



Letters

H.P. LOVECRAFT GETS HIS DUE

"I'm generally up to my armpits in the creepiest, slimiest, nastiest kind of critters that the ocean produces," Niels Hobbs says. We're discussing Hobbs's work as a freelance marine biologist who patrols the coastlines of Rhode Island and Massachusetts, studying invasive species. But it's not much of a leap to his interest in — and fierce advocacy for — Providence's most famous literary figure: horror writer H.P. Lovecraft.

On March 21, Hobbs will lead a Rhode Island Historical Society discussion at the John Brown House Museum titled "H.P. Lovecraft's 'Gods': Atheism and the Cthulhu Mythos." The lecture is the first in a series of 2013 events devoted to the man the *New York Review of Books* once dubbed "The King of Weird." On March 23, the RIHS will host a "literary walk" pointing out significant landmarks from Lovecraft stories. On April 7, the H.P. Lovecraft Commemorative Activities Committee will hold its annual tribute service on the lawn of Brown's Ladd Observatory, followed by a march to Swan Point Cemetery and Lovecraft's legendary "I AM PROVIDENCE" headstone.

Come late August, Providence will play host to hundreds of Lovecraft fans and scholars at NecronomiCon Providence 2013 — Hobbs & Co.'s reboot of the bygone Providence convention of the 1990s. Local venues and restaurants — like Julian's, where Hobbs and I are having lunch — will hold exhibitions of Lovecraft-inspired artwork. AS220's black box theater will host theater adaptations of the author's fiction and life story. The all-stars of the Lovecraft universe — biographer S.T. Joshi, renowned Lovecraftian filmmaker Stuart Gordon — will mingle with hordes of costumed creatures and Lovecraft lookalikes. Hobbs and his newly-christened non-profit, The Lovecraft Arts and Sciences Council, Inc., are dubbing it "The Month of Lovecraft."

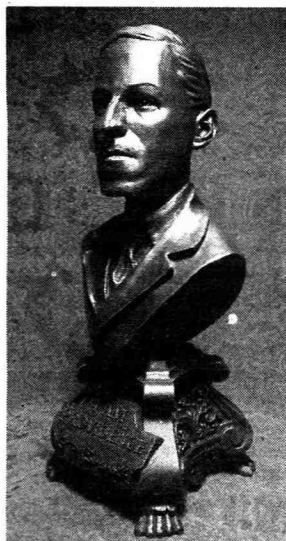
And that's just the beginning. Over lunch, Hobbs excitedly reports that the Athenaeum has just agreed to provide a home for a bronze bust of Lovecraft and that plans are in the works for the rededication of streets and squares in Lovecraft's honor — and perhaps even an "H.P. Lovecraft Day" in Providence.

Our interview is edited and condensed.

THE FLYER FOR YOUR RIHS EVENT SAYS THAT LOVECRAFT'S FICTION TRACES BACK TO "A PHILOSOPHY OF COSMICISM." WHAT IS "COSMICISM," EXACTLY? For Lovecraft, cosmicism is something that came out of his understanding, of the time, of the cutting edge of astrophysics and astronomy. And it's something that certainly still stands today as expressed by Neil deGrasse Tyson or Carl Sagan, where you think of the earth as the "pale blue dot" in this vast, unforgiving black gulf. And not only is the universe this vast, cold, dark place which doesn't really care about us on our little speck of dust, we're also just a speck of dust among many billions of other specks of dust out there that are also planets that may house life. And who knows what that life actually might be like?

WHAT CAME FIRST FOR YOU, MARINE BIOLOGY OR LOVECRAFT? There's a tandem event going on in my life. I don't want to overplay it too much, but there is definitely a very strong correlation between why I live in Providence, why I'm a marine biologist, and why this convention is happening. And that really is because of an early interest in his stories and a growing fascination with Providence, with the history of New England, with creepy creatures from the sea — all of these things sort of tie in together.

BUT YOU'RE A MAN OF SCIENCE. AND LOVECRAFT'S FICTION, WHILE REALISTICALLY RENDERED, IS STILL FICTION. That's the thing: he was also a man of science, you could easily argue. He was a prolific devourer of the latest science of the time, for good and bad. Some of that might even explain some of his racism: the fact that the '20s and '30s were the height of phrenology. These were all things that he gobbled up, along with the latest advances in physics and astrophysics and geology and such. One of the particular things that I like, coming from a scientist's point of view, is the fact that he writes this imaginative fic-





tion that includes things that are at least as weird as the stuff we find in our oceans, as opposed to so much of what Hollywood produces these days [which] are essentially [films featuring] the stereotypical guy in the spandex suit.

WHAT WOULD LOVECRAFT THINK OF THE NECRONOMICON 2013? He loved exchanging, what, 20,000 letters with all of his friends who were also authors or budding authors. I think the opportunity to actually meet with potentially 100 of them at one place and one time would have been something that he would have relished. And to have them come to his home, essentially, he would have loved. [But] I think he was far too modest to be able to withstand the adoring fandom that has built up around him now. So I think he might have ended up just being cloistered in his hotel room for most of the convention.

—Philip Eil

“I think [Lovecraft] was far too modest to be able to withstand the adoring fandom that has built up around him now.”

—NIELS HOBBS