



## The H. P. Lovecraft Pages

### Lovecraft Continues to Haunt Cinema

The unique works of H. P. Lovecraft have been the inspiration for many films, and have provided ideas & atmosphere for many more. Lovecraft was an influential writer of macabre fiction in the 1920's and 30's. Some modern critics complain that his stories seem too quaint or too garish for readers two generations later. Yet his stories are still in print in brand new editions -- and continue to get turned into movies.

To be honest, I am a big fan of H. P. Lovecraft. I have read & re-read all his stories many times since I was just a tyke (which might explain some things about my character). In my opinion, although some of these movies are very enjoyable, none has even come close to doing justice to the kind of atmosphere that Lovecraft could invoke. But they keep trying.

The films in this section are those that were based explicitly on a Lovecraft tale. At the end of the section are some lists of those films that are more derivative, but owe Lovecraft for their ideas.



presented in chronological order

### the HAUNTED PALACE

(1963) prod & dir: Roger Corman; w/ Vincent Price, Debra Paget, Lon Chaney (Jr.), Frank Maxwell, Leo Gordon, Elisha Cook.

A man becomes possessed by the evil spirit of his wizardly ancestor and wreaks vengeance upon the town of Arkham. Although based entirely on Lovecraft's "Case of Charles Dexter Ward", the Poe connection was so successful for AIP that they wedged a few verses of poetry into this one and billed it as *Edgar Allan Poe's Haunted Palace*. It's quite well done, but flawed. The script strolls along at a sleepy pace and it doesn't actually have an ending, just a stopping point. But it does have some nice diabolical Lovecraftian creepiness and the castle set is great. Enjoyable & spooky, but a little unsatisfying.

### DIE MONSTER DIE

(1965) dir: Daniel Haller; w/ Boris Karloff, Nick Adams, Freda Jackson, Suzan Farmer.

Based (very loosely) on Lovecraft's "Colour Out of Space", this features a wicked glowing rock that lands near Arkham, *England*. Karloff puts in a great performance, but the script is amateurish and the directing & editing are ungraceful, to say the least. And the one real special effect they have (Karloff turned into a glowing statue) is so badly done (silver cloth with lotsa spotlights on it) it won't scare anyone. Only Karloff or Lovecraft completists need bother with this one. I was actually quite disappointed....

### the SHUTTERED ROOM

(1967 - UK - aka *Blood Island*) dir: David Greene; w/ Gig Young, Carol Lynley, Oliver Reed. No skin; no gore.

A young lady returns to her childhood home and discovers (rather slowly) that her old nightmares were much too real and something malevolent still lurks in the attic. This takes the slimmest of inspirations from the original story, but it does start out by building a nice Lovecraftian mystery -- but that's where the good stuff ends. All we really get is a watery production that spends a lot of time on feeble attempts at artsy photography and jazz music, and what's left of the script spends most of its effort on the usual tiresome drivel about city folk being abused by hillbillies. And the



mystery, when finally revealed, must be one of the wimpiest climaxes in film history. It's a good quality production with a nice cast, but the script and direction (and bizarre music track) leave it a complete failure.

## CURSE OF THE CRIMSON ALTAR

(1968 - Britain - aka *The Crimson Cult*; *Curse of the Crimson Cult*; *The Crimson Altar*; *Reincarnation*; *Spirit of the Dead*; *Witch House*) dir: Vernon Sewell; w/ Boris Karloff, Christopher Lee, Mark Eden, Barbara Steele, Michael Gough. Teeny bit o' skin; no gore.

A young antiques dealer is searching for his missing brother and instead finds an ancient witchcraft cult -- or perhaps it's all in his head because his host keeps slipping him hallucinogenic drugs. Although advertised as an adaptation of Lovecraft's "Dreams in the Witch House", we can safely dismiss any actual connection with that story. Still, it's a fun, if somewhat silly, flick. This is another of those British horror films that tries to be "hip" -- so right off the bat we get an entirely gratuitous free-love-and-drugs party and a self-referential joke about Boris Karloff. Fortunately, the cast and the art director chip in to save us all from the screenwriter. Lee is disarmingly casual (so we know he's got to be evil), Gough is superb in his small, meaty role, and Karloff doesn't seem at all embarrassed about upstaging everyone in sight. Finally, what makes the movie truly worth watching are the wonderfully outrageous dream sequences featuring leather-mistresses in pasties, half naked blacksmiths, sacrificial babes on the altar, and Barbara Steele as the Queen Witch. Delightful, simply delightful.





## the DUNWICH HORROR

(1969) dir: Daniel Haller; w/ Sandra Dee, Dean Stockwell, Ed Begley, Sam Jaffe.  
Teensy flash o' skin; no gore.

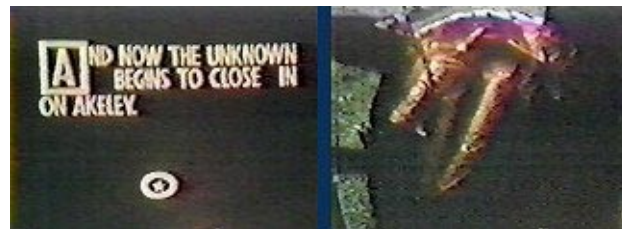
Young Wilbur's daddy was an extradimensional demon, and now Wilbur has gone and seduced Sandra Dee and stolen the Necronomicon in an attempt to bring daddy home. This is the most anemic adaptation of Lovecraft I've seen. It strains itself trying to be "modern" and stylish, but all it manages is to be as undramatic as possible. For an AIP flick, it has surprisingly high production values -- but it also has ten minutes worth of plot stretched to 90, an ending that looks like the screenwriter just ran out of ideas, and, except for Jaffe, it's filled with bloodless, where's-my-paycheck acting performances.

## the WHISPERER IN DARKNESS

(1975 - silent) dir: D. C. Smith; w/ J. Vernon Shea, David Clement. No skin; no gore; darn near no movie, either.

Two paranormal researchers discover an ancient terror from space lurking in the New England woods. This short amateur film has all the production values of the average 8mm home movie.

In fact, I'm pretty sure it *is* an 8mm home movie. Given the obvious limitations, it's a fairly faithful adaptation of Lovecraft's story. Much of the story is told in the title cards, mostly relating the letters the two lead characters shared, and the actual camera footage is barely adequate to illustrate the story. It's, um, interesting... in a morbid sort of way. These days, an 8 year old kid with a camcorder & a computer could make a film ten times more sophisticated.



## RE-ANIMATOR

(1985) dir: Stuart Gordon; w/ Jeffrey Combs, Bruce Abbott, Barbara Crampton, David Gale, Robert Sampson. Skin & gore vary with version.

A twisted med student picks up where Victor Frankenstein left off. This gets my vote to be one of B-moviedom's modern classics. A wonderfully twisted tale with a great performance from Combs and a nicely demented sense of humor. According to scuttlebutt, this was cut in several different degrees of naughtiness, from soft 'R' to 'X' -- a complete edition is now available on DVD. And if you liked this flick, be sure to check out *Bride of Re-Animator*.



## FROM BEYOND

(1986) Dir: Stuart Gordon; w/ Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton. Filmed in Italy.

Whoa, that was kinda creepy. I liked it. I was even impressed! This is probably the most successfully & genuinely scary feature-length Lovecraft adaptation I have yet seen. It had good effects, great characters, good performances, and the pacing of the plot was outstanding. The original story, "From Beyond," actually forms the prologue for the film, the opening credits roll after the story concludes -- the film then takes the events further. Bravo.

## the UNNAMABLE

(1988) dir: Jean-Paul Ouellette. w/ Chalres King, Mark Kinsey Stephenson. Based on H. P. Lovecraft -- actually taking inspiration from several stories. One nice little bit of skin, moderate gore, low budget but good makeup for the monster.

I kinda liked this one despite very modest production values. Lighthearted in spots, faithful to the Lovecraftian atmosphere. Mostly, it is just a formula piece about being stuck in a haunted house with a monster. Good characters and good action make it worthwhile.

## BRIDE OF RE-ANIMATOR

(1989) dir: Brian Yuzna; w/ Jeffrey Combs, Bruce Abbott, Claude Earl Jones, Fabiana Udenio, David Gale. A little skin; lots of severed body parts.

Jeffrey Combs outdoes himself as the insanely enthusiastic Herbert West. His experiments escalate to the point where he is about to recreate the Bride of Frankenstein. Meanwhile, Dr. Hill's head is out for revenge. This one is heavier on the gore than the first, and leans a little towards slapstick. Still, it's a rollicking carnival ride of gruesome creepiness and warped humor. A worthy sequel.



## DARK HERITAGE

(1989) prod & dir: David McCormick; w/ Mark LaCour, Tim Verkaik, Eddie Moore, David Hatcher. No skin; tidbit o' gore.

A reporter on the trail of grisly murders keeps losing friends to mysterious killers who come and go in the night. It's a loose Louisiana adaptation of Lovecraft's *The Lurking Fear*, and what it lacks in budget and talent, it makes up for with a whale of a lot of ominous music. This is barely above home-movie caliber, and although it's not really *badly* made, it's the sort of flick that struggles to achieve competence.

What sinks all their efforts are some amateur actors who couldn't emote if you kicked 'em in the nuts, and a script that tosses the Lovecraftian element for a "surprise" ending that is actually quite dull. Nothing to see here, folks.



## the UNNAMABLE 2

(1992) dir: Jean-Paul Ouellette. w/ Mark Kinsey Stephenson, Charles Klausmeyer, John Rhys-Davies, Julie Strain, (David Warner cameo).

Features the same central figures, but with a clumsy segue from the first movie. The ending of *Unnamable 1* is implicitly altered to lead into a “morning after” sequel. A bigger budget and more serious and tense. It succeeds better as a fright film, but loses the lightheartedness of the first. It uses Lovecraftian themes and lore very well.

## the RESURRECTED

(1992 - Canada) dir: Dan O'Bannon; w/ John Terry, Jane Sibbett, Chris Sarandon. No skin; a little gore.

A young man seems to be possessed by the spirit of an ancestor, and begins to dabble in the black arts. An imaginative, if rather slow, adaptation of Lovecraft's “The Case of Charles Dexter Ward”. This one takes the opportunity to further explore the mad wizard's experiments -- thereby providing a reason to show gruesome mutants. The flick is told from the viewpoint of a P.I. investigating Mrs. Ward's oddly behaving husband, and it is well done all around. However, the story plods along and fails to create any atmosphere. It pays off a bit near the end with some grotesque creatures and a little necromancy, but never fully succeeds. Some folks like this one, but I thought it too dreary at the beginning and too predictable at the end.



BAD CINEMA DIARY

## NECRONOMICON

(1993 - aka *The Book of the Dead*) dir: Brian Yuzna, Christophe Gans, Shusuke Kaneko; w/ Jeffrey Combs, Richard Lynch, David Warner, Bruce Payne, Maria Ford, Bess Meyer, Signy Coleman. One teensiest flash o' boob; a little gore.

H. P. Lovecraft (Combs) introduces three separate tales; these aren't truly adaptations, but original takes inspired by Lovecraft stories. Although each of them is very well done, they fall short of the mark. They fall short of Lovecraft because they go for more adventure & less creepiness. They fall short of being fun anyway because they have insufficient imagination or storytelling skill to pull it all together. There are some neat bits scattered through here, and it's kind of interesting to watch -- but in the final analysis, it's a loser.



## OUT OF MIND: The Stories of H. P. Lovecraft

(1998 - Canada) writ & dir: Raymond Saint-Jean; w/ Art Kitching, Christopher Heyerdahl, Peter Farbridge. No skin; no gore.

An interesting, if disjointed, little tale that involves Lovecraft himself as a dream-observer of a modern adaptation of "The Case of Charles Dexter Ward" with "The Statement of Randolph Carter" stapled into the middle for spice. Interspersed through this are episodes of Lovecraft musing on his own writings (quoting excerpts from his private letters). It's quite well done and Heyerdahl's impersonation of Lovecraft is superb. However, the script doesn't quite weave all these disparate elements into a whole, and there is a patchwork feel to it. There seems to be a lot of potential unrealized here, but still, it's a creative and worthy adaptation.



## RETURN TO INNSMOUTH

(1999 - black & white) writ & dir: Aaron Vanek; w/ Ezra Hubbard, Larry Curwen. No skin; no gore.

A young man researching New England history stumbles across his own family's inhuman legacy. This short, micro-budget amateur film starts out with a sparse version of Lovecraft's "Shadow Over Innsmouth", and then adds an original version of what came after. It's done with evident talent and good attention to detail, even if the CGI fx are intensely unconvincing. Still, if you cut it some slack for the lack of resources, it is a decent film. The



biggest flaw lies in the bare-bones script -- viewers who aren't familiar with the original story probably won't be able to make heads or tails of it.

## COOL AIR

(2000) prod, writ, & dir: Bryan Moore; w/ Jack Donner, Bryan Moore, Vera Lockwood.

A young writer takes a room at the boarding house and ends up entangled in the mystery of his upstairs neighbor, who is confined to a refrigerated room. This is a very capably done no-budget indie, adapted from the Lovecraft story of the same name. The adaptation is fairly faithful, with a few bits of business added to pad it out to 50 minutes. The photography & cast are very good, but the sound is lacking. This is the third adaptation I've seen, and I've read the original I-don't-know-how-many times, so it's hard for me to judge -- but, I think the hints they left out (so the ending wouldn't be too obvious) and the softening of the doctor's character (so he wouldn't be too cheesy) left the ending insufficiently foreshadowed, so it lacks some punch. However, whatever little failings the film has are more than made up for by Jack Donner's show-stealing performance as the decaying Dr. Muñoz. Recommended to Lovecraft fans, and certainly laudable for its technical & artistic merit -- it's certainly a finer production than many "professional" Lovecraft adaptations.



## DAGON

(2001 - Spain/US - aka *H. P. Lovecraft's Dagon*; *Dagon*, *Sect of the Sea*) dir: Stuart Gordon; w/ Ezra Godden, Francisco Rabal, Raquel Meroño, Macarena Gómez. Teeny bit o' skin; a little gore.

A rich dweeb and his girl are shipwrecked at a Spanish fishing village -- that is populated by fishy-freaks who want to sacrifice them to their ancient fishy-god. Despite the title, this is actually an adaptation of "Shadow Over Innsmouth". Well, Stuart Gordon at last tackles another Lovecraft tale. Well, all directors put out a clunker from time to time. <sigh> Most of the flick is just comical Run & Scream stuff that is so pointless, it might as well be called padding. The rest of the script is so meandering, predictable and lightweight that it fails to generate the least bit of suspense, Lovecraftian atmosphere, or even a good scare now and then. The film is well-crafted over all, with good art direction and a solid



cast; but it seems they just settled for cranking out some cheese. I don't see a lot of respect here for the material or the audience.

## BEYOND REANIMATOR

(2003) prod & dir: Brian Yuzna; w/ Jeffrey Combs, Jason Barry, Elsa Pataky. A tidbit o' skin; moderate gore.

After 13 years in prison, Herbert West finds a new protégé in the young prison doctor. But a reporter is on their trail, the warden is a psycho, and before you know it, there's berserk corpses everywhere. This doesn't exactly raise the bar, but is at least a worthy sequel. There's a tight script, wacky characters, some terrific effects work, and the humor may be even more demented than in the first two flicks. And Combs, as usual, just has way too much fun with the role. It's another wild carnival ride for Reanimator fans.



## the SHUNNED HOUSE

(2003 - Spain/Italy?) photo & dir: Ivan Zucco; w/ Giuseppe Lorusso, Federica Quagliari, Emanuele Cerman, Silvia Ferreri. No skin; a little gore.

A couple of investigators dig into the murderous history of an abandoned old house, where they run into the ghostly echoes (& lots of flashbacks) of past horrors. It's sort of like an intercut anthology piece, with bits loosely inspired by several Lovecraft stories, none of which manages to complete the thought. It tries, at turns, to be artsy or spooky, but only succeeds in being random and silly. It does score some nifty tidbits of nightmare imagery, but since they pop up virtually without context, they have no real impact. It's as if Zucco filmed the germ of an idea without actually bothering to complete the script. It's well made and has a little atmosphere going for it, but mostly it's just dull as dishwater... and nowhere near as useful.



## DREAMS IN THE WITCH HOUSE

(2005 - for TV's Masters of Horror) dir: Stuart Gordon; w/ Ezra Godden, Jay Brazeau, Campbell Lane, Chelah Horsdal. No skin; mild gore.

A young student in a creepy old boarding house gets haunted by a naughty ol' witch and now he sort of



wants to kill babies. The tale borrows a lot of fragments from Lovecraft's original, but oddly leaves out all the real Lovecraftian substance and gives us only a quite typical pseudo-Christian demonic possession theme. In the end, many of the borrowed elements prove to be merely tacked on and have no real impact on the story. Although it is well made, it is not at all Lovecraftian and it is far too simplistic to provide either atmosphere or scares. Even at less than an hour, it doesn't deliver enough to make the time worthwhile.

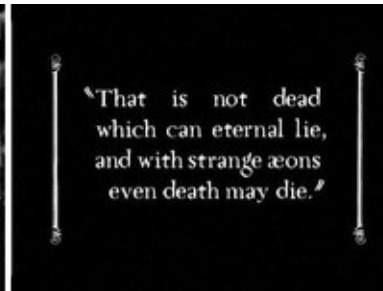
## the CALL OF CTHULHU

(2005 - silent - 47 min)

dir: Andrew Leman; w/  
Matt Foyer, Ralph Lucas,  
Chad Fifer, Patrick O'Day.  
No skin; No gore.

A faithful adaptation of Lovecraft's tale of the fateful discovery of the ancient malevolent beings who want their planet

back. It's a Silent film and not just in the technical sense; they imitated the photography, lighting, and even the makeup and acting styles of the silent era. It doesn't always work, but it is a very good looking film graced by a lot of talent. Unfortunately, their very success in recreating antique filmmaking styles works against them -- the film artistry becomes the focus of attention and one is far more conscious of watching an amusing experiment in film than in watching Lovecraft's story. And the cheesy miniatures and jerky stop-motion animation effectively evoke the silent era but are also "cute" in a way that entirely defuses the atmosphere. It is a lot of fun to watch, but more as an amusing and nostalgic romp than as any kind of horror story. Even so, that still leaves it light years ahead of most of the recent attempts to film Lovecraft.



## BEYOND THE WALL OF SLEEP

(2006) writ & dir: Thom Maurer & Barrett Klausman (aka Barrett J. Leigh); w/ William Sanderson, Fountain Yount, Kurt Hargan, (Tom Savini cameo). A tidbit o' skin; some black & white gore.

A loopy intern at a seedy nineteenth century asylum starts experimenting with thought waves and electricity -- then some people blow up -- and then some vaguely demonoid thing gets conjured -- 'scuse me while I piss all over this flick. The only nice thing I can say is that despite the budget, someone did a fine job with the art direction & sets. Everything else was painful. Shoddy editing, hammy acting, and a whole lot of damned annoying quick-cut montages fail to substitute for real content. The acting, in fact, was so flagrant that for a moment I wondered if I was watching a failed attempt at a satire -- but it does appear as if these poor, deluded saps were serious. In the end, they not only pissed me off, they utterly failed to tell their story (which, by the way, has no substantive relation to the original) -- and all we're left with is the disgusting, maggoty corpse of a movie. I was in such a bad mood after downing this turd, I was cussing at things for the rest of the day.



More films that belong on this page, and will get here eventually, include:

The Curse (1987)

The Lurking Fear (1994)

### Lovecraftian Homages --

Although not based on any particular story, some films have used the whole Lovecraftian mythos as their basis. *In the Mouth of Madness* (1995) is a twisted sort of tribute to Lovecraft and his stories -- I imagine the flick is completely pointless to viewers unfamiliar with the titles & characters of Lovecraft's work. *Cast a Deadly Spell* (1991), is an original comic adventure where Lovecraft is tough-guy P.I. in a world where magic is commonplace.

The Canadian film *Bleeders* foregoes the atmosphere and background, but lifts the plot concepts from "Lurking Fear" and weaves a new script around them.

## In Name Only --

Some films have used Lovecraft for their title and nothing else. These include *Necronomicon* (1969, aka *Succubus*) and the embarrassing *Cthulhu Mansion* (1990)

## A Little Lovecraft for Flavor --

And Lovecraft's gods, demons, and forbidden books have provided some spice for films that otherwise have nothing to do with Lovecraft. Still, his stuff is just so darn *cool* sounding that screenwriters continue to use snippets of names or the cosmology of the Elder Gods to give their story a little character. Lovecraftian influence can be spotted in many films with a supernatural element -- such as *The Gate* and the *Evil Dead* series, just for example.

## And the Very Best --

To date, the very finest Lovecraft adaptations to film are not movies at all. Rod Serling's Night Gallery series, which ran on American television in the early 1970's, featured the only two adaptations which I feel did Lovecraft justice. Specifically, *Cold Air* and *Pickman's Model*. And for a bit of whimsy, add in the short humor segment called *Professor Peabody's Last Lecture*.

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Icon Glossary:



**Good Stinker** -- These are the films where a good deal of the entertainment comes from filmmaking incompetence; fun to watch in spite of themselves.



**Goopy Gore** -- These films exhibit distinctly above-normal quantities of unpleasantly abused body parts.



**Naughty Nudie** -- Films with this flag feature frequent and/or explicit nudity (almost always female) beyond that normally found in your average T&A flick.



**Butt Stompin'** -- These films feature at least one superior violent fight or shootout scene that will get the testosterone pumping.



**Gold Star** -- These are the flicks that I felt reached above their expectations or at least pleasantly surprised me; they may not always be actually good flicks, but I did find something in them worthwhile.



**Blue Max Medal of Really Goodness** -- These are flicks that I not only enjoyed, but I think are actually quite good films (not always the same thing).



**Lethal Cinema** -- These wretched viewing experiences go beyond being merely bad to become genuine sources of pain and regret; they should be avoided by all but the most masochistic trash cinema veterans. Don't say I didn't warn you.