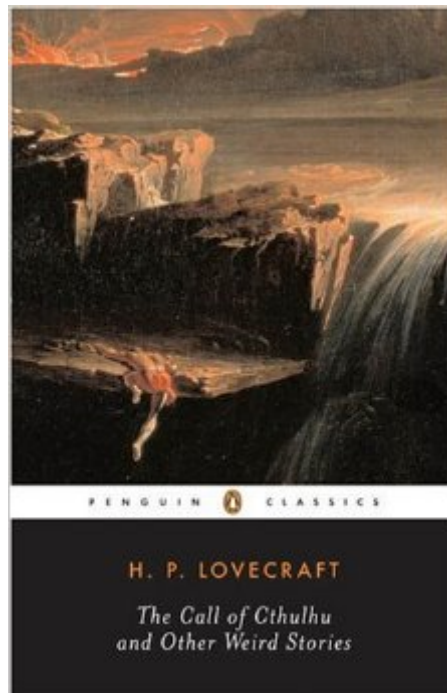


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The Call Of Cthulhu And Other Weird Stories (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics)



Synopsis

A definitive collection of stories from the unrivaled master of twentieth-century horror "I think it is beyond doubt that H. P. Lovecraft has yet to be surpassed as the twentieth century's greatest practitioner of the classic horror tale." -Stephen King Frequently imitated and widely influential, Howard Philips Lovecraft reinvented the horror genre in the 1920s, discarding ghosts and witches and instead envisioning mankind as a tiny outpost of dwindling sanity in a chaotic and malevolent universe. S. T. Joshi, Lovecraft's preeminent interpreter, presents a selection of the master's fiction, from the early tales of nightmares and madness such as "The Outsider" to the overpowering cosmic terror of "The Call of Cthulhu." More than just a collection of terrifying tales, this volume reveals the development of Lovecraft's mesmerizing narrative style and establishes him as a canonical- and visionary-American writer. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

Book Information

Series: Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics

Paperback: 448 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics; Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics edition (October 1, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0141182342

ISBN-13: 978-0141182346

Product Dimensions: 5 x 0.8 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (101 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #28,672 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #23 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Horror > Anthologies #255 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Anthologies #300 in Â Books > Literature & Fiction > Genre Fiction > Horror > Occult

Customer Reviews

Edited by J. T. Joshi, "The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories" offers an excellent, even scholarly, introduction to the tales of H. P. Lovecraft. For those readers like myself who are relatively

new to Lovecraft, this collection offers a nice broad brush look at some of his better known works. At the same time, the extensive commentary and foot-noting means that even long time fans should find something new in this collection. For those entirely unfamiliar with Lovecraft, this collection serves the additional purpose of explaining why one should read this enigmatic author. Put simply, Lovecraft's merit lies as much in the ideas behind his stories as their actual execution. In fact there are many who argue (with some merit) that Lovecraft wasn't much of an author. He routinely uses far too many words to make his point, an error compounded by his tendency to repeat himself, and many of his plot lines border on self satire. Nonetheless, he is revered because he reshaped the face of modern horror/fantasy. He removes man from the focal point of all previous storytelling, and finds horror in our insignificance. He creates a mythology (perhaps best personified in Cthulhu) in which beings both vastly older and infinitely more powerful than humans have lived and fought over untold eons. It is their complete indifference and capriciousness to mankind that inspires horror. At his best, Lovecraft captures this fear of the unknowable or unfathomable with an air of palpable menace. By arranging the stories found in this collection in chronological order, Joshi allows the reader to see Lovecraft's growth as a writer, something that makes the final five entries all the more impressive. "The Call of Cthulhu", "The Colour Out of Space", "The Whisperer in the Darkness", "The Shadow Over Innsmouth", and "The Haunter of the Dark" all beautifully capture the depth of Lovecraft's imagination. Hinting at things just beyond human ken, he taunts the reader with dark mysteries and an escalating level of paranoia in the seemingly mundane unknown. Hence, the breadth of his imagination exceeds his limitations as a writer. Like any collection, especially one that covers a significant period of a writer's development, "The Call of Cthulhu" is a mixed bag. Nonetheless, more entries than not will have you glancing over your shoulder. Moreover, given Lovecraft's influence on authors like Stephen King, not to mention emerging talents like China Mieville, it is interesting to explore his tales and consider their long term impact. In many ways it is like listening to Muddy Waters in order to understand the Rolling Stones and the Beatles. Finally, editor S. T. Joshi's fascinating notes help place both the author and his writings within a larger context. Jake Mohlman

This was my first exposure to the writings of H. P. Lovecraft, and I enjoyed it so much that half way through, I went out and bought another collection, THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP AND OTHER WEIRD STORIES. Lovecraft's prose is creepy in a way that I really hadn't experienced from other so-called horror writers. A lot of the stories follow the same basic structure, but that didn't distract from the fact that these were some of the wildest and most chilling stories that I have read in a very

long time. I had heard a lot about the types of stories that Lovecraft wrote, but I wasn't really prepared for how creepy they would be. A lot of them really shouldn't be as shocking as they are, but somehow Lovecraft gets away with it. He likes to use a lot of frivolous language and has the tendency to take short cuts by saying that the various creatures and entities are too frightening, too complicated, or too alien for the human mind to comprehend. While I'm usually the first person to roll my eyes at this sort of literary cop-out, I was completely enthralled by its use here. Lovecraft's command of language is precise and effective. The monsters and Gods that he describes truly seem fearsome and unnerving. The actual plots of these stories seem to be vaguely repetitive. Since this is the first collection of Lovecraft that I have read, I'm not sure if these are indicative of his work in general, but it is certainly apparent that many of these stories follow the same basic structure. I didn't really find this to be a problem though. There are enough major differences in the stories that they don't all seem to blend together, despite their commonalities. This was helped, no doubt, by the fact that I only read a few stories at a time, managing to absorb the book slowly over a longer period of time. This edition is semi-annotated, though I'd advise against reading them if you've never encountered these stories before. They contain a lot of background detail, but also contain numerous spoilers. I found myself reading a story and then going back and safely reading the notes and references. Each story is also given a short write-up that gives a non-fictional account of the background. Interested readers can see what the circumstances were behind each of the writings, as well as their publishing history. To be honest, it's difficult to review a short story collection. After all, there are eighteen different tales in this book, and the reviewer simply doesn't have enough space to discuss each one individually. The best that I can do is to state that while there were one or two stories that failed to grab, the vast majority of these were spellbinding and genuinely unsettling.

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