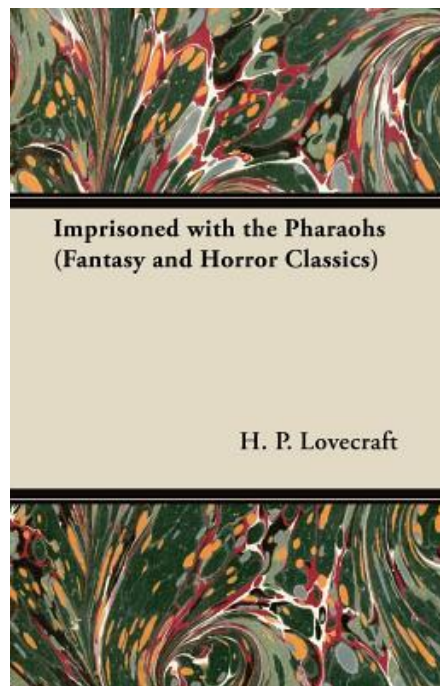




Imprisoned with the Pharaohs

H.P. Lovecraft

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Imprisoned with the Pharaohs H.P. Lovecraft

H. P. Lovecraft ranks amongst the most important speculative fiction writers of all time. First published in the Summer 1924 edition of *Weird Tales*, 'Imprisoned with the Pharaohs' fictionalizes an allegedly true story, told to Lovecraft by escape artist Harry Houdini. Many of the finest stories of magic and fantasy, particularly those dating back to the 1900s and before, are now extremely scarce and increasingly expensive. We are republishing these classic works in affordable, high quality, modern editions, using the original text and artwork.

Imprisoned with the Pharaohs Details

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From Reader Review Imprisoned with the Pharaohs for online ebook

Irene Azuaje says

Perturbadora lectura, hay veces que no se logra distinguir lo real de lo fantástico.

Bill Kerwin says

This tale is unique in the Lovecraft canon, for it was ghost-written for Harry Houdini at the request of J.C. Henneberger, the owner of *Weird Tales*, which published it in the May-June-July issue of 1924. Henneberger was trying to boost readership, the “Ask Houdini” advice column he had instituted was popular, and the two short stories supposed written by the great magician had gain favorable attention as well. What could be better—Henneberger reasoned—than a true life adventure of Houdini’s, the tale of how he escaped being bound and dropped from a rope into the heart of the Great Pyramid itself?

The story features a lot of padding, and not terribly much tension. Lovecraft must have spent some time at the local library, in the travel and mythology sections, because the tale begins with a typical tour of Cairo and the desert, and soon shifts to a fairly traditional exposition of Egyptian religious lore and symbology. But when Houdini lies bound in the depths of the pyramid, alternating periods of nightmare and waking, the narrative takes a distinctively Lovecraftian turn.

Some say this story reminds them of “The Shunned House,” which Lovecraft completed later the same year, and they certainly share some of the same cosmic atmosphere. But I instead was struck by two things: 1) how H.H.’s explorations in the pyramidal dark evoke the first half of Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum,” and 2) how the procession of beast-headed gods observed by Houdini resembles the march of the frog-fish of Innsmouth.

Here for your enjoyment is a bit of the aforementioned procession:

The tramping drew nearer—heaven save me from the sound of those feet and paws and hooves and pads and talons as it commenced to acquire detail! Down limitless reaches of sunless pavement a spark of light flickered in the malodorous wind, and I drew behind the enormous circumference of a Cyclopic column that I might escape for a while the horror that was stalking million-footed toward me through gigantic hypostyles of inhuman dread and phobic antiquity. The flickers increased, and the tramping and dissonant rhythm grew sickeningly loud. In the quivering orange light there stood faintly forth a scene of such stony awe that I gasped from a sheer wonder that conquered even fear and repulsion. Bases of columns whose middles were higher than human sight . . . mere bases of things that must each dwarf the Eiffel Tower to insignificance . . . hieroglyphics carved by unthinkable hands in caverns where daylight can be only a remote legend. . . .

I would not look at the marching things. That I desperately resolved as I heard their creaking joints and nitrous wheezing above the dead music and the dead tramping. It was merciful that they did not speak . . . but God! their crazy torches began to cast shadows on the surface of those stupendous columns. Heaven take it away! Hippopotami should not have human hands and carry torches . . . men should not have the heads of crocodiles. . . .

Carole Rae says

This is first story I've read by HP Lovecraft. I'm a huge Poe fan (as you all know) and my friend Court let me borrow her collection of Lovecraft's works, so I give him a go.

Ugh. This one was boring. :/ I skimmed a lot. However, I loved the ending...that was creepy and unexpected and awesome. Honestly, the author should have shortened it up, but thats just my opinion.

Not a great intro to Lovecraft, so onto the next short story.

Out of five stars, I stamp this with 2 stars.

Favorite Character(s): The half animal-mummies? LOL

Not-so Favorite Character(s): No one really

Julesmarie says

Having this be told from the first person pov of an actual person made it even more enthralling. Especially because the narrator (Lovecraft writing a fictionalized account of Harry Houdini's experience in Egypt in 1910) attributes the events of this story to his fame as an escape artist.

Thoroughly entertaining!

Some Favorite Quotes:

Travelling to seek curiosities, I was often forced to stand inspection as a sort of curiosity myself!

Thank God for the mercy that shut out in oblivion those clawing Furies of consciousness which half unhinged my faculties, and tore Harpy-like at my spirit!

reached such a state of emotional exhaustion that no new horror could make much difference.

a terror peculiarly dissociated from personal fear, and taking the form of a sort of objective pity for our planet, that it should hold within its depths such horrors as must lie beyond these aegipanic cacophonies

and may all the gods of all pantheons unite to keep the like from my ears again

Sarah Teal says

ghost written for Houdini. one of lovecraft's more promising premises; suffers from the style abberation.

Bernardo Arcos Álvarez says

Lovecraft no era del tipo de persona que disfrutara de los viajes, además, su situación económica siempre fue tan apremiante que no podía permitírselo; no obstante, conocía a la perfección el primer cuadro Gizah, la disposición de los templos, pirámides, tumbas, y la historia del antiguo Egipto, un ejemplo del poder de la lectura. Harry Houdini, la esfinge, hombres con cabeza de animales, excelente.

Annathelle26 says

Another really interesting short horror story from Master Lovecraft! However, this one wasn't without its faults.

I was really hyped when I started reading this one, but unfortunately, I found *Part 1* to be a bit boring. It started well, but then it dragged on and on, talking about Giza and Kairo's monuments in such great detail, I felt like I was reading a lengthy tourist guide to Egypt. Alright, it was interesting sometimes, given that I personally love Egypt, but I really think that all these details weren't needed, they could be less. Thus, there goes the final star.

Then I started *Part 2*, where Lovecraft finally gets to the core of the story. From that point on, it was as amazing as his other novels. *Captivating* atmosphere, and the descriptions were so vivid, next thing I expected was to start actually smelling the decaying, stale air of the Pyramids all around me. I also liked the plot, and that ending.... it gave me chills.

I saw the horror and unwholesome antiquity of Egypt, and the grisly alliance it has always had with the tombs and temples of the dead. I saw phantom processions of priests with the heads of bulls, falcons, cats, and ibises; phantom processions marching interminably through subterranean labyrinths and avenues of titanic propylaea beside which a man is as a fly, and offering unnamable sacrifice to indescribable gods. Stone colossi marched in endless night and drove herds of grinning androsphinxes down to the shores of illimitable stagnant rivers of pitch. And behind it all I saw the ineffable malignity of primordial necromancy, black and amorphous, and fumbling greedily after me in the darkness to choke out the spirit that had dared to mock it by emulation.

In my sleeping brain there took shape a melodrama of sinister hatred and pursuit, and I saw the black soul of Egypt singling me out and calling me in inaudible whispers; calling and luring me, leading me on with the glitter and glamor of a Saracenic surface, but ever pulling me down to the age-mad catacombs and horrors of its dead and abysmal pharaonic heart.

What huge and loathsome abnormality was the Sphinx originally carved to represent?

A question readers never know the answer to, but one for which Lovecraft has given away just enough clues to make me close the book feeling a powerful sense of awe.

Bryan Padua says

Had nice world building but still slow and was overdoing it on the verbose side. The ending wasn't even that great, the only thing I really did enjoy was the description of the creatures met. The way Queen Nitros' face was very briefly described made me wince and Lovecraft didn't even use any "imposing" words to do so. This story doesn't really hold up today as I imagine it would've before.

Alejandro Solis jimenez says

One of the best. The creatures he describes are just so morbid. I think it's incredible how an author can make you so interested and surprise you in very few pages.

Becky says

My main impression of this book is that it contains lots of SAT words.

Andrew Pixton says

Interesting that Houdini, the character of the story, was both inspiration for the story from his own tales but also a big patron. He liked it so much, he hired Lovecraft as a writer for other personal projects. I wasn't so enchanted. It's barely passable as a horror and has more of his racism this time mixed with tourist borne colonialism "Egypt is the source of all evil" lol, STFU! Actually if that were true, I'd just want to go there more than I already do. The monster ritual scene at the end was pretty cool and I wish he'd done more with it. Granted, it's another tame ending because the character is alive and well (at time of writing). It's not nearly as scary as it could've been. Being trapped in a tomb? Hello claustrophobia! But I suppose Houdini would keep it together more than anyone else.

Sara says

Somehow this is the first H.P. Lovecraft story I have ever read. Kind of a strange one to read first, considering that it's the only thing he ever ghost-wrote, and it's ghost-written for Harry Houdini, which is just incredibly random.

I think there's something about Lovecraft's writing style that just inherently bugs me. It's overly descriptive, which sometimes I like, but in this situation it just annoyed me. I really liked the dark tone and the descriptions of the setting, but it's just....to many words or something.

Besides all that, I did kinda like this story. It's been a month or so since I read it, and it did actually stay with me a little. It's creepy and dark and grotesque, and made me want to learn more about Harry Houdini, actually :)

TOM says

“Egypt . . . truly, this dark cradle of civilization was ever the wellspring of horrors and marvels unspeakable!”

Excellently evokes the sense of superstitious horror connected to the mysteries of Ancient Egypt and the

pharaohs in popular imagination. Atmospheric and maintains a horrid claustrophobic feeling of terror and suspense which Lovecraft is renowned for.

This was ghost written by Lovecraft for Harry Houdini and originally published in Weird Tales Magazine. Not a recommended starting point if you haven't read Lovecraft before, but essential reading for fans of his writing.

Shawn says

Absolutely, one of my favorite Lovecraft tales. Who doesn't like ancient Egypt, mummies and archaeologists. I know it sounds like an Indiana Jones movie and it kind of is in slow motion. I love his tales and this is my favorite non-Cthulhu tale.

Patrick says

Horror story--terrible (1 star)
Travelogue--right on! (5 stars)

Perry Whitford says

A ghost-written ghost story by H.P. Lovecraft, though supposedly a fictional rendering of a rather terrifying adventure experienced by the escapologist Harry Houdini while holidaying in Egypt in the year 1910, where it seems the pharaohs themselves took exception to his fame as a modern-day magician, or "hahwi".

Hiring a mysterious guide who turns out to be so much more than he first appears, Houdini finds himself tied in ropes and lowered in the shadowy depths beneath the pyramid of Khephren (Khafra) where he witnesses 'the age-mad catacombs and horrors of its (Egypt's) dead and abysmal pharaonic heart.'

As with all the stories I have read by Lovecraft, the abominable nature of the prose occasionally threatens to overshadow the abominable nature of the horrors it describes, with his ungainly sentences and overwrought diction.

I liked 'the thaumatropically grotesque shadows of abnormal horror' though, that was a good one.

The story itself is, of course, complete bunkum, but it does have a good ending, and it's interesting the speculate just how much, if any, of this actually happened to Houdini on that holiday.

Quirkyreader says

This is the story Lovecraft ghost wrote for Houdini.

Rose says

This was very hard to rate.

I kept going back and forth..from 4 stars to 3, at some point even to only 1! Yet, my final rating must be 2,50-2,75.

I will be as frank as possible, I didn't like this particular story as much. Maybe it is my fear for mummies, or ancient Egypt; or maybe only a faint feeling, lingering around, that Lovecraft didn't do a much great job with this one.

First of all, the actual "terrifying" part felt shadowed completely by a superficial way of describing **/e v e r y t h i n g/** . Don't get me wrong, I enjoy portrayals of people, views, things, anything. Yet, I was..and I hate to say this, unusually bored. Disappointed even? I found myself forcing through the words, thinking only about the computer or other books.

The only few things I enjoyed, and maybe it's the fact this book got a 2 from me, instead of 1, is the portraits and characteristics of the people, and *especially* of the pharaohs. + The navigation through the dark, without any lights whatsoever..only supported on the wind and sounds.

I do feel like I am being too harsh, thus I am recommending this book with all my heart. Just a warning, you might be left disappointed OR, maybe, filled with tears of joy.

Ivonne says

Una de mis historias favoritas de Lovecraft. Si bien es atípica (no la escribió a nombre propio, sino para que Harry Houdini la publicara), es un perfecto ejemplo de lo descriptivo y oscuro que era el autor. Las historias del antiguo Egipto siempre me han movido mucho y son mis favoritas; ésta en particular revela una de las peores pesadillas de todo explorador: quedar atrapado en los secretos de las pirámides y ser juzgado por esas criaturas que consideramos mitológicas e inexistentes. Sobra decir que el final es arrasador.

Jason MacDee says

Travelogue turned thriller turned horror. If you want a guide to Egypt, this will be interesting. If you want an engaging horror story, you'll be disappointed. The journey is fun, but the horror content is blasé.
