

= The Colour Out of Space =

" The Colour Out of Space " is a short story written by American horror author H. P. Lovecraft in March 1927 . In the tale , an unnamed narrator pieces together the story of an area known by the locals as the " blasted heath " in the wild hills west of Arkham , Massachusetts . The narrator discovers that many years ago a meteorite crashed there , poisoning every living being nearby ; vegetation grows large but foul tasting , animals are driven mad and deformed into grotesque shapes , and the people go insane or die one by one .

Lovecraft began writing " The Colour Out of Space " immediately after finishing his previous short novel , The Case of Charles Dexter Ward , and in the midst of final revision on his horror fiction essay " Supernatural Horror in Literature " . Seeking to create a truly alien life form , he drew inspiration from numerous fiction and nonfiction sources . First appearing in the September 1927 edition of Hugo Gernsback 's science fiction magazine Amazing Stories , " The Colour Out of Space " became one of Lovecraft 's most popular works , and remained his personal favorite short story . It was adapted into feature film versions in 1965 , 1987 , and 2010 .

= = Synopsis = =

An unnamed surveyor from Boston telling the story in the first @-@ person perspective attempts to uncover the secrets behind a shunned place referred to by the locals of Arkham as the " blasted heath . " Unable to garner any information from the townspeople , the protagonist seeks out an old and allegedly crazy man by the name of Ammi Pierce , who relates his personal experiences with a farmer who used to live on the cursed property , Nahum Gardner . Pierce claims that the troubles began when a meteorite crashed into Gardner 's lands in June 1882 .

The meteorite never cools , but begins shrinking , and local scientists cannot discern its origins . As the stone shrinks , it leaves behind globules of colour that are referred to as such only by analogy , as they fall outside the range of anything known in the visible spectrum . These remains eventually disappear but , the following season , Gardner 's crops come in unnaturally large and abundantly . When he discovers that , despite their appearance , they are inedible , he becomes convinced the meteorite has poisoned the soil . Over the following year , the problem spreads to surrounding vegetation and local animals , altering them in unusual ways . Plant life around the farmhouse becomes " slightly luminous in the dark , " and Gardner 's wife eventually goes mad , forcing him to lock her in the attic . During this time , Gardner begins to isolate his family from the rest of the town and Pierce slowly becomes his only contact with the outside world .

Soon after Gardner 's wife becomes mad , the vegetation begins eroding into a grey powder and the water from the well becomes tainted . One of Gardner 's sons , Thaddeus , goes insane like his mother and is similarly locked in a different room in the attic . The livestock begins turning grey and dying and , like the crops , their meat is tasteless and inedible . Thaddeus eventually dies and Merwin , another of Gardner 's sons , goes missing during an excursion to retrieve water from the well . After two weeks of silence from Gardner , Pierce visits the farmstead and witnesses the tale 's eponymous horror for the first time in the attic . Gardner 's final son , Zenas , has disappeared and the " colour " has infected Nahum 's wife , whom Pierce puts out of her misery . He then flees the decaying house as the horror destroys the last surviving resident , Nahum .

Pierce returns to the farmstead shortly after with six other men , including a doctor , who begin examining Nahum 's remains . They discover Merwin and Zenas ' eroding skeletons at the bottom of the well , as well as remnants of several other creatures . As they reflect upon their discoveries in the house , a light begins to emit from the well that eventually transforms into the " colour " and begins pouring out , spreading over everything nearby . The men flee the house just as the horror blights the land and then shoots toward the sky . Pierce alone turns back after the " colour " has gone and witnesses a small part of it try to follow the rest , only to fail and return to the well . The knowledge that part of the alien still resides on earth is sufficient to alter his mental state . When some of the men return the following day , there is nothing remaining but a dead horse and acres of grey dust , and the surrounding area is quickly abandoned by all of its remaining residents .

== Background ==

Lovecraft began writing " The Colour Out of Space " in March 1927 , immediately after completing The Case of Charles Dexter Ward . As he wrote the tale , however , he was also typing the final draft of his horror fiction essay " Supernatural Horror in Literature " . Although the author himself claimed that his inspiration was the newly constructed Scituate Reservoir in Rhode Island , Lovecraft scholar S. T. Joshi believes that the planned Quabbin Reservoir in Massachusetts must have influenced him as well . American writer and pulp fiction enthusiast Will Murray cites paranormal investigator Charles Fort , and the " thunderstones " (lightning @-@ drawing rocks that may have fallen from the sky) he describes in The Book of the Damned , as possible inspirations for the behavior of the meteorite .

Lovecraft was dismayed at the all @-@ too human depiction of aliens in other works of fiction , and his goal for " Colour " was to create an entity that was truly alien . In doing so , he drew inspiration from a number of sources describing colors outside of the visible spectrum . Most notably , Joshi points to Hugh Elliott 's Modern Science and Materialism , a 1919 nonfiction book that mentions the " extremely limited " senses of humans , such that of the many " aethereal waves " striking the eyes , " The majority cannot be perceived by the retina at all . " Lovecraft had used this concept previously , in his 1920 short story , " From Beyond " . Completed by the end of March , " The Colour Out of Space " first appeared in Hugo Gernsback 's science fiction magazine , Amazing Stories in September 1927 . The story was illustrated by J. M. de Aragón , an artist who produced occasional artwork for the magazine .

== Reception and legacy ==

" The Colour Out of Space " became the only work from Amazing Stories to make Edward O 'Brien 's anthology of The Best American Short Stories , appearing in the 1928 " Roll of Honor " . Gernsback paid Lovecraft only \$ 25 (approximately \$ 341 in present @-@ day terms) and was late in doing so , leading Lovecraft to refer to the publisher as " Hugo the Rat " . He never again submitted anything to the publication . Lovecraft did not write another major short story until the following year , when he crafted " The Dunwich Horror " , although he did pen " History of the Necronomicon " and " Ibid " as minor works in @-@ between , as well as an account of a Halloween night 's dream that he called " The Very Old Folk " .

In addition to being Lovecraft 's personal favourite of his short stories , critics generally consider " The Colour Out of Space " one of his best works , and the first with his trademark blending of science fiction and horror . Lovecraft scholar Donald R. Burleson referred to the tale as " one of his stylistically and conceptually finest short stories . " Joshi praises the work as one of Lovecraft 's best and most frightening , particularly for the vagueness of the description of the story 's eponymous horror . He also lauded the work as Lovecraft 's most successful attempt to create something entirely outside of the human experience , as the creature 's motive (if any) is unknown and it is impossible to discern whether or not the " colour " is emotional , moral , or even conscious . His only criticism is that it is " just a little too long " . The text of " The Colour Out of Space " , like many of Lovecraft 's works , has fallen into public domain and can be accessed in several compilations of the author 's work , as well as on the Internet . It also had a strong influence on Brian Aldiss 's The Saliva Tree , which has been seen as a rewriting of Lovecraft 's tale . In 1984 , the novel The Color Out of Time by Michael Shea was published as a sequel to the original novelette .

== Film adaptations ==

The 1965 film Die , Monster , Die ! , directed by Daniel Haller , is based on " The Colour Out of Space " . Nick Adams plays a scientist named Stephen Reinhart who travels to England to visit his fiancée (played by Suzan Farmer) at the home of her parents Nahum (Boris Karloff) and Letitia (Freda Jackson) . There he discovers that Nahum is keeping a space rock in his basement and

using it to grow giant vegetation and mutated animals . The rock has driven Nahum and Letitia insane and , in the film 's climax , it transforms Nahum into a glowing monster . Lovecraft scholar Don G. Smith claims that , of the scenes that are derived from Lovecraft 's work , the " blasted heath doesn 't live up to Lovecraft 's description " and asserts that , overall , the film does not capture Lovecraft 's intent to " ... play ... with the idea of an alien life form completely different from anything humans can imagine . " Smith considers Haller 's work an imitation of Roger Corman 's Edgar Allan Poe films , rather than a serious attempt to adapt Lovecraft 's tale .

Another adaptation , 1987 's *The Curse* , was directed by David Keith and more closely follows the plot of Lovecraft 's work . A meteorite lands on the property of Nathan Hayes (Claude Akins) and local physician Alan Forbes (Cooper Huckabee) is unable to explain why the rock keeps shrinking . He is dissuaded from contacting the authorities by Charlie Davidson (Steve Carlisle) , a realtor who does not want the new arrival to discourage the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) from establishing a new reservoir in the area . As the rock disappears , a glowing colour seeps out and into the ground . Within a few weeks , the farm 's crops bloom but soon turn out to be inedible . Shortly after , local animals , as well as Nathan 's wife , begin to go mad , and a previously unknown element is discovered in the property 's well . Soon Nathan and his son Cyrus (Malcolm Danare) also go insane , and begin terrorizing those who come to the farm , including the other children Zack (Wil Wheaton) and Alice (Amy Wheaton) . In the film 's conclusion , they are saved by TVA representative Carl Willis (John Schneider) and the house collapses . Lovecraft scholar Charles P. Mitchell referred to the film as faithful to the author 's original work , but claimed that " [t] he last twenty minutes of the film are so disjointed that they virtually ruin the entire film " .

The 2010 film *Die Farbe* , directed by Huan Vu , is an adaptation set in Germany instead of in Massachusetts . It is shot mainly in black and white , the exception being the " Colour " itself . S. T. Joshi described it as " the best Lovecraft film adaptation ever made " .