

THE CTHULHU PRAYER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Inaugural Meeting of The Providence H.P. Lovecraft Friends' Group

MARCH 18, 2001 — More than a dozen writers, artists, composers and others who are fans of the writing and mythos of H.P. Lovecraft, America's greatest horror writer, gathered at the Union Station Brewery in downtown Providence on March 18th. The managers of this micro brewery, famed for its excellent cuisine, assured us that the sawdust and vomit would be cleared from the previous night's St. Patrick's celebration. Our own "Cthulhu Table" would be set and ready, and the dawn of the Elder Gods would commence for the new millennium.

Expected attendees for the first Cthulhu Prayer Brunch included founder Brett Rutherford, Providence's Gothic poet and small press publisher; Carl Johnson, Providence-born actor noted for his Lovecraft re-enactments; Egyptologist and classical scholar Jacob Rabinowitz; artists Pieter Vanderbeck, Pierre Ford, Jennifer Booth and Richard Sardinha. A complete roster of attendees will be published in each successive newsletter.

The Cthulhu Prayer Brunches are intended to be both social and intellectual, bringing together both fellow creative artists and Lovecraft fans of all ages. Most brunches will be followed by field trips to Lovecraftian sites, film viewing, poetry/fiction readings or discussions. Artists engaged in Lovecraft-related work are encouraged to bring their work to show and share. Artists and writers may also submit work excerpts, poems, graphics files, shameless promotions of their work, and personal ads for trans-dimensional relationships.

The first Prayer Brunch (blessed be thy Name, Cth—l—!) was also the weekend commemorating the death of Lovecraft (March 15, 1937). The brunch participants, after finishing off the dregs and tentacles of their repast, dashed off to Swan Point Cemetery to read poems, incantations and Lovecraftian excerpts. Other Lovecraft fans who spontaneously arrive at the grave site were expected to join in.

The full text of this newsletter, along with other material, will be added to the Grim Reaper website at www.thepetspress.org late in March.



The Tree At Lovecraft's Grave

by Brett Rutherford

This solemn spreading beech was once a perfect hemisphere of waxy red-green foliage. Now it is crippled and sere, scarred by the pruning of diseased limbs, trunk bared, a twisted bole in the form of a petrified heart. Its gnarled roots rake earth with a death-row desperation. Within another hollowed bole, (eye-socket for a Cyclops) malignant mushrooms proliferate, caps and stalks angled sunward. The schoolboy gashes where fans have carved initials (their own and HPL's) widen and blacken, the once-proud limbs tattooed with NECRONOMICON, HOWARD P. LOVECRAFT '99, even a whole sentence about the primacy of fear, runes ruinous to a living monument.

Still, the furry beech-nuts fall like hail to the delight of squirrels. Still, the hard brown kernels issue forth, each a perfect blueprint of a perfect tree —

or have the roots, tasting the calcium of author's bones, the humus rot of eye and brain and memory mutated the germ and flower anew so that these seeds transcend to sentience?

Gather these nuts, then, and harvest them. First they must hibernate for the beech remembers glaciers. Then they will germinate, pale tentacles in search of anchorage, until the red-green engine of stalk and leaf is ready to catapult into the sun-chase.

Will these trees move of their own accord?
Will their root-claws crave blood and the iron-rich earth of a crumbling grave?
Will the branches sway on windless nights?
Will fox-fires and will o' wisps paint impossible colors on bud-ends and blossoms?
Will beech nuts burst to pale blue eyes insomniac astronomers with perfect vision, counting the Pleiades, numbering the galaxies.

And will they speak the patient sonnets of their greater lifespans, the long-arc'd lines their waving branches beat?

And somewhere within them, does *he* smile there, transmuted poet and dreamer subsumed into the eons?

Are those *his* thoughts that make them tremble at every sunset, *his* elder gods they fear might swallow the sun as it tosses in darkness?

Is he lord of their nightmares, giving them Dread, the obverse of the coin of Joy, Fear, the companion of Wonder?

I regard the ailing tree, the modest gravestone. The tree will die. The rain will wipe the letters clean. Only the whispered words, the lines the fingers trace from one yellowed book to another endure —

I hold the burst nuts in one hand, a book of Lovecraft's tales in the other. I study the cloudless, blue, deceptive sky, the lie that conceals an infinity of screaming stars —

Oh, these roots have read him, they have read him.

Op. 700
August 20, 2000 (Lovecraft's birthday)



Lovecraft's Planet Yuggoth, Tombaugh's Planet Pluto, Wiped from Solar System

Astronomy fans were startled recently when the Museum of Natural History in New York removed the planet Pluto from its displays of the solar system. Around the world, astronomers and museums are giving in to a major wave of revisionism in defining planets. Pluto and its twin Charon, it is argued, are just part of a vast ring of asteroids and mini-planets, not "real" planets like Jupiter, Neptune and Uranus.

As a boy astronomer, H.P. Lovecraft was intensely interested in the search for "Planet X," which astronomer Percival Lowell speculated upon. Because of perturbations in the orbit of Neptune, Lowell believed that another, previously unknown planet was out there somewhere.

Lovecraft, who published astronomy columns in local Rhode Island newspapers, had the following letter published in *Scientific American* when he was sixteen years old:

In these days of large telescopes and modern astronomical methods, it seems strange that no vigorous efforts are being made to discover planets beyond the orbit of Neptune, which is now considered the outermost limit of the solar system. It has been noticed that seven comets have their aphelia at a point that would correspond to the orbit of a planet revolving around the sun at a distance of about 100 astronomical units (9,300,000,000 miles).

Now several have suggested that such a planet exists, and has captured comets by attraction. This is probable, as Jupiter and others also mark the aphelia of many celestial wanderers. The writer has noticed that a great many comets cluster around a point 50 units out, where a large body might revolve. If the great mathematicians of the day should try to compute orbits from these aphelia, it is doubtful if they could succeed; but if all the observatories that possess celestial cameras should band together and minutely photograph the ecliptic, as is done in asteroid hunting, the bodies might be revealed on their plates. Even if no discoveries were made, the accurate star photographs would almost be worth the time and trouble.

H.P. LOVECRAFT
Providence, R.I., July 16, 1906

The actual story of the discovery of Pluto involved another amateur astronomer who was, like Lovecraft, entirely self-taught at the time of his remarkable accomplishment. The following text, the obituary of astronomer Clyde Tombaugh as provided by New Mexico University, is a good recap of one of the most exciting discoveries of the 1930s.

Clyde W. Tombaugh, discoverer of the planet Pluto and father of the astronomy research program at New Mexico State University, died Friday, Jan. 17, 1997 at his home in Las Cruces. He was 90.

"He was truly one of the great men of science," said Jack Burns, associate dean of arts and sciences and former astronomy department head at NMSU.

Tombaugh was 24 years old when he made world news in 1930 by discovering the elusive ninth planet using a photographic telescope at Lowell Observatory in Arizona. He came to New Mexico State University in 1955 and began the university's research program in astronomy, which today is regarded as one of the nation's best.

He remained active long after retiring as a professor emeritus in 1973, lecturing on an occasional basis and going to his office regularly. In the 1980s, he went on an extensive lecture tour to raise money for an astronomy endowment at NMSU.

Rene Walterbos, head of the NMSU astronomy department, said he was in the process of selecting the top candidates for



Clyde Tombaugh with his home-made telescope.

the next Tombaugh Scholar appointment when he received a phone call Friday notifying him of Tombaugh's death.

"This is a great loss for the department and for science," Walterbos said. "It was a pleasure to know him personally — he had a great sense of humor."

Tombaugh is survived by his wife, Patsy; son, Alden Tombaugh, of Las Cruces; daughter, Annette Tombaugh, also of Las Cruces; five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

Born on Feb. 4, 1906, on a farm near Streator, Ill., Tombaugh moved with his family to a farm near Burdett, Kansas, during his high school years. He shared his father's keen amateur interest in astronomy, and when he wanted a telescope more powerful than his 2 1/4-inch Sears

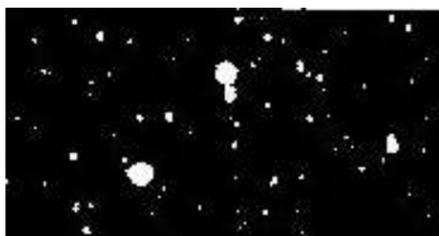


Pluto and its mysterious twin, Charon, photographed by the Hubble Space Telescope.

Roebuck model, he began grinding mirrors and making his own.

Using a hand-made 9-inch telescope, he made meticulous sketches of Jupiter and Mars and sent some of them to the Lowell Observatory. He thought he might get some advice from the professionals. Instead he was offered a job. It happened that the observatory was looking for a good amateur astronomer who could operate a new photographic telescope.

Tombaugh was hired in 1929 as a junior astronomer to join in the search for a "Planet X" beyond Neptune, a search begun in 1905 by Percival Lowell. Working through the nights in a cold, unheated dome, he made pairs of exposures of portions of the sky with time intervals of two to six days. These were scrutinized under



The original film on which Clyde Tombaugh found the solar systems' ninth planet, Pluto.

a device called a Blink-Comparator in hopes of detecting a small shift in position of one of the hundreds of thousands of points of light — the sign of a planet among a field of stars.

On the nights of Jan. 23 and 29, 1930, Tombaugh made two such photographs of the region of the star Delta Geminorum. On the afternoon of Feb. 18, comparing the plates with the Blink-Comparator, he detected the telltale shift of a faint, star-

like image. The discovery was confirmed with subsequent observations and announced to the world on March 13, 1930.

Tombaugh continued searching the skies at Lowell Observatory over the next 13 years, with time out for a college education. No more planets showed up, but he discovered six star clusters, two comets, hundreds of asteroids, several dozen clusters of galaxies and one super-cluster.

During those same years, he entered the University of Kansas on a scholarship (1932), married Patricia Edson of Kansas City (1934), earned his bachelor's degree in astronomy (1936) and went on to get his master's (1939).

After teaching at Arizona State College (now Northern Arizona University) and the University of California at Los Angeles, Tombaugh moved to New Mexico in 1946 to become chief of the Optical Measurements Branch in the Ballistics Research Laboratory at White Sands Missile Range, where German V-2 rockets were being tested. He came to New Mexico State University in 1955 and started the Planetary Group, an astronomy research program.

He was instrumental in designing and obtaining funding for the university's Tortugas Mountain Observatory, a 24-inch telescope that captured its first images in 1967 and is still in service taking data for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Tombaugh was largely responsible for the astronomy program becoming a separate department at NMSU in 1970. Today the department is a member of the Astrophysical Research Consortium, which owns and operates the Apache Point Observatory in New Mexico's Sacramento Mountains. NMSU manages the observatory.

Tombaugh remained active long past retirement and never lost his passion for stargazing. When the Smithsonian Institute asked if it could have for its museum the telescope he made in 1928, "I told them I was still using it," he said in an interview. The 9-inch telescope, with which he made the drawings that impressed the Lowell Observatory staff, was built with parts of discarded farm machinery and a shaft from his father's 1910 Buick. Tombaugh ground the mirrors himself.

Until frail health prevented it, Tombaugh continued observing the heavens through that 9-inch telescope and a larger one he made himself, from his backyard in the Mesilla Park community of Las Cruces.

While he was in his 80s, Tombaugh toured the United States and Canada with his wife, Patsy, giving 75 lectures during a three-year period to raise money to bring astronomers to NMSU for post-doctoral research. The Tombaugh Scholars Fund now is a permanent endowment.

Tombaugh, the former farm boy with a fondness for corny jokes and puns, de-

MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY DRINKING SONG

created for
THE FIRST CTHULHU PRAYER
BREAKFAST

Yog-Sothoth! Yog Sothoth!

Bless our broth!

Tekelili, Tekelili!

Bend the knee,

Drink the tea!

Nyarlahotep! Nyarlahotep!

Nothing rhymes with Thee!

Azathoth! Azathoth!

Not more broth?

Herbert West? Be my guest!

Dexter Ward — but not possessed!

Ech Pi El! Ech Pi El!

Taste the ale!

Cthulhu! Cthulhu!

Union Brew! Union Brew!

lighted in recounting the tale of his discovery of Pluto, which he compared to finding a needle in a haystack. It was tedious work but better than pitching hay on his father's farm, he liked to say: "I'd had my hay day."

By the time he retired, he and his NMSU astronomy staff had confirmed the rotation period of Mercury on its axis, determined the vortex nature of Jupiter's Great Red Spot, and developed a new photographic technique for the small Earth satellites search he was supervising.

Of the decades of discovery since he made the history books, and the thousands of hours spent at his telescopes, Tombaugh often said: "I've really had a tour of the heavens."



Photo: Keith Johnson



Carl Johnson To Host Yet Another Graveside Ceremony for Lovecraft On April 1, 2001

As noted in a feature article in the Providence's *East Side Monthly*, Carl Johnson's home-grown, gothic and oft melancholy memorials for the Old Gent will continue this year on Sunday, April 1. This series of commemorations, which the Rhode Island-born actor has been conducting on and off since 1987, continues this year with a 3 pm gathering at Lovecraft's grave. The ceremony usually includes music, a performance of Brett Rutherford's poem, At Lovecraft's Grave, and small re-enactments of tidbits from Lovecraft's life and works. We saw last year's production, which included a church bell, a coffin, and readings of passages from Rutherford's HPL bio-play, *Night Gaunts*.

Participants usually retire to Newport Creamery on Wayland Square for an ice cream and chocolate infusion after Carl's fine production.

Johnson's ceremony was first conceived for the 50th anniversary of Lovecraft's death, and was crafted to provide a local response to the impromptu gatherings of out-of-town Lovecraftians, who generally arrive and leave unannounced on the Lovecraft death and birth anniversaries.

For more information about the HPL April 1 event, call 401-732-4870.

INCA RUINS AT RISK...

Machu Picchu, the ancient Inca citadel perched 8,366 feet up in the Peruvian Andes, could collapse at any time, according to *New Scientist* magazine.

The earth beneath the hallowed city, listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and one of Latin America's best known tourist attractions, is shifting and at risk of a major landslide.

Japanese geologists who have been monitoring the movement said the back slope is moving downward at about a half-inch per month.

"This is quite fast, and it's a precursor stage of a rockfall or rock slide," said Kyoji Sassa of Kyoto University's Disaster Prevention Research Institute.

"It's not possible to say exactly when the landslide might occur, but that will be the focus of the next stage of our research."

Sassa and his team believe the landslide could destroy all of Machu Picchu. Rockfalls have already damaged some structures.

"There is a distortion line running north-south inside the citadel and buildings along the line show signs of damage," the magazine reported.

The Japanese researchers are trying to find a way to preserve Machu Picchu, which is visited by more than 1,000 tourists a day.

Machu Picchu was abandoned at the time of the 16th century Spanish conquest. In 1911, U.S. archeologist Hiram Bingham rediscovered the ruins, which historians regard as an important religious center for the Inca empire.

New Lovecraft Incantation in Ancient Egyptian

by *Jacob Rabinowitz*

Er en redeyet er en Reb kerefet, en-ef , heret netcher. Djed-ef:

Weben-eney em sewehet yemeyet ta sheta, redeyew-en-ey er-ey medew-ey yem-ef em-bah netcherew djewat.

Nen kesef-tew-ey em djadjat net netcher a-a Weseyer neb er-setcha new netey m tep keteyew.

Yey-en-ey , yer-en-ey meret yeb-ey em Yew-Neserser: akem-ey neser, per-ey yem!

Utterance for granting the power of speech to Lovecraft in the graveyard. He says:

When I have emerged from the cosmic egg in death's undiscovered country, control of my mouth was returned to me that I might speak with it before the gods of Hell.

No one will oppose me before the tribunal of the great god Osiris, Lord of the Open tomb, the one whose throne is the fresh grave mound.

My wishes are granted: I have passed through the testing flames of the Isle of Fire: they become cool paradise for me, I come through them, I am saved.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Thanks to Dr. Jacob R. for the splendid new incantation, which we challenge our members to set to music or adapt. A version in true hieroglyphic script will be published in our next issue. Readers should note that this is the first time Lovecraft's name has been transliterated into Egyptian. Dr. R. tells us the closest Egyptian equivalent, working phonetically, is Reb kerefet.

If this spell works, a lot of you will be having Lovecraftian dreams, and the crows of Swan Point will start uttering some unusual calls.

THREE NEW POEMS BY BRETT RUTHERFORD

THE GRIM REAPER

paraphrase of an old German Folksong

*Es ist ein Schnitter,
heisst der Tod...*

There is a Reaper and his name is Death,
and though he kills, he kills for God,
and though his blade is sharpest of all
he stands at the wheel and whets it,
and when he is ready
we must be ready, too.
O fair little flower, beware!

No matter what is green today,
the Reaper's scythe will mow away.
His blade never misses
the noble Narcissus,
down to the ground
the lovely hyacinth,
harvesting all the Turk's Cap lilies,
the charms of the meadows
now toppled and sere.
O fair little sister, beware!

Will he take everything
in sidelong swing
of the blood-edged scythe?
While tulips are falling,
speedwell flying, blue tops
into a bluer sky,
silver-fringed bluebells crying
doomed phlox not gold enough
to ransom its beauty
against the *swish, swish*
of the Harvester.
O fair little brother, beware!

Now I defy you, Death!
I stand amid the mown lawn,
feet planted against your holocaust.
I defy you! Go somewhere else!
But if you turn, and your red eye
should light upon me suddenly,
I shall be whisked away
to your garden of beheaded flowers,
the place where interrupted thoughts
meander to their long-off poems.
Be happy, my fair one! Live on!

—The original German of this folksong was set by Brahms in his *German Folksongs for Four-Part Choir*. This paraphrase changes the original's rather conventional "die and go to Heaven" ending, and the poet has chosen to end each stanza with a different line rather than retaining the original refrain, "Beware, fair little flower!" The original song verse uses this refrain three times, and then "Be happy, fair little flower!" at the end.

PLUTO DEMOTED

No longer a planet, they say!
Pluto, Hades, Yuggoth, Nine
is now a nothing,
a rock among rocks
despite the tug of its companion,
silent and airless Charon

Now you are a "mini-world,"
an oversize asteroid
tumbling in dustbelt
so dark and distant
our sun is but a blob
of wavering starlight.

World of death and darkness,
methane, monoxide molting
in every orbiting,
shunned by the sun that made you,
must you now be snubbed by man?

How demote a planet
so lustrous in history.
It has its gods! It has its gods!
Can they evict

the Lord of the Dead
with just a say-so?
What of the millions of souls
whose home was Hades?
What of beautiful Persephone
who shuttles still
on a high-speed comet
for her six-month residency
as mistress of the underworld?
What of the heroes and philosophers,
the shades of pagan times
who teem those basalt cities
warming the Plutonian night
with odes and songs and serenades?
Are they to be homeless vagabonds,
slowed from their distant heartbeat
to the stillness of absolute zero?

At first, it was "Planet X,"
out there somewhere
because Neptune wobbled,
nodded its rings
toward Death's domain.
Then a Kansas farm boy
obsessed with the stars
ground his own mirrors
built his own telescope
with car parts and farm equipment.
Hailstones destroyed the farm crops.
The telescope survived.
The boy sent drawings of Mars
and Jupiter
to Lowell Observatory —

Come work for us, they said.
He hopped a train, had just enough
cash for a one-way fare.

And then, in monk-like hermitage
he toiled at Flagstaff,
comparing sky photographs,
hundreds of thousands of stars,
negative over negative to light,
searching for celestial wanderers,
planetoi, asteroids, comets
that moved when everything else
stood still in the cosmos.

Clyde Tombaugh, twenty-four,
surveyed a sky
where fifteen million lights
the brightness of Pluto twinkled
but only one was Pluto.
He found it.

They sought him out
in his retirement,
those fellows
from the Smithsonian,
asked for his home-made instrument
for their permanent collection.
"Hell no," he said,
"I'm still using it."

I would as soon
forget Kansas as Pluto.
Tell Tombaugh's ghost
his planet is not a planet!

I can see the old man now,
just off the death-barge
he hopped from Charon,
greeting the Lords of Acheron,
that rusted tube of telescope

under his arm,
scouting a mountaintop
for his next observatory.

Pluto, Hades, Yuggoth, Nine!
Change at your peril
a thing once named!

AS IDOLS FALL IN THE AFGHAN HILLS

What to do?
What to do?

Mail a Mullah
a thousand portraits
of Bodhisattvas.

Airdrop a million
little Buddhas
on tiny parachutes
onto the streets
of Kabul.

Mate giant Tokyo
Buddhas with Godzilla,
send their offspring
to the Afghan Hills
to sit serene
in lotus pose

(then watch their fire-breath
melt Taliban tanks
and send the soldiers
shrieking!)

Skywrite
LORD BUDDHA
from border to border
in every known language.

Or wait for Karma
to burn the burners,
shatter the shatterers,
silence the mouths
of the speakers of law?
(No time, no time
as the nitro explodes
a Buddha head
from fifteen hundred
years ago.)

Let Allah, Buddha
Christ and Brahma
rage like comets,
moth fluttering
around the Man Sun.

One vanity makes them,
A greater vanity destroys them.
Yet a child with hands in clay,
in the mud by the riverside
will make a new god
with broad shoulders
far-seeing eyes,
a forgiving visage,
a palm extended
for the benediction
of unbearable Beauty.

This parched land
needs its memories,
its slender share
of human fairness,
against the dark night
of goats and dynamite.