First trailer for HBO's Lovecraft Country blends eldritch horrors and racism

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Jordan Peele and J.J. Abrams are among the executive producers of HBO's *Lovecraft Country*.
H.P. Lovecraft is having a moment. January brought us Richard Stanley's surreal film, *Color Out of Space*, an adaptation of the short story of the same name, in which a family on a farm encounters a glowing purple meteorite with typically horrific Lovecraftian consequences. Stanley's film adaptation of *The Dunwich Horror* is rumored to be in development, the second in a planned trilogy. And now HBO has dropped the first trailer for a new series partly inspired by the works of the Cthulhu-loving horror master, called *Lovecraft Country*.

The series is based on the 2016 dark fantasy/horror novel, *Lovecraft Country*, by Matt Ruff, who also found inspiration in a 2006 essay by Pam Noles describing what it was like growing up being both black and, well, a hardcore nerd. The protagonist is a black veteran of the Korean War and science fiction fan named Atticus, who embarks on a perilous road trip from his home on Chicago's South Side to a small town in rural Massachusetts. He's looking for his estranged father, who purportedly vanished after encountering a well-dressed man

driving a silver Cadillac.

Atticus' Uncle George and childhood friend/fellow sci-fi buff, Leti, come along for the ride. This being inspired by Lovecraft, naturally they encounter all kinds of arcane rituals, magic, shape-shifters, monsters, and an alternate reality or two along the way.

- *Lovecraft Country* takes place in the 1950s Jim Crow era.
- Atticus Black (Jonathan Majors) heads back home.
  YouTube/HBO
- Walking the old familiar streets.
  YouTube/HBO
- Jurnee Smollett-Bell plays Leti Dandridge, a friend to Atticus.
  YouTube/HBO
- Haunted by the past?
  YouTube/HBO
- A cryptic letter.
  YouTube/HBO
- Ready for a road trip.
  YouTube/HBO
- Their route takes them right through "Lovecraft Country."
- Fantastical revelries.
  YouTube/HBO
- Surrendering to the experience.
  YouTube/HBO
- An ominous figure.
  YouTube/HBO
- Abbey Lee plays Christina Braithwhite, whose father leads a secret order known as the "Sons of Adam."
  YouTube/HBO
- Trying to look innocuous for the local police.
  YouTube/HBO
- A car chase with guns.
  YouTube/HBO

- Violence breeds violence.
  YouTube/HBO
- Here be monsters.
  YouTube/HBO

What makes Ruff's novel so ingeniously subversive is how it reflects the horrors of racism in the United States in the supernatural horrors conjured by a novelist famous for his extreme racist views. As Ars' Peter Opasker noted in his review of *Color out of Space*, one reason Lovecraft has proven so difficult to adapt for modern audiences is "because he was super-racist. Like, even other racists at the time would say, 'Jesus, dude, chill.'" As Cory Doctorow observed at Boing Boing, "These characters… don't need Elder Gods to experience horror. They live it in their daily lives, through harassment, violence, expropriation, and the legacy of slavery that is anything but ancient history for them."

HBO's 10-episode adaptation seems to be hewing pretty closely to those themes. Per the official synopsis:

> *The series follows Atticus [Black] (Jonathan Majors) as he joins up with his friend Letitia (Jurnee Smollett-Bell) and his Uncle George (Courtney B. Vance) to embark on a road trip across 1950s Jim Crow America in search of his missing father (Michael Kenneth Williams). This begins a struggle to survive and overcome both the racist terrors of white America and the terrifying monsters that could be ripped from a Lovecraft paperback.*

The trailer opens with Atticus on a bus, returning home to Chicago, where he's welcomed with open arms. We see him reunite with Leti and then discover that his father, Montrose (Michael K. Williams, aka Omar from *The Wire*), has gone missing. But Atticus receives a letter from his father asking to meet him in a remote location deep in "Lovecraft Country." It's a dangerous place, and not just because of the rampant

racism, courtesy of a secret order known as the Sons of Adam. We are treated to dimly lit scenes of monsters on the attack, along with Jim Crow-era scenes of escalating racially charged violence. One might conclude, along with Leti: “I thought the world was one way and found out it isn’t.”

Lovecraft Country premieres on HBO in August 2020.

Listing image by YouTube/HBO

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