

Review of M. John Harrison's book *Light*

by [Jacob Williams](#) on 2025-03-19
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After a moment, he had the impression of something huge sweeping in across the bay towards him. The monster was returning to its beach. Or perhaps not the monster itself, but whatever lay behind it, some condition of the world, the universe, the state of things, which is black, revelatory and, in the end, a relief—something you don't want to know but are perversely glad to have confirmed.¹

This book is trying to be very deep and literary but—notwithstanding a few good moments like the quote above—for me it just doesn't work. The characters are unlikable, their choices are unrelatable, and it takes far too long for the novel to start transitioning from *series of weird events* to *plot*. And the revelation at the end still leaves most of the events seeming arbitrary and irrelevant.

One element I found particularly unsatisfying was the characters' relation to violence. Of the three main characters, one is a serial killer and one is an impulsive (mass-)murderer. The amount of grappling they do with the seriousness of their own crimes is rather less than I might have expected. My impression is that the characters' violent tendencies are intended to give them depth and pathos, to illustrate the intensity of their inner emotional struggles. But intense inner turmoil is something many people deal with, and very few deal with it by embarking on murder sprees. So these characters' behaviors come off more as a contrived attempt at grittiness than as a reflection of the human experience.

1. M. John Harrison, *Light*, Kefahuchi Tract Ser v.1 (Westminster: Random House Publishing Group, 2004), 351.