

BOOKMARKS

Weird and wild tales

"PLANETS GREY WITH ELD"
 LOST WORLDS, Volume 1.
 by Clark Ashton Smith
 Panther Books /1.75 205 pages

Laurie Kruk
 In the 1930's, when magazines like *Weird Tales* and *Astounding Stories* flourished, and H.P. Lovecraft was never confused with a naughty store, there appeared a brilliant young poet named Clark Ashton Smith, who wrote fantastic stories of exotic worlds and lost continents.

His tales seemed to come from distorted dreams of forgotten pasts, and they were at once tremendously tragic and feverishly beautiful. His prose was naturally very poetic, carefully constructed and full of strange, archaic words. Smith outlined his interests in "To The Daemon: An Invocation":

"Tell me, if you will, of the years when the moon was young, with siren-rippled seas and mountains that were zoned with flowers from base to summit; tell me of the planets grey with eld, of the worlds whereon no mortal astronomer has ever looked, and whose mystic heavens and horizons have given pause to visionaries."

Smith filled his stories accordingly; a delicate balance of pathos, horror, tenderness and cruelty, beauty and monstrosity.

Now, Panther Books have resurrected the best of Clark Ashton Smith's short stories in two paperbacks entitled *Lost Worlds I* and *II*. Each book is further divided by the unique and bizarre settings that Smith envisioned for his tales; legendary Atlantis and Hyperborea, the lost continent of Zothique, and unreachable worlds in distant galaxies. Most of his stories, however, are rooted in the actual or mythical past where civilizations are ancient and corrupt; and their ends, imminent.

The theme of desperate flight from death was a favorite one for Smith; despair, betrayal and the oblivious trampling-on of Time. Clark Ashton Smith was an extremely sensitive man. His heroes are resourceful, brave and mortal; his monsters are possessed of demonic intelligence. In the end, however, Time emerges the victor over both Good and Evil.

Though Smith has long been associated with the early American writers of Science Fiction, it is clear that he is not one of them. His prose presents a barbarous, romantic past; an incredible age from which we are separated by the deep chasm of Time and Space.

Smith's stories give the reader an escape from the weary familiarity of our world; an escape to new spheres and races and unknown histories. The world of Clark Ashton Smith is weird and fantastic, in the old sense! His tales provide the reader with an imaginary look at life everywhere and at its uninhibited potential.

New face for North

The Pitok Retribution
 Published by Williams-Wallace International in Toronto.
 Available at the York University Bookstore.

George S. Treadway

More than one B-grade movie tells the story of an honourable man, who in the uneven fight for justice resorts to violence. To fashion a novel from such a tired theme would take a great deal of skill. Angus Brown's *The Pitok Retribution* is the product of such craftsmanship.

By placing the often-told story in Canadian bush country, he has given it unsettling relevance. But he has done more than change the setting: the corrupt southern sheriff is transformed into a uniformed OPP, and the newspaper whose biggest story is last week's society ball has turned its facilities into the CBC.

Set in the fictional Pitok Valley, *The Pitok Retribution* describes the fate of a small band of reformists after their Socialist League has been suppressed.

Because the book begins well after the disintegration of the organization, Brown relies on the memories of three principal characters - Buckshot, Tommy Mosquito and Bill Brady - to reveal his story. It is this use of stream-of-consciousness sequencing that gives the story much of its interest. The rest comes from the graphic descriptions of corruption and brutality in north-eastern Ontario.

Related in the sparse language of the bush, the story reveals the North to be more than peaceful country for hunting and fishing.

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