

## AZATHOTH.

*Stories: The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath, The Whisperer in Darkness and The Dreams in the Witch House.*<sup>1</sup>

AZATHOTH is nebulous, defined only by teasing references.

He is the nuclear chaos, sprawling and bubbling on his throne at the centre of the universe.

Around him, flutes pipe and drums beat in a maddening rhythm.<sup>2</sup>

Other gods dance around him.

He is mindless, an idiot god.

So, for an Azathothian scenario, we must make something from these, using the tricks outlined above.

First, try a straight substitution: Azathoth for Cthulhu. Take part of the plot from *The Call of Cthulhu* (specifically, the Tale of Inspector Legrasse) and just add Azathoth.

The Investigators discover a jet-black sculpture of a bubbling, sprawling mass, made of unearthly material.

They discover it is linked with barbaric rituals in the mountains.

When they arrive at a mountain town, they discover reports of disappearances and rumours of cults.

They find a raving man who screams of evil in the highest mountains.

When they climb these mountains, the Investigators find worshippers dancing mindlessly to piping flutes.<sup>3</sup>

At the climax of the ritual, a black polypous thing, possibly an extension or facet of Azathoth, bulges down from the night sky.

1. Whenever I list a story without an author, it's by Lovecraft. Here, because Azathoth is only mentioned briefly in stories, I have omitted synopses of the stories.
2. Steal this reference whenever you have music and dance in a scenario, especially if it is influenced by the Mythos. If, for example, the Investigators hear jazz in New Orleans, it will have a piping clarinet and a maddening rhythm.
3. We've replaced the standard descent with a climb.

This is a straight steal, with imagery changed. Cthulhu's green becomes Azathoth's black. Drums become flutes. And, where *The Call of Cthulhu* riffed around the theme of water, with lakes and swamps, this plot riffs around space themes, with the mountains and the night sky.<sup>1</sup>

Next, instead of stealing a Lovecraft plot for Azathoth, let's assemble one. Use a progression of Lovecraftian locations, slowly increasing the horror and harm. Riff on Azathothian themes and add some Lovecraftian set pieces.

Steal only the  
creepy bits from  
BEYOND THE  
WALL OF  
SLEEP here.

→ The Investigators read press reports of comatose animals found in mountain streams.<sup>2</sup> The animals are drooling corpses, their minds blasted by unknown forces.

Following the streams, they find a forgotten, crumbling mountain town. Although most inhabitants will not talk, one tells them strange tales of worshippers who lost their minds and raved about stars.

That night, the Investigators stay in an old and stinking hotel. On the wind, they hear discordant flutes and the beat of drums. They dream of flying beyond the stars, where polypous things caper around an unknown black mass.

The next morning, the Investigators find a twitching and comatose dog. Its mind has gone.

When they enquire about the worshippers, the Investigators are told they worship at an observatory on the highest peak. They are warned not to go there.

The Investigators go there. They find a drooling, near-comatose man, babbling about stars and thrones. There are records of strange rituals performed in the observatory. The sound of flutes is loud, now, and comes from beneath the observatory.

1. Try adding further details from other stories. Steal descriptions of the mountain town from *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*. Steal the mountain expedition from *At the Mountains of Madness*.
2. Stolen from *The Whisperer in Darkness*.

When the Investigators descend, they find an ancient network of tunnels. Deep within, they find a great chamber, with a bubbling mass seething within. It is Azathoth, summoned, seeping through an interstitial vortex. The bubbling mass grows and floods through the tunnels, forcing the Investigators to flee.

At the end, the Investigators stand outside the observatory. An immense blackness radiates from the mountain, beautiful and terrible, as Azathoth returns to the sky.

This simply uses the tricks outlined above. The locations are stock ones: a town, an old building, an underground city. The distance between Investigators and Azathoth decreases: the Investigators read reports, hear second-hand stories, meet a babbling witness, then see Azathoth himself. The victims increase in importance: first a dog, a human, then the Investigators themselves. And, since Lovecraft didn't say how Azathoth harms people, this plot riffs on the "mindless" theme, giving the victims blasted minds.

It also steals Lovecraftian set pieces. Animals-in-streams come from *The Whisperer in Darkness*, the dreams from *The Call of Cthulhu*. The bubbling mass is a Shoggoth clone, from *At the Mountains of Madness*. And the ending comes from *The Colour Out of Space*, with blackness replacing colour.

We've taken space as our theme for Azathoth, giving us meteorites, telescopes, astronomy and so on.<sup>1</sup> An alternative theme is "nuclear", riffing on "nuclear chaos", which takes us into the physics laboratory and Manhattan project.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, even the nebulous Azathoth can spawn scenarios. You simply steal ideas and riff on themes. If we can do it for him, we can do it for anyone.

1. To avoid problems with narrative distance, we *refer to* space, rather than *going there*.
2. Almost certainly, Lovecraft didn't mean "nuclear" this way, but it's too good to waste.

Look to  
history for  
inspiration.  
This scenario  
fits well on  
North  
Carolina's  
notoriously  
mysterious  
Brown Mountain  
(Today,  
Robert Moog  
has a theremin  
factory  
nearby).

Debatable. How often does  
Lovecraft talk about Einstein?

## COLOURS.

*Story: The Colour Out of Space.*

*Synopsis: On arrival in the Arkham Hills, the protagonist meets Ammi, who tells the following story. A meteorite fell, which scientists studied but could not understand. Afterwards, local flora and fauna grew strangely, then decayed. When Ammi visited the farm where the meteorite fell, he found the farmer and his wife, alive but crumbling, apparently attacked by something in the well. Ammi summoned the authorities. When they arrived, everything began to glow and the Colour shot from the well into the sky. It left behind a blighted area, which grows by an inch each year.*

COLOURS, unlike Azathoth, don't transplant well. Try taking the plot of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* and substituting Colours for Deep Ones. It won't work.<sup>1</sup> You can't have a hotel run by a Colour.



This is because Colours are unique. They do one thing and do it well: slow, inexorable decay.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Colour scenarios are about decay.

First, decide when your scenario begins in the Colour's chronology:

The Colour falls to Earth in a meteorite.

It gradually sucks the life from the land.

The Colour shoots back into the sky, although part remains behind.<sup>3</sup> It leaves a devastated area, like an acid burn.

1. Although try substituting a buried Old One with a Colour.
2. Another unique race is the Great Race. Their one thing, which they do well, is possession.
3. It's unclear whether there are several Colours, of which one remains behind, or one, of which part remains behind. It doesn't matter.

Mash  
them with  
the Horgor  
or Shlan  
and you can.



This gives us three places to begin a scenario: when the Colour arrives, when it is present and just after it has left (see *Shifting Time*, above). Let's briefly consider the third, which is unexplored by Lovecraft. We have:

A devastated, blighted area, which spreads gradually, growing an inch each year.

The Arkham reservoir, built on the dusty land.

Here, then, is a possible scenario about the spreading blight and poisoned reservoir, which leads to the remaining Colour beneath the soil. But let's return to the first two timing options: scenarios set when the Colour arrives and when it is present. Both options, for the most part, follow the plot of *The Colour Out of Space*.

How can we rerun this plot, but make it look new? First, switch locations. Pick any Lovecraftian location: a town, the mountains, Antarctica. Or pick somewhere specific: a theatre, an observatory, a museum, the slums of Victorian London.<sup>1</sup>

In that location, run through the process of decay, which runs as follows.

Inanimate things decay: water tastes bad and milk goes sour.

Plants become glossy and strangely coloured and grow to phenomenal size.<sup>2</sup> They bud prematurely and move even when there is no wind. They taste bitter and sickening.

Animals are born with unnatural proportions, move oddly, have unnatural agility and leave strange arrangements of footprints. For example, rabbits leap further than seems possible.<sup>3</sup>

1. And, depending on the location, describe the decay differently. Perhaps, in Antarctica, the ice breaks apart or the rock becomes brittle. Perhaps, in the slums of Victorian London, the decay looks like a disease.
2. This description has dreamlike elements: beautiful, eerie, light (note how the plants are glossy rather than dull). See *Dreaming*, above.
3. Note how the footprints maintain narrative distance. Seeing an overpowered rabbit might be comical. Finding footprints is eerie.

Ice under high pressure can become an unearthly blue colour...

Humans sicken, shun company and go mad. They glimpse shifting walls and hear things moving in the night. These people lose motivation, becoming listless and mechanical. Towards the end, they become luminous, crumble or mysteriously disappear.

Much of the  
Colour's alien-ness  
comes from the  
notion that it is  
merely carrying  
out its life  
cycle:

Fall, Infect.  
Reproduce.  
Return.

Try to steal this  
mechanical,  
inevitable,  
inplacability  
for other  
phenomena,  
from Deep Ones  
to Haster.

So, the order is: *things, plants, animals, humans*.<sup>1</sup> This is not just the order in which things decay: it's the order in which Investigators encounter the Colour's victims.

Another sequence describes *how* these things decay. Broadly, the decay progresses through the following stages:

Unhealthy.

Unnatural.

Moving strangely.

Oddly coloured.

Luminous.

Grey and brittle.

Crumbling.

(c.f. Darwin's "The Power  
of Movement in Plants")

So, in your chosen location, run through these two sequences of decay. By using them side-by-side, you get a rich array of weirdness. Here's an example using Victorian London:

In the East End markets, the fruits are huge and glossy, but taste bitter. The milk, too, has an unnatural taste.

Traders report tales of unnaturally large rats, which scurry up walls.

The Investigators uncover tales of an ancient meteorite, which landed in London's East End, and rumours of something underlying the soil, getting stronger. At night, the buildings of the East End glow.

1. See Increasing Harm, above. As noted in that section, we can add "the Investigators" as a fifth step. That is, in your scenario, the Investigators could be the Colour's final victims. At the end, they notice they are glowing or decaying.

There are tales of animals that the thing under the soil has sucked dry. The Investigators find mice and birds, crumbling and decaying.

Now, the fruits in the market become brittle, crumbling when they are touched. There is starvation in the poorer areas of London.

The buildings, too, begin to crumble.

As the Investigators investigate, they find crumbling humans, confined to slum housing and slowly dying.

A road, New Oxford Street, is driven through the crumbling slums. Yet the Investigators know that, eventually, the Colour will suck the life out of that too.

Thus, with a good location, you can simply rerun the *Colour Out of Space* plot, and it will seem new.

Throughout your scenario, tease the players with impressions of colour. Lovecraft gives us the following:

Distortions in the colours of the sun.

Cloudiness.

Moving colours.

Being brushed by a vapour.

A pale, insidious beam.

Add your own: try shimmering, glistening or impressions of mirages. Begin with intangible impressions, then move towards tangible contact and sightings of the Colour.<sup>1</sup>

1. Again, note how dreamlike these descriptions are. Beside the unpleasantness, there is distorted beauty.

*The Colour is a great story, but makes an unsatisfying plot for a game. Give the players something to do against the background of inevitable decay.*



→ Try inverting the Chase. The investigators have to follow a mind-controlled victim into the heart of the Colour zone...

To end your scenario, either copy the bleak ending of *The Colour Out Of Space*, or use a standard Lovecraftian climax:

**The Descent.** Although the protagonist of *The Colour Out of Space* doesn't descend underground, your Investigators might. They could discover the Colour roosting in caves, mines or tunnels.

**The Final Horror.** Since the Colour is more dreamlike than horrific, the final horror is probably a victim of the Colour, rather than the Colour itself. Nevertheless, it's possible to imagine a larger, horrific Colour, hurtling towards the Investigators or hanging bleakly in the night sky.

\* **The Chase.** It's unlikely the Colour will participate in a dramatic car chase. However, it could rush through tunnels, Shoggoth-style. Alternatively, the Investigators could flee the spreading grey blight, as the countryside collapses behind. Although *The Colour Out of Space* ends bleakly, your scenario can end with adrenaline.

**The Hopeless Epilogue,** with the Colour remaining beneath the soil, is ready provided for you.

→  
"A terrible,  
unnatural  
aurora  
that haunts  
me still."

Other endings are less probable, but worth considering. Fighting the Colour is probably silly: the Investigators would simply attack a patch of light. But self-realisation makes a good ending: an Investigator could realise they have been infected by the Colour.

Finally, let's return to the meteorite, which is ripe for stealing. Here is how it arrives:

There is a string of explosions in the air.<sup>1</sup>

There is a pillar of smoke.

The next morning, a huge rock is found.

1. c.f. H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, in which green flares from Mars fall to Earth as green shooting stars. They turn out to be huge cylinders. It doesn't end well.

→ See Libyan  
desert  
glass.

\* One-shot idea: injured war veterans  
must out-crawl an - inexorably  
creeping colour.  
Colour

It is struck by lightning on the nights after it lands.

It contains several “globules”, of an alien colour, which pop when hit with a hammer.

Over time, it shrinks into nothing.

Steal this description for anything that falls to Earth. Note two things in particular. Firstly, although the lightning makes little sense, it makes a wonderful omen. Put similar omens in your scenarios. Secondly and importantly, the meteorite leaves no permanent evidence behind.

Steal, also, the material from that meteorite.

It is soft: you scoop it, rather than chipping it.

It is luminous.

It is hot.

It is corrosive, burning through any container.

It is invulnerable to all known reagents.

It is composed of a previously unknown element.

It produces strange emissions when analysed with a spectrometer.

It shrinks to nothing over time.

So, it is *odd, powerful, beyond science*<sup>1</sup> and *decaying*. Other alien materials, in other stories, are similar: for example, the soapstone in *The Call of Cthulhu*. Whenever you need alien substances, then, steal these descriptions, either by using the specific details above or by expanding on those four points.

1. Presumably, if you put it near a cloud chamber, it would give strange tracks. If you put a radio near it, it would give strange radio emissions. And so on. Inventing scientific anomalies is easy.

Radio is a wonderfully spooky technology. Voices out of the ether, whispering strange truths.