

Lovecraft eZine

**A Magazine Report
by
Greg Rozen
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Fact Sheet

Web Address: www.lovecraftzine.com

E-mail Addresses: MichaelDavisWriter@gmail.com

Founded: February 2011

Founder/Editor: Mike Davis

Frequency: Monthly (some exceptions)

What They Publish (From the site): The Lovecraft eZine wants well-written, original Lovecraftian and Cthulhu Mythos fiction. While we enjoy and appreciate pastiche, best read works will feature an original voice and new takes on old themes, not simply mimicking Lovecraft's style. Simple mentions of Cthulhu or the Necronomicon do not make a story Lovecraftian. For us, the best Lovecraftian fiction share the tone and themes of Lovecraft: Cosmic horror, the discovered knowledge of the unnameable terrible things behind the curtain of reality, etc.

Submission Guidelines: Send submissions to MichaelDavisWriter@gmail.com: Attach the story in RTF or DOC formats. In the subject line put the STORY TITLE (in all caps), your name and word count. In the body of the email, put your name, pen-name (if any), contact information, a short bio, two to three lines, as well as any credits or relevant websites you wish to plug. The story should be double-spaced. Stories under 5000 words preferred, but no hard limit. Longer pieces may be serialized.

Contributor Payment: \$50 (+3000 words), \$25 (-3000 words).

Cost: Free (Kindle or Nook- 99 cents)

Submissions received: Approx. 40/month

Acceptance rate: 1-5%

Sleek, professional page design. The blog, which constitutes the main page, is updated almost daily, and the issues themselves are simple to find and read. One of the better looking sites I've seen.

Why I Chose Lovecraft Zine

H.P. Lovecraft is, along with Poe, the progenitor of most all horror short-fiction. I fell in love with his work a few years ago, when I stumbled onto his public domain works, and have been integrating his themes into my own work ever since. Along with being a new, prolific, and well-run website, Lovecraft Zine is also a place that publishes work I enjoy reading, and, moreover, might be a place for myself, or anyone else who loves the dark and macabre, to publish in the future.

Issue Comparison

	September '11	October '11	November '11
1st\2nd\3rd Person	4\0\1	3\0\2	4\0\1
Present\Past\Other	4\1\0	4\1\0	2\2\1
Emerging\Established	2\3	1\4	2\3
Men\Women	5\0	3\2	4\1

Lovecraft Zine makes an effort to include emerging authors, that is, authors with no books published or forthcoming, in every issue. Lovecraftian fiction is an active niche market, and thus, there are usually established authors submitting work for publication, but the unestablished authors often have no credits at all. So the zine is relatively accessible.

Interestingly, there tends to be more male authors than female. It might say something about the make up of the fan-base, or it could mean nothing at all. More meaningful, I think, is the tendency to publish works in first person present tense. This form makes for very immediate, often unsettling work, which fits right into the market.

As an added note, I attempted to put a number on how many stories directly reference Lovecraft's work, but found that it's a rather nebulous feature of many of the pieces. Direct references, using actual names of tropes and characters from the Mythos, are rare, but often times there are statements that seem very much thematically connected to the Mythos, but feature no overt, direct references. So, while the editor has made it clear that direct references are not necessary, or even desired, in submissions, they're not flat out rejected either.

Prose Reviews

November '11

Desert Mystery! Gas & Go! is a plain spoken short horror story, told in the first person and addressing a second character in the second person, all in present tense. The unnamed narrator is the proprietor of a small gas station, which houses a “mystery building,” where customers can enter for a dollar. A customer (the second-person “you”) comes into the store for a coke, and is convinced to see the mystery, which the narrator hints, to the reader but not the character, is dangerous and causing him horrible dreams. After bypassing the mummified corpse of a coyote, the narrator leads the customer down a hidden ramp, which leads to a “wave of sentient shadows” that consumes the customer, as the narrator implies the sacrifice will temporarily prevent his dreams.

This piece is fun, in that it contains direct references to the Mythos without seeming like a retread of old themes. The customer is always addressed in the second person. “You’re going to buy a ticket. You just won’t admit it yet.” This puts the reader in the place of that character, and turns it into a folktale of sorts, something that could have happened to anyone, as the sacrifice is portrayed as a recurring event. Short interjections by the narrator, which seem addressed directly at the reader, and not to the second character, reveal the narrators degrading mental state, as he opines “The dreams are getting bad.” or “Still no witnesses. I’ve already checked.” Overall, with its distinctive style and creative use of the Mythos, which directly references “A Shadow out of Time” as the narrator describes a “race far older than humanity – but no wiser,” this piece represents a unique way to integrate Lovecraft’s themes into original work.

#Dreaming is a surreal, self-aware, in-mythos story told in third-person past tense. Darren, the protagonist, finds a twitter account for the “great cthulhu,” a recurring primordial monster from Lovecraft’s work. Amused, Darren interacts with the account, one of myriad Lovecraft fans to do so, and eventually finds that his responses have granted him some notoriety and more followers. Day by day, his group of followers grows larger as he does what he can to spread the word about Cthulhu and his nightly dreams, which seem related. Every night, it seems that more and more people have the same dream, and see each other *in* the dream, where they descend on an ancient, inhuman city (implied to be Ryleh, where Cthulhu sleeps). Eventually, Darren has over fifty thousand subscribers, but is lost to the dream, ending up in a catatonic state.

I absolutely adore this piece. My favorites, when it comes to modern interpretations of the Mythos, are pieces that manage to marry those themes with the technology and culture of our time and place. The idea to write a lovecraftian story about Twitter, is, thus, brilliant. Most of the piece takes advantage of the inherent humor of ancient, all-powerful beings the size of skyscrapers using twitter. “@greatcthulhu Hey @yogsototh Whassup dude? Takeli-Li! LOL!” These little moments, themselves references to different Lovecraft stories, are hilarious, and that hilarity, once the story kicks into overdrive at the end, going dark, makes that moment really stark, where he’s “on his bed, fully clothed, eyes open but sound asleep.” Without the humor, the story would feel a lot more one-note. Instead, you have a really interesting adaptation of Lovecraft’s themes that is patently twenty-first century. That’s really neat.

October '11

The Prophecy of Zarah, by Jennie Kaivo, is a short epistolary piece, composed as a letter detailing fictional archaeological findings. The writer of the letter is the leader of a “team” of scholars who have discovered a new excerpt of text in the Dead Sea Scrolls, purporting to be the prophecy of a poet named Zarah. The prophecy details a brief creation myth featuring grand, horrible monsters from the

very beginning of the universe, and warns that some day they will return to wreak havoc on the stars. This excerpt is contextualized, then presented in its entirety. The letter concludes with an incredulous appraisal of the translators' claims that the text grows longer as they translate it. The speaker also says that the suicides of two translators should be disregarded.

This is, thematically, a prototypical Cthulhu Mythos story, featuring primordial chaotic beings and making humanity small and unimportant. There's even a reference to the in-Mythos Miskatonic University. Absolutely, this is an example of the more specifically Lovecraftian works they publish in this journal. The epistolary style is also very much in the tradition of Lovecraft. This is a great instance of coming creatively to very tried-and-true subject-matter for the genre; it's fun, feels real, and carries the switch in and out of the prophetic text with flair. Very fun read.

Sky Full of Fire by Corinna Sara Bechko is a post-apocalyptic horror piece, told in the internal first person and featuring no dialogue. Shortly before the story begins, the protagonist's house collapsed, and his friend, Justin, disappeared. Since then, many have disappeared, and, from his spot in the immobile car he calls home, he always remains wary, knowing that big, invisible things stalk the dark at night. The sky seems normal when he looks at it straight on, but red out the corners of his eyes. He rarely sees people, or even animals, and wonders if he's the only person left alive on the planet. When his friend mysteriously returns, he is near comatose, and won't talk about where he was or what he saw. The monsters that stalk the night eventually leave him a message in oil or blood, that reads "Blood Sacrifice," but the protagonist refuses to kill himself or his friend for the monsters, and resolves to leave.

This is a more original piece, instead featuring the themes of the genre more than the conventions. There is a large, otherworldly monster towards the end, but there are no names, locations, or mythologies that are common to the Mythos. The disjointed, quick, first-person narrative makes the reader feel the slowly unraveling sanity of the main character, and gives the whole story an uncomfortable tone. He notes, for example, that the sky is slowly changing. "I noticed it first when I went on the foraging expedition." Then all at once, a new subject. "I had thought first about entering one of the apartment houses..." He skips around, unable to focus, and we feel his growing insanity. There seems to be a lot of story left unsaid, under the surface, about the nature of what's going on, which is less typical. This suggests that they will accept works with only implicit connections to the Mythos.

September '11

In Phantom Isolation is a surreal, esoteric piece of short fiction, told in the first person and in the past tense. The main character, an unnamed narrator, laments the unfulfilled nature of reality, and people's ignorant happiness within it. He, rather, enjoys gazing "inward," at the phantoms and apparitions that "laced [his] soul with doom." So, he separates from society, finding a "lonely and shallow indentation in the earth," and looks within himself. He eventually finds himself in a field under a daemon star before a large tower, and, upon becoming convinced that he was no longer in the material world, climbs the tower, and rides a beam up light into the star, wherein he "sacrificed one final remnant of mortality so as to join the churning conclave [of phantoms]."

The esoteric nature of this story makes it stand out. The author is actually a well established composer of lovecraftian work, and the work was solicited. That may be why it feels so experimental. That being said, it does feel like a close cousin of Lovecraft's "Beyond the Wall of Sleep," which also deals with a man looking for another reality in his own consciousness. The story features no paragraph breaks, and is rather a large block of text. This all makes the piece feel like a monologue, like a quick glimpse into the character's thought processes. We're never grounded in a location, so the story feels ethereal and wispy. The confusion, I think, is an intended response, which is a Lovecraftian theme I typically don't much care for. Still, there manages to be a complete arc, without any real action. It's an impressive piece.

The Wagon's Trail is a western-horror piece, told in a poetic, semi-prose style, using the first person and past tense. The main character and his companion, named Bart, travel the wild west after “the War,” most likely the Civil War. The piece opens with ruminations on what the West was like, inhospitable and filled with desperate people with agendas. Eventually, we see the two men sitting around a fire, talking about the whores they missed in Tombstone. The next day, a woman in rags, holding a staff covered in snake corpses, accosts them, talking about “ancient exhumations” and the Sphinx. The two gunmen strike her down, but it takes a large number of bullets, the woman still smiling after being riddled with slugs, destroying her head, her hands, her chest, and her face. Finally, she falls, after speaking in the voice of a “Black Man” who they've seen before. Afterward, they travel back to Tombstone, party, and catch a train back east to Arkham.

This piece dances on the line between poetry and prose. Though it tells a clear story, that story is hidden beneath metaphor, sentence fragments, and disjointed trains of thought. Rather than in typical sentences and paragraphs, the piece is told in fragments, often with one word getting a line to itself. “Near two years gone by—/ lot of open sky with just our own./ rain/ dismal as/ not to be/ or/ understanding you misplaced.” The result is a story that is difficult to understand. Once the two gunmen settle around a fire and begin talking to each other, the thread of the plot is pretty easy to find, but before that, the story more closely resembles a poem about the old west. This gives the author the advantage of being able to comment on the West as a whole, before moving the scope in closer and focusing on our characters. “they all came West./” one section begins, “brought dreams./ the nightmares too.” The result is a story that manages to be both specific and esoteric. Also of interest, this piece has no specific explicit connection to Lovecraft's work. Instead, it seems to have been selected for its dark, overwhelming feel. Thus, it's a demonstration of how much you can stray from the formula and still satisfy the requirements of the zine.

Interview with Editor/Founder Mike Davis

Conducted December 5, 2011

Greg Rozen: Why don't you start by telling us a little bit about yourself, and how Lovecraft eZine got started.

Mike Davis: Well, I'm 40 years old. I was in real estate for a long time. My wife got offered a job down here in Texas, we moved to Texas from Iowa, and I saw it as an opportunity, since I was staying at home, to do something that's been on my mind a while. And it's been on my mind because, for years, I've been collecting new and old anthologies of Lovecraft fiction, and I thought, you know, wouldn't it be nice if there was an online free magazine that was just every bit the quality of going into the bookstore and buying an anthology.

GR: Why Lovecraft?

MD: I've always liked horror, I've read horror all my life, and... There's so many things I could say. I could talk about it for another fifteen minutes, but it's more realistic than a lot of other horror fiction. It really could happen. The universe has been around fourteen or fifteen billion years, there's got to be alien races out there that have just been evolving forever, and to us would seem like Gods. They might look at us like ants. And the universe isn't really looking out for us, it doesn't care whether you're there or not. That seems more realistic to me, as well.

GR: How do you balance finding work directly connected to the Mythos and finding work that's only connected in theme?

MD: Well, you're not going to get accepted if you're directly citing the mythos, and you're not going to get accepted if you're not. I want stories that are more along the themes, Lovecraftian themes, cosmic horror, the indifference of the universe, or that there's something behind the curtain of everyday life that's really not good for you, or doesn't have your best interests at heart. Just because someone uses the name Necronomicon or Cthulhu in a story matters less to me than those things. I really have to focus on looking for work that's simply well-written. I want people to think that it's just as good as a print anthology, even if they are reading it for free.

GR: You've attracted a good number of established authors to your magazine. Do you solicit their submissions, or do they normally contact you with work they think would fit?

MD: Well, you know, they heard Mike Davis is publishing this new magazine, and they're like, I guess I better get on board for that. (Laughs) No, nobody knew who I was, or anything. It never even crossed my mind, when I started. The thing that I kept thinking was that they just have to be good, well written stories. So I let it be known that the first issue was going to be coming in a couple months, and what gave me a real shot in the arm was William Maple, who's a published author, he's got several books, contacted me and asked if he could submit something to the new magazine, and I thought "Wow, how many more of these guys can I get?" So I've been trying to do that. It's really nice to have people like William Maple and W.H. Pugmire legitimizing the magazine.

GR: There's a very active Lovecraft community. How have you interacted with that community through the magazine?

MD: Well, I really look at the magazine as being two things. The main thing is, of course, publishing each issue, every month. But at the same time, I wanted to make it one of the central points for people to go and get Lovecraft news and links and information about other Lovecraft books being published. Anything Lovecraft, I want to be a source for it, if I can be. The other thing I do is promote other anthologies or books I think are really good. I hate the attitude you see, with magazines, of "I'm not going to draw any attention to anyone else; I'm the only one doing this thing." I feel like if I take a step back and just say, "I like this book because I like this

book, and I know what I'm talking about. It's a great Lovecraft book," people will start to trust what I say, and I think other Lovecraftians really appreciate that.

GR: You've been very proactive as far as getting your magazine out digitally, making it available on both the Nook and the Kindle. Has that been successful?

MD: Well, relatively speaking, most people read it on the website. But I do have some subscriptions, and no one seems to subscribe and then unsubscribe later, it slowly grows.

GR: What's next on the docket for Lovecraft Zine?

MD: I think the more big names I get the better. I've got this list of things to do, when I get to them, and that's one of them. Another one is, I hope to post, this month, a big list of my favorite Lovecraftian books, you know, things like that, to be a resource to others. It's pretty encouraging, because it's growing much faster than I ever thought it would.

GR: Does it matter if someone is an established writer?

MD: I'd like to say, "Oh hell no it doesn't matter; the story is all that matters," and that really is eighty percent true, it is the story. But if Stephen King sends you a short story you're probably going to think a little less about "jeez, is this good enough?" But sometimes established writers will send you something and you think, "Man, am I getting the bottom of the pile?" And you've got to politely say this doesn't really fit without offending them. Rejecting submissions is the hardest part of the job for me. I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. But at the same time, I owe it to everyone spending time at this website to only publish the best stories. And if you're not an established writer, nothing matters but the story. I'll accept a great story over something that a name writer gave me that isn't as strong. You just have to look longer at the stories sent by established authors.