



## The Face in the Abyss

*A. Merritt , Rodney Matthews (cover)*

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The Face in the Abyss is a classic from a "golden age" of science fiction. A brilliant tale filled with weird imagination, marvelous writing, horror, beauty, and it may well be called the most "visual" book ever written for the world of fantasy. The Face in the Abyss is a grand book with a grand cast of characters. Visualize a monstrous head that cries tears of gold, locked deep in a cavern out of time forgotten. Consider also the incredible, Snake Mother, who is both human and reptilian, and her battle with the thing called the Lord of Evil.

## The Face in the Abyss Details

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Author : A. Merritt , Rodney Matthews (cover)

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## **From Reader Review The Face in the Abyss for online ebook**

### **Juan del Desierto says**

An interesting foray in the weird pulp fiction of the 20's-30's with inspired, strange descriptions albeit simple characters, "The Face in the Abyss" was actually the joining of two tales, and it is quite noticeable.

The main male character Nicholas Graydon does not change very much in any of the tales, although the main female character Suarra goes from an eerie, with a hint of a menacing presence to a mere supporting character that is there for motivates the actions of hero, her importance in the narrative taken by a more interesting female, but inhuman character.

It is worthy of note that the best characters in the book are not human and they don't act as humans for the most time and the moments in which they do are shown in contrast with their usual behavior.

There is an insistent effort by the author to provide scientific explanations to the weirdest moments (for the Science of the period). This, rather than being welcomed, results in over exposition because most of the time is not really needed and through the book prevails a haunted atmosphere that collides with such explanations. One could even argue that the Shadow of Nimir appears as a precursor to the Dark Lord Sauron from "Lord of the Rings", which was written decades after.

Taking it as a whole, it is a very enjoyable reading with several shortcomings which don't invalidate the work.

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### **Jim says**

Another book showcasing the incredible imagination and purple prose of perhaps the greatest of all the pulp writers of the 20s and 30s, Abraham Merritt, born in New Jersey in 1884. He passed away in Florida in 1943 at the age of 59. This one features some of Merritt's favorite themes--a lost civilization, a daring adventurer, a beautiful woman to be won, bizarre creatures, and an apocalyptic conflict between good and evil. "The Face in the Abyss" first appeared in the September 8, 1923 issue of Argosy-All-Story. Not my favorite of Merritt's work--I think his later "Dwellers in the Mirage" remains my favorite.

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### **Keith Davis says**

Merritt wrote fun "lost world" type adventures of sort that H. Rider Haggard once wrote. You can easily imagine Indiana Jones staring in almost any of Merritt's novels. Merritt's books are largely forgotten now; there is not much long term memory in the world of adventure fiction.

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### **Henry Avila says**

Three greedy men, desperate foreigners, in South America, have a map, that promises them, fabulous riches (

the usual lost Inca gold), but no money, to finance an expedition. Starrett, their leader, asks Nicholas Graydon, who has the dough, for aid, in Quito, Ecuador, and a big share of the uncountable, presumed, profits. A mining engineer, graduate, of some obscure school, called Harvard (never heard of it either). So Graydon, ten years after leaving the university, needs to make something of his life, even taking a chance, with such unsavory looking gentlemen, he doesn't expect this document, to be authentic (none are). Mr. Graydon, is an educated man, and the chasing of legends, is not what Nicholas worked, so hard for, anyways, there are valuable minerals in the stunning Andes Mountains, but you can imagine, transportation during the early 20th Century, is very primitive indeed, here. Eight burros are attained, six local Indians as guides, to do all the difficult tasks required, Roads? They make them, the packers are nervous, too many strange incidents, have occurred, in this forbidden territory, so the superstitious Indians, leave without permission, in the small hours of the the night, taking half of everything, why does this happen, in every adventure story? Selfish people, must be, very sound sleepers (like logs), the rest of the group, hardly misses them and go on, without the anxious guides. After a long, tiring hike, of many days, the first interesting thing, they find ... Suarra, an unbelievable beautiful girl, in this the remotest part, of the Andes, what race is she? Not Indian or Spanish, or any known tribe on Earth. Graydon rescues the lady from Starrett's, annoying advances, she had been draped with a great amount of precious jewels... Making him Starrett, instantly an enemy of the others ( nobody likes a double- crosser), and prisoner too. Not to worry, Suarra returns, leads them into the Hidden Land (Yu-Atlanchi), where people live forever, a place full of ferocious dinosaurs, and the riders on them, also invisible flying Demons (messengers, as they like to be called). The Face in the Abyss, in a dark, terrifying, colossal cave, with a moving weird head and great voice, inside a rock (the Evil One), just call him ... Nimir. Graydon gets a little scared, who wouldn't ? Almost collapses, not to mention, also there, Lizard-men, and spider-men, too, real big spiders, not the Hollywood kind. Incredible death defying, rapid travels through caves and tunnels, an unknown somethings is after the intruders. The strangest part of all, Snake Mother, half reptile and half woman, Adana, she's thousands of years old, but doesn't look it. The outsiders, see a magnificent, ancient city, by a gorgeous lake, arriving at a rather unhealthy moment, though, for the four newcomers, civil conflict, breaks into the open, between the Snake Mother's, and the Dark Lord's, respective, bloodthirsty followers . Fought with mostly deadly rays of different, gorgeous colors ( the old-fashioned sharp swords and spears too) . Graydon and Suarra, fall madly in love, while he fights, for the snake. In any war, there is always time for a little romance, but how old is Suarra? This land of unlimited life, if they can avoid an unpleasant, and unforeseen, "accident". Nicholas is afraid to ask, her age, it's not nice, to do so !

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## **Pam Baddeley says**

A lost world fantasy, reminiscent of Edgar Rice Burroughs or Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Lost World*), featuring dinosaur survivals in a remote area of Peru, cut off from contact with the outside world, but with an early genetic engineering vibe - a race who originated in the South Pole before a polar shift made that area uninhabitable have somehow banished death (while at the same time making it impossible to have children, in order to keep their numbers in check), and have manipulated others into particular physical types such as humanoid spiders called Weavers.

The protagonist stumbles upon this remnant of an advanced civilisation as part of an expedition looking for fabled riches. He falls out with the expedition leader when the latter assaults a young woman who originates from the hidden race. She later returns to lead them to the riches the other expedition members crave, though the protagonist cares only for her welfare, having instantly fallen in love with her. The riches then turn out to be a form of judgement. After that, the story takes a different turn as the hero becomes entangled with an imminent civil war between factions in the lost world, the apparent good guys being led by an apparent

human-reptilian hybrid, the Snake Mother, who may be less human than she leads him to perceive.

The story concentrates on action, but flags in places, and has very little character development. The protagonist and his would-be girlfriend are particularly cardboard. The book has elements which later would become fantasy tropes such as a dark lord (it was published in 1931, apparently based on magazine stories dating from the 1920s). In some ways it better fits the label of science fantasy, as the various ray-weapons etc are, we're told by the Snake Mother, all products of the former civilisation of which she is the only direct member, and not magical. Obviously it cannot avoid being dated by today's viewpoints, though, to the author's credit, manages to avoid racism in relation to the Native Americans who form the labour force and are the spear carriers in the armies of the various factions. But it rather loses impetus by the end and fizzles out, and has rather too rambling a plotline to always hold interest, hence only 2 stars for me.

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### **Travis says**

I love how the summary on the back of this book manages to capture key details of the actual plot, and yet is entirely inaccurate. My guess is that it is text from the original publishing, but I wonder why it was kept for this reprint?

This book was a suggestion from a blog that I read, and it sounded intriguing enough to read. I really like this sort of genre of lost worlds and ancient superscience, or at least I like the concept of it. Ancient serpent people wielding technology that is akin to magic -- not just because it is sufficiently advanced, but appears to be built along different principles than our own -- to fight dinosaurs and uplift primitive ape-people; it just feels really cool to me. The problem is that this book is very much a product of its time, with all the casual racism (of course the ancient precursor-humans are white, and I don't think more than one of the numerous natives is given a name, if even one) and overt sexism (women are always weak and frequently devious, and are so because they are women, even though men may exhibit the exact same traits) that comes with it. Also, there are remnant dinosaurs (always cool) but the author obviously had no idea what dinosaurs were like, blending traits of sauropods and theropods, describing "Tyranosaurus" with long snake-like necks and pillar-like legs. And the smaller dinosaurs balancing in tripod formation on their tails like kangaroos is sort of nostalgic for some of the first books on dinosaurs I read when I was little, and especially the toys.

Probably more of a 2.5 for quality, but it was enjoyable enough so I rounded up.

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### **Dr. Strangelet says**

Intriguing and frustrating. I can see reading this why A. Merritt's work was so popular back in the day and why it fell into oblivion since then. Where Merritt really excels is creating weird, otherworldly impressions, not so much with the poorly paced, meandering large scale plot. (Which is maybe why I've enjoyed the short fiction I've read of his more.) His the characters are flat even by the standards of generic pulp adventure archetypes, including some not-great portrayals of Indians. But there's some wonderful, evocative moments like the first appearance of the Face, the hero's confrontation with the Lord of Evil in his cursed garden, and the Dream-Makers. And of course, there are dinosaurs, which improves any book.

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## Simon says

These days I don't let myself pick up random books by authors I have heard talked about. I make sure that I know which books to look for first. But this has been on my shelf for a while, back from the time when I wasn't quite so meticulous and did pick up random books. And getting to the end of this reminded me why I revised by book acquisition strategy!

A lost world adventure story that mingles elements of science fiction with fantasy as the protagonist Graydon discovers a hidden valley in the Andes that hides humans of an ancient race that have conquered ageing as well as having created strange animal-human hybrids. He falls in love with a woman he meets there and becomes embroiled, and ultimately pivotal, in a conflict between two warring factions. Can he help stop an ancient evil from rising again or will he become its instrument?

While it did have its moments, it felt overall to have dated quite badly. It was often slow and plodding, peppered with antiquated ideas and simplistic philosophising, its characters were shallow and one dimensional. I didn't feel that the author did a good job of bringing this lost world to life, evoking a sense of wonder in the reader.

One day I will find a copy of *The Moon Pool* which is the book that most seem to cite as being his best work but until then, I won't pick up anything else I see by him.

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## Sandy says

Abraham Merritt's "The Face in the Abyss" first appeared as a short story in a 1923 issue of "Argosy" magazine. It would be another seven years before its sequel, "The Snake Mother," appeared in "Argosy," and yet another year before the book-length version combined these two tales, in 1931. It is easy to detect the book's provenance as two shorter stories, as the first third of the novel is pretty straightforward treasure-hunting fare, while the remainder of the book takes a sharp turn into lost-world fantasy, of the kind popularized by H. Rider Haggard and Edgar Rice Burroughs. In this novel we meet Nick Graydon, an American miner, who is searching for lost Incan loot with three of the nastiest compadres you can imagine. In the Peruvian wastes, they come across a mysterious girl, and are led by her toward Yu-Atlanchi, the so-called Hidden Land. Graydon's cohorts suffer a mysterious fate, but Graydon himself goes on to discover Yu-Atlanchi's many wonders. He meets the Snake Mother, one of Merritt's finest creations: a half snake/half girl entity who is countless aeons old and possessed of ancient wisdom. The Snake Mother is similar in nature to the Silent Ones of Merritt's first novel, "The Moon Pool," but is a much more fleshed-out character. It seems that Graydon has stumbled into Yu-Atlanchi just as civil war is about to break out there. Nimir, an evil lord whom the Snake Mother had imprisoned ages ago, has returned, and is intent on using his weapons of mind control and superscience to rule the world. Merritt does ultimately treat us to a nifty battle between the forces of Nimir (aided by his lizard men, dinosaurs and various weapons) and the Snake Mother (aided by her invisible flying lizards and assorted way-out armaments). But before we get to that battle, Merritt also dishes out a dinosaur hunt, a dinosaur race, a tour through the Cavern of Lost Wisdom, a garden of evil, mind control, spirit possession, spider-men (and NOT of the Peter Parker variety!), and some fascinating history of and philosophizing by the Snake Mother. It's all wonderfully pulpy and improbable stuff, but Merritt throws quite a bit into the book to keep the reader well entertained.

On the down side, "The Face in the Abyss" does not feature as much of the wonderful purple prose that made

earlier Merritt works such as "The Moon Pool" and "The Metal Monster" so special. This book seems to have been written more quickly and, in some places, almost carelessly. For example, in one scene, the moon is said to be rising from the west! In another, Graydon is said to have only one pistol, under his arm, although the pistol he's had at his waist is never mentioned again. That Cavern of Lost Wisdom seems so easy to come across that it's impossible for the reader to believe that it has been undiscovered for thousands of years. Merritt is also guilty of occasional fuzzy writing in "Face" (such as when he refers to a "three foot parapet"; is that three feet high or three feet wide, or what?), and much of the geography of the incessant tunnel crawling that takes place in the book is hard to follow. But perhaps this is deliberate on Merritt's part. Not all of our questions are concretely answered by the novel's end, and Graydon's theorizing is apparently meant to suffice. But I suppose that this is all nitpicking. What "Face" ultimately does succeed at is in providing action-packed escapism, constant imagination and colorful wonders. What an incredible Hollywood blockbuster this would make! Anyway, as it is, this is yet another fine fantasy from Abraham Merritt.

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### **Wreade1872 says**

Completely over the top pulp adventure with dinosaurs and ray guns, force fields and genetic engineering, a Dark Lord and a Snake Goddess. This is great stuff, i'm not a big fan of pulps but this has a more descriptive style than most. Its sort of like half-way between Burroughs and H.P.Lovecraft.

In structure its a bit like the 'Chronicles of Riddick' in that it started out as a short story and years later the author expanded it into other crazyness. Unlike 'Pitch Black' however its the crazy over the top part of this which is really enjoyable. There is the usual princess and blank slate protagonist but some of the side characters have real personality which makes up for the card board cutout hero.

Also you might get a strong 'Lord of the Rings' vibe in places, i'm assuming thats coincidence and that Tolkien never read this but you never know :) .

The author throws absolutely every idea he can into this story, if you ever wanted to try a pulp this is the one to start with.

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### **Derek says**

I was struck by the Lord of the Rings parallels: Nimir, the Lord of Evil, was imprisoned or otherwise diminished by powerful beings in some previous age. Those responsible have passed from the world, and Nimir now whispers from his imprisonment, a shadow of himself seeking corporeality, and is served by the corrupt and foolish as well as fallen beings of his own creation.

While obviously not human, Adana the Snake Mother considers herself a woman foremost, bearing what she claims are a woman's vanities and foibles. But Greydon, and through him Merritt, suggests that these traits are crude affectations and manipulations similar to those done by Nimir. At the denouement, her resolutions are ruthlessly efficient and inhumanly merciless despite whatever frailties she appeared subject to. Her earlier statements, about the rightness of genetic manipulation of humans, also suggest that the 'good' and 'evil' at play are at best relative, or that this conflict is less about morality and more about personal enmity or personal interests. Merritt--perhaps just his narrator--is more wrapped up in the romance and drama of events and never pulls this thread to its conclusion.

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## **Eric N. says**

A cross between Indiana Jones and The Lost World maybe? Track this down.

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## **Kenneth says**

This one is a SciFi/Fantasy/Adventure story all rolled into one. Nicholas Graydon is in South America searching for lost Inca treasure, meets Suarra who is the handmaiden of the Snake Mother and who leads him to an abyss where Nimir the lord of evil is imprisoned in a face of gold. The tale takes off from there.

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## **Michael says**

The first few chapters can be kind of a slog, but stick with it, it's worth it.

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## **Jim Dooley says**

If the pulp magazine thrills of Doc Savage or The Shadow set your heart racing a bit faster, this book has more creative elements and larger spectacle than is usually found in them. It is a fun adventurous diversion. If you can't imagine why anyone would waste their time on such things, then you'd best steer clear of this one.

In a much more extensive tale of the type that would have been found in "Amazing Stories," an American adventurer is waylaid by a trio of unscrupulous treasure-seekers. Their trek leads them to a lost civilization with uses of science so startling that it seems like magic. Of course, that could have something to do with the Dr. Moreau-ish human / creature hybrids that inhabit a land filled with strikingly beautiful people.

Like most of Merritt's work, THE FACE IN THE ABYSS would have made an extremely entertaining cinematic pot-boiler for the Indiana Jones fans. There are long sections of traveling descriptions that seek to dazzle by lingering over the sights being seen. I kept wishing for those longer chapters to end so that I could return to the adventure.

The ending is as spectacular as anything I've read in a John Carter tale (and with characters that would have seemed right at home there). However, the John Carter tales frequently had some social commentary interwoven into the narratives that made them more memorable. This one did not.

If you are in the mood for a nostalgic fantasy adventure, you should take a look at THE FACE IN THE ABYSS.

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