

WHISPERS FROM THE ABYSS 2

DREAMS &
NIGHTMARES
INSPIRED BY
H.P. LOVECRAFT.



A.C. WISE :: GREG STOLZE :: LAIRD BARRON :: CODY GOODFELLOW :: JOHN C. FOSTER
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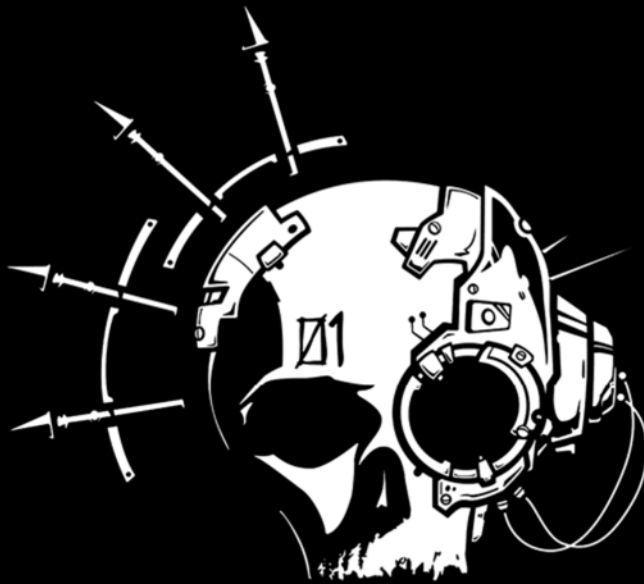
EDITED BY KAT ROCHA

Whispers from the Abyss Vol. 2

- The Horrors That Are & Shall Be -

A collection of H.P. Lovecraft inspired short fiction

Edited by Kat Rocha



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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

This book is a work of fiction. All characters, names, and events portrayed are fictional or are used in an imaginary manner to entertain. Any resemblance to any real persons, living or dead, is co-incidence or purely intentional for the purpose of satire.

WHISPERS FROM THE ABYSS II : The Horrors That Are & Shall Be

Edited by Kat Rocha

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FOREWARD

The 1920s reflected a fascinating period of time: the hustle and bustle of streets – electric trolley cars, horses and buggies, foot traffic, street merchants, automobiles. Skyscrapers pierced the sky, becoming an iconic image of modern civilization. Electric lights extended day into night as people sought relaxation and amusement in this new urbanity of illuminated signs and brightly lit department stores. Lively, decadent, without rest, the city of this time represented new cultural standards, which clashed with traditional ideals of agrarian conservatism and vied for attention, radically transforming the individual's relationship to nature and society. Mechanization created feelings of both wonderment and trepidation: this was the time of H.P. Lovecraft. It was a world he was not altogether comfortable with – modernity with its positive and negative connotations – became one of his themes that he wove into the fabric of his short stories.

H.P. Lovecraft had a rampant imagination, coupled with a stifling, narrow view towards modernity, especially in relation to the diversity of cultures coalescing into a preverbal mixing pot of the American experience of the early 20th century. He struggled as a writer and editor, and he spent most of his short life in near poverty. After his death, his writing laid in obscurity for decades; his stories making brief appearances in dark library corners and old used bookstores, discarded like a loose thread. However, the seed was planted in the creative minds of individuals who found inspiration in Lovecraft's often stilted, meandering prose that uniquely tantalized the reader's imagination to fill in the gaps of suspense and horror, just around the corner. With technology – probably much to his chagrin – Lovecraft's brand of horror gained further traction in the collective psyche, of course it has not been without ruffling feathers when mediating the disagreeable beliefs, namely racism, that were unfortunately common place at the time of Lovecraft's life. In spite of the controversies, his stories have continued to be influential.

This year marks the 125th anniversary of Lovecraft's birth in Providence, Rhode Island, however he has been commemorated for several years with NecronomiCon Providence, H.P. Lovecraft Film Festivals in Portland, Oregon and San Pedro, California, and was even the subject of a panel at this year's San Diego International Comic Con – the granddaddy of popular culture! His stories have influenced a great many films, comic books, graphic novels, video games, music, and even Cthulhu plushies. However widespread his influence has been over the intervening decades since his death, Lovecraft's roots are in the written word.

For the second time, editor Kat Rocha brilliantly edits together a collection of short stories that accommodate our modern life – a life on the go. Among these pages, each writer finds their respective Lovecraftian thread and weaves a balance between suspense and simmering madness in the vein of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*, *Azathoth*, *The Color Out of Space*, to name a few. Each story

represents our early 21st century mores, such as the use of Kickstarter to raise money, the spirit-breaking status quo of the mundane life, sacrifices for love, desires to experience all and live forever, class struggles, and prejudice against others. In addition, the use of humor is fascinating because while not necessarily creating a somber tone, these writers have demonstrated their cleverness to spin a yarn that taps their breath of knowledge of Lovecraft's mythos and locales. These stories are a reflection of our time and may they prove their place in the rich tapestry of literature inspired by Lovecraft.

Michele Brittany

September, 2015

WE ARE NOT THESE BODIES, STRUNG BETWEEN THE STARS

By A.C. Wise

I'm one of the ones who remembers what it was like before R'lyeh rose. Before New Orleans sank. Before Venice burned. When Mi Go first screamed through the space between the stars, and when Shoggoths last in the dooryard bloomed. For the record, it doesn't make me one of the lucky ones.

Like right now, I'm slogging through a water-filled lobby, all greenish and faintly luminescent. If I look too close, I'll see indistinct shapes moving just beneath the surface, so I make a habit of not looking. The floor is canted, just enough to remind me that the Baltimore, once one of the art deco "Grand Old Dames" of the city, is now either sinking or rising. No one's quite sure which. There's a fish tank behind what used to be the reservation desk, a cruel joke now. Things that aren't quite starfish cling to the remains of the shattered, dusty glass, opening and closing their eyes just to remind us they can.

The elevator hasn't worked in years. Probably since before all this started. The gold filigree cage is rusted halfway open; the outer doors with their ornate friezes mercifully wedged all the way into the walls. One less depiction of the nautical scenes—the stylized waves and curling tentacles—is a good thing. They're bad enough outside the building, the brackish growth furring them gives them unwanted depth during the day, and makes them shine faintly at night.

My hip-waders squelch, trailing water as I climb toward the Baltimore's top floor. Nothing but the best for us, by God. A few propped open doors remind me we're not utterly alone. A face with thin, down-turned lips and bulbous eyes peers out suspiciously before a webbed hand slams the door. From another, strains of what might be music, or keening loss, or both, drift into the hall.

At the top of the stairs, I pause for a deep, wracking cough. A smoker's cough, though I haven't been able to get my hands on anything like a real cigarette in years. Just another legacy of the bad old days. I knock once on the penthouse door, not expecting an answer, and enter.

The curtains are drawn. The room is murky-dim, redolent with decay, but betraying hints of former glory. The previous occupant was in a bad way when I discovered the place, gasping for air through slit gills, but refusing to go into the water. It was an act of mercy, really.

Zee lies on the couch. Their head back, their eyes closed. All the shit that's going down, is still going down—will go down? time is slippery these days—and Zee is dying from good old-fashioned cancer. And there's not a goddamned thing I can do about it.

HIS CARNIVOROUS REGARD

By John C. Foster

“So you’re going to cover all my meals?”

“You’ll never eat the same thing twice. Henry VIII didn’t eat like you’ll eat.”

“Who?”

“Not important. And then there’s the sex.”

“This sounds too good to be true. I can do anything I want?”

“With as many women as you can handle.”

“Kinky shit?”

“We want you to explore everything.”

“This sounds too good to be true.”

“You’ll be exposed to art. You’ll sky dive. You’ll wrestle an alligator and scuba in a shark cage. You’ll get drunk on the finest wines and the cheapest vodka. You’ll trip the light fantastic on psilocybin and LSD. You’ll sit by quiet seashores and run with the bulls in Pamplona. You’ll experience everything.”

“And you’re gonna put something in my head?”

“The device will monitor your brain’s reaction to each experience. We’re creating a map, a guidebook, a lexicon of how you experience things.”

“So you’ll record it if I wanted to, you know, fuck someone in the ass?”

“We want you to fuck them in the ass. We want them to fuck you in the ass.”

“I dunno about—”

“And don’t forget the money. Mr. Machen will provide one hundred million dollars to whomever you choose.”

“This sounds too good to be true. I have to go up in the ship and — tell me again what exactly I do up there? I didn’t follow everything the first time you explained it. You know, the space stuff.”

The man in the charcoal gray suit explained it to the candidate, whose look of confusion rapidly devolved into anger.

“You’re outta your mind. Count me out.”

The potential candidate stormed out with a gratuitous door slam and the man in the charcoal gray suit sighed, drawing a line through the twenty-third interview subject. He took a moment to line up the papers on his desk and tapped the intercom next to an obsidian nameplate reading CHALMERS.

“Next.”

* * *

There was an axe buried in a wall speaker. Maxwell was still trying to sort things out so he left it where it was.

He leaned back in the leather and brass captain’s chair of the derelict craft and let his eyes wander over the screens where a small, olive-skinned man was eating, fencing, swimming, sodomizing, and otherwise experiencing every measurable activity Etan Machen’s researchers could dream up. Pop-up boxes on each screen showed three-dimensional images of the candidate’s brain, tracking the activity resulting from each experience. Sights, sounds, smells, pain, pleasure, anticipation, fear, ecstasy.

The ozone stink of an electrical fire still lingered, but most of the equipment had been repaired before Maxwell docked with the ship. Tools had been scattered about the floor, ready for his use.

There were terabytes of data on the olive-skinned man and his experiences. Newer data, data closer to the time of the incident, required some reassembly.

The ship’s lights were down, power run in from GALILEO Station enough to restart life support and the computers, and in the dimness lit only by flickering screens, Maxwell let his gaze linger on the candidate frolicking in a hot tub with two nubile things. He felt himself stiffen but had already been infected by a slight strain of paranoia from the candidate’s journal — the man’s awareness that everything he thought and felt during his last year of life was being recorded and analyzed, his inner workings deciphered for mass consumption — and Maxwell felt himself under some sort of existential observation, a paranoid secularist’s idea of *God is watching you*.

He slid over the deck in a low-G walk and lowered the volume until the grunts and cries of the grappling threesome were no more than a whisper, his gaze wandering around the hemisphere of the observation dome overhead, silently damning whoever had applied a haphazard coat of spray paint. He wondered which of the five crew members had done it and if it was the same person who had painted over the mirrors in the lavatory. Perhaps the same wit whose finger painted OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE CLOSER THAN THEY APPEAR over the airlock.

There was no one to ask, of course, because Machen's ship had been recovered with no crew, no indication in the captain's log or computer log as to where — and how — they had gone. The airlock had its own tracking system for comings and goings and the only person on board who had been outside the ship was the candidate.

The candidate who never returned.

The crew had simply vanished.

As he passed through the airlock to the Spartan confines of GALILEO station, Maxwell shivered. His job as investigator meant countless routine explorations, the forensic analysis of every possible bit of evidence. So he had spectrum analyzed a small scraping from the painted words over the lock.

The words were written in blood.

* * *

From the Commonwealth Dictionary, Fifth Edition: "Dark Matter" – (n) – non-luminous material postulated to exist in space including weakly interacting particles – known as cold dark matter – or randomly moving high-energy particles created soon after the Big Bang – hot dark matter – postulated to account for gravitational forces observed on astronomical objects.

As much as 96% of the universe is made up of dark matter.

From the Icarus Journal: The theory that X-ray signals originating from dark matter in the Perseus Galaxy cluster are a form of sentient communication has been widely discredited.

* * *

The candidate swirled the cabernet in his glass and sniffed audibly before taking a small sip and rolling it around his mouth.

"Blackberry and tannins, big tannins. Chocolate, plum and maybe ... cedar," he said.

Chalmers nodded and made a note on his tablet. He observed the concurrent brain activity and made another note as he said, "Your palate is growing more refined."

"So is my sense of smell," the candidate said.

"Excellent, excellent."

THE LABYRINTH OF SLEEP

By Orrin Grey

Beyond the wall, the first moon has already risen. Kendrick stands still for a while, getting used to the changes to the air, to gravity. He can still taste the last bitter dregs of the cigarette he stubbed out just before hooking up to the machine. Can still smell the antiseptic tinge of the room he's left behind, as a breeze perfumed by distant and unnamed glades carries it away.

Down below him, at the bottom of the hill, is a forest of tall white trees, and beyond that the beginning of the Labyrinth. He's been here before, maybe not *right* here, but near enough. He's seen this moon before, stood under its light. He's been in that forest, even if maybe some other part of it. He's seen the split-headed giants that live there; the doors that they build in the ground, the men with cloven hooves and the heads of dogs, the black shapes that occasionally flit in front of the moon. All of this is familiar to him, but something about the night, *this* night, feels different. A smell in the air, like the ozone smell before a storm. Something...

Maybe it's because this trip is different. Not some hapless dreamer he's riding in this time but another rider, another professional. McCabe, lying in a drugged coma in his hotel room. McCabe, a few milligrams of noxitol short of dead, lying there on his bed, hooked up to monitors and IVs and to the machine. McCabe, waiting somewhere in the Labyrinth for Kendrick to come in and find him to learn why he'd gone to the needle instead of his oldest friend.

The company is paying for the hotel room now, for the monitors, and paying Kendrick double his usual rate, but this one he'd do for free. He has to know what happened, what changed. Or, the worse answer, if nothing has, if this was always what waited at the end of McCabe's street and he's just been blind to it until now.

One way or the other, he has to know, and so he starts down the hill, toward the Labyrinth.

* * *

It probably started with the drugs; the new kinds of sleep aids to help a world full of light and motion find the time to dream. But it was the machine that ultimately did the job that brought the wall of sleep crashing down. And what we found on the other side wasn't what we had expected, not at all. Not a changing jungle of Freudian symbols, not personal, not subjective. An actual place, the Labyrinth and the lands that surrounded it.

It took the machine to find it. The dreamers themselves never remembered somehow that they all went to the same place. On their trips back to consciousness the details of the dream world were lost, their minds replacing them with the minutiae of their memories and their own imaginations, the things that they remembered as their dreams. Always keyed to events in the Labyrinth, but never identical to it.

The machine was the silver key. With it, another person, a rider, could piggyback in on the dreamer's trip to that secret world. Not asleep, not really, and therefore not subject to the forgetfulness that true dreaming entailed.

It became a fad, a drug, an industry. In the waking world, there were dream parlors in every mall, where you could hook into someone's sleeping mind and take a ride to the Labyrinth. But most people were nothing more than tourists in the dreamlands, children stumbling along the turns of the Labyrinth. Kendrick and McCabe, they were professionals.

Or they had been, before McCabe tried to make himself sleep forever.

* * *

The walls of the Labyrinth are always black. Basalt, or something that can pass for it, the dreamland equivalent. They always rise up too high to scale, too high to jump. Once you're in the Labyrinth, you're in it, submerged, blind to anything except the next corner, and then the next.

Countless efforts have been made to map it. Kendrick has never known a professional who didn't have at least one in-progress map tacked up somewhere. But no one has ever managed. You can't see the Labyrinth from anywhere except the top of the hill, near the wall, and from there it all looks the same, and once you're in it, well...

There are landmarks. Some have been seen by more than one person. He and McCabe had compared their lists late one night. They'd both seen the fountain choked with moss. They'd both seen the doorway in the middle of the courtyard, the ground on the other side of it darker than on this side, but neither of them had been brave or stupid enough to step through. Kendrick had once seen a river, miles down, that cut a roaring chasm through the midst of the Labyrinth. McCabe claimed to have found a building that looked like an abandoned mosque, with no one inside but an altar set in the back with some kind of mummy in an alcove behind it, one he couldn't quite make out without getting closer than he suddenly found himself wanting to.

Some people say that the Labyrinth changes, and certainly Kendrick has never known two pros whose maps ever really lined up. Most people have an opinion on the subject, once they've put a few beers in themselves at the end of the day, but Kendrick

never really thought about it before. To him, the Labyrinth was what it was. It was always there, on the other side of the wall, and it was always the same, really. Even if the paths changed, its nature never did, and that was enough for him.

* * *

He stands at one of the gates to the Labyrinth. All the gates he's ever seen looked identical. No horn or ivory, just unadorned clefts in the sides of the Labyrinth. Others have tried to mark them, he knows, but the markings were always gone when they came back. Either that, or no one has ever gone to the same gate twice.

It should be impossible, what he's doing. Going into a place that can't be mapped, to find someone who's been lost there already. It should be, but it never is. Something's different about the dreamers, maybe, or about the pros. Something in how they approach the Labyrinth, or in how it approaches them, but he's never gone in after a dreamer, never once, and not found them.

It isn't by any conscious art that he does it, though, at the same time, he knows it's not something everyone can do. He walks the Labyrinth as blind as if he were a dreamer himself. No one really knows how the professionals do it, the dream hounds, the *Oneiroi*, as some in the industry have tried to dub them, though the name never stuck. Kendrick has this theories, all the pros do. To him, it's all in the thinking. Dreamers don't think while they're in the Labyrinth, not really. They can't. They're caught up in the black, forgetful rivers of sleep. But the riders, those who follow them in, can think, and, by thinking, by keeping their minds on their quarry, they can track them down, whether that's by changing the turnings of the Labyrinth itself, or simply by knowing which way to turn their own steps, Kendrick doesn't know, and has never bothered to care.

Though time has no meaning here, still he knows that this is the longest he's ever been under. Out of the corners of his eyes, he sees what might be landmarks down curving paths, but already his feet are carrying him in another direction. He wonders how much time has passed out there in the waking world. It could be hours, minutes, days. They were prepared before he went under. IVs to feed and hydrate him, so that he could stay down no matter how long it took.

How long will they let him stay? How long before they pull the plug, before they decide that this errand is costing more than it's worth? He wills himself to hurry.

There are things that live in the Labyrinth. He's always known it. Not the giants or the dog-headed men or any of the other things that live outside. These are different, he knows, even though he's never seen them. He hears them sometimes, their hopping, shuffling gait just on the other side of a wall, just a few turns away. Sometimes in the waking world he tries to picture them, to imagine them as he goes about his day. He always sees them as pale, eyeless things, adapted to a life lived deep underground,

though, of course, the Labyrinth is always open to the perpetual twilight of the dreamlands' sky.

When he's here, in the Labyrinth, he tries not to think of them at all, because he believes that thinking here has power. Even now, as he hears them behind him, he tries to think only of putting the next foot in front of him, then the next. Of going faster, not of why. Even when they sound like they are right behind him, just around the next turn, not even that far. That if he turned his head he would see them, see them at last as they are and not as he imagines. Even then he keeps his eyes forward, keeps his thoughts only on McCabe, McCabe, McCabe.

And then he turns a corner and he's somewhere he's never been before. Normally in the Labyrinth he can't say that, not with certainty. Most of it looks the same, excepting the occasional landmarks. But this is something else entirely. More than a landmark. This is the landmark. He knows it without even having to look around, knows even before his mind has processed what he's seen, knows with the faultless logic that is sometimes the province of the dreamlands, that this is the center of the Labyrinth.

The things behind him are forgotten, and, as if they are driven back by some invisible barrier, or as if it really has been his attention, however indirect, that held them here, the sounds of their pursuit cease. Or, was it ever really pursuit? Were they herding him here?

What would he call the structure that he sees before him, this extruded building of green stone with its soaring towers and many gaping windows, if he saw it in the waking world? A castle, a tower, a house?

There have been countless attempts to map the Labyrinth, and even more to explain it. Is it the first step of an afterlife, a tiny taste of death that we get each night when we close our eyes? Is it a representation of something from the collective unconscious, an enormous symbol housed in all our psyches? Is it a literally just the maze of our own neurons? These were things Kendrick never thought about, not outside the Labyrinth and certainly not within it, but he thinks about them now.

What does it mean, this structure? No map of the Labyrinth has ever found its center. No rider, no dream hound has ever come this far and returned, at least, not that he's ever heard of. In the mind of every sleeping man and woman, a maze, and in the center of the maze, this place. And inside this building, he knows with that same faultless logic, McCabe.

Without hesitating any further, he goes through the front door.

* * *

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Michele Brittany is a popular culture scholar and is the editor of *James Bond and Popular Culture: Essays on the Influence of the Fictional Superspy* (2014) and the upcoming *Essays on Space Horror in Film, 1950s – 2000s*. She is a member of *H.P. Lovecast*, a monthly podcast analyzing stories by and inspired by H.P. Lovecraft.

A.C. Wise's fiction has appeared in *Apex, Shimmer, Uncanny, Whispers from the Abyss Volume 1*, and *The Year's Best Dark Fantasy and Horror 2015*, among other places. Her collection of inter-linked short stories, *The Ultra Fabulous Glitter Squadron Saves the World Again*, will be published by Lethe Press in October 2015. In addition to her fiction, she co-edits *Unlikely Story*, and contributes a monthly Women to Read: Where to Start column to *SF Signal*. Find her online at www.acwise.net and on twitter as @ac_wise.

Laird Barron is the author of several books, including *The Croning, Occultation*, and *The Beautiful Thing That Awaits Us All*. His work has also appeared in many magazines and anthologies. An expatriate Alaskan, Barron currently resides in upstate New York.

Samuel Poots is a 24 year old English journalist and teacher, currently living in Nagoya, Japan. He studied literature at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, focusing on Victorian Gothic horror and American anti-war literature. Sam has worked as a journalist, editor and script-writer for the table top gaming website *Beasts of War* and has had stories published alongside two table top games, as well as by online publishers such as *The Bohemyth* and *Dead Beats*. "The Thing in the Fridge" was inspired by a run in with a fridge in China that had been left by his apartment's previous occupant. He never got up the courage to find out what horrors lurked within.

Richard Lee Byers is the author of over forty fantasy and horror novels including *Blind God's Bluff: A Billy Fox Novel* (Night Shade Books) and the Black River Irregulars trilogy (coming soon from Privateer Press). His short fiction has appeared in such anthologies as *Blackguards: Tales of Assassins, Mercenaries, and Rogues* (Ragnarok Publications), *The Fall of Cthulhu* (Horrorified Press), *The Bard's Tale* (Blackspoon Press), *Cthulhu Fhtagn!* (Word Horde), and *Blood Sushi* (Dirge Publications), and he has collected some of the best of it in the eBooks *The Plague Night and Other Stories*, *The Q Word and Other Stories*, and *Zombies in Paradise*. He writes an opinion column for the Airlock Alpha SF news site when the mood takes him and invites everyone to follow him on Facebook, Google+, Ello, and/or Twitter.

Chad Fifer co-hosts the H.P. Lovecraft Literary Podcast and works as a writer and musician in Los Angeles, where he lives with his wife Heather Klinke. He is the author of the coming-of-age novel *Children in Heat* as well as co-author of the Lovecraftian graphic novel *Deadbeats* from SelfMadeHero. His album *Sense Impacts*, an hour of soundtrack for the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game, is now available from Chaosium, and more of his spooky tunes can be found at chadfifer.bandcamp.com.

Jonathan Sharp is an occasional writer, and full time maker of noise from the English Lake District. He doesn't get to write fiction anytime near as much as he'd like to.

Konstantine Paradias is a jeweler by profession and a writer by choice. His short stories *have been published in the AE Canadian Science Fiction Review, World War Cthulhu and the Battle Royale Slam Book by Haikasoru. His short story, "How You Ruined Everything" has been included in Tangent Online's 2013 recommended SF reading list and his short story "The Grim" has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.*

"Whispers in Porcelain" was originally read on Episode 33 of the *Bizarrocast* short story podcast.

Deborah Walker grew up in the most English town in the country, but she soon high-tailed it down to London, where she now lives with her partner, Chris, and her two young children. Find Deborah in the British Museum trawling the past for future inspiration. Her stories have appeared in the *2015 Young Explorer's Adventure Guide, Nature's Futures, Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet* and *The Year's Best SF 18* and have been translated into over a dozen languages.

"Baby Rhyme Time" was first published in *Innsmouth FreePress* 2009.

Sarah Hans is an award-winning editor, author and teacher. Sarah's short stories have appeared in about twenty publications, but she's best known for her multicultural steampunk anthology *Steampunk World*, which appeared on *io9.com*, *Boing Boing*, *Entertainment Weekly Online*, and *Humble Bundle*. The anthology also won the 2015 Steampunk Chronicle Reader's Choice Award for Best Fiction. Sarah's next project is an anthology featuring characters with exceptionalities called *Steampunk Universe*. You can find Sarah online at www.sarahhans.com.

"Shadows of the Darkest Jade" was originally published in *Historical Lovecraft: Tales of Terror Through Time*, edited by Silvia Moreno-Garcia and Paula R. Stiles, 2011.

Mike Hudson lives in Austin, Texas.

Kevin Wetmore is the author of short stories published in such anthologies as *Enter at Your Own Risk: The End is the Beginning* (Firbolg), *Moonshadows* (Laurel Highlands), *Dark Tales of Elder Regions: New York* (Myth Ink) and *Midian Unmade* (Tor), among many others. A New England native, this now Los Angelino is also the author of *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (Continuum) and *Back from the Dead: Reading Remakes of Romero's Zombie Films as Markers of Their Time* (McFarland) as well as articles in *Rue Morgue*, *Horror Studies* and *Gothic Studies*. When not writing, he also acts, directs and is a stage combat choreographer.

Joel Enos has written comics, graphic novels and books, published short fiction in FLAPPERHOUSE and *alphanumeric* and a comics adaptation of Anais Nin's *Under a Glass Bell in A Café in Space*. He's also edited many comics, books and manga including the best-selling series, *Tokyo Ghoul*.

Tom Pinchuk mysteriously emerged from the misty jungles of Southeast Asia and went on to ensnare the whole world in his tentacles. Like Nyarlathotep, he's assumed many guises as he's worked in a myriad of media – creating mind-bending comics like *Hybrid Bastards!* and *Unimaginable*, producing viral web videos to distract hundreds of thousands of anime fans from their schoolwork, and writing international animated TV series that are fun, sunny and not at all Lovecraftian. He hopes this journey into the darkest depths of the psyche has left you shaken, troubled and generally uncomfortable. Thanks for reading! Conjure him at www.tompinchuk.com

Greg Stolze is aging and cruel and bores easily. He's been writing horror stories since he was 16, and many of them can be found on his website at www.gregstolze.com/fiction_library. (Try "Locked Up", it's good times.) Lately he has been focusing on the horror games *DELTA GREEN* and *Unknown Armies*, when he's not grooming his brood for literacy and skill in martial arts. He's on Twitter as @GregStolze.

Robert Stahl. Unbeknownst to Robert Stahl, his body is an empty shell, telepathically controlled by a brain in a jar, which was buried long ago under the floorboard of his home in Dallas, Texas. Consequently, his days are filled with the urge to write: stories, letters, articles, whatever. At night, he listens to music, and when he drifts off to sleep, the brain laughs, a humorless, pitiful sound, as it jiggles alone in the dusty darkness. His work has been published at *Acidic Fiction*, *Urban Fantasist*, *Creepy Campfire Stories*

(for *Grownups*), and *Odd Tree Press*. Contact him (if you dare) at RobertStahlWriter@gmail.com.

Nathan Wunner once tried to whisper something into the Abyss to no effect; proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Abyss's preferred method of contact is to whisper things to you. Nathan Wunner's work has been featured in magazines and anthologies from Insomnia Press, Surreal Grotesque, Sub-Verse, 01 Publishing, The Colored Lens, XNOYBIS, Ink & Coda, and Infernal Ink. If you'd like updates on future stories by Nathan, you can look up any of his long neglected social media accounts. But we'd recommend contacting him directly at nwunner@gmail.com

Orrin Grey is a writer, editor, amateur film scholar, and monster expert who was born on the night before Halloween. His stories of monsters, ghosts, and sometimes the ghosts of monsters have appeared in dozens of anthologies, including Ellen Datlow's *Best Horror of the Year*, and been collected into two volumes, *Never Bet the Devil & Other Warnings* and *Painted Monsters & Other Strange Beasts*. You can find him online at www.oringrey.com.

"The Labyrinth of Sleep" originally appeared in *Future Lovecraft*, published by Innsmouth Free Press in 2011.

Marc E. Fitch is the author of *Paranormal Nation: Why America Needs Ghosts, UFOs, and Bigfoot* and the novels *Old Boone Blood*, *Paradise Burns*, and *Dirty Water*, which is forth-coming from 280 Steps. His fiction has appeared in such publications as *ThugLit*, *The Big Click*, *Pulp Metal Magazine*, *Horror Society*, and *Massacre*. He currently lives in Harwinton, CT with his wife and four children and works in the field of mental health. www.marcfitch.com

John C. Foster was born in Sleepy Hollow, NY, and has been afraid of the dark for as long as he can remember. A writer of thrillers and dark fiction, Foster lives in New York City with his lady, Linda, and their dog, Coraline. He is the author of the novel *Dead Men*, published by Perpetual Motion Machine Publishing in July 2015. His second novel, *Mister White*, will be published by Grey Matter Press later this year and his short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. For more information, please visit www.johnfosterfiction.com.

David Busboom was raised in a castle that his father built in the woods of Champaign County, Illinois. He is a graduate of Eastern Illinois University, where he edited the student produced literary magazine, *The Vehicle*. His writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Prospectus News*, *Shock Totem*, *Euphemism*, *Gonzo Today*, the *Providence Journal*, *Nameless Digest*, and the Rogue Planet Press anthology *Swords*

Against Cthulhu. He lives in Central Illinois and can be reached on Facebook and Twitter.

Cody Goodfellow has five novels—his latest is *Repo Shark*—and has co-written three more with John Skipp. His collections *Silent Weapons for Quiet Wars* and *All-Monster Action* both received the Wonderland Book Award. He wrote, co-produced and scored the short Lovecraftian hygiene film *Stay At Home Dad*, which can be viewed on YouTube. As a bishop of the Esoteric Order of Dagon (San Pedro Chapter), he presides over several Cthulhu Prayer Breakfasts each year. He is also a director of the H.P. Lovecraft Film Festival in Los Angeles and cofounder of Perilous Press, a micropublisher of modern cosmic horror. He “lives” in Burbank, California.

Ferrett Steinmetz's debut urban fantasy *Flex* features a bureaucracy-obsessed magician who is in love with the DMV, a goth videogamemancer who tries not to go all Grand Theft Auto on people, and one of the weirder magic systems yet devised. He was nominated for the Nebula in 2012, for which he remains moderately stoked, and lives in Cleveland with his very clever wife, a small black dog of indeterminate origin, and a friendly ghost. (Oh, and the sequel, *The Flux*, should be out by now.)

He Tweets at @ferretthimself, and blogs entirely too much about puns, politics, and polyamory at www.theferrett.com. (Or, if your work has blocked his site, try it mirrored at theferrett.livejournal.com.)

Hunter James Martin can be reached at hunterjamesmartin@gmail.com

Patrick McEvoy draws, paints, animates, designs, podcasts, lives, breathes, and occupies space in the physical universe. In the non-physical universe, he can be found here: www.megaflowgraphics.com.

Kat Rocha began her career as a collaborating artist on such projects as *Utopiates*, a Catwoman story for *Batman*, *80-Page Giant* for DC Comics and *Titanium Rain*. She produced numerous concept designs for Spartan Games and has had work featured in *Interzone* magazine.

In 2011, Kat founded 01Publishing with the goal of producing the best in science fiction, fantasy, and horror of both prose and graphic storytelling. 01Publishing's catalog of books have received acclaim from *The Huffington Post*, *SF Signal*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *Innsmouth Free Press*, and *The Examiner*.

She is also an Associate Editor with *Escape Artists* and *Pseudopod* and an active member of the Horror Writer's Association.

Melissa V. Hofelich is a freelance proofreader and copy editor. Born and raised in South Jersey, she now lives in Atlanta, Georgia with her husband Alex and their two cats. She is the copy editor for Nightmare Magazine and a former proofreader for *Lightspeed Magazine*. She has also contributed to several of the special Destroy! issues of *Nightmare* and *Lightspeed*. Melissa holds a BFA from The University of the Arts in Philadelphia and is a ravenous reader, gamer, and tikiphile. In her spare time, she is working for a mysterious benefactor, bringing the *Book of Eibon* and *Cultes de Goules* into compliance with the Chicago stylebook. You can find her on Twitter at @melissavh.

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