

THE CTHULHU PRAYER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

APRIL 22, 2001 — Once again, 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 for the second Cthulhu Prayer Brunch. The managers of this micro brewery, famed for its excellent cuisine, assured us that our own table would be safely separated from those of celebrants arriving for "Earth Day" festivities. Our own "Cthulhu Table" would be set and ready with its multitentacled party favors, and the Elder Gods would receive an appropriate burnt offering in the kitchen.

Attendees for the second 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; artists Pieter Vanderbeck, Riva Leviten, Pierre Ford, Jennifer Booth. Also, Joseph Cherkes, publisher of Haunts magazine, and newly arrived New Jersey poet Thomas D. Jones, who was promised a special Innsmouth baptism in the Providence River (weather permitting).

We had planned an afternoon outing up the hill to Brown University to see a production of Mac Wellman's *Dracula*, but the play turned out to be so badly staged, directed and acted that we, instead, warned everyone away from what may have been the worst *Dracula* rendition of all time (well, not quite as bad as *Blacula* or *Old Dracula*.)

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.



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LOW TIDE by Brett Rutherford

"The tide was flowing out *horribly*—exposing parts of the riverbed never before exposed to human sight...*something* descended to earth in a cloud of smoke, striking the Providence shore near Red Bridge...The watchers on the banks screamed in horror—*It has come—It has come at last!* and fled away into the deserted streets."

—H.P. Lovecraft, letter dated May 21, 1920

"brisk off-shore winds pushed a lower than normal 'moon tide' even lower on Narragansett Bay...miring dozens of pleasure boats in a sea of mud...There are mechanics who say that in the 20 years they've been working here, they've never seen anything like it."

Providence Journal, September 18, 1986

The azure sea, the silt brown Seekonk,
the placid ebbing of sun-tides
the contrary pull of the moon,
all form a subtle balancing act—
until accumulated rhythms
resolve in one great tug
at the sleeve of the world.
The sea withdraws, the shape
of the earth convulsed by gravity

as if the sentient waters
grown weary of poison and oil slicks,
bereft of the colloquy of whales,
shrugged into space.

Would not the war-hemmed
Mediterranean be more serene
refreshing the cracked canals of Mars?
Would not the North Atlantic,
brimful of nuclear submarines,
prefer to slip off the earth-edge weightless,
an unmissed flotilla of icebergs
writing their names in the velvet sky
as comet messengers of Chaos?

The Narragansett waters drop
as the ocean makes its getaway,
rivers run dry
to fill the falling shoreline.

Drawn from their sleep
by the burning moon,
the people, a motley of coats and robes
and slippers, a clot of bicycles and skates,
drift down to the riverbank
to see the helplessly stranded boats
dangle from their moorings,
level with their anchors,
topsy-turvy on a forest of pilings,
sails drooping and torn,
their rotors exposed like genitals,
their captains perplexed and swearing.

The riverbed undulates with dying fish,
the wriggling of eels in the hardening mud,
the half-seen slurry of amphibians.
Around the base of the iron-red bridge,
the barrows of humanity emerge:
a tangle of cars and mattress springs,
the skeletons of suppressed babies,
a statue of the Holy Infant of Prague,
a well-preserved gangster in a steel drum,

a thousand soda bottles & aluminum cans,
and, standing up like autumn trees—
or some hideous joke of the fishes—
the unfurled frames of lost umbrellas.

Someone says the water will return,
Low tide out, high tide in, insists
the river and the bay and the sea
will repave themselves with reflected sky.
Then why should a fireball plummet down
into the sodden riverbed? They watch,
hoarding their fears
in the windless midnight,
as steam subsides
over the mud-lined crater.

A madman, barefoot, bearded, rag-robed
avers that the Kraaken is rising
from the noisome mud on the bottom—
he snatches a fisherman's lantern
and runs across the Red Bridge screaming
It has come! It has come at last!"

The people hear a distant murmur. A child
goes rigid with the spasm of seizure.
A woman faints, and no one leans
to pick her up. It is a blur
of stumbling and clawing: a boy
is struck down cold for his bicycle,
a deaf girl trampled near a street light.
Men break the door
of the great-domed church,
determined to pray out the end of the world,
encircled by Host and holy books.

Of course, it is only the tide returning,
the meteor a slap from the brittle stars.
Homesick and dizzy from errant flight,
the prodigal sea comes home.
The boats resume their proper angles.
The bay fills in, the river rises.
The elders of Angell Street will say
None of this ever happened.

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!



Astronomers Find 18 Distant, Planet-Sized Gas Balls Objects So Unusual Scientists Have No Name For Them May Force Astronomy To Rethink Theories About Planets

(AP) Eighteen planet-sized gas balls, wandering free and unattached to any star, have been found in a star field some 1,200 light years from Earth. Astronomer Maria Rosa Zapatero Osorio of the California Institute of Technology said it is the largest collection of isolated, free-floating planet-like objects ever found and astronomers are at a loss just what to call them.

"There is a problem of nomenclature," said Zapatero, the first author of a study appearing in the journal *Science*. She said the objects are not like traditional planets, which are bound by gravity to a central star such as the sun. And they are too small to be brown dwarfs, an object much smaller than a star, but bigger than a planet. For now, she is calling them "planetary mass objects."

Other astronomy teams have found a total of about 50 planets outside the solar system, but all of those planets were in orbit of central stars.

"The formation of young, free-floating planetary-mass objects like these are difficult to explain by our current models of how planets form," said Osorio.

Planets in the solar system, such as the Earth, are thought to have evolved from debris left after the formation of the sun. Planets formed in this way would be gravitationally locked into an orbit of the central star.

Joan R. Najita, an astronomer at the National Optical Astronomy Observatory in Tucson, Ariz., said that Osorio's discovery is significant and may force astronomers to reconsider theories about planets.

There is, said Najita, "an incomplete understanding of how these objects could have formed." The nomadic planets range in size from five to eight times bigger than Jupiter, the largest of the solar system planets, to about 13 times bigger than Jupiter. Generally, objects 13 times the mass of Jupiter are classified as planets, while bodies between 13 and 75 times bigger than Jupiter are considered brown dwarfs.

Osorio said that the size of the objects is based on their brightness and on an analysis of the light — the spectrographic characteristics — that suggests a planet-like temperature and composition.

The objects are in a star cluster field called *Sigma Orionis* within the constellation Orion.

New Planet Found 'In Our Own Backyard': Jupiter-Sized Giant 'Just' 10 Light Years Away

(CBS) A Jupiter-sized planet orbiting a young star in Earth's "backyard" could help reveal whether Earth, with its variety of life forms, is a unique jewel in the universe.

William Cochran, with the University of Texas' McDonald Observatory, said in a news release that finding a planet orbiting Epsilon Eridani, "a star very similar to our own sun ... is like finding a planet in our own backyard — relatively speaking." Cochran is scheduled to present the findings Monday at the 24th General Assembly of the International Astronomical Union in Manchester, England.

"It's a very exciting discovery because ... the star itself is the closest star for which a planet has ever been discovered," Geoff Marcy, a University of California-Berkeley professor and co-author on the project, said Friday. "It's only ten light years away."

"In the next 100 or 200 years, it will be one of the first stars humans visit," he said. A light year is the distance light will travel in a year in a vacuum, about six trillion miles.

Scientists discovered the planet by observing Epsilon Eridani as it wobbled on its axis. That wobble is caused by the planet's gravitational influence as it orbits the star. By measuring the size and frequency of the wobble, researchers can calculate the size of the guest planet and its distance from the host star.

Scientists hope the nearness to Earth of the host star will allow them to collect high-quality data. Pictures of the new planet may be possible in a few years as scientists fine-tune new instruments, including one that will help telescopes see clearly through the Earth's turbulent atmosphere.

Those observations could reveal whether the planet is a gas giant, like Jupiter, what it's made of, what chemicals are in its atmosphere, its temperature, whether it has moons or rings, and other vital statistics.

The new planet has about the same mass as Jupiter, said Artie Hatzes, a McDonald Observatory team member. The planet takes longer to orbit its star than any of the other planets identified outside our solar system. Jupiter takes about 11 years to orbit the sun, while the new planet takes about seven years to orbit its star.

Hatzes said the similarities of the Epsilon Eridani system to our solar system mean it

could harbor a terrestrial planet like Earth that could sustain life. Marcy said a ring of dust surrounds Epsilon Eridani. The dust can collide and stick together to form planets while the ice can provide water to sustain life. "It probably would have a chance of having life-bearing worlds," Hatzes said, adding that an Earth-like planet probably would be inside the orbit of the newly discovered planet where it would receive more warmth from the star.

But Marcy points to what appears to be a unique feature of our solar system. Most of the planets move in nearly circular orbits. The new planet has an oblong orbit as do most of the other newly discovered planets. Earth's circular orbit provides a relatively stable environment, evening out the extremes of cooling and heating that would be experienced on the surface of a planet with an oblong orbit. What has been observed so far "suggests the architecture of our solar system may be abnormal," Marcy said. "We have a burning question as to whether our solar system is a rarity in the planetary zoo. It may be that life here is possible because of the circular orbit."

Steve Maran, a NASA astronomer and a spokesman for the American Astronomical Society, said the discovery hints that there will be more to come. The new planet is the 41st to be discovered outside our solar system recently. Three others were found by the University of Texas University team in Austin. "The fact that the McDonald team has found a planet so close to the Earth continues a trend of discovery of other solar systems that are all around us, which we didn't know until only a few years ago," Maran said. "I think the more we keep looking, the more we find ... it's a really exciting development."



Ectoplasm at Swan Point? Photo Shows Spectral Presence at Recent Lovecraft Gathering

The above photo, supplied to us a while ago by Carl Johnson, seems to show an other-worldly visitor listening in on one of the Lovecraft grave side readers. The Gothick Lady was blissfully unaware of the misty presence, as were the other attendees. In the old days of table-tapping spiritualists, this would have been another "proof" of the existence of ghosts.

Much as we would like to believe HPL was hovering nearby, this was probably one of those many photographic flaws known all too well to photographers and photographic technicians.

Now, if it had turned the pages of the Lady's book, and spoken, even faintly, in that piping voice...

NEXT MEETING

SUNDAY MAY 20 (WANING CRESCENT ATTIRE)
11:30 am, Union Station Brewery followed by a visit to the grave of Sarah Helen Whitman (Providence poet and one-time fiancée of Edgar Allan Poe), plus a walking tour of Poe/Whitman sites.



Photo: Keith Johnson

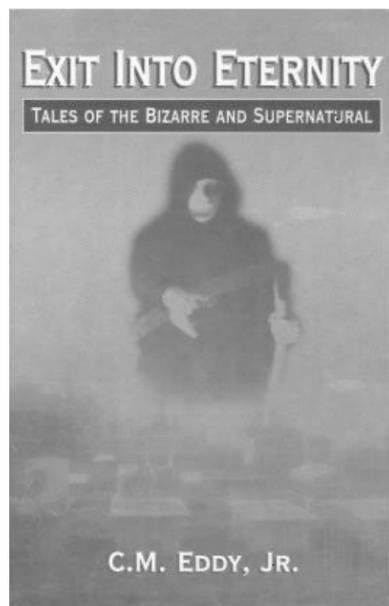


THE OLD GENT'S FRIENDS

All but a tiny handful of the folks who knew H.P. Lovecraft personally are gone. Lovecraft's friends who were fellow writers have been widely published, although some, like **Frank Belknap Long**, saw their work go in and out of print unpredictably.

Another Lovecraft contemporary was **Clifford M. Eddy**, who lived in Providence and became a good friend of the Old Gent. Mr. Eddy and his wife befriended Lovecraft in 1923. As **L. Sprague DeCamp** wrote in his Lovecraft biography, "The Eddys became the only real friends, outside of his aunts, whom for many years Lovecraft had in Providence...[H]e often arrived late in the evening and stayed to the small hours. He read his stories aloud."

Lovecraft is believed to have helped Eddy with some of his tales. Eddy also got a small share of the ghost-writing projects that came Lovecraft's way. In return, Muriel Eddy typed Lovecraft's manuscripts. Lovecraft and Eddy also worked briefly on



a collaborative project with magician Harry Houdini, which was to be a book debunking the supernatural. The project ended with Houdini's untimely death.

Eddy's "The Loved Dead," with some help and/or inspiration from Lovecraft, was published in *Weird Tales* in the summer of 1924. The story, about a necrophiliac undertaker who also kills to get additional cool-fleshed companions, was considered so shocking that *Weird Tales* was threatened with legal action, and copies of that issue were removed from newsstands in various parts of the country.

C.M. Eddy's gruesomeness in this tale is akin to the Grand Guignol manner of Lovecraft's "Herbert West, Reanimator." It's a type of tale than can be taken tongue-in-cheek by the initiated, or literally by the naïve.

At Carl Johnson's recent HPL memorial at Swan Point, we were delighted to meet **Jim Dyer** of Narragansett. Mr. Dyer is C.M. Eddy's grandson, and he has recently commenced the painstaking project of getting the bulk of his grandfather's stories — many unpublished — from handwritten manuscript into book form. He has started a press, Fenham Publishing, for that purpose, and has just issued the first collection of C.M. Eddy's stories, *Exit Into Eternity: Tales of the Bizarre and Supernatural*.

The book is available for \$14.95 from Fenham Publishing, P.O. Box 767, Narragansett, RI 02882.

Providence artist **Richard Sardinha** has a long association with horror. As co-founder of the Rhode Island-based horror magazine *Haunts*, he was art director for that magazine during its early years. For The Poet's Press, he illustrated the chapbook *At Lovecraft's Grave*, and the book *Last Flowers: The Romance Poems of Edgar Allan Poe and Sarah Whitman* (about to go into its second edition). Since those days in the 1980s Richard has gone on to become an accomplished oil painter. His recent show at the Providence Public Library featured his impressive landscapes. But monsters are never far away from Casa Sardinha: Richard's other specialty is dinosaur paintings, some of them real beauties. You can see his work sampled on the Internet at www.battleduck.com. Better yet, you can buy an original Sardinha to grace the walls of your library or mausoleum.

Carl Johnson's April 1 memorial for H.P. Lovecraft, which included readings of poems and an excerpt from the play *Night Gaunts*, is the eighth time this Rhode Island actor has organized and run these well-attended events. Past ceremonies have included props such as coffins and church bells, atmospheric music, and Carl's own impersonation of Lovecraft. Mr. Johnson is to be commended for the huge amount of advance publicity work which goes into these events, which regularly draw 30 to 70 people and at least one television crew. He has done a great service to help keep The Old Gent's name before the public. And without Carl's events, we wouldn't have half the friends we know. It says something special about us — and Providence — when you can say "Most of my friends I first met at Lovecraft's grave."

Carl is hoping to play in a revival of *Night Gaunts* at some time. A new generation of Lovecraft fans needs to see The Old Gent walk and talk again.

TWO NEW POEMS BY PIETER VANDERBECK

I AM THE GRAVEYARD

I am the graveyard,
consumer of dreams!
Beneath my sad surface
your splendor and grandeur
lie rotting in shapes
that defy all description.

Be thankful the ground
on which rests your feet's weight
stays so solid with pebbles,
for inches below
comes the border adjoining
colloidal and liquid,
beneath it chthonic.

So there in the breezes
with trees gone to pollen
in flickering sunlight,
think not of their roots,
what nutrition they suckle!

What faces and arms
wail the dashing of dreams,
as into the river
from oozing on bankside
the lives of the many
come mingled in concourse,
the grand social ball
where the oil slick colors
cling roundly to boulders
set stranded and lonely
among the brown ichor
where regular moments
the gas pockets open
emitting a vapor
of colors too morbid
to place in the spectrum,
before they disperse
for the breathing of others.

—Op 20,839
March 18, 2001
Read at Lovecraft's Grave

[This poem is inspired by a spot at the bottom of Swan Point Cemetery where waters seep from the hillsides above into a sinister mud flat at the edge of the Seekonk River.]

AN EVENING ON YUGGOTH

All the day's meandered movements,
as the methane rises billows,
settles into flattened clouds
that sink to liquid flowing rivers.

To the edge the shadow draws
that summons into hibernation
citizens of distant Yuggoth,
as their star begins to set.

When the night is sunk upon,
the slush will turn to frozen crystals;
even hydrogen will thicken,
making still the night-time city.

Yet, within their frozen blankets,
does their life both stir and revel;
for, freed from the merely yugly,
do their colors dance the spaces.

Lights in towers, coursing by-ways,
meeting in the likes of taverns,
Yuggan night-life is the finest,
even through the solar system.

For the hours that they flicker,
do they celebrate with passion;
for the shadow edge of morning
will by Yuggoth make them sluggish.

—Op 20,862
April 4, 2001

**VIEWS OF SWAN POINT:
LOVECRAFT MEMORIAL
APRIL 1, 2001**



Photos by Brett Rutherford. Top to bottom: (1) Carl Johnson at Swan Point, with his HPL hat and coat on one side; (2) Keith Johnson in Monk's attire, reading Lovecraft's poem "Death"; (3) Offerings at Lovecraft's Grave on April 1, including Jacob Rabinowitz's hieroglyphic vase, a Cthulhu made of a celery root with cranberry eyes, candles, incense, and flowers. Brett Rutherford burned \$15,000 in joss money to send Lovecraft's shade some much-needed royalties (a Chinese Taoist custom).

**CAN ANY FILM DRACULA BE TRUE TO STOKER'S
MASTERPIECE? COPPOLA'S FAILED VAMPIRE**

by Brett Rutherford, reprinted from *Haunts Magazine*

Since the beginning of cinema, Dracula's shadow has loomed large in the minds of directors, eager to thrill audiences with the dark romance and supernatural chills of Bram Stoker's masterpiece. And from the very start, Stoker's book has defied even the most well-intentioned efforts to transfer its story literally to the screen.

Early on, directors averted their eyes from the novelistic Dracula and turned to the stage adaptation by Balderston and Deane. After a promising beginning, Tod Browning's 1931 *Dracula* becomes a mere parlor drama. Francis Ford Coppola's version of *Dracula* is, sadly, another object lesson in what *not* to do with the King of the Vampires.

The novel *Dracula* is told entirely in letters, diaries and journals, and is one of the few novels that actually succeeds in sustaining suspense and terror through this difficult device. The first part of *Dracula*, in which Englishman Jonathan Harker visits Castle Dracula and becomes the prisoner of the vampire and his brides, has been the easiest to transfer to film. Both Nosferatu films capture the atmosphere and claustrophobia of Harker's captivity. The Todd Browning/Lugosi *Dracula* — despite Browning's static camera — also conveys the overwhelming power Dracula holds while he is in his own domain.

Actor Gary Oldman's Dracula is frightening, too, in his Transylvania guise — wizened, wicked and perverse. When Harker cuts himself shaving, this Dracula surreptitiously licks the razor. He kidnaps a baby and tosses it to his "brides" as a treat (an actual moment in the novel, replete with a bereft mother howling at the foot of the castle, "Monster, give back my child!") The opening of the film promises us the Edwardian blood vision of *Dracula*: a creature of unremitting evil — old, thirsty and beyond redemption.

Once this rejuvenated Dracula turns up in London, however, all faithfulness to Stoker's character vanishes. We have a long-haired, exotic foreigner dressed in a coat that is a cross between a Hungarian army uniform and a John Lennon Sergeant Pepper outfit. He pursues and courts Mina when she is supposed to be worried sick about the prolonged absence of her fiancée Jonathan Harker (so much for female purity). He convinces her that he is really a Very Nice Fellow. Contrast this with Stoker's Dracula, who calls Mina his "bountiful wine-press" and boasts to the heroes: "Your girls that you love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine — my creatures, to do my bidding and to be my jackals when I want to feed."

Renfield — Prophet of the Coming

After *Dracula*, the character of the madman Renfield is the greatest acting and screen writing challenge. In Stoker's book, Renfield is a "harmless" lunatic in Dr. Seward's asylum, who has recently taken to eating flies and spiders, and who has psychic contact with a mysterious "Master." Most of the film versions have attempted to link Renfield to Dracula, most often by making Renfield — not Jonathan Harker — the Englishman who travels to Transylvania. Stoker's Renfield is much deeper — a seemingly harmless lunatic who knows about and worships Dracula even before he sets eyes on him. He wanders about the asylum and plays a vital role as Dracula's eyes and ears. He tells the master everything he learns about Van Helsing's efforts to save Mina. If we see Dracula as Stoker intended him, as "the King of his kind," and almost an AntiChrist, Renfield is his anti-John the Baptist. Renfield proclaims the blessings of the vampire kingdom is his chilling speech about "thousands of rats...all this will I give you..." Dwight Frye's Renfield in the Tod Browning film captures the possessed spirit wonderfully.

Coppola's Renfield, unfortunately, is a pathetic wimp. He is explained away as the previous agent sent to Transylvania who came back insane, and he is never permitted to leave his cell.

It is startling that no director has ever used Renfield for the ultimate dramatic purpose Stoker employed. Van Helsing and company believe Mina to be safe in Dr. Seward's sanitarium because Dracula cannot enter any house into which he is not first invited. The madman Renfield permits Dracula full access to the house. Instead of using Renfield as a double agent, most directors seem content to make Renfield a comic character.

The Wagnerian Mina

Coppola, like some of his recent predecessors, cannot resist making Mina — cast by Stoker as a paradigm of Victorian female chastity — into a liberated, modern woman. This undermines the plot seriously, since the male protagonists are set up like a troupe of Arthurian knights to save a woman they would all die for, from a villain of pure evil. Instead we get a "liberated" woman who actually falls in love with a centuries-old walking corpse who killed her best friend and nearly killed her husband. She drinks his blood willingly in the vampire wedding ritual, an act that cannot be construed as anything but humiliation and submission.

At film's end, Mina goes off alone with the wounded Dracula — to no one's apparent surprise — and lops his head off after her pure love redeems the vampire's soul (through some unspecified magic). In Coppola's vision, the love of one air-headed bimbo is somehow supposed to convince the Heavenly Powers to let Dracula die as a mortal, his soul redeemed. This of course, is straight from Wagner opera, the old "redemption through love" idea. The prologue to the film sets us up for the notion that Mina is the reincarnation of Vlad the Impaler's great love, as if finding your reincarnated lover justified five centuries of vampirism.

The new *Dracula* thus falls apart at the seams. How, after all, can a creature who feeds kidnaped babies to his mistresses — a creature who has murdered thousands of innocent people — be redeemed? At the heart of this screenplay is a shocking amorality. It is impossible to sustain a genuine Romantic work of horror if its creators quite literally do not know the difference between good and evil.

You don't have to be a Christian to enjoy *Dracula* (I'm not one, certainly) — but *Dracula* makes no sense as a story unless you go along with some of its major premises. The premises underlying *Dracula* are that (1) souls are immortal, (2) souls can be saved or damned, (3) killing people is bad, (4) vampires possess terrifying magic powers, and, not least, (5) vampires can be defeated with specific means, including the magic of Christian symbols and objects. If these values are missing or undermined in a dramatization of *Dracula*, everything falls apart. It may be a story, but it's not the story Stoker told.

I think people will be reading *Dracula* a hundred years from now, even if Christianity continues its decline as a religion. The book's convictions give it power. Coppola's *Dracula*, on the other hand, will probably be seen as just one more permutation on the Dracula theme, made by jaded Hollywooders with fatally confused values.