months after "The Shadow over Innsmouth" and more than halfway through his final decade of mature work, a period triggered by his failed marriage and fearful sojourn in New York and nourished by a return to his native Providence. Lovecraft's artistic conception was certainly an ambitious one: to compose an account (not of interstellar but) of *inter-dimensional visitation* which the reader glimpses beneath the surface of the conventional panoply of New England witchcraft (evil crone, gothic mansion, furry familiar, "The Blackman," etc.) Think of it! A horror for a new century! The union of Hawthorneian darkness and Einsteinian physics!

Sounds good, doesn't? But like I said, it didn't quite work out that way.

The problems began, I think, because H.P. thought of "planes" of existence as if they were geometric "planes," and therefore, when describing the dreams of his protagonist Gilman—who initially explains his own visions as "a result, jointly, of his studies in mathematics and in folklore"—channeled Euclid when he should have been channeling Poe:

All the objects—organic and inorganic alike—were totally beyond description or even comprehension. Gilman sometimes compared the inorganic masses to prisms, labyrinths, clusters of cubes and planes, and Cyclopean buildings; and the organic things struck him variously as groups of bubbles, octopi, centipedes, living Hindoo idols, and intricate Arabesques roused into a kind of ophidian animation.

This strikes me as amusing rather than terrifying. And things get worse:

Those organic entities whose motions seemed least flagrantly irrelevant and unmotivated were probably projections of life-forms from our own planet, including human beings. What the others were in their own dimensional sphere or spheres he dared not try to think. Two of the less irrelevantly moving things—a rather large congeries of iridescent, prolately spheroidal bubbles and a very much smaller polyhedron of unknown colours and rapidly shifting surface angles—seemed to take notice of him and follow him about or float ahead as he changed position among the titan prisms, labyrinths, cube-and-plane clusters, and quasi-buildings; and all the while the vague shrieking and roaring waxed louder and louder, as if approaching some monstrous climax of utterly unendurable intensity.

I could offer more evidence, ladies and gentleman of the jury. But you get the idea.

Add to this the fact that the conventional witchcraft story is not of great interest in itself, and you are faced with a recipe for failure. (To be fair, though, I love that loathsome witch's familiar, Brown Jenkin. Brown Jenkin gave me a few genuine chills. And what a *wonderful* name for a familiar!)

Lucky for us, though, that H.P., after a thorough contemplation of inter-dimensional horror, concluded that the most fruitful dimension for fictional exploration was *time*, aeon piled upon terrifying aeon, looming in

the cosmic dark. Three years later, he would complete his meditative masterpiece, *The Shadow out of Time*.

Baal Of says

Yeah, it's Lovecraft, so it's got the usual overwrought, portentous language, and lengthy, wordy descriptions involving impossible angles, unreal violet light, and inexplicable events. Because this book is about dreams encroaching into the real world, the excess works for me. A lot of Lovecraft's mythos is showcased in this story, and I do love Nyarlathotep, so flawed as it is, I enjoyed this one.

Karl says

Lovecraft Illustrated Volume 2

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Sarah Marie says

4.25 stars. Well this was weird? Review to come.

Badseedgirl says

Masters of Horror: season 1, episode 2

This short story was just not my cup of tea. I struggled through it, but it was a hard, hard story to complete.

? Irena ? says

This science fiction paranormal horror story should be enough for any fan. Or you could be like me and like one part more than the other (the second one). The mathematical explanations aren't my thing. It can get a bit too detailed for my taste. Still, the main idea that if we knew the right mathematical formulae, we wouldn't be bound to our dimension or universe is interesting.

I liked the idea for the story itself and that ending didn't hurt it one bit.

Walter Gilman becomes obsessed with a witch who disappeared from her jail during the Salem witch trials in 1692. It is believed she escaped to Arkham and lived in a house now known the Witch House. Soon, weird things start happening to him and around him.

The paranormal elements are great. Unexplained events, weird evil creatures that come at night and attack you in your sleep, murders and kidnappings and so on - all contribute to the general creepy atmosphere of the house.

Quirkyreader says

This was a very powerful and vivid story. Lovecraft used his theme of long walks in this story and it worked in rather well.

A.N. Mignan says

It is Donnie Darko meets The Blair Witch Project. One of those unique stories by Lovecraft where science-fiction, fantasy and horror are blended for the best, or should I say... the worst? One sentence from the text says it all: "*he began to connect his mathematics with the fantastic legends of elder magic*", the rest is an escalation towards the ultimate horror.

Monse says

[Quiero creer que Gilman en realidad era un asesino, que en sus estados de sonambulismo, terminó matando a niños y a la "bruja", y se encontraron tiempo después los esqueletos que lo inc
