



The End of the Story

Clark Ashton Smith , Scott Connors (Editor) , Ron Hilger (Editor)

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Published in chronological order, with extensive story and bibliographic notes, this series not only provides access to stories that have been out of print for years, but gives them a historical and social context. Series editors Scott Connors and Ronald S. Hilger excavated the still-existing manuscripts, letters and various published versions of the stories, creating a definitive "preferred text" for Smith's entire body of work. This first volume of the series, brings together 25 of his fantasy stories, written between 1925 and 1930, including such classics as "The Abominations of Yondo," "The Monster of the Prophecy," "The Last Incantation" and the title story.

The End of the Story Details

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From Reader Review The End of the Story for online ebook

Daniel says

I am so glad that I finally got around to reading Clark Ashton Smith. His stories are fun and exciting and well-written. In less than 10 pages, he can tell a complete tale that satisfies better than works that extend much longer. The diversity of settings and characters that he creates is astounding; one story will focus on astronauts on Venus; another will conjure a medieval landscape in the 13th century, peopled by monks and sorcerers and evil deeds. Reading this book felt like taking lessons on the story-telling craft.

Thanks to Night Shade books, all of Clark Ashton Smith's repertoire is being assembled in a suite of beautiful, hardcover-bound volumes. The editors ordered the stories by creation, rather than publication date, drawing upon Smith's considerable correspondence and a number of archives to do so. This first volume thus contains some of Smith's earliest attempts at writing weird fiction, as he calls it in excerpts of letters to H.P. Lovecraft that are printed in one of the appendices.

Some of these early tales are more pastiches that establish a mood or setting without much plot. Thanks to Smith's prose, these are a fun read. Other stories really shine for the sheer amount of things that happen within a few pages. My favorites in this collection were "The Monster of the Prophecy"; "The Last Incantation"; "The Venus of Azombeii"; "The End of the Story"; "The Tale of Satampras Zampas"; "The Planet of the Dead"; "The Root of Ampoi"; "The Immeasurable Horror"; "Marooned on Andromeda"; and "A Voyage to Snafomoe".

Surprisingly, Smith wrote at his strongest in his early science fiction stories. In other compilations, I've favored his fantastic tales based in Hyperborea, Atlantis, and Averroigne. There were, however, only a few stories from this milieu featured in this compilation; I'm sure that future ones will have more.

Glenn Russell says

In the tradition of Poe and Lovecraft, over two dozen finely wrought mind-bending tales of horror, terror, shock and hallucination by Clark Ashton Smith (1893-1961). Below are my comments on a trio, including the title story, a cautionary yarn on the nature of memory and a dark fable featuring one of those Dionysian creatures who loves wine, women and physical pleasure and who roams the forests as it plays its panpipes - the Satyr.

THE END OF THE STORY

At one point in this short story our first-person chronicler reflects: "At sight of her, I trembled from head to foot with the violence of a strange emotion. I had heard of the sudden mad loves by which men are seized on beholding for the first time a certain face and form; but never before had I experienced a passion of such intensity, such all-consuming ardor, as the one I conceived immediately for this woman. Indeed, it seemed as if I had loved her for a long time, without knowing that it was she whom I loved, and without being able to identify the nature of my emotion or to orient the feeling in any manner."

Is our young narrator in this tale beholding a manifestation of the Hindu goddess Rati or perhaps Tara or

Avalokitevara or another female Buddhist deity? If so, then all would be well. However, this is France in the 17th century and prior to his ecstatic, sensual experience our young man was a guest of a Benedictine monastery wherein he read a forbidden manuscript propelling him on his quest that led to this intense, sensual encounter in the first place. Therein lies the basis of his conflict – does his trust his heart or listen to the advice of the monastery’s abbot? His final reflection foreshadows his choice.

A NIGHT IN MALNEANT

A tale of remorse. Having caused his true love, the brokenhearted lady Mariel, to take her own life, our handsome, dashing young narrator flees from his home, wandering from city to city throughout the world in an attempt to banish any memory of Mariel. He comes upon the city of Malnéant, but mystery of mystery - everyone in this city has spent many years mourning the death of a beautiful woman by the name of Mariel and are currently preparing her burial. The young lover reflects, “Now I began to dread the city about me with a manifold fear: for apparently the whole business of the people in Malnéant consisted of preparations for the funeral of this lady Mariel. And it began to be obvious that I must walk the streets of the city all night because of these same preparations.”

I recall Jorge Luis Borges noting how our memory can be a great magician and deceiver - our first memory is of the event or happening itself but our second memory becomes a recollection of the first memory, the third memory a recollection of the second, ad infinitum, an infinite series of memories, each one in turn becoming the very clay, the source material for our next memory - repetition of bad memories as self-created prison. And this Clark Ashton Smith tale compounds the mental prison – an entire city of men and women perpetually living through our very own bad memory, the entire city suffering our personal unending torture.

THE SATYR

A dark fable featuring husband Raoul drinking his wine that dulls his senses, while poet Olivier writes his verses and ballads about Raoul’s wife Adele and her golden eyes, feminine charms and her wine-dark tresses. On occasion, Adele will even take strolls with Olivier through the forest surrounding their chateau. But there reaches a point where between his drinking wine and hunting game Raoul observes how his wife appears to have grown younger and fairer, which, he realizes, can only happen if she is touched by the magic of love. Sidebar: through Raoul’s wine drinking, Olivier’s poetry and Adele’s awakened love, the spirit of Dionysius is present and accepted since it is contained within the walls of ‘civilized’ behavior.

One fine April day, with spring and greenery in the air, Olivier persuades Adele to venture further into the forest, a forest where legends abound about the wood being haunted by a primordial spirit even more ancient than Christ or Satan, a spirit filled with “panic, madness, demoniac possession or baleful, unreasoning passions.” Well, not only do Olivier and Adele take their forest stroll but a now suspicious Raoul takes up his rapier and sallies forth on his own not-so-casual forest stroll.

Let’s pause here to note how one ancient interpretation describes the Satyr as possessing the fearless and brutal instincts needed to defend itself in the wild forests without the aid of civilization as it lives its carefree life, playing music on its flute and having a deep connection with nature. Other interpretations, as in this Clark Ashton Smith tale, are not nearly so glowing, depicting the Satyr as a wine-crazed sex-fiend, a dark Dionysian force that should be avoided.

The tale’s events transpire until Raoul comes upon Olivier and wife Adele embracing one another, naked and asleep. We read, “He was about to fling himself upon them and impale the two with a single thrust where they lay, when an unlooked-for and scarce conceivable thing occurred. With swiftness veritably supernatural, a brown hairy creature, a being that was not wholly man, not wholly animal, but some hellish mixture of both, sprang from amid the alder branches and snatched Adele from Olivier's embrace. Olivier and Raoul saw it only in one fleeting glimpse, and neither could have described it clearly afterwards. But the face was that which had leered upon the lovers from the foliage; and the shaggy' legs and body were those of a creature of antique legend. It disappeared as incredibly as it had come, bearing the woman in its arms; and

her shrieks of terror were surmounted by the pealing of its mad, diabolical laughter.”

I noted the various interpretations of a Satyr’s nature to suggest that Clark Ashton Smith can be read on many levels, including our probing and questioning underlying cultural myths and attitudes contained in his imaginative tales and, indirectly, in our own society.

DarkChaplain says

As an avid fan of H.P. Lovecraft, I've long been meaning to read the works of his close colleagues, authors that were published in the same pulp magazines of the timeframe, who he frequently discussed his, and their, works with. Whether it be Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch or, in this case, Clark Ashton Smith, I wanted to learn more about the other minds dabbling in Weird Fiction in the 1920s and 30s.

Now I had the pleasure of reading the first of five volumes collecting the stories of "Klarkash-Ton", as HPL frequently referred to Smith, and can certainly tell why the two got along so well.

Clark Ashton Smith certainly has a way with the weird. Some of his themes clearly overlap with Lovecraft's, although his focus in this anthology certainly lies with the exploration of space, rather than solitary minds on the brink of insanity. Well, Smith has those too, but it is obvious that his passion was with outer space and exploring odd environments and lifeforms.

The anthology features 25 stories total, some of them short enough to be read during breaks, others long enough to offer a substantial evening read. I liked the mix of lengths and themes quite a lot.

Some of my favorite stories of the bunch would be *The Venus of Azombeii*, *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros*, *The Monster of the Prophecy*, *A Murder in the Fourth Dimension*, *The Planet of the Dead* and *The Immeasurable Horror*, but I also enjoyed *The Metamorphosis of the World* and most others.

Again, I am pleased with the variety offered in this collection.

One more thing I positively rate are the notes on the stories' publication history and correspondence with other authors. HPL's excitement for *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros*, and anger over its initial rejection from *Weird Tales*, had me laughing out loud.

I am looking forward to picking up the paperback edition of this collection, which is supposedly releasing in fall 2015, and adding it to my shelf. In the meantime, I will hopefully find the time to read the rest of the five part series as well, and explore what else CAS has to offer.

Jacob says

If H.P. Lovecraft's books and Rod Serling's *Twilight Zone* episode scripts had a literary child (who sometimes went into space), it would look a lot like Clark Ashton Smith's short stories.

I'll be reading more of these.

mark monday says

Clark Ashton Smith is one of my comfort food authors. An odd sort of comfort, I know: ornate, overripe, extravagantly archaic prose; bizarre and often nightmarish dreamscapes; love and death, hand in hand; sardonic malevolence and fulsome melancholy and sinister, ambiguous threats and a longing for vistas far, far away. Well I suppose we all take our comforts where we feel the most comfortable. As an author and an influence on many other authors, CAS needs no defense – he is one of the originals of fantastic fiction and the shadow his legacy casts is a long one.

Rereading the stories collected in this volume brought something new to my appreciation of this brilliant writer: he is an author in love with the idea of love. Many of his stories are surprisingly romantic. I had already seen him as a perverse version of a Romantic author, “Romantic” in the classic sense... Romanticism that 'validated intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience, placing new emphasis on such emotions as apprehension, horror and terror, and awe — especially that which is experienced in confronting the sublimity of untamed nature and its picturesque qualities' (and if you think I wrote that last phrase, let me introduce you to my best friend Wikipedia). Reading these stories of alien wonders and lonely deaths in alternate dimensions and dreamers dreaming themselves to faraway planets made it clear to me that the concept of Love, particularly its transcendent and sometimes obliterating qualities, is often centralized in his tales.

The End of the Story is Volume 1 in Night Shade Books' collection of the complete works of CAS. It is an admirable effort: lost stories are carefully resurrected, whenever possible the original is used over an edited version, there are a couple alternate endings included, and the footnotes are encyclopedic. Excellent work, publisher. Because the order of the stories is chronological, this first volume does have its share of works that feel incomplete or minor or even unnecessary. Nonetheless there are many brilliant gems within that were even more pleasurable to read so many years after I first read them.

CAS often set his stories within a handful of imaginary places. I've bolded what I consider to be the strongest pieces in this collection.

There are two stories set in the medieval French province of *Averoigne*: the brief, dark “The Satyr” and “**The End of the Story**”. The latter details the fateful encounters of a young traveler as he is invited into one castle and explores a second, enters another plane of existence, and meets the serpentine girl of his dreams.

There is one story set in *Hyperborea* – his prehistoric land of adventure, magic, and doom: a gleefully malicious and exceedingly fun tale of thieves stumbling upon an amoebic old god. “**The Tale of Satampra Zeiros**” is awesome.

Two stories are set on the doomed last isle of Atlantis called *Posiedonis*: “The Last Incantation” is about a dying sorcerer trying to recapture the essence of his greatest love; “Voyage to Sfanamoë” details a bizarrely transcendent flight to Venus.

Unfortunately, this volume does not include any of the wonderful science fantasy stories set in the far-flung future of *Zothique*, a place that would soon come to dominate the author’s storytelling. Ah well, there are future volumes that await me.

Many stories are not set in any of these places. My favorites:

“**Sadastor**” tells of the brief flirtation between the demon Charnadis and the siren Lyspial. Forlorn Lyspial lives alone on a dying world, longing for the glory days when she sang sailors from their ships and into

watery graves.

Alas! The kisses that I laid on their cold and hueless lips, on their sealed marmorean eyelids!"

Poor Lyspial! A siren without sailors is a lonely siren indeed.

"Venus of Azombeii" is about an adventurer in Africa, the true love he found within a secretive tribe, and an appallingly jealous shaman's poison. I hate jealous shamans.

"The Abominations of Yondo" is a creepy catalogue of eerie night terrors that a newly-exiled wastrel encounters in his journey through a ruinous desert.

"The Necromantic Tale" concerns itself with the undying love between two evil enchanters, and a strange possession that may or may not be occurring to our narrator, their descendant.

"The Uncharted Isle" starts off as an almost traditional adventure tale of a shipwrecked sailor finding a very odd island village, and then slowly transforms into an oblique meditation on the uselessness of trying to combat The End of All Things.

"The Immeasurable Horror" introduces a Planet of Terrible Terrors whose most eyebrow-raising inhabitant is a vomit-pink, miles-long, slug-like mass of carnivorous jelly. Nice! In the depiction of this feral world, I was reminded of the equally marvelous novel Red Claw.

"The Monster of the Prophecy" is my favorite story in this collection. A pathetic, suicidal young writer meets a chilly mysterious stranger who invites him to have adventures in a place far, far away. Things are not as they seem and the poor fellow soon realizes that he is the monster of the title. I hate spoilers, but I just have to add that this tale ends in a really lovely bit of romantic wish fulfillment as our hero gradually falls in love with a bizarre alien (I mean *really* alien, think extra limbs and eyes and other alien bits) who shares his love of poetry and melancholy. Aw, sweet!

Clark Ashton Smith is not for everyone, including genre lovers. His byzantine prose is no doubt off-putting to the reader in search of rambunctious, straightforward tales of derring-do. But I adore him. No other wordsmith has captured what I really want to see in fantasy, in science fiction, in horror. And the pictures he paints, the vibrant, lustrous colors he uses to paint them... swoon!

Tell me many tales, O benign maleficent daemon, but tell me none that I have ever heard or have even dreamt of otherwise than obscurely or infrequently...

Skip says

Let me start by saying I do not generally read short stories, but a great review by GR friend, Stephen, interested me. This collection of short stories was written mostly in the second half of 1929 and the first half of 1930, and are presented in chronological order. Smith's writing style is very dense and descriptive, he uses language we do not often see these days (archaic, I suppose), and seems to have a fixation about colors and flora. Most of the stories had elements of death. Interspersed throughout the stories is a very dry sense of humor. The stories span fantasy, science fiction, and horror, which was one of the reasons I wanted to read this book. Personally, I liked his science fiction stories best.

Jakk Makk says

[maybe an inverse of "Sylaire." (hide spoiler)]

Stephen says

If I mentioned **stories** with lavish, **velvety** prose conjuring **eldritch** imagery and secret, **cabalistic** settings, where shady characters face nameless, **indescribable** terrors...you'd know I was referring to ~~H.P. Lovecraft~~ **Clark Ashton Smith**...right?

After completing this first installment of the collected works of CAS's fantasy/horror fiction, I'm now a serious FAN of his work. Smith's evocative, melodramatic style is reminiscent of two of his contemporaries (and friends), HP Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard, both of whom I count among my favorites. While each of these 3 giants clearly had their own distinctive voice, they each chose to write with a flowery verbosity that imbued their stories with a sense of grandeur and vital urgency that heightened the level of tension felt when reading their stories.

It's a style that warms my cockles, and with the addition of Clark Ashton Smith to this list, those cockles should remain well and truly toasty for years to come.

In addition to the superb content, I think the format of the collection was wisely chosen. Rather than being grouped by theme or sub-genre, the stories are presented in "chronological" order based on when CAS wrote them (not necessarily when he published them).

By structuring the collection this way, the reader is able to watch the evolution of Smith's considerable talent, which incidentally is on display even in the early stories. In fact, even though the general quality of the story-crafting gets better the deeper you get into the collection, several of my favorite stories were earlier works that, while not quite as polished, stirred a deep emotional impact.

I can't wait to see what the succeeding volumes contain.

QUICK NOTE ON VOCABULARY:

It would be advisable to keep your dictionary handy while reading Smith's stories as his language skill is both broad and deep. I thought I had a decent vocabulary going into this, but I in constant look up mode while reading this, as CAS peppers his stories with some real obscurities. To give you a sense of this, I picked at random two pages from one of Smith's stories (*The Monster of the Prophecy*) and made a list of every word I was not familiar with. It was lengthy and included:

Nacarat
Dubiety
Erubescant
Habiliments
Discoïd
Veriest

Quotidian
Sybarites
Vates
Erigible
Adumbration

I looked all of those words up, and I can assure you that they are, in fact, ENGLISH!! CAS must have totally kicked ass at scrabble as a kid. Anyway, I thought that aspect of the stories was a lot of fun and worth mentioning.

THE STORIES:

The genres represented in this collection include horror, dark fantasy and science fiction, and the range of Smith is evident after only a handful of stories. Smith, being a close friend and colleague of H.P. Lovecraft, would occasionally set his stories in the “Cthulhu Mythos” and part of his lasting fame is as a contributor to that rich world.

The 25 stories in this collection include:

To the Daemon
The Abominations of Yondo
Sadastor
The Ninth Skeleton
The Last Incantation
The End of the Story
The Phantoms of the Fire
A Night in Malneant
Resurrection of the Rattlesnake
Thirteen Phantasms
The Venus of Azombeii
The Tale of Satampira Zeiros
The Monster of the Prophecy
The Metamorphosis of the World
The Epiphany of Death
A Murder in the Fourth Dimension
The Devotee of Evil
The Satyr
The Planet of the Dead
The Uncharted Isle
Marooned in Andromeda
The Root of Ampoi
The Necromantic Tale
The Immeasurable Horror
A Voyage To Sfanome

Of these, my favorites were:

The Abominations of Yondo - An early piece set in a strange, desolate locale, where a morally questionable protagonist confronts an ancient evil. This had a very Lovecraftian feel to it. Beautiful imagery and a terrific ending.

Sadastor - Another earlier work with a real sense of pathos. Dealing with an ages old love that results in pain

and loss spanning eons, it was evocative and full of melancholy. I thought this, along with *The Ninth Skeleton*, was one of the more powerfully emotional stories in the collection.

The Ninth Skeleton - Another emotion-centric story full of eerie imagery and having a wallop of an ending that left me pondering it long after I finished it. Like Sadastor, this shows Smith's ability to tap into the emotional wiring and give the soul a charge.

The End of the Story - The title story and another terrific Lovecraftian tale of amoral scientists, investigating the dark corners of the universe and getting bitten...hard. Savvy, brilliant and a ton of fun to read.

The tale of Satampira Zeiros - Part of the Cthulhu Mythos and one of Smith's most famous stories. See my detailed review of this story here [Steve's Shameless Plug](#)

The Devotee of Evil: A creepy, dread-fest of a bone-chiller about the search for the source of all evil.

The Satyr: I loved Smith's take on forbidden love and the influence of the title creature on a lad, a lady and their lusty lie down. I think Smith did a terrific job with this one.

The Root of Ampoi: A unique, gender inverting story that will mess with your preconceptions and your expectations, all while doling out loads of fun.

Overall, a very strong collection. Looking forward to delving into Volume 2...once I brush up on my vocabulary.

4.0 stars. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

Malum says

Imagine Jack Vance mixed with H.P. Lovecraft and you will have a good idea of what Clark Ashton Smith is all about. Wonderous worlds fueled by a fantastic imagination are filled with monsters and madness.

Personally, I enjoyed his gothic horror-type stories much more than his sci-fi/alien stories.

Ray says

Many years ago I went on a school trip to Wales and I was given some money to buy myself a book for the coach journey. On the strength of the cover alone I bought a book of short stories by Clarke Ashton Smith - I cannot remember which now. It certainly made a great impression on the twelve year old me - it scared the crap out of me. The stories of wizards, necromancers and ghouls gave me nightmares.

Roll the calendar forward a few years and student me is rummaging through secondhand bookshops to feed my book habit. Every now and then I come across a CAF, and soon I have most of his books. (BTW They no longer give me nightmares).

And now the full short story oeuvre is being published in five volumes. Completist me will buy them all (in the same way that I have six albums by The Only Ones, whereas they only actually released three).

Clarke Ashton Smith's short stories make for an enjoyable read. Note that they are very much of their time, and were written as a product suited to publication in pulp magazines in the 1930s. CAF has a very distinctive style, with a macabre tone and much use of arcane words such as ethereal, eldritch and mephitic.

The first volume has a mix of stories - set in space, Atlantis, medieval France and modern day America. Well worth a read.

Evgeny says

This is a collection of short stories from a writer who was a contemporary to H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. The works of all three of them were published in the same magazines and they have some common themes (in case of Howard, I am talking about his horror stories, not sword and sorcery adventures).

As I already mentioned all of the stories can be qualified as horror with said element present to a lesser or a greater degree. Some of them have contemporary feel, some are more like fantasy, and some are undoubtedly science fiction.

Regarding the latter I want to mention "The Immeasurable Horror", "A Voyage to Snafomoe", "The Metamorphosis of the World", and "Marooned on Andromeda". It is interesting to note that while the humanity was always fascinated with planet Mars, Clark Ashton Smith turned his view to Venus as all of the stories I mentioned but the last one deal with this planet, or its inhabitants (hint: according to the author, Venus is a very nasty place - and I do not mean its proximity to the Sun, or its atmosphere).

The writing style of the author is somewhat similar to H.P. Lovecraft, but I found it easier to read; unlike the former he also wrote dialogs.

I really like author's imagination which shines in his depictions of different kinds of monsters: extraterrestrials and our own, lost cities and their architecture, people and their cultures. According to the book's blurb the best stories of the collection are "The Abominations of Yondo," "The Monster of the Prophecy," "The Last Incantation", and "The End of the Story". I agree with this, but I also think that the rest of the stories are well worth checking out.

The collection is worth 4 well-deserved stars. I would personally recommend to any fans of H.P. Lovecraft who are not familiar with Clark Ashton Smith to read his works; I definitely want to read more from him. He is not as well-known as his two colleagues I mentioned, and in this case the obscurity is not justified. His entire works are freely available from <http://www.eldritchdark.com>

This review is a copy/paste of my BookLikes one: <http://gene.booklikes.com/post/915598...>

Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at Risingshadow.

(Please note that this is a short review/essay about all the volumes in this series.)

I was asked to write a short review of *The Collected Fantasies of Clark Ashton Smith: Volumes 1-5*. This review is more of a short essay about these books and an introduction to the works of Clark Ashton Smith rather than an actual review about them.

Clark Ashton Smith probably needs no introduction to readers who are familiar with weird fiction, dark fantasy and horror. He's one of the best short story writers ever published, because he wrote beautiful and morbid prose, and his stories range all the way from fantasy to horror. His stories - along with the stories written by H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Algernon Blackwood and William Hope Hodgson - have become the cornerstones of weird fiction, dark fantasy and horror. Modern weird fiction and horror genres owe a huge debt to these old stories.

Although Clark Ashton Smith is a well known and highly respected author among readers of weird fiction and dark fantasy, he's unfortunately less known among readers who tend to read epic fantasy and modern dark fantasy/horror. This is a shame, because his stories contain beautiful, detailed and decadent prose (he had a unique eye for details and words).

It may be a bit difficult to find *The Collected Fantasies of Clark Ashton Smith: Volumes 1-5* now, because - if I'm not mistaken - they're currently out-of-print and haven't been republished. Fortunately certain volumes can still be found from second-hand bookshops and online bookshops.

Scott Connors and Ron Hilger have done an impressive job by gathering all the fantasy, science fiction and horror stories of Clark Ashton Smith into these five volumes. The stories in these volumes appeared in *Weird Tales*.

The story notes and alternate endings are interesting. The story notes offer insight to the stories and how they were created and published. It was interesting to read how the author had problems publishing certain stories, because they were considered to be - for one reason or another - unsuitable for the magazines that published strange tales and science fiction.

The Collected Fantasies of Clark Ashton Smith consists of the following volumes:

1. *The End of the Story*
2. *The Door to Saturn*
3. *A Vintage from Atlantis*
4. *The Maze of the Enchanter*
5. *The Last Hieroglyph*

Because these volumes collect all the speculative fiction stories written by Clark Ashton Smith, they contain such stories well known and highly regarded stories as *Genius Loci*, *The Abominations of Yondo*, *The Return of the Sorcerer*, *The Empire of the Necromancers*, *The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis*, *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros*, *The City of the Singing Flame* and *The Last Incantation*. Each of these stories is a masterpiece and should be read by all readers who enjoy reading beautifully written speculative fiction.

The above mentioned stories with the rest of the stories offer readers fascinating and unforgettable glimpses into fantastical, hallucinatory and phantasmagorical worlds. His imaginary stories contain visions of doom, alien worlds, and gothic and grotesque elements that are difficult to forget. I dare say that once you let Smith's fantastical and otherworldly visions enter your mind, you're hopelessly hooked and want to read all of his stories.

As fans of Clark Ashton Smith already know, most of his weird fiction falls into four series set variously in *Hyperborea*, *Averoigne*, *Poseidonis* and *Zothique*.

The Hyperborean cycle is a series of stories by Clark Ashton Smith that take place in the fictional prehistoric setting of Hyperborea. The Hyperborean stories represent the author's greatest contribution to the Cthulhu Mythos (the non-anthropomorphic god Tsathoggua is featured in many of them). These stories include such stories as *The Door to Saturn*, *The Tales of Satampira Zeiros* and *The White Sybil*.

Averoigne is a fictional counterpart of a historical province in France (it's based on the actual province of Auvergne). These stories include such stories as *The Best of Averoigne*, *The End of the Story* and *Mother of Toads*.

Poseidonis is a richly imagined last remnant of the lost continent of Atlantis. These stories include such stories as *The Last Incantation*, *A Vintage from Atlantis* and *The Death of Malygris*.

The stories in the Zothique cycle tell of an imagined future continent (to be exact, it belongs to the Dying Earth subgenre of speculative fiction). These stories include such stories as *The Dark Eidolon*, *The Last Hieroglyph*, *Necromancy in Naat*, *The Empire of the Necromancers* and *The Charnel God*.

Clark Ashton Smith has also written Mars stories (*The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis*, *Vulthoom* and *The Dweller in the Gulf* are the best known Mars stories) and Xiccarph stories (*The Flower-Women* and *The Maze of Maal-Dweb*).

All the readers who read Clark Ashton Smith's stories will immediately notice how gorgeous, morbid and evocative the author's descriptions of the places and the happenings are, and how horrifying and mesmerizing the atmosphere is in many of his stories. In my opinion Clark Ashton Smith is one of the few authors who have an ability to awake feelings of fear, wonder and admiration in his readers.

It's possible that it may take a while for certain readers to get used to Clark Ashton Smith's prose and his descriptions of the happenings, but once you get used to them, you'll become a devoted fan. If you've never read Clark Ashton Smith and aren't familiar with literary weird fiction, it might be good idea start reading his stories by taking a look at *The Return of the Sorcerer* and other similar stories, which are accessible and easy to read stories. If you've read H. P. Lovecraft, I can mention that you're in for a real treat when you begin to read Clark Ashton Smith's stories. Some of his stories are similar to Lovecraft's stories, but there are stylistic differences.

Clark Ashton Smith's exotic, horrifying and unique stories have stood the test of time surprisingly well. There's a charmingly old-fashioned feel to certain stories, but none of the stories are bad or badly written. There's slight fluctuation in quality between the stories, but all of them are excellent stories.

I'm aware that there are readers who regard Clark Ashton Smith as a better writer than H. P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard. I'm personally as fond of Smith's stories as I'm fond of Lovecraft and Howard's stories. I know that it's possible to place one of these authors above the others, but there's no need to do so, because each of them has written excellent and memorable stories. I think it's imperative to mention that these authors shared a few ideas, but each of them had their own distinct writing style.

If there are readers out there who wonder why they should read these five volumes, I give these readers three good reasons to read these volumes:

1. Clark Ashton Smith is one of the best weird fiction writers and his stories should be read by as many readers as possible.
2. Many modern authors have been influenced by Clark Ashton Smith's stories. It's possible to say that Clark Ashton Smith - along with H. P. Lovecraft - has had a huge impact on the weird fiction, dark fantasy and horror genres.

3. If you call yourself a devoted fan of weird fiction, it's important to be familiar with all the stories written by Clark Ashton Smith.

I could write a lot about the stories in these volumes, but many things have already been written about them, so I won't repeat what has already been said by others. I'll end this short review/essay with the following paragraph:

If you've never read anything by Clark Ashton Smith, please do yourself a big favour and read his stories. These five volumes contain many stories, which have become classic stories and deserve to be read by old fans and newcomers. These five volumes are essential volumes for all readers who love weird fiction and dark fantasy.

Very highly recommended!

K.T. Katzmann says

Often a single author anthology is carefully created to show off a single tone or creation of the author.

This one isn't.

Come one! Come all, to the Clark Ashton Smith Grab-Bag Circus!

Marvel at a boy's science fiction story that is a parade of unearthly alien horrors

Flinch at the Great Depression era Twilight Zone story!

See a bizarre, poetic planetary romance!

Read a darkly satirical and satirical fantasy romance with a bite (and a stab!)

Resurrected snakes! Necromancers! Liches! Atlantean astronauts! The Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua!
Fantasy, science fiction, and horror, all under one tent, in the inimitable Smith style!

If you want a book focusing on one Smith style (modern fantasy, medieval France, ancient historical fantasy), there are other books. This is a buffet table of the weirdly poetic.

If you've never read Smith, this isn't a bad sampler. You'll have a wide variety, and if one story bores you, the next will be completely different. I'm giving it four stars for being fun with a great notes sections; I was pleasantly pleased by the inclusive of letters to Smith from Lovecraft! The last star is with-held because, well, it's uneven.

Still, you might have noticed me uploading quotes I've liked over the past week. For all the ups and downs, I definitely enjoyed it.

Phil says

[Introduction]

The introduction is nice and appropriately respectful of Clark Ashton Smith's legacy, but it won't mean much to new readers not yet familiar with his work. The introduction was written by British horror writer Ramsay Campbell, who along with Robert M. Price and Brian Lumley, is one of the major living figures in modern Lovecraftian horror fiction. Campbell's Lovecraftian creatures have been statted up in Call of Cthulhu, most notably Glaaki (from *The Inhabitant of the Lake*), the Insects from *Shaggai*, and Y'Golonac. I agree that CAS has fantastic, evocative titles. Campbell also touches on the fact that CAS created and revisited a number of distinct fantasy worlds in his fiction, including the Hyperborea (a pre-Ice Age setting), Poseidonis (remnants of Atlantis), Averoine (based on medieval France), and Zothique (far, far future, as the Earth gradually dies).

[To the Daemon]

This is more of a prose poem than a story, but I like how packed it is with strange imagery ("eyeless titans," "beings that wander in the green light of the twin suns of azure and orange"). In the Introduction Campbell suggests that it might be Smith talking to his writerly muse, asking this "daemon" to tell him stories, but to me it feels more like a bored sorcerer or aristocrat demanding entertainment from a literal summoned demon. It also reminds me of this famous bit from the very first Conan story by Robert E. Howard, the Phoenix on the Sword (also paraphrased at the beginning of the Conan the Barbarian movie):

"KNOW, oh prince, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities, and the years of the rise of the Sons of Aryas, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars—Nemedia, Ophir, Brythunia, Hyperborea, Zamora with its dark-haired women and towers of spider-haunted mystery, Zingara with its chivalry, Koth that bordered on the pastoral lands of Shem, Stygia with its shadow-guarded tombs, Hyrkania whose riders wore steel and silk and gold. But the proudest kingdom of the world was Aquilonia, reigning supreme in the dreaming west. Hither came Conan, the Cimmerian, black-haired, sullen-eyed, sword in hand, a thief, a reaver, a slayer, with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth, to tread the jeweled thrones of the Earth under his sandalled feet."

Both passages manage to pack a lot of exciting and mysterious imagery into just a wee bit of text.

[The Abominations of Yondo]

While one of CAS's early stories, this one in particular stuck with me for the decades since I first read it. The plot is a bit sleight, and it's more of a string of events that happen to the narrator than a plot with a beginning, middle, and end, but I like it.

So much of modern fantasy places an undue emphasis on world-building, where the author conceives and documents everything about his setting in advance and details everything down to the lineage of the last rural goat farmer. Tolkien and the Star Wars Expanded Universe are two major examples of this. While that's a perfectly valid approach and one beloved by geek fans (IME especially "right-brain" engineer types who value internal consistency above all else) who want to immerse themselves in ultra-detailed fantasy worlds, it's not the One True Way to go about things in fantasy & SF. In this story CAS hints about so much, without really revealing anything. The result is a lot of appealing mysterious imagery. Remember in Star Wars how cool and intriguing the "Clone Wars" and Jedi sounded? Until you found out how dull the Clone Wars really were, and that Jedi powers are powered by Midichlorians? CAS doesn't mess around with all that. He MIGHT have planned the background out in great detail (I kinda doubt it, though), but he doesn't tip his hand to the readers. He reveals enough to make you intrigued, but continues on with the story. Who are the Inquisitors of Ong and why did they torture the narrator? Why is the world so devastated? Who knows. The reader is left to fill in the blanks by himself. You see this a lot in old school sword & sorcery fiction ("Remember that time we were almost killed by the Winged Men of Xarn?") and I dig it. I prefer evocative and tantalizing hints over info-dump exposition.

It's interesting to note that the chuckling bat-faced nine-legged monster that emerges from the cave in this story has been statted up in Call of Cthulhu. It's not given a name by Clark Ashton Smith, but the CoC writers call it a Wamp and say it lives in Lovecraft's Dreamlands. There have been a number of other cases where I've read about a cool monster in Call of Cthulhu, only to read the original Mythos story and find out that the monster in question only shows up for a paragraph, or is just mentioned in passing in a "I heard from a guy who heard from a guy that this monster exists" way. It's kind of funny. I love Call of Cthulhu, but it has kind of a funny Pokemon-style "Gotta catch 'em all!" Pokedex take on quantifying and categorizing Mythos creatures.

It's a little thing, but the big image from this story that has always stuck with me is the screaming half-buried statue of the naked woman. I don't have anything particularly profound to say about this passage, but it creeped me out when I first read it, and it still stands out to me today. It reminds me a bit of the Elric stories, where the Sorcerers of Pan-Tang turn enemies into living, wailing statues.

I also like the last line of the story, where the narrator flees back past all the horrors he's seen, into the waiting arms of the Inquisitors of Ong. Did they release him in Yondo as a death sentence? Were they hoping he'd see something in particular? Was this exile to Yondo just another form of torture (perhaps the likeliest explanation to me)? We can only speculate.

[Sadastor]

This is a story told by a demon to cheer up a lamia, which is a premise I find delightful.

To me, the main theme of this story is loss, which is something that shows up frequently in CAS's work a lot. Beautiful things are always rotting, temples and empires are falling to pieces, continents sink, and even whole planets die. This focus is probably only natural, though, as Smith was a fan of Romantic poetry and even categorized with his collages as a "West Coast Romantic." (It might not be a coincidence that a lamia shows up in this story, too, as Romantic poet John Keats famously wrote a poem called "Lamia.")

As an aside, I like the fact that the demon Charnadis physically flies through space, including into the atmospheres of Neptune and Jupiter. I like how it brazenly defies the laws of physics, with no attempt at providing a pseudo-scientific explanation. I think I first encountered this with the unnamed flying creatures from HPL's The Festival (they came to become known as Byakhee), and it's always appealed to me. Unless I'm mistaken, even in CAS's time they knew it was impossible for muscle-powered flight to work in a vacuum, but it's both a cool mental image and a quick way to show that normal human rules about How Things Are do not apply.

[The Ninth Skeleton]

Despite mention of a girl named Guenevere, this story takes place in contemporary California, near Auburn (the town in which the real CAS lived). After the past few stories it was a little jarring to see the author turn his same extremely descriptive gaze to California forests rather than alien landscapes.

While there are some nice creepy bits, overall this story fell flat with me. Why are skeletons wandering through the forest carrying infants? Mystery a la Abominations of Yondo is one thing, but here it felt too cryptic and obscure. And while it might not have been so played out when the story was written in the 1930s, the ending felt like the "It was all a dream, or was it?" trope.

[The Last Incantation]

While The Ninth Skeleton was a bit bland, The Last Incantation is another one of CAS's best, and a story that has stuck with me for decades. The beginning creates an extremely vivid scene of a wizard's sanctuary, and

"Malygris" is a particularly delicious name for a magician. I believe this might also be the first story explicitly set in Hyperborea. Anyway, the ending is classic; Malygris discovers that with all his power, he can't bring back the magic of young love. Again we see the recurring theme of loss in Smith's work. I also suspect it's not a coincidence that Malygris' demon familiar takes the form of a snake; like the serpent in Eden he harbors more knowledge than the protagonist.

[The End of the Story]

I think this is the first Averroigne story. While the fairly conventional setting of Averroigne doesn't capture my imagination as much as Zothique or Hyperborea, it still has an interesting atmosphere. The story itself is pretty straightforward, without any major surprises, but the lush, sensual presentation of Nycea appeals. Unlike Lovecraft, Smith was fond of including sexual temptation as an element in his work, and I never get tired of femmes fatale.

[The Phantoms of the Fire]

This is kind of a clunky, banal story. It's frequently embarrassing when authors attempt to emulate regional dialects; it was clunky in Lovecraft (e.g., *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*), and it's awkward here, too. The foreshadowing is heavy-handed and the protagonist lacking in sympathetic qualities. About the only redeeming quality is some elegant description of the scenery.

[A Night in Malneant]

While the ending is a bit predictable bit light on plot, this story is heavy on atmosphere. It reminds me a bit of *Silent Hill 2*, with the narrator trapped in a hell that reflects his mental state.

[The Resurrection of the Rattlesnake]

One of CAS's lesser works. I found the ending more confusing than mysterious.

[Thirteen Phantasms]

I noticed that the name of the protagonist, Alvington, is a bit similar to "Avilton" from the previous story. The plot itself reminds me a bit of *The Ninth Skeleton*, as it basically relates a brief encounter with the supernatural. It feels like Smith is emulating Poe with this story.

[The Venus of Azombeii]

I found this story to be pretty exciting. It has sort of a "Lost World" pulp adventure feel, and despite being published circa 1931 the African characters are presented more fairly than in much of the fiction of the time. Despite being idealized to a certain extent, Mybaloe is a strong and appealing character who is given more to do than just be a passive object of admiration. The final paragraph is pretty brutal.

[The Tale of Satampra Zeiros]

Like *The Last Incantation*, this Hyperborea story is another example of Smith at his best (Lovecraft especially liked this story as well). In terms of the Mythos, this story introduces Tsathoggua and the monster named the "Formless Spawn of Tsathoggua" in the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG. As usual, Smith's invented names (Satampra Zeiros, Tirouv Ompallios, Cunambria) are flavorful and charming. While it takes a turn towards the horrific, the first half of the story has a great picaresque feel, with charming dialogue (e.g., the two thieves deciding whether or not to buy food or alcohol with their remaining coin) and a droll voice. I wouldn't be surprised to hear that Fritz Leiber and Jack Vance were influenced by this tale in particular.

The relentless stalking of the amorphous creature from the temple was exciting. In a lot of Mythos tales, the story would end--in insanity or death--abruptly after its first appearance, but Smith doesn't let his characters off that easily. The "every man for himself" finale and jaunty farewells make me smile.

[The Monster of the Prophecy]

One of the lengthier stories in this volume, it involves an unsuccessful poet being taken to a planet orbiting Antares, where he lives a brief life of pampered luxury before the dominating regime collapses and he finds himself fleeing for his life. The spacecraft, setting, and the aliens described are all extremely imaginative. (Science fiction was more fun before it was codified by realism-fetishists like John W. Campbell.) This story feels a bit like Edgar Rice Burrough's planetary romances, minus the protagonists super-competence. I also liked that the poet continues to make the best of his life in space, rather than slink back to Earth in defeat.

[The Metamorphosis of the World]

Scientists investigate strange and sudden changes in the environment, with the Sahara and other locales undergoing bizarre, life-threatening metamorphoses. As the story progresses they learn that Venusians are "terraforming" the planet, transforming it to suit their habitational needs ahead of their impending invasion. Maybe I haven't read enough classic SF, but the premise felt extremely novel to me; I've read plenty of stories where aliens invade, but this was the first I can recall where they take steps to make the planet more like their own home. I was also a bit taken aback by the grimness of the tone. Nearly all of the characters featured in the story die horrible, agonizing deaths. The story ends 20 years after the start of the invasion, and while mankind has put up a valiant fight and gained some powerful weapons, their victory is still far from assured. Pretty bleak stuff.

[The Epiphany of Death]

Short and fairly insubstantial, but atmospherically written.

[A Murder in the Fourth Dimension]

This story reads like a minor episode of the Twilight Zone, complete with ironic comeuppance. The romantic conflict at the beginning could have been developed further; as it stands, the narrator just seems petty. The story has an interesting premise, though, and a spooky conclusion.

[The Devotee of Evil]

This is another story that relies more on atmosphere and prose than plotting. Much like "loss", genius characters done in by their own hubris is a frequently recurring theme in CAS's work.

[The Satyr]

The appendix of the book has an alternate ending for this story, but the one included with the story itself is far superior. The forest in Averouigne is beautifully described, and the supernatural elements are surprisingly subtle and incidental to the story itself.

[The Planet of the Dead]

An interesting portrayal of romance on a dying planet. This story feels like one of those crushing dreams where you experience a perfect love, only to be wrenched back to reality. The way the protagonist is drawn into space through his telescope again reminds me of Edgar Rice Burrough's Barsoom, where John Carter basically teleports to Mars.

[The Uncharted Isle]

Brief but creepy. Not only does the narrator find himself on a bizarre isle seemingly removed from time, the fact that the other inhabitants can't perceive him makes his plight feel so much more desperate. This story reminds me of William Hope Hodgson's spooky nautical tales.

[Marooned in Andromeda]

SF tales of characters being stranded on dangerous planets are common, but this is the first I've seen that has mutineers intentionally marooned in space. The story that follows is a bit formulaic for CAS ("characters journey through strange terrain" is a theme that pops up again and again), and the "all is forgiven" ending seemed a bit pat, but this was still an engrossing adventure tale.

[The Root of Ampoi]

In some ways, this story felt like the opposite of *The Venus of Azombeï*. Like that story, the protagonist finds himself in a lost world and romances a tribal queen. But rather than have his idyllic days spoiled by a jealous interloper, he spoils his own paradise out of a sexist desire to "assume his rightful place as a man" and dominate his giant bride. The climax, where Knox is bodily cast out from village society, is effective, but I felt the story could have benefited from some final reflection by the main character on his actions.

[The Necromantic Tale]

The ending is probably a bit predictable to modern readers, but this is still an entertaining read in the tradition of Edgar Allan Poe.

[The Immeasurable Horror]

Another brutal SF tale. If you journey into Smith's version of space you're almost guaranteed a horrible fate. The narrator survives, but endures horrific injuries and mental scars. An interesting example of horrific SF, but by this point in the book it felt a little over-long.

[A Voyage of Sfanomoe]

This tale is a sort of counterpoint to *The Immeasurable Horror*. Two genius scientist brothers from the dying realm of Poseidonis build a spherical spaceship and journey to Venus/Sfanomoe in an attempt to avoid perishing along with their society. This being a CAS story, the brothers die nearly immediately after their arrival, but they're extinguished in such a wonderful, painless, exhilarating way that this reader actually felt joy. The last Atlanteans dissolve into beautiful Venusian flowers, effectively being embraced and absorbed into their new home. And that's not such a bad way for two old men to go, is it?

[Concluding Thoughts]

While there are some definite hits and misses in this collection, the breadth of CAS' imagination is astonishing. Even the lesser stories are eloquently written, and the better tales (*Abomination of Yondo*, *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros*, *The Last Incantation*) are among the best the fantasy genre has ever seen. Just this one volume would be a powerful retrospective of an author's career; the fact that no fewer than four volumes follow in this *Collected Fantasies* series is nothing short of amazing. Clark Ashton Smith is a giant, and every fantasy fan should explore his work.

Joseph says

This is the first of a five-volume set from Night Shade Press collecting all of Clark Ashton Smith's short fiction, arranged by order of composition; I'd already read probably 75-80% of the stories contained herein, but these are probably the closest we'll ever get to a definitive Clark Ashton Smith collection -- they went back, as much as possible, to original manuscripts and any corrections or emendations that he had made.

CAS was one of the Big Three of Weird Tales (the other two being H.P. Lovecraft and Robert E. Howard). He came to weird fiction from a different direction -- he was a Californian and a poet. His stories, if simply described, aren't anything too out-of-the-ordinary, but his prose is rich and strange. Here's the opening paragraph of the very first piece, "The Abominations of Yondo":

The sand of the desert of Yondo is not as the sand of other deserts; for Yondo lies nearest of all to the world's rim; and strange winds, blowing from a pit no astronomer may hope to fathom, have sown its ruinous fields with the gray dust of corroding planets, the black ashes of extinguished suns. The dark, orblike mountains which rise from its wrinkled and pitted plain are not all its own, for some are fallen asteroids half-buried in that abysmal sand. Things have crept in from nether space, whose incursion is forbid by the gods of all proper and well-ordered lands; but there are no such gods in Yondo, where live the hoary genii of stars abolished and decrepit demons left homeless by the destruction of antiquated hells.

That should give a good idea of what you're in for. Me, I was captivated. Were all of the stories worth five stars? No -- as always in a collection of this sort, it's going to be a bit of a mixed bag. My personal favorites are the ones set as far from modern times as possible -- there are early stories in here of Poseidonis (the last outpost of foundering Atlantis) and Hyperborea (a lost land that predates Atlantis) and Averoigne (an imaginary province of medieval France) and strange planets unknown to Terrene astronomers. My least favorite of the stories are the more conventional tales of contemporary horror, although even then the writing is gorgeous and evocative.
