



The Three of Swords

Fritz Leiber

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3-in-1 volume - SFBC Edition - Contains the first three Fafhrd and The Gray Mouser Books - SWORDS AND DEVILTRY - SWORDS AGAINST DEATH - SWORDS IN THE MIST

The Three of Swords Details

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Author : Fritz Leiber

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From Reader Review The Three of Swords for online ebook

Sean says

I finished book one, and so my comments will be regarding that book. If anything changes and the other two books suck it, I will alter my review.

What separates Heroic Fantasy and Fantasy, I think, are the efforts you make to have your characters be super cool bad asses. Krynn's Chronicles are not good literature, and yet Raislin, Tanis, Kitiara, and Sturm are so much cooler than Legolas and Stryder. In fact, Raistlin alone is cooler than those guys combined.

And so this novel is not so epic as it focuses on the small rebellions and battles of the two lead character's youth, yet it creates two distinct, interesting, and "cool" characters that we want to see adventure.

As far as origin stories go, the tales of these characters are rich, unique, and fanciful. They are also amusingly relaxed dudes. When the two characters meet, there is no big discussion or battle. They just look at each other and say "that guy is cool. Let's hang out." They then immediately go on a double date and get drunk.

A great story of comradeship in a fantastic world. Can't wait to read the other two.

UPDATE: Working on the other two. The episodic nature undoes my earlier enthusiasm. Readers I have talked to have recommended that I not read them back to back "like a novel." What's my other option? To read a chapter a week? I dunno, but the rhythm is making me punch drunk.

Update: Finally finished, with little enjoyment. Other readers smile when they see me reading Lieberman. He is a fond memory for them, and these stories are often recommended. All in all, it was fine. I am not impressed, though if I had but read "Swords and Deviltry," I would have been more pleased.

Arckhangelos says

Hard to tell what I think about this books. I think I don't like much the novella (short stories) style for Fantasy. But I really enjoy to follow the adventures of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser.

Short french review :<http://wp.me/p1gH27-bI>

Jim says

It's been 30 years since I read this the first time, and I remember it being most excellent then. However, on my reread it was ok, but nothing spectacular. Over the years, I have come to dislike short stories.

Brian Maicke says

A fantasy classic that doesn't get as much exposure as it should. Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are the non-epic cousins of most main stream fantasy. They go out on adventures but usually with goals no higher than to make some cash, have some fun or drink some liquor. There are no epic fights against great evil. The fate of the world doesn't hang in the balance of their adventures, but all the same it makes for good reading.

My only minor gripe is that I did not care much for the origin stories that start the book. You really don't get a good feel for Fafhrd and Mouser until you see them in action together. The first two stories, where they act singly didn't work as well for me.

For those looking for the modern descendants of Fafhrd and Mouser should look at *The Lies of Locke Lamora* by Scott Lynch.

Kevin says

i have known about Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser since i began playing D&D in the early 1980s. they always sounded intriguing and they were obviously influential but i never got around to reading them until now.

i have to say that i wish i would have read them years ago. good stuff, this. like a gritty, back-water version of *LotR* told from the POV of peripheral characters who really have no bearing on the main plot but nevertheless live in the same world.

like *LotR*, this is a tale to be read out loud 'round a fire or a heavy table in a candlelit pavilion. the language is easy to read yet archaic in feel, not at all unlike that found in *Harry Potter*, and the story conveyed in each paragraph is dense. harkening more than a bit to Michael Moorecock's *Elric* series, the two protagonists seem like aspects of the same warrior- and Leiber says as much at the outset. they compliment one another in ways even they do not understand. Fafhrd tall and matter of fact and yet constantly wondering about what else while the Mouser is a bit more urbane and slick, coming off more like a con-artist than anything else. but both aspire to the acting arts and it serves them well when they need it, disguising themselves and playing roles to entertain for money but also to obtain otherwise secret or guarded information. thieves, rogues, and swordsmen seeking adventure. no noble causes for them although they are inherently and usually on the side of the Good and the Underprivileged.

it reads like a D&D campaign mixed with a healthy dose of mythology and *Twilight Zone*. it is very easy to see the influence it had on RPG development and later fantasy works like Martin's *Song of Ice and Fire*.

Jonathan says

"Sword and sorcery" is for nerds of my generation such a ubiquitous concept that we seem to think it's been around forever. The conceits of the genre are instantly recognizable, from the brash and impetuous young hero turned deadly swordsman to the wizened old wizard dispensing arcane advice. Of course this popularity is due in part to the efforts of the man who coined the term, and coincidentally left some of the most indelible examples of the type, in the forms of the head-strong barbarian Fafhrd and the street-wise Gray Mouser.

This volume contains the first three of Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar books, themselves each a collection of short stories or novellas. And no sooner has Leiber announced his intentions by setting up the now time-honored tropes of the genre, he immediately goes about subverting them. Everyone knows that an essential accoutrement for every aspiring young hero, as both foil and companion, is a love interest. So it is that young Fafhrd leaves the cold wastes of his Northern homeland in the company of the urbane yet deadly actress Vlana, while simultaneously the Mouser is overthrowing Duke Janarrl with the help of his shy but capable daughter Ivrian. When the two erstwhile heroes meet one dark night in the seedy metropolis of Lankhmar, and their lady friends likewise hit it off, this is the start of a whirlwind of romance and adventures for the happy foursome, right? Yeah, not so much. The two girls are brusquely tossed aside in a manner that, after the intervening decades of authors not nearly so bold, is actually refreshing.

Leiber writes with the same cavalier attitude he has imbued his heroes with: Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser are not driven by an honorable nobility or by some epic quest on which hangs the fate of the world, but rather by boredom and petty greed (their most involved adventure in this collection is precipitated by our heroes' need to rid themselves of a curse which polymorphs their paramours into animals). Consequently, these stories lack the grandeur of Tolkienesque high fantasy, but the breadth of Leiber's imaginings serves as a passable substitute for depth. The heroes' wanderings span the whole scope of their fantastic world and beyond; their adventures fraught with duels of sword and wit, chases, thieveries, torrid affairs. Almost everything here is some sort of stereotype, though this is partly because Leiber was chief among those creating the stereotypes, and for that reason the familiarity never gets stale. Sure, I could have used more character development, more plot intricacies, but hey, sometimes you drink champagne, and sometimes you drink Bud Light. Actually, no, there's never a reason to drink Bud Light, but you get where I'm going with this. Leiber's audacious tales of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser are worth reading just because of the place they hold in genre history; the fact that these yarns are so enjoyable should seal the deal completely. If you're a young(ish) fan of sword and sorcery, pick this one up and have some fun exploring your roots.

intrepideddie says

This book contains the first three books in the Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser saga: "Swords and Deviltry", "Swords Against Death", and "Swords in the Mist". These books don't follow a tight timeline; rather, they are collections of short stories that have been arranged in chronological order. Thus, there is no single plot line or sense of climax.

The stories themselves are pure pulpy drivel, much along the lines of the "Conan the Barbarian" books -- short on character depth, long on action and adventure. Fantastic! It makes for great lazy summer reading. Also, these are the stories of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser! Any self-respecting player of FRPGs has heard of them. These are the kinds of stories I think of when I hear the phrase "classic fantasy".

Though the characters are very one-dimensional and rather inconsistent in actions and mannerisms, but no one is claiming it to be a piece of literary snobbery. It is pure, unadulterated, pulpy entertainment. The stories would actually be pretty good, but the author has the same problem with every story: he does a great job building it up, but the big plot resolution comes across very brief. Almost feels like each story was prematurely truncated by a Cliff's Notes summary.

Matt says

Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser are absolutely terrific characters. A brilliant reply to Conan-- whom I also like-- they are funny where he is serious, clueless and errant where Conan would be unshakable and solemn. They are still great swordsmen, adventurers, thieves. They are also fools, who are at their best when filling in for each other's inadequacies. They can't do too well without quarreling, they can't win a great treasure without losing it.

But they do climb the tallest mountain in the world, and save both the city of Lankhmar and the world of Nehwon numerous times. They are heroes, fairly decent people except for the stealing, capable of amazing deeds. More to the point, they are incredibly entertaining.

Also, I love their hilarious mystical sponsors, the utterly alien Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face. Alien wizards whose faces and bodies are never clearly seen, Ningauble is flamboyant where Sheelba is circumspect. Much like the Mouser and his giant barbarian comrade, they are often unwilling allies and rivals. Their main skills seem to be in manipulating the two mortals, though the results frequently make no one happy.

Read these books. They will make you smile.

Maiya says

This was pretty much a monster-of-the-week TV show. The plots were predictable and grew a bit tiresome, but the stories and characters had charm and the prose was quality, if long winded.

For the writers out there, it's also a masterclass on how to write a sword fight and I might recommend it just for that.

Dan Schwent says

The never-ending re-read

Book 1 - Swords And Deviltry:

- **The Snow Women:** Fafhrd, young skald in training, is torn between duty to his pregnant wife to be and his desire to see the world in the company of an actress visiting the Cold Wastes...

And here we are again after ten years on the shelf, the first tale in Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar series. Was my love for the series misplaced? It was not.

While it's not as magical as later tales in the series The Snow Women does a good job of setting the tone. There were so many details I'd forgotten since my last reading, like Fafhrd alluding to a chance meeting with his future partner, The Gray Mouser. Another thing I didn't remember? How misogynist the tale seems at times. Still, pretty damn entertaining and a lot funnier than I remembered.

- The Unholy Grail:

A wizard is killed by the duke's men and his young apprentice, Mouse, seeks vengeance. But the duke's

young daughter is his lover...

The Gray Mouser's origin is told here, closing the book on his past as a wizard's apprentice and sending him on the path to roguedom and his partnership with Fafhrd. It's much darker than the first story and does a good job of establishing Mouser's personality for the rest of the series.

- Ill Met in Lankhmar:

Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser form their partnership after robbing members of the thieves guild. However, their reverie is short lived...

This is the story where the hetero life partnership of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser is forged and also nicely illustrates why I like the duo so much. They don't go up against the thieves guild because of a grand quest, they go up against them because they're very drunk and their girlfriends tell them to do it. I do not find that hard to relate to in the least. The shit storm of violence at the end of Ill Met in Lankhmar is the best part of Swords Against Deviltry.

Book 2 - Swords Against Death:

- The Circle Curse:

Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser leave Lankhmar behind and explore Nehwon in an effort to forget about the deaths of their lovers.

This isn't as much of a story as it is explaining how the dynamic duo returned to Lankhmar after the disastrous end of Ill Met in Lankhmar. It does feature the pair's first meetings with Sheelba of the Eyeless Face and Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

- The Jewels in the Forest:

Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser follow a treasure map to a deserted tower in the forest. The tower is not as empty as it seems, however.

This is a fairly typical tale of the pair. The guardian of the tower winds up being pretty cool.

- Thieves' House:

After being double-crossed by Fissif, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser enter the Thieves' house to retrieve a bejeweled skull.

I found the Mouser's antics in this one hilarious. I couldn't help picturing him doing the generic Monty Python old lady voice while impersonating a witch.

- The Bleak Shore: Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser are cursed and sail farther west than anyone ever attempted, to find their doom...

This was a fairly average tale until the fight at the end.

- The Howling Tower: As they travel back to Lankhmar, Fafhrd is bewitched by a strange tower and it's up to the Mouser to save him.

While not phenomenal, it does a good job showing the depth of the Fafhrd/Gray Mouser friendship.

- The Sunken Land: On the voyage back to Lankhmar, Fafhrd finds a ring inside a fish that is also a key.

What will it unlock?

A sunken land that rises, a lost band of Northmen, and our beloved duo caught in the mix. What's not to like?

- **The Seven Black Priests:** Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser steal the diamond eye of an idol and have to contend with the priests responsible for guarding it.

Classic Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, although they certainly fall victim to their fair share of mind control.

- **Claws from the Night:**
- **The Prince of Pain-Ease:**
- **Bazaar of the Bizarre:**

Book 3 - Swords In the Mist:

- **The Cloud of Hate:**
 - **Lean Times in Lankhmar:**
 - **Their Mistress, The Sea:**
 - **When the Sea-King's Away:**
 - **The Wrong Branch:**
 - **Adept's Gambit:**
-

Eric Moebius says

I enjoyed these books, but... In the book it talks about how these are the best sword fighters in the world and names off all the folks they could have surpassed had they been compelled to cross swords with them... There is also some influence from H.P. Lovecraft, and probably Michael Moorcock. The were okay stories. I enjoyed them, but... Once I read one. They became redundant so that the were kinda exactly what you'd expect even when you didn't know what to expect... if that makes sense.

The Grey Mouser, and Fafhrd as characters had great potential, but for some reason I feel like Lieber struggles to let the be happy. Actually, I take that back... He doesn't even make any pretense that he is going to allow the possibility that they might be happy after the first book, and... I'm sorry that blows. You have two great characters full of potential, they aren't morally ambiguous, even if their actions drift that way on occasion, but what do you do with them? The "heroes" are almost never were rewarded for their troubles, Whatever it is, it is super powerful and even though they are the baddest sword fighters ever... they can't seem to manage. So the almost invariable, lose or destroy anything of value, or if they do escape with it, it's cursed, and so they have to get it back, and they barely escape with their lives. So, not only did they not get the treasure or the girl... they are also moping around.

I would much rather read Robert E Howard.... Michael Moorcock, Roger Zelazny, Modesitte... I fought with myself over 2 or 3 stars because some times the ideas in the book are really good. It touches on some ideas that I haven't seen explored elsewhere, but on another level it feels like... Why the fuck am I reading a swords and sorcery book written by Eor?

Lisa says

Very entertaining, and a perfect example of the classic fantasy novel: imperfect adventuring heroes who

overcome the obstacles, but rarely are rewarded for their efforts (at least with material gain). Lots of wit, wry humor, and swordplay. Some of the stories in the collection were written as far back as 1947, and the most recent were written in 1970.

Stephen says

4.0 stars. This review is for the first book of this trilogy, *Swords and Deviltry*. This novel collects the first of the Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser stories. The first two stories, *The Snow Women* and *The Unholy Grail* introduce us to Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser individually. The real magic is when the two meet for the first time in *Ill Met In Lankhmar* which is a superb story in the classic sword and sorcery meets buddy book genre. A lot of fun and a quick read.

George Christie says

Moments of inspiration. Sadly much of it was unclear or just plain boring. Useful read just for a sense of the history of Fantasy Lit, but beyond that, read *Locke Lamora* for the same thing done better

Randal says

Most of this was a re-read for me. I had not previously read the genesis stories of the two heroes; I'm sorry I found them, particularly Fafhrd's story, "*The Snow Women*." Originally published in 1970 as a novella, it is presented here as the first part of *Swords and Deviltry* and is frankly misogynist. That's a word I seldom use because I often think it's inaccurately used in place of "sexist" or "male-centric," but here I think it's the correct word.

The portrayal of women in the rest of the books is seldom complimentary (although in truth, few of the characters including the titular heroes are portrayed in a positive light ... they were among my first antiheroes when I read these stories in my youth and their flaws were and are a big part of the fun). Not only is there misogyny it's in the first story of the collection, which poisons much of the rest.

The other problem with this book is that it's an omnibus. I had always read F&tGM stories in anthologies, where they were rare treats. But like the marzipan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, it's too much of a good thing having them all back-to-back.

For all those faults, some of the stories remain real gems, and the on-again, off-again Mutt & Jeff act remain a classic of the buddy / bromance genre. The other highpoint is Fafhrd, who is a real barbarian. Unlike many fictional barbarians (Conan in the movies, for instance, or Tarzan), Fafhrd is not a gentleman with a rustic upbringing who is mean to his enemies, chivalrous to the ladies and essentially a diamond in the rough. Instead, Fafhrd is pretty much an uncouth drunken lout from start to finish. You know, *barbaric*. I like that in a berserker.
