

= The Cats of Ulthar =

" The Cats of Ulthar " is a short story written by American fantasy author H. P. Lovecraft in June 1920 . In the tale , an unnamed narrator relates the story of how a law forbidding the killing of cats came to be in a town called Ulthar . As the narrative goes , the city is home to an old couple who enjoy capturing and killing the townspeople 's cats . When a caravan of wanderers passes through the city , the kitten of an orphan ( Menes ) traveling with the band disappears . Upon hearing of the couple 's violent acts towards cats , Menes invokes a prayer before leaving town that causes the local felines to swarm the cat @-@ killers ' house and devour them . Upon witnessing the result , the local politicians pass a law forbidding the killing of cats .

Influenced by Lord Dunsany , the tale was a personal favorite of Lovecraft 's and has remained popular since his death . Considered one of the best short stories of Lovecraft 's early period , aspects of The Cats of Ulthar would be referenced again in the author 's works The Other Gods and The Dream @-@ Quest of Unknown Kadath . It was first published in the literary journal Tryout in November 1920 and now resides in the public domain .

= = Synopsis = =

An unnamed narrator , while gazing upon his pet cat , begins to reminisce about a law in the town of Ulthar that forbids the killing of cats and relates the story of how this law came to be . The tale begins with the introduction of an old cotter and his wife who delight in trapping and violently killing any cats who venture onto their property . The people of the town are too afraid of the couple to speak against these acts , so they instead focus their efforts on keeping their felines from approaching the cotter 's house . One night a caravan of travelers from a distant land arrives and passes through the village . They bring with them an orphan named Menes who , having lost his family to a plague , has only a small , black kitten to keep him company . After being unable to find his kitten on the third day of his stay , Menes hears the stories of the old cotter and his wife , and decides to take action .

Menes spends time meditating prior to unleashing a prayer that affects the shapes and movements of the clouds in the sky . The caravan leaves Ulthar that night , shortly before the townspeople notice that all of their cats have gone missing . The townspeople suspect both the old couple and the wanderers , but the innkeeper 's son Atal witnesses the felines circling the property of the cotter . The next morning , the cats have returned to their owners well @-@ fed , but the cotter and his wife have vanished . When the townspeople explore their abandoned house , they discovered nothing more than two skeletons that have been picked clean . The local burgesses , after reviewing the evidence and stories of the townspeople , decide to pass a law that forbids the killing of cats in Ulthar .

= = Background = =

Lovecraft outlined the plot to his friend Reinhart Kleiner in May 1920 and wrote The Cats of Ulthar on June 15 , 1920 , five months after completing his previous tale , The Terrible Old Man . Conceived during the author 's early period , Lovecraft was influenced by the writing of Anglo @-@ Irish writer Lord Dunsany and attempted to mimic his style . Among the literary aspects that Lovecraft borrows are the " vengeance motif " and the " ponderous tone " of Dunsany . Dunsany 's influence is evident on the surface of the text as well : wanderers , similar to the ones portrayed in The Cats of Ulthar , appear in Dunsany 's earlier tale Idle Days on the Yann . Lovecraft 's character of Menes shares his name with Menes , the semi @-@ mythical founder of the ancient city of Memphis , Egypt . The ancient Egyptians were admirers of cats who made it a crime to kill or export felines .

Prior to The Cats of Ulthar , Lovecraft had penned several tales in the style of Lord Dunsany , including The White Ship , The Street , The Doom that Came to Sarnath , The Terrible Old Man , and The Tree . His next Dunsanian tale , Celephaïs , was considered by Lovecraft scholar S. T.

Joshi to be " one of his best and most significant " . The Cats of Ulthar was first published in the literary journal *Tryout* in November 1920 , and later appeared in *Weird Tales* in February 1926 and 1933 , as well as being privately reprinted in a forty two @-@ copy run in December 1935 .

= = Reception and legacy = =

The Cats of Ulthar was a personal favorite of Lovecraft 's , who was an ardent cat lover . A number of contemporary critics , as well as Lovecraft himself , consider the story to be the best of all his Dunsanian tales . Other critics have noted that the story is one of Lovecraft 's most famous tales that fits both the Dunsanian and the " weird fantasy " style . Literary critic Darrell Schweitzer , however , comments that The Cats of Ulthar resembles Dunsany in " mood and execution " only and that " [ it ] has no obvious parallels in any Dunsany story " . Schweitzer refers to the prose as " restrained " , and notes that , unlike Lovecraft , Dunsany preferred dogs and would have been unlikely to have written such an enthusiastic tribute . Lovecraft scholar S. T. Joshi disagrees , claiming that " [ t ] his tale owes more to Dunsany than many of his other ' Dunsanian ' fantasies " .

The character of Atal , the innkeeper 's son who witnesses the cats of Ulthar circling the antagonists ' cottage , would later appear in Lovecraft 's *The Other Gods* . In this short story , written in August 1921 and first published in November 1933 , Atal , now an adult , becomes an apprentice to Barzai the Wise and travels with him to seek out the tale 's eponymous deities . Barzai even mentions the law against killing cats in Ulthar , further cementing the connection . Atal also appears as a priest in the long *The Dream @-@ Quest of Unknown Kadath* ? written in 1927 but not published until 1943 ? when protagonist Randolph Carter visits the city 300 years after the events in *The Cats of Ulthar* , when the town is still heavily populated by felines . Carter is later able to summon the cats of Ulthar to his aid . Cats would be used in what scholar Katharine M. Rogers calls " a more original way " in Lovecraft 's 1923 work *The Rats in the Walls* . Here , as in others of Lovecraft later tales , cats embody the attraction to horror while , unlike the human protagonists , " never pursuing horror to the point of becoming horrible themselves " . The text of *The Cats of Ulthar* , like many of Lovecraft 's works , has fallen into the public domain and can be accessed in several compilations of the author 's work as well as on the Internet .