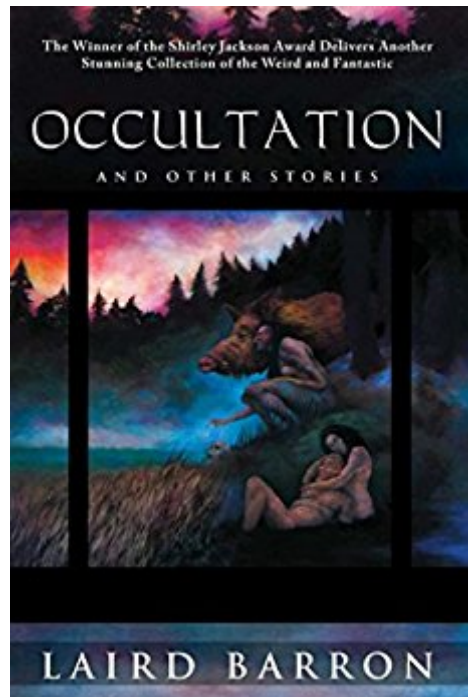


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Occultation



Synopsis

Laird Barron has emerged as one of the strongest voices in modern horror and dark fantasy fiction, building on the eldritch tradition pioneered by writers such as H. P. Lovecraft, Peter Straub, and Thomas Ligotti. His stories have garnered critical acclaim and been reprinted in numerous year's best anthologies and nominated for multiple awards, including the Crawford, International Horror Guild, Shirley Jackson, Theodore Sturgeon, and World Fantasy Awards. His debut collection, *The Imago Sequence and Other Stories*, was the inaugural winner of the Shirley Jackson Award. He returns with his second collection, *Occultation*. Pitting ordinary men and women against a carnivorous, chaotic cosmos, *Occultation*'s eight tales of terror (two never before published) include the Theodore Sturgeon and Shirley Jackson Award-nominated story "The Forest" and Shirley Jackson Award nominee "The Lagerstatte." Featuring an introduction by Michael Shea, *Occultation* brings more of the spine-chillingly sublime cosmic horror Laird Barron's fans have come to expect.

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Customer Reviews

After reading Jody Rose's exhaustive critique of Laird Barron's *OCCULTATION*, I'm not sure what

more I can add that's of value, but I'll certainly give it a shot, because the more people there are singing this fellow's praises, the better. Before I get to the book itself, let me just say that Laird Barron is, without a doubt, one of the best horror writers to come along in a very, very long time. Actually, calling him a "horror writer" doesn't even come close to doing the man justice, although I think it's safe to say that the majority of his output falls into that category, and I doubt he himself would take issue with the tag. Don't get me wrong: I'm not one of those people who feel that the horror genre is somehow unworthy of respect and must be apologized for. In reality, horror fiction constitutes the vast majority of what I read, and it always has; it's simply what appeals to me more than anything else. Think of that, and of me, what you will, but what it ultimately means is that I'm pretty familiar with the genre, and the sheer quality of Barron's work easily outstrips nearly everything else I've encountered in at least the past two decades, if not longer. Despite my horror fiction addiction, I've read enough of what qualifies as literature to know unequivocally that Laird Barron writes literary horror; if anyone still thinks that literature and horror are mutually exclusive, please direct them to this book as a definitive refutation of their sheer wrong-headedness. As you're undoubtedly aware, OCCULTATION is Barron's second collection of short fiction, the first being the excellent THE IMAGO SEQUENCE. If I had to choose between the two (and having to do so would be a horror story unto itself), I'd have to say that OCCULTATION has a very slight edge over IMAGO, and I'll tell you why.

My introduction to Laird Barron came quite by accident, when I was attending Norwescon and decided to listen to some of the authors' readings. I walked into the reading room and saw Laird for the first time, and listened to him read. I was instantly fascinated and affected by the power of the prose that I listened to, and I made a point to remember this young man's name and attend any panels that he was participating in. My next recollection was meeting him at World Horror Convention in San Francisco. I had just bought the new FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION in which he had a story. He had brought me the issue of F&SF in which his story, "The Imago Sequence," was first published. I read the story during the convention and honey I flipped! This guy was brilliant! That brilliance is evident on every page of this amazing second collection, OCCULTATION AND OTHER STORIES, beautifully published by those rad youngsters at Night Shade Books. The front cover is especially wonderful and is the first published book cover of Matthew Jaffe, whose art will be showcased in a forthcoming hardcover edition of Arthur Machen to be published by Centipede Press. I have read the majority of this book before, when the stories had their initial publication or were reprinted in Year's Best anthologies, and in one case as a file sent me by Laird.

To read them in book form is so delicious, and to reread them a second time is instructive, because they have not lost any of their evocative power, a power that is conjured from richness of imagination, powerful prose, and pure genius. Laird Barron is, quite simply, one of the most powerful new writers in the horror genre, as his solid reputation attests.

The first thing that struck me about *Occultation* was that, after having read it and *The Imago Sequence* - Laird's first anthology - for the first time, I immediately turned around and read them both all over again. That's never happened to me before with any other book - not sure what it means, just taking note. Laird is often spoken of in the same breath with Thomas Ligotti, but they could not be more different. While I am in awe of Ligotti's work, his universe is one of futility - of clockwork horrors that don't even afford their victims the grace of personal animosity. Laird's horrors are intimately personal, with a predator/prey relationship oft-times fraught with gleeful malice - while his protagonists are doomed, they oppose their fate with a frontiersman's fatalism and stoic refusal to submit - this, I assume a result of Laird's upbringing in rural Alaska. While the characters in both Ligotti's and Barron's tales wind up as no more than peristaltic grist for the maw of Lovecraftian horrors intent on provender, Laird's protags at least have the decency to kick and struggle on their way down the gullet, rather than succumbing to the numb despair exhibited by Ligotti's people. Then there is craft. Laird leaves so much unsaid that the majority of his stories unfold puzzle-like behind your unconsciousness after you're done with them, ultimately looming several times their original size back in your oh-so-vulnerable lizard brain. His wording, phrasing, and editing are flawless - literally among the best wordsmithing I have encountered among writers active today.

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Occultation

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