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H.P. Lovecraft's Weird Fiction Has Inspired A Line Of Beer

THE RHODE ISLAND-BASED BREWER TRIES TO ANSWER A SIMPLE QUESTION: WHAT WOULD CTHULHU DRINK?

Based out of Rhode Island, the [Narragansett Brewing Company](#) is perhaps most strongly associated with *Jaws*, thanks to its prominent placement in the 1975 classic. But now Narragansett is teaming up with a number of New England-based artists to design beer cans celebrating another underwater monster with strong links to Rhode Island: the tentacle-faced Elder God, Cthulhu. Or perhaps more accurately, Cthulhu's daddy—famed horror writer H.P. Lovecraft.

"H.P. Lovecraft was born in Providence in 1890, the same year we were founded," Narragansett president Mark Hellendrung tells me. "So we thought what better way to pay tribute to Lovecraft and the great state we both were born in than to release a series of beers inspired by his life and work on our mutual 125th birthday?"

For the first beer in Narragansett's H.P. Lovecraft series, the brewery was inspired by an early story called "The Festival." First published in 1925, "The Festival" deals with the Yuletide rites of Kingsport, Massachusetts, an ancient sea town settled by the half-human descendants of otherworldly things that once crawled on shore from the bottom of the oceans. At the end of the story, the residents of Kingsport mount a flock of "hybrid winged things" called the Byakhee "that no sound eye could ever wholly grasp, or sound brain ever wholly remember." They then travel to interstellar space to worship their deity, Hastur the Unspeakable—a vast, amorphous, and vaguely octopoid-like Elder God of the Chthulhu Mythos.



If that sounds like an improbable story to inspire a beer, you're not wrong. But once Narragansett came up with the idea to release a line of H.P. Lovecraft beers, it made sense. "The Festival" is generally acknowledged as the first story in the Cthulhu Mythos. It was published in January of 1925, almost 90 years ago exactly. And the Cthulhu Mythos has a name for the stuff that Kingsport's residents drink to allow them to survive the ride across interstellar space on the back of the Byakhee: space mead.

"Our head brewmaster, Sean Larkin, was just fascinated with this idea of space mead," says Hellendrung. "So he tried to come up with a recipe, inspired by the honey meads that were popular in Lovecraft's time." The finished beer is a robust dark ale with an edge of sweetness, brewed from five malts and two different kinds of hops.

For the Lovecraft Honey Ale can, Narragansett teamed up with Providence-based graphic designer [A.J. Paglia](#) to bring the can to life. They wanted to do something more respectful to Lovecraft's legacy than just slapping a tentacled monster on the can. Paglia's approach was to come up with a design that was both evocative of the beer inside, and evocative of some of H.P. Lovecraft's more surreal imagery. It's a tasteful approach that Narragansett intends to continue with the rest of the series.

At least three more beers in the Lovecraft series are coming out from Narragansett this year. The next beer to be released will be an English-style old ale inspired by Lovecraft's novella, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, with label art designed by Jason Eckert of the [H.P. Lovecraft Historical Society](#). The Innsmouth ale will be released in April. And a third, Hellendrung tells me, will not actually be inspired by a horror story at all, but by the line inscribed on Lovecraft's tombstone: "I AM PROVIDENCE." The third and fourth designers have not yet been chosen.

For beer-drinking horror fans like yours truly, seeing the face of H.P. Lovecraft staring out of the beer case at the local liquor store is worth getting excited about. But none of that changes the fact that H.P. Lovecraft is something of a strange patron saint for Narragansett. The word "beer" shows up only once in the author's collected fiction, and Lovecraft himself was a teetotaler. Asked what he thinks Lovecraft might have thought of having a series of beers released in his honor, Hellendrung admits he has no idea.

"I'm not sure I could ever really get into his head," Hellendrung laughs. "But it's important for us to do this delicately, and be very respectful to both Lovecraft and his fans. With its Lovecraft beers, though, Narragansett wants to do something less cynical: pay tribute to a fellow Rhode Islander, a literary great just as old as 'Gansett' itself. It's the equivalent of raising your glass across the bar at the guy in the corner who shares your birthday.

The Lovecraft Honey Ale goes on sale in limited release starting January 19.

Correction: the original text said the upcoming 'Shadow over Innsmouth' beer will be a stout. It will be an English style ale, instead.