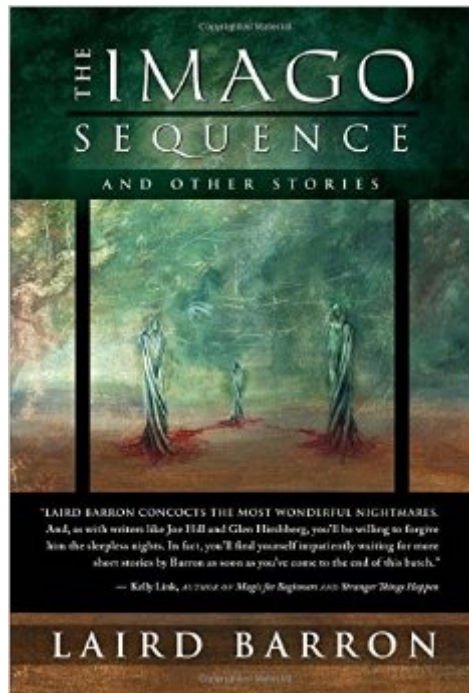


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# The Imago Sequence And Other Stories



## Synopsis

To the long tradition of eldritch horror pioneered and refined by writers such as H.P. Lovecraft, Peter Straub, and Thomas Ligotti, comes Laird Barron, an author whose literary voice invokes the grotesque, the devilish, and the perverse with rare intensity and astonishing craftsmanship. Collected here for the first time are nine terrifying tales of cosmic horror, including the World Fantasy Award-nominated novella "The Imago Sequence," the International Horror Guild Award-nominated "Proboscis," and the never-before published "Procession of the Black Sloth." Together, these stories, each a masterstroke of craft and imaginative irony, form a shocking cycle of distorted evolution, encroaching chaos, and ravenous insectoid hive-minds hidden just beneath the seemingly benign surface of the Earth. Skyhorse Publishing, under our Night Shade and Talos imprints, is proud to publish a broad range of titles for readers interested in science fiction (space opera, time travel, hard SF, alien invasion, near-future dystopia), fantasy (grimdark, sword and sorcery, contemporary urban fantasy, steampunk, alternative history), and horror (zombies, vampires, and the occult and supernatural), and much more. While not every title we publish becomes a New York Times bestseller, a national bestseller, or a Hugo or Nebula award-winner, we are committed to publishing quality books from a diverse group of authors.

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## Customer Reviews

The first thing that struck me about Imago was that, after having read it and Occultation - Laird's second 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. I am reminded of Joyce Carol Oates' very best in some of Laird's work, or Ramsey Campbell at his most hallucinogenic - Laird's characters are often face to face with facts and realities they refuse to recognize or acknowledge.

Out of all the books I've read, and all the stories I've enjoyed, I'm never really sure which one I'll sit down to review until I actually start typing. I read this book, *The Imago Sequence and Others*, a few weeks ago and it's really stuck with me. This is the author's, Laird Barron, first collection of short stories. I'm always on the lookout for new horror, so when I saw this book on the shelf in the library it grabbed my attention immediately. The collection starts with "Old Virginia", a story about an over-the-hill CIA agent assigned to guard a strange experiment in the woods of West Virginia. Of course, something goes wrong and the experiment gets out of hand, leading inevitably to very bad things. I really liked the tone of this one, and it sets the stage very well for the stories that follow. "The Procession of the Black Sloth" is a strange story about ghosts and witchcraft set in modern day China. I like the atmosphere and characters, but the ending was kind of a let down after such a good buildup. "Bulldozer" is set in the Old American West, and follows a Pinkerton Detective on the trail of a murderous circus strongman with some very strange abilities. "Hallucigenia" starts with a rich couple's encounter with a giant wasp nest in an old abandon barn. They both are attacked by something they don't remember. While his wife is in a coma, the husband investigates who owns the barn and tries to find out what really happened there. The imagery in this story really

stuck with me, and this story is be my favorite of the bunch."Parallax" is another weird story, this time about a husband whose wife mysteriously disappears one day.

Barron's storytelling skills are in full bloom in this first collection. "Old Virginia," "Hallucigenia" and "Bulldozer" are first-rate horror tales. Especially "Bulldozer." Its air is thick with inevitability and the end just masterful in its deadly economy. For my money, this stands with later Barron classics like "Mysterium Tremendum" (from Occultation) and "The Siphon" (from Beautiful Thing). And then there's "Proboscis." I didn't quite get it at first; the epiphany and the terrifying scene that follows seem at first to come out of nowhere. (Notwithstanding, it threw a good scare into me.) Now I'm thinking that not quite getting it may be the point and I'm liking the story better and better for it. I'm still not sure whether I should be piecing together the insect lore or piecing together signs of incipient burnout in the narrator. Some close calls. I like those, too. (Even when Barron is slightly off, he's on.) Endings can be an issue here. "Shiva -- Open Your Eye" is wonderful for as long as it stays on point. But having reached its summit, Barron goes on four more pages and, expanding the scope, diminishes the effect. Similarly, I liked the title story quite a bit, including the ending, but the lead-in to the ending felt expedient. (A stranger in a strange land shouldn't wind up in exactly the right spot.) And I think I know what Barron was after in "Procession of the Black Sloth" -- something akin to the slithery cross-cultural dread that powered the better of the "Grudge" films. Alas, he doesn't quite get there -- someone has to spell it all out for us at the end -- and I'm tempted to interpret the story's drawn-out quality and relative tameness as signals of tentativeness.

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