

THE CTHULHU PRAYER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March 10 Meeting of The Providence H.P. Lovecraft Friends' Group — Were You There?

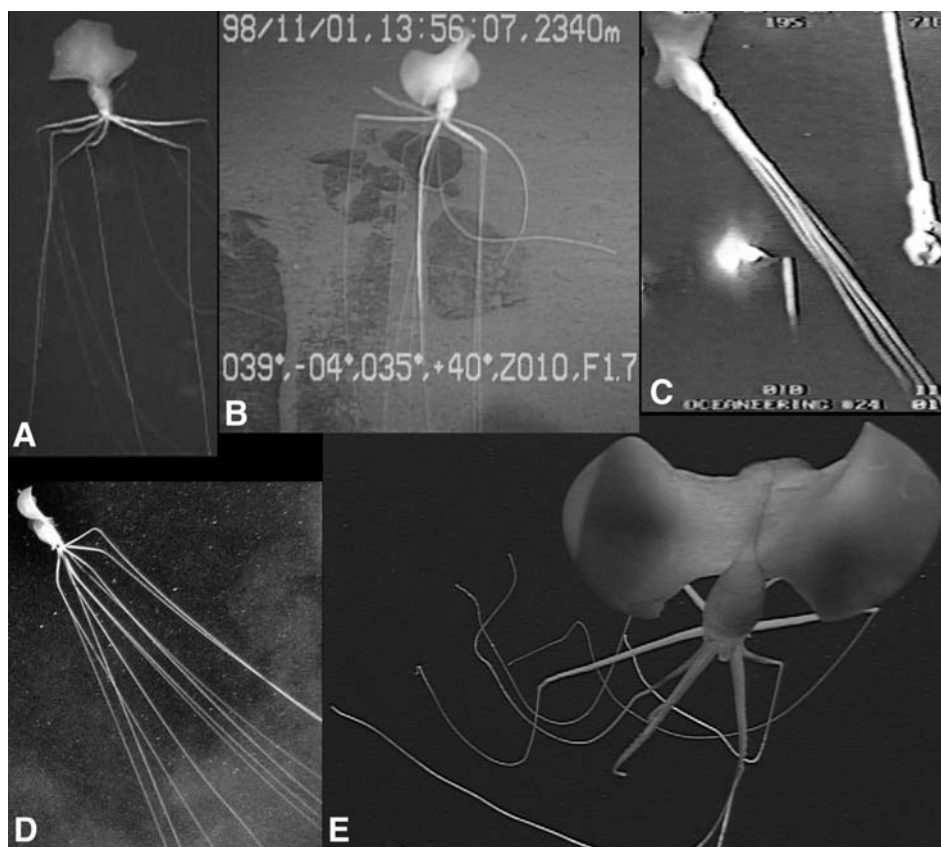
MARCH 10, 2002 — Once again, writers, artists, composers and others who are fans of the writing and mythos of H.P. Lovecraft, America's greatest horror writer, gathered at 11:30 am at the Union Station Brewery in downtown Providence for the eighth Cthulhu Prayer Brunch. The managers of this micro brewery, famed for its excellent cuisine, waived the usual restrictions on chainsaws, spectral presences, and pets so that all could be comfortably seated at our tables, replete with squids and other Lovecraftiana.

Activities for the survivors of brunch included a trip to Swan Point Cemetery for a brief visit to Lovecraft's grave, a tradition twice yearly adhered to mark Lovecraft's death (March) and birth (August).

This marks the first official gathering of the HPL group in 2002. Earlier, informal events included Brett Rutherford's (Un)Orthodox Christmas Party on January 6th, attended by many of the merry crew. Many presents were extracted from beneath the Baba Yaga tree, on whose top the famed Russian witch with iron teeth rode her broom. Several guests vanished beneath the seven-foot Douglas fir, and have not been seen since.

The sinister fir tree, with a distinct hump in its spine, refused to die after Christmas despite its amputated, rootless state, and it still stands in early March, green as ever, on Rutherford's Hope Street deck, where it has drawn the suspicions of passersby. Rumors of the aphrodisiac qualities of its minuscule pine cones have not been confirmed.

At the luncheon, Brett Rutherford showed galley proofs of the new, second edition of *Night Gaunts*, his Lovecraft biographical play, and Hal Hamilton told us of the non-Euclidian geometries of the basement and attic of Wytch House, his new home on Arnold Street.



Mysteries of the Deep: Astonishing New Squids

A new type of large squid, reaching up to 23 feet (seven meters) long, has been spotted in the deep waters of several ocean basins, according to a report published in the 21 December 2001, issue of the journal *Science*. The open ocean covers more than two thirds of the Earth's surface, yet scientists know relatively little about its inhabitants. The fact that the squids were seen eight times within a few years, at similar depths in the Gulf of Mexico, and the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific oceans, indicates how little we know about life in the Earth's largest ecosystem, the authors write. The squids' arms were longer than those of any known squid species and held in an unusual position: spread outward from the body and then bent anteriorly. The authors speculate that the squid may be adult members of the recently-identified family, *Magnapinnidae*. Only juvenile squids in this family have been seen before. More research will be required, however, to classify the squid.

We find the new squid amazingly elegant. With its vast elephant-ear-like fins, and its spindly, segmented tentacles, it seems admirably fitted for listening to clavichord music, and for turning the pages of old books without damaging them. In short, it would make a great librarian.

Shown above are video frames of unusual deep-water squids observed from submersibles in (A) the Eastern Atlantic Ocean, (B) the Indian Ocean, (C) and (D) the Gulf of Mexico, (E) the central Pacific Ocean.

In other squid-related news clippings, we find the following from Graeme Smith in the January 15th *Glasgow Herald*: "A Scottish fishing boat has landed a giant squid— one of the world's largest and most feared sea creatures.

"[Giant] Squid have seldom been seen alive, let alone captured alive, so the crew of the Fraserburgh-registered Marina Polaris joined a select few at the weekend when they hauled a baby giant squid up in their nets 100 miles west of the Hebrides.

"They had been fishing for white fish at 420 fathoms (half a mile) when they caught the ten-foot squid, which skipper George Jack estimates weighed about 20stone.

"<It was alive when we hauled it in, but there was no way we could keep it alive until we landed it at Scrabster. Quite frankly it was a pest because it is of no commercial value,> the ship captain reported.

"Mr Jack said that they offered it to a number of marine centres, and the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth took it, where it will go on display.

"The squid — genus *Architeuthis* — is thought to have been female and about three years old."



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2002 LOVECRAFT FRIENDS EVENTS

Although a common interest in the life and writings of H.P. Lovecraft was starting point for our thriving little group, we have coalesced into something quite above that of “fandom.” Our “Cthulhu Prayer Society” luncheons and outings have attracted writers, artists, and others with a genuine appetite for the unusual, the dark and the strange. Our conversations may often turn to Lovecraft and his chilly cosmic visions, and his haunted Providence, but we are just as likely to be talking about ancient Maya civilization, the planet Pluto, Russian poetry or classical music. All seem to agree that we have a great thing going, and various little groups of us have had many other dinners and excursions, exploring our deeper common interests.

I have worked out a preliminary schedule for the year with some proposed programs and field trips. You may want to pencil some of these dates in your calendar so that you won't miss the ones that interest you. And of course you are encouraged to propose alternate programs and field trips, and offer to add to existing programs provided. Here it is, with all meetings except those starred with double asterisks commencing at 11:30 am at the Union Station Brewery.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10.

HPL death anniversary — a wind-chilled, brief trip to Swan Point for our usual readings and offerings

****SUNDAY, APRIL 7**

Carl Johnson's Annual Lovecraft Memorial Tribute at Swan Point Poetry, Drama, Music, Eulogies

Carl's widely-publicized Lovecraft ceremonies are high theater and not to be missed. Meet new and old friends at Lovecraft's grave at 3:00 pm. Rutherford's traditional “At Lovecraft's Grave” eulogy will be read by Brett Rutherford, Allison Rich, Hal Hamilton, Keith Johnson and Christian Tobler.

Also expect Gothic visitors from New York/New Jersey.

SUNDAY, APRIL 14.

“The Devil Sings: Satan and Mephisto in Opera and Music.”
Brett Rutherford presents the Mephisto from *Faust* in various guises in opera, film, and other music. All are welcome for lunch but RSVP for the program since seating is limited at BR's place.

****TUESDAY, APRIL 30**

This is Walpurgis Night, or May Eve, and there will be a dinner party hosted by Rutherford — unless Wytch House on Arnold Street is ready for a grand opening.

****SATURDAY, MAY 11 and SUNDAY MAY 12.**

The Marblehead Sleepover.

We visit HPL's favorite New England town, taking in bookshops and antique stores, colonial architecture, and the famous Burial Ground. This visit involves a bed & breakfast stayover, a midnight walk to the Burial Ground, and some HPL readings. Salem and its attractions are right next door, too!

****SUNDAY, JUNE 9th.**

A Boston cemetery tour, led by Judith Askey. Mt. Auburn and other graveyards will be featured. Day ends with a feast in Boston.

SUNDAY JULY 14.

Day of the Gorgons.

All are invited to share art, stories, film, and anecdotes related to Medusa, the mysterious Cyclades islands, and the Gorgons.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 11.

HPL Birthday at Swan Point Cemetery.
Poetry readings, offerings, tributes.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15th.

Program to be announced.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13th

Poe and Mrs. Whitman.

Premiering the second edition of Rutherford's book on the doomed romance of two important poets and dreamers. Location to be announced.

****THURSDAY, OCTOBER 31.**

Samhain (Halloween).

A grand celebration, place to be announced.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 15th.

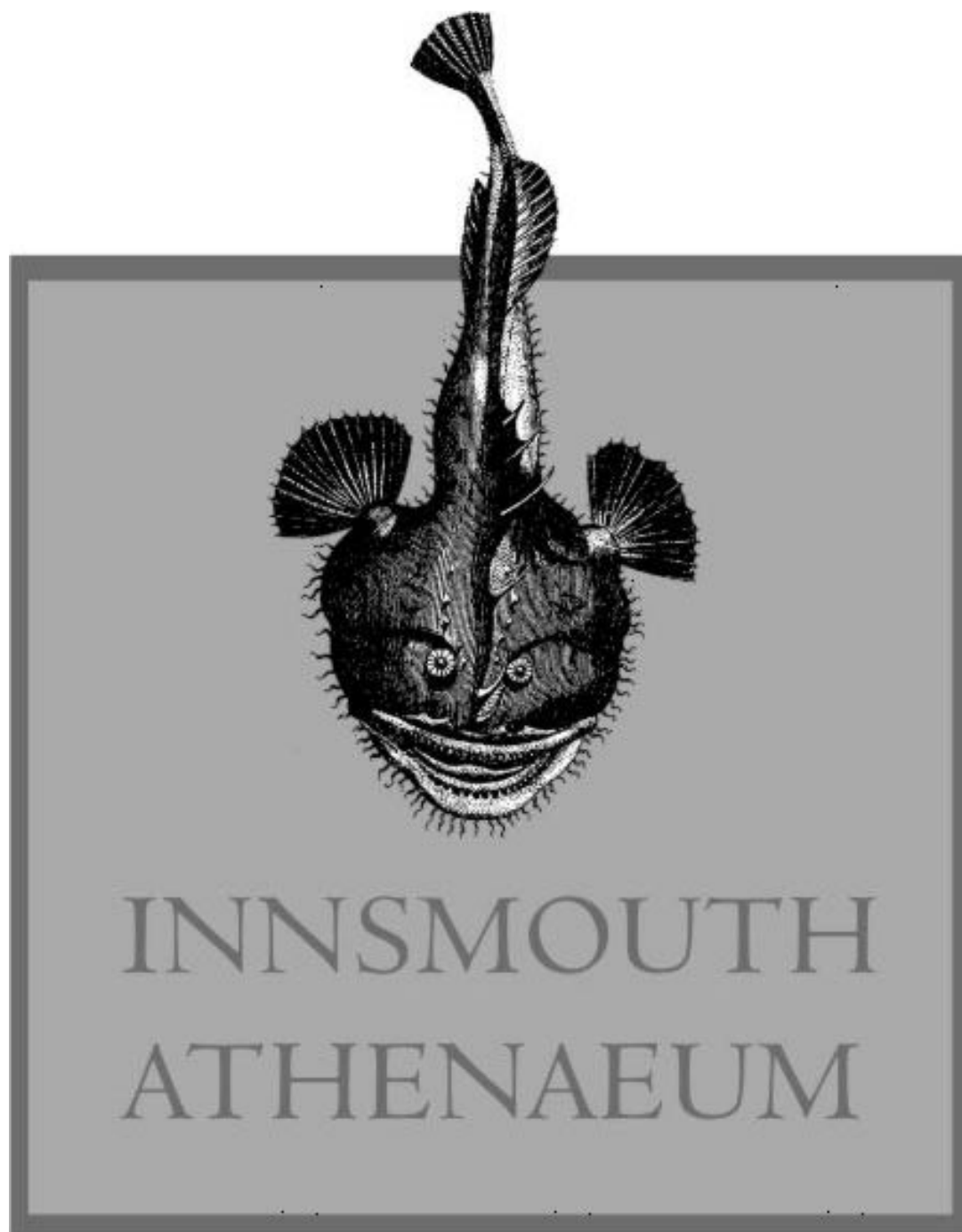
Decorating the Baba Yaga tree at Rutherford's place. Bring mystery presents to be unwrapped on Russian Christmas, January 6th 2003

That's it for the year. Your ideas and suggestions will be welcome. Among the “unscheduled” events will be viewings of DVDs and videos, including the last portion of *Gormenghast* (BBC); a double feature of “Dead Alive” and “Meet the Feebles” by Peter Jackson (director of “Lord of the Rings”), and other surprises.

We also hope that Pierre and Jen are able to get started on their HPL puppet show, and that Hal will find a sponsor for his HPL documentary. Onward, onward! —BR



Rhode Island actor Carl Johnson as H.P. Lovecraft.
Photo: Keith Johnson



LAST LETTERS OF DOUGLAS JEFFERSON

by **Matthew L. Paris**

The story of how these missives were rescued from a trunk in the cellar of the Athenaeum in Innsmouth at the lip of this new century is at once too dull and banal to tell in this rather hastily scribbled foreword. The materials are authentic enough; they consist of Jefferson's episodes in his own unmistakable handwriting, and some footnotes and commentary by the second cousins of both John and Abigail Adams which I shall publish separately in a monograph.

Although Douglas Jefferson left us over 50,000 letters extant, there are many more of them we do not have. His early and probably much more effusive correspondence written before his twenty fifth year, like his uncle Thomas', had been largely destroyed in a fire. If copies of them have been made they have to yet turned up in our Innsmouth cellars. We are still searching for them and we have some clues I cannot speak about at this moment which suggest we shall be able to unearth many of them too.

One cannot overestimate the value of these letters for the author himself. He borrowed his uncle's machine with a parallel pen, making copies instantly while he put them to paper, to make sure he kept his own copies of them as he wrote them. He cer-

tainly had no small opinion of these epistles as felicitous expressions of his thought as well as testimonies to his knowledge of a history that was at the least singular in the extreme.

One might note some small difference between these new letters and the boring and unconscionably otiose ones with which we are familiar. Most of Douglas Jefferson's letters ran between one and three pages. Some letters to intimates can run several pages and take on in their fustian subtly prurient qualities that may remind one of Sterne or Smollett at their worst. We sense at these moments Douglas Jefferson aiming for something like novelistic writing of the epistolary sort common enough in his own tradition.

From whom had he culled such turns and asymmetrically unbalanced ripostes, in his hands inspiring the most alert of us to dullness and sleep? We might remind ourselves that Samuel Richardson's immense and subtly obscene novels were all done within an engine of copious and insinuating letters; Sterne wrote even more murkily bawdy books; one in Douglas Jefferson's time commonly read letters of Walpole or Chesterfield for their wisdom as well as their more elusive artistic qualities.

A letter by its nature has no other narrative drive than the motion of the thought of its author. A writer without substance offers almost less than nothing. His reader ages to no purpose. As a form of communication even the best letters lack the dramatic cohesion and force of fiction. Of course, fiction is lies; one might even suspect the mendacity of any sentence by its apparent clarity and sense. On the other hand, letters are presumably by real people about real subjects even when they are invented by scurvy writers aiming at imitating life in some stale or exotic particular.

Douglas Jefferson's letters never become Art or even mildly interesting but they have none of the charm, felicity and intelligence of even empty and dull fiction. In that they are a very paradigm of the genre of the boring. The interest in him of scholars and mystics is more certainly no more than two-fold. He is the first American to talk of alien monsters on this new continent; his uncle was the rather more famous and intriguing Thomas Jefferson.

It is the mark of the practical nature of the United States that its revolutionaries are more famous than its Gothic metaphysicians. We believe more than ever in my century that the will to expect one's tastes and notions of politicks into law and reality is



The nondescript facade of the Innsmouth Athenaeum deceives passers-by into thinking that this is a commonplace library and museum. Eight levels of closed stacks are carved under the hill almost down to the old waterfront, and three subterranean vaults house exotic archaeological specimens from around the world.

more important than the musings or even observations of those hermetic masters of vigil who glean from the murk at the borders of our more recondite perceptions some shard of more than a world of pure utility.

Douglas Jefferson was this sort of man. If he lacked intelligence, felicity of expression or even the common sense to embrace silence he did in these epistles rant rather labially of his converse with arcane creatures from the deep and beyond, most of whom he informs us rather archly had settled in Virginia long before the Vikings, founding the city of Newport News, of course known by another name in 1276.

What is, or for that matter are, the value of these letters, one might ask? If his accounts are accurate, he is the only Virginian of his time to report this much earlier voyage to the New World. When the testimony of genius is absent, the confessions of the competent or even the babble of near morons are not negligible. Douglas Jefferson wrote only one book, published in his twenties: *Yuggoth of Newport News*. There is no systematic record beyond this tale of Gothic mayhem of his thought whatever.

The beautifully engraved toad-leather bound edition of this monograph is too well known among scholars much beyond Innsmouth — impeccable in its lineaments yet empty in its matter. His letters are much more inchoate than even this rank opus, most of them hastily written first drafts scribbled at some speed with no attempt to relate them to opinions in other epistles or referring to any central truck of political vision. Yet they are the only reports of Yuggoth, almost certainly not a scurrilous fiction of Douglas Jefferson. Nobody of his low ilk could make up such a shambling improbability of this metaphysical lurker in the shadows.

If Douglas Jefferson's letters are improvisations by a near imbecile rather than discourses, they do give us some tenebrous ideas of this horrific alien. Perhaps Jefferson gave Yuggoth's descriptions of walking through the solid atmosphere of Pluto and meeting its dense inhabitants with their icy mien more intelligibility than they had in their parley. The later letters seem to me an attempt to depict a slaving horror much more consistent in his thinking than his je-june effusions. Certainly Jefferson's account of his panic-ridden search for Yuggoth in the eerie nocturnal innards below Luray Caverns where the screams of genius-level and ambulatory fungoids never stopped is five times the length of any known Douglas Jefferson letter. What he

found there finally might be uncomely fare for the less than presumptively credulous but even in its clothing of quasi-incoherent blathering in may give the seeker of such equivocal pleasures at least a genuine if small shiver.

At present it is enough that we let Jefferson speak for himself as he was amply wont to do in life and letters. It is both the burden and evil of criticism that no critique can be any more intelligent than the critic. I would rather be mute about these new Douglas Jefferson letters than add to the ample evidence accumulating in my life of my own limitation and stupidity. If Yuggoth thinks we are a piteous race, so be it. There is much to be said for the virtues of compassion. If we exist merely to let the Yuggoths of the universe mildly despise us, we have not lived in vain.

In any case, it is the work of a lackey to be a commentator on another man's or monster's meditations. To live to honor by one's exegesis the world of a monster seems villainous and odious enough; to be a minor footnote to Douglas Jefferson, who is himself an inevitable candidate for oblivion seems unworthy even of me. I think I shall consign these last letters of Jefferson to the fire.

I am aware that both scientists and mystics would like to know more about Yuggoth. Let them find other epistles by dullards and witlings, other confessions by churls. It is enough that I have maundered through the capacious cellars of the Innsmouth Athenaeum to unearth these excellent epistles for a public increasingly illiterate, coarse, violent, unable to savor what to any and all other ages would have been caviar. Let them seek out the caves of Luray Caverns and call up the alien where he lies sleeping in the crepuscular mists. Once they bring him up from his immortal slumbers, after they hear what will almost certainly make them at the least very unhappy, let them not neglect what might provoke him to take up his august dreams again.

There are prices for each bit of wisdom. The worst of these tolls for now are what one pays for pap and pish-posh at American colleges. I would augur at the nonce that Yuggoth would exact a recompense for his sagacities that might make even that academic cost seem petty indeed.

—Matthew Paris
Miskatonic University
April 1st, 2001

In the 19th century, students and scholars flocked by steamer to Boston and by packet or stage coach to Innsmouth, where the endless stacks of the Athenaeum, open all night long even on Sundays, attracted the most liberated young minds of the era. The library's refusal to censor or conceal occult and erotic volumes caused a national scandal in the 1870s.

When a Catholic mob attempted to burn the Athenaeum in 1889, the result was ironic indeed. The Board of Governors invested \$100,000 in fireproofing the building and expanding its underground vaults; certain duplicate volumes were shipped off to Miskatonic University in Arkham, and the library continued its open stacks policy. Meantime the religiously intolerant took over the town government and instituted new laws more stern than those of the New England Puritans. Within ten years, the town was bankrupt, its harbor abandoned, and a long decline in population and public health commenced.

The Innsmouth Athenaeum took down its public sign in 1905 and became a private research institution, closing its collections to the public. Today, admission is granted only by written permission of the Director, Ezekiel Marsh.

