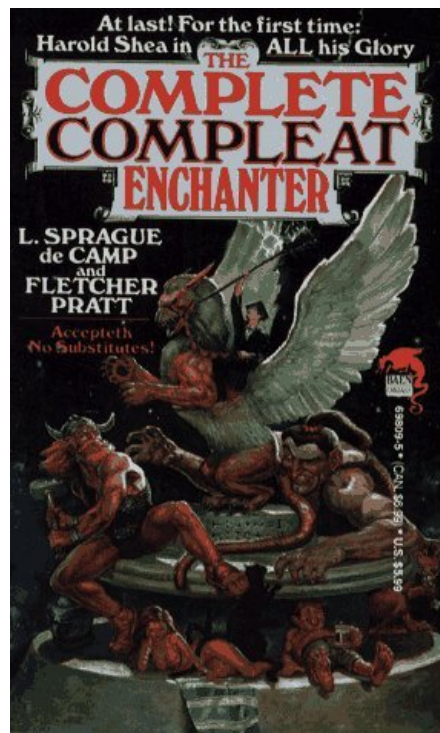




The Complete Compleat Enchanter

L. Sprague de Camp , Fletcher Pratt

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The Complete Compleat Enchanter L. Sprague de Camp , Fletcher Pratt

Omnibus including The Roaring Trumpet, The Mathematics of Magic, The Castle of Iron, The Wall of Serpents, and The Green Magician.

The Baen edition includes an introduction by David Drake.

The Complete Compleat Enchanter Details

Date : Published March 1st 1989 by Baen Books (first published January 1st 1975)

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Author : L. Sprague de Camp , Fletcher Pratt

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From Reader Review The Complete Compleat Enchanter for online ebook

Akshay says

One of the most entertainingly tantalising fantasy works I have come across in a long while.. filled with equal parts, wit, humour, inventiveness, adaptation of known fantasy/fictional themes and characters, attention to detail, adventure, action and silliness - this is one of the finest and most innovative examples of fantasy fiction.

Prof. Harold Shea has become hands down one of my all time favourite characters as a result of these stories and I only wish fervently that there had been more! The simple concepts alone are enough to hook you completely, and the characters are so human, and at the same time not even close, that you can actually believe them and imagine yourself in there.

Well worth reading for anyone who has even the slightest taste for fantasy/scifi fiction.

Johnny says

The Compleat Enchanter (I have a different edition than the one pictured.) is not a novel, but five novels/novellas with a recurring cast of characters. Subtitled, "The Magic Misadventures of Harold Shea," this collection has the unique idea of presenting a psychology professor at a private university (endowed by one particularly generous donor) as the protagonist. Harold Shea is neither the chairman of his department nor the most prestigious member of the faculty, but he has not yet become so rooted to the academic vine that he cannot engage in reckless experimentation on the "Road to Adventure."

Now, I am somewhat facetious in calling this the "Road to Adventure" because all of these misadventures would have made great Hope and Crosby movies. Crosby could easily have taken on the role of Harold's mentor and department chairperson, the highly theoretical Dr. Chalmers. Hope would have made a great Harold Shea--both finding ways into and out of trouble with unpredictable turns of events.

Meanwhile, De Camp and Pratt somewhat foreshadow the conceit of Simon Hawke's *Timewars* series by having Shea (and eventually, company) adventure *not* in parallel universes only slightly different from our own, but parallel universes which correspond to mythology, literature, and folklore. Hence, Shea ends up at various times in the dimension of Norse gods, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, the lesser-known *Orlando Furioso* (a work by Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto that may have been "borrowed" by Sir Spenser), the Finnish epic known as the *Kalevala*, and of course, the gritty Ireland of Cuchalain.

Not only is it entertaining to see modern sensibilities trying to grasp the archaic thought forms of these varied civilizations, but it is delightful to see them try to relate to epic heroes in their fictional (or, at least, legendary, in some cases) milieu. Yet, as fascinating as dealing with culture shock may be, the most interesting aspect of each book (at least, to me) was the fact that these social scientists were trying to apply empirical laws to the working of magic. Yet, in each of the five milieus, there is something inherent in the belief system and its effect on the physical environment that makes the "scientific" or perhaps "magical realism" style of magic go haywire. Learning the secrets of the magical differences in each environment is part of the wit and charm of the stories.

My friend and colleague, Pierce Watters, recommended this work to me almost a decade ago. It was one of those books I thought I vaguely remembered reading, so I nodded politely and mostly forgot about it. When I

recently saw this in a bookstore, that conversation returned to me and I thumbed through the book enough to realize I hadn't read it before. I brought it home and enjoyed it tremendously. At times, the pace was rather too slow for me and at times, the "mystery" of a given challenge or puzzle was rather too obvious, but overall, this anthology of novels/novellas is worthy of the title, "classic."

Edwina Callan says

This book contains all 5 of the adventures of the wanna-be-wizard, Harold Shea. Escapism at its finest, and, I was sad to see this book reach its end.

purplechick says

A silly and fun entertaining read. This is an omnibus of several Fantasy novellas originally published in the 1940s in Sci-Fi Mags. What would happen if you could travel into an alternate universe just by thinking about the logical construct of that universe and concentrating? The book goes to several alternative universes based on literature including Norse Mythology, Spencer's Faerie Queene, Coldridge's Xanadu, and ancient Ireland of Cuchulain and the Sidhe.

Joseph Carrabis says

I read The Complete Compleat Enchanter when I was at the height of my powers as a trade-technical author in the late 1980s. Thank god it saved me from the disaster the industry took shortly after. It is a fun read that has remained on my shelf. Excellent world-building, wonderful storytelling, incredible storycrafting.

Gregory Sadler says

This omnibus volume brings all five of L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt's "Compleat Enchanter" tales together in one nearly 500 page volume -- a good thing or bad thing depending on one's perspective, since each one of them is short, and really, light enough, to tempt one towards perusing on into the next story.

Each of the narratives was told previously in the pages of the SF/Fantasy magazine UNKNOWN, as the "Harold Shea stories," named after one of their most central characters, and he seems a reasonable enough feature to begin with, in rattling off reasons why this volume deserve the mantle of speculative fiction classics.

Shea starts off in the first story, "The Roaring Trumpet," as a fairly unappealing character -- a psychologist by trade, reflective enough to understand his own neurotic need to impress others, unsure of what he wants -- except that he's up for adventure. Quickly enough though, thrown into do-or-die situations, he finds untapped resources of skill, strength, cunning -- and most important -- resolve within himself, catalyzed through demands imposed by, quite literally, a world of gods and heroes, in this story, the gods of Norse myth.

Precisely because he must -- both for his own sorry sake, but also, with growing awareness, in order to turn the tides against impending evil -- he experiments with magic, calls back his previous acumen as a fencer, and puts psychology into actual practice.

A digression here by way of explanation might prove helpful. One of the basic premises of the five novellas is that parallel worlds exist and can be accessed -- magic of various sorts working in many of those worlds, analogously to science and technology in our own plane of existence, in each world whatever principles governing it following the internal and intelligible logic of that world. As Reed Chalmers, the elder psychologist who will, from the second book on, become a full-on enchanter -- the intellectual who originally develops the hypothesis to explore -- frames the matter:

"the world we live in is composed of impressions received through the senses. But there is an infinity of possible worlds, and if the senses can be attuned to receive a different set of impressions, we should find ourselves living in a different world"

An epistemologically and metaphysically interesting notion, sort of putting Kantian idealism into play without ever mentioning that great philosopher or (thankfully!) introducing any of his crabbed and at times obscurantist terminology -- not only would attuning the senses of a person allow that person to perceive a different world indexed to those sense-impressions, the person perceiving would literally enter that world and leave this one, no longer being able to be perceived by those in this world -- also becoming vulnerable to all sorts of fates in the other worlds.

It gets still more interesting -- though if one actually follows out the metaphysics involved, unfortunately implausible (so perhaps better not to do so!) -- when Chalmers discusses how one actually carries out this transposition from one world to the other:

". . . the method consists in filling your mind with the fundamental assumptions of the world in question. Now, what are the fundamental assumptions of our world? Obviously, those of scientific logic."

"Transference to any world exhibiting such a fixed pattern is possible. . . we merely choose a series of basic assumptions. . . To contrive a vehicle for transportation from one world to another, we face the arduous task of extracting from the picture of such a world as that of the Iliad its basic assumptions and expressing these in logical form."

Shea does this, aiming at the world of Irish legend, but winds up instead in the land of Norse myth, close to the end of the world, Ragnarok -- running first into Odin, who he follows to an inn, traipsing through the frozen north, then quickly meeting Thor, Loki, Frey, and Heimdall. Shea almost loses his life, not least by smarting off without considering the contexts in which he's landed, before gaining his bearings -- then finds himself dragged into the adventure he thought he'd been seeking, trying to locate and win back the legendary weapons needed by the gods in their coming battle with the giants.

Sent back to his own earthly plane of existence by one of the denizens of the Norse world, and confirms Chalmer's hypothesis -- a new, much more confident man, quick with his wits, tongue, and sword, and even a bit experienced with magic. The two of them, then travel off together in "The Mathematics of Magic" to the land of Faerie, based on the logic of Spenser's Faerie Queene, where Shea meets and falls in love with the woodswoman and archer Bephelbe, bringing her back to Earth.

I'll not try to even summarize the plots of the various stories, but just mention the "worlds" which "the Castle of Iron," "The Wall of Serpents", and "The Green Magician" introduce: those of Coleridge's Xanadu, Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, the Finnish Kalevala, and finally the land of Irish legend. Several other characters get introduced, and well-developed in these stories as well.

There's two traits of these stories that are particularly striking. The first is that the depictions of each of the

worlds are surprisingly rich, without ever lapsing into fantasy world-developing for its own sake. The characters are interestingly sketched and explored, social customs and mores come into play in important ways, even the rules and workings of magic vary from world to world. The second feature is that, for stories written in the 1940s and 1950s, they remain very fresh, unconfined by environing assumptions from their own epoch -- precisely why these stories comprise a classic.

Rhys says

This is an omnibus volume of five novellas (the description often claims that there are four novellas and a novel, but the 'novel' is only a little longer than the first two novellas). The adventures of Harold Shea in a multiverse that is based on our epic mythologies and literatures anticipates all parallel-universe-hopping and intertextual adventures that followed.

L. Sprague de Camp was one of the finest writers of the 'Golden Age' of SF. Perhaps his ideas were less wild than those of Asimov, Heinlein, et al, but his prose was solid and muscular and better than theirs. His collaborator, Fletcher Pratt, had a more unusual background: a decade older than de Camp he had worked as a translator of German SF in the 1920s. Together they produced this masterpiece of heroic satire and serious comedy.

Of the five novellas, the first two are the strongest. 'The Roaring Trumpet' (set in the universe of Norse myth) and 'The Mathematics of Magic' (set in the world of Spenser's *Faery Queen*) are crisply written, funny, farcical, profound and exciting, both on a vastly higher plane than most magazine SF and fantasy of the time (they were originally published in *Unknown* in 1941).

The third novella, *The Castle of Iron*, is still brilliant. Set in the strange mishmash cosmos of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, there is a slightly strained tone to some of the scenes, but generally it works very well. The fourth and fifth novellas, written ten years after the first three, are weaker still. And yet they have many worthwhile elements and surprises to offer.

So not a perfect work... But still a masterpiece and a fantasy opus of magnificent originality and quirkiness and lasting influence.

Al "Tank" says

Rollicking Good Fun

The first book of the series was "The Incomplete Enchanter", but have no fear. the first 2 stories in this book are the same, so you won't miss anything by grabbing this one to start with (if you can find a copy).

The first 2 stories are inspired and will grab the imagination of any fantasy fan. They did mine.

I'd have given the book 5 stars, except that the second two stories were pretty much more of the same, but in different fantasy realms with slightly different "rules" for magic to challenge Mr. Shea. And he's always in the situation of either rescuing his wife (which he acquired in the Faerie Queen realm), or keeping her from falling into the hands of the horny potentates of the realms where they travel.

There's more to his travails than just that, so don't think I've spoiled anything for you. Find a copy and let

yourself be transported into swashbuckling fun with some hokus pokus thrown in.

And don't be disappointed when you're done reading it. There are two more books in the series to follow.

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Steve says

The third and fourth novellas take us to the worlds of Mythic Finland and Ireland. These were written over 10 years after the first two and it appears our hero, Harold Shea, has matured. The men from our universe all have a tendency to spout off when it's obvious they should keep their mouths shut. This is ameliorated in the later novels. I have no idea if that's intentional or accidental, given that the authors are also 10 years older. But it's evident.

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nhw.livejournal.com/684127.html>[return][return]Reading "The Compleat Enchanter",[return]when I came to the fourth section,[return](set in Finland's Kalevala)[return]somehow I began to wonder:[return]Can one write LiveJournal entries[return]in iambic tetrameter?[return](Yes, I know that last word's bogus[return]and perhaps that gives the answer.)[return][return]This, a five-book compilation[return]of the works of Pratt and de Camp,[return]brings together the adventures[return]of a man called Harold Shea from[return]Ohio, mid-20th century,[return]who is, with his friends and lover,[return]thrust in various fant'sy poems,[return]first Norse legends, second Spenser,[return]third Orlando Furioso[return](also Kubla Khan here featured),[return]fourth (as mentioned) Kalevala[return]ending in Cuchulain's Ireland.[return][return]Though Mark Twain perhaps began it[return]writing of King Arthur's Yankee[return](don't think I can really mention[return]which state that wayfarer came from[return]as it has two unstressed vowels[return]in succession, so won't scan here)[return]this ambitious and effective[return]merging of mundane and mythic[return]surely was an inspiration[return]for much else in the same genre.[return][return]Even the stock story setting -[return]visitors arrive from elsewhere,[return]get entwined in local issues,[return]solve the problem (sometimes fail to)[return]disappear to next adventure[return]using magic means of travel[return]sounds a bit like Doctor Who, ne?[return][return]Also, use of spell components[return]such as "verbal" and "somatic"[return]was employed by Gary Gygax[return]in so far as I remember[return]from my teenage D&D days.[return][return]Anyway, this book is harmless.[return]Irish bit is, sadly, least good -[return]use of silly plot devices[return]to prevent our heroes

making[return]any difference to the story.[return]But the rest is entertaining.[return]And I think I'd recommend it.[return]Four stars in my on-line cat'logue.

Cherrod says

LURV THIS BOOK!!! From cover to cover a TRUE classic.

Stephen Brooke says

Great concept, okay stories, boring narratives. I was able to enjoy these tales the first time I read them, several years back. On attempting to reread, I found them just too tedious to entertain me again. What wit there is comes off as leaden and sets very easy targets for itself. There is little depth. De Camp gets to once again demonstrate how smart he thinks he is and how dull his writing actually can be.

It is said that Fletcher Pratt contributed the more inventive flights of fancy to these stories. True or not, that is what saves them. (Pratt's solo fantasy novels, 'The Well of the Unicorn' and 'The Blue Star,' are far more ambitious and satisfying works.) They do not seem to have much of a point to them, other than the good guys win and get the girls. They are essentially escapist fiction with rather intriguing underpinnings.

So, entertaining enough, at least the first time around, but not the classic some have portrayed it as. Three solid stars but I just can't bring myself to give it the fourth.

Jordan says

This jaunty fantasy novel is perhaps the only one that bears the distinction of having a psychologist for the hero. In a world of massive epics, it's nice to return to a well-written, light-hearted work as a change of pace. Despite having its share of humor, the authors clearly had a very strong knowledge of Norse and Irish folklore, the Kalevala, the Faerie Queen, and more.

Craig says

A silly book that I read as a kid and enjoyed a great deal. The hero Harold De Shea moves through parallel universes by repeating aloud certain phrases from symbolic logic. (if p is equal to not q, and not q is more than dx' then not dx' is... and so on ad nauseum. Anyone that's ever taken symbolic logic or boolean algebra has probably wished that repeating such would cause their instructor to vanish into another dimension.) I reread this book not long ago and it holds up pretty well. Also, I found that reading the story "The Mathematics of Magic" made Spenser's "Faerie Queene" somewhat more accessible.
