



THE WHISPERER
IN DARKNESS

HOWARD LOVECRAFT

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The story is told by Albert N. Wilmarth, an instructor of literature at Miskatonic University in Arkham. When local newspapers report strange things seen floating in rivers during a historic Vermont flood, Wilmarth becomes embroiled in a controversy about the reality and significance of the sightings, though he sides with the skeptics. Wilmarth uncovers old legends about monsters living in the uninhabited hills who abduct people who venture or settle too close to their territory. Howard Phillips Lovecraft was an American author of fantasy, horror and science fiction. He is notable for blending elements of science fiction and horror; and for popularizing "cosmic horror" the notion that some concepts, entities or experiences are barely comprehensible to human minds, and those who delve into such risk their sanity. Lovecraft has become a cult figure in the horror genre and is noted as creator of the "Cthulhu Mythos," a series of loosely interconnected fictions featuring a "pantheon" of nonhuman creatures, as well as the famed Necronomicon, a grimoire of magical rites and forbidden lore. His works typically had a tone of "cosmic pessimism," regarding mankind as insignificant and powerless in the universe. Lovecraft's readership was limited during his life, and his works, particularly early in his career, have been criticized as occasionally ponderous, and for their uneven quality. Nevertheless, Lovecraft's reputation has grown tremendously over the decades, and he is now commonly regarded as one of the most important horror writers of the 20th Century, exerting an influence that is widespread, though often indirect.

The Whisperer in Darkness Details

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From Reader Review The Whisperer in Darkness for online ebook

Sarah Marie says

4 stars. Better than most of Lovecraft's stories, but still not his best. Review to come.

Marina Tetzlaff says

One of the most frightful things about scientific investigation is fear of retribution for your findings. In "The Whisperer in Darkness" the narrator and folklorist Albert Wilmarth embarks on a exploration of "creatures" recently seen in the hills of Virginia after flooding in 1927. As Albert becomes more involved in the controversy, he gets a letter from a Henry Wentworth Akeley, who claims to have proof of the existence of the alien race.

In this novel, H.P. Lovecraft captures the narrator's curiosity and turns it into an element of danger. Albert's total willingness to meet with Mr. Akeley after a sudden change of tone in their letters of exchange represents total foolishness. The reader can already conclude that Mr. Akeley was probably kidnapped, and yet Albert's curiosity must be satisfied.

When he goes to visit Akeley's house, he finds that all farm animals are missing, and that Akeley has been ill and has remained immobile in a chair in the corner. Upon waking the next morning, and discovering face and hands in Akeley's chair, Albert flees the house.

While the major fear in the story is if the alien-creatures will attempt harm Albert, a greater fear is that of a race which has appeared to master machinery, time-travel and flight. While readers might assume that Henry left willingly, it is hard to be sure, and we are left not knowing whether to like or despise the creatures.

The lack of clear answers about the alien race was intriguing but frustrating. One is left wondering what really happened to Akeley, and if in his own pursuits he was destroyed, or elevated to a higher plane of knowledge.

Bill Kerwin says

This story, first published in *Weird Tales* (August 1931) shares many qualities with the earlier "The Colour Out of Space": it is lengthy (in "Whisperer"'s case, extraordinarily lengthy, some 26000 words!), features detailed descriptions of the countryside which contribute to the eerie atmosphere, and claims a place in two genres, the literature of horror and the world of science fiction too. Somehow, though, "Whisperer" never rises to level of "The Color Out of Space."

It is certainly not the fault of the description. Lovecraft's use of a New Hampshire river valley is extraordinarily effective here, equal in power to "Colour"'s depiction of the blighted Massachusetts farm:

As we passed out of Brattleboro my sense of constraint and foreboding increased, for a vague quality in the hill-crowded countryside with its towering, threatening, close-pressing green and granite slopes hinted at obscure secrets and immemorial survivals....

Gradually the country around us grew wilder and more deserted. Archaic covered bridges lingered fearsomely out of the past in pockets of the hills, and the half-abandoned railway track paralleling the river seemed to exhale a nebulously visible air of desolation. There were awesome sweeps of vivid valley where great cliffs rose, New England's virgin granite shewing grey and austere through the verdure that scaled the crests. There were gorges where untamed streams leaped, bearing down toward the river the unimagined secrets of a thousand pathless peaks. Branching away now and then were narrow, half-concealed roads that bored their way through solid, luxuriant masses of forest among whose primal trees whole armies of elemental spirits might well lurk. As I saw these I thought of how Akeley had been molested by unseen agencies on his drives along this very route, and did not wonder that such things could be.

This is good stuff. Sure, you could cut out an adjective or two (okay, maybe five or six) but the total effect is haunting. And Akeley's peril—crablike space creatures who wish to *forcibly* transport him to the stars—is pretty scary.

I think the real problem with this story is the same as the reason why *Alien 3*—no matter how effective David Fincher's direction may be—is *never* as scary as Ridley Scott's *Alien*. *Because we have been allowed to see too darn much of the monster*. In the case of "The Whisperer in Darkness," we *hear* far too much: how benign we crablike star travelers are, how beautiful your trip to the stars will be, how comfortable you will be with your brain in a jar (this one made me think of *Futurama*!), how the operation won't hurt one little bit, etc., etc. Yakety yak, yakety yak. *Ad infinitum*.

"The Whisperer in Darkness" definitely has its moments, but by the end of the tale the aliens seem more like a creepy old grandpa who won't shut up than like a major threat to civilization.

Still, it is mature Lovecraft, and—if you love horror—it is worth a try.

Vicky Hunt says

Racism Against Ignorance Or Prejudice Against Stupid is a Real Thing

Weird Sci-fi is not my usual genre. My favorite brand of Science Fiction is that involving Science, technology, or especially space. I love imaginary worlds, and imagining the (one day)possible. But, I have a pragmatist side that balks at monsters and magic and voices in jars. In *The Whisperer in Darkness*, I had some difficulty in suspending disbelief to really enjoy the story until the climax, where the story changes mysteriously.

It's striking that Lovecraft chooses to separate the reader from the unknown in degrees, thereby intensifying the element of mystery. He does this by using a protagonist that is not directly involved in the problem. The protagonist, Wilmarth corresponds by letter with a secondary character, Henry Akeley who is exploring the mystery while separated from the aliens by the walls of his house. At the climax, presumably Akeley interacts with the extraterrestrials. Then in the denouement Wilmarth closes in in stages by train, then by car, then approaching the house, then in his encounters with Akeley and the whisperer in darkness. But, he never sees everything that was alluded to in the letters. It is all kept at arm's length from the reader to heighten the

mystery. When Wilmarth runs, you are left with an imposed sense of unknown to horrify: ‘the things in the chair.’

“Would to heaven I had quietly left the place before allowing that light to rest again on the vacant chair.”

Neither the Whisperer in Darkness, nor Lovecraft’s brand of weird mystery would have been possible to convey to the extent he did without his personal racism. The aspect of human reasoning that is captured by that which is strange and bizarre, toys with the unknown. Only in a place where the alien, the foreign exists can you really illustrate the unknown. Here we see Lovecraft bring an alien fungus race into a closed mountain society. He’s mixing what he perceives as two alien races (at least two.) He sees different races and different intellects as alien, due to his xenophobia. Even more, it’s clear he sees those ‘ignorant people’ and ‘run-down farmers’ as less human than himself.

This is similar to Edgar Rice Burroughs’ premise in the Tarzan series that the black native African race was less intelligent, less creative, having less imagination than the white man. Indeed, many educated people of his age believed the early ideas of evolution that taught that different races were evolved from different primates, and the black man was less evolved than the white man... more beast-like.

I don’t consider Lovecraft’s writing as good as Edgar Allan Poe’s Science Fiction. The Pit and the Pendulum, The Fall of the House of Usher, The Raven; almost everything Poe wrote was much better than The Whisperer in Darkness. H.G. Wells work was better, though his is definitely more my genre and not quite weird fiction like Poe and Lovecraft. Interestingly, I love Poe’s writing regardless of the genre.

I enjoyed the existence of early electronic devices preserved in this short story; such as the polaroid and the phonograph record. Some of the phraseology like, ‘for love or money,’ is colloquially interesting. The sentence structure is well written, and Lovecraft has his own distinct voice. Yet, typical of today’s horror movies, at no point does the protagonist heed his warning instincts to change course, though he says repeatedly that he wished and longed to flee. Lovecraft enjoys using description in his writing, and spends a great deal of time filling every object in the physical worlds he creates with adjectives. But, the ideas are disjointed and you frequently see what appears as lists of mythic beings from different times and places that have nothing to do with each other.

I read the book on Audible, narrated by Phil Reynolds. The narration was excellent. I can’t recommend the book though, personally. I think Poe’s is a better example of the genre if you are looking for truly weird macabre writing. But, I can certainly see why Lovecraft has his fans.

Oleksandr says

[??? ??? ?????????? ?????? ?????? ? ????? ???]

? Irena ? says

The narrator, Albert N. Wilmarth who teaches at Miskatonic University in Arkham, tells a story about horrible events that took place near Townshend, Vermont.

Newspapers report that after a flood, people notice strange creatures floating in the river. He, of course, doesn't believe that but his published opinion makes Henry Wentworth Akeley, a man from a place where the creatures have been seen, write to him. Since the man is not a crazy person (even if his letters are a bit crazy), they become friends.

Most of *The Whisperer in the Darkness* is told through their correspondence. Akeley convinces Wilmarth that something lives in the hills and it doesn't like to be known.

It is possible that you need a bit more patience with this story than with some others since most of it is told through retold correspondence (except the beginning and the end), but as always what I love the most is the atmosphere.

Netanella says

Another dose of awesome sauce from the master of creepiness, H.P. Lovecraft. The sense of forboding, the creepy descriptions of stillness and terror, the remote stillness of the wilds of Vermont. Howie does a great job here.

There was something menacing and uncomfortable in the funereal stillness, in the muffled, subtle trickle of distant brooks, and in the crowding green peaks and black-wooded precipices that choked the narrow horizon.

But it's not just the creepy quiet that gets to our narrator, a professor of literature at the famed Miskatonic University in Arkham. Instead, it's the something from beyond:

Here, indeed, in objective form before my own eyes, and surely made not many hours ago, were at least three marks which stood out blasphemously among the surprising plethora of blurred footprints leading to and from the Akeley farmhouse. They were the hellish tracks of the living fungi from Yuggoth.

And Yuggoth, apparently, is the ninth planet from the sun, the recently discovered Pluto, which is causing all of this trouble in quaint Vermont. Footprints in the dirt, dead dogs, whispers in the darkness, pickled brains in jars - Howie's got a smorgasbord of good stuff here.

Amy (Other Amy) says

I am beginning to think Lovecraft's entire reputation is built on maybe a half dozen of his works. If so, this is one of those founding stones.

Logan Paul says

This novella is a classic example of Lovecraft's application of sci-fi horror in his stories. Lovecraft's interests in the supernatural led him to create a very beautiful network of macabre beings and entities. We see in this story though, that Lovecraft began to expand the universe with more sci-fi related concepts. These include aliens and advanced technology.

This tale is about the discoveries of Albert Wilmarth, an instructor at Miskatonic University in Arkham, Massachusetts. After serious natural disasters threaten northern New England, bodies of strange crab-like beings begin being sighted floating down rivers and streams. Albert, along with many skeptics, reject the stories as nonsense. However, upon receiving a letter from an Mr. Akeley, an amateur researcher living in the hills of Vermont, Mr. Wilmarth's interest in the legends of these creatures is kindled.

Akeley's research into these crab-like monsters reveals that they are in fact aliens that have had hidden colonies on Earth for thousands of years, and hail from a dark planet on the edge of the solar system. They are in fact more fungoid than crab, and have less malevolent intentions than what's described within stories that the local Native American's had ascribed to them. This revelation however, is pales in comparison to the secrets revealed when these alien beings contact Akeley directly and recruit him into their fold. Albert travels to Akeley's home, who proves to be a very unnerving host. Their collaboration opens up terrifying vistas of alternate reality, only quelled by Albert's apprehension.

I feel that this story would be wonderful introduction the the mythos for new readers. It is fairly original compared to the themes of other Lovecraft stories, and presents some of the core entities within the mythos in an indirect way. Cthulhu, Hastur, Nyarlathotep, Yog-Sothoth, Azathoth, R'lyeh and the Magnum Innominandum are all referenced, providing the reader with an excellent presentation of the eldritch vocabulary. I greatly enjoyed how the story built tension and was released in a truly terrifying fashion in the end. From the first description of the aliens (the Mi-Go) to the application of their other-worldly technology, Lovecraft guides the reader through the experiences of Wilmarth with horrifying grace. As I read the passages describing Akeley's plans to join the Mi-Go and leave Earth with them, I truly felt a subtle dread that permeated my entire being. The thought of leaving Earth to be taken through the vast nothingness of space to a completely different world truly shows the insanity that the entire mythos is trying to convey. But a wonderful story does have its flaws, and this is no exception. The only true issues I found was the Lovecraft seemed to insist on drawing the story out as long as possible. The visit between Wilmarth and Akeley only happens in the final chapters of the book. The rest attempts to describe the Mi-Go, their home, and the troubling and hostile relationship between them and Akeley.

Benja says

In 1930 Lovecraft's interest for cosmic horror was piqued by the discovery of a new planet just beyond our solar system. Imagine the possibilities! H.P. took a turn to science fiction with *The Whisperer in the Darkness*, in which a species of parasitic fungi named Mi-go hailing from "Yuggoth" (Pluto) start terrorizing the Vermont countryside with threats of intergalactic colonialism.

Most of the story is told through the correspondence between Professor Wilmarth, one of Lovecraft's stock erudites from Miskatonic University, and a lonely Vermont hermit named Akeley, whose house becomes "the focus of transcosmic horror amidst the lonely green hills and curse-muttering brooks of a spectral rustic land." What a set up. As with *The Dunwich Horror*, Lovecraft mines the creepy atmosphere of the quiet, desolate countryside, suggesting presences older and more important than man's.

Lovecraft was a master at keeping actual horror at arm's length, coming up with terrifying suggestions that could never be quite verified or fully understood. Through Wilmarth we surmise all sorts of glimpses of the alien threat - letters, clippings, pictures, phonographic records - but there remains a fundamental, terrifying imprecision to the whole affair. Even though he eventually makes it to the location of the events and comes unusually close to present danger for a Lovecraft protagonist, something bigger and more evil always seems to be lurking in the margins.

As usual, H.P. name-drops some of his favorite authors like Poe and Arthur Machen, but through the ritual nightly siege of Akeley's rural home I was mostly reminded of Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland*. His letters prove he had read the novel at least by 1934. Is it possible it inspired him? In any case the authors appear to have been on the same wavelength when it came to interweaving cosmic horror and sci-fi. Lovecraft displays some amazing inventive here and anticipates a lot of classic genre tropes.

About the only criticism I have for the book is that it fumbles the climax by downright spoiling Wilmarth's fate in the opening of the final chapter and banking on a twist that isn't all that surprising. So even if the overall unnerving effect of the story isn't wasted, the result is decidedly anticlimactic.

Amy Mills says

[Typewritten letter to conceal hand-writing, complete and utter change of tone, inviting up for a visit when before asking to stay away, specifically asking for all evidence and correspondence to be brought... Really? That didn't make the narrator suspicious?!?? (hide spoiler)]

Andrew Nguyen says

The Whisperer in Darkness is Lovecraft's first foray into science fiction. But let's be clear, it's horror sci-fi and Lovecraft at his most Lovecraftian (although without any denigrating comments about people of color this time).

The Whisperer in Darkness checks a lot of boxes on my favorite things about Lovecraft. Mysterious atmosphere? Yep. Slowly rising tension and anxiety? In spades. What this book adds is an element of tension between the narrator, Dr. Wilmarth, and his human interlocutor, Akeley. There is an element of insidious human vs human relationship that I haven't read in any Lovecraft story yet.

One thing that was really frustrating was the narrator's reasons for imperiling his life. I was frustrated in the way of watching a character in a horror movie check out a noise in a haunted basement. At one point physically cried out, "why are you doing that?!" His actions were almost entirely at odds with the character built at the beginning. And while reading the novella's postscript, some of Lovecraft's co-conspirators found this problematic as well. In the end though, I actually halfway enjoyed the illogical decision of the narrator since it was enough to illicit a physical reaction in me.

This ranks as my second favorite Lovecraft tale (lol I have read three to date). This is a solid 3.5 in my book and a must read for sci-fi and horror fans.

Jason MacDee says

Interesting concept, boring execution. Creative use of the discovery of Pluto though. I enjoyed the attempt to keep it all grounded in science. The narrator as skeptic is fun.

Lyn says

While most casual readers of Lovecraft, and even many readers who only visit the horror shelves of our collective library in October, will recognize great Cthulhu and maybe even the Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred, it takes a more dedicated and learned reader of HP to have a familiarity with his 1931 novella *The Whisperer in the Dark*.

This should change – because this quiet, pensive and brooding work not only demonstrates much of what is best in his writing, but also exhibits much of what is best in horror writing period.

First published in the August 1931 edition of *Weird Tales*, Lovecraft blends elements of science fiction with his inimitable and eldritch horrific prose. While technically a part of the Cthulhu mythos, *The Whisperer in Darkness* is more fully thought out and more creatively developed than many of his shorter works in this series.

A psychological and menacing tale as dark as any from his unspeakable pen, this is a gem of his later writing.

Peter Ezzat Aziz says

My first Lovecraft story, Not bad :)

A.N. Mignan says

An original story by Lovecraft that significantly deviates from his usual lore. We have aliens and their androids! Unfortunately it is lengthy and boring at times. But as I already commented on other Lovecraft stories, he manages to create alternative local histories where real characters are incorporated to change a fantasy into some folklore that feels plausible (here with e.g., Charles Fort, Albert Einstein, the recent discovery of Pluto).

TwentySomethingReads says

Horror Short Story

Flying creatures that are made out of unknown material torment a man in his mountain cabin.

Spoiler/Discussions

This is an amazing piece of Lovecraft lore. The creatures being discussed that they are alien creatures that have intergalactic travel are just a fun thing. It was interesting to hear what they were and what they had to offer from their own words.

Capturing minds in technology which is revealed late in the story is a concept that is still discussed today.

This is a moment where Lovecraft was ahead of his time.

The ending scare makes this such an amazing Lovecraft story. From start to finish this story had me captivated.

Joey Woolfardis says

A first-person narrative from a lecturer of the oft-mention Miskotonic University tells of eerie goings on in a tumbledown, backwater farm house in the mountainous countryside of America.

This is decidedly Lovecraftian, of course it is, but it was lacking in so much that his other stories hold. I think the main problem was the length: far too long, in short. His other works vary from very short to quite short to a bit longer than short, but this one could not hold the tension and it seemed as if the roads through the grim, desolate places would never cease.

It holds the sense of other, the wonderful sci-fi horror fantasy hybrid that makes Lovecraftian an actual thing, but the long, drawn out descriptions didn't have quite the same oomph that I've come to expect.

There is eldritch esotericism abound, and wonderful imagination and a great sense of wickedness of the human heart (cults are the best plot points) but it seems quite the chore to get through some parts of it. It had a bit too much repetition from his other stories as well, and quite often I found myself wishing Cthulhu would appear and eat a couple of people just to speed things a long a little.

It's a great story and a lovely piece to the Lovecraft jigsaw (the Cthulhu jigsaw? The Necronomicon jigsaw?), but it simply didn't have the lovely flow of his other works.

Do?an says

Güzel ama di?er öykülerinin yan?nda biraz sönük kalm??. Ha birde Profesör Alberth Wilmarth karakteri bu kafayla nas?l profesör olmu? anlayamad?m :)

Leonard Gaya says

Written in 1930, a few months after the discovery of Pluto, at the rim of the Solar System — a planet Lovecraft calls Yugoth! — *The Whisperer in Darkness*, once more, is a meditation on ghosts, on the resurfacing of repressed origins. First, some strange creatures are found among river log drives after the thaw in New England, and crab-like footprints are spotted in the mud. Later on, this leads to the evocation of ancient myths, notably those of the Algonquian people. The tale ends up with the chilling discovery of an outer space fungi presence, akin to the Cthulhu creature, possibly hostile to human life.

This is, for the most part, an epistolary novel, written as a series of letters by Henry Akeley (the “whisperer” of the title). The eerie *sfumato* landscape description in chap. 6 is Lovecraft at his best — somewhat redolent of Washington Irving's Legend of Sleepy Hollow —, and the ending is, although somewhat predictable, genuinely creepy. The idea of the brain in a vat is quite original for its time (although reused countless times since). Certainly one of my favourites, and a probable inspiration to Michel Faber's Under the Skin.
