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Arts & Entertainment

A twist on terror: Open Circle adapts work by H.P. Lovecraft

by Rob La Gatta
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Seattle's Open Circle Theater group prepares for Halloween by staging three disturbing tales from horror master Howard Philips Lovecraft.

Arkham is a surprisingly well-done interpretation of Lovecraft's stylistic and lengthy writing.

Lovecraft wrote some of history's most horrific tales and has inspired hundreds of authors in his posthumous fame. In his most effective tales, he shows his brilliance for suspense as one may want to stop reading from sheer terror, but is forced to stick around and see what happens.

Arkham is broken into three sections, each showing a different story of Lovecraft. First, "The Shunned House" tells of a cursed building with a secret. Next is "Cool Air," a play where a mysterious doctor must maintain a certain body temperature.

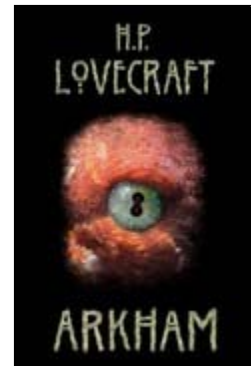
Finally, "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" chronicles the journey of an outsider into a strange and cult-like town in New England.

Open Circle Theater has taken quite a few liberties with Lovecraft's work and the three tales have been adapted into modern time.

Also, all of the protagonists are female, which is a sharp contrast from Lovecraft's work. He rarely wrote from the female perspective.

Some of the changes are only minor, while others seem to alter the direction of a story completely. However, the writers of the adaptations are obviously familiar with Lovecraft's work and have retained the most necessary dialogue, descriptions, and themes.

The acting troupe consists of nine performers who have worked around Seattle in the past.



While the play has quite a bit more drama and flamboyance than Lovecraft's writings suggest, the actors don't overact, but rather work with the adaptation to add some fun to it.

Seeing the more suspenseful scenes played out right before your eyes in their small and dimly lit theater is an experience that will get anybody's heart racing.

The elaborate makeup and costumes are well put together, which is essential for the added horror. Fish-human crossbreeds are simple yet hideous, and the special effects for the dead are lively. The cast has only nine actors who take on over fifteen roles.

Open Circle Theater is a small company, but their dedication to bringing Lovecraft to life is commendable.

Despite the alterations to Lovecraft's work, *Arkham* is an effective, disturbing bit of theater full of twists and turns, making it the perfect Halloween treat.

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