AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS

By

H. P. LOVECRAFT

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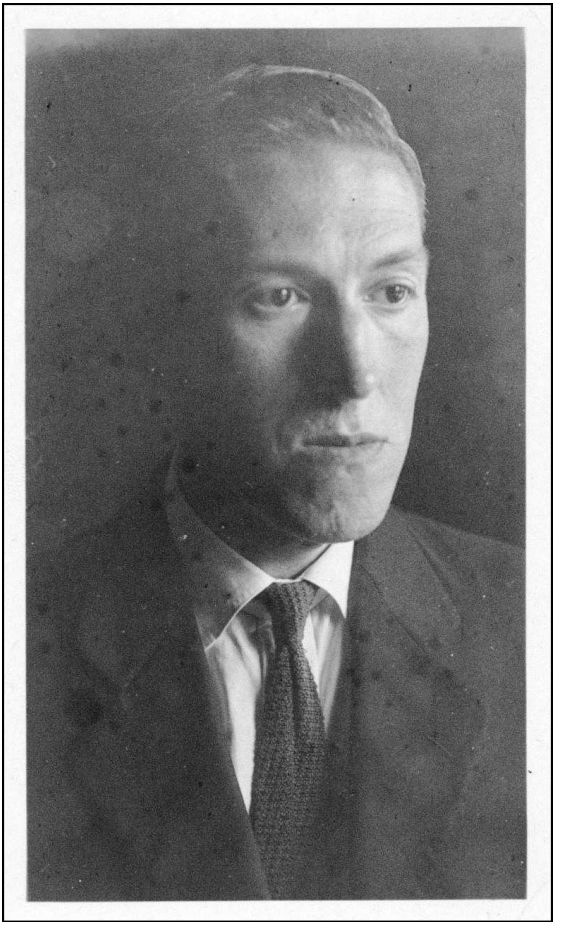


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ABOUT AUTHOR



H. P. Lovecraft:

"*The Pioneer of Cosmic Horror*"

He was born on August 20, 1890, in Providence, Rhode Island, Howard Phillips Lovecraft led a life deeply marked by tragedy, isolation, and financial hardship. Raised by a troubled family after both of his parents suffered mental breakdowns and died in psychiatric care, Lovecraft grew up as a sickly, reclusive child plagued by vivid night terrors. He spent most of his youth immersed in dark literature and science, which heavily shaped his grim view of the world. Despite his immense talent, he lived much of his adult life in near-total poverty, working primarily as a ghostwriter and editor for pulp magazines like *Weird Tales*. He died of cancer in 1937 at the young age of 46, completely unrecognized by the mainstream literary world.

Following his death, Lovecraft’s work underwent a massive global revival, permanently altering the landscape of modern fiction. He became the undisputed pioneer of "Cosmic Horror," a revolutionary subgenre that blended gothic horror with science fiction. Unlike classic tales of ghosts, vampires, or demons, Lovecraft introduced the philosophy of cosmicism: the terrifying idea that human beings are completely insignificant in a cold, vast universe ruled by ancient, uncaring alien deities. His creation of the "Cthulhu Mythos"—a shared universe of forbidden books like the

Necronomicon and colossal monsters—redefined how writers approach the fear of the unknown.

Today, Lovecraft is celebrated as one of the most influential horror authors of all time, standing alongside Edgar Allan Poe. His immense impact on world literature has inspired legendary creators like Stephen King, Guillermo del Toro, and Neil Gaiman, while his concepts continue to heavily shape modern cinema, video games, and pop culture. His unique style of blending psychological dread with alien existentialism was so groundbreaking that his very name became an official literary adjective worldwide: "Lovecraftian."

Literary Innovation: Cosmic Horror

- **Pioneer:** Invented the genre known as **Cosmic Horror**.
- **Philosophy:** Believed humanity is insignificant in the universe.
- **Themes:** Focused on forbidden knowledge and cosmic madness.
- **Subgenre:** Blended traditional gothic horror with modern science fiction.

- **Fear Factor:** Replaced ghosts and vampires with alien gods.
- **The Mythos:** Created the famous and terrifying **Cthulhu Mythos**.

Global Influence on World Literature

- **Posthumous Fame:** Achieved worldwide recognition only after death.
- **Cultural Icon:** Transformed modern horror, fantasy, and sci-fi.
- **Inspirations:** Directly shaped authors like Stephen King and Neil Gaiman.
- **Media Impact:** Influenced countless movies, video games, and board games.
- **Legacy:** His name became an official adjective: **"Lovecraftian."**

Here are H. P. Lovecraft's most essential masterpieces that shaped the cosmic horror genre and heavily influenced world literature:

- **The Call of Cthulhu (1926):** The most iconic story that laid the foundation for the Cthulhu

Mythos, introducing the colossal, ancient alien deity sleeping at the bottom of the ocean.

- **At the Mountains of Madness (1931):** A brilliant blend of sci-fi and horror, this novella follows an Antarctic expedition that discovers the ruins of a monstrous alien civilization predating humanity.

- **The Shadow over Innsmouth (1931):** Lovecraft's most suspenseful and cinematic tale, focusing on a decaying, sinister port town inhabited by a mutated race of half-human, half-fish hybrids.

- **The Colour Out of Space (1927):** Lovecraft's personal favorite story, detailing a meteorite that crashes into a farm and poisons the surrounding nature and human minds with an incomprehensible alien color.

- **The Dunwich Horror (1928):** A core Mythos tale about a deformed boy's attempts to use the *Necronomicon* to summon a terrifying cosmic god (Yog-Sothoth) into our world.

- **The Case of Charles Dexter Ward (1927):** Lovecraft's only full-length novel, exploring themes of alchemy, necromancy, and a young man who becomes dangerously possessed by the spirit of his wizard ancestor.

- **The Whisperer in Darkness (1930):** An early sci-fi horror classic involving a fungal alien race (the Mi-Go) hiding in the mountains of Vermont, capable of extracting human brains into metal cylinders for space travel.
- **The Shadow Out of Time (1934):** A mind-bending tale of psychological dread and time travel, where a professor's mind is swapped across millions of years with a member of a prehistoric alien race.

PREFACE

An Uncharted Continent.

A Forbidden Discovery.

A Terror Older Than Time.

In 1930, a scholarly expedition from Miskatonic University ventures deep into the frozen, untouched wastes of Antarctica. Equipped with advanced drilling technology, the team of scientists expects to uncover ancient fossils and geological secrets. Instead, beyond a range of colossal, storm-swept mountains higher than the Himalayas, they stumble upon the impossible: the monumental, non-Euclidean ruins of a megalithic city abandoned millions of years before the dawn of humanity.

As the explorers delve deeper into the frozen labyrinth, they decode the horrifying history of the city's prehistoric builders—the Elder Things. But the true terror lies not in the dead past, but in what

still stirs within the dark, subterranean depths. What began as a mission of scientific discovery rapidly devolves into a desperate, claustrophobic nightmare as the team realizes they have awoken a cosmic madness that defies human reason and survival.

Experience H. P. Lovecraft’s ultimate masterpiece of cosmic horror and science fiction. Masterfully blending psychological dread with a chilling atmosphere, this definitive tale of architectural nightmares and ancient entities uncovers a universe where humanity is nothing but a fragile speck in the dark.

I.

I am forced into speech because men of science have refused to follow my advice without knowing why. It is altogether against my will that I tell my reasons for opposing this contemplated invasion of the antarctic—with its vast fossil hunt and its wholesale boring and melting of the ancient ice caps. And I am the more reluctant because my warning may be in vain.

Doubt of the real facts, as I must reveal them, is inevitable; yet, if I suppressed what will seem extravagant and incredible there would be nothing left. The hitherto withheld photographs, both ordinary and aërial, will count in my favor, for they are damnably vivid and graphic. Still, they will be doubted because of the great lengths to which clever fakery can be carried. The ink drawings, of course, will be jeered at as obvious impostures; notwithstanding a strangeness and technique which art experts ought to remark and puzzle over.

In the end I must rely on the judgment and standing of the few scientific leaders who have, on

the one hand, sufficient independence of thought to weigh my data on its own hideously convincing merits or in the light of certain primordial and highly baffling myth cycles; and on the other hand, sufficient influence to deter the exploring world in general from any rash and over-ambitious program in the region of those mountains of madness.

It is an unfortunate fact that relatively obscure men like myself and my associates, connected only with a small university, have little chance of making an impression where matters of a wildly bizarre or highly controversial natures are concerned.

It is further against us that we are not, in the strictest sense, specialists in the fields which came primarily to be concerned. As a geologist, my object in leading the Miskatonic University Expedition was wholly that of securing deep-level specimens of rock and soil from various parts of the antarctic continent, aided by the remarkable drill devised by Professor Frank H. Pabodie of our engineering department.

I had no wish to be a pioneer in any other field than this, but I did hope that the use of this new mechanical appliance at different points along previously explored paths would bring to light materials of a sort hitherto unreached by the ordinary methods of collection.

Pabodie's drilling apparatus, as the public already knows from our reports, was unique and radical in its lightness, portability, and capacity to combine the ordinary Artesian drill principle with the principle of the small circular rock drill in such a way as to cope quickly with strata of varying hardness.

Steel head, jointed rods, gasoline motor, collapsible wooden derrick, dynamiting paraphernalia, cording, rubbish-removal auger, and sectional piping for bores five inches wide and up to one thousand feet deep all formed, with needed accessories, no greater load than three seven-dog sledges could carry. This was made possible by the clever aluminum alloy of which most of the metal objects were fashioned.

Four large Dornier aëroplanes, designed especially for the tremendous altitude flying necessary on the antarctic plateau and with added fuel-warming and quick-starting devices worked out by Pabodie, could transport our entire expedition from a base at the edge of the great ice barrier to various suitable inland points, and from these points a sufficient quota of dogs would serve us.

We planned to cover as great an area as one antarctic season—or longer, if absolutely necessary—would permit, operating mostly in the mountain ranges and on the plateau south of Ross

Sea; regions explored in varying degree by Shackleton, Amundsen, Scott, and Byrd. With frequent changes of camp, made by aëroplane and involving distances great enough to be of geological significance, we expected to unearth a quite unprecedented amount of material—especially in the pre-Cambrian strata of which so narrow a range of antarctic specimens had previously been secured.

We wished also to obtain as great as possible a variety of the upper fossiliferous rocks, since the primal life history of this bleak realm of ice and death is of the highest importance to our knowledge of the earth's past. That the antarctic continent was once temperate and even tropical, with a teeming vegetable and animal life of which the lichens, marine fauna, arachnida, and penguins of the northern edge are the only survivors, is a matter of common information; and we hoped to expand that information in variety, accuracy, and detail. When a simple boring revealed fossiliferous signs, we would enlarge the aperture by blasting, in order to get specimens of suitable size and condition.

Our borings, of varying depth according to the promise held out by the upper soil or rock, were to be confined to exposed, or nearly exposed, land surfaces—these inevitably being slopes and ridges

because of the mile or two-mile thickness of solid ice overlying the lower levels.

We could not afford to waste drilling depth on any considerable amount of more glaciation, though Pabodie had worked out a plan for sinking copper electrodes in thick clusters of borings and melting off limited areas of ice with current from a gasoline-driven dynamo.

It is this plan—which we could not put into effect except experimentally on an expedition such as ours—that the coming Starkweather-Moore Expedition proposes to follow, despite the warnings I have issued since our return from the antarctic.

The public knows of the Miskatonic Expedition through our frequent wireless reports to the *Arkham Advertiser* and Associated Press, and through the later articles by Pabodie and myself. We consisted of four men from the University—Pabodie, Lake of the biology department, Atwood of the physics department—also a meteorologist—and myself, representing geology and having nominal command, also sixteen assistants: seven graduate students from Miskatonic and nine skilled mechanics.

Of these sixteen, twelve were qualified aëroplane pilots, all but two of whom were competent wireless

operators. Eight of them understood navigation with compass and sextant, as did Pabodie, Atwood and I. In addition, of course, our two ships—wooden exwhalers, reinforced for ice conditions and having auxiliary steam—were fully manned.

The Nathaniel Derby Pickman Foundation, aided by a few special contributions, financed the expedition; hence our preparations were extremely thorough, despite the absence of great publicity.

The dogs, sledges, machines, camp materials, and unassembled parts of our five planes were delivered in Boston, and there our ships were loaded.

We were marvelously well-equipped for our specific purposes, and in all matters pertaining to supplies, regimen, transportation, and camp construction we profited by the excellent example of our many recent and exceptionally brilliant predecessors. It was the unusual number and fame of these predecessors which made our own expedition—ample though it was—so little noticed by the world at large.

As the newspapers told, we sailed from Boston Harbor on September 2nd, 1930, taking a leisurely course down the coast and through the Panama Canal, and stopping at Samoa and Hobart, Tasmania, at which latter place we took on final supplies.

None of our exploring party had ever been in the polar regions before, hence we all relied greatly on our ship captains—J. B. Douglas, commanding the brig *Arkham*, and serving as commander of the sea party, and Georg Thorfinnssen, commanding the barque *Miskatonic*—both veteran whalers in antarctic waters.

As we left the inhabited world behind the sun sank lower and lower in the north, and stayed longer and longer above the horizon each day. At about 62° South Latitude we sighted our first icebergs—tablelike objects with vertical sides—and just before reaching the antarctic circle, which we crossed on October 20th with appropriately quaint ceremonies, we were considerably troubled with field ice.

The falling temperature bothered me considerably after our long voyage through the tropics, but I tried to brace up for the worse rigors to come. On many occasions the curious atmospheric effects enchanted me vastly; these included a strikingly vivid mirage—the first I had ever seen—in which distant bergs became the battlements of unimaginable cosmic castles.

Pushing through the ice, which was fortunately neither extensive nor thickly packed, we regained open water at South Latitude 67°, East Longitude 175°. On the morning of October 26th a strong land

blink appeared on the south, and before noon we all felt a thrill of excitement at beholding a vast, lofty, and snow-clad mountain chain which opened out and covered the whole vista ahead. At last we had encountered an outpost of the great unknown continent and its cryptic world of frozen death.

These peaks were obviously the Admiralty Range discovered by Ross, and it would now be our task to round Cape Adare and sail down the east coast of Victoria Land to our contemplated base on the shore of McMurdo Sound, at the foot of the volcano Erebus in South Latitude 77° 9′.

The last lap of the voyage was vivid and fancy-stirring. Great barren peaks of mystery loomed up constantly against the west as the low northern sun of noon or the still lower horizon-grazing southern sun of midnight poured its hazy reddish rays over the white snow, bluish ice and water lanes, and black bits of exposed granite slope.

Through the desolate summits swept raging, intermittent gusts of the terrible antarctic wind, whose cadences sometimes held vague suggestions of a wild and half-sentient musical piping, with notes extending over a wide range, and which for some

subconscious mnemonic reason seemed to me disquieting and even dimly terrible.

Something about the scene reminded me of the strange and disturbing Asian paintings of Nicholas Roerich, and of the still stranger and more disturbing descriptions of the evilly fabled plateau of Leng which occur in the dreaded *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred. I was rather sorry, later on, that I had ever looked into that monstrous book at the college library.

On the 7th of November, sight of the westward range having been temporarily lost, we passed Franklin Island; and the next day descried the cones of Mts. Erebus and Terror on Ross Island ahead, with the long line of the Parry Mountains beyond. There now stretched off to the east the low, white line of the great ice barrier, rising perpendicularly to a height of two hundred feet like the rocky cliffs of Quebec, and marking the end of southward navigation.

In the afternoon we entered McMurdo Sound and stood off the coast in the lee of smoking Mt. Erebus. The scoriaceous peak towered up some twelve thousand seven hundred feet against the eastern sky, like a Japanese print of the sacred Fujiyama, while beyond it rose the white, ghostlike height of Mt.

Terror, ten thousand nine hundred feet in altitude, and now extinct as a volcano.

Puffs of smoke from Erebus came intermittently, and one of the graduate assistants—a brilliant young fellow named Danforth—pointed out what looked like lava on the snowy slope, remarking that this mountain, discovered in 1840, had undoubtedly been the source of Poe's image when he wrote seven years later:

"—the lavas that restlessly roll

Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek

In the ultimate climes of the pole—

That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek

In the realms of the boreal pole."

Danforth was a great reader of bizarre material, and had talked a good deal of Poe. I was interested myself because of the antarctic scene of Poe's only long story—the disturbing and enigmatical *Arthur Gordon Pym*. On the barren shore, and on the lofty ice barrier in the background, myriad of grotesque penguins squawked and flapped their fins, while many fat seals were visible on the water, swimming or sprawling across large cakes of slowly drifting ice.

Using small boats, we effected a difficult landing on Ross Island shortly after midnight, on the

morning of the 9th, carrying a line of cable from each of the ships and preparing to unload supplies by means of a breeches-buoy arrangement.

Our sensations on first treading antarctic soil were poignant and complex, even though at this particular point the Scott and Shackleton expeditions had preceded us.

Our camp on the frozen shore below the volcano's slope was only a provisional one, headquarters being kept aboard the *Arkham*. We landed all our drilling apparatus, dogs, sledges, tents, provisions, gasoline tanks, experimental ice-melting outfit, cameras, both ordinary and aërial, aëroplane parts, and other accessories, including three small portable wireless outfits—besides those in the planes—capable of communicating with the *Arkham's* large outfit from any part of the antarctic continent that we would be likely to visit.

The ship's outfit, communicating with the outside world, was to convey press reports to the *Arkham Advertiser's* powerful wireless station on Kingsport Head, Mass. We hoped to complete our work during a single antarctic summer; but if this proved impossible we would winter on the *Arkham*, sending the *Miskatonic* north before the freezing of the ice for another summer's supplies.

I need not repeat what the newspapers have already published about our early work: of our ascent of Mt. Erebus; our successful mineral borings at several points on Ross Island and the singular speed with which Pabodie's apparatus accomplished them, even through solid rock layers; our provisional test of the small ice-melting equipment; our perilous ascent of the great barrier with sledges and supplies; and our final assembling of five huge aëroplanes at the camp atop the barrier.

The health of our land party—twenty men and fifty-five Alaskan sledge dogs—was remarkable, though of course we had so far encountered no really destructive temperatures or windstorms.

For the most part, the thermometer varied between zero and 20° or 25° above, and our experience with New England winters had accustomed us to rigors of this sort. The barrier camp was semipermanent, and destined to be a storage cache for gasoline, provisions, dynamite, and other supplies.

Only four of our planes were needed to carry the actual exploring material, the fifth being left with a pilot and two men, from the ships, at the storage