



An alchemist and his young nephew hunt down a legend in this profound and unsettling speculative Western, for fans of Karen Russell and Victor LaValle.

Alone in a frontier town in the brand-new state of Washington, Gentle Montgomery is grieving his best friend. Liam, a self-taught alchemist, was killed when he tried to capture a creature that shouldn't exist: a giant salamander that drives men mad. When Gentle's nephew, Kitt, arrives at his doorstep, the two set out together to track the monster down so they can use its blood in an alchemical formula that will bring Liam back to life.

It's a hard and haunted journey through the Northwestern frontier. The salamander produces surreal nightmares and waking dreams of a blighted, burning future. And Gentle and Kitt soon find themselves pursued by a bloodthirsty hunter, a sadistic judge, and a doomsday cult, all of whom have their own plans for the river monster. Armed with nothing but Liam's alchemical notebooks, they must not only find the salamander but learn to understand it—and the terrifying visions it causes—before it's too late.

Dark and compelling, *The Great Work* is an arcane adventure through the wilderness of friendship and the rotten heart of the early American empire.

- **FOR SPECULATIVE FICTION FANS:** Will appeal to readers of beautifully-written fiction with speculative hooks, like Kelly Link and Karen Russell's stories (as well as Russell's forthcoming *The Antidote*, also a magic-tinged historical novel about the American mythos), and Victor LaValle's *Lone Women*.
- **MAGICAL ATMOSPHERE:** Ancient forest spirits, visions, cults, and alchemical magic against a backdrop of gritty frontier life.
- **GRIPPING AND PROFOUND:** The novel hits on big themes like masculinity, colonialism, and the meaning of human endeavor, all within a compelling adventure story.
- **ICONIC DUO:** The pairing of the gruff, guarded protector and the curious, open-hearted naif echoes speculative adventures like *The Last of Us* and *The Road*, as well as offbeat Westerns like *True Grit* and *The Sisters Brothers*.
- **"WESTERN GOTHIC" TREND:** Forecasters predict an explosion of interest in the intersection between Western and goth/dark culture, as exemplified by books like *Vampires of El Norte* and *Lone Women*, musical artists like Orville Peck, and décor and fashion trends.
- **AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR:** Sheldon Costa is a recipient of the AWP Intro Journal Project Award, and both the 2018 and 2020 Helen Earnhart Harley Creative Writing Fellowship. Ramona Ausubel chose his story "The Pig Queen" as the winner of Cream City Review's Summer Fiction Award, and Carmen Maria Machado selected him as a runner-up for The Pinch Literary Awards.

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Advance Praise for *The Great Work*



"*The Great Work* is a vision of America as both homeland and horror story. And it is also just a good ol' page-turner, the kind of dark tale that delivers on every promise it makes."—Joseph Fink, cocreator of *Welcome to Night Vale*

"Costa's ripsnorting debut is a wild ride through freaky old America: Backwoods alchemists, a sadistic reverend judge, an animalist cult, and a quest for a primeval monster of nightmares come together in a hell-for-leather frontier yarn packed with action, wonder, and heart."—James Kennedy, author of *Bride of the Tornado*

"A moody, atmospheric, and singular novel which navigates corners of American history through the complicated territory of horror, the monstrous, and the heroic."—Kelly Link, best-selling author of *The Book of Love*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Sheldon Costa is an award-winning fiction writer who has been published in *The Georgia Review*, *Conjunctions*, *Electric Literature*, and others. He holds an MFA from The Ohio State University and lives in rural Missouri with his wife and three cats. This is his debut novel.

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