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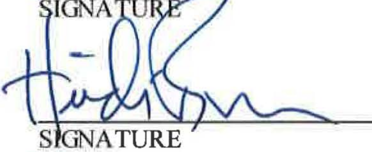

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Dark Lens: Postcolonial Lovecraftian Interactive Fiction

David Davis

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Chapter One: The Love/Hate of Lovecraft

Many tropes come to mind regarding the label "Lovecraftian." One may think of gentleman narrators being driven mad by hidden occult knowledge, or giant, tentacled Elder Gods who toy with humanity. These Lovecraftian images often result from a collective misunderstanding of themes and aesthetics in the work of Howard Phillips Lovecraft and many of these tropes fail to address the colonialist tendencies of H. P. Lovecraft. Lovecraftian scholars agree that H. P. Lovecraft was racist and that to varying degrees his writing was fueled by his hatred of "the Other."[1] This hatred is important to understand because many of the tropes H. P. Lovecraft utilized so effectively in his work to marginalize people of color and reinforce his colonialist impulses are foundational elements of contemporary horror. As a result, the enjoying of Lovecraft's cosmic horror stories can feel problematic for many readers because there is a concern that celebrating the author's work may also celebrate his colonialist and racist views. My project is an interactive fiction narrative that explores themes of cosmic horror though a postcolonial framework while utilizing Lovecraft's aesthetics to subvert the original colonialist views. My intent with this creative project is to interrogate Lovecraftian tropes and reclaim them. To accomplish this, I identify three aesthetic tropes in addition to a central philosophy of terror that makes a work Lovecraftian and are necessary for fitting a work into this genre: These tropes are the thematic usage of isolation, nihilistic mythology, and descriptive or interpretive ambiguity. I will be establishing the importance of these tropes by exploring Lovecraft's fiction and attitude toward writing, specifically in the context of one of his most famous stories, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth." To show that these tropes are usable as resistance to Lovecraft's colonialist attitudes, I will analyze Lovecraft's "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" illustrating how

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[1] Houellebecq, Harman, Sederholm and Weinstock among others

the tropes function in one of his most iconic tales, then I will then utilize these tropes in the creation of my own resistance narrative, titled *Dark Lens*.

My creative project, *Dark Lens*, involves the usage of these three major Lovecraftian tropes that were used in service of Lovecraft's colonial perspective which I will utilize as a form of resistance to the colonial origins of his writing to engage in a process of decolonialist intervention. I will be doing this by developing a story with resistance themes in mind by repurposing, commenting on, and reflecting on elements of Lovecraft's aesthetic. Furthermore, I will be including a significant component of interactivity where readers of my project, a Twine-driven narrative, will make choices that will have the potential to fundamentally alter the trajectory of the story. Given the interactive nature of my project, as it is a reader-driven story through usage of choices and the indexing of choices made by readers, I am inviting intrusion into my own work and giving up control of my narrative to a degree – something that subverts the Lovecraftian fear that comes with a loss of control in one's own universe.

Critical Framework

Lovecraftian Scholarship

Lovecraft's posthumous popularity ultimately led to a late bloom of significant scholarship on his writing. There are three periods of Lovecraftian scholarship based on attitudes towards the author over the decades. The first period was one of preservation, led by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, contemporaries of Lovecraft who sought to collect Lovecraft's writings for preservation (Joshi, *An Epicure in the Terrible* 39). The pair, unsuccessful in finding a publisher for the material, took matters into their own hands by forming Arkham House, which

to this day remains in operation under the management of Derleth's family.[2] This first period, beginning with the formation of Arkham House in 1939, spans until roughly the mid-1970s. During this period, a combination of burgeoning scholarship, a growing fan base, and foreign-language translations began to shape the idea of Lovecraft's literary merit. Lovecraft's scholars in this period were few: Edmund Wilson, Colin Wilson, T. O. Mabbott, Peter Penzoldt, George T. Wetzel, Matthew H. Onderdonk, and Fritz Leiber represent most of the scholarship of this period (40). Much of this scholarship was akin to evangelism; there was a fervent desire to justify the study of Lovecraft. Even into the 1990s, S. T. Joshi suggests that many writers approached scholarship of Lovecraft is such a manner (40). The effort of this first period of scholarship, however, was largely successful, as the second period of scholarship consists not so much of the justifying of Lovecraft's influence, but rather exploring how that influence shaped horror literature.

The second period of Lovecraft scholarship arose in the 1970s and spanned, roughly, into the early 1990s. S. T. Joshi, who is the most influential living scholar of Lovecraft's works, and perhaps more influential even among figures such as Derleth and Wandrei, would ultimately best represent this period. Derleth's work in the first period would prove controversial regarding interpretations of Lovecraft's themes, because as in the late 1960s into the 1970s, writers such as S. T. Joshi, Richard L. Tierney, Dirk W. Mosig, and L. Sprague de Camp all seemed to focus on correcting some of Derleth's more Christian-influenced interpretations of Lovecraft's mythology (40). Robert M. Price, in his 1982 essay "The Lovecraft-Derleth Connection" notes that "Mosig suggests that it was Derleth's Roman Catholic upbringing, deeply engrained [sic], that made him 'unable to share Lovecraft's bleak cosmic vision' (Price). Whereas Lovecraft's own writing was

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[2] Derleth coined the moniker of the "Cthulhu Mythos" which is widely used today (Price, "Lovecraft's Artificial Mythology" 247).

often fatalistic, Derleth's Catholicism expressed itself in his own interpretation of the "mythos" as being expressions of conflicts between good and evil. Lovecraft does not utilize this broad conflict of good and evil often, though, as Price notes, "Lovecraft, too, had 'good guys', and sometimes they won" (Price). Often, though, these victories are merely the staving off the inevitable destruction of humankind. The work of Price here is an example of the scholarship of this second period. With Lovecraft having be established as a figure of literary note through efforts in the first period, discourse surrounding him expanded significantly in the second period.

The third and current period of scholarship arose in the 1990s and continues today. If the first two periods represent advocating for Lovecraft's literary merit and significance, then this third period seems to dwell on modern interpretations of Lovecraft's canon. Lovecraft's literary influence and merit established by the previous periods resulted in difficult questions in contemporary scholarship regarding his influence in horror literature, given his colonialist attitudes. Graham Harman's *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*, published in 2012, represents this third period of Lovecraftian scholarship. Harman applies a speculative realist lens to the writings of H. P. Lovecraft, establishing a philosophical perspective that reality is far more terrifying and unexplainable than we would care to admit, for "real objects are locked in impossible tension with the crippled descriptive powers of language" (Harman 27). This is not unlike Lovecraft's frequent usage of indescribable horrors that his characters confront, there is a failure of language to depict the "reality" his works present. Harman's influence seems to be so great that this third period is primarily driven by philosophical explorations of Lovecraft's themes. *The Age of Lovecraft*, published in 2016, owes a great deal to Harman's philosophical explorations. Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock suggest, "the most strident case for Lovecraft's twenty-first-century philosophical significance is made by Graham Harman, a

central figure within the object-oriented ontology branch of speculative realist philosophy" (4). Modern interest in Lovecraft for philosophical purposes poses problems, however. There is a growing movement to recognize that his influence, while major, also carries the weight of his toxic racism. Sederholm and Weinstock concur, outlining that a major component in the discussion of Lovecraft needs to concern Lovecraft's views on race; however, they note the tendency of S. T. Joshi to attempt to avoid these issues as focal points in the discussion of Lovecraft (25). This is problematic as S. T. Joshi wields tremendous influence in the field of Lovecraft studies and his reluctance to address issues of racism is puzzling at best and divisive at worst. An awareness of Lovecraft's racism does tend to overpower one's reading of his texts as well, as Sederholm and Weinstock indicate that the awareness of Lovecraft's racism can often lead to his texts as being seen simply as "transcripts of racist beliefs," rather than critical engagement of larger issues of the self and other (27). As a result, this third period of Lovecraftian discourse seems to be the recognition and exploration of Lovecraft's flaws and the resistance to his views on race. Ultimately, Lovecraft is a tangle of paradoxes; a racist who married a Jewish woman, a brilliant, scientific-minded writer with antiquated, regressive views on race, and a man who appreciated the sublime beauty of landscapes but seemed to carry a philosophy of nihilistic entropy. I make no claims to have any insight to how to detangle the contradictions of Lovecraft; my engagement with the scholarship is to recognize these issues and take them into account as I craft my own narrative of resistance to Lovecraft's colonialist impulses. I will do this, for example, by creating narrators who are not in the typical Lovecraftian aesthetic, such as characters who do not benefit from colonialism. Another way I can resist colonialist impulses is to develop narratives within the text that present colonialist actions from the perspective of those who are being colonized.

Horror Theory

Lovecraft's writings evoke more of a mood of terror rather than outright horror or revulsion. Many authors have contributed to such divisions and classifications under the overarching genre of horror fiction, which, based on my engagement with the scholarship, presents three dominant moods associated with horror fiction. Conceptually, I view this as a triad consisting of the reactions to a horror story falling under the classification of terror, horror, and revulsion. While terror and horror have fuzzy boundaries and sometimes appear interchangeable, there is a distinct difference between them. Devendra P. Varda's *The Gothic Flame* states that "the difference between Terror and Horror is the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse" (130). By Varda's interpretation, of which I subscribe to, terror is best expressed as an aura of anxiety or an atmosphere of dread that comes with the expectation of something horrifying right around the corner or at the edges of our perception. Terror is only one mood associated with the genre of horror, however. The emotion of horror, distinct from the overarching genre, is often associated with abjection or the rejection of that which violates our conceptions of self; this can refer to a breakdown between the self or other, or on a more symbolic level, the subject or object. Julia Kristeva, author of *Powers of Horror*, illustrates this through various examples, among which the corpse is the most powerful of these abject concepts as it represents the finality of death and is a harsh reminder of our mortality (3). The emotional response of horror is most often associated with the specter of death - or the physical reminders of death and sickness - bleeding wounds, vomit, rot, decay. Death haunts Lovecraft's stories, but a fear of death is not necessarily what drives the horror in his tales; Lovecraft's abject is far more metaphysical. Given Lovecraft's

materialist leanings and pessimism of life itself, death is simply part of a cycle. Referring to his correspondence with Farnsworth Wright makes this clear as Lovecraft states "that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large" ("To Farnsworth Wright"). Death is entropy, and entropy is merely a part of material existence. Lovecraft's abject is not the rot and decay associated with death - it is that ultimately none of material existence matters or carries significance at large to an indifferent cosmos.

Lovecraft's materialist nature, which eventually evolved into the philosophy of Cosmicism, a fundamental indifference to humanism and a lack of belief in a God, akin to atheism, recognizes death as an inevitability; for at the center of Cosmicism is a belief in a universe indifferent to the concerns of humankind (Price, "Lovecraft's Artificial Mythology" 248). Lovecraft encapsulates the nature of Cosmicism in one of his letters, writing, "Individuals are all momentary trifles bound from a common nothingness toward another common nothingness" (Joshi, *The Evolution of the Weird Tale* 88). Humankind, in his fiction, is not the first, nor would they be the last residents of planet Earth. Countless beings grow and fade across the cosmos. What Lovecraft expresses as abject is the realization and confrontation of beings that fundamentally alter the human-centric perspective of the universe. Images and signs of death can be abject in Lovecraft's stories, such as the fate of the patriarch of the Gardner family in "The Colour Out of Space," but Lovecraft suggests something worse than death: the unknown. After all, as written in "The Call of Cthulhu," "that is not dead which can eternal lie, and with strange aeons even death may die" (31). Lovecraft's horror is not the realization of the monstrous form of Cthulhu, but rather that the monster will outlast any record of humankind. Evoking Kristeva's notion of the abject as a form of violation, the genre of horror is about the transgression of borders we have established, socially, bodily, or psychologically. Cthulhu, a being that slumbers

beyond the final breaths of humankind, violates that metaphysical constant of death. Just because we die does not mean those deaths are of any significance beyond that which *we* attach to them, for the universe continues ever forward toward entropy. The abject does have an important place in Lovecraft's fiction of course, beyond abject, boundary-shattering moments; there is also abjection manifest in Lovecraft's views on race.

The cosmic indifference of Lovecraft's worldview is represented by the otherworldly beings that haunt his prose. They go by many names, and in most cases, one can classify them as monsters. Some of them are beings known to his readers such as Azathoth, Shoggoths, and Deep Ones. But others have transcended the boundaries of pulp-literature; one cannot forget Cthulhu, an icon of horror. Lovecraft's monsters are repulsive and abject beings not from their appearance, though it certainly helps, but rather what they represent. Lovecraft's monsters are beings beyond true comprehension, transgressive entities that exhibit supernatural abilities, non-human intelligence, or, in the Lovecraftian model, beings with no discernable human motivations for their actions, violating the border of our understanding of the natural world. Noël Carroll's, *The Philosophy of Horror: or, Paradoxes of the Heart*, bridges this gap from the emotion of horror to the aesthetic concept of horror-fiction, which he defines as "Art-Horror" (27). This is separate from the emotion of horror in the context of our immediate reality, manifested, for example, in traumas, massacres, and other horrifying things we may encounter in life - dubbed "natural horror" (12). Such trauma or physical results of trauma often generate feelings of revulsion, just as the trauma of death leads to spoiled flesh, which is abject. Lovecraft's monsters are traumatic, not only to Lovecraft's narrators, but to Lovecraft himself. For his narrators there is the horror of realization. For Lovecraft, he evokes racial terror in his writing by having the threat of the foreign always lurking on the periphery.

One thing to account for is that Stephen King, arguably one of the most influential and successful of Lovecraft's literary descendants, complicates this concept of the difference between terror and horror by introducing a third term in his book *Danse Macabre* – revulsion. King positions revulsion as the gag-reflex, the physical reaction to something shocking or abject (22). Referring to the notion of the difference between terror and horror as the moment of apprehension and the moment realization, respectively, then King's wrinkle is this - revulsion is the nausea when seeing the corpse. So then where does H. P. Lovecraft's brand of horror, as a genre, fit in this triad? Elements of the abject horror, terror, and revulsion are all present in the work of H. P. Lovecraft.

H. P. Lovecraft's writing most often skews towards the dread of psychological terror than the abject shock of horror or the Kingsian notion of revulsion. Lovecraft's writing is effective in generating mood and terror, but rarely does he deliver on sustaining that tension through horrific reveals. Michel Houellebecq, in *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life* addresses this, pointing out that "after fifty laborious pages [...] the reader might feel a little disappointed. He had been expecting something more terrifying" (53). Despite this, Lovecraft's prose is still quite affecting - sustaining mood and tension over pages and pages of prose. This is something that Lovecraft had considered in his own writing process by emphasizing atmosphere. Lovecraft-scholar S. T. Joshi argues, in *The Evolution of the Weird Tale*, that atmosphere sustains a Lovecraftian weird tale (94). This Lovecraftian atmosphere is one of anxiety, which considering the emotional triad of horror fiction - the moods of terror, horror, and revulsion - aligns Lovecraft's work most closely to terror. In his 1933 essay, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," Lovecraft conveys that "in writing a weird story I always try very carefully to achieve the right mood and atmosphere, and place the emphasis where it belongs [...] This marvel must be treated

very impressively and deliberately—with a careful emotional 'build-up'— else it will seem flat and unconvincing" ("Notes on Writing Weird Fiction"). This careful and sustained establishing of atmosphere is often what allows readers to buy into the metaphysical anomalies presented in his work; anomalies such as his non-Euclidean geometries of "At the Mountains of Madness," the sunken city with a slumbering cosmic titan of "The Call of Cthulhu," or indescribable alien colors of "The Colour Out of Space." Lovecraft prioritizes a mood of dread in his weird fiction, this dread being something sustained as long as possible to achieve the greatest result - this is that element of psychological terror that drove the philosophy of his work, an awareness of something on the cusp of our understanding and the escalating anxiety that results.

Postcolonial Theory

The study of Lovecraft's writing and biography leads to the realization of Lovecraft's colonialist attitude. Even though he had anxieties regarding colonialism putting him in contact with "the Other," many of his attitudes on science, civil rights, and politics perpetuated the general colonialist hegemony of the 1920s and 1930s, his most active and influential periods of writing. His colonialist-perspective, most obviously represented by his views on race, fueled his vivid hatred and fears. Lovecraft's most productive period was a reaction to his abject misery in a multicultural New York for only two years. S. T. Joshi describes this New York period as "[beginning] with a heady cosmopolitanism that saw Lovecraft acting the part of the carefree sophisticate; but as the atmosphere of New York began steadily to wear away at him, Lovecraft came to realize that his New England heritage meant much more to him than he had believed" (Joshi, *A Subtler Magick* 44). This is certainly a diplomatic view of Lovecraft's experience of New York, but I feel it attempts to mitigate the intensity of Lovecraft's hatred of those who did

not match his ethnic ideal of white, Anglo-Saxon, and protestant. Michel Houellebecq's depiction of this New York period, colored by Lovecraft's *own words*, gleaned from his correspondences, offers a view closer aligned to Lovecraft's own thoughts:

> And it was in New York that his racist opinions turned to full-fledged racist neurosis. Being poor, he was forced to live in the same neighborhoods as the "obscene, repulsive, nightmarish" immigrants. He would brush past them on streets and in public parks. He was jostled by "greasy sneering half-castes," by "hideous negroes that resemble gigantic chimpanzees" in the subway. (105-106)

Houellebecq's description is chilling in the abject racism portrayed, pulled from Lovecraft's own correspondences and notes. In a letter to Clark Ashton Smith, Lovecraft conveys how influential the racial anxieties of New York were on his writing:

> The idea that black magic exists in secret today, or that hellish antique rites still exist in obscurity, is one that I have used and shall use again. When you see my new tale "The Horror at Red Hook", you will see what use I make of the idea in connexion [sic] with the gangs of young loafers & herds of evil-looking foreigners that one sees everywhere in New York. (*Selected Letters* vol. 2 27)

Joshi's acknowledgement of racism in Lovecraft's views treats the racism inherent in the man as a curiosity, whereas Houellebecq illustrates this racism as a driving force in Lovecraft's fiction. Lovecraft's racism was sharpened by New York, a melting pot, a city that was rendered more diverse from the spoils of colonial intervention on the part of the United States. Just as the colonizer intrudes on a foreign landscape, the colonized make their way back; in a Lovecraftian sense, the host becomes infected from the exposure to "the Other."

How colonial viewpoints are manifest and how the literary world has reacted to these views through postcolonial theory helps to uncover ways of resisting the legacies of colonialism. One area to consider is the act of looking, particularly given how a colonial nation forces a subject position on other nations, such as the case of conceptions of "the East" by Western powers. Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* grapples with Western representations and conceptions of "the East" through a concept of exoticism referred to as orientalism. Lovecraft is no stranger to orientalist perspectives in his own writings, such as the creation of the "mad Arab" Abdul Alhazred, who in Lovecraft's mythology, is the creator of the *Necronomicon*. Lovecraft's view of "the East" is less than flattering, in line with modes of looking that Said explores in *Orientalism*. On the other hand, how does the exotic "East" communicate with the colonizing "West?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" poses that central question; can the colonized express themselves if it is in the language or context of the colonizers? Spivak's essay discusses the practice of sati, or ritualistic widow's suicide in certain populations of India and the conflict comes from the apparent inability of practitioners to articulate their practice under the judging gaze of the "West." For example, Lovecraft's depictions of "the blackest of African voodoo circles" or "Esquimaux" engaged in a cult of "deliberate bloodthirstiness and repulsiveness" (Lovecraft, "The Call of Cthulhu" 28) are examples of this Western gaze. One wonders what the subjects of these descriptions would have to say on these matters, but as a colonialist writer, Lovecraft does not give them the consideration of a voice. I do not claim that I will give a voice to the voiceless in this creative project, but I am aware of this Western gaze in Lovecraft's writing and I aim to resist it to the best of my ability as a writer. For example, when it comes to the idea of the colonized being able to express their culture in the context of their colonizers, I see this in relation to objects in

museums. There are issues revolving around artifacts presented in museums in the Western world, often as spoils of Imperialist campaigns not contextualized by the populations who generate them, but by those who possess them. These objects are presented as artifacts of a culture but are often interpretations of that culture that the objects have been removed from, effectively silencing them. The voices of these objects are muffled – or most often outright silenced – by the cultural interpretations of those who display them. These objects cannot speak for their people just as it seems the people cannot speak in the language of those who Other them. As discussed in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?," expressions of the oppressed culture will always be filtered by or contextualized by the culture that oppresses them; this oppression extends to objects in museums.

Colonized subjects can utilize a variety of techniques in the resistance of perpetuating colonialism. David Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* explores the idea that discourse regarding postcolonial theory is not monolithic, but rather expressed in a variety of approaches. Spurr contextualizes this through certain tropes, such as debasement, insubstantialization, and resistance. Understanding these tropes in relation to how cultures are marginalized and objectified in the colonialist lens allows me to interrogate these processes in forging my postcolonial narrative. Spurr's chapter on "Debasement" (76 - 91), for example, focuses on the idea of a Western gaze as debasing in three ways: firstly, through judging a colonized people for an apparent lack of civility, and secondly, judging the colonized for reaching too high and blurring boundaries between the colonizer and colonized. Lastly, the Western gaze can also equate the colonized with natural disasters, such as Western civilization being overrun by invading others who bring chaos and disease. In H. P. Lovecraft's "The Horror at Red Hook" Lovecraft engages in this

debasement by portraying masses of foreigners as a “contagion” that runs the risk of infecting society (356). Secondly, Spurr’s chapter on “Insubstantialization” (141-155) explores the rhetorical gesture of insubstantialization where the cultural “object of representation is seen as an immaterial counterpart to the dissolving consciousness of the subject” (142). This insubstantialization is a tendency to portray other cultures in a dream-like manner, presenting them as *unreal* from a Western context, such as depictions of the stereotypical Orient. Lovecraft engages in this very notion with his occult, mystical middle east, represented by the character of Abdul Alhazred (“The History of the Necronomicon” 475) or references to “the blackest voodoo circles of Africa” (“The Call of Cthulhu” 28). These moments of making these representatives of “Eastern” cultures and treating them as magical effectively treats these cultures not as real cultures involving real people, but rather as devices for incorporating plausible mysticism to a mysterious land for metaphorical purposes. Lastly, Spurr’s chapter on “Resistance” (184-201) explores the concept of colonial resistance by establishing the inherent structure of colonialism traps both the colonized and the colonizer. The colonizer is given language and perspective that perpetuates their subject position early on, for even critical discussion on colonialism often originates from and is discussed in the context of the colonizer (185). Resistance, then, is utilizing the discourse to destabilize colonial rhetoric. One particularly humorous example in Spurr’s text involves a Sudanese woman who continually refers to the British occupiers of Sudan as “Turks” and mocks the smell of the British (187). The Sudanese woman destabilizes the colonial power by equating them with just another of a long line of occupiers, reducing their position, and portrays them as abject because the meat-based diet of the British supposedly made them smell like death; here the colonized turns their colonizers into “the Other.” Spurr’s text presents many ideas on how resistance manifests in postcolonial discourse.

One of the largest components of my own resistance to Lovecraft's racism present in his texts is that I want to foreground the kinds of people that Lovecraft erased; those who are the outsiders in his text become the central point of view characters in my own text. One way I seek to introduce this diversity of perspective is through a plot device, an enchanted lens,[3] referred to as the "Dark Lens" that allows readers to explore a museum of cultural artifacts and uncover the connection between these artifacts and a cosmic conflict. This does result in a delicate situation regarding my desire to resist colonialism, however, as the museum is a site of colonial rule. To create postcolonial Lovecraftian horror the utilization of a museum may seem out of place. Postcolonial theory explores colonial texts and writers of the colonial period by understanding their positionality in relation to the hegemonic powers of the period of and after colonialist rule. In this discourse we can see the museum as a site where the artifacts of a culture, most often one that has been exploited or conquered, are displayed as a representation of colonialism by those who have the power over others. Many of the great museums around the world consist of collections from all over the world - disconnected from their cultures of origin. This, I relate, to Mary Douglas's thoughts of the nature of dirt in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, particularly, the notion of the impure in supposedly purified spaces. In the chapter "Ritual Uncleanness," Douglas puts forward that what is considered pure and impure is contextual, such as the ingesting of water that has been used to bathe the feet of a *sadhu*, or Hindu holy woman (9). What is seen in a Western context as abject, the drinking of particles washed from the feet of another person, in the context of the Hindu culture is a supplicating and respectful gesture. Taking this idea of context further, what is dirty or impure is that which exists

[3] Lovecraft, as a materialist, rarely explored the supernatural in the form of magic in his fiction. We generally consider his Shoggoths and Deep Ones as supernatural to a degree, but they are more closely associated with aliens in that they are plausible to exist. Lovecraft's "magick" is more akin to alchemy than wizardry.

devoid of a proper context. Douglas conveys that dirt is "matter out of place" (36). Unpacking that further, "dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (36). Based on classification that which does not belong is rejected. If one were to maintain a clean floor in their home, loose dirt generally does not reflect the systemic order of cleanliness that is established. Now, apply this notion of an organized space of a museum.

If the museum is manifested as the height of culture and order, such as in the Western, white hegemonic perspective, then does the presence of materials presented devoid of context, often stolen from other lands, essentially dirty the idea of a museum? The artifacts and cultural items that are a legacy of other nations and peoples are not *the* dirt; rather the nature of their being devoid of their proper context *is* dirty. These collections are almost haunted, for the specter of colonialism hangs over them, even in the modern day. Consider the collection of Egyptian artifacts in the British Museum, many of them shipped from Cairo, a Colonial British-occupied city after the Anglo-Egyptian War of 1882.[4] These cultural artifacts of the Egyptian people are displayed far from their homelands. These objects are disorderly in the orderly space that the museum is supposed to represent: a site of categorization and preservation - yet dirtied by colonialism.

This detachment of the object from its context is of vital importance to a museum, which to a great degree is involved in the manufacturing of a new context for the object. In *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett suggests that "ethnographic objects are made, not found, despite claims to the contrary. They did not begin their lives as ethnographic objects. They became ethnographic through processes of detachment

[4] The British National Archives has information on the Anglo-Egyptian War: nationalarchives.gov.uk/battles/egypt/.

and contextualization. Whether in that process objects cease to be what they once were, is an open and important question" (3). Objects in a museum are a manufactured experience in a manufactured space toward whatever the dominant hegemony is of those who develop the museum.[5] The objects could still maintain their status of what they *were*, with a careful awareness and maintaining of their context, but most often, the context is strictly that of the finder's design in conjunction with the museum itself. I see this defragmentation as matter out of place, in the Douglasian sense: the place where the object belongs becomes a distant memory, and instead they are placed into a space where they do not generally belong. The situation today is not nearly as dire as it has been, as Kirschenblatt-Gimblett writes that "native peoples are taking charge of the disposition, handling, access, ownership, and interpretation of their patrimony—whether artifacts or performances—the spaces in which they live, and their ways of life. A new generation of museum professionals is proactively addressing the stewardship of cultural property, its presentation and interpretation in museums" (165). Operating museums filled with plundered artifacts is a notion that difficult to defend today and many museums are being called upon to divest their collections of the spoils of past colonialist engagements.[6] Lovecraft himself perpetuated this museum culture in a sense; Christmas of 1936 saw the horror author receive "a long-interred human skull, found in an Indian graveyard" sent by long time contact, Willis Conover (Joshi, *Dreamer and Visionary* 384). Lovecraft would die in 1937, and by Christmas of 1936, aware of his looming death, found the skull to be "delightful." This is an example of matter out of place in Lovecraft's own life.

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[5] This, too, can apply to tourist sites, such as popular dark tourism, "death tourism," or thanotourism. These sites are on native soil, but their context is shaped toward a purpose by those who develop the site as a location for tourism; generally, these sites are meant to educate and contextualize sites of tragedy, but the commercial venture of tourism itself also suggests an entertainment value is being attached to these locations.

[6] Jonathan Jones wrote an article about this for *The Guardian* in 2014: www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2014/nov/04/art-worlds-shame-parthenon-elgin-marbles-british-museums

Lovecraft's racism has been documented and discussed at length in the scholarship, often resulting in an attitude of cursory acknowledgement or reference to his ideas as an abject curiosity of an otherwise talented writer's biography. While H. P. Lovecraft's racism and colonial attitudes are not exactly condoned by his literary advocates, they are not painted as overtly negative in the reception of his work. Critical works written on Lovecraft by scholars such as S. T. Joshi or Lovecraft's contemporaries such as August Derleth and others acknowledge Lovecraft's problematic attitudes on race, but do not particularly condemn them. It seems only in recent years that there is a substantial backlash pointed at the legacy of Lovecraft, such as his likeness being stripped from fiction awards; in 2015 S. T. Joshi went as far as to return his own two World Fantasy awards he had won in protest of the decision to remove the likeness of Lovecraft from the award trophy (Flood). Joshi's reaction to this resistance toward Lovecraft represents, in my mind, a form of acceptance of Lovecraft's racism by a portion of his scholars who struggled to establish Lovecraft's importance to literature and may see these forms of resistance as an attempt to undo Lovecraft's importance to weird fiction. Lovecraft's racism does not prevent him from being influential because Lovecraftian literature already exists and thrives. It is important now to recognize flaws in Lovecraft's worldview can result in dialogue that can move the genre forward.

Some authors, Michel Houellebecq being a leading example, acknowledge racism as part of Lovecraft's creative spark, noting that his hatred drove his writing during his most prolific period. Houellebecq, no stranger to controversy himself, sympathizes with Lovecraft to a degree, and suggests that Lovecraft's hatred of other races was a symptom of Lovecraft's hatred of life itself. While I am not in agreement with Houellebecq's perspective on Lovecraft's hatred of life "explaining" his racism, I do appreciate that Houellebecq recognizes that Lovecraft's output is

directly tied to his hatred; many of Lovecraft's greatest works, thematically, developed during and after a two year stay in New York where Lovecraft lived a meager, unsuccessful existence surrounded by "the Other," whom he feared.

With the acknowledgement that Lovecraft's arguably most effective output is tied to a particularly frustrating and hateful period of his life, it raises a question of what value is there in the themes and aesthetics of Lovecraft in the modern world of literature? So much of Lovecraft's best writing and most effective utilization of techniques that I recognize as the anchors of Lovecraftian prose come from a place of abject hatred for people who were different from him. Would utilizing his techniques of isolation, nihilistic mythology, and descriptive/interpretive ambiguity that came from such hate taint my own utilization of these techniques in an interactive narrative? There is that risk, as the legacy of Lovecraft's colonial perspective will always be attached to any Lovecraftian writing, as his stories are generally invasion stories, but I feel the trick lies in maintaining an awareness of the context of these techniques and utilizing resistance in the best ways I can to comment, repurpose, and optimistically, engage in decolonialist intervention. One way this can be handled is by presenting a character with a colonialist attitude as not recognizing the larger stakes that stem from the extradimensional invasion, that the reader would be aware of, and instead have the character continue to selfishly pursue a course of action that most benefits their positionality at the expense of others. This can illustrate, to a degree, that the desire for power can ultimately severely derail civilizations who are being colonized and exploited.

Isolation, Nihilistic Mythology, and Descriptive Ambiguity

Important to my project are three techniques and an overarching philosophy I have identified as having developed in H. P. Lovecraft's body of work. Lovecraftian stories utilize the

thematic techniques of isolation, nihilistic mythology, and descriptive ambiguity; the overarching philosophy I attribute to Lovecraftian writing is the prioritizing of psychological, metaphysical terror over abject body horror.

The usage of isolation is key to making a tale feel Lovecraftian, and isolation is a primary element of the terror in Lovecraft's story "The Colour Out of Space," which utilizes themes of isolation in the context of physical space, the burden of dark knowledge, and isolation from one's community. "The Colour Out of Space" is a frame story narrated by a surveyor who is relaying the recollections of an old witness to the horrifying fates of a farming family. "The Colour Out of Space" emphasizes the rural remoteness of the Gardner homestead frequently with many references to the landscape around them. The professors from Arkham at the beginning of the tale make repeated trips from civilization, represented by their labs at Miskatonic University, to the Gardner homestead (Lovecraft 15-16). The necessity of stopping at Ammi Pierce's place to rest each trip illustrates remoteness and serves to establish the limited contact the Gardners have with their community. As madness and death set in, the Gardners' only real contact is with Ammi Pierce for most of the tale; the Gardners are apart from their community physically but are even further set apart as the family begins to go mad and their landscape spoils and grows abject, eventually isolating them from their only close contact, Pierce. Pierce, as well, is isolated by the events of the mysterious alien Colour that haunts the Gardner homestead. Lovecraft makes it clear that Pierce is haunted by his singular, terrible awareness of the nature of the events, for "his eyes drooped in a curious way, and his unkempt clothing and white beard made him seem very worn and dismal" (Lovecraft 14) and is rarely seen outside of his home. It certainly does not help Pierce is the only surviving witness to the final fate of the Gardner family, as the other witnesses had since expired in the decades since.

Lovecraft's stories all feel as though they are on the periphery of much larger events that the characters have little to no influence over. Part of the dread that can be felt in his writing comes from the acknowledgement that his protagonists, and more to the point, humanity, occupy only a small sliver of space and time, and that humankind will not be the first or last race in this cosmic lineage. This sort of nihilistic awareness of one's limited role in the scope of eternity ultimately serves as a foundation to Lovecraft's own philosophy of Cosmicism. Lovecraft's outlook and its influence on his writing is best stated in a letter to the publisher of *Weird Tales*, Farnsworth Wright, where Lovecraft writes, "now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large" (Lovecraft, "To Farnsworth Wright"). In Lovecraft's oeuvre there is a cosmic anxiety that plays out when humans confront that their subject, or desired, position of natural-world authority is rendered as objectively minimal by more powerful or intelligent, non-human beings. This anxiety is developed in "The Call of Cthulhu" by various characters becoming aware that they are merely scratching at the surface of a much larger and more terrifying world. How else can we interpret part of the closing statement by the narrator of "The Colour Out of Space?" "I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me" (Lovecraft 36). This cosmic awareness rattles those who have the misfortune of discovering these nihilistic mythologies.

One element of Lovecraftian prose that gets overlooked and often substituted for tentacled monsters is descriptive ambiguity. Take, for example, Cthulhu, often depicted as a winged dragon with a tentacled face. This results from literal reading of the narrator's description of a bas-relief he finds in "The Colour Out of Space". However, we cannot truly

know Cthulhu's form as the narrator himself quantifies that his description is not "unfaithful to the spirit of the thing" (Lovecraft, p. 26). This distinction is important because the spirit of the thing is not the thing itself; the signifiers here are too limited to reveal the whole picture of Cthulhu. This is the narrator trying to contextualize something otherworldly into images he can comprehend. Lovecraft's images of unknowable cosmic horrors are often delivered in this ambiguous manner, where the terrible thing can never truly be captured and there can be only an approximation or a vague reference to the terrible thing's nature. This is utilized to a great degree in "The Colour Out of Space." The alien Colour is a being of abstraction, a generally formless mass of light that is never quite given a named color we could begin to associate with it. This ambiguity is exemplified during the climax of the story where Lovecraft writes that "this new glow was something definite and distinct" (Lovecraft 21). The reader is left not with a clear idea what the Colour truly is, only that it exists and that this so horrifying that our narrator is incapable of contextualizing it for us further, only that it was distinct from an earlier state. Further, the Colour's motivations are indescribable. As S.T. Joshi writes, these entities are "horrifying precisely because the entit[ies] exhibit none of the traits attributable to any sentient being on this planet or perhaps in the known universe" (Joshi, "Weird Tales" 91). Even the landscape, under the influence of the terrible Colour is presented similarly, where "the trees may or may no have swayed without wind" (Lovecraft 19). There is no concrete statement, even from the narrator, on the nature of this chilling image. This descriptive ambiguity, in combination with nihilistic mythology and isolation, are principle techniques of a Lovecraftian tale.

These three techniques work in conjunction with and underscore a philosophy of terror in Lovecraft's writings. While terror and horror have fuzzy boundaries, and are often closely linked, there is a difference between them. Devendra P. Varda's *The Gothic Flame*, states that

"the difference between Terror and Horror is the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse" (Varda 130). Lovecraft's writing is effective in generating a mood of terror, but rarely does he deliver on climaxing that tension through horrific reveals. Michel Houellebecq, in *H. P. Lovecraft: Against the World, Against Life* addresses this, writing "after fifty laborious pages [...] the reader might feel a little disappointed. He had been expecting something more terrifying" (Hoellebecq 53). Despite this, Lovecraft's prose is still quite affecting - sustaining mood and tension over pages and pages of prose. This is something which Lovecraft consciously considered in his own writing process. S. T. Joshi argues that it is atmosphere that sustains a Lovecraftian tale (Joshi 94). For my purposes, I find this Lovecraftian atmosphere is one of anxiety, which considering the emotional triad of horror fiction - the moods of terror, horror, and revulsion - aligns Lovecraft's work most closely to terror. In his 1933 essay, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," Lovecraft conveys that "in writing a weird story I always try very carefully to achieve the right mood and atmosphere, and place the emphasis where it belongs [...] This marvel must be treated very impressively and deliberately—with a careful emotional 'build-up'— else it will seem flat and unconvincing" (Lovecraft, "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction"). This careful and sustained establishing of atmosphere is often what allows readers to buy into the metaphysical anomalies presented in his work; anomalies such as his non-Euclidean geometries of "At the Mountains of Madness," the sunken city with a slumbering cosmic titan of "The Call of Cthulhu," or indescribable alien colors of "The Colour Out of Space." Lovecraft prioritizes a mood of dread in his weird fiction, this dread being something sustained as long as possible to achieve the greatest result - this is that element of psychological terror that drove the philosophy of his work, an awareness of something on the cusp of our understanding and the escalating anxiety that results.

Colonialism and Lovecraft

These three elements of Lovecraftian fiction, isolation, nihilistic mythology, and descriptive ambiguity, can create a chilling tale, but they also carry the weight of Lovecraft's colonialist perspective. His views slip into his text frequently and reflect an abject terror he seemed to feel around others, or as Michel Houellebecq suggests, "the brutal hatred of a trapped animal who is forced to share his cage with other different and frightening creatures" (Houellebecq 106). Lovecraft's racial anxieties are some of the primary signifiers of his colonialist beliefs; in several letters he expressed an admiration for Adolf Hitler, but closer toward his own death, Lovecraft's admirations of the fascist had cooled considerably. As Houellebecq indicates, Lovecraft's views on Hitler, for a time, saw him as "an elemental force called to regenerate European culture" (Houellebecq 108). Even Lovecraftian scholar S. T. Joshi in *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H. P. Lovecraft in His Time*, notes Lovecraft's interest and eventual souring on Hitler, including a section of a letter stating: "I repeat that there is a great & pressing need behind every one of the major planks of Hitlerism - racial-cultural continuity, conservative cultural ideals, & an escape from the absurdities of Versailles. The crazy thing is not what Adolf wants, but the way he sees it & starts out to get it. I know he's a clown, but by God, I like the boy!" (Lovecraft qtd. in Joshi 360). This admiration of Adolph Hitler is highly problematic, and the tenants of "Hitlerism" that Lovecraft seems to admire are easily connectable to colonialism, particularly given Hitler's eventual grab for territories in the years after this letter was written. The colonialist connection established, one of Lovecraft's best stories that deftly exemplifies his colonialist views informing his techniques is "The Shadow Over Innsmouth". "Innsmouth" is a terrifying tale, one that may reveal Lovecraft himself grappling with his

anxieties regarding race, utilizing his thematic techniques of isolation, nihilistic mythology, and descriptive ambiguity.

Isolation, as associated with colonialist leanings, is present in a couple of distinct ways in "The Shadow Over Innsmouth." The narrator, Robert Olmstead, can be read as a literary manifestation of the author himself. Biographical details indicate, for example, that Lovecraft was very much a thrifty traveler who would dine on highly budget-friendly fare, such as vegetable soup and crackers presented in the story (Joshi and Schultz 240). Humorously, the eventual horror that Olmstead faces is a result of that budget-constrained nature that Lovecraft seemed to have; the narrator demurs at the idea of paying for the train out of Arkham, and instead is introduced to the idea of taking a bus that goes through Innsmouth… because it is cheaper (Lovecraft 103). One can assert that certain descriptions and isolated feelings Olmstead experiences are not dissimilar to feelings Lovecraft had possessed at times. Lovecraft's colonialist perspective is manifest in Olmstead through fears of being the only "normal" man surrounded by what can be interpreted to be subhuman monsters. This is illustrated, for example, by a great deal of descriptive attention paid toward cranial abnormalities associated with *the Innsmouth Look*. This evokes the pseudoscience of phrenology, or the measure and the study of the human cranium to determine intellectual abilities. Phrenology, while having fallen out of favor significantly by the 1930s, was one of many attempts to utilize science to position those who were not in the dominant white Christian hegemony as Other. In some phrenological documents and guides, the presence of a bump at the back at the head, could, for example, determine how effective of a mother a woman may be, thereby attributing one's worth by their physical characteristics; the presence of a more "full" head protuberance at the back of the skull indicating a person is, in a sense, a more admirable human (Sharpe). Lovecraft's attributing

things such as head shape the increasingly inhuman residents of Innsmouth is telling of this colonial perspective. Take, for example, Olmstead's first encounter with a resident of Innsmouth, the bus driver who he describes as having a "narrow head" and "bulging, watery eyes" (Lovecraft 107). This phrenological evocation connects to theme of isolation in that the narrator is one of the only proper "humans" in Innsmouth. The narrator finds himself surrounded by subhuman monsters that happen to be marked with phrenological language, racializing them because of physical characteristics that carry implications as to how far away from human they are.

Lovecraft's nihilistic mythology asserts itself as associated with colonialist points of view. Much of the darkness of Innsmouth comes from colonialism; sailors heading to strange islands and obtaining secret knowledge of the natives. A resident of Arkham suggests the residents of Innsmouth are "about as bad as South Sea cannibals and Guinea savages" (Lovecraft. 105). Much of Olmstead's perspective on Innsmouth is that of a colonizer inspecting a strange new land and casting judgement, often objectifying the residents. Readers may not find this tendency as abhorrent when it comes to Innsmouth's human-fish hybrids, but it is a practice of looking that perpetuates colonialism. This hybridity is also of note as Lovecraft's views at their least extreme periods, toward the end of his life, often revolved around separation of races. "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" seems to reflect an anxiety that colonialism runs the risk of tainting the colonist. This fear of being touched by the other is illustrated by the story of Obed Marsh, delivered by Innsmouth's town-drunk, Zadock Allen. Marsh, in an effort to bring prosperity to Innsmouth, makes a pact with the Deep Ones, at first, in Allen's words "to do no mixin', nore raise no younguns to take to the water an' turn into fishes with eternal life" (Lovecraft 115). By the end of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," however, we will have learned

that the intermarriage of the Deep Ones and the humans of Innsmouth has been practiced for decades, and even the narrator himself learns the terrible knowledge that he is a descendent of the Marsh family - descended from Marsh's second wife, Pht'thya-l'y - a Deep One (Lovecraft 127). The colonizer has become hybrid, a terrifying notion to H. P. Lovecraft. Anxiety of not quite being different or being "infected" or "dirtied" by the colonized subjects, can be a terrifying thing for a colonialist writer, which is very much the form of racist rhetoric expressed by H.P. Lovecraft in many of his works. Indeed, much of the horror of Lovecraft is the protagonist's realization that they are not in control of the world around them and are rarely the masters of their destiny.

"The Shadow Over Innsmouth" carries traditional Lovecraftian techniques of descriptive ambiguity, however, it curiously introduces an interpretive ambiguity regarding Olmstead's, and potentially Lovecraft's, descriptions of having a kinship to the Other. Lovecraft's two years living in New York City had hardened his views on race to an extreme degree, but removed from there, back in Providence, his beloved home, his views did revert toward his racial view of separation over outright hostility. One wonders if he had lived longer, as he had died at the age of 46, that perhaps his views may have softened further. "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" may be an indication of this. What can we make of Olmstead's acceptance of his ancestral connection to the Deep Ones, and the desire to make his way to the sunken city of Y'ha-nthlei? True, his narration at the end of the story is frenzied and peppered with barking chants evoking the name of the great Cthulhu (Lovecraft 127). Olmstead's fate is an abject nightmare for Lovecraft himself, seemingly crafting a resolution as frightening to him is the specter of death is to most human being. Yet, it is Olmstead's acceptance of his own hybridity that raises the curious question if Lovecraft himself may have wanted to give himself over to the Other. If we look at

Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection, the simultaneous rejection and desire for what we find to be abject, then perhaps Olmstead serves as a literary proxy; one which can let Lovecraft explore an impulse he may not have been comfortable with expressing in the material world – that perhaps he and the Other may not be too different after all.

Dark Lens

I have identified three tropes utilized in effective Lovecraftian horror that, while used effectively in contemporary horror writing, illustrate racial anxieties and colonial impulses in H. P. Lovecraft's own work. My project utilizes these tropes to subvert his racist and colonialist tendencies through an interactive narrative, programmed in Twine. This interactive component is one way I can resist in that I am inviting interference into my Lovecraftian narrative by as many diverse perspectives as I can though an interactive composition. My project utilizes the three aesthetic tropes of isolation, nihilistic mythology, and descriptive/interpretive ambiguity as ways of resisting, resistance to Lovecraft's views through the utilization of his aesthetics has already become a major part of Lovecraftian genre storytelling in a variety of ways. Films like *Get Out*, *The Thing*, video games like *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem*, and literature such as *Lovecraft Country*, soon to be adapted to television by *Get Out*'s Jordan Peele, represent a re-contextualization of Lovecraftian themes, particularly in relation to race. I am situating *Dark Lens* in that discourse.

One way I aimed to resist Lovecraft's fear of outsiders was by offering anyone who desired to influence the story a chance, given the nature of the interactive narrative. Lovecraft's fear of the outsider is a manifestation of a loss of influence and control. Lovecraft in many ways represented the dying gasp of an aristocratic family, reduced to his meager earnings as a writer and a rapidly dwindling inheritance and would ultimately not be able to continue his own lineage

(Joshi, *A Subtler Magick* 13-49). Lovecraft, a symbol for white hegemony, bred of New England stock, was widely regarded as a failure in life; his work only really became influential after his death and he struggled with persistent poverty (28). It is because of this powerlessness he felt in his life that Lovecraft's only real expression of his position came from his letters and his retreat to his literary world, where his narrators were like him, or at least what he saw himself as: an educated, upper-middle class gentleman of New England (Boerem). The irony in Lovecraft's self-image, however, lay in the fact that he was not traditionally educated, having dropped out of high school, nor was he upper-middle class as his family's inheritance rapidly dwindled. In his fiction he expressed his anxieties about his own positionality by utilizing otherworldly invasions, often utilizing alien monsters to represent an abject Other. To resist Lovecraft's creation of a world he used to exert power, my aim was to release control of my own world, to a degree. I ultimately needed to generate a coherent narrative, but every opportunity I could I aimed to relinquish control of my story to my readers, allowing them to shape the direction of my story. Where Lovecraft asserted control in his fiction to relay his fears, I aimed to let the fears of "intruders" shape my fiction.

As Lovecraft's narrators and settings have consistent similarities across his stories, I chose to resist by developing stories set in different cultures as they relate to this otherworldly invasion narrative I developed. I am a white, cis-male author, however, which does bring up questions as to how my positionality affects the way I represent these perspectives. As I engaged in this process I constantly interrogated my positionality and how I could best meet my desire of having a diverse array of perspectives. I do not know how successful I was in this regard, time will tell, but at the very least my being conscious of my positionality in society allowed me to

present characters as point of view sources who would never have been utilized by Lovecraft in his own stories.

One way I comment on Lovecraft's colonialist tendencies is by addressing themes of racism and colonialism within my narrative. I generated circumstances within the narrative to pose questions or present problematic scenarios. This is one way in which descriptive ambiguity can be utilized as a method of postcolonial resistance. History is a record of conquests and dominations, and in presenting events from the perspective of the colonized, where I can approach these colonial interactions in such a way that these colonial legacies become ambiguous in their results. "Civilization," in a Western hegemonic sense, may progress but at what cost? Perhaps a culture that is dominated in this colonial action may, had it been left alone, have had a significant influence into the ending of this extra dimensional invasion.

Lastly, I wish to repurpose, in broad strokes, Lovecraft's posthumously-designated Cthulhu mythos to instead develop a mythos driven by diverse perspectives as the cosmic threat is not just to Lovecraftian narrators, but many cultures. What could the views of different cultures be to the revelation of extra dimensional invasion in the shadows of assumed history? The irony is that the greatest contribution Lovecraft gave to the literary world was not really intended. The Cthulhu Mythos, or interconnectedness of his stories revolving around ancient, indescribable aliens was never something he was particularly invested in as a writer, comically, he bemoaned the "Yogg-Sothothery" of it all and generally labelled his interconnected works as such, it is only after his death that the "Cthulhu" mythos was coined by August Derleth (Price, "Lovecraft's Artificial Mythology" 247). This mythology serves to establish a shorthand of themes he could reference across his texts, but much of the work of exploring these cosmic denizens came from collaboration of writers over the decades, with and without Lovecraft's

influence. In this spirit of repurposing, my own nihilistic mythology broadens the view of such conflicts by tying together cultures across human history in this struggle against extra-dimensional invaders. My usage of a museum full of artifacts allows me to present many different perspectives that my participant readers can choose from in service of the development of a Lovecraftian narrative of resistance.

Chapter Two: Project Reflection

The result of the creative portion of the project resulted in a website featuring five Twine-developed chapters. Each chapter contained a short, episodic narrative that featured choice points and branching sequences. This makes a straight, compiled narrative hard to generate outside of summary that invokes the choices of the participants during the project's production. As I released the chapters I would have a two-week period in which user choices would be recorded into a Google spreadsheet based on variables and JavaScript integrated into the Twine documents that comprised the chapters. The story of the chapters based on participant voting follows.

Dark Lens Summary

The following contains information mentioned in the Prologue and adapted from an earlier draft of the project. *Dark Lens* begins with a phone call at 4:44 AM. Historian Mika Briggs was called by one Detective Tetsuya about the remains of a Dr. Pavel in the halls of Harcourt Manor, an estate and museum in Harwell, R.I.. Dr. Pavel was brutally murdered with his body mutilated, burned, and his teeth removed. He additionally had two Nordic runes carved into his skull.

Two weeks later shortly after his funeral, Mika is confronted on the estate by a Mr. Gary Bouscher who provides her with a letter written by Dr. Pavel regarding the circumstances of his death and a mysterious artifact: a cloudy spyglass lens called the Dark Lens. Bouscher, nervous, then flees, leaving behind a revolver for Mika's protection. Much of this is covered in the original *Dark Lens* comic (an earlier incarnation of the project).

"Prologue: A Secret Study (1996 AD)": Following the clues laid out by the late Dr. Pavel, Mika finds a hidden room in the manor's library and discovers a secret study where Pavel

spent a great deal of his time and seemed connected to his grisly fate. Alarmed by recent events, Mika opts to lock the door of the study, though she is alone in the manor. A great deal of material seemed to be laid out for Mika to discover, including a tarnished, silver pendant depicting the hammer of Thor. Following the pulsing of the Dark Lens, Mika examines the pendant through the cloudy glass.

"Chapter One: The Strange Shore (996 AD)": Mika's consciousness is thrown back 1000 years into the body of one Ake Gundrun, a betrayed Shaman who was sent out to sea to die at the whims of his Jarl. Mika and Ake, as a singular entity, wake on a funeral pyre erected after a battle with the natives of the land. Ake is the only survivor of the raiding party and recounts the failed raid against the natives of the land. He is alarmed to see the silent, grey-skinned men passively bringing corpses into the cave for the pyres and ignoring his presence. Ake is wounded in an attempt to escape the cave by an arrow piercing his right thigh. He opts to break the arrow shaft at the wound rather than pull it out. He also finds a discarded short spear. Rather than confront the strange grey men further, Ake opts to head deeper into the cave, compelled by a mysterious force pulling on his body.

Ake's trek grows more disturbing as the cave seems to stretch on and on, deeper and deeper, into the Earth. While making his way down he encounters not only glowing fungus but the passage of the cave growing impossibly smooth and seamless, as though the passage was constructed. He also encounters the remains of two strange creatures: a large, shelled being, and a tall, impossibly thin beast. Rattled, he presses on and finally makes it out of the cave and into a sunken city.

“Chapter Two: The Sunken City (996 AD)”: Still riding along in Ake’s body, Mika witnesses the Viking’s fate. Ake explores the city that at first seems abandoned. The city is a

massive expanse below the surface of the ocean, kept from flooding by some form of clear dome. At first Ake encounters a black ooze that seems to be spreading around the city. Upon closer inspection, however, it not that the ooze is black, but rather an absence of form and light, as though the ooze is a hole in the fabric of space and time. Wounded, Ake treks towards a gigantic dome in the center of the city, compelled by curiosity and the realization he is dying. He quickly learns he is not alone in the city when he encounters two alien beings, living versions of those remains he saw in the cave and observes them engage in ferocious combat. The thin species, some form of humanoid-fish, is the victor, but the victory is short-lived as it is then consumed by the void-ooze that Ake encountered earlier, that seems to exhibit some degree of sentience. After being chased by this void-consumed alien, the entity seems to burn itself out and dissolve away.

Pressing forward, Ake encounters a stone pillar in a plaza with some form of writing on it. The stone pillar is ancient from Ake's perspective, but is dotted with writing that cannot be deciphered, all of which is arranged around four central symbols. Though Ake is incapable of understanding what the mean, he feels a connection to them, which is then punctuated by the invisible force pulling on his gut, dragging him toward the central dome. As he approaches the dome, Ake attempts to sneak past another roaming humanoid-fish but is unsuccessfully and is attacked. Ake manages to stab it in the neck with his short-spear being splashed with some form of cold, yellow bodily fluid. Ake considers mercy-killing the creature but realizes that this species has had some form of interbreeding with the natives on the surface. Enraged, he brutally stabs it and resolves to destroy the city if he can.

Arriving outside of the dome, finally, and near death, Ake discovers a defensive barrier assembled near the entrance with strewn remains of the two different alien species he had encountered. He also turns to discover another void-drenched fish-humanoid approaching him,

but mysteriously the invisible force that has dragged him to this location gives his entire body a violent jerk, drawing him safely into the dome where it seems the void cannot seem to cross. Within the dome, Ake discovers that the space opens to an infinite starfield and four tears in the fabric of space and time, representing Life, Death, Order, and Chaos are opening into Ake's plane of reality, having guided him to this point. Ake, near death, is asked by the gods to serve, and Ake chooses to align himself with the God of Life.

As Ake throws himself into the gateway that represents Life, Mika is separated from Ake's body and ghost-like, observes over decades the other gates fade while the gate of Life expands. Time slows down and a desiccated, living corpse of Ake Gundrun is birthed from the gate, rising to his feet.

"Interlogue: A History of Misery (1996AD)": Having witnessed the cosmic rebirth of Ake Gundrun, the being responsible for the death of Dr. Pavel, Mika finds herself back in the present period of 1996, still inside of the secret study. She is alarmed to hear, outside of the locked study door, creaking floorboards implying she is not alone. The creaking continues past the threshold of the door, but the source remains invisible, only remaining in the room long enough to knock a book from one of the shelves. Mika picks up the book, a sketchbook that belonged to a Joseph Frank in 1961, and discovers this man seemed to have encountered the aliens Ake had seen in some capacity due to illustrations found in the book.

Mika searches the room for other objects that may have more information. She finds a tarnished bullet accompanied by a note in Dr. Pavel's own handwriting that reads "Stalingrad." Other artifacts include a silver ring labeled "Spain, 1572," an ornate key labeled "New York, 1893," Mr. Bouscher's revolver, and a chunk of a car headlight from the accident that orphaned Mika in 1974. Mika opts to learn more about the sketchbook and Joseph Frank.

"Chapter Three: Blood, Sweat, and Ink (1961 AD)": Mika occupies the experience of Joseph Frank in 1961, Midtown Manhattan. Joseph has walked to Midtown from Greenwich Village carrying a portfolio of material for his job as an artist for Star Comics, a small publisher. As he makes his way to his work in the morning heat, he contemplates the origins of a story he wants to pitch about four wizards, but also recalls nightmares of being a concentration camp survivor as a child in World War II, punctuated by appearances of strange, thin beings that have tormented his dreams for a long time.

At Star Comics, triggered by post-traumatic stress and not being given serious consideration as a story-writer, Joseph snaps at the editor and is fired, learning that Star Comics will likely shutter soon anyway. Jobless and stressed, Joseph steps into a small bodega for a soda and to use the restroom. Joseph has a dissociative episode in front of the bathroom mirror reminding him of his time in the camps but manages to regain his composure enough to visit his drug dealer in Greenwich Village. While there, Joseph is given marijuana and a tab of a relatively new drug, LSD. Joseph smokes for a while and abandons his sketchbook at the crash pad, unnerved by his drawings of the nightmare creatures. He heads home.

On his way home, Joseph passes an alley where something catches his eye. He enters and encounters a dead man, soaked in blood and missing his teeth. On the verge of another dissociative episode, Joseph encounters the man's presumed killer, his doppelganger, who seems to be eating the teeth of his victim. The killer proceeds to write out runes in midair with an umbrella, but the glamour disguise fades and the killer is Ake Gundrun in his skeletal appearance. Horrified, Joseph attempts to prevent the now-animated corpse of the victim from entering the gateway that materializes in the middle of the alley, but to no avail. Joseph elects to take the direct approach, taking a running swing at Ake, connecting with the lich, who then

dissolves to dust. Joseph, however, falls into the gateway. As he is pulled through the membrane and into another world, Ake's grinning skull looks down at him.

Mika now observes the alley, again, as though she is a ghost that has been severed from Joseph. Mika is horrified to realize that Ake can see her time-displaced form as he calls out to her. Mika snaps to and returns to the study in the present time, only to see Dr. Pavel, seemingly alive, standing before her.

Dark Lens and Theory

To achieve the goal of resistance using Lovecraftian tropes I needed to work theory into the development of the project, which sometimes proved challenging given the disrupted nature of the text. Ultimately, theory played out in three major ways in the project; through generating scenes and scenarios deliberately drawn from theoretical frameworks, generating choices and scenarios for readers based on theoretical frameworks, and utilizing disruption as a component of the narrative process.

In the five installments of Dark Lens there were several moments that were directly influenced by theory that drove my project. Principle among them was colonial resistance. Based on the work of Mary Douglas and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, I approach the setting of the narrative as a site of colonial resistance. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's work in *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. enabled me to take a site of colonial revision, the museum, as a starting point. Douglas' work in *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, which explores themes of purity and taboo, suggested to me that if a museum is matter out of place, polluting a space with the plundered relics of other cultures, what would that make objects that are not on display, that are locked away? This line of thought was, initially, what drove the development of the secret study that serves as the framing location for the different

artifacts that come into the *Dark Lens* narrative. The museum is a physical archive of colonialism meant for display; objects within are stripped of their context and firmly contextualized by those who have the power to display them. What if objects are so tainted, however, that they cannot be contextualized? That resulted in the special collection of materials within the secret study. In *Dark Lens*, while all of the objects in the museum are all connected to an extra-dimensional invasion that plays out over centuries through different cultures, the objects in the study are particularly connected to the invasion and primary players in the centuries-long struggle. The collection, as established by Dr. Pavel, is a record of this invasion meant to seek out a way to bring it to a halt, and while that is a noble goal, how he does so, through being complicit of the plundering of other cultures, proves problematic. Whether the character of Dr. Pavel had an inkling of this is hard to say, however, as reader choices never really allowed for his point of view narrative to be written. During the "Interlogue: A History of Misery" chapter, one of the potential narrative branches was a bullet from the Battle of Stalingrad, where Pavel first encountered the otherworldly invasion that runs through the narrative.

One element of colonial resistance in Dark Lens is the fate of Ake Gundrun, the Viking invader who himself becomes colonized by one of the four extradimensional gods in chapters one and two. Ake Gundrun's first chapter begins with a botched raid in 996 C.E. on the shore of what will later be called Harwell, Rhode Island, the setting of the overall frame narrative (Mika's 1996-set scenes). The Vikings have a long and storied history of plunder and colonizing lands. Every incarnation of Dark Lens, as the project originally began as an interactive online comic, features the character of Ake, who would become a skeletal lich. Ake was always a Viking raider as well, whose shamanistic practices make him a valuable vehicle for the interdimensional gods to work their way into the reality of Ake's world. Ake's chapters portray him as a failed warrior

and singular survivor of a massacre conducted by who he dubs “strange brown men.”[7] A crushingly direct repudiation of colonialist action sets the stage for Ake’s journey, which places him as an object to be used by the interdimensional entities. Ake’s positionality, his personally-expressed superiority to the natives, is further rocked when he travels far below the surface of the Earth via tunnels, encountering a quite literal alien culture. Here, there are signs of battle between two alien species in an underground city amongst the spread of a kind of void-fungus. Central to Ake’s experiences in the sunken city is the large, central dome, which serves as the landing site for the interdimensional gods. The larger plot that the wreckage of the city indicates was the presence of the two alien species, dubbed the Jinyan and Choraji, involved in some form of defense against the four invading gods, only to be driven to madness over centuries. Ake’s position as a dominant force in the world as a white invader is disrupted twice over; he encounters far more powerful beings than himself that have already set down on Earth to create a sophisticated city, and more alarmingly, encounters beings that are even more powerful than the Jinyan and Choraji that are in the process of an invasion.

Many of Lovecraft’s strongest tales are invasion narratives. “The Shadow Over Innsmouth,” for example, is an allegory for Lovecraft’s horror at the thought of miscegenation. Lovecraft’s anxieties of racial purity being disrupted by the inclusion of the genetics of those he considered lesser is a horrifying thing to read and speaks of a tragically ill-informed mind. These anxieties, as off-putting as they are, generated a strong story based on the fear of being colonized. Invasions are such a Lovecraftian trope that in my own project invasion becomes the primary element of the terror I aim to invoke. Having a colonizer, Ake, be colonized himself

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[7] These are the words of Ake Gundrun. I felt as an author that as we inhabit his point of view that we see things from his perspective. I struggled with this for a long while, but I came to the realization that Ake’s sense of superiority over people of color would come across as pathetic given his wounded state.

evokes the Lovecraftian trope but skews it in such a way that the typical historical conquest of white Europeans over people of color does not play out as has happened so often in written history. However, Ake's positionality-shift from subject to object as a colonizer to being colonized is not the only way I believe Dark Lens complicates the invasion narrative. The invaders themselves, the four extradimensional gods, are not merely invading for conquest, but are seeking safety from a mysterious force that we see present in the narrative: The Void. During Ake's chapters the city seems to be covered by an inky-black fungus that, upon closer inspection, is a tear in the universe. This Void is a multiversal parasitic absence that spreads from reality to reality and as the narrative would progress, readers would discover that the four gods are merely personifications of universal forces in this setting, seeking refuge from the encroaching nothingness. It is the desire to not just survive, but thrive, however, that motivates the competition between them to lure in Ake as their Earthly-vessel, culminating with the reader's choice of which god to serve. There was also a somewhat obscured choice where readers could, instead, have Ake give himself over to the Void, which would have radically altered the story.

One element of Lovecraft's work that I feel is not criticized enough is the blandness of his narrators, most of whom tend to be white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men. Despite the true universality of Lovecraft's cosmicism- none of us matter to the universe, after all- his writing is painfully limited to a singular perspective, and this perspective is more or less his own. In writing from a position of privilege from the perspective of privileged narrators, Lovecraft perpetuates much of the colonialist nature of literature of his era. I find this problematic because of the scale of the conflicts Lovecraft generally dabbles in - questions of human agency in a vastly uncaring cosmos - his narrative perspective is frustratingly limited to men like himself, men of privilege, a privilege that comes from the exploitation of other nations. One way I sought

to check this privilege inherent in Lovecraft's stories by using a more diverse array of point of view characters. While I had seven point of view characters planned as of the first interlogue, the project only resulted in three different point of view characters. The primary character was Mika Briggs, who acted as the framing character, who is a woman of color. Mika works as the assistant director of the Museum which the narrative takes place in. The first character Mika learns about (and inhabits through the Dark Lens) is Ake Gundrun, a Viking shaman and the primary antagonist; admittedly, I had concerns about jumping into the perspective a colonizer immediately, but his nature as the antagonist necessitated this. The second point of view character that Mika inhabits is that of Joseph Frank, a Jewish survivor of the Nazi concentration camps. Joseph deals with the trauma of losing his family in the camps as a child while working as a comic book artist in 1960s New York City. One potential character who was to come into play if readers had moved the narrative in his direction included Dr. Pavel, a Russian immigrant and survivor of the Battle of Stalingrad. Dr. Pavel is mentioned several times in the project as his mysterious murder is what kicks off Mika's exploration of the dark, alternate history of the world. There were other characters who had gone unnamed but would have been developed if the readers had chosen their corresponding artifacts in the interlogue, including an African man who worked as a trader during the Spanish Inquisition in the late 1500s, a Puerto Rican immigrant woman in 1890s New York City, and Mika's mother just before her death in the 1970s. These characters occupied different periods of time, but I felt that they all had the potential to grapple with the legacies of colonialism in specific ways. These were the immediately planned character chapters, however, I had rough sketches of at least a dozen potential point of view narratives dealing with a variety of cultures and time periods.

One of the challenges that I had to contend with in the narratives were portraying cultures without falling into the trap of Othering, such as engaging in the process of Orientalism. I aimed to not present any value judgements on a culture as a writer and when I present cultural components in corresponding narratives I sought to use them without necessarily drawing attention to them. One example is in Chapter Three where Joseph Frank makes a reference to a dybbuk, or a possessive spirit in Jewish folklore. By having Joseph casually reference his Grandmother's tales while considering the nature of the otherworldly creatures who haunt his dreams I sought to make Joseph's heritage a understated part of his world view. Similarly, in Chapter One, Ake refers to his life as the shaman back in Norway as he ponders how he has found himself left for dead among the failed raiding party he was in. These references are not designed to be presented as fantastical, mythical, or alien, but rather just a part of their cultural heritage and understanding. Because of this, I chose not to artificially define these cultural references in the narrative because by doing so I would be engaging in a form of othering. However, my decision as a storyteller to utilize cultural terms and references that are not my own carries a level of positionality I need to address because I have this option to use cultural terminology in the storytelling that an author of color or from another culture may not. I recognize this and in an effort of being respectful I sought to not make those terms into objects I could just slide into the text to give a character ethnic-flavor. My decision comes from a place of respect and an effort to generate characters that are true to the cultures that I am borrowing from to tell a story.

Another way in which I rebuke Lovecraft is by offering up my work for disruption. Much of Lovecraft's anxiety comes from the threat of not being in control of losing his position in society. This would be a fear that would haunt him throughout his life and it was not entirely

unfounded; Lovecraft represented a dying lineage of wealth and status and whatever meager inheritance he gained with his being the only living male was constantly under threat of being diminished. It can be argued that Lovecraft's limited view of the human race is best seen in his protagonists of his short stories, wealthy and college-educated white men are the standard by which all other humans are judged. Not all white-men are worth consideration in Lovecraft's view; consider the Gardners, the rural family of "The Colour Out of Space," who speak with an exaggerated accent in dialogue, just as the drunk white sailor, Zadok Allen of "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," too, speaks with an exaggerated regional dialect. Portrayals such as this, combined with a lack of literary interest in views that are not Lovecraft's ideal model, represent a subconscious desire of control of Lovecraft's literary world. Lovecraft's worldview is undoubtedly reflected in his choices of narrator, something he can control. Lovecraft's narrators are a way for Lovecraft to create a world he controls by having the readers experience his world through these specialized narrators.

My primary goal regarding the horrific components of the Dark Lens narrative revolves around sticking closely to the sense of terror that I identified as being part of what makes Lovecraft's horror so effective, even today. Those three elements, isolation, nihilistic mythology, and descriptive ambiguity all found their place to varying degrees within the chapters. Isolation is particularly key to the three point of view scenarios I presented in the interactive texts. Mika spends the prologue and interlogue in a hidden study in a museum that is temporarily closed due to the recent murder of her mentor, Dr. Pavel. Mika's isolation is remarked upon several times in the narrative, but even then, she is emotionally isolated, compelled to unravel the mystery of Pavel's death, having followed a lonely trail of clues that leads her directly to the situation where readers first encounter her. A close reading of the passages corresponding large piece of glass in

the interlogue further reveals that Mika is an orphan as the glass is from a headlight of the car that her parents died in. Ake Gundrun is isolated in several ways as well. He is the lone survivor of the failed raid on what is implied to the shores of the future state of Rhode Island. Ake's backstory further reveals his isolated nature as he is indignant and confused about being sent as a raider to what he calls "a strange land," despite his status as the shaman of his community, all because of the Jarl's apparent grudge against him. Naturally, Ake's chapter reveals an even more startling form of isolation as he finds himself to be the lone human in a city of monstrous aliens deep below the Earth. While Joseph Frank's isolation comes from his trauma of being a holocaust survivor and orphan, he suffers two other forms of distinct isolation as well. As a creative entity, Frank feels alone in his desire to tell meaningful stories through comic books, but his boss has him working on material that Frank feels is schlock, at best. Frank is also plagued by intense, recurring nightmares because of the post-traumatic stress of being a survivor, but the chapter does not indicate he has an outlet or much of a social network to help him grapple with this aspect of his past. Frank's chapter has several potential hallucinations and nightmares brought on by an internal PTSD counter in the game code, but the implication is that he must ultimately suffer through these, alone.

Woven through all three of these point of view chapters are elements that create an unsettling mood. Mika's isolation in the museum emphasizes the environment around her and elements such as light and sound, or even the presence of a door, are rife with potential threat. Early on in the prologue Mika has the option of locking a door or simply shutting it. Though the text goes to great effort to point out that she is alone in the building, an overwhelming number of readers chose to lock the door because the door seemed threatening given the isolation of the point of view character. In the interlogue, the locked door is almost a comfort as Mika hears

what seem to be footsteps on creaking wood, though it is revealed not even a locked door can stop the invisible presence from creaking the wooden floor within the room. Even the ever-present nature of the Dark Lens itself is meant to generate a form of anxiety as it often changes temperature and pulses as Mika approaches objects with a related-history. For Ake Gundrun, the nature of the cave tunnels themselves are unnerving as the cave sequence presents tunnels that seem fantastically long, necessitating a travel time of hours. Then this cave is rendered even more unusual for unusual smoothness, glowing fungus, and the remains of strange alien creatures that are not explained in any substantial form, and this is all before Ake arrives in a massive city that exists deep within the Earth, below the ocean. Even with Joseph Frank travelling through 1960s Midtown and Greenwich Village, New York, there is a distinct tension in his environment that comes from his stress and the experiences of the readers at this point. By the time Joseph finds his way into the alley with the dead and/or dying man, dependent on reader choices, the relative emptiness of the area stands out as a harbinger of some encroaching danger.

The construction of a nihilistic mythology was a major component to making Dark Lens feel suitably Lovecraftian. The most important of these elements was the creation of the four gods and establishing a long, secret history of their involvement with the human race. To give the gods a satisfyingly mythic feeling, I aimed to make each one a representation of four universal concepts: life, death, order, and chaos. These concepts are on a massive scale that exist beyond significant human influence, and as such humans are merely at the whims of these entities, seen most directly by Ake becoming the acolyte of one of the gods, as chosen by the readers. By tying these beings to concepts, I feel they have a level of weight beyond just being some form of alien entity trying to carve a path between worlds. These beings also presented a challenge to me as a writer because I needed to find a way to take these concepts, some more

abstract than others, and interpret them through their corresponding gateways through space and time. This, admittedly, veers into the element of descriptive ambiguity that helps make a tale Lovecraftian, but the nature of these beings as expressions of grander, universal concepts reflects a kind of mythology when contextualized by Pavel's notes and the narrative experience of chapters one and two. Chapters one and two further present the nihilistic mythology through Ake stumbling upon the detritus of a conflict that is not entirely contextualized. He finds remains of alien beings that seem to be in combat, but he, and the reader, are not given any reason why these beings are engaged in conflict, or the origins of the city where the conflict occurs. All that is revealed is that this conflict seems to have gone on for a long time, long enough for the remains of the aliens to rot away and leave skeletons. There are potential hints at the relationships between these elements, such as the presence of barricades around the central dome where the gods are encounter, and the Void fungus that has spread throughout the city, but nothing is made explicitly explanatory.

How exactly does one describe beings, or at least living gateways that represent beings that represent life, death, order, and chaos? Some of these concepts proved easier to personify than others, but I feel that all four were strong examples of descriptive ambiguity in my text because there are concrete descriptions of these entities and how they manifest, but they remain nebulously defined as well. Other moments of descriptive ambiguity in the chapters is mostly explored through how the different characters depict or encounter the alien beings that come to be known as the Jinyan and the Choraji. These beings are referenced a few times in the text from the different perspectives of the point-of-view characters. In chapter two readers get their most involved physical descriptions of the being from Ake's perspective. The Choraji are described as such in one of the two primary descriptive passages:

> You recognize the bulky plates covering it as the same type of shell from the remains you saw earlier in the cave. However, those remains did not prepare you for how horrid in dimension and appearance this being is.
>
> The creature is nearly twice as tall as you, and you are not a small man. The heavy, barrel-like torso rests on two, thick and fleshy legs, not unlike meaty, pulsating tree trunks. With each step muscle ripples along the brownish, moistened limbs. What you recognize as some form of scythes on the remains are firmly in place on the creature's torso. The two largest of these limbs are packed into shaped grooves along the creature's sides, and what you consider to be the chest also features two small grooves with triangular scythes, firmly embedded.
>
> Most unnerving, though, is the triangular shell that makes up what you could only loosely call a head. The heavy, pointed plate rests upon a thick thick and angular neck, jointed like a bird. It disturbs you greatly to look on it further, but you notice towards the pointed end of the monster's head are small, wriggling fingers, akin to a crustacean. ("Chapter Two: The Sunken City")

The Jinyan is equally abhorrent in its description:

> You turn your attention to another avenue that leads into this small intersection and spy what seems to be another denizen of this deep city. The familiarity alarms you; this was the same creature as the desiccated corpse you saw in the cave, but this one is ambulatory.
>
> You watch the creature step into the area. Brilliant orange plates near the side of its head rattle violently, as though it were a warning to the shelled creature. It reminds you of an unholy fish. The thick, ridged brow nearly encompasses the creature's horrid,

> glassy eyes in shadow. The hinged jaw that was so disturbing on the corpse terrifies you now that you see it snapping aggressively at the other beast. You hear loud, echoing cries, not unlike a warble of a demonic bird.
>
> The fish-beast's head rests on a thin, spindly body with a hunched gait. On the limbs you see orange tumors, like external muscles, that flex and shudder with each motion. The being carries a polished metal staff between three long, angular fingers. The rest of the skin is grey and scaled. ("Chapter Two: The Sunken City")

Readers are then also given a visualization of the creatures from the sketchbook of Joseph Frank within the interlogue. These appearances come from illustrations, but they are still from Joseph's own point-of-view and rendered in his art-style, not necessarily reflecting the reality of what these beings may look like. Joseph, in chapter three, even has a dream where a Jinyan appears, but he references it as a dybbuk, coloring his interpretation of what the being is based on his own cultural knowledge. The character of Ake Gundrun, himself, occupies several physical forms that generate ambiguity about what he is. While Ake begins his chapters as a human, by the end he takes on a skeletal, Lich-like appearance, but there is not necessarily an indication he is undead, though one could infer it from his appearance. This is complicated further in the third chapter where Joseph Frank encounters a Lich-entity, implied to be Ake, who is consuming teeth in some form of transformative process that allows him to take the form of the other man in the alley that Joseph stumbles upon. A great portion of why there is ambiguity as to what Ake is comes from the fact that readers have not had an option to explore his perspective from any point after he gives himself over to one of the invading "gods."

One aspect of horror I was happy to dabble in was the abject, as abject images carry a fascination for me and are a part of the horror genre that I enjoy. The gods portrayed in the text

represent abjection in different ways and it was a challenge to give physical manifestations to concepts such as life, death, order and chaos; these concepts required a “throat” to connect their specific planes to Ake’s world, and these throats needed to become physical manifestations of abject imagery. Of the four, broader concepts, life and death seemed easiest to render as abject. With life, the presented throat is a “tunnel of flesh shudders and you notice the passage is slick. You see steam spilling out from within and the walls are dripping with moisture. There is something primal to it. Something compelling. You step closer” (“Chapter Two: The Sunken City”). The imagery here can be read as sexual and part of the abjection comes from the fact that this tunnel of living flesh is extending from nothing but a tear in the fabric of the universe. Additionally, this tunnel speaks in a calming voice that gives it a persona that seems to have appealed to most readers, as “life” was the most-chosen god for Ake to align with. The rampant life that the tunnel of flesh represents is made even more unnerving when vines and flowers are seen to sprout within it, combining flora with fauna: “You pause at the edge of the platform, suspended over the stars, and realize you can leap into the passage. You can smell the ruddy scent of blood and flowers wafting from the tunnel of flesh. You stare straight down the gullet and see that green vines grow along fleshy walls, and vibrant flowers begin to bloom” (“Chapter Two: The Sunken City”). Life, here, comes off as seductive but equally wrong in how flesh and plant seem to mingle. With the passage that represents death, the first abject detail encounter is the sweet scent of rot, and the voice of the god is like a death rattle. What stands out most, however, is the depiction of the tunnel itself:

> The passage itself, though, troubles you. You see what seems to be rotting flesh and torn skin, strung up between greasy bones that suspend the draping folds of the tunnel. Greenish fluid erupts from boils nestled between the folds of the fleshy walls. You hear

> the sounds of infinite maggots churning along the rotten throat. ("Chapter Two: The Sunken City")

Here the abjection is readily seen in the presence of rot, decay, and bodily-remains, but what also stands out is the fact that the passage is a living entity that calls to Ake who at this point is so wounded and close to death that the finality of it is appealing.

Order and chaos were more challenging to render as abject entities because these are not normally concepts that have physical manifestations or images that can be invoked and that are familiar to all readers. As such I had to find a way to give these concepts physical characteristics which were equally repellent and attractive to Ake. Order is depicted through rhythm and a sort of comforting conformity:

> The passage that represents ORDER makes you dizzy and you feel your weight shift beneath you as you watch the actions of thousands of rings, gears, blades, and pillars rotate and intersect the passage. You observe the precise timing of each action in relation to others and you marvel and the gleaming metallic and crystalline constructs within. You would surely die if you entered the churning throat, however. ("Chapter Two: The Sunken City")

For Ake, there is a certain awe that may come from the clock-like movements of the passage, and as impressive as it is to envision, much like online videos showing perfectly calibrated machinery or actions, the passage also represents certain death. Ake grows so intrigued by the calibrations he begins to fall in sync with the passage, however, as he "rock[s] back and forth, in time with the complex mechanisms within the tunnel. You find yourself in sync with this realm of repetitive motion and you find it soothing, but the thought of surrendering yourself to the vortex below fills you with fear" ("Chapter Two: The Sunken City"). In the passage that

represents chaos, Ake is immediately confronted with a voice that sounds like a thousand screams simultaneously. He is immediately confronted with sensory overload, but even the overloaded senses have the chance of experiencing something new: “You shake your head, trying to filter through all the different voices and pitches. You focus on the arcs of fire and the waves of light emanating from the tear in space before you. The colors are bright, and there are some that you are unfamiliar with amongst the flashes of ones you know well” (“Chapter Two: The Sunken City”). Here Ake can observe colors that he has never seen, that may not be of Earth, and that has a certain appeal, particularly as the god communicates nihilistically that nothing matters. Despite how agreeable the message is to the wounded and exhausted Ake; however, the manifestation of chaos leaves him off balance and uncomfortable: “You take a stumbling step backwards, the flashing lights have put you off balance, and the tunnel itself offers no focal point. It is merely a vibrating, jerking gash on the skin of the universe. But the words… the words ring true” (“Chapter Two: The Sunken City”). None of the potential gateways Ake can observe will allow him to live, nor is there the implication that Ake really wants to, given his injuries. Each passage represents a sort of “final” experience or exploration, from his perspective, something that only he will ever get to experience, thus each one, as abject as they are, is also attractive in a unique way.

Two other moments of abjection seen in the text include the cold blood of the Jinyan and the moment with teeth-eating. Body fluids are heavily invoked in Julia Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror* as manifestations of abjection when those fluids find their way outside of the body. Fresh blood is expected to be warm, but in creating a distinctly alien entity I chose to replace blood for a more unnerving fluid. At one point in chapter two, Ake is able to kill one of the Jinyan and he

is sprayed with fluid from the alien body, but rather being the warm splash of blood that one may expect from a living being he is splashed by something far fouler:

> You hear a satisfying gurgle and cry from the mouth of the fish-beast, but you are not prepared for the cold, creamy-yellow fluid the gushes out from the wound and splashes you across the face
>
> The creature falls back, your spear sticking out of the accursed grey flesh like an absurd pillar.
>
> However, all you can do is vomit at the scent of the foul-smelling blood- if that is what it can be called- that drips down your face onto your singed leather armor.
>
> You wipe at your face with a burnt woolen sleeve and finish spitting out the last chunks of bile from your mouth. You notice your yellow vomit has heavy streaks of red; a sign that your death is approaching. You watch your hot bodily waste mingle and coalesce in the puddle of the cold fluid of the fish-beast.
>
> You dry heave as you have nothing left to give. ("Chapter Two: The Sunken City")

The contrast of the fluids here emphasizes the alieness of what Ake encounters. Here I sought to use abjection in such a way that readers are shown that these beings are not of the Earth, rather than tell them this directly. In a similar way, just as the Jinyan are shown not to be of the Earth through abject imagery, Ake is seen to be something far different than the human he once was through abjection.

During the third chapter, "Blood, Sweat, and Ink" Joseph encounters either a dead or dying man in an alley who has had all of his teeth ripped from his head, depending on choices in the preceding screens. Here Joseph encounters a well-dressed stranger in the alley who seems to have the teeth:

> You turn around to see a well-dressed man with a hollow and ashen face, staring down at you.
>
> "Buddy, go get some goddamn help" you bark.
>
> The man looks down dispassionately, and as you look him over you see that his sleeves are soaked in blood and between his fingers is a tooth. Presumably the tooth of this poor bastard in the alley.
>
> You hear his jaw click and you hear a sickening crunch as he chews on something. He continues to observe, and you turn back to your charge who is now dead. You back away and lean against the dumpster.
>
> "Did you fucking do this?"
>
> The man gazes at you, and you realize he is the same man as the one crumpled against the alley wall. *The same man*.
>
> You take one of your bloodied hands and wipe at your forehead, unsure of what you're seeing. The man takes the tooth and pops it into his mouth and begins to chew. You hear the scrape and crunch of teeth rubbing together and you nearly crumple over in disgust.
>
> ("Chapter Three: Blood, Sweat, and Ink")

On the next screen Joseph observes that whatever glamour was being used by the man fades, and the description of the robed stranger is very much in line with who the readers have observed is Ake. The scene with the usage of the teeth is particularly interesting as it also plays with the anticipation of the abject. Early in the prologue, readers can uncover a detail in the discovery of Dr. Pavel's body that notes his teeth were stolen. When readers are presented with a toothless body and a description of crunching at first in the alley seen there is a fear that the tooth is being consumed. By having another tooth be eaten, explicitly, it doubles down on the abject

consumption of what we would consider non-consumable, but also links it to some sort of ritual or incantation by this version of Ake to disguise himself. In turn, if the detail of Dr. Pavel's missing teeth is remembered then it sets a very uncomfortable precedent that is potentially delivered on at the end of chapter three, when Mika's consciousness returns to the secret study. She finds herself face-to-face with the supposedly dead and buried Dr. Pavel.

Technical Design

The development of an interactive narrative presented several challenges. These challenges fell into two camps: technological and editorial. The first technological hurdle, naturally, was the interactivity. Early in the process I had to look at different engines to develop the narrative and arrived at Twine in particular due to its flexibility. Twine struck me as the right platform due to the fact it was open source, had a large network of documentation, and a particularly engaged community across the Twine websites, Reddit, and their official Discord development channel. Furthermore, a great deal of interactive literature I explored during my brainstorming process was created in Twine which has become a somewhat ubiquitous platform from the creation of interactive fiction. Many fascinating Twine projects on the Steam platform or the Interactive Fiction Database illustrated the variety of approaches one can take to interactive fiction through the platform.

One of the flexibilities afforded to me by Twine was the fact that the code is mostly internal, specific to the program, but based on JavaScript, HTML, and CSS. This meant that a great deal of Twine functionality does not need a specific level of knowledge of JavaScript, HTML, or CSS to create interactive narratives, but all the functionality was built on that framework. Rather than hard-coding links between passages, for example, you can generate a link in a Twine passage through the simple usage of brackets, such as [Key] that would create a

link to a passage called "Key." Within 30 minutes and access to a general glossary, nearly anyone could assemble a choice-driven Twine narrative as the program is very simple to learn. The native "Twine" code has increasingly complex functionalities that allow for a great deal of complex actions in the designing of an interactive story as well, but if one has knowledge of JavaScript, HTML, and CSS, however, then Twine becomes even more powerful. This ability of using JavaScript to supplement the experience Twine can provide internally is what most drew me to the program as I was adamant that my narrative required the recording of choices in order to match my vision of a disrupted Lovecraftian horror story.

The other hurdle associated with the technical design of the project was recording player choice so that their playthroughs mattered. I knew that Twine would give me by best chance at such a system, but from there I needed to figure out how to make it work. I began by searching the Twine community to see if anyone had taken on a project that worked similarly to the project I envision, and mercifully, I was able to find one that was similar enough that I could tweak it to my own needs. My biggest concern was the taking of choices as they were made by readers and bouncing them to a database, so I could then count the votes with each chapter and adjust the trajectory of the story accordingly. On that note, I encountered a blog-post by John Stewart, the Assistant Director for the Office of Digital Learning at the University of Oklahoma, that covered how to use Twine game data in Google Sheets in the form of a pseudo-database. This technique, based on the scripting work of Martin Hawkey, was able to use a Google Sheets file as a form of database (Stewart, "Twine Game Data to Google Sheets via Javascript"). This meant that rather than spending money on a webserver to record reader choices with an actual MYSQL database, I could instead utilize free Google technology in the form of a spreadsheet. While my initial test of the process outlined in Stewart's article went well, when I began working seriously on it about a

week later the technique did not seem to work as it had. I was unable to identify why this was the case, so I reached out to Mr. Stewart about my project and working closely with him he had managed to update the process (Stewart, "Twine Game Data to Google Sheets via JavaScript version 2"). This revised technique utilized JQUERY and AJAX to pass on variables from the Twine game to the Google spreadsheet and is also CORS-compliant. The initial batch of code was not able to be parsed in my earlier takes because it did not meet standards of web protection to prevent malicious data injection when writing data between websites. His revised technique ended up working just as I had needed, and the full development of the project began for me. I am indebted to his development of this technique as my project may not have been realized to the capacity in which I have been able to realize it.

Naturally, once the technology issues were addressed came the editorial challenge. How can I maintain some measure of authorial control over a piece where I am inviting disruption? Even at this stage of the work, having done five sections and looking back at the process, I am not entirely sure. It seems that at times where I tried to tilt the odds in the favor of one narrative choice or another, readers may have been resistant. Other times where I was not intending to lead them down one choice I may have subconsciously done that. There were three moments of choice in the narrative I wanted to look at that illustrate how I managed, or sometimes failed to manage, authorial control over the disrupted text.

In the prologue of *Dark Lens* I present a simple choice on one of the screens: do you shut the door, or shut and lock the door? This is one of the first actual choices readers could make and was one of the choices I recorded. While the choice has no immediate impact on the text, it did leave me with a potential opening to have something bad happen later. Knowing this project was in the horror genre, most of the readers chose to lock the door. Though there was an expectation

that the locked door would subvert any plans I may have had for the future, I chose to acknowledge their choices of having a barrier in the interlogue, but then chose to have an invisible, intangible force enter the room anyway. The door still worked as a barrier, but something else was able to enter the room, which is highly disconcerting despite the apparent aid it provided Mika. This mysterious entity is what leads Mika to the sketchbook of Joseph Frank.

The introduction of Joseph Frank's sketchbook in the interlogue represents my authorial hand influencing the trajectory of the story for the readers without my entirely being aware of it. When I introduced the sketchbook, my aim was to have a visual representation of the Jinyan and Choraji from the point of view of someone further along in the timeline who had also encountered them to some degree. This, I assumed, would deepen the mystery surrounding these beings as Mika would be given direct evidence of their existence outside of her riding the consciousness of Ake in the past. The usage of the sketchbook also served as a pacing element to provide backstory before the more open section where Mika could look at each of the objects that could lead to potential chapters. The problem I encountered, however, is that readers ended up spending so much time with the sketchbook as opposed to the other objects that most of the recorded choices were to learn more about Joseph Frank. Here a flaw in my pacing directly influenced the readers as to where to take the story next, despite the fertile ground of the other options, including a secret option if all objects were inspected carefully.

The most significant and overarching choice readers could make in the narrative was over which god to sacrifice Ake to. As I drafted the project my concept for the choice in gods also influenced the type of horror and abject that would be encountered in the rest of the story. The choice of life or death gods would result in more bodily-oriented horror, whereas the choice of order or chaos would result in a more challenging style of horror revolving around perception.

While I ultimately laid out the options and had plans in place for each god upon their being chosen by the readers, the choices could potentially be read as false because I had so much influence in stacking the deck. I find, however, that this was not necessarily the case because no matter what stories I had planned to address within the narrative, I would still need to adjust how they play out due to the choice of god made by the readers. That meant that even if I had an outline for a story surrounding one of the objects in Harcourt Manor that aspects of the story would need to be significantly altered by the choice of god that the readers had made.

Project Results

Once the hurdles of the initial project design were overcome, I began to spread the word about the chapters. I initially approached close friends and family, but also reached out to several communities, among which were several Lovecraft and Twine subreddits, including r/lovecraft, r/interactivefiction, and r/twinegames. These subreddits had the most substantial feedback; with r/lovecraft the enthusiast community proved intrigued by the material and encouraged my efforts whereas r/interactivefiction and r/twinegames were quite detailed in the criticisms of game structure when there were concerns about some chapters being too linear. Feedback from the different subreddits was particularly invaluable, as was the feedback of a number of creative communities I am involved with, many of which originated on the Discord community chat client. The Twine Games chat on Discord provided me with a great deal of technical documentation and suggestions regarding the game structure. Narrative choices and feedback came from two storytelling communities I am involved in, and I am indebted to the Comicadia and Project Vanguard communities for their encouragement and suggestions when I brought forward potential chapter concepts. These Discord communities were also particularly key in the testing of various drafts of the narratives.

Overall, the pool of readers who influenced the story remained steady between the installments, on average ranging between 15 to 20 participants. While some installments fared much higher regarding participants, technical errors, such as occasional null values from browser compatibility errors could not necessarily be used as proper data. This was not always the case, however; in the prologue the null value presented for "door" represented merely shutting the door rather than locking it. As I moved into successive installments I made sure I had more identifiable variables in place rather than relying on a null value. The spreadsheets representing each installment and the recorded choices can be found in the index.

Moving Forward

Having engaged in this process, there are a number of areas of concern I would take into account in potentially continuing this project. To begin with, I would want to address some technological limitations as some elements of the design process proved to be a thorn in my side throughout the posting of installments. I was very much learning Twine as I developed the narrative and the earlier installments reflect this. The prologue proved irksome for me on reflection because there are many structural issues in the narrative that I can identify as things I would not have done given my currently level of Twine experience. This includes the way variables were handled, such as the "locked" variable for the door and simply relying on a "null" value for the unlocked door. Furthermore, I would want to revisit the earlier installments and increase their complexity to better reflect the complexity of "Chapter Three: Blood, Sweat, and Ink" given how I introduced a behind-the-scenes "stress meter" that would influence what choices would appear depending on the internal tension of the point of view character. I also would be interested in developing a trackable, internal inventory system, is possible that required readers to actively solve more puzzles in experiencing the narrative.

For all the strengths of Twine as an Interactive Fiction platform, and the amount of customization I was able to utilize, I realize I have far more I can do with the platform. The most important resource I wish I had managed better, however, was time. My biggest challenge to crafting the project was time. I am immensely proud of the amount of work I was able to do regarding *Dark Lens*; while simultaneously exploring complex postcolonial and horror theory I was able to craft a narrative and then learn a programming language to craft an episodic game that was driven by the choices made by readers. Waiting for readers to respond to the material and make their choices proved to be my biggest time sink, as I would need to take a mandatory week out of my schedule to wait for the reading period to end before I could do any serious narrative writing and begin to craft the game system around the story.

Index: Google Spreadsheet

Prologue

door	guns	door	guns
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	undefined	TRUE
locked	undefined	unlocked	TRUE
undefined	undefined	unlocked	TRUE
undefined	undefined	unlocked	TRUE
undefined	undefined	unlocked	TRUE
undefined	undefined	unlocked	TRUE
undefined	TRUE	unlocked	TRUE

Chapter One

weapon	arrow	weapon	arrow
axe	breaking	spear	breaking
axe	breaking	spear	breaking
axe	breaking	spear	breaking
axe	breaking	spear	breaking
axe	breaking	spear	breaking

weapon	arrow	weapon	arrow
axe	breaking	spear	breaking
axe	breaking	spear	breaking
axe	breaking	sword	breaking
spear	breaking	sword	removing
spear	breaking	sword	removing
spear	breaking	sword	removing
spear	breaking	sword	removing

Chapter Two

monster	stone	action	crossbreed	serve
Choraji	FALSE	ambush	FALSE	chaos
Choraji	FALSE	ambush	FALSE	chaos
Choraji	FALSE	ambush	FALSE	chaos
Choraji	FALSE	sneak	FALSE	chaos
Jinyan	TRUE	sneak	TRUE	death
Jinyan	TRUE	sneak	TRUE	life
Jinyan	TRUE	sneak	TRUE	life
Jinyan	TRUE	sneak	TRUE	life
Jinyan	TRUE	sneak	TRUE	life
Jinyan	TRUE	sneak	TRUE	life
Jinyan	TRUE	undefined	TRUE	order
Jinyan	TRUE	undefined	TRUE	order
Jinyan	TRUE	undefined	TRUE	void
Jinyan	TRUE	undefined	TRUE	void

Interlogue

artifact	revolver	artifact	revolver
bullet	undefined	ring	undefined
bullet	undefined	ring	undefined
bullet	undefined	ring	undefined

artifact	revolver	artifact	revolver
bullet	TRUE	ring	undefined
headlight	TRUE	sketchbook	undefined
headlight	undefined	sketchbook	undefined
headlight	undefined	sketchbook	undefined
headlight	undefined	sketchbook	undefined
key	TRUE	sketchbook	undefined
key	undefined	revolver	TRUE
key	undefined	revolver	TRUE
key	undefined	revolver	TRUE
		revolver	TRUE

Chapter Three

job	victim	action
fired	alive	punch
quit	dead	flee
fired	alive	punch
fired	alive	punch
fired	dead	flee
fired	dead	punch
quit	dead	punch

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