

The horror writer whose stories influenced Stephen King's novels, 'Prometheus,' Batman's Arkham Asylum and countless other works - and you may never have heard of him before

By [Associated Press Reporter](#)

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Influential: H.P. Lovecraft died poor and obscure in 1937, but his legacy lives on through the works he influenced

If you've enjoyed the works of Stephen King, seen the films 'Alien' or 'Prometheus,' or heard about the fictional Arkham Asylum in Batman, thank H.P. Lovecraft, the early 20th century horror writer whose work has been an inspiration to others for nearly a century.

The mythos Lovecraft created in stories such as 'The Call of Cthulhu,' 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward' and 'At the Mountains of Madness,' has reached its tentacles deep into popular culture, so much that his creations and the works they inspired may be better known than the Providence writer himself.

Lovecraft's fans want to give the writer his due, and this month are holding what they say is the largest celebration ever of his work and influence. It's billed the 'NecronomiCon,' named after another Lovecraft creation: a book that was so dark and terrible that a person could barely read a few pages before going insane. The August 22-25 convention is being held in Providence, where he lived and died – poor and obscure – at age 46 in 1937.

Howard Phillips Lovecraft was born in 1890. His parents both died in an insane asylum, his father when Lovecraft was just 8 years old, said S.T. Joshi, who has written a biography of Lovecraft and edited several collections of his work. He attended just three years of high school, leaving because of a nervous breakdown, Joshi said.

Besides a brief and unhappy marriage that took him to New York from 1924 to 1926, Lovecraft lived his whole life on Providence's East Side, close to Brown University. He wrote his most significant work after returning to Providence, publishing many of his stories in the magazine Weir Tales. He barely scraped together a living, but developed a wide network with fellow writers through letters, and wrote an estimated 80,000 of them in his lifetime.



Creeping horror: Many of the works that Lovecraft influenced are now far popular than Lovecraft is. Seen here, a scene from 'Alien'



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Stephen King, master of the horror genre, cites Lovecraft's stories as an influence and has included many references to Lovecraft's work in his books

Lovecraft said several times he could not live anywhere but Providence, a sentiment reflected in the gravestone his fans put up decades after his death: 'I AM PROVIDENCE,' a line they took from letters he wrote. The grave in a city cemetery is often visited today by fans, who leave trinkets or notes behind.

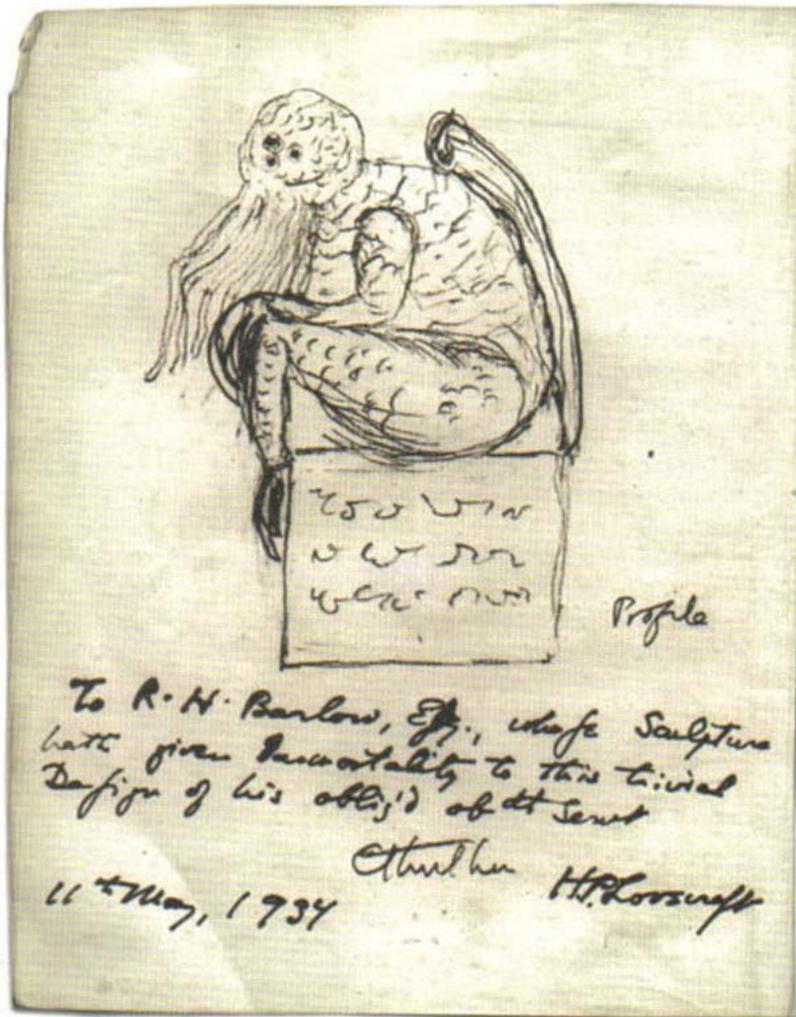
He was a fan of Edgar Allan Poe, a master of psychological horror, but Lovecraft tackled different themes.

He combined horror with science fiction and developed what is commonly referred to as cosmicism, the idea that man is inconsequential in the universe, that there are forces that defy human understanding in the cosmos, represented by gods or creatures who are far more powerful than us but also indifferent to us. To them, we are like ants or specks of dust. When we get in their way, we will be destroyed.

'A lot of these creatures have baffling physical properties that don't fit into our perceptions of natural law. For him the most terrifying thing that could happen is to defy our understanding of the known laws of physics,' Joshi said.

His most famous creature is Cthulhu.

'A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings,' Lovecraft writes. He likens it simultaneously to an octopus, dragon, and human caricature.



Perhaps Lovecraft's best known creation is his Cthulu monster, an ancient evil he created in a short story. The author's original sketch of the beast is seen here



This is the mansion in Lovecraft's hometown of Providence, Rhode Island, that served as a setting for one of his most famous works, 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward'



Providence served as the setting for many of Lovecraft's works, and it is the setting of NecronomiCon, a convention of Lovecraft fans that will be gathering this week

In 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth,' he writes of a race of creatures that are a cross between fish, frogs and man. The story inspired a Metallica song, 'The Thing That Should Not Be.'

Lovecraft's writing is detailed and dense.

'You're not going to pick up a Lovecraft novel and just breeze through it,' acknowledges Lovecraft fan Anthony Teth, who is helping to organize the conference.

He weaves in historical and architectural references throughout his stories, many of which are set in his beloved hometown or other spots he visited in New England, such as Salem, Massachusetts, (Arkham) and Newburyport, Massachusetts, (Innsmouth).

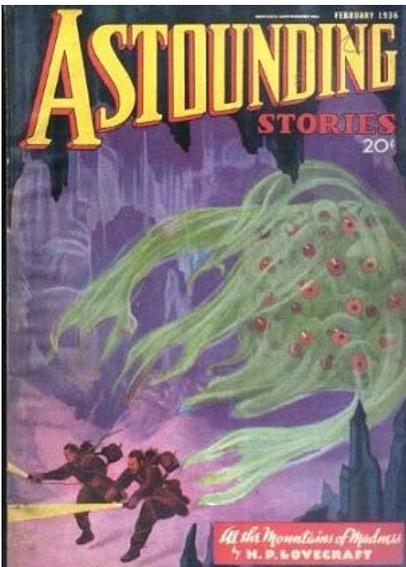


Batman's Arkham Asylum, which features prominently in a popular dark video game, was also inspired by a work by Lovecraft



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'Prometheus,' the 2013 science fiction film, draws its inspiration from a Lovecraft story



At the Mountains of Madness is said to have inspired the blockbuster science fiction film 'Prometheus'

In Providence, most of the buildings he wrote about are still standing, said Niels Hobbs, 43, a marine biologist who among those organizing the conference.

'When you walk the streets of Providence, especially College Hill, his old neighborhood, you can see Lovecraft's Providence. It's simply everywhere,' he said.

Even so, many Providence residents have no idea of Lovecraft's connection with the city and his importance in literature. There are no Lovecraft museums or prominent markers in the city.

His fans hope to change that with this week's conference, which will include walking tours of Lovecraft's old haunts, the unveiling of a new Lovecraft bust at one of his favorite spots, the Providence Athenaeum, and panel discussions on Lovecraft's work, even the negative aspects.

He was steeped in the past and suspicious of change, and like some of his contemporaries was racist and anti-immigrant, themes reflected in his stories including 'The Shadow Over Innsmouth.'

In recent years, appreciation for Lovecraft has grown worldwide. There have been film festivals on the West Coast of Lovecraft-themed movies and conferences in places such as Arizona and Vermont, and people come from all over the world to visit his grave.

Joshi said the market for horror has always been smaller than for other genres such as science fiction and detective fiction. Critics in the past have also dismissed horror, thinking it was all blood and guts, failing to recognize the stories are symbols for concerns about humanity's place in the universe. But he believes that is changing.

'I think we're finally getting to the era where horror fiction can be looked at more than just something to scare you,' he said.