



The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath

H.P. Lovecraft , E. Hoffmann Price

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Six bone-chilling tales of bizarre beauty and awesome horror lurk in the dark of the soul, waiting to be called upon by the demons of nightmares, and let loose in the frightened mind. Only H.P. Lovecraft could conjure up these testaments to evil that will live inside of you forever....

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The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath Details

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From Reader Review The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath for online ebook

Rose says

Well, that was painful!! At least I can say this book didn't beat me - I read the whole damn thing *pats self on back*.

I used to think back in the first half of the last century that authors were paid by the word. If you read some of the old stuff you'll see how they tend to ramble a lot. However, I think in this case he was paid by the adjective and adverb. Seriously, you couldn't fit another one in this story if you were using size 8 font and a crowbar. Does everything have to be described so intensely? I think not. You could probably cut 50 pages out just by stopping the over-descriptiveness.

To give you some idea of Lovecraft's writing, at least in this story, imagine Neil Gaiman and his most fantastical story ever. Now pump him full of LSD and magic mushrooms et voila, Lovecraft.

So, the story...as descriptive as it was, and as weird as it was, was overwhelmingly boring. The protagonist, Carter, has discovered a city in his dreams that he can see but cannot get to but he really, really wants to go there. This is the story of his travels through dreamland in search of this city. My dreamland is better than his. Really, everyone's dreamland is better than his. It was dark and full of monsters, and cats – apparently Lovecraft had a fondness for cats.

Would I recommend this? Hell no. Not to the average reader anyhow. Only people who've previously read Lovecraft should look at it. The rest of you, step away from the book.

elpida_la_blue says

Αν το παραλληλ?σεις με την "αρχ?γονη αναζ?τηση του ?γνωστου εαυτο?", ε?ναι ακ?μα πιο τρομακτικ? και συγκλονιστικ?. Αξεπ?ραστος Λ?βκραφτ. ?μουν συνοδοιπ?ρος του Κ?ρτερ κ?θε στιγμ?. ?μουν κι εγ? εκε?.

? Irena ? says

4.5

The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath is a wonderfully creepy horror story of one man's quest to find and reach a forbidden place with an unexpected and great ending. The lack of dialogue shouldn't be a surprise to any Lovecraft lover, but the imaginative way this story is told and filled with unearthly creatures while the protagonist is searching for a way to get to his destination should be enough to overlook that.

The main character is Randolph Carter who meets many strange and terrifying beings on his journey; beings like zoogs, ghastrs, gugs, nightgaunts and so on.

Whatever Randolph Carter encounters, whatever happens to him on his journey, he never stops going forward. There isn't a single place or a tavern where people don't try to warn him off his quest to get to Kadath. He never wavers. One of the beautiful things is that he gets help from unlikely sources.

There are so many references to other Lovecraft's stories here, I am certain I missed a few. Some of well-known characters play an even greater role than you might expect. Here you'll find out what happened to Kuranos and where exactly Pickman ended up after he had disappeared. The cats of Ulthar don't just make an appearance, but rather give this story a fairy tale touch. Even Nyarlathotep has a role to play.

Now, you can choose to read this story partly as a commentary on society. I'll simply read it as fantasy.

Katy says

Synopsis: Three times Randolph Carter dreamed of the marvelous city, and three times was he snatched away while still he paused on the high terrace above it. All golden and lovely it blazed in the sunset, with walls, temples, colonnades and arched bridges of veined marble, silver-basined fountains of prismatic spray in broad squares and perfumed gardens, and wide streets marching between delicate trees and blossom-laden urns and ivory statues in gleaming rows; while on steep northward slopes climbed tiers of red roofs and old peaked gables harbouring little lanes of grassy cobbles. It was a fever of the gods, a fanfare of supernal trumpets and a clash of immortal cymbals. Mystery hung about it as clouds about a fabulous unvisited mountain; and as Carter stood breathless and expectant on that balustraded parapet there swept up to him the poignancy and suspense of almost-vanished memory, the pain of lost things and the maddening need to place again what once had been an awesome and momentous place.

My Thoughts: Although it took me an unforgivably long time to get this whole story read, it was not through lack of interest, I assure you. I have looked at many reviews, and it appears that a lot of readers just didn't "get it" - describing it as a "travelogue" or such. But this... this is a brilliant little piece of dream-world building, and the ultimate aspiration of any lucid dreamer is to create a world as vivid as the world Randolph Carter creates for his own dreams (or at least I aspire to such - I have had dreams from which I have awakened, most reluctantly, while in the process of begging whomever I am with in the dream to hold me there somehow). Others complain of Lovecraft's racism, but ignore the fact that he was just parroting the thoughts of the time. Besides, anyone who venerates cats the way this guy does can't be all bad, right?

I reveled in the lush prose, enjoyed the horrors he creates in this short. I highly recommend Lovecraft to people who, like me, love words.

Nate D says

Back in college, I worked for a few semesters shelving books in the sub-basements of the library, which for some reason set it's 3 floor at ground level. Two floors below that was a largely-ignored fiction section, dimly lit by flickering lights that turned off automatically when no one was around. The farther corners never really got direct light, giving the whole space a perfect kind of eerie-cozy twilight feel, and in retrospect, it was a pretty amazing place to work. Not least because I usually kept up with my shelving pretty well and found time to browse the more esoteric sections when no one was around (almost always). Naturally, this

was the perfect place for reading Lovecraft. Most people tend to be less than thrilled with *Dreamquest*, I think, but in that context those strange winding mythologies were just about right.

Karl says

Lovecraft Illustrated Volume 1

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Dana Campbell says

Reading this was like slogging through quicksand. I wanted to enjoy it, I really did, but I just couldn't. I read at least 50 pages a day. This 101 page book took me the entire month to read. It's like Lovecraft sat down and said how many elaborate adjectives can I fit into each sentence. I have an expansive vocabulary so I only had to lookup a word every few pages but I can imagine most people would need a dictionary every few sentences. Also nothing happens. The book over there the most terrifying thing you've ever seen and in that corner something even more horrific. I couldn't care about Carter. I also had no idea why he was on this journey.

The part at the end about the spheres of music was vaguely interesting. I've also heard that Lovecraft thought this was the worst thing he had ever written so I'm not entirely sure why the book club picked this instead of another of lovecraft's books and I would definitely give Lovecraft another try at some point. If Goodreads let you give half stars I would give this 2 & 1/2 stars because I wanted to like it but I just couldn't.

Alan Smith says

H P Lovecraft is best known as a writer of highly original, wordy and grotesque horror tales, based on the premise that a displaced pantheon of evil tentacled gods lurk just outside our own ordered, settled world, and are only a hairsbreadth away from breaking back in and tearing the universe apart. But many may not be aware that there is a gentler side to the Providence Dreamer.

Now, speaking of this particular author's "gentle side" might seem as weird as anything he ever wrote, but in the early part of his writing career, Lovecraft came under the spell of Lord Dunsany, the Irish fantasist (whom Lovecraft actually heard lecture), and during this period he wrote many tales that are out and out fantasy, rather than the cosmic horrors he later penned.

This work is a collection of these tales, including three from the "Randolph Carter" cycle (Carter is an idealized version of the author, who spends his time searching out arcane lore and trying to avoid the modern world), together with "Celephais", a story about a man so obsessed with his dreams he fails to wake up, "The White Ship", a quest tale with a truly tragic conclusion, and "The Strange High House In The Mist", about a

guy who meets some of the more benevolent characters from mythology.

The Carter stories are particularly intriguing, telling of Randolph's search through the world of dream looking for a wonderful city to which the gods have denied him entrance - only to find that it is actually composed of his boyhood memories (*Dream Quest...*), his attempts to hold back the emotional collapse of middle age by dreaming himself firstly back into his own childhood, and then beyond (*Silver Key*) and finally into another dimension entirely, in which he becomes marooned (*Through The Gates...*) . Sure, these are fantasy, but there's nothing insipid about them - you'll look in vain for happy endings and friendly elves! In fact, in Carter's attempts to avoid the pressure of the world and recover the wonder of dreams you read a symbolic and mythological account of Lovecraft's own life and world-rejection... truly poignant stuff!

OK, Lovecraft can be wordy, overblown, and in his own way, didactic... but his writing has such power, imagination and originality that his faults are easy enough to forget. After all, what's a "rugose" or an "eldritch" or two between friends?

Bill Kerwin says

The Dream Quest may not be Lovecraft's best effort, but it is undeniably one of his most significant. It is a bridge—and a key—to his two greatest periods. Paradoxically, it is also both his most far-flung fantasy and his most revealing personal work.

Before *The Dream Quest* came the short stories influenced primarily by Poe and organized around a single effect (“The Outsider” to “Pickman's Model,” 1921–1926) and after came the Cthulhu-mythos novellas set in haunted, particularized landscapes (“The Colour Out of Space” to “The Haunter in the Dark,” 1927–1935). In between, though, there is this rambling dream-fantasy--stretching over valleys, seas, and caverns, all the way to the titanic black sculptures of the farthest North—which begins on the model of *Vathek*, in Dunsanian style, boasts an Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars-style plot, and ends with a “Wizard of Oz” moral: “Dorothy, there's no place like home.”

H.P.'s life was in transition too. After his beloved mother's death, he married Sonia Greene, seven years his senior, and the thirty-year-old Howard and his “take-charge” bride moved to Manhattan to seek their fortune. But her business failed, his stories fizzled: after a couple of years, she relocated to Chicago, and he returned to Providence.

The Dream Quest was written not long after H.P.'s return to Rhode Island, and it is filled not only with an enthusiasm for finely detailed landscapes and the flora and fauna which inhabit them, but also with a nostalgia for his own New England landscapes and the characters and spectres of his previous work, to which he frequently alludes. (For example, the eponymous “hero” of “Pickman's Model” appears here, under the name of “the ghoul who once was 'Pickman.'”)

Around the time that H.P. was writing *The Dream Quest*, he remarked, in a letter to Clark Ashton Smith: “Like Antaeus of old, my strength depends on repeated contact with the soil of the Mother Earth that bore me.” This elaborate dream fantasy, in an odd way, brought him even closer to this insight. Lovecraft's next major work was the short novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*. It is set in the city of Providence, Rhode Island, realized with particular descriptive detail, and its hero—whatever his origins--looks a lot like H.P. Lovecraft himself.

Dan Henk says

I think Lovecraft often gets a bad rap. People read that he influenced the modern greats, everyone from authors like Stephen King and Clive Barker, to movie makers like John Carpenter and Wes Craven, and then dive into his books expecting the same fare. He wrote for a different era. His mind-bending, first person surrealistic approach to a creeping, nameless horror stunned and fascinated huge segments of early century America. The America that read, that is, which wasn't nearly what it is today. I enjoy his approach, even if some of it is a bit florid, but his ideas are dauntless. They broke conventions and rearranged the way a future breed of horror authors would look at the world. Even today, I find them stunningly original, and well worth the read. If any sound familiar, it is only because they have been copied, usually far less efficiently, by later day authors.

sinéad says

Τόσο ονειρική? Ήταν η Αναζήτηση, τόσο μαγευτική? Ήταν και η εμπειρία ανήγνωσης αυτού του βιβλίου. Κι ως το καθυστέρησα, ξίριζε πολύ. Για κάθε του λεπτομέρεια, για την ονειρική του γλώσσα, τις περιγραφές και τον δομημένο του ονειρικό κόσμο.

Κόριε Σκοτεινή, μόνο εσύ ξέρεις πόσο σε αγαπώ για αυτό το δώρο.

Maureen says

the most boring lovecraft i have ever read. a lot of mythology here but not really much story. more of a travelogue -- it's back on the shelf. not sure when i will finish it.

i did go back and finish it but i must say it was excruciating. again, this is the disappointment i felt when i began to read lord dunsany who had been cited as influential by so many, and found that there really wasn't much of a story but rather a beautiful picture of strange places and people. so sadly, i will not be able to recommend this lovecraft. it's useful to read as a bestiary and atlas of his worlds, but i'd rather be given the opportunity to skip all the dry text and look at illustrations and maps instead.

and yes, i did like that army of cats. where do you think the two stars came from?

Thiago says

First, this story, I think, is just for the hardcore Lovecraft fan. Something that one must keep in mind is that “The Dream-Quest to Unknown Kadath” is very much a first draft; Lovecraft wrote it, decided that it was

bad and put it in a drawer (he was very critical with his own work). It was only some years after his death that it was published.

Here Lovecraft delves deep in his Dream World and in all craziness of dreams in general (or at least his dreams, which were certainly much crazier than mine). I guess one could say that this story is a weird mixture of Alice, Oz and Lovecraftian horror (although I'm not sure if one should, so excuse me if I do). Oh, and cats.

Anyway, one of the best things about this novella is that it references most of Lovecraft's body of work, especially those stories concerning Randolph Carter and what later became known as "the Dream Cycle". It is not just the references to places, creatures, hideous gods and tomes of forbidden lore, as is indeed usual in Lovecraft's fiction, but also we get to re-encounter many of the characters he created in previous tales (and that is quite rare in Lovecraft's work).

No doubt, this story has its fair share of problems, but I had so much fun reading it, the adventure, the perils, the battles, the cats - YAY Cats! -, the references (and the bonus of actually knowing that I knew them, it felt like sharing a secret with the man himself) that I couldn't possibly rate it with any less than five stars. I do acknowledge that it definitely does not achieve the same heights as most of what Lovecraft was writing around that time and after, like *The Call of Cthulhu*, *At The Mountains of Madness* or *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, just to name a few. And did I say it had cats? Yeah, they were some big damn heroes.

In conclusion, even though it, most certainly, wasn't Lovecraft's plan, the greatest thing about this story is finding the bits and pieces that are referenced throughout. Indeed, if one is not acquainted with most of Lovecraft's body of work that would end up being the story's main weakness, as most of it would seem disconnected.

Great stuff.

Tijana says

Ovo apsolutno i definitivno nije knjiga od koje treba po?eti s ?itanjem Lavkrafta, utoliko pre što su neke njegove stvari zapravo sasvim okej.

To na stranu... šta re?i, ovde Lavkraftove mane u pogledu jezika i stila dolaze do punog izražaja. Sve je užasno, stravi?no, jezivo i ?udovišno. I smrdljivo. Ali, varijacije radi, sa mnogo sinonima i to uglavnom latinizama da bi lepše zvu?alo. Samo da su izba?eni izlišni epiteti (jer zaista nema potrebe da se svaki put kad se pomene bi?e koje se hrani lešinama istovremeno pomene i da je neprijatnog mirisa, imajte malo poverenja u ?itaoce aman) knjiga bi bila solidno kra?a.

Pravde radi treba re?i da je Lavkraft solidno maštovit i da ume da izazove pravu horor jezu iako (opet) ova knjiga ni na tom planu nije najbolji primer. Zemlja snova kojom Lavkraftov junak ovde cunja ne bi li našao Kadat a potom i bezimeni grad za kojim zapravo traga - nema u sebi gotovo ni?eg oniri?nog, sve je nepomerljivo i trajno, nema pretapanja i alogi?nosti karakteristi?nih za snove kakve možemo na?i kod (recimo) Kafke ili Kortasara - fantasti?ni svet koji nam se predstavlja ima mnogo više zajedni?kog sa pri?ama lorda Dansejnika. Ima, dakle, upe?atljivih slika, ali one potonu pod teretom neumereno kitnjastog jezika.

I kona?no klju?ni i zaklju?ni problem: (view spoiler) Monstruozno, fabulozno, neizrecivo i neopisivo sam se razo?arala.

Algernon says

I remember thinking Lovecraft is not really my cup-of-tea when I first tried to read some of his stories. To a twelve years old curious about science and about voyages of discovery, the mystical and obscure master of horror could not compete with the likes of Jules Verne, Karl May or Alexandre Dumas. So it took almost 40 years (and a homage novella written this year by Kij Johnson) to make me come back to these nightmares realms ruled by malefic gods.

At the start of the quest, Randolph Carter looks to me like a scion of John Carter of Mars : he goes to sleep and wakes up in an alternate world, where he is carving out a kingdom for himself with daring sword and unflinching courage. Lovecraft may share the starting point with Burroughs, but the focus of the story is not pulpy planetary romance (alas! no scantily clad princess of Barsoom awaits Randolph in the Dreamland) but an indepth exploration of the hidden and often scary depths of our subconscious mind.

Carter resolved to go with bold entreaty whither no man had gone before, and dare the icy deserts through the dark to where unknown Kadath, veiled in cloud and crowned with unimagined stars, holds secret and nocturnal the onyx castle of the Great Ones.

While John Carter lies down in the desert and dreams of distant stars, Randolph Carter goes in his sleep to a magical city of indescribable beauty, a twilight wonder of marble halls, slender columns and twisting alleys by a topaz sea, a city that is locked against him by the hands of invisible Great Ones.

It was a fever of the gods, a fanfare of supernatural trumpets and a clash of immortal cymbals. Mystery hung about it as clouds about a fabulous unvisited mountain. [...] Vaguely it called up glimpses of a far forgotten first youth, when wonder and pleasure lay in all the mystery of days, and dawn and dusk alike strode forth prophetic to the eager sound of lutes and song, unclosing fiery gates towards further and surprising marvels.

Is Randolph on a quest to rediscover his youthful enthusiasm for the world, his thirst for adventure and for distant shores? How did the world of adults betrayed him, disappointed him? What made him reject the present day and take refuge in fantasy? A brief foray into the biography of the author, a sensitive man, alternatively passionate and depressive, tormented by life in the metropolis and yearning for a return to his home in Providence, Rhode Island, may offer an answer to these questions, but it is not a prerequisite for enjoying the journey Randolph Carter embarks on.

So to Celephais he must go, far distant from the isle of Oriab, and in such parts as would take him back to Dylath-Teen and up the Skai to the bridge by Nir, and again into the enchanted wood of the Zoogs, whence the way would bend northward through the garden lands by Oukranos to the gilded spires of Thran, where he might find a galleon bound over the Cerenarian Sea.

These names are resonant with promise of adventure and marvels, but right from the start the quest is threatened by the true rulers of the Dreamland, lesser and higher gods that dance to unknown tunes and bicker among themselves while turning a blind eye to the pitiful affairs of human ants. To unlock the gate of the sunset city, Randolph must address his plea to the highest supernatural authority in the universe. Problem is, the higher you climb up the god's ladder, the more fickle and irrational the gods become. I am not truly

familiar with the Cthulhu Mythos, but I believe there exists in the Lovecraft oeuvre a coherent vision of the things that lurk in the shadows of the waking world. The present novella is a prime example of this vision.

Always upward led the terrible plunge in darkness, and never a sound, touch or glimpse broke the dense pall of mystery.

A quick browse of the florid prose favoured by Lovecraft in describing these 'superior' beings can partly explain his lasting influence on readers and writers interested in the study of the supernatural:

unearthly immanence
tyrannous gods
elder witchery
cryptical
sinister
Cyclopean
gargantuan
prodigious void
gigantic, blind, voiceless, mindless
crawling chaos
grotesque

Makes you wonder what kind of nightmares haunted the dreams of Lovecraft, what existential dread sent him into despair and made him imagine that there is no ultimate answer to the question of life, nothing but a **last amorphous blast of nethermost confusion which blasphemes and bubbles at the centre of all infinity**

I didn't much like this bombardment of lurid images, this insistence that we are doomed by invisible chaos, not when I was twelve, and honestly not so much now in my fifties. But I can at least appreciate the monumental struggle of the individual against the darkness waiting to engulf him every night, the heavy price paid by the artist, by the dreamer who dared to descend into Hell and bring back to us a clarion call of warning and an entreaty not to lose sight of our private sunset city, this **symbol and relic of your days of wonder**

Lovecraft, like Randolph Carter, was constantly plagued by night-gaunts, ghouls, gugs, ghashts, zoogs, moon-beasts, shantak-birds and evil priests, but parts of the Dreamland are still reminiscent of his youthful days of wonder. The author's utopia bears witness to the less savoury things I heard about the author : a W.A.S.P. exclusive resort, male only, darkies to be used as slaves or servants or cannon-fodder. Cats are allowed favored-nation status, but that's about it as far as Lovecraft is concerned. Most of the racial insensitivity is not particular to Lovecraft, but a mirror of the larger views held by his entourage and by a lot of philosophers and political leaders of the period the story was written. Same can be said about the purple prose, something most of the readership expected in their Weird Tales. I would never recommend banning an author for his private views, especially since his contribution and influence on the genre is undeniable.

Since October with its Halloween themed reads is just a month away, I plan to further explore the universe of Lovecraft. I am sure there are more haunting gems to be discovered among his stories:

Perched on that ledge night found the seeker; and in the blackness he might neither go down nor go up, but only stand and cling and shiver in that narrow place till the day came, praying to keep awake less sleep loose his hold and send him down the dizzy miles of air to the crags and sharp rocks of the accursed valley.

The stars came out, but save from them there was only black nothingness in his eyes; nothingness leagued with death, against whose beckoning he might do no more than cling to the rocks and lean back away from an unseen brink.

Jakk Makk says

Better on audiobook. Not an entry level volume. Dream-quest is a strange first choice since it was a Lovecraft first draft. This advanced mythos touches on several stories not present here. This volume would be better if it contained the, *Cats of Ulthar* and other tales. No doubt this has to do with some publishing brouhaha. A better collection can be had for free online. Beware, Dream-quest has subject matter repugnant to many.

The Silver Key and *Through the Gates of the Silver Key*, are my two favorite mythos stories. As for you, find a better collection.

Celephais, *White Ship*, and *the Strange High House in the Mist*, are reviewed under their titles.

Here is my preferred order, assuming you read all of the Dreamlands: Hypnos as best introduction-- then chronological, Doom that Came to Sarnath, Quest of Iranon, the Other Gods, Hypnos, Cats of Ulthar, Celephais, Strange High House, Dreamquest, Silver Key, Through the Gates, The White Ship.

Lyn says

Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer commercial take 17:

Randolph Carter: Hi, I'm Randolph Carter, star of Lovecraft's Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath -

Cthulhu: And I'm Cthulhu and need no introduction.

CUT!

Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer commercial take 26:

Cthulhu: I drink Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer because it tastes great.

RC: and I drink it 'cause it's less filling. It's the Dream Cycle side of Lovecraft's canon, while referencing the darker Cthulhu stories, it is more fantasy than horror -

Cthulhu: that's right Nancy -

CUT!

Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer commercial take 42:

RC: Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer, clean and refreshing, harkening back to a more whimsical, fantastic time of Edgar Rice Burroughs and L. Frank Baum –

Cthulhu: Yep, it is to my mythos as lemonade is to Jack Daniels – as to my Old Ones as Air Supply is to Black Sabbath –

CUT!

Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer commercial take 61:

Cthulhu: I don't always drink craft beer, but when I do, I like to drink Arrogant Bastard Ale –

CUT!

Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer commercial take 77:

RC: Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer takes you back to dreamy, fantastic yarns of an older, more innocent time, inspiring later writers like Jack Vance and John Varley –

Cthulhu: And the Care Bears and Smurfs. So drink Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath craft beer, if you like your fantasy hoppy as an IPA and not too boozy – or horrific.

Dfordoom says

H. P. Lovecraft's *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* is one of his fantasy, rather than horror, stories. Lovecraft was very much influenced by the great British fantasist Lord Dunsany. It's exactly what the title says it is – it's a dream quest, wherein the great dreamer Randolph Carter dreams a dream to find the fabulous sunset city which he has so far never quite been able to reach in his dreams, because the gods (possibly the gods of Earth, or the more mysterious outer gods) have prevented him. It's a book which really has no right to work. There isn't much of a plot, and Lovecraft's prose is even more impossibly overblown and overelaborated and generally overdone than normal. But somehow it does work. The prose is unbelievably purple, but it suits the dreamworld perfectly, and captures the right mood of impossibility. The dreamworld Lovecraft creates is bizarre and grotesque, but sometimes beautiful and often glorious. The army of cats is absolutely fabulous! And the idea of the cats who, at night, climb to the highest rooftops and then leap to the dark side of the moon – it's just a marvellous idea and it works beautifully. There are whimsical moments such as this, and there's humour (and Lovecraft's humour is often underestimated). If you've only read his horror his fantasy will come as a surprise, and a very pleasant surprise. I liked this one very much.

David Sarkies says

Kubla Cthulu

30 December 2017

While this rather long short story was not necessarily based upon the poem with an interesting background by Coleridge, it still reminded me of it quite a lot, except of the part where he is woken up halfway through his opium induced dream state by some guy from Portlock who refused to go away to get him get back to his trip (well, it didn't happen that way, but it still sounds cool). Actually, considering Lovecraft was a bit of a teatottler then descending into a heroin induced dream isn't really his style, though I should remember that this is not so much a story about him, but a story about one of his reoccurring character's: Rudolph Carter.

The version that I read has a short story about Carter before this one, though it is probably more a statement than a story. However, one thing that seems to have been consistent with the Lovecraft stories that I have read so far has the main character wander into some ruins or whatnot, come across a deep pit descending into the Earth, and upon entering these pits uncovering some indescribable horror. In a way I was starting to expect more of the same, except that *Dreamquest of Unknown Kadath* does take a different path.

Much like *Kubla Khan*, Carter has a dream of a beautiful and magnificent city, and decides that he must go and look for this city, however the only beings that happen to know the location of this city are the old gods of Earth. The only way for Carter to reach them though is to go on a dream quest, so he descends into the world of dreams and goes on what is quite a long, and adventurous, journey, to look for the gods and discern the location of this magnificent city. In the process he gets kidnapped by some rather disreputable sailors, leads an army of cats against some monstrous entities, and makes some friends with ghouls, who happen to be the souls of those who have died.

In a way this story is somewhat different than what one would expect from Lovecraft in that it is more of a fantasy adventure than a horror story. Okay, a lot of the horror elements are still present, though unlike many of the other stories, it seems as if Carter is able to deal with them without going insane – maybe it has something to do with him being in a dream world than in reality. In many cases it reads like a fantasy story, though, with the exception of the ghouls, ghasts, and cats (and humans), most of his encounters involve creatures with names worthy of Cthulu himself. Oh, and it is also set in the world of Cthulu, which means that the elder gods that Carter seeks aren't the anthropomorphic gods that we are all familiar with (and Nyarlathotep, the crawling chaos, seems to regularly make an appearance).

One of the interesting things about this mythos that I discovered happens to do with the cats. It seems as if cats are not only antagonistic towards many of the nasties that inhabit Lovecraft's realms, but they are actually able to deal with them. I guess this idea stems back to the Egyptians who first domesticated cats so that they could deal with the snakes, but then raised them to some godlike status. In a way the suggestion is that having a cat around is a good thing because against the supernatural and the horrific they are much more capable defenders than are dogs (and Stephen King even borrowed the idea for one of his short stories). In fact the image of Carter wandering through the world among an army of cats was somewhat cool. Mind you, like the cats that we all know, these cats also have a mind of their own, and don't so much travel with Carter because he persuaded them to, but rather for their own reasons.

Then there is this idea of the dream. Carter seems to go into the dream world to escape from the dull and dreary world in which he lives to find something that he believes is truly glorious. Mind you, whether anything in the world of Cthulu can be truly considered glorious, as opposed to horrific, is a question open to debate, but this dream that Carter had no doubt grabbed his imagination to make him want to leave the familiar and travel to the fantastic. Yet, interestingly, the further we descend into the dreamquest, the more we forget that we are actually living in a dream. It is sort of like the statement 'reality is a state of mind without drugs'. Many people take drugs (in fact most of them) to escape reality – in a way they provide a gateway to the world of dreams, a world where the dreariness of society no longer exists. The problem is that the more you descend into the world the more you become disconnected from reality.

Dreams are always funny, and those annoying alarm clocks that yank us out of a world that appears to be much better than the work-a-day world in which we exist are the bane of our existence. Yet, like drug users, when we catch a glimpse of this heavenly realm the more we pursue them, and the more we disconnect ourselves from reality. In fact there are people that make substantial amounts of money, and countless pieces of literature, about interpreting dreams. In a way we want to attain that heavenly realm in much the same way that Carter wanted to reach this heavenly city. Yet the reality is that we are always dragged back into the real world by annoying men from Portlock, and like Coleridge, we simply cannot return.

(view spoiler)

Sr3yas says

Opens the door

My friend, The Dreamlands of Dylath-Leen, Ulthar, Oriab, Celephaïs, even the accursed Plateau of Leng and the unknown golden city of Kadath awaits your pre...

I love Lovecraft's tales from Cthulhu cycle, but his Dream cycle tales and I have a rocky relationship. And Dream-quest of Unknown Kadath is **THE** Dream cycle tale. It tells the odyssey of Carter through the vast dreamlands to find the mysterious unknown city, Kadath. As Carter progresses through his quest, he gets kidnapped and gets taken to the moon, makes allies with cats, gets kidnapped by flying monsters, makes allies with ghouls, gets kidna... Okay, I'm going to stop now.

Lovecraft wrote this novella in the 1920s, and just like his novel *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, Lovecraft never published the story in his life because he thought it was crap. Now, I disagree with Lovecraft about the quality of Charles Dexter Ward, but his instinct about Kadath is quite accurate.

It's crap.

Okay, that's a bit harsh. It's a vast, imaginative story filled with diverse creatures, gods, civilization, and worlds. But ultimately it's pointless and even unreadable at times.

Nevertheless, Dream-quest is an important tale as Lovecraft weaves characters and stories from his previous works to this gigantic dream. He brings our protagonist from *The Statement of Randolph Carter* (1919), supporting characters from *Pickman's Model* (1926), *Celephaïs* (1920), *The Cats of Ulthar* (1920), *The other gods* (1921) and probably more that I missed. Lovecraft has never connected so many short stories together like this in any of his other works. I just wish he had a better story to tell.

The cats are cool though.

There are also five short stories included in this collection, all from dream cycle. The Silver Key and

Through the gates of Silver Key is soft sequels to Randolph Carter's Journey, and while The Silver Key is fun-ish, the latter is a cosmic mess with a decent ending.

The White Ship and The Strange High House in the Mist are the two decent short stories in this collection, and it tells the stories of men who brushed with the wonders and gods of other worlds.

Verdict: When it comes to Lovecraft's Dream cycles, the shorter the stories are, the better.
