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"This has all happened before": Intergenerational Trauma, *Tulpas*, and Tackling Lovecraft's Cultural Legacy in America in *Scooby Doo! Mystery Incorporated*

Aiden Tait

Among renewed cultural and academic interest in the work of H.P. Lovecraft, and the emergence of several recent long- and short-form adaptations of the mode of horror he in part inspired—Lovecraftian or "cosmic" horror—the 2010–2013 television series *Scooby-Doo! Mystery Incorporated* (*SD!MI*) holds unusual membership. Unlike its predecessors in the *Scooby-Doo* media franchise, *SD!MI* removes the Mystery Incorporated gang from various conventional Euro-Gothic settings to instead locate the gang in the heart of Lovecraft's America and all its insidious trappings. Beyond the appeal of Lovecraft's terrifying cosmic forces and *Scooby-Doo*'s easily appropriated aesthetic and tone, *SD!MI* stands out among contemporary Lovecraftian horror and recent *Scooby-Doo* media not only for its combination of these two seemingly disparate horror modes, but also for its mobilisation of semi-anthology short-form horror animation as a critical media form through which to navigate Lovecraft's problematic legacy in America. Limited as the series was in the extent to which it could address Lovecraft's white supremacy and bigotry (Moreland 2018a) and the Lovecraftian horror mode's use of racist, queerphobic, and xenophobic representations (Klinger 2014), I argue that *SD!MI* nevertheless takes advantage of the short form to closely analyse, confront, and deconstruct the complex discursive matrix that surrounds a key underlying concern of Lovecraft's work: the horror of perpetuating intergenerational trauma.

Where Lovecraft locates this horror in the threat of supposed moral and biological "degeneration" of the dominant Anglo-American order in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *SD!MI* locates this horror in the perpetuation of settler-colonial violence and cycles of secrecy and oppression in contemporary American identity by translating the horror into a series of Lovecraftian *tulpas*, or thoughtforms made real through decades of collective intergenerational trauma experienced by the gang's hometown of Crystal Cove. The diverse, flexible nature of the series' predominantly "Monster of the Week" (MOTW) format, typical of short-form horror television (Rudy and McDonald

2016) and particular to *Scooby-Doo*, enables *SD!MI* to adapt elements of Lovecraft's work and to flesh out the specific political and sociocultural traumas that inform the series' Lovecraftian *tulpas*. Similarly, Hollywood animation's use of a "hyper-realist" aesthetic (Brown 2021), or a "a stylised realism that ha[s] a lifelike feel without actually being photorealistic" (Price 2009, 213), in tandem with humour provides a familiar, nostalgic, but experimental medium through which to visualise these traumas in accessible but no less nuanced terms. As such, I argue that *SD!MI* foregrounds semi-anthology short-form horror animation as uniquely capable of "unmasking" Lovecraft's legacy and the horror of perpetuating intergenerational trauma for a contemporary audience in the best way *Scooby-Doo* knows how: the revelation of a grim reality lurking beneath a rubber mask scapegoat, with a dash of the supernatural for emphasis.

"By the tendrils of Shap-Shap Sumagurath!": Short-form horror animation and adapting Lovecraft for *Scooby-Doo*

SD!MI is something of a love letter to American horror and an experiment in contemporary children's horror. The two-season, fifty-two-episode series follows the gang in their hometown of Crystal Cove, claimed to be the "Most Hauntedest [sic] Place on Earth," as they attempt to solve the various mysteries that both beleaguer the town and generate its booming dark tourism industry. The gang soon inadvertently uncover "a truth that should have remained hidden" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2010a, 00:22:21–00:22:23)—namely, the truth behind the supposed "curse" of Crystal Cove which the residents have done their best to keep hidden for generations. In their search for the truth, the gang pursue a series of puzzles and mystery cases that enable *SD!MI* to follow its typical MOTW format and *Scooby-Doo* formula of "investigate the mystery, trap and unmask the villain, solve the mystery, roll to the next episode." However, *SD!MI* is similar to other short-form horror television series such as *Supernatural* and *The X-Files* in that while it largely follows the MOTW format, it is a semi-anthology horror series that uses a narrative arc across its two seasons. This format allows the series to develop the increasingly sinister dealings at work in Crystal Cove—a reveal that suggests that there is more to the series' tongue-in-cheek allusions to America's horror tradition as is typical of *Scooby-Doo* than meets the eye, especially when Lovecraftian themes come into the picture.

SD!MI's engagement with Lovecraftian themes moves beyond citational "textual echo" (Sanders 2016, 6) to mobilise the discursive potential of the

adaptive process as critical literary praxis. More than simple revision of a source text to provide commentary or to make the source "relevant" to new audiences (Sanders 2016), adaptation fundamentally operates as a rhetorical tool for its wielder; adaptation can house "as many opportunities for divergence as adherence, for assault [on] as well as homage" (6) to a source text and the conditions that led to its production. While *SD!MI*'s point of entry to the "tradition" of Lovecraftian horror is not quite so oppositional, it is subversive by virtue of its unusual operation in short-form horror animation and its targeted youth audience. Of course, this subversive potential is not specific to *SD!MI*. Animated children's horror is regarded by many (though not all) scholars as inherently subversive for its introduction of "taboo" or "radical" concepts that are perceived as anathema to otherwise "mainstream" children's animation, these concepts including the supernatural, the grotesque, death, and moral ambiguity. However, in the case of long-form horror animation such as Hollywood children's horror films, Noel Brown (2021) argues the following:

> [The films'] radicalism should not be overstated; their moral ambiguities and depictions of death, decay, and so on are made palatable by a combination of humour and fantasy that serve to inoculate against unmediated feelings of horror or revulsion. Moreover, they are recognisable as family films, and any sense of alterity they might project is regulated by the conventions of the genre. (146–47)

But what of *short-form* children's animated horror such as *SD!MI*? While the degree to which *SD!MI* could explore its horror was undoubtedly restricted by the "age-appropriate" guidelines set out by Standards & Practices, I hesitate to say that it "inoculates" against negative affective responses for its youth audience in the way Brown suggests. In fact, I argue that *SD!MI* foregrounds how short-form horror animation specifically has the capacity to operate outside the generic boundaries that normally regulate long-form children's horror and which facilitate *SD!MI*'s subversive entry point into the Lovecraftian horror tradition.

First, *SD!MI*'s insistence on its supernatural threats being *real* and a direct consequence of Crystal Cove's residents' collective trauma negotiates space for negative affect to be explored with relative freedom.[1] It is revealed that Crystal

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[1] Prior to *SD!MI*, only two *Scooby-Doo* animated incarnations had plots that revolved around the supernatural threat being real: *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island* (1998) and *Scooby Doo! and the Witch's Curse* (1999).

Cove's curse is the result of a malignant being known as the Evil Entity that has been trapped in a crystal sarcophagus beneath Crystal Cove since the area was first colonised by Spanish settlers in 1630. The Evil Entity, an antagonistic member of a group of extradimensional gods known as the Anunnaki, has carefully orchestrated the lives of eight generations of mystery solvers to manipulate them into releasing him.[2] Unlike his benevolent counterparts that aid humanity, the Evil Entity is bent on the total destruction of humanity. Under his influence, the previous seven mystery-solving groups (the current Mystery Incorporated being the eighth group) either disappeared, succumbed to madness, or, it is implied, died by their own or each other's hands—ultimately reliving and repeating the traumas of their predecessors *ad infinitum* and driving Crystal Cove into an endless feedback loop of violence and secrecy. With this knowledge, when in the episode "The Devouring" Velma anxiously announces, "Gang, for the first time in our history as mystery solvers, we have to consider that something truly supernatural is happening here" (2013b, 00:04:23–00:04:30), she introduces a definitive cognitive and ontological shift in both the narrative and the characters that has been steadily growing throughout the seasons.[3] No longer able to operate under the assumption that supernatural threats are "crazy criminals pretending to be monsters all the time" (00:04:02–00:04:04), the gang are forced to approach the threats to Crystal Cove as a lived, ongoing reality and that they are no longer in conventional, manageable Hollywood children's horror or *Scooby-Doo* territory—they are now firmly in the territory of Lovecraft.

Second, it should be noted that the mode of horror *SD!MI* primarily operates in is specifically and deliberately *Lovecraftian*, the conventions of which largely preclude the possibility of total "inoculation" against alterity except through the utter madness or death of the protagonist—and *SD!MI* does not shy away from either option. Rather than simply alluding to the recognisable "Lovecraftian" aesthetic of tentacles, dark waters, and ominous religious organisations as other animated series have done to satisfy cult interest, *SD!MI*'s adaptive entry into Lovecraftian horror is subversive insofar as it does not

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[2] The Anunnaki are based on a group of deities of the same name found in ancient Mesopotamian cultures; however, their origin and representation in *SD!MI* are largely based on the (rejected as pseudoscientific) theories proposed by Zecharia Sitchin in his 1976 book *The Twelfth Planet*.

[3] This ontological shift is also the central focus of the *Supernatural* episode "Scoobynatural." See Erin Giannini and Kristopher Woofter's essay "'That's a Scooby-don't': The Melancholy Nostalgia of 'Scoobynatural' for *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?*" (*Monstrum* 3, no. 1, 2020).

attempt to shield its characters (and by extension its audience) from its horror through humour and fantasy despite being a *Scooby-Doo* show. In fact, part of *SD!MI*'s approach to Lovecraftian horror is that the series introduces *Scooby-Doo*'s typical satirical treatment of cultural references to the mode and mobilises this satirical humour to *emphasise* the Lovecraftian horror, thus gearing what are otherwise "heavy" topics toward a youth audience without negating the discursive power of those topics. Humour becomes a survival tactic for the truth that satire exposes. A particularly effective way that *SD!MI* navigates this tension between horror and comedy is through its caricature of Lovecraft and Lovecraftian horror itself.

In Season One, *SD!MI* introduces "H.P. Hatecraft," a depressed author whose appearance is that of a hyper-realised Lovecraft, and the fictional "dark forces" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2010b) he writes about and is tormented by. In the episode "The Shrieking Madness," Hatecraft tells the gang that he may have released the being currently terrorising Crystal Cove known as "Char-Gar Gothakon" into the world as a result of his connection to other realms, his voice an over-the-top warble as he claims, "[d]ark forces are at work in this [Hatecraft's] very home" (2010b, 00:11:14–00:11:16). For older audiences, they may recognise that Char-Gar Gothakon's appearance borrows recognisable elements from Lovecraft's stories to make its function as Lovecraftian caricature explicit, from the octopus-like features of Cthulhu drawn from the Cthulhu Mythos to the priestly vestments and strange jewellery of the Order of Dagon found in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (Lovecraft [1936] 2014).[4] However, both Char-Gar Gothakon and Hatecraft are unmasked as frauds, with Char-Gar Gothakon an overly enthusiastic Hatecraft fan in a costume and Hatecraft unable to commune with the supernatural. Part of the unmasking process is exaggerating the laughable mundanity behind the horror: Char-Gar Gothakon's terrifying Cthulhu-like features turn out to be parts of a dead, stinking octopus and the remaining costume as made or stolen from the local theatre, while Hatecraft's perpetuation of the Char-Gar Gothakon myth is essentially a marketing scheme to sell his work. More than simply commenting on Lovecraft as a haunted writer and the sometimes ridiculous nature of his monsters, *SD!MI*'s use of caricature exposes the social function of the "dark forces" it satirises in uncomplicated but critical terms: society's fear of the unknown and unfamiliar necessitates any means (even absurd ones) of control over what *is* known and familiar to maintain society's perceived position in the world. The

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[4] *The Shadow over Innsmouth* was first published in April 1936 by Visionary Press, Everett, Pennsylvania.

repetitive nature of the MOTW format typical of the short form enables *SD!MI* to reinforce this caricature's critical work for its audience, as almost each episode's antagonist—rendered in similar hyper-realised, over-exaggerated fashion to Hatecraft and Char-Gar-Gothakon—follows the same *Scooby-Doo* formula of the villain manipulating what is familiar to exert power over the unfamiliar using extreme means.

So far, *SD!MI* seems to prioritise Lovecraftian horror's preoccupation with existential terror as a product of sublimity the most. By "sublimity" I refer not to the Burkean or Kantian sublime but instead to Vrasidas Karalis' (2010) explanation of the term: sublimity is "[a] historically defined category of experiencing and interpreting objective realities" (3) that occurs during periods of transition where "an existing order of things and values is gradually undermined, dislocated, and transformed by different forms of perception and diverse patterns of ordering experience" (2). Understood in these terms, Lovecraftian horror's relationship with sublimity is a product of the immense historical and cultural transitions occurring in America in the twentieth century. As such, Lovecraftian horror is an attempt to respond to the new objective reality of certain devastating events, such as the First World War (Moreland 2018b), where forces beyond the average citizen's reach can exert unimaginable power on the known universe and can do so without perceivable concern for humanity's survival. It is not surprising, then, that the Cthulhu Mythos is studded with the presence of unfathomable, uncaring Outer Ones and Great Old Ones. The conditions surrounding the sublimity experienced by the gang are eerily similar in that the gang, following most Lovecraftian protagonists, must also reckon with the notion that they have no true agency under the influence of cosmic forces such as the Anunnaki and the Evil Entity, thus reflecting the America Lovecraft imagines in his work. The Evil Entity is an ancient, powerful force beyond their comprehension that has systematically orchestrated the gang and their predecessors' lives, is singlehandedly responsible for Crystal Cove's current objective reality as a product of intergenerational trauma, and has made it clear that the world's survival upon his release is not his concern. The Evil Entity sets down the terms of the gang and Crystal Cove's existence in three sentences: "You have no choice. This is your destiny. Everything you have done, you have done for me" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013d, 00:19:14–00:19:21). In the wake of this existential crisis, having to endure these extreme cognitive and ontological shifts, the gang and their predecessors turn to one method of interpreting their new objective realities: the Lovecraftian *tulpa*.

"Doesn't anybody stay dead around here?": The Lovecraftian *tulpa*

The *tulpa* has a somewhat complex place in both paranormal discourse and popular culture. In basic terms, the *tulpa* is an entity that is initially produced in the imagination only to then gain sentience and exist in physical reality, either deliberately through an individual's will or unintentionally by the collective thoughts of multiple people—an embodiment through thoughtform (Mikles and Laylock 2015; Veissière 2016). In their research on the subject, Natasha L. Mikles and Joseph P. Laylock (2015) define the contemporary paranormal *tulpa* as "an entity that can be created by anyone, usually inadvertently; exists independently of its creator(s); is sentient and capable of rebellion; and is frightening, if not dangerous" (91).[5] It is in these terms that Lovecraftian *tulpas* manifest in *SD!MI*. I should clarify here what I mean by "Lovecraftian *tulpa*": the Lovecraftian *tulpa* is a *tulpa* that skirts the border between the "psychological" and "metaphysical" explanatory principles behind the phenomenon (Mikles and Laylock 2015; Veissière 2016). Samuel Veissière (2016) explains these principles as follows:

> In the psychological community, neuroscience (or folk neuroscience) is the explanation of choice. Tulpas are understood as mental constructs that have achieved sentience. The metaphysical explanation holds that tulpas are agents of supernatural origins that exist outside the hosts' minds, and who come to communicate with them. (59)

Following this, the Lovecraftian *tulpa* has the capacity to be a sentient mental construct conceived of by the Lovecraftian protagonist as a result of their heightened state of negative affect or through obsessive interest; the "unnamable" entity of the eponymous short story by Lovecraft fits this psychological category, as the nameless apparition is willed into being by the characters after a particularly frightening night in a graveyard where they debate

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[5] Throughout this paper, all use of the term "*tulpa*" will be in reference to the contemporary paranormal concept as it is described by Mikles and Laylock. I acknowledge the complicated origins of the term as it relates to Western European Theosophy and Tibetan Buddhism but defer to Mikles and Laylock's (2015) article "Tracking the *Tulpa*: Exploring the 'Tibetan' Origins of a Contemporary Paranormal Idea" for a full account of this concept's inception.

the likelihood of the apparition's existence (Lovecraft [1925] 2014).[6] The Lovecraftian *tulpa* can also exist as a supernatural being of its own; the Outer God Nyarlathotep fits this metaphysical category given that Nyarlathotep is a real supernatural agent who delivers arcane knowledge to humanity. However, Nyarlathotep tends to occupy the space between psychological and metaphysical *tulpa* in that though he is real, in "Nyarlathotep" he only manifests as a result of humanity's desire to see him (Lovecraft [1920] 2014).[7]

Thus do the Lovecraftian *tulpas* in *SD!MI* skirt the tenuous border between psychological and metaphysical reality. However, more than just paranormal phenomena joining a growing list of supernatural happenings in *SD!MI*, the Lovecraftian *tulpas* that appear operate as ontological responses to sublimity, namely, Crystal Cove's legacy of intergenerational trauma and the conditions that led up to that trauma at various points in time—these conditions being inextricably tied to Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history. Veissière explains that tulpamancy is an example of the neurophenomenology of sociality, or "the tendency of humans and other social animals to form cooperative groups and experience shared ways of being in the world" (2016, 55). Consequently, the Lovecraftian *tulpas* of Crystal Cove may be understood as the residents' desire for a shared experience and interpretation of their past or current objective reality, and residents fulfil this desire at risk of further perpetuating past traumas and cycles of violence that result in the various monsters of the week. As Scooby-Doo so aptly puts it in "Dance of the Undead": "Doesn't anybody stay dead around here?" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013a, 00:02:52–00:02:54). For the seven Crystal Cove-based mystery-solving groups, this desire resolves itself into the creation of the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*.[8] As a metaphysical *tulpa*, the Evil Entity's shift from thoughtform to physical reality can be attributed to being an Anunnaki, which the gang understand as having an established history as supernatural agents on Earth. However, the Evil Entity's existence in *SD!MI* and in Crystal Cove specifically is almost entirely predicated on the Crystal Cove-based mystery solvers, their attempts to find the truth behind the curse, and their attempts to come to grips with their fate upon realising the truth, thus presenting the Evil

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[6] "The Unnamable" was first published in July 1925 in *Weird Tales*.

[7] "Nyarlathotep" was first published in November 1920 in *The United Amateur*.

[8] For the sake of brevity, I will focus only on the one (and arguably most significant) Lovecraftian *tulpa* in *SD!MI*—the Evil Entity. However, there is a case to be made for certain MOTW entities as *tulpas* that are most intimately linked to Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history, such as the ghost of Captain Fernando El Aguirre.

Entity as a psychological *tulpa*. The explanatory ambiguity of the Evil Entity—as possibly metaphysical, possibly psychological phenomenon—contributes to the existential terror he invokes.

The Evil Entity's origin as a Lovecraftian *tulpa* begins with the settlement of Crystal Cove by Spanish conquistadors, led by Captain Fernando El Aguirre and his men, and by Spanish missionaries, led by the Fraternitas Mysterium, the first Crystal Cove-based mystery solving group, under the edict of the Spanish Catholic missions in the Americas. I should note that while *SD!MI*'s engagement with America's Spanish settler-colonial history is largely suggestive in its representations and narrative, the series nevertheless attempts to acknowledge the gravity of the conquistadors' actions in Spain's expansionist regime and the Spanish Catholic missionaries' negligence. The semi-anthology short form is especially helpful here, as it enables *SD!MI* to slowly flesh out the particularities of this aspect of Crystal Cove's history across seasons without sacrificing the familiarity and fun of the MOTW format. In a series thematically concerned with hidden secrets, maintaining a formula designed to set up and reveal secrets in each episode is helpful. This in turn ensures that *SD!MI* is still recognisably a *Scooby-Doo* show from a form perspective and thus does not alienate its youth audience by deviating too far or too abruptly from what is generally understood to be the *Scooby-Doo* formula and norm. For instance, similar to how *SD!MI* uses caricature in "Shrieking Madness" to peel back the social function of fear, *SD!MI* exaggerates or emphasises certain episodes' unique monsters and spooky settings to unmask and pick apart specific layers of Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history and how they contribute to the creation of the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*.

For example, the episode "Night on Haunted Mountain" largely takes place aboard El Aguirre's decaying galleon in the desert. The episode highlights the unsettling incongruency of an undiscovered Spanish galleon being found in a desert of all places, both alerting the gang to its significance to the Crystal Cove mystery and signalling to the audience the noticeable but gradual shift in the series' narrative arc toward a darker, more horror-focused character as it begins to address the topic of intergenerational trauma. In the preserved manifest of the galleon, El Aguirre explains that he and his crew stole the crystal sarcophagus containing the Evil Entity, perceiving it to be of great financial value. However, upon exposure to the sarcophagus, they soon realise that "in our thirst for power and wealth, we had discovered a terrible evil" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2012a, 00:13:54–00:13:58). In a flashback, a close-up of the crystal sarcophagus reflected in El Aguirre's terrified eyes is followed by a series of shots depicting El Aguirre and his men attacking and razing several

villages. El Aguirre states, "[the Evil Entity] preyed upon our fears, driving us to commit horrible acts" (00:14:00–00:14:05). It is significant that the conquistadors, flaunted symbols of the Spanish Empire's geopolitical hegemony and a nod to America's settler-colonial history more broadly, are the ones to introduce the Evil Entity and the cycles of fear- and capital-driven violence associated with him to Crystal Cove. Rather than ensuring that Crystal Cove operates as a proud extension of the Spanish Empire, the accumulated wealth that the conquistadors appropriated in their conquests instead corrupts the colony at the very root of its settlement. How to navigate the horror of this revelation without nullifying its critical impact? *SD!MI* returns to the *Scooby-Doo* formula but keeps the fear. The episode's monster is unmasked, the villain reveals how they nearly got away with it, and the gang, though unnerved, moves on to the next mystery, still secure in their established position in the formula. There is comfort in the return to the familiar in this episode, but *SD!MI* takes advantage of the semi-anthology format to seed a looming sense of terror into that comfort by including a chilling parting shot of the hitherto unseen ghost of El Aguirre watching the gang depart from the galleon. Rather than following the episodic *Scooby-Doo* trope which has it that the closing shot of each episode refocuses on the gang and Scooby-Doo himself as he howls his trademark "Scooby-Dooby-Doo!," the parting shot of the episode instead latches onto the unsettling incongruous object, the galleon, and onto a visual representation of the narrative arc of the series, being El Aguirre and his symbolic association with Crystal Cove's intergenerational trauma. This episode's mystery may be solved, but *SD!MI* uses this last shot to reiterate that the gang's encounter with sublimity remains inevitable and imminent.

SD!MI repeats this tactic of returning to the formula but keeping the fear in the episode "Theater of the Doomed," which explores the impact of the Fraterinas Mysterium on Crystal Cove's history. Similar to "Night on Haunted Mountain," this episode uses an object incongruous to its setting to emphasise a significant tonal and formal shift in the series' character. The object in question is the mummified corpse of the Fraternias Mysterium's Friar Gabriello Serra being used as a stage prop for a dramatic reproduction of Crystal Cove's history at the local theatre. The friar's corpse explains that the Fraternitas Mysterium took up the mystery the conquistadors had left behind after El Aguirre and his men were driven to madness, only for the friars to nearly succumb to the same fate as they grew obsessed with the mystery and fed into the Evil Entity's existence. Their obsession led to their negligence of the mission and ultimately to their partial destruction of Crystal Cove in an attempt "to rid us and the town of evil" (2012b, 00:20:32–00:20:33). As a result, *SD!MI* depicts the Fraternitas

Mysterium as agents of damnation rather than salvation. Like the conquistadors, when the Fraternitas Mysterium realise what they are doing, they are unable to reconcile themselves with their actions and instead attribute their faults to the influence of the Evil Entity. For both parties, if the Evil Entity is a real, Luciferian agent capable of influencing even the most powerful and holy of people to commit atrocities, then absolution of their guilt and erasure of their complicity is possible. Thus do the conquistadors and friars propel the Evil Entity from imagined bogeyman to living, sentient being through their shared investment in the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. Both groups attempt to prevent the next generation from investigating their actions, and therefore pre-emptively protect them from enacting the same traumas, but they do so through deceptive means as opposed to full disclosure, thus beginning Crystal Cove's long cycle of intergenerational trauma. Once again, *SD!MI* navigates the horror of this revelation by returning to the familiarity of the formula. Unlike "Night on Haunted Mountain," the closing shot of "Theater of the Doomed" *does* refocus on the gang and Scooby-Doo, but the close-up on Scooby-Doo's frightened face is far from celebratory. Instead, this trope cements the centrality of the gang as more than just mystery solvers but as arbiters of a very real and troubling legacy the conquistadors and friars have left behind.

From there the next five mystery-solving groups would follow in this cycle, contributing toward the traumas that mark the city. All seven Crystal Cove-based mystery-solving groups at some point become aware of the Evil Entity through the clues left by their predecessors, contributing to the continued existence of the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. As Friar Serra warns the gang, a warning that would come to haunt much of the series, "this has all happened before" (2012b, 00:21:29–00:21:30), intimating that the gang will inevitably follow in their predecessor's footsteps. Ultimately, these two episodes announce that the truth of the curse of Crystal Cove is this: the foundation of the city is built on the remains of its undisclosed, unaddressed traumatic settler-colonial history, and the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa* functions as that history made embodied and perpetual by the residents.

"It's come undone": (Un)Breakable cycles and the Lovecraftian hero

It is notable that of all the mystery solving groups, only the first group and the current Mystery Incorporated attempt to defeat the Evil Entity and redress the truth behind Crystal Cove's curse. The groups between only delayed the Evil Entity's plans, which required concealing the truth. However, the deferral of

definitive action, and therefore the deferral of full disclosure, only maintained or even ensured the cyclicality of the curse instead of its resolution. It is this idea of cycles, both the making and breaking of them, that operates as both formal and thematic throughline in *SD!MI*, sustained by its short form.

Cycles of violence and secrecy as products of intergenerational trauma inform many of Lovecraft's works, though it is *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* that *SD!MI* most closely engages with. Both the unnamed narrator in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* and the eponymous narrator in *Charles Dexter Ward* (Lovecraft [1941] 2014) discover unwanted heritages: the narrator that he is part of a long line of monstrous humanoids known as the Deep Ones and Ward that his ancestor Joseph Curwen is a mass murderer and necromancer who has haunted Ward for most of his life.[9] For both protagonists, the truth of their heritage remains concealed through "furtiveness and secretiveness" ([1936] 2014, 886) until pursued by the two men. However, like the Crystal Cove mystery-solving groups, their investigation inevitably leads to their destruction; the narrator is transformed into a Deep One and Ward is possessed by Curwen. As Mark Lowell (2004) argues, the Cthulhu Mythos is the "perversion" (48) of the Campbellian hero and monomyth, with Alissa Burger (2018) expanding on this concept by remarking that "instead of setting out into the world and conquering the adversary which lies there, the Lovecraftian hero finds that there are questions best left unmasked, horrifying truths better left unknown" (82). In becoming aware of the "horrifying truths" that underpin their lives, both men as Lovecraftian heroes re-enact the cycles they thought themselves removed from. In both cases, the terror of their situations is centrally located in the idea that intergenerational trauma will be perpetuated by those that inherit it, and that attempts to circumvent their fate are inconsequential in the grand scheme of an uncaring universe. The conquistadors operate similarly as Lovecraftian heroes in that "what is seen cannot be unseen, what is learned cannot be forgotten, and the Lovecraftian hero is cursed to carry this knowledge to the grave" (Burger 2018, 84). In "Nightmare in Red," the gang encounter the trapped liminal counterpart of El Aguirre, who is convinced that he and his men "should never be set free. We must pay for all the horrible atrocities we committed while in service to the Entity. I can still hear their screaming. All the screams of the innocent ones" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013c, 00:17:05–00:17:20). Here El Aguirre as Lovecraftian hero is "broken by the futile nature of the human struggle for life and meaning in the face of cosmic terror" (Burger 2018, 84). However, El Aguirre's attempts at purgatorial

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[9] *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* was first serialised in 1941 in *Weird Tales*.

atonement (the only way he perceives he can respond to sublimity) only further perpetuate the cycles that led to the creation of the Evil Entity in the first place, as El Aguirre misconstrues concealment as prevention and re-enactment of trauma as absolution.

But what of the gang as Lovecraftian heroes? How do they reckon with the existential terror that attends their encounter with sublimity? I should note that the realisation of intergenerational trauma is primarily directed toward the gang, who, except Scooby, are white subjects. While marginalised subjectivities are explored to an extent in *SD!MI* through recurring BIPOC side characters, *SD!MI* centres largely white subjectivities and white responses to the power they held and continue to hold in Crystal Cove, which *SD!MI* translates into the gang having to come to terms with their complicity in perpetuating the Evil Entity's existence as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. Nevertheless, in the final episode "Come Undone," the Evil Entity announces that "I brought you together as I brought all those together before you. I made you into friends. Forced you into a group. I am the author of your every hope and dream" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013e, 00:19:21–00:19:32). Shaggy and Fred articulate what the rest of the gang fears most upon this revelation: "'Like, is this—this evil telling the truth? Like, our whole life, our friendship has been a lie?' 'Maybe everything we think we know, none of it is real'" (00:19:55–00:20:06). However, faced as they are with their new and terrifying objective reality, the gang differ from most Lovecraftian heroes in that there is no "desperate yearning for their earlier ignorance" (Burger 2018, 84) or succumbing to their powerlessness but rather the obstinate refusal to perpetuate the cycles of trauma they were forged in, even if those cycles must end with their undoing. Armed with the truth of Crystal Cove's curse, the gang pit their friendship—"something that monster can never take away, something it can never defeat!" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013e, 00:11:29–00:11:34) Scooby-Doo insists—against the oblivion Lovecraft's America imagines. They destroy the crystal sarcophagus, the lingering symbol of Crystal Cove's settler-colonial history, and in doing so destroy the Evil Entity. However, this introduces a second ontological shift, as by destroying the Evil Entity, the gang have destroyed the whole of Crystal Cove, its residents, and the current timeline, and for a moment the gang are left isolated as the only survivors—friendship *in* the oblivion of finally breaking a long cycle of trauma.

SD!MI adheres to the Cthulhu Mythos narrative structure that subverts the teleological Campbellian hero's journey typical of the narrative ideology of Hollywood children's horror (Brown 2021), which sees the child protagonist leave their home, overcome some sort of obstacle, and eventually return home to re-enter society with a newfound sense of maturity. Closure is thus an integral

element of this narrative ideology. In *SD!MI*, the narrative trajectory is not quite so linear, made apparent by the series' break with the MOTW format in the last three episodes of the series, which form an extended encounter and final battle with the Evil Entity. Up until the three-part finale, each episode has operated as a self-contained story that closely adheres to the conventional narrative beats of the episodic *Scooby-Doo* formula. Maintaining the monomyth structure provided a sense of stability and familiarity that the audience could grasp onto as the series developed its narrative arc's trickier thematic concerns. As such, the break with this established format to shift into the Cthulhu Mythos narrative structure is all the more visceral. Moments after defeating the Evil Entity, the gang abruptly find themselves having to reckon with sublimity once more when they are placed in a new timeline where there are no monsters or mysteries to produce the *Scooby-Doo* formula. Any closure that the gang receives upon defeating the Evil Entity and breaking the trauma cycle is put into question when they cannot go "home" after their hero's journey when that home no longer exists in its former objective reality. Their "happy ending" resolves itself into a place where everything is too normal, too unmysterious—a new Crystal Cove, now "the Sunniest Place on Earth," where the gang's sole purpose of solving mysteries and thus the gang itself have no place without the Evil Entity to be sustained as Lovecraftian *tulpa*. As Velma states, "[w]e destroyed the Entity and by destroying it, it was as if it had never existed. So, everything it touched, all the evil, all of the curse . . . none of it ever happened" (Watson, Brandt, and Cervone 2013e, 00:18:38–00:18:48, 00:18:52–00:18:54). The horror of their survival is that they must navigate being remnants of another objective reality entirely.

This shift in narrative structure is also strategic in that it enables *SD!MI* to deliberately *defer* closure rather than seek it out. Despite being presented with the opportunity to assume the narrative teleology of the Campbellian hero, in which the gang would adapt to their now utopian circumstances, assured in their maturity and achievements, and resume life as is conventional of most long-form children's animated horror protagonists (Brown 2021), the gang instead choose to restart their cycle as Lovecraftian heroes anew. For them, closure as it is framed in Campbellian terms becomes a site of existential terror rather than psychological maturity and narrative fulfilment. As such, in this new timeline, the gang manage sublimity by reconstructing and reinserting themselves into their previous objective reality by recreating the symbolic and material conditions that led to their formation as the current Mystery Incorporated. Fearing the unknown and the unfamiliar, they inadvertently repeat the pattern the villains of *SD!MI* established by seeking control of what is known and familiar to them. As both close friends and as Mystery Incorporated, this means

controlling shared nostalgia. They repaint the now white Mystery Machine to its original Seventies design and leave Crystal Cove, where they promise to one another that "we'll stop and solve every mystery we find along the way" (00:20:51–00:21:53) and "[we'll] stop and eat at every burger place and pizza joint we find along the way too" (00:20:58–00:21:03). However, given the series' shift to the Cthulhu Mythos narrative structure, where the gang lose their identities and purpose, the callback to these iconic, nostalgic symbols and themes of Mystery Incorporated renders them uncanny rather than comforting. In the process of artificially restoring the *Scooby-Doo* formula, the stability that this formula once afforded to both the gang and the audience is now a false double given that *SD!MI* has made it quite clear that closure cannot be achieved. In these new Lovecraftian hero terms, *SD!MI* consigns the curse of Crystal Cove, its cycles of violence as a result of its settler-colonial history and as embodied in the Evil Entity as Lovecraftian *tulpa* to the obscurity of an ultimately uncaring universe—until, of course, this all happens again.

"Scooby-Dooby-Doo!": Conclusion

For a *Scooby-Doo* show, the end of *SD!MI* is surprisingly harrowing. If the resolution of trauma in the series' ending seems too easy, that is because it is. Despite the smiles the gang share in the Mystery Machine and Scooby-Doo's signature "Scooby-Dooby-Doo!" that follows the gang as they depart from Crystal Cove in pursuit of new mysteries, the end of *SD!MI* leaves behind more uncertainty than security and a lingering sense of the existential terror that underpinned much of the series. The gang's decision to return to an earlier objective reality, facilitated by the series finale's break from the *Scooby-Doo* formula reinforced by the MOTW format and *SD!MI*'s shift to the narrative structure and thematic concerns of the Lovecraftian hero of the Cthulhu Mythos, critically undoes the gang's realisation of Crystal Cove's legacy of intergenerational trauma and their relation to it. In doing so, *SD!MI* seems to suggest that there is no clear-cut path in the navigation of trauma. This is emphasised by the gang who, in response to the horror that comes with perfect awareness of the truth of the (un)known universe and society's corresponding powerlessness, seems to choose the path of madness over death as Lovecraftian heroes, though it is a strangely jaunty kind of madness indeed. Over the course of two seasons, *SD!MI*'s adaptation of Lovecraftian horror and engagement with Lovecraft's cultural legacy is sustained, frequently subversive, and

championed through the semi-anthology short form specifically, thus marking the media form's potential as a discursive and critical platform.

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