

The Devil's Library Episode 8.5 – “Grimscribe” & “Songs Of A Dead Dreamer”

[Intro Music]

Leraje

Welcome to another, uh, bonus edition of the Devil's Library. And we are doing yet another of our Ligotti episodes. And with me tonight is Ligeia.

Ligeia

Hail Satan.

Leraje

And, um, a special guest all the way from the US of A. Hello, Chris from the band Buzzard.

Chris

Hello. Hello.

Leraje

How are you?

Chris

Thanks for having me.

Leraje

No worries.

Chris

Doing as well as one can be given the circumstances.

Leraje

Yeah. In the ongoing fascist based collapse of our universe that's going on around us.

Chris

So let's dive into some bleak cosmic nihilism.

Leraje

Yeah, let's really depress ourselves.

Chris

Ah, it's cathartic. In the end.

Leraje

It is. You're right. Right. So, as per usual, we chose three stories. I chose The Night School. Chris, what did you choose?

Chris

The Frolic

Leraje

And Ligeia?

Ligeia

Like, accordingly? The Sect of the Idiot.

Leraje

Okay, uh, let's start with The Sect of the Idiot, shall we? Do you want to tell us a little bit about the storm? Sorry, I'm down.

Ligeia
My lungs.

Leraje
Just. We had a mouthful of vape there. Sorry about that.

Ligeia
Vape? What do you mean? Okay, okay, let me, Let me see my notes. My printer broke today. Today. So, um, guys, please appreciate. I made notes on the piece of paper. So the Sect of the Idiot was again, a very short story. You don't need to read a lot to get the results with Ligotti.

I love that. I think out of these three stories you will hear today the. This one is the most grotesque and theatrical and maybe baroque. Those are the words I would use. I don't know why I'm starting with, uh, like the comparing, but just don't question me. So, uh, we are following a person that I would call investigator who is drawn into a secretive sect.

This sect is devoted to a being that is called the Idiot. And this is a godlike, uh, figure whose presence annihilates reason, agency and identity. Sounds lovely. Right? Uh, so this cosmic principle of stupidity is not to be confused with ignorance and it's actually like the mindlessness. I have just words here, so please bear with me at the heart of the existence itself.

So it's very cosmic. I didn't know. I didn't remember what, uh, I read it before, but again, so I just chose the title. Uh, and I'm happy I chose this because it's a very cosmic.

Leraje
Yeah, I say this every time. And I'm aware I say every time, but this was the most Lovecraftian of the three.

Ligeia
Was it?

Chris
Oh, I was thinking. I wrote. I actually wrote that on one of my Note cards, obviously, is the Necronomicon quote.

Leraje
Yeah, yeah.

Chris
But the idea of a sect worshipping, uh, a deity that represents either an indifferent universe or just the mindless abyss. Yeah, yeah. Even the authorial voice reminds me of one of those lone protagonists even. And this is on a very micro level. Legati uses the adjective infinite repeatedly. And that's such a Lovecraftian tick.

Like there's the infinite horror, the infinite just to mean very like.

Ligeia
Yeah, infinite.

Chris
He just means extremely or quite so or very.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Leraje
He's also got that, uh, that Lovecraftian kind of. That Lovecraftian sense of personal identity being erased or kind of like, um. And obviously, you know, we

all know good old Howard Phillips, his ideas of identity were perhaps more extreme. Yeah, um. But, uh, I don't think Ligotti is like that at all.

Um, but again those. Those themes of kind of like the. The erasure of personality, the erasure of personhood.

Chris

And another Lovecraftian element is the physical space where the sect worships is. Has like non Euclidean geometry. It has. The dimensions don't make logical sense the way even the town itself ends up being infected by this strange alien, uh, geography. Which is just like in the actual, uh, story Call of Cthulhu, when the Temple of Rises out of the ocean and the narrator describes how the angles didn't make sense with each other.

You know, it's almost like a Lovecrafting cliché. The non Euclidean angles in the geometry and the physical space of the sect as it exists in the dream and as it exists as he represents. Revisits it later. And as he wanders the town after it's been infected by the grim bleakness of his nightmare dream.

Leraje

Yeah, yeah. I mean, Ligeia and I, with Pike, um, read, uh. The Haunting of Hill House is one of ah, our full episodes. And uh, Shirley Jackson does something similar with that. Kind of like the angles don't quite add up to uh, 360 or, you know, that kind of stuff.

Ligeia

And it looks different from outside and inside.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Not the same in the inside. And the doors are not door-ing, the windows are not window-ing. Like, what do you. I love that.

Leraje

I think she does it better than Lovecraft. Not that Lovecraft's a bad. But she just brings, uh. It's kind of like there's a clarity to it. There's clarity to her writing that doesn't really exist with Lovecraft.

Chris

And a very painterly, uh, quality that he managed. He finds a voice that's. Has enough detail to picture it like a painting but vague, uh, enough like general enough, like lacking enough specifics. So it feels universal. Sometimes I walk away from these stories and the sequence of events are almost banal, but the images in your mind are nightmarish and haunting.

Ligeia

Cosmic M. And he brings it very close to. To human. I. I think anywhere. Because the. The description of the town, the streets. I would imagine it's M. In the most areas of the world could be the settings.

Chris

Exactly.

Ligeia

You know, 100 house is a house. It doesn't really belong to New York or Boston or London or, I don't know, Moscow. It's a house, it's a street. And it's confusing it. There. There's roofs, there's chimneys, doors and hallways. And it's just how he works with those simple, simple aspects of normal human, you know, everyday life.

You need to go through a city, a street, a village or whatever.

Chris
Yeah.

Ligeia
And he changed it forever. For me.

Leraje
That is a trait of his writing, because he does. I mean, the sort of. Like the first part of. Of, um. Sect of the Idiot is stylistically almost interchangeable with Music of the Moon.

Ligeia
Very close. Yes.

Chris
Interesting, that. Yeah. Nice call. Yeah.

Leraje
It's, uh got his usual theme of insomnia and wandering it. Wandering a city.

Ligeia
And that one was also my choice, so.

Leraje
It was.

Chris
Yeah. Yeah.

Ligeia
I guess I. I am intrigued with these night walks when you can't sleep or are you actually up? You. We don't. We don't know. But. Yeah. So this is like the plot, I would say. I don't know how you guys found this. Where was the horror in it? I think it's kind of clear.

Chris
Yeah. The body horror of the hand.

Ligeia
Yeah. And was it disturbing in any way? I don't know. How about you, Chris? Like, are you atheist or what are your beliefs like? Was it disturbing you in any way?

Chris
Yeah, I think the description of their. Their tentacles, but their strings, like the hands of the figures in the dream. And then you sense already that that's the, um, pivot point, that that will. The horror will emerge from. And then as he emerges from his dream and he's being infected by the. The plague of.

The plague of the cosmos, you know, um. He, uh. The plague. You see it as he's walking down the street and there's the reactions of people and he's deformed and, uh. That mysterious figure who starts laughing. You know, it's like your hand. That was really. Yeah, I think it's visceral. I think that what's interesting about this story is like all the guidance.

There's a kind of heady, there's a philosophical through line. But then at the same time he does touch on real visceral body horror tropes at times. And that straight out of, uh, A Thousand stories, the rotting hand. He's feeling your own. Feeling your own body disintegrate through corruption.

Leraje
It touches on a lot of themes in like. Like you both just said, um, in one pretty short story, because you've got the things you've talked about and

there's also this kind of like, horror of. Of what you might. And, uh, this loss of personhood that I talked about earlier, this loss of individuality.

Um, it's a very complex. I mean, on the surface you think, uh, it's a shocker about a man going into a strange. But it's not just that, uh. It's always. There's always more and there's always other things and other types of horror that he's playing on. Um, both classical and Lovecraftian, I think.

Chris

Yeah, I think that's a through line. A lot of stories in this collection and even the three stories we're talking about tonight have an access point with conventional horror, body horror or like with the Frolic, you know, the hidden blight of suburbia. Like a John Cheever story gone horribly awry.

Leraje

Yeah.

Chris

Mixed in with the serial killer sub genre serial killer and the psychologist engaged in, uh, dialogue. Like it's got all these familiar elements, but then there's that distinct look, um, Ligottian, um, bleak cosmic nihilism and dissolution of individual identity. Um, that's the unique point. And he always gets there. And the night school with that immediately recognisable scenario showing up in class and I need to ask your neighbour for a piece of paper.

Leraje

Yeah, yeah.

Chris

It's almost like a nightmare version of, um, your anxiety dream where you, uh, show up at school unprepared.

Leraje

That's one of the. That's one of the things that he does very, very well. It's come across in all the stories of his I've read. Because you two are much more kind of like familiar with his body of work than I am. I'm trying not to read ahead. I'm trying to sort of like read them as we do these episodes.

Chris

And, uh, it's. I envy you. I envy you. Your process of discovery, but also the discipline to encounter it chronologically. Like as he evolved. Because I started randomly but more at the end and then worked my way back.

Leraje

Right? Yeah, yeah. But he seems everything he writes, it's always got this kind of like dreamlike quality to it. Which is uh. I'm gonna do it again. Which is almost Lynchian in its. I'm doing it again. I compare everything to David Lynch. Yes. But it is. It's almost kind of like it's the real world.

But it's just been twisted just a little bit and it's not quite. And it's like uh. Uh. It's this normal. No.

Chris

Yeah.

Leraje

Is it? I'm not quite sure. And all of his stories to be.

Chris

Like to me 100%. But in each step may seem micro. But by the end you're in that dream space where you could never retrace your steps. And like you end a story of his. Like you wake up from a dream and if someone asks you to summarise it besides the simplest series of events.

And guy goes to a classroom, doesn't have a piece of paper, they're in the wrong room. He walks upstairs. Like besides just the quotidian banal scenario and a few actions. They're impossible to summarise because it's that dream logic like you say.

Ligeia
Yeah, yeah.

Chris
Very Lynchian. Yes.

Ligeia
Mhm. So I was just. I would just summarise probably the thought I had with this story. I'm back to my story. Right. The sect of the idiot. So I think the. I saw the horror in how Ligotti was able to bring the thought of consciousness being. As the biggest error. Which is absolutely terrifying if you start thinking about it.

Because what the fuck now? Like what do we do? And uh. The universe that does not want the meaning in anything. I was thinking about this today. Like what have. What if it's just us who created this whole thing? Uh. Of like where's the meaning, the sense of things and which is true.

We created that. But. But like that's fucking. Fucking horrible.

Leraje
Yeah. There are certain things that have to exist that for us to be defined as human. And the idea of something having meaning is one of those things. But really, you know, the universe is so vast and uh. Rejects an easy understanding that how could there be meaning to something.

Ligeia
I think the universe doesn't care about this. It's the vacancy of sense. Like we are so terrifyingly silly.

Chris
Yeah.

Leraje
Yeah. I mean we're just a collection of cells that have become self aware.

Ligeia
It's just like um. Sort of matter that is organised in sort of some way filled with pain. And you know, everything that body like.

Chris
The universe not caring. And one thing I often feel is distinct about The Ligottian sub genre writers like him as well, is Lovecraft. The universe is mostly indifferent, like doesn't care. Or there's these space monsters. Um, they may be at times malevolent, other times just indifferent. Then modern post Lovecraftian fiction, the universe becomes increasingly malevolent, like, you know, also.

And in these stories particular, like corrupting, toxic. You see all this language of sewage and sewers and decay and just shit, like stinky, ugly.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Chris
Putrid, fetid. And these words are Lovecraftian, but just the hostility, which in a sense is physically, not metaphysically true, but physically true. Um, apart from this little sliver of atmosphere here on Earth, the universe wants to

kill us, we immediately die in space. It's a hostile place. So he's both physical and metaphysical.

Ligeia

I could see the puppet principle, Ligotti's puppet principle in this one. Very well. Yeah. Right, yeah. Have you seen it as well like humans as this matter, animated matter, and we are pretending to be, like, self aware of everything and, you know, aware of the world and the meaning and the universe and why we are here, why the life continues after death and why the war is important and why the borders and maps and everything.

This, this just makes sense to us, which is incredibly stupid and entitled and I can't even, you know, the universe just doesn't share this delusion with us and it's sort of terrifying and also liberating, like, well, why all this pressure?

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

Ah, let's just have a life. I don't know.

Leraje

The meaning of things is the things that we as individuals in society put onto things. There's no kind of external. And that's a kind of atheist, non theist thought, isn't it, that there's no external thing or person either wishing us well. Well or wishing us ill. They're just, you know.

Ligeia

Uh-huh.

Leraje

Indifferent. The universe is indifferent. It neither cares for us nor hates us. Chris, tell us a little bit about The Frolic.

Chris

Yeah, So I like to think of this story as like the first song on, on the first album.

Ligeia

Right.

Chris

Um, you're introducing yourself. It's the first story in his first collection. And with your. When you introduce yourself, you kind of meet the audience halfway. Like, I'm going to present something acceptable, accessible, relatable, immediately recognisable. Write it in a literary style that you don't work too hard to get on the same page and then slowly ease you into, um, what's unique about, uh, the artists, in this case, Ligotti.

But if you're A musician. Like your, your first song is one of your best songs, but also is one that people can kind of dig immediately and then kind of, oh, this I see what's different about this? And so I feel like the frolic is very much like that. Like, we start in a suburban setting, could be in a New Yorker story.

It's written with great details, very realistic. It's a literary style we immediately recognise. And the environs are immediately recognisable. And as a genre too, like, you immediately know that there's blight lurking underneath, like the decay of suburbia. That's a recognisable, um, trope. And then we're introduced to these characters and we learned that, uh, the husband is a psychologist who works with child serial killer in a prison.

And like, ah, it's a serial killer story too. Got it. Um, so the question that remains as an, as a savvy reader is, okay, this is very well written. What's the

twist? What is new about this? What, how. What is the nature of the serial killer ultimately? And what is the nature of the decay or blight or darkness lurking behind this veneer of suburban comfort and normalcy?

And the answer, which we get on the last page is kind of like the mic drop at the end of the song, right? We find, we get the note from John Doe that he left, um, to the, uh, you know, the poor child that he abducted. That note is pure Ligotti. Never seen anything like it before.

The sewers of the stars, as it turns out. You know, uh, the slums of the cosmos, they're going, he's. He's taking the baby deer to go frolic. So creepy, right? With the Bambi doll. It hits on a visceral level in terms of realistic fiction, like it's a real thing. A child has been abducted.

There's a stuffed toy that was disembodied with a note stuck into it. Nasty. But the identity, rationale, the nature of this malevolent serial killer. Not a mortal human, not exactly a demon from hell either, because in this cosmology, there's no heaven or hell.

Leraje
Hmm.

Chris
It's, uh, it's chaos, actually. Literally. There's a line in there that John Doe is chaos represents chaos, which is back to the sect of the idiot, the mindless abyss. Except here it's not so mindless, is actually malevolent, but such a highly developed degree of lunacy that this demon conceives of its malevolence as a fun game right through the frolic he's taking.

Based on A literal physical level. This is a serial killer murdering a child. But it's also a cosmic demon taking this human to stretches of, um. Just horror in the vast cosmos to suffer, I don't know, indefinitely. Like a Hellraiser scenario.

Leraje
Um, so there's the other one that we did, uh. I think in part two, Ligeia. The one about the writer, uh, the artist.

Ligeia
That was.

Leraje
No, it was. It was the one that it was. It was. She. She was a writer. The character was a writer.

Ligeia
The Alice girl.

Leraje
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And this one, The Frolic is very much. Yeah. Not, Not. Not thematically or stylistically, but in terms of its kind of, like, immediacy and its accessibility. Yeah, it's very. It's very.

Ligeia
The narration, I would say it's quite similar. Yeah, it's like not very. Very cosmic. Nothing. It's more about people's interactions.

Leraje
Yeah, you kind of like think, okay, this is a story. That is immediately understandable.

Ligeia
And there's no monster, you know, uh, no monster like it was in the first story.

Chris
Yeah, mine.

Ligeia
There was a monster. It was monstrous. It was.

Chris
No, it's a monstrous human. Right.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Chris
Right.

Ligeia
Yeah, It's.

Chris
It's a human and serial killers, so. That's a good point. There's no monster in the.

Ligeia
In the.

Chris
In the sense of a supernatural, um.

Ligeia
Being.

Chris
Or so it seems. At first it's a serial killer, but then we realised the serial killer, it's a supernatural serial. Which is not unheard of. We get those. We've had those. Um. So. But it's. This nature of its supernatural evil, um. Is uniquely legauding because it represents, um. Forces of a hostile universe.

That's, um. A weird blend of malevolence, indifference and negation. Human identity.

Leraje
I think one of the things I most liked about that story was the kind of. The first two or three pages, the kind. I mean, yes, the rest of it, it was good. All of it was good. But I really liked that kind of, like the sort of immediate exposure of the kind of, like, under tension, the tension, the suburban tension of, uh.

A married couple sitting down that their daughter has gone to bed. They're sitting down, uh, they're having pre or post dinner drinks, not quite sure which. And, um, you know, they're talking about their day. But it's. There's this kind of, like, not quite acknowledged wrongness about it all until one of them actually has the courage to say, okay, yeah, right.

You're right. I've had a shit day. And this is why.

Chris
Yeah, there's this simmering tension. There's tension between them. Yeah.

Ligeia
Uh, and the false politeness that was like, please just say something. Just say it. I day here.

Chris

Oh, uh, yeah. And the way they're mixing drinks and dancing around. And it's. It's written with a very sharp psychological insight. And the dialogue, it's still within that neo gothic style, but plausible how humans might speak. It established so much authority, so that when we do get to the ever increasing horror, it has that, um, oomph, because we.

He has that, uh. That authorial, um, power established.

Leraje

Well, he keeps shifting the goals of the horror as the story progresses. Interesting, because at first. At first it's the kind of like, oh, is this a story about suburban life gone wrong?

Chris

Right.

Leraje

Maybe. But then is it a story of the horror of accepting a job that you find out is not right for you and now you have to pass your whole life up and move.

Chris

Right. There's that whole step right there.

Leraje

Yeah. And then. No, it's not correct quite that. It's this, actually. And then it's. Then it's the horror of having a day at work. And it affected your relationship. No, it's not quite that, but it's all these things and it's. It's kind of like this cumulative build. And then there's this kind of like gut punch of, oh, actually it's this, uh, you know, traveller from the stars who's inhabited the body of a person who's stealing children.

Chris

Yeah, it just goes.

Ligeia

Yeah, it just goes, whoa.

Chris

I thought this was a. I thought this was a John Cheever story.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Chris

Yeah. And I feel like there's this. Because all these tropes become, like, familiar, are familiar to an alert reader. There is an immediate sense of dread. And as you say, it builds like, shit day, marital tensions, bad job. But there's. It's tragic in that, uh, original sense that the. That even though the ending is not predictable in its exact nature, we know it's not going to end well.

And it feels inevitable. There's this dread just dripping from this. From the beginning. And then it. It reaches a crescendo we could not have anticipated. Or just a deranged, um. Just deranged.

Leraje

I would guess. It's probably the first short story by him. You read as well, Ligeia? Was it. Was it.

Ligeia

Yeah, I just started with the first one. Yeah.

Chris

What was it like?

Ligeia

This is interesting. I will just go back to this because when I first read The Frolic, I was in the middle of the reading and as you are saying, I Could sense the dread. It was there from the first word. It was not hiding at all. There was. The horror was there, the monster somewhere.

Obviously there's this prison and the bad guy. But I. I couldn't help myself. I was still waiting, like, maybe it's not that guy. Maybe this psychologist or psychiatrist, whatever. Maybe he's a little bit there. Maybe he's killing. Or is it the wife?

Chris

Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia

And I was like, are they actually going to move? Because the wife, she really wanted to move and she was so happy when she sort of manipulated the discussion into that. Oh, we should. To let him say it. The guy actually said it like, oh, we are moving. And she's like, there we go.

Now I can have a drink.

Chris

Yeah, right, right.

Ligeia

So I was like, is it her?

Leraje

Yeah. Uh-huh.

Ligeia

Huh.

Leraje

Uh-huh.

Ligeia

So when I finished it, I'm like, what the. Actually, it was straightforward. It was none of those. And still it's horror. It's even worse than I could have imagined. How. How does he do it?

Chris

That's fascinating. Yeah, I can totally see that. Because there's two ways to read. Like, because some stories do. You're waiting for the left turn.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Chris

But I never really thought about that before. You were saying the word that. I was just thinking as I was listening to. That is straightforward or it's straight ahead.

Ligeia

Yes.

Chris

So many legislators. Like, we're going from point A to point, not B. I don't know, point Z and. Or is going to be point letter in an Alphabet that hasn't been invented. You know, a malevolent, evil Alphabet from the Necronomicon. The last letter.

Ligeia
But we're.

Chris
We're going ahead and, uh. But it's not going to, like. Oh. But as it turns out, you would never have guessed it. The butler did it.

Ligeia
Yes. Like Agatha Christie.

Leraje
Like.

Ligeia
Oh, yeah. That's like.

Chris
No, the secret. No, you're gonna. You meet the butler on the first page. But the butler is a slave of, like, cosmic deity.

Ligeia
Yeah, but. But Ligotti, he's able to just name the person in the first line and still keep it going and still surprise me.

Leraje
I don't think he ever does that, though, that kind of left turn. I never think of him as an author who does that.

Ligeia
No, but, you know, this was the first story I read.

Leraje
Yeah. Yeah.

Chris
So, uh, in that sense, sometimes I think you guys have felt like this sometimes, too. Like, stories are almost like poems in a way. And the way poems work often is you arrive at the last line and if the poem Succeeds it simultaneously has that feeling of surprise, yet inevitability. Like, I'm surprised that we landed on this line or this word or this image or this place, yet it feels like it couldn't have landed anywhere else.

Leraje
You said something very similar, Ligeia, when we were talking about, um. Oh, Jesus. I can never remember the names of his. The one about the two doctors, Dr.

Chris
Voss and Dr. Dr. Volk and Mr. Veech.

Leraje
But yeah, you said. You said something very same. This kind of like. There's this feeling of, um, inevitability that it's kind of not. But not in a kind of like, oh, it's obvious what's going to happen way. No, but in a kind of like, Jesus Christ, the doom is impending, you know?

Ligeia
Yes, but you never. Well, I. I know it's. It's there, it's staring at me, um, in every single word of that page. And I still. My mind goes to like, oh, there's gonna be a surprise. Well, it is, but not in a way that I would imagine. His mind works in ways that are, like, hidden from me.

Leraje
So I do think the surprise with him. And, uh, this is based solely on the stories that I've read so far, which is what, 10? I think at this point is that

he commits fully to the bit. There's no left turn. It's as bad as you think it's going to be.

Chris

Well put. Yeah, well put. Yeah. The intensity of his landing. He lands one story after another.

Leraje

Um.

Chris

He lands the doom.

Leraje

Yeah, yeah.

Ligeia

And he doesn't over explain the. There is no need. He doesn't need us to understand. There is no reasoning or anything. It's just like there.

Leraje

David Lynch.

Ligeia

There you have it. David Lynch. Right.

Chris

I'm listening to. And I'm like, we should. We should. We should just dub this doom fiction and be done with it. Like anyone called this sub genre doom fiction, but.

Leraje

Well, you know, it's not far off the mark, really.

Chris

That's doom fiction.

Ligeia

I don't know the definition, but it could be this.

Leraje

Yeah, we'll make our own definition. We'll call it what we want. Damn it.

Ligeia

Yes.

Chris

We're going to start a publishing house. Doom Fiction.

Leraje

Are you both a nihilist and a good writer Apply to doom fiction. Okay, so, uh, are we on to night school? The Night School, yeah.

Ligeia

Your turn Leraje.

Chris

Yes.

Leraje

Ah, so the night school, um, is again, it's, uh, very Ligotti setting. There's a guy walking around doing stuff, thinking his morose thoughts, um, and holding his button holding his button on for grim death. His sole remaining button. What's that about? Um, so, yeah, so he's walking around and he tries to take a

shortcut and it's across a uh, school, which I'm guessing is like a college university type thing.

Because school over here means like something for kids. It's like a place that kids go to be educated. Whereas I think in America it's got a broader kind of like definition of.

Chris

Yes, yes, yes, school can be anything.

Leraje

Yeah, so he takes a shortcut, uh, across the school that he used to go to and uh, weird shit ensues as, uh, is usually the case with Ligotti. What did we think of this story? What did you think, Ligeia? What did, what was the standout for you?

Ligeia

Yeah, I again, uh, enjoyed the setting. The empty streets, the cold, the. The wind. Now how he described how he was approaching the school and there was this tree and he was looking through the leaves and he saw the fire, like flickering. And I'm like, okay, so is this some sort of a monstrous thing he's gonna see like some apparition?

You know, there was these people just burning some in a barrel. Yeah, I like, okay, whatever, yeah, but it was very poetic. And then he just nails it like, yeah, it's this. But the way I was approaching the, the school with this guy and I felt how he was so cold and he was like, oh, I'm gonna just cheque like I haven't been here for a while.

I know the setting. I know like we knew he has been there. He had studied something and he just wanted to see if it's still there or just do the shortcut.

Leraje

So it felt, I think to me it felt the most. I mean, we used the word earlier or I did dreamlike. It felt like the whole, that whole story felt like a dream. It felt like someone recounting a dream.

Ligeia

Out of these three.

Leraje

Yeah.

Ligeia

For me this was the most, I think.

Leraje

Yeah. Mhm.

Ligeia

I wasn't sure if he was up, if he was alive, if he was dying. Well, so.

Leraje

But it has those themes you were touching on earlier as well, Chris, about this kind of like the excrement of the human race. Yes. The kind of like the shit of creation, I guess if we were, if we were Nergal, we'd call it.

Chris

Yeah, yeah. I think I wrote an index card. Every scatological word. This one won by a wide margin. Even though again, like frolic introduced, Sewers of the stars and the sewage and all that. But this is the one where he's like now we're coming back to that. We're going to circle back to this.

Yeah, we're going to circle back. We got compost, people. Putrid. We got.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Chris
You know, the septic curriculum. M. Right, right.

Ligeia
Like it was bleeding through the roof. The, The. The not bleeding blood, but the decay.

Chris
The nocturnal product.

Leraje
Yeah. This whole thing about it being poss. It feeling like a dream or a nightmare. It felt like an anxiety dream. You know when you've gone to somewhere and you think, oh, oh, I should be over there. Ah, uh, I'll just go there. Oh, I forgot. I haven't got any paper.

Chris
Yeah, right. 100%.

Leraje
Why would you do that when all you're doing is taking a shortcut home? You wouldn't worry about that.

Ligeia
Exactly. It was weird, you know, it just.

Leraje
Felt like this whole thing was kind of like.

Ligeia
That's very true.

Leraje
It also felt. And I don't know whether this might be just my brain farting out crap, but it felt like all the bits prior to him being in the school were kind of like, not real. The bit of the school was real. And then he went back to his weird life afterwards.

Does that make any sense to anybody?

Ligeia
It could be. It could be. It's hard to say, really. I think you can read it like that.

Leraje
It's just that it felt like the descriptive passages up to the school bit were kind of like this guy who's kind of like meandering and lost and not quite sure and doing not really anything distinct. And the same after it left the school. But the bits set, uh, at the school were very immediate and kind of like.

Yeah, not. Not terse, but sort of like very sparingly written in terms of action. You know, it was. It just felt like it was. Maybe it was just a device of the writing, I don't know. But yeah, it's, ah. It felt like a big old nightmare to me.

Ligeia
It was a nightmare 100%.

Chris

Made me think of, uh, the anxiety. I think I said it before. The anxiety. Dreams of showing up to school naked on test day or you forgot your pencil.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Chris
And it's just like the most deranged nightmare version of that.

Ligeia
Um, everything that can go wrong.

Leraje
Yeah. Yeah.

Chris
And as it turns out, the professor's not in there and the third floor is just the rotting corpse of God. And.

Ligeia
Uh, the Portuguese God.

Chris
Yeah, right, right, yeah.

Leraje
What was his name?

Ligeia
I don't know why.

Leraje
Instructor Carneiro.

Ligeia
Do you understand why he was Portuguese? He was mentioned there more than once.

Leraje
Yeah. He kept. He was Hammering that point, wasn't he? And I was never quite sure why.

Chris
I would. I would say, like, overall, like, of all the stories, this is like one of the more comic, like blackly comic, like the bleakest, blackest comedy ever. But I think it's that juxtaposition of this kind of quotidian, almost banal. Like, I went to school, I asked my neighbour for a piece of paper.

All that stuff juxtaposed with the extreme horror of everything else we're talking about. And the thing about the professor's name I had. Two things came to mind. One thing, I'm not the type who likes to read too much into name choices, or like, it's. He's called that because he symbolises. He's an eloquent.

But I couldn't help but think, Carniero, carne meat. Yeah, Professor Meat. That just fits into the whole thing that we humans, we're meat with brains, we're sacks of flesh with this erroneous consciousness. That's a mistake of the abyss. And so I just couldn't that fit. And in terms of being Portuguese, there's something about that was maybe in the us more.

As an American reader, there's not a particular stereotype for being Portuguese. It can know something foreign without any unwanted connotations, like, say, if he was German or, uh. You immediately have a host of associations. If he's. You wanted to be geographically specific to have that exotic foreign connotation, but without carrying along, uh.

If he was Italian, you'd be the. You know. But in the US at least, there's no. It's a little bit of a blank. But there's no immediate stereotype or image or cultural connotation. Um, that's. I have no evidence that that's the case. But I would say, as a reader, if I were to swap in.

As, at least as an American reader, if I were to swap in other nationalities, there could be some unwanted or distracting connotation. But it helps the story that. That the professor is geographically named on planet Earth in a real place that is exotic and foreign. Um, especially since he represents, or he's an avatar of chaos and degeneracy and corruption, uh, decay.

Leraje

He's certainly a character that would have fitted into one of Lovecraft's, uh, more, uh, florid stories. I mean, Lovecraft was a big. He liked to introduce kind of like professors, lecturers, instructors. Yeah. And I think. Yeah, yeah, Carneiro would have definitely fit into that. Uh, I mean, uh, he obviously is a kind of like, I'm not going to use the word trope because I think that's unfair to Ligotti.

But he certainly fits that kind of like Lovecraftian archetypal.

Chris

I think trope is fair because you've got the Dread Tome. And if you don't have a Dread Tome, you have a dread avatar of the tome.

Leraje

Ah.

Chris

A dread professor. A dread, like. And all his diagrams and m. All of that. That he's the presenter of the Dread Tome of the Necronomicon, dispersed on all these pages that he's disseminating for his students.

Ligeia

Yeah. Now there you. You are saying this, uh. This is like a big thing that I see in Ligotti's work is the institution that's always there, it's present. And now this institution of the school is represented by this professor. And the students were like, almost worshipping him because of the hidden knowledge he was reciting.

And nobody actually understood what. Because that didn't make any sense to anybody. So maybe it's his take on how we think that our institutions and the order we put in things and documenting all the stuff and putting everything on the page in. In formulas. Like, this is the knowledge. And actually he's laughing at this.

Like. Yeah, it's.

Chris

It's almost like a satire. It's a parody. It's a satire of exactly what you're saying.

Leraje

He made sure that the character was called Instructor Carneiro, not Teacher Carneiro, not Professor, but he was called Instructor Carneiro. And that ties in very much to what you've just said. This idea that he was just kind of like. He wasn't trying to impart wisdom, he wasn't trying to kind of like teach anybody.

He was just instructing them to keep doing these diagrams over and over and over.

Ligeia

And they were just doing it blindly, like sheep.

Chris

The fact it was nonsense is part of the point. He was instructing them into the nonsense of, uh, human existence.

Ligeia

And this, this, exactly. This idea blinds all these three stories together. I think now, you know, the frolic was this psychologist, psychiatrist. I forgot. Forgot which one, Forgive me. Which is also like the prison, the institution. And how he wasn't able to see through what's going on in her. In his house. Like the danger.

He just didn't see it. He was sitting on his sofa on his ass and this guy somehow did it. Anyway, so institution failing.

Chris

Uh, and also the idea that the institutions are attempting to indoctrinate. Mhm. In these cases, especially sect of the idiot in night school. You have this again, once again, the lone scholar, the lone wanderer. And they're being indoctrinated through corruption, through something that. Both physical and metaphysical. Like it's physical through the hand is metaphysical.

Um, through the images invading his dreams and his consciousness. And in fact, they're getting infected. And they're different sects in the night school. It's a cult. They're both cults. The sect is a cult worshipping, uh, the mindless abyss.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Chris

In Night School, they're worshipping, uh, an instructor who's an avatar for death. The void.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Leraje

Decay. Really. Yeah.

Ligeia

The horror I felt in this story also came from the idea of how he has been to this school.

Chris

Yeah.

Ligeia

Before. So he re. He is re. Entering something.

Leraje

Yes.

Ligeia

And it's not possible to re. Enter it doesn't remember him. So it's like nothing actually remembers us. Is like, oh, okay.

Chris

Well, there's the indifference of the universe right there for you.

Leraje

Yeah.

Chris

Like you said something along like that seemed like a glimmer of hope, like a glimmer of light. Because this story has a bit of that.

Ligeia
Yeah.

Chris
I thought, uh, in terms like, at the end, it's almost like he reached nirvana. He had let go of desire. He had embraced the negation. He no longer wanted to learn or to know more. He didn't want to find out the meaning of his existence. He accepted his meaninglessness. And from then on, he's just going to go to the movies.

He's not going to take the shortcut. He is.

Leraje
True. That's true. Yeah. Yeah.

Chris
He's achieved nirvana.

Ligeia
Yeah. That is very nice, actually.

Leraje
All right.

Ligeia
Okay. Um.

Leraje
So what about this fucking button talk? What's going on with these buttons? This poor guy.

Chris
What do you think?

Leraje
I got no idea. I'm trying to think of a deep, subtextual meaning to why his button might be loose. And I can't think of a single one. M. I think it was just a thing he threw in there.

Chris
I think it's a lovely image, uh, to kind of bookend the story. I. I represents it, you know, it's the last straw. The final button came off the coat. His. The veil has been lifted. He sees the nature of the universe. The circle's been completed. Notice the end of the story is a lot of repetition.

Ligeia
Yes.

Chris
The image of his ashes ascending after his own cremation to sully the sky. He kind of Ligotti, increasingly does that. Spoiler alert. That becomes a common technique of his is by the end, he recycles phrases verbatim, almost like poems. To become mantra, like. And so that's a great callback. I. It always struck me as being really effective.

I mean, just putting chaos into one little image. That one little button we all, again, immediately relatable and tangible that we'd been barely holding up, finally came off like. Okay.

Leraje

A lot of good writers do that. Um, yeah, Sylvia Plath did it quite a lot. Um, and, uh, we talked about earlier, Shirley Jackson does it quite a lot as well. Even, uh, Stephen King does it occasionally. But, uh, yeah, it's a. That's. That's a good thought. That's a good thought.

Ligeia

And also maybe it was like a good description of how cold he was. Like he was actually trying to hold this coat together with that one last thread of light.

Chris

Oh, yes. Which portrays. Yeah. Which portrays his vulnerability.

Ligeia

Yeah.

Chris

Because this comes cold. Wind's blowing.

Leraje

All right, so there we go.

Ligeia

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Leraje

Ligotti. Part four for us, part one for Chris. Um, wow. Uh, there's, ah, our three stories, the frolic, the sect of the idiot. Um, and the night school. Yeah, I guess that's it from us. Chris, thank you very much for coming on.

Chris

Oh, what a treat. Just what a treat. Thank you so much for asking me.

Leraje

No problem at all. Okay. Right, we'll wrap this up then. Um, and if you want to hear more from Chris, I'll be interviewing Chris about musical matters on Contra Odium. On the next Contra Odium, which will be out in February, and Ligeia and I will see you on the next. Shit. What we called Devil's Library podcast.

Okay. I've been Leraje Hail Satan.

Ligeia

I've been Ligeia. Hail Satan. See you very soon.

Leraje

Chris you don't have to hail Satan, but if you want to say goodbye, now's your chance.

Chris

Bye.

[outro music plays]