

A HAUNTED MIND

By Dr. Robert Curran

BOOK SUMMARY



Arguably no writer of horror and the supernatural in recent time has had more of an impact on the genre than the reclusive H.P. Lovecraft. His vision of a dark and monstrous world which lies somewhere just beyond than which we know and experience. It has both intrigued and stimulated fans and writers alike and has evolved into a detailed and interconnected corpus of fiction, comics, film, together with video and role-playing games, collectively known as the Cthulhu Mythos. The Mythos, of course, did not stop with Lovecraft but has been developed by others such as Clark Ashton Smith, Robert Bloch, Brian Lumley, Ramsey Campbell, right down to the modern day horror master Stephen King. All these writers have expanded the Mythos and have given it their own unique perspectives. But all have been based on Lovecraft's own horrific vision. And even today, over seventy years since his death, his tales continue to fascinate and mystify. So detailed are they and so intricate is their interlinking that some have even suggested that Lovecraft may, through his mother's family connections, have had access to a repository of ancient and arcane knowledge denied to ordinary, sane people, which he used as the basis for his macabre tales

But who exactly *was* H.P. Lovecraft and what was the source of his nightmarish vision? Did he truly use actual occult knowledge in his work? Do some of the entities which he described actually exist or are we better off not knowing? He was certainly an unusual individual who maintained an interest in Classical myth and esoteric branches of folklore and this pervaded the limits of his narrow but intense world. In a fascinating book on the subject of Lovecraft and his nightmares **Dr Bob Curran** seeks to untangle the influences which created the macabre visions which lie behind much of his fiction. He explores the roots many of the strange and eldritch deities which inhabit Lovecraft's fiction – of Cthulhu, of Shub Niggurath, of Father Yig of Nyarlathotep and of many more. Have these beings a parallel in ancient myth and legend with which Lovecraft himself might have been familiar and if so what might it be? Dr. Curran delves back into ancient Celtic, Roman, Arabian myth as well as medieval and early modern folk tales in order to find the underlying beliefs and traditions which Lovecraft might have used. He also examines how others have expanded upon these traditions and have taken them along strange new paths which even Lovecraft might have shied away from.

One of the dominant features of Lovecraft's work was the mysterious and blasphemous books, fragments and carved inscriptions to which his protagonists are often drawn – horrendous volumes such as the *Necronomicon*, the *Book of Eibon*, the *Cultes des Goules*. But do such books truly exist and what terrible secrets do they hold? In a section on occult lore, Dr. Curran traces not only the history of occult writing but examines a number of the books mentioned by Lovecraft to see if they have any parallel within the magical and supernatural canon and some of the conclusions may be extremely surprising!

And what of the strange and remote decaying and inward-looking places that Lovecraft used to set his bizarre tales? Locations such as Dunwich, Innsmouth, Arkham. Over the years these have been added to by other writers who have incorporated locations from other parts of the world such as Brichester and Stregocavar. Could they possibly exist or were they based on somewhere just as eerie and isolated as the descriptions themselves? And what about the mysterious and fantastic sites which Lovecraft and others wrote about – Leng, N'Kai, the Dreamlands? From where did their inspiration come? Certainly, as far as Lovecraft was concerned some of the locations were based on his native Rhode Island home but what of the others? Dr. Curran explores some of the possible places in our everyday world which may have formed a template for such sites.

And behind all the mystery and horror, is the shadowy figure of Lovecraft himself. What sort of a person was he? How did his personality contribute to the continued popularity of his tales? Was he as popular during his lifetime as he later became? Dr. Curran takes an in-depth look at the man behind the Mythos and traces how a strange and withdrawn child grew up to be an even stranger and more withdrawn man (his personal life was just as strange as that of some of his own creations) and how his fear, prejudices and paranoias shaped the terrible Universe in which ancient and monstrous beings ceaselessly roamed. And how did his fears and slight distaste for ways which were unfamiliar and perhaps abhorrent to him – the customs and beliefs of foreigners for example – translate themselves into the decrepit and degenerate individuals who populate his works? This too is explored in the book.

During his lifetime Lovecraft did not make much money from his work (in fact for most of it, he lived precariously close to penury) and was frequently dependent on others including, during a relatively brief marriage, a reasonably wealthy wife whom he all but deserted as soon as her money began to fail., yet he left behind a rich, unique and fantastic legacy of horror and fantasy. This has come down to us across the years and remains as popular today as ever. *A Haunted Mind* traces the evolution of the Mythos and the impact that it has had on modern supernatural fiction and in doing so shines a light into the dark and often twisted world of H.P. Lovecraft.